Policy and reality: The teaching of oral communication by Japanese teachers of English in public junior high schools in Kurashiki City, Japan.

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Abstract

In 2003 the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) unveiled their new junior high school (JHS) English as a Foreign Language (EFL) policy, which focused strongly on oral communication. Although there is evidence of policy non-compliance in schools until now there has been no English language research on the attitudes or practices of Japanese teachers of English (JTEs), or the views of the students, and their parents in regards to teaching/learning English speaking skills. The research, based on JHSs in a mid-sized Japanese city (pop. 475,000 approx.), focused predominantly on JTEs, but also included students, and their parents. Focus group sessions, questionnaires, and one-on-one interviews were used to collect data. The study reveals that learning English speaking skills is considered important, but passing the senior high school (SHS) entrance examination is the main concern and so, test impact from the SHS entrance examination exerts the greatest pressure on JHS JTEs. The JTEs also perceive themselves as facing other issues such as student motivation, JTE speaking proficiency, and large class sizes. Another finding is that JTEs appear to receive inadequate training– pre- and in-service– resulting in issues, such as a reliance on traditional methods (yakudoku), which are not in accordance with MEXT's intentions, and JTE proficiency test achievement levels lower than those desired by MEXT. As a result of these issues gaps exist between MEXT JHS EFL policies and actual teaching practices, and have unfortunately led to a situation where JTEs believe that MEXT does not care about or understand the teaching environment. The study concludes that implementation of MEXT's policy require a better match between the SHS entrance examination and JHS EFL policy, a decrease in class sizes, and JTEs receiving more adequate training. A more positive relationship between MEXT and JTEs would result from these two groups working collaboratively when designing JHS EFL policies and could better achieve a match between the SHS entrance examination and JHS EFL policy.

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

1.1. My Quest For Knowledge

In June 1997 I received a letter from the Kurashiki junior high school (JHS) assistant English teacher (AET) whom I was selected to replace in the Kurashiki Sister City Teaching scheme run by the Kurashiki Board of Education. She wrote to inform me of what to expect once I arrived in my working environment. I remember little of the letter now, but cannot forget one particular comment. She wrote that the head Japanese teacher of English (JTE) at my new school was extremely nervous about working with me because she had not spoken English recently and was unsure whether we would be able to communicate. This comment shocked me as I equated it to a mathematics teacher who had little confidence in his/her multiplication skills. Given time the head JTE and I built a solid working relationship and her self-doubt about her spoken interactive competence proved to be exaggerated.

Another surprise occurred when I began teaching– most students were very disruptive and appeared apathetic towards English as a foreign language (EFL). Only during the frequent tests did the students seem to be universally applying themselves to their EFL education. Prior to coming to Japan I believed in the image of the bespectacled, diligent, hardworking, disciplined Japanese student. In my Kurashiki junior high school I found very few of these students (most of them did not even wear spectacles!). After asking other Kurashiki AETs about their schools I realised that my situation was normal. One AET told me his survival technique– “If the JTE is useless and students don’t want to learn English, look out the window and count money”. Though I now feel that this comment demonstrates an extreme lack of understanding about the pressures faced by JTEs it is the strategy which got me through my first few years of teaching EFL in a public Japanese junior high school.

Eventually I became more comfortable in my working environment and began to wonder what JTEs, students, and parents thought about junior high school EFL education. I pondered the reasons how students could receive an EFL education for six years– more if

they went to university– yet in most cases could say little more than “hello, how are you?”. Answers given to me by both foreigners and Japanese pointed the blame directly at the JTEs. This answer began to trouble me as I forged friendships with JTEs. I began to notice that most JTEs seemed restricted by elements beyond their control, for example they had no free time, even in the weekends, to pursue any type of study to improve their English skills. As I became more acquainted with the JTEs I could sense their negativity towards the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, Japan (MEXT) and the local Board of Education. Once I received the opportunity to undertake academic research on TESOL I felt that I owed it to myself to focus on Kurashiki public junior high schools in an attempt to answer the questions that had been nagging me for several years.

In the following sections I will outline reasons behind my selection of the Japanese public junior high school EFL education environment for the research focus. I will present my objectives in conducting and writing this research, and provide details on the research setting and participants. Following this my three research questions will be stated before concluding with a chapter summary that will provide the reader with a “road map” of the thesis to follow.

1.2. The Academic Contribution

The pursuit of answers in my chosen field is worthwhile and overdue as there appear to be major pressures within Japanese public junior high school EFL education, particularly pressure on JTEs, test impact, policy and practice, and the MEXT – JTE relationship. Furthermore, the Japanese public junior high school environment has been grossly under represented in English language EFL research. Most research has focused on EFL at the senior high school (SHS) and university levels. As a result my thesis does not directly relate to any previous published research[1], but it will hopefully be a catalyst for more research on a field that deserves immediate attention. This point is particularly valid considering the thousands of native speaking assistant English teachers working with JTEs in Japanese junior and senior high schools who, in all likelihood do not understand

[1] This comment only relates to works published in English.

anything about the Japanese public school EFL system beyond what they witness in the classroom.

1.3. Research Setting And Participants

This research was undertaken in the public junior high schools of Kurashiki City. Kurashiki is located in Okayama province on the western side of Japan's largest Island, Honshu. Although it is considered by Japanese people as a "rural" city it has a population of 476, 710 (as at February 2007)[2]. It supports four universities and numerous junior colleges, but is not regarded as an educational centre of any significance. Having taught in Kurashiki public junior high schools until 2003 I developed a tight bond with Kurashiki EFL education. I also have a vested interest in it as many of the students I teach in my current capacity as a university lecturer are products of Kurashiki public school EFL education, and, because my family is based in this area, my children are likely be educated in the Kurashiki public school system.

At the time of my initial investigations there were 90 fulltime public junior high school JTEs in Kurashiki and one fulltime AET in every public junior high school. To restrict the scope of my research I chose to focus only on the JTEs. Although JTEs have not been required to teach on Saturday mornings since April 2002 (Goodman, 2003), all fulltime JTEs have extra curricular school duties that allow them little free time. Duties range from club coaching every day after school to leading school excursions on weekends and holidays. The busiest JTEs are *homeroom teachers*, who are responsible for student wellbeing at school and within the community. Such is their level of responsibility that when students break the law police often call the homeroom teacher before calling the offender's parents (Gordon, 2005).

The other participants in this research were the students from two Kurashiki junior high schools, and their parents. All three junior high school levels were represented in the survey. The students, predominantly, come from middle-class backgrounds, with their

[2] http://www5.j-server.com/LUCKRSK/c3/ql.cgi/http%3a//www.city.kurashiki.okayama.jp/toukei/index.html?SLANG=ja&TLANG=en&XTYPE=0

parents involved in a range of professional employment, providing a typical cross-section of Kurashiki's socio-economic makeup. All students surveyed have been exposed to English while at elementary school. The students and their parents were surveyed because I believed that as key stakeholders their opinions may influence JHS EFL lesson content. I was also interested in their views on the purpose of JHS EFL education and how speaking skills rated in their assessment.

1.4. The National Setting

In 2003 MEXT introduced an "Action plan" to cultivate English speaking skills in junior high school students. The plan/policy stated: "On graduation from a junior high school, students can conduct basic communication with regard to areas such as greetings, responses, or topics relating to daily life." To do this the MEXT publicly stipulated that

> The majority of an English class will be conducted in English and many activities where students can communicate in English will be introduced. … instruction mainly based on grammar and translation or teacher-centred classes are not recommended… To carry out such instruction effectively, it is important for teachers to establish many situations where students can communicate with each other in English and routinely to conduct classes principally in English…At the junior high school level, the focus is on cultivating communication abilities in listening and speaking.

In an attempt to increase JTE spoken interactive communicative competence MEXT asserted that

> Almost all English teachers will acquire English skills (STEP[3] pre-first level, TOEFL[4] 550, TOEIC[5] 730 or over) and the teaching ability to be able to conduct classes to cultivate communication abilities through the repetition of activities making use of English.

[3] An English test conducted by the Society for Testing English Proficiency
[4] Test of English as a Foreign Language
[5] Test of English International Communication

One of the aims of this research was to gauge how successfully these policies have been implemented, and to assess the reasons why the policies have or have not been implemented successfully. It is important to note that while MEXT writes policies, it is the role of the local Board of Education, effectively the branch of MEXT in each region, to ensure that policy is properly implemented.

1.5. The Research Questions

The following research questions were developed in line with the aims of the study.

1. How do JTEs, parents, and students view public junior high school EFL oral communication education in Japan?

2. What do JTEs perceive as critical factors in teaching oral communication in Japanese public junior high school EFL education?

3. Are there gaps between MEXT's public junior high school EFL policies for oral communication and the current practices and beliefs of public junior high school JTEs?

1.6. Chapter Summary

Chapter Two focuses on past research and studies on Japan, particularly in relation to EFL, and begins with a historic look at English's introduction in Japan and how it has gradually become *the* foreign language to learn. Attention then shifts to the Japanese public's apparent lack of uptake of English, in spite of the public attention to this outcome, and the opinions held towards English speaking skills by the Japanese population. Following this, reasons for the apparently low acquisition of English speaking skills are presented before moving to focus on junior high schools in Japan, in particular the image of the uncreative learning environment that some scholars hold JHS to be. MEXT junior high school policy is then presented with a focus on both what MEXT states students should

learn and be able to do as a result of their junior high school EFL education, and what MEXT expects JTEs to achieve in regard to their own speaking skills. Japanese junior high school EFL education is then examined, followed by one of the most prominent issues in Japanese public EFL education, test impact. The junior high school JTEs receive attention before the chapter concludes with insights from some relevant studies conducted in China and South Korea.

Chapter Three presents and examines the data collection process. The chapter begins with a detailed introduction to the setting and research participants, and progresses through the development of the main data collection tools, the three questionnaires. This detailed process is documented from the initial stages involving focus groups, item production, validity and reliability checks, to the final administration of the questionnaires. There is also information on the data entry stage and how gaps left by the questionnaire were filled, before concluding with an analysis of data collection issues.

The results section, Chapter Four, presents the most significant data gathered from the parent questionnaire, followed by the same from the student questionnaire. The chapter then focuses on the JTEs. Information in this section is mostly based on data gathered from the questionnaire. However, information from the focus group sessions and one-on-one interviews is used throughout to provide extra data and insights to questionnaire results. Key topics include the perceived difficulties of teaching speaking skills in junior high school, JTE methodology, MEXT policy and EFL lesson content, and the JTE achievement levels of MEXT directives.

Chapter Five features an analysis of my first research question; looking in particular at the importance and role of EFL in Japanese junior high schools, opinions of the three participant groups in regard to what they think students should learn, and whether there is a need for English speaking skills in the future. Research question two is then examined looking at the difficulties that JTEs stated they faced in teaching English speaking skills in junior high school, most prominent among these are test impact, student motivation, class size, and outside time constraints. The analysis of research question three focuses on the MEXT – JTE relationship, and whether MEXT policy is being implemented in junior high school EFL lessons. This section concludes with a detailed analysis on JTE pre- and in-service training, and JTE achievement of MEXT training directives.

Chapter Six focuses on the conclusions drawn from the research, beginning with a research summary that details the conclusions drawn in relation to the three research questions. Following this there is an examination of the methodology providing an overview of the types of data collected, the development of the main data collection tools, data collection issues, and the challenges that were faced and overcome in this process. General research conclusions are then presented which provide details of the most prominent findings in my study, including information on test impact, teaching methodology, lesson activities, and JTE training. Practical implications are presented with suggestions of steps that could be taken by JTEs and MEXT in light of my research findings. The chapter continues with a discussion on the types of research that could be undertaken to follow up my study before concluding with a frank final statement.

1.7. Summary

This chapter looked at the reasons behind my focus on Japanese junior high school EFL education, followed by a section on why I believe that this field is worthy of detailed research. My research questions were presented and the research setting and participants of this study were introduced. The final section of this chapter– the chapter summary– acts as a "road map" for the entire thesis.

CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on prior studies and research by other scholars. The history of EFL in Japan and the perceived failure of the Japanese people in mastering English will be the first points presented. Following this the typical views of Japanese people of Japanese speakers of English will be shown along with the perceptions of the Japanese public regarding the need for English speaking abilities in Japan. The next two sections will focus on reasons put forward to explain the perceived difficulty of Japanese people to acquire English. The second half of this chapter focuses mainly on the public school EFL environment in Japan, in particular the EFL policy for the junior high school level, the JTEs, EFL teaching issues in junior high school, and test impact. This chapter will conclude with a brief presentation on relevant studies that have been conducted in public schools in South Korea and China.

2.2. Japan's English Language History

The history of EFL in Japan dates back to 1808 when a British battleship, the *Phaeton*, sailed into the port of Nagasaki to capture Dutch ships (Oda & Takada, 2005), and began with an unfortunate incident. At that time Japan was in a state of self-imposed isolation from the outside world, and had been since 1640. At the time the Dutch were the only Westerners permitted entry (Kowner, 2002). The British captured some Dutch traders and held them hostage. A Japanese magistrate named Yasuhide Matsudaira was in charge of negotiations for the prisoners' release. Though the prisoners were eventually released, due to his poor understanding of English Matsudaira felt that he had mishandled the case, and to take responsibility he committed honourable suicide. However, the main catalyst for EFL's introduction into Japan occurred when Admiral Perry caused the conclusion of the

Japanese isolationist policy by the threat of military force in 1853 and opened the doors of Japan to foreign countries (Oda & Takada, p. 94).

A negative attitude toward EFL in Japan began with the re-emergence of Japanese nationalism in the twentieth century. EFL in Japan suffered markedly during World War II when it was considered the enemy's language and English learners were considered spies (Reesor, 2003, p. 62). The teaching of English during this time was severely restricted and the use of loanwords of English origin was banned (Oda & Takada, 2005). The strong revival of English in the post-war years was "a political consequence of Japan's defeat and the general Japanese socio-cultural pattern of wishing to identify with a perceived source of power" (Loveday, 1996, p. 96). English is now "the" foreign language in Japan (LoCastro, 1996, p. 40) and loanwords from English comprise approximately 10% of the everyday Japanese vocabulary (Blair, 1997; Takanashi, 2004). This percentage will undoubtedly increase in the future as 60% to 70% of the new words in annually revised dictionaries come from the English language (Takanashi, 2004).

2.3. The Perceived Failure Of Japanese People To Learn English

Despite the acceptance of English by the Japanese public in general, EFL teaching and learning has been perceived by many scholars as not having enjoyed great success. For a long time Japan has been "held up as the poster child" for first world nations that have been unsuccessful in their EFL education (Reesor, 2003, p. 57). Reesor (ibid) admitted to being "stupefied" by what he perceived as the failure of the Japanese populace in general to master English when he considered EFL's strong focus in Japan. The information Reesor based his comments on were the performance results of Japanese English students in the main English proficiency tests; TOEIC and TOEFL. Within the Asian region no country can match Japan for the resources and the wealth that are invested in EFL education. Yet Japanese TOEIC scores have consistently been lower than those of other Asian countries. In 2000 the only Asian countries with lower average scores in TOEIC were Afghanistan, Laos, and Cambodia (ibid, p. 57). Japanese TOEFL scores also depict a gloomy picture; in the late 1990s Japan's rank was 180 out of 189 participating nations (Kowner, 2002, p. 340). While it may be that the majority of the Japanese EFL learners that sat these tests

were not junior or senior high school students, it is not too much to suggest that in light of the years of English education that they would have received in JHS and SHS, the test-takers should have been capable of much more. These results were undoubtedly met by educators with despair.

Reedy (2000) provides a counter-argument to the opinions above by claiming that the test statistics are being misrepresented and deserve further analysis. Reedy concedes that at first glance Japanese results do appear alarming, but when the number of Japanese test takers is taken into account vis a vis other countries the result is not shocking at all. The inflated number of Japanese people taking the test equates to a larger range in English ability levels and thus a lower overall average score. He concludes that in countries with exceptional test averages, such as Germany, only the elite students are taking the test and speculates that if the same thing happened in Japan it would enjoy similar results. Childs (2005) also argued that a low TOEFL average does not mean that Japanese are poor at English; it simply means that "hordes of low scoring people take the test". However, scholars with similar views are scarce in the literature on this subject. The typical theory in the literature is unlikely to change in light of conclusions such as those reached in a recent survey by Benesse Corp which found that South Korean high school students were more confident and far more active in using English than their Japanese counterparts (Yamasaki, 2004). Yonesaka (1999) quoted Tobin (1986) as lamenting that "Japanese education is rarely simply described or analyzed in its own terms. Instead it is either criticized or held up as an object of wonder."

2.4. Japanese Views Of Japanese English Speakers

The main reason for EFL in the Japanese public education sector since Japan was "opened" by Perry has not been on communication with the outside world, but rather to gather knowledge from foreign countries. As Reesor (2003, p. 59) contends, English was to be used as a "sponge to soak up the knowledge created outside of Japan" to aid in modernization. This meant that EFL in Japan emphasised receptive rather than productive English skills (ibid., p. 59). Considering Japan's rise to become an economic superpower it must be suggested that EFL in this regard has been highly successful.

Guest (2006) asserts that some prominent people in Japan appear to be proud of their low English competence, as though if they possessed English skills it would dilute their "Japaneseness". He maintains that this fuels the "foreigners-speak-English-but-we-Japanese-don't mentality" in Japan. Guest also declares that, in contrast to other countries, there is little to motivate Japanese people to learn English as the likelihood of getting a better paying job due to possessing English skills is very rare. Reesor (2003) and Loveday (1996) expand on this theory by stating that Japanese bilinguals face discrimination in the workplace based on their English proficiency. As they both argue, who would aspire to become bilingual when the end result is facing discriminatory attitudes and low paying employment? Loveday (ibid., p. 99) claims that upon returning to Japan people who have lived abroad or been in foreign service "are often considered by community members to be 'contaminated' and no longer 'pure' Japanese". Lui and Littlewood (1997, p. 373) term the identity problems arising from speaking English the "banana complex", where, in Asia, using English makes you a banana, white on the inside but yellow on the outside. Scholars such as Kubota (2002, p. 20-21) have argued against these views claiming that a child bilingual in Japanese and English is "enthusiastically praised" while others bilingual in Japanese and another languages are largely ignored.

2.5. The Need For English Speaking Abilities In Japan

One of the main debates in Japan EFL education is over student needs; do Japanese people really need English? Bruthiaux (2002, p. 291) contends that Japan has a vibrant culture and a prosperous middle class that operates almost exclusively in Japanese, and therefore has no need for English. He claims that even for the more worldly and advanced "recourse to English remains a last resort". Japanese people do not need English to gain access to foreign literature as most major titles, along with technical and academic books, are translated into Japanese (Bruthiaux, 2002; Loveday, 1996). Conversely, Kubota (2002, p. 13) quotes that:

> in 1999, over sixteen million Japanese people travelled out of Japan and close to five million non-Japanese people entered Japan (Ministry of Justice

2000a).The number of non-Japanese residents in Japan is larger than ever before.

While no one can argue with Kubota that the population of foreigners living in Japan is large and will probably increase due to the low domestic birth-rate, one must ask what nationality these non-Japanese residents are. Are they from English speaking countries? No, no more than 17% of the 1,973,747 registered foreign nationals recorded in 2004 were from English speaking countries (The Japanese Ministry of Justice). This obviously will not increase the average Japanese person's exposure to English communication. Secondly, while the figure of Japanese travellers abroad presented by Kubota is high, the destination of these travellers is important. Currently the top four international destinations for Japanese tourists are, in rank, Italy, Bangkok, China and the European continent; all non-English speaking countries (JTB Corp., n.d.). Furthermore, in the English speaking countries that they may have visited the tourists probably used package tours that required no English communication abilities (Travel Industry Association, n.d.). Accordingly, Loveday (1996, p. 99) states that "direct interaction with English-speaking people still remains minimal, in spite of increased travel."

Samimy and Kobayashi (2004) stated that unlike students learning English in an English speaking country there is no pressing need for Japanese living in Japan to master English. Toyama (2003) countered, however, in an official article for MEXT, that it was imperative for children in the 21st century to learn English communication skills to promote understanding and trust to further Japan's development and world standing. This statement is open for debate; what is not open for debate is that this is the official thinking of MEXT and therefore students in Japan's schools have no choice but to learn English regardless of their opinion of its usefulness for their future.

2.6. Iwanu Ga Hana

The Japanese proverb *Iwanu ga hana* literally means *silence is golden*. This is the way that Japanese are said to look at communication. Other proverbs such as *the inarticulate speak longest* and *silence surpasses speech* add further evidence to the underlying Japanese tendency to avoid verbosity. Barnlund (1989, p. 128) asserts that "the

Japanese seem to hold words in lower esteem than do members of other cultures". According to McDaniel (1997, p. 3), nonverbal communication is "integral to the Japanese psyche". The development of nonverbal communication begins early in life in Japan. According to research Japanese mothers talk less to their babies than American mothers do. Therefore Japanese babies must develop an early skill in understanding nonverbal communication (ibid., p. 7-8).

It has been claimed that foreigners are incapable of Japanese levels of nonverbal communication (Befu, 2001, p. 39). One of Japan's most famous novelists, Junichiro Tanizaki, asserted that Westerners were "brash squanderers of words" (Dale, 1986, p. 79). The propensity towards nonverbal communication apparently arose through Japan's unified and cultural homogeneity, a result of geography and the isolationist policy mentioned in 2.1 (Barnlund, 1989; McDaniel, 1997). Rubrecht (2004, p. 93-94) believes that the Japanese mistrust speech and see it as a source of conflict and an "inadequate medium for conveying meaning and feelings". According to Rubrecht the sacredness of the unspoken word in Japanese culture originates from Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism. Yet this idea is rejected by Lui and Littlewood (1997, p. 374) who stated that Confucianism had become a convenient excuse for any noted cultural behaviour in Asia. They question the Scollon and Scollon (1994) theory that the Confucian teacher-student relationship did not promote questioning because questioning could be perceived as meaning the teacher had taught inadequately and left unanswered questions. Lui and Littlewood pointed out that the term *knowledge* is constructed using two Chinese characters; taken separately, one means *learn* and the other *ask*. It must be queried whether the original term and its contemporary meaning denote the same thing. One could also question whether *asking* is exclusively verbal in nature or if it can also encompass actions such as introspection.

Hofstede (1986) conducted research on cultural differences regarding teaching and learning. His research findings showed that of the more than fifty countries surveyed Japan had one of the highest levels of uncertainty avoidance. Hofstede (ibid., p. 308) says that uncertainty avoidance:

> as a characteristic of a culture defines the extent to which people within a culture are made nervous by situations which they perceive as unstructured,

unclear, or unpredictable, situations which they therefore try to avoid by maintaining strict codes of behaviour and a belief in absolute truths.

I contend that oral communication is not about absolute truths but is about negotiating. It is about responding. In the "real world" speaking can be highly unstructured, unclear, and unpredictable.

Hofstede's research further concluded that Japan rated highest in the masculinity index. Two characteristics of masculine societies are that the system rewards student academic performance and a failure in school is a severe blow to a student's self-image and may in extreme cases lead to suicide (ibid., p. 315). When uncertainty avoidance is strong in a highly masculine society one could theorize that students focus only on the things essential to their educational success– which eliminates speaking as it is not assessed in the senior high school entrance examinations. Furthermore, when elements within one subject, such as in English, are more structured and predictable, i.e. grammar gapfills or grammar multiple choices, they will be focused on at the expense of more unstructured and unpredictable elements, such as speaking.

2.7. Ethnocentric Excuses

The most controversial arguments about EFL problems in Japan are the ones based on ethnocentric views. Some scholars have argued that geography is at the heart of the perceived difficulty that Japanese people have in learning English, while others, such as the famous Japanese linguist Haruhiko Kindaichi, have suggested that the problem lies in Japanese having no apparent linguistic link with other languages and thus in its uniqueness (Befu, 2001, p. 35). Kindaichi asserted that one of the ramifications of this uniqueness is that it is harder for Japanese people to learn English than it is for speakers of other languages. Without doubt Japanese is natively spoken only in Japan. Yet Japanese is not alone, many tongues share a lack of structural and lexical similarity with English.

Reesor (2003, p. 58) claimed that in an article on EFL policy in Japan, Koike and Tanaka (1995) stated that geography was one of the main reasons for poor English skills in Japanese people. Japan is an island nation and until recently had little contact with the outside world which meant little opportunity to communicate with speakers of other

languages. As a result Japanese people failed to develop the ability that people of non-island countries had in learning other languages. However, as Kowner (2002, p. 341) points out Japan is not unique in this sense, many non-English speaking island nations are far more isolated than Japan is, and because Japan has been open to the world for approximately 150 years it has had time to transform itself into a modern country and change its social customs.

The most radical suggestion was made by Dr. Tadanobu Tsunoda M.D. in 1978. He claimed to have found evidence of differences in the hemispheric brain functions of speech between native speakers of Japanese and native speakers of Western tongues (Befu, 2001, p. 36). Evidently, in contrast to speakers of Western languages, Japanese speakers process independent vowels and nonlinguistic sounds– with the exception of machines and musical instruments– in the left hemisphere of the brain. This finding was never universally accepted by scholars because of the poor scientific procedure and the small sample Tsunoda used.

2.8. Japanese Junior High Schools

Students aged between 12 and 15 must attend junior high school for three years. Class levels in junior high school are simply termed Grade One, Grade Two, and Grade Three. The transition from being an elementary school student to becoming a junior high school student is a big step in responsibility. White (1993, p. 83) suggested that by the third year of junior high school most students have an understanding of their future, both academically and occupationally. Le Trendre (1993, p. 37) asserted that "At the end of their middle-school days, students are ushered into educational tracks that will have repercussions throughout their lives". In Van Wolferen's (1989, p. 86-91) opinion students as young as twelve are aware of what their future holds because to get into a high level senior high school it is important to first attend a high level junior high school.

Some scholars claim that Japanese junior high schools are not creative and do not create creative thinkers because the emphasis is on rote memorisation (Abecasis-Phillips, 1992; George, P. & George, E., 1995; Le Trendre, 1999; Van Wolferen, 1989). Successful students are ones that have good memories and can regurgitate masses of facts rather than

ones who can think logically, creatively, and formulate arguments or express themselves well (Beauchamp, 1987, p. 315; Takanashi, 2004, p. 9; Van Wolferen, 1989, p. 83) which was probably the perception held by some members of Japan's higher echelon of society who stated that the education system was turning out "inferior versions of robots" and "trained seals" (Van Wolferen, p. 87).

A typical lesson in junior high school begins and closes with one student calling their classmates to attention; all the students stand and bow to the teacher, who in turn bows back. From this point the lesson is usually dominated by teacher centred talk with little questioning by the students (LoCastro, 1996, p. 52). The expected actions of students in the traditional Japanese classroom are to listen and write notes (Taguchi, 2002, p. 7); much like the image of an empty vessel being filled with knowledge. This educational environment may be at odds with the spontaneity and creative skills needed in oral communication.

Van Wolferen (1989, p. 83) felt that the aims of Japanese schools completely deviates from true definitions of *education* as they do not deal in developing minds but just in imparting facts. However Van Wolferen is approaching education from a Eurocentric standpoint and despite what he has said the Japanese education system has, as previously noted, successfully produced an economic superpower. Rubrecht (2004, p. 120) hypothesized that schools may have a dual role, one in education, the other "in fostering and installing the cultural values of Japanese society (e.g., the importance of group membership and harmony)".

George and George (1995, p. 25) wrote that many scholars have inferred that the main objective of junior high schools in Japan could be the development of extreme conformity to the group.

2.9. Junior High School EFL Policy

"Education change depends on what teachers think and do
– it's as simple and as complex as that" (Lamie, 1998, p. 521)

In addition to the A*ction Plan to Cultivate Japanese with English Abilities* mentioned in 1.4 MEXT also released a *Course of Study* (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2003) for foreign languages to be implemented in junior

high school. In the *Course of Study* MEXT stated that junior high school students should be able to do the following in English:

> use language to share their feelings and thoughts… perform language activities where they have to think of how to express themselves in a way appropriate to the specific situation and condition.

To help accomplish these goals MEXT stated the following:

> Small-group teaching and the streaming of students according to proficiency in the English classes of junior and senior high schools will be positively adopted.

MEXT also made plans to improve JTEs and the learning environment. In 2001 MEXT formulated a plan to increase teacher numbers to allow small-group teaching and proficiency based streaming. In regards to the JTEs MEXT made the demand that almost all JTEs demonstrate their English proficiency by passing any one of three given language tests (see 1.4). However, in a 2005 survey MEXT found that 90% of junior high school JTEs had yet to pass one of these tests (Childs, 2005). When recruiting new JTEs MEXT stated that it intended to conduct listening tests and English conversation tests "in almost all prefectures and designated cities". MEXT also vowed to consider proficiency scores in examinations such as STEP, TOEFL and TOEIC, "to confirm that teachers have the required levels of English ability upon selection."

All schools and teachers in Japan are supposed to abide by the curriculum and rules set down by MEXT, however, schools and individuals are not closely monitored (Rubrecht, 2004, p. 126). This lack of vigilance resulted in a well publicised education scandal that occurred in Japanese senior high schools in the latter part of 2006 when over 400 schools throughout the country were found to be falsifying curriculum reports to prefectural Boards of Education stating that students had been taught compulsory subjects they had not (The Daily Yomiuri, Oct. 28, 2006). After emotions lowered and one senior high school principal committed honourable suicide, over 86,000 students had to receive make-up classes before they could graduate senior high school (The Daily Yomiuri, Oct. 28, Oct. 31, 2006). This shows the wide gulf between the ideologies of MEXT and the teachers and schools. Teachers are the "gate-keepers" of reform and their attitude and acceptance is essential; if changes do not match their philosophy then there will be little true change in

teaching practice. This is especially applicable when the learning environment remains the same. Most reasons given in literature for the slow application of reforms have been teacher incompetence or intransigence (O'Donnell, 2005, p. 303). LoCastro (1996, p. 43) suggested that one reason for JTE resistance in implementing reforms could simply be a "general pervasive hostility" towards MEXT. This could result from the way MEXT views teachers as state servants as opposed to professionals (Shimahara, 1998, p. 256). Due to its highly hierarchical nature policy making in Japan is top-down with input coming from high-level bureaucrats and university level consultants, while JTEs are not consulted at all (LoCastro, 1996; Gorsuch, 2000; Pacek, 1996; Samimy & Kobayashi, 2004). As Lamie (2002, p. 152) summed up, reforms "will proceed much more smoothly if those involved in the process are included in the planning, implementation and evaluation procedures." Canagarajah (2006, p. 27) contends that curriculum construction should be from the ground-up.

Instruction has not been addressed in the reforms (Gorsuch, 2000, p. 687), creating a loophole which allows teachers to maintain the teaching practice status quo. This separating of content and instruction in reforms and curriculum has been declared untenable by Gorsuch (p. 677). McNamara and Roever (2006, p. 209) also highlighted contradictions in MEXT policies. On one hand MEXT emphasise communicative competence and on the other they have reduced the number of English lessons in schools; which means that JTES may not have enough time to cover what is expected of them, resulting in the elimination of the most difficult skill to teach: speaking.

The language used in the MEXT guidelines is often vague. When MEXT stated that "Almost all English teachers will acquire" certain proficiency levels questions could be asked on: what percentage "almost" is, who decides which JTEs are to acquire this level and what happens to the JTEs who do not reach this level. Similar questions could be applied to the statement about the "boards of education in almost all prefectures and designated cities" conducting listening and speaking tests. The mission objective statement for junior high school student abilities upon graduation is also interesting. The level of English required in talking about daily life is far beyond that for greetings and simple responses. Yet these three points are explicitly grouped together by MEXT.

Rubrecht (2004, p. 126) suggested that part of the blame may lie with the textbooks as there are gaps between the content and the MEXT guidelines. If this is so then MEXT must take responsibility since the only textbooks used in public schools are checked and approved by MEXT, or produced by MEXT itself (Lamie, 1999, p. 64). Gorsuch, as cited by Gates (2003, p. 198), found, in a 2001 report, that six of the most-widely used MEXT approved textbooks did not promote speaking. Atake (2003, p. 5) disputed this claim and concluded that the textbooks used now are in a more communicative style, however, she echoed the McNamara and Roever opinion that the reduction of English classes, from four to three, since 2002 is a problem as JTEs have to omit less relevant exercises based on student needs.

Many scholars have suggested that the main reason for reform failures could be examination influences (McNamara & Roever, 2006, p. 206; O'Donnell, 2005, p. 303). Akiyama (2003, p. 118-119) stated that, though the guidelines place an emphasis on developing speaking skills in the students, the non-oral nature of the senior high school entrance examinations show a large discrepancy between policy and practice, meaning that these examinations lack authenticity and validity.

2.10. EFL In Japanese Junior High Schools

English began being taught in junior high schools in 1884 (Amano, 1990, p. 75). Although technically not compulsory, teaching English is a de facto requirement because it features in almost all university entrance examinations (Rubrecht, 2004, p. 143). English lessons formally began at the elementary school level from 2002 (ibid.) meaning that all students enter junior high school with a grounding in English. Unfortunately, to promote "the group", when entering into junior high school proficiency levels are not taken into account in any subject and students are randomly placed in classes. This adversely affects the motivation of more advanced students in EFL classes as they constantly wait for less able students to advance (Rubrecht, 2004, p. 143-144). In a newspaper column Childs (2006), a scholar actively involved in Japan's university EFL sector, expressed the opinion that the students' goal was to be able to communicate their thoughts and stated that they lose motivation when they realise that this is not one of the education system priorities.

The main method of instruction in junior high school EFL classrooms is yakudoku (LoCastro, 1996, p. 49; Porcaro, 2004, p. 80; Rubrecht, 2004, p. 145). Yakudoku has been used for centuries in teaching foreign languages in Japan (O'Donnell, 2005, p. 302; Poza, n.d.) and is often thought of as a local version of grammar-translation (Gorsuch, 2000, p. 691). This method is teacher centred and the majority of the lesson is conducted in Japanese resulting in inadequate comprehensible input in the target language (LoCastro, 1996, p. 53). Gorsuch (1997, p. 42) found in her research that "the teachers created classes that resembled Japanese language classes more than English classes". Despite a negative image yakudoku has remained prevalent (O'Donnell, 2005, p. 313), possibly because teachers that break from tradition are viewed as deviants in Japan (Pacek, 1996, p. 336). Many other reasons are given for its continued use, however. Reesor (2003, p. 63) stated that this method is the one that most JTEs felt comfortable with. Reasons provided for this comfortable match are poor JTE English proficiency, the few skills needed in implementing the method, and the fact that tests based on translations can be made easily and scored objectively (Brown, H., 2000, p. 16; Gorsuch, 2001; LoCastro, 1996, p. 49). Rubrecht (2004, p. 145) alleged that it is used so a teacher can avoid making mistakes in English and losing face in front of his or her students. Thornbury (1998, p. 111-112) suggested that grammar is a "life raft" for less confident teachers and that teaching it gives teachers "order, security and power", whereas a communicative method provides "chaos, risk and subversion".

Bax's (2003) article reminded people of the dangers of *linguistic imperialism* and against the view that if an EFL community does not use CLT then it is backward. He contends that CLT does not take the learning context into account, which includes things such as culture and student needs. Using this theory yakudoku may match Japan's context. Be that as it may, according to Loveday, (1996, p. 98), the reliance on yakudoku has resulted in English being one of the most unpopular school subjects among students.

Yakudoku may also be based on a reaction to the large classes that JTEs face in Japan. Takanashi (2004, p. 5) stated that it was one of the most pressing issues for JTEs and quoted nationwide research that showed 43.6% of junior high school JTEs believed large classes were the root of most of their lesson problems. In 2002 MEXT and OECD both conducted research measuring Japanese junior high school class sizes. Unexpectedly the

results of the two surveys differed in respect of class size means. Stranger yet, the results of both of these surveys appear on page 78 of a MEXT publication– Japan's Education at a Glance 2005, references section[6]. MEXT stated that the mean was 31.7 students per class; OECD quoted the mean as 34.3. Letters inquiring why the two means differed were sent to both MEXT and OECD in April, 2006. An answer from OECD was received within 72 hours– a rapid response, indicating a public-friendly, transparent way of dealing with its research and results; MEXT never replied to this letter– one can only surmise what this suggests. Regardless of the accuracy of either figure, both figures are well above the *OECD country mean* of 23.7 students per class. Reasons for large classes have included such things as the cultural practice of "group-ism", yet the most believable reason seems to be an issue of cost-cutting (Poza, n.d.).

The issue of class sizes in junior high school EFL lessons is particularly relevant when one considers EFL class size threshold and at what size meaningful communicative teaching becomes impossible. LoCastro (2001, p. 495) believed that the number was fifteen, while Takanashi (2004, p. 5) simply stated that it's a case of "the smaller, the better". LoCastro (2001, p. 494) listed some problems stemming from large class sizes:

* more difficulties in carrying out speaking
* difficulties in giving feedback
* problems with individualizing work
* difficulties in setting up communicative tasks
* tendency to avoid activities that are demanding to implement
* high noise level, which affects neighbouring classes
* difficulties in attending to all students during class time
* discipline problems are more acute.

Gorsuch (1997, p. 33) stated that "yakudoku is really about teacher control". When one considers LoCastro's list above it might seem that JTEs are perfectly justified in seeking the control that yakudoku may be based on. Another valid reason may be test impact.

[6] http://www.mext.go.jp/english/statist/05101901/008.pdf

2.11. Test Impact

Most literature calls the effects of examinations on teaching practice either *backwash* or *washback* (Brown & Hudson, 1998, p. 667; Taylor, 2005, p. 154). However, I will use the term *test impact* because I believe that it more accurately encompasses every element affected by tests, from individuals to general society (Caine, 2005, p. 16). Test impact can be viewed as either positive or negative depending on how it operates. If assessment matches course goals, objectives, and teaching practice then the test impact is said to be positive. If assessment does not match course goals, objectives, and teaching practice the test impact is viewed as negative (Brown & Hudson, 1998, p. 667-668). LoCastro (1996, p. 47) stated that most Japanese junior high school students cite passing the exams as the main reason for studying English. Akiyama (2003, p. 134) cited that 80% of JTEs believed the introduction of speaking tests in the senior high school entrance examinations would impact their teaching practice positively and they would change to a more communicative style. Akiyama (p. 135) contends that if a speaking test was included in the entrance examinations this would link policy to teaching practice.

Test impact negatively affects the amount of oral English taught in junior high school EFL lessons because– although English is a core subject in the senior high school entrance examination (McNamara & Roever, 2006, p. 206)– there is no speaking component present (Akiyama, 2003, p. 129). Akiyama (p. 134) concluded that this may lower both student and teacher motivation to communicate in English in lessons. It appears that the main reasons oral communicative competence is not assessed are time and complexity issues. Akiyama (p. 121-122, p. 136) also cited reliability, validity, a lack of resources, and low practicality as other speaking test problems. Students are aware that their scores on senior high school entrance tests will have ramifications on their future (Finkelstein, Imamura and Tobin, 1991, p.145; Johnson and Johnson, 1996, p. 4) so gravitate towards that which is most relevant and see oral communication as “neglectable” (Atake, 2003, p. 4).

Most literature in the past has concentrated on the university entrance examinations, Gorsuch (2000, p. 686) contended that these exams are “the key for students’ future success and standing in Japanese society”. However, in reality, the senior high school entrance

examinations are probably more important. LeTendre (1996, p. 193) asserted that the senior high school entrance examination was the most crucial event in Japanese school life. Gordon (2005, p. 465) reinforced LeTendre's view by stating:

> Junior high teachers face a very different problem from either high school or elementary school teachers given that their main task is to prepare students for the fateful examination that will determine their life options.

Akiyama's (2003) conclusion that JTEs may be more motivated to communicate in Japanese is because JTEs want to give their students an understanding of the English that will feature in the upcoming examinations, which will not include speaking skills. This is due to the widely held philosophy that the failure of a junior high school student in the senior high school entrance examination is seen as a failure not only of the student but also of the teacher and the junior high school (LeTendre, 1996, p. 200). This philosophy results in pressure on JTEs to actually teach *Exam English* (LoCastro, 1996, p. 47). Takanashi (2004, p. 6) referred to this as *EEE*, *English for Entrance Examination*, and suggested that teachers could not teach English without using grammar-translation techniques in this environment. While students may influence the teacher's approach in the classroom pressure may also come from parents who, according to research by O'Donnell (2005, p. 311), want their children prepared for the senior high school entrance examinations above all else. English has therefore become a way of sorting students rather than providing them with communicative competence (ibid., p. 301; Loveday, 1996, p. 96). The result of this is students who can pass the entrance exams but cannot speak English despite three years of junior high school EFL classes and tuition at elementary school.

Belief in the existence or severity of test impact in Japan is far from universal. LeTendre (1996, p. 193) felt that the test impact phenomenon may be exaggerated as actual selection and placement into senior high school is usually done prior to the entrance examinations in placement counselling sessions in junior high school. Akiyama (2003, p. 118) provided further evidence of this stating that between 50% and 60% of the marks received in junior high school are carried forward and used in conjunction with senior high school entrance examination marks for admission purposes. Finkelstein et al. (1991, p. 140) contended that competition for entrance into coveted senior high schools, in the main, only occurred in large cities, which suggests that tests may have little impact in middle-sized

Japanese cities such as Kurashiki. It could be however, that junior high school JTEs in smaller centres are purposely creating a type of test impact to use, as Prodromou (1995, p. 14) suggested, as a way to increase student motivation, attendance rates, and to control unruly classrooms.

2.12. Junior High School JTEs

Many scholars feel it is fair to criticise and challenge the work of JTEs (Porcaro, 2004, p. 80). MEXT also tends to blame JTEs for the poor English levels of their students (Childs, 2005). To back these accusations scholars point to the lack of English used in EFL classrooms; JTEs have been cited as using Japanese 90% of the time in EFL lessons (Murphey & Sasaki, 1998; LoCastro, 1996, p. 49). Porcaro (2004, p. 83) maintains that using English in EFL classrooms is what JTEs need to do most if they want their students to be successful English learners. One reason for a reliance on L1 is convenience, the students and JTEs share the same first language. Therefore, to increase comprehension teachers often revert to their L1.

Proficiency levels also affect the method that teachers employ. Murdoch (1994, p. 254) calls language proficiency in teachers "the bedrock of their professional confidence" and states that most people would rate it as the most essential element in a good teacher. Medgyes (1999, p. 184) bluntly stated that "an EFL teacher with faulty English may be compared to a music teacher who can play no musical instrument and sings out of tune". Holmes (2007) simply stated that JTEs who cannot speak English are "unqualified" as teachers. Naturally it would be difficult to teach speaking when you cannot speak English well. A reason for low English proficiency in JTEs is due to the poor tuition they received during their schooling years. Nunan (2003, p. 607) asserted that the English proficiency levels of many JTEs were not high enough to give the students the input needed for language acquisition. Yet Childs (2005) maintained that teachers can nurture fluency in students without being fluent themselves, though he failed to elaborate on how this was possible.

To understand how people with low English proficiency levels become JTEs we must look at the training that JTEs undertake. Most JTEs are graduates of general

universities rather than teaching colleges (Yonesaka, 1999); literature is a typical major (Browne & Wada, 1998, p. 101). JTEs are not usually required to have any linguistic or TESOL qualification. Gorsuch (2001) contended that the current EFL pre-service training lacks both vision and adequate teaching methodology instruction. The training course also lacks a sufficient practical component as trainee JTEs receive as little as two weeks pre-service practical training before beginning fulltime JTE employment (Poza, n.d.; LoCastro, 1996, p. 42; Browne & Wada, 1998, p. 101; Murphey & Sasaki, 1998). This insufficient training is one reason for JTEs falling back on the methods that they understand– the way in which they were taught, usually yakudoku (Lamie, 1998, p. 521; Oka, 2004; Porcaro, 2004; Poza, n.d.; Samimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999, p. 137). It has been suggested that this problem is culturally based. In Japan universities are said to prepare for entry into employment, but it is the employers who provide training for specific roles (Yonesaka, 1999). Research has also indicated that the substandard pre-service training JTEs receive is complemented by inadequate in-service training (Porcaro, 2007). While MEXT pushes communicative competence in students they do not provide the JTEs with the tools to realise this goal (LoCastro, 1996, p. 42; Samimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999, p. 137). For many JTEs in-service training is either unobtainable or the teachers make themselves unavailable to attend the training sessions. Simply put, the Japanese education environment is not a teacher-development climate and MEXT has done little toward developing the profession of teaching in Japan (Shimahara, 1998, p. 256).

JTEs face other difficulties in their working environment. As mentioned earlier JTEs face class sizes similar to those found in the most undeveloped places in the world (Porcaro, 2004) and feel constrained by test impact. Other problems listed by scholars include overwork, administrative duties, club commitments, school trips, low student abilities, student passivity, counselling students, poor textbooks, pressure from colleagues to conform, and the expectations of principals, parents, and students (Poza, n.d.; Gorsuch, 2000, p. 680; Taguchi, 2002; Pacek, 1996; Gordon, 2005, p. 467). Childs (2005) concluded that most JTEs know what to do but are too busy with other things.

2.13. Other Relevant Studies

Li (1998) conducted a study on the perceived difficulties of teachers in implementing CLT in South Korean secondary schools. The findings echoed many of those found in Japan. EFL teachers felt their speaking and listening abilities were not sufficient to teach CLT and the fear of losing face discouraged them from using CLT. Li also noted that South Korean EFL teachers were overworked, and students had low motivation, low proficiency, and were passive. Evidence of test impact was also found as grammar makes up a large part of English examinations and teachers felt that oral tests were logistically impractical and too subjective. Classes were also thought to be too large– usually 48-50 students, funding was insufficient, and the Board of Education did not provide enough support to teachers.

The application of CLT in China has recently been investigated by a number of scholars. Xiao (2006) stated that native culture influences perceptions on how EFL is taught and learnt, surmising that western teaching styles may not match the learning styles and the collective philosophy of Chinese students. From research Xiao (ibid., p. 5) found that the communicative approach was incompatible with student beliefs. Hu (2002, p. 102) also concluded that the philosophies of CLT and the traditional Chinese culture of learning were so different that it would be counterproductive to replace the traditional ways with CLT. However, Liao (2004, p. 270) believed that by using CLT China could keep up with modern English teaching methods and its learners would gain a higher level of communicative competence. If the Chinese government did not push CLT then teachers would continue to use traditional methods, focusing on grammar and vocabulary. Hu (2005, p. 65-66) alluded to the top-down , centrally-controlled education system of China and suggested that this way of implementing a communicative approach for teachers to use does not work and cited the well documented resistance to CLT by Chinese EFL teachers. Liao (2004, p. 271-272) contended that Chinese EFL teachers do not know how to choose an “appropriate” method, and, even if they did, this system would be incompatible with Chinese customs since China is centrally controlled and thus the only thing appropriate is that teachers do as instructed by the bureaucrats. He also believed that while things such as test impact and class size may inhibit CLT adoption these difficulties can be overcome.

Hu (2002, p. 94) listed some problems that EFL teachers in China encounter, many of which are identical to those in Japan. These include large class size, limited teaching time, poor teacher proficiency, and test impact. According to Chen, Warden and Chang (2005, p. 610) many Chinese believe that they have no need for English as literature and other media is translated into Chinese. Furthermore, young Chinese could be avoiding English as it, in their eyes, decreases their "Chinese-ness". Another point identical to Japan's philosophy is the theory that if a student fails it is the teacher's fault (Hu, 2002, p. 99).

2.14. Summary

This chapter presented the opinions, findings, and conclusions of scholars who have published their work. The history of EFL in Japan dates back approximately 200 years. There is a perceived failure of Japanese people regarding their success rate at acquiring English. The typical views held by the general Japanese populace of Japanese speakers of English in Japan appears to be negative. The need for English speaking skills in Japan is, according to most of literature, minimal. Many of the reasons given for the perceived low level of speaking skills in Japanese people are ethnocentric, for example the suggestions made by Dr. Tadanobu Tsunoda M.D. of brain differences between Japanese people and native speakers of Western tongues.

The second half of this chapter focused mainly on the public junior high school EFL environment in Japan, introducing the schools in general, the EFL policies set out by MEXT, EFL practices in JHS, JTEs, and indicates that test impact was found by many scholars to be a major issue in the Japanese public school EFL environment. Following this relevant studies focusing on EFL in public schools conducted in South Korea and China were presented.

From analysing the literature I established that there were issues within the junior high school EFL environment in Japan. I felt that this domain deserved considerable research. To do so I had to design a data gathering tool that was effective in acquiring information from as many relevant participants as possible– those engaged in this EFL

environment– the JTEs, the students, and the parents. The next chapter will look at how I accomplished this.

CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

In this chapter the research environment– Kurashiki junior high schools– and the demographics– JTEs, parents, and students will be introduced. The main focus of the following section is the development of the main data collection tool– the questionnaires. This will be undertaken in stages looking at the focus group process, item production, the Q-sort process that was undertaken to improve validity and reliability, the back translation of the items, the pilot study, and finally the administration of the questionnaires. The one-on-one interviews undertaken to fill information gaps left by the questionnaires will also be presented. This chapter concludes with a brief on data entry, and a detailed analysis of the data collection issues associated with my research.

3.2. Kurashiki, Japan

As an "adopted local" of Kurashiki, I, similar to the local population, also regard Kurashiki as having a rural feel, yet as its population shows (provided in 1.3) it must be considered a mid-sized Japanese city. Despite its size there are few native English speaking foreigners residing in Kurashiki, and the city does not have a well developed tourism industry to attract native English speaking tourists. This leaves few opportunities for local residents to hear or practise English in an authentic context. JTEs have often commented to me that Kurashiki's environment is typical of similar sized "rural" cities in Japan, which makes this research applicable to other areas.

3.2.1. Kurashiki Junior High Schools

All junior high schools in Japan have 3 grades, teaching students from years 7 to 9, (ages 12-15)[7]. Foreign language tuition is mandatory in junior high schools. Schools have a choice on which language to teach, however EFL is "virtually obligatory" (Oda & Takada, 2005, p. 95). English is promoted by MEXT as the principal language to learn[8], and is the foreign language of choice in all of Kurashiki's twenty-six public junior high schools.

Japanese junior high school students normally receive only three 50-minute EFL lessons per week. Kurashiki is unique, in that from April 2005 it became a *special educational district of English*, one of only 34 districts out of the 2,400 presently in Japan. To gain this status, cities must apply for it and have their application approved by the central Board of Education. As a result Kurashiki public junior high school students receive four 50-minute lessons per week and Kurashiki City has one foreign native speaking English teacher per junior high school. The extra lesson is conducted by the foreign native speaker. The actual tuition time students receive is far lower than 200 minutes per week however, because of events such as sports days, festivals, and student health examinations.

From April 2007 English began to be taught as an official subject in all Kurashiki elementary schools[9]. Student numbers in Kurashiki junior high school EFL classrooms range from 15 to 38, however 59% of classes had 30 or more students (see Appendix 1 for a more detailed breakdown), which is in keeping with the nationwide trend[10].

Due to the trust that I have built over the years within the Kurashiki public school system I was able to administer questionnaires to the JTEs, a short questionnaire to the students of two Kurashiki public junior high schools, and another questionnaire to the students' parents. Size, average for Kurashiki, and wide socio-economic mixes were the bases in selecting the two schools for student and parent questionnaire administration.

[7] http://www.mext.go.jp/english/org/f_formal_16.htm
[8] http://www.mext.go.jp/english/shotou/030301.htm
[9] http://www.city.kurashiki.okayama.jp/kyosido/hiringja.htm
[10] http://www.mext.go.jp/english/statist/05101901/008.pdf

3.3. Demographics

In the following section the research participants, the Kurashiki JTEs, students, and parents will be presented. This will include their background and some relevant information that has been found from other studies on these particular groups.

3.3.1. Kurashiki JTEs

At the time of data collection there were 90 fulltime public junior high school JTEs working in Kurashiki. The respondents' university degrees were predominantly based on three subjects: English Literature (32%), Education (28%), and English Linguistics (23%). The remaining JTEs majored in subjects such as French and German Literature, though interestingly none of the JTEs from the survey majored in TESOL. Though gender was not investigated in the JTE questionnaire, over 75% of Kurashiki JTEs are women. The reason for this disproportion may be because teaching is one of few professions in Japan where women have pay and workload parity (Gordon, 2005, p. 462). There is no reason to assume that this ratio was any different in the survey responses. Teaching experience ranged from 1 year to 34 years among the JTEs participants. Generally speaking many JTEs are relatively inexperienced; 35% have less than 10 years experience, for a more detailed breakdown of Kurashiki junior high school JTE experience see Appendix 2. Due to the manageable number of possible participants, all JTEs in Kurashiki were sent a questionnaire. From the 90 JTEs, six also participated in the two focus group sessions and two were involved in one-on-one interviews.

3.3.2. Students

The student research participants were boys and girls ranging in age from 12 to 15 years old. It was essential to distribute the questionnaires across the three junior high school grades as each grade has its own collective attitude. Kimura, Nakata and Okumura (2001, p. 63) found that there was a drop in motivation levels for junior high school students in

general as time progressed from their first days in junior high school EFL lessons. From personal observation I found first grade students eager to speak English, but upon reaching the second grade their desire dropped markedly. LeTendre (1996, p. 199) stated that teachers were especially concerned about these students for which they have a developed special term, *nakadarumi*, meaning "lost in the middle". Third grade students often displayed considerable extrinsic motivation, but not for speaking as that does not feature in senior high school entrance exams. Kimura et al. noted similar findings on the motivation of junior high school students. All students surveyed have had regular exposure to English since elementary school through native speaking AETs.

3.3.3. Parents

Every student participant in the questionnaire study was also given a questionnaire to take home for their parents to complete. The parents involved in the survey come from diverse socio-economic backgrounds based on the socio-economic make-up of the particular school zones. The students' parents were viewed as a valuable data source for this research as they are an important factor in public junior high school education. Parents influence their children greatly through actions, attitudes, and comments. As LeTendre (1993, p. 37) states "Children's aspirations are best supported when they are in line with the family's position". Parents have a vested interest in and take their child's education extremely seriously in Japan in response to the financial and social ramifications of academic success/failure (Finkelstein, Imamura & Tobin, 1991, p. 143). Due to their concern the PTA has developed a strong voice on many educational aspects within Japanese public junior high schools. Parents also often have direct contact with junior high school teachers so one could assume that their voices have a sizable influence. In light of this it was appropriate to survey parent attitudes to EFL in junior high school.

3.4. Ethical Considerations

The aim of my research was to investigate the status of oral communication in public junior high school EFL classrooms in Japan and how political policy for this environment in regards to oral communication compares to classroom reality. To understand issues associated with this environment it was necessary to survey the people involved at the base level. These people were in three groups; the JTEs, the junior high school students, and the students' parents. The data collection tools chosen to survey these three groups were self completion questionnaires. All participants involved in any stage, from focus groups to one-on-one interviews, were informed that participation was voluntary. They were also informed that while all of their responses may be presented in this thesis confidentiality would be strictly maintained.

3.5. Questionnaire Design Considerations

To develop the questionnaires I requested and received the voluntary assistance of a small group of JTEs to participate in two focus group sessions. The JTEs collaborated during these sessions to develop a list of possible questionnaire items. Before the focus group sessions began all participants were informed of the research topic and how the data generated in the sessions would be used. The participants were aware of their rights and that they could stop participating at any stage during the sessions. Both focus groups consented to the sessions being audio recorded and transcribed under the assurance of participant confidentiality.

3.5.1. JTE Questionnaire Administration Considerations

From the suggestions made by the focus groups, questionnaires were developed for distribution to the JTEs (see 3.5). Before they were administered they were sent to all focus group participants so they could assess the relevancy and appropriateness of all questionnaire items. A copy of the questionnaire was also sent to the head of the Kurashiki

Board of Education for official approval. Despite fears that Kurashiki Board of Education involvement in the questionnaire might affect the candidness of participants I had to receive consent because without it the Kurashiki Board of Education may have forbidden JTEs to respond.

Special attention was given in ensuring potential participants were informed of the research focus and how the data gathered would be used. All JTEs who received the questionnaire were given this information in a cover letter. They were also informed that their answers would be confidential and anonymous. To provide further assurance, the cover letter specifically stated that participants should not write their name on the questionnaire, furthermore there was no space allocated on the questionnaire for them to do so. Potential participants were neither pressured nor coerced into answering the questionnaire. Manipulation or encouragement to answer in certain ways in the questionnaires was avoided; the cover letter specifically stated that what could be considered a negative answer was just as important to my research as one that may be considered positive. Assurances were given to all participants that their completed questionnaires would be stored in locked cabinets in my office and destroyed following data processing.

3.5.2. Parent And Student Questionnaire Administration Considerations

To administer the student and parent questionnaires JTE assistance was essential. Two JTEs assisted me with the language level and question style used in both questionnaires. Their advice was invaluable, particularly in ensuring that the questionnaires were culturally appropriate. Both questionnaires received the consent of the principals from both selected schools. Although the students completed their questionnaires in class, making it semi-voluntary, they did have the freedom to be candid. The parents who completed the questionnaire did so voluntarily and were provided with envelopes, in which to return their completed questionnaires, to maintain privacy.

3.6. Data Collection Tool Development

In this section the development of the three questionnaires, with an emphasis on the JTE questionnaire, will be outlined in detail. The outline is done in chronological order, beginning with the initial knowledge I possessed prior to undertaking my research, moving to the focus group sessions, questionnaire item production, the detailed reliability and validity checks, the back-translation process, before concluding with the pilot studies.

3.6.1. Inside Experience

The experience gained from working more than six years in public junior high schools in Kurashiki was invaluable to my research on multiple levels. It enabled me to form the questions to ask the focus group participants, and some possible questionnaire items. It also gave me access to the JTEs and Kurashiki Board of Education officials. Above all else my experience endowed me with a strong desire to find the answers to questions that have long puzzled me which formed the basis of the thesis research questions.

3.6.2. Useful Previous Studies

Gorsuch's research on Japanese education policy (2000, 2001), Karavas-Doukas' (1996) study on teacher attitudes to CLT in Greece, and Li's (1998) paper on CLT adoption in South Korea were particularly relevant. Not only did Gorsuch's and Karavas-Doukas' research provide data on EFL education, they also featured good examples of likert scales.

3.6.3. Focus Groups

Focus groups were set up to assist in questionnaire item generation, mainly for the JTE questionnaire. Due to the inherently limited nature of questionnaires making the questionnaire items as relevant as possible was essential; this could only be achieved by

drawing on JTE perspectives and experiences. I believed that focus group sessions would be more beneficial than one-on-one interviews for this as they would give me greater breadth, as Gibbs (1997, p. 2) suggested, a "multiplicity of views". Other research on this subject indicated that EFL in Japan's public school system had a number of problems and in my experience I had also noticed some issues. I wanted to hear the JTE opinions on the difficulties faced in teaching oral communication in their lessons and where they thought the source of the difficulties lay. I then wanted to voice my ideas and that of the prior studies by other scholars to gauge participant reaction. While in this phase I wanted to keep the "floor open" so that the focus group process would be a collaborative elaboration of ideas.

These meetings gave the JTEs an opportunity to voice their opinions on the difficult and sometimes controversial issues they face in their employment. The participants reacted positively in the knowledge that they were contributing something positive for research on the entire Kurashiki JTE group and readily voiced their opinions. Because each focus group had different members there was the potential for very diverse views. This did not occur however and I was able to correlate and highlight the main themes from the sessions easily. These themes were identified and developed into items to appear in the JTE questionnaire. Examples of comments that lead directly to item development were "there is no need to speak English in Japan", "our main task is to prepare students for their senior high school entry tests", and "policy makers don't know the work and problems that JTEs face daily", which were rephrased into items #3, #7 and #8, and # 16 respectively in the JTE questionnaire (see Appendix 6) The information gathered from the two focus group sessions went beyond questionnaire item development to become an invaluable source of data in its own right supporting questionnaire findings, providing more evidence and colour, and filling in gaps left by the questionnaire. The transcripts of the sessions were referred to consistently throughout the process analysing all the results to look at the interplay between them.

Both sessions were conducted in both English and in Japanese and were initially semi-structured to develop the predetermined themes I wanted expanded. After receiving an elaboration on the predetermined points I allowed the sessions to become freer to allow

further pertinent points to be brought forward and discussed. Regulation was the key for me to ensure that all discussion was relevant and the focus group sessions were fruitful.

3.6.3.1. Focus Group Session One

The first focus group session involved just two JTEs. I was well acquainted with one of the participants, which lead to a relaxed, honest, and productive atmosphere. The session was scheduled to last one hour only, yet the two JTEs continued the discussion for longer than two hours. The entire focus group session was audio recorded and transcribed verbatim in English by me the following day: Japanese sections were translated also by me.

Initially, I introduced my research to the participants and explained my study goals. I then gave both members a pencil and some paper and told them to write down the main difficulties they face in trying to teach English oral communication. The rationale behind the list scripting was to give the participants time to warm-up, focus on the issue, and develop their ideas clearly, and because, although both JTEs were proficient in English, talking about such an emotive issue abruptly in their L2 may have caused considerable language anxiety.

After a brief period the lists were handed to me. Each list featured approximately 10 points which was more than I had expected and perhaps an indication that my technique of allowing the participants to ease into the focus group process by writing lists was correct. I then added my list of ideas, scripted prior to the session, based on prior studies conducted by other scholars and personal experience, to the two taken from the JTEs. After this point the focus group session became a collaborative process in discussing and developing the points from the three lists. Before concluding, I asked the JTEs for their thoughts on how I could promote response rates in the JTE questionnaire

3.6.3.2. Focus Group Session Two

Focus group session two was held at the school where the four participants taught EFL. Similar to the first session this session was also planned to last for one hour only but

lasted far longer. Once again I was well acquainted with one of the JTEs and this allowed for a relaxed, honest, and fruitful atmosphere to develop quickly. As with the first focus group session this focus group session was audio recorded and transcribed verbatim in English by me the following day: Japanese sections were also translated by me.

I was initially concerned that conducting the session in their working environment might make the JTEs uncomfortable. This fear was unfounded however as many candid and controversial comments were made by the focus group participants. As with focus group session one, I intended to have the participants write lists of the difficulties and issues they faced in teaching oral communication in their EFL lessons; however each JTE had scripted a list prior to my arrival and was ready for the collaborative discussion phase. Once again I added my list to the participants' lists to be discussed and developed. The final discussion again focused on how the participants thought JTE questionnaire response rates could be promoted. As with the first focus group session this discussion was enlightening. From this process I became aware that I would need approval for questionnaire administration from the Kurashiki Board of Education and I became convinced that the questionnaire should be translated into Japanese for the JTEs.

3.6.4. Item Production

The use of my questionnaires was limited to one time so validity and reliability were essential. The questionnaires also needed to be short and unambiguous. The target number of items in the JTE questionnaire was thirty as I thought that number would ensure that the questionnaire would comfortably fit into the three leaf booklet form I was planning to use.

I began with three lists: points taken from general EFL literature, points taken from pre-existing questionnaires by other researchers, and points identified in the focus group sessions. The lists were combined to make a master list of 94 possible items for the questionnaire.

Likert scales were developed at this stage and attached to appropriate questions. The traditional "strongly agree…strongly disagree" scale was avoided because, in Fowler's (1995, p. 65) words, it:

> clearly violates the first rule of designing a responsive task for subjective questions: It contains two dimensions. The term “strongly” suggests an emotional component, a degree of conviction or caring about the answer over and above the cognitive task that is the central question.

Though Fowler’s comments were on likert scales in general I found this point to be particularly pertinent to Japanese society where displays of emotion are often looked down on– especially in the workplace. Instead scales worded “全くそうである... 全くそうではない” and “強くそう思う... 全くそう思わない” were used, which can be translated as meaning “completely agree…completely disagree” and “completely true…. completely untrue” respectively. Some of the Likert scales featured five options with a middle category to allow for participants who may genuinely not possess an answer or opinion, i.e.

MEXT considers the opinions of JTEs when they write the English syllabus

For items where the participants would have been more likely to have an answer or opinion the middle option was avoided and only four choices were offered, i.e.

I learnt English by the traditional ‘yakudoku’ method when I was a student.

On recommendations by Brace (2004), and Bradburn, Sudman and Wansink (2004), negative choices were placed on the left end of the scale to reduce bias.

Following the advice of Brown (2001), Fowler (1995), Bradburn et al. (2004), and Brace (2004), the ninety-four items were reviewed for the following;

* relevancy to research questions
* appropriateness and wording
* the presence of negative and double/1½ barrelled questions
* length– below 20 words per item
* repetition of items or closeness to other items
* bias– the use of *loaded words* such as “clearly”, “obviously”, etc…
* comprehensibility and ambiguousness
* overlapping choices– each item should make respondents feel that only one option is appropriate for them

Items found with any of the problems from the check list above were either deleted or reworded. This item review process reduced the number of questions to 55.

3.6.5. Item Analysis

The item list of 55 questions was sent to a journalist for a more thorough and professional analysis, resulting in the rewording of some of the questions. The 55 questions were then given to an EFL professor with over 25 years teaching experience in Japan. He analyzed the questions for quality and appropriateness. Following this process 46 items remained, which still exceeded my target by 16. To reduce question numbers further the items were applied to a *Q-sort* process. Nahm, Solis-Galvan, Rao and Ragun-Nathan (2002, p. 2) describe the Q-sort method as "an iterative process in which the degree of agreement between judges forms the basis of assessing construct validity and improving reliability of constructs."

3.6.6. The Q-sort Process

Before employing the Q-sort process two further item lists were developed from previous research and my focus group sessions; one for the junior high school student questionnaire and the other for their parents. The number of items was eight and seven respectively. These two lists, along with the JTE items, were kept separate and the items randomized. The Q-sort judges were sent these three uncategorized lists.

The judges, experts in their chosen fields within the English language industry, included two Japanese university EFL professors (one a native speaker of English and the other a non-native speaker of English), a journalist, and an English teacher– the latter two New Zealand residents. The judges were selected because of their diverse backgrounds. The rationale in using two New Zealanders who were unfamiliar with the Japanese school system was to increase placement objectivity through their neutrality.

The judges received the following (see Appendix 3):

1. An “Explanation of Terms” paper
2. A cover letter, including instructions on how to undertake a Q-sort
3. A JTE items list
4. A JTE constructs page
5. A Parent items list
6. A Parent constructs page
7. A Student items list
8. A Student constructs page

I applied Moore and Benbasat’s *Hit Ratio* (1991) evaluation, presented in Nahm et al. (2002), because of its simplicity. The judges were asked to look at an item list, for example the JTE items and using the relevant constructs page, in this case the JTE constructs page, write the item into the construct that they thought it should go. The hit ratio refers to the percentage of correct item placements by the judges– “hits”– within question constructs. A high percentage of items placed in target constructs by the judges amounts to a high level of inter-judge agreement, meaning a high hit ratio. The higher the hit ratio, the higher the degree of construct validity and the higher the reliability potential of the data collection tool once the correctly placed items are amalgamated into a questionnaire.

My process deviated in one way from the Nahm et al. theory; they recommended repeating the process until a sufficient level of inter-judge agreement has been reached. I could only complete the process once however, due to the future unavailability of the judges and the time constrictions within my research. I was aware of this problem prior to conducting the Q-sort process, so in an effort to offset limitations I increased the number of judges from two, as suggested by Nahm et al., to four.

Following Nahm et al. my process featured two stages:

Stage One – Judges placed the questionnaire items into constructs and returned their three completed JTE, student, and parent construct pages to me. The judge’s placements for each questionnaire were combined and entered on three separate tables, one each for JTEs, students, and parents to show overall results. Inter-judge agreement was measured for each

construct on each of the three tables. Correct placements ran diagonally from the top left square of the table for construct one to the bottom right corner square for the last construct. Any off-diagonal entries were items placed in the wrong constructs and were identified as being ambiguous (see Appendix 4 for an example of a completed construct table).

Stage Two – Ambiguous items were mostly deleted and those considered essential to the questionnaires were reworded under the guidance of the native English speaking EFL professor to improve clarity. Following this procedure inter-judge agreement levels were recalculated for the three questionnaires (reworded items were still considered as misplaced). For the ratios achieved see Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Q-sort Ratios

Item Types	Total Item Placement	Number of Agreements	Overall Hit Ratio
Items for the JTE questionnaire	116	100	86.21%
Items for the Student questionnaire	32	29	90.62%
Items for the Parent questionnaire	28	23	82.14%

The hit ratios were high. Furthermore the question numbers were now:

JTE questionnaire – 29 items

Student questionnaire – 6 items

Parent questionnaire – 5 items

These numbers fitted into my initial plans for questionnaire lengths.

3.6.7. Back Translation

Kurashiki JTE proficiency levels vary markedly so to facilitate the interpretation of the questionnaire items and to promote response rates all three questionnaires were translated into Japanese. This procedure involved three stages using three separate, bi-lingual, Japanese native speakers. The stages were as follows;

Stage One – The three questionnaires were sent to a translator to translate from English to Japanese. The questionnaires, in Japanese, were returned to me.

Stage Two – The Japanese questionnaires were sent to a different translator to translate back into English. The questionnaires, translated back into English, were returned to me.

Stage Three – The original English questionnaires, sent out in stage one, and the questionnaire translated back into English, in stage two, were compared. Only two items did not match. The items were given to a third translator to analyse where the mistakes had been made. These mistakes were fixed so that the Japanese versions of the questionnaires asked for the information I sought.

3.6.8. Pilot Study Preparation

I set out the questionnaires in the style and item order that I intended to administer them. On the advice of Brace (2004) I endeavoured to make questionnaires that flowed. Numbers were attached to the items to add more order to the questionnaires. On the JTE questionnaire sensitive questions inquiring into areas such as experience and qualifications were put towards the end. The JTE questionnaire was printed on plain A4 paper. To go with the JTE questionnaire I included a cover letter which provided details on my background and introduced the JTEs to my research. For the pilot study I sent out the questionnaires exactly how I planned to administer them. For the JTE questionnaire I designed and attached a title page which provided the questionnaire title, my contact details, and instructions on how to complete the questionnaire. A short introduction with instructions was printed on the top of the parent questionnaire. A simple set of instructions was also printed at the top of the student questionnaire.

3.6.9. The Pilot Study Process

All of the questionnaires and extra papers for the JTE questionnaire were sent to a Kurashiki junior high school for a pilot study undertaken by three JTEs. The JTEs reviewed the JTE questionnaire, noting the time it took to complete, ease of completion, ambiguous or inappropriate questions, and critiqued the questionnaire style/layout and the accompanying cover letter. The JTEs also gave student questionnaires to the junior high school's English Club to pilot, and the club noted suggestions for improvements. The English club students also took the parent questionnaire home for their parents to pilot. Comments and suggestions were then sent back to me by the head English teacher and changes were made to the questionnaires where advised. The student and parent questionnaires were filed for administration later as I had to focus on preparing the JTE questionnaire for administration in the summer vacation.

The JTE questionnaire was sent to the head of the Kurashiki Board of Education for his approval. After analyzing the questionnaire he concluded that it was appropriate and agreed to give it the Board of Education's backing. It was essential to receive backing by the Kurashiki Board of Education on all of the questionnaires because without their approval some participants might not feel obliged to respond or the Board of Education might forbid questionnaire administration to the JTEs, students, and parents.

3.7. JTE Data Collection

The following sections will detail the methods in which data was received from the JTEs, with the exception of the focus group sessions.

3.7.1. Questionnaire Layout

Following the advice of my supervisor, Bradburn et al., (2004), and Brace (2004) the questionnaire was administered in booklet form. Despite finding no literature that promoted the use of colour paper I acted on my supervisor's suggestion to use it. The

questionnaire was printed on high quality, lavender coloured, A4 paper which would stand out amongst the white paper I remember piled on my old ex-colleagues' desks. The questionnaire allowed room for extra comments should a participant care to expand on some of their answers. Cover letters, to go with the questionnaire, were printed on good quality white A4 paper. Each questionnaire came with a cover letter and a stamped, self addressed envelope. These papers were put into large envelopes (questionnaire packs) ready for administration. See Appendix 5 for all documents sent in the questionnaire packs, see Appendix 6 for an English version of the JTE questionnaire (not part of the questionnaire pack).

3.7.2. JTE Questionnaire Administration

Both focus groups suggested that I deliver the questionnaire to the junior high schools in person. Unfortunately, due to work commitments, this was impossible. I spoke to the head of the Kurashiki Board of Education to get his opinion on the best approach to administer the questionnaires and he invited me to a Kurashiki City-wide JTE seminar. At this seminar nearly all Kurashiki junior high schools were represented by at least one JTE. I gave a presentation and highlighted to the JTEs that this was their first chance to give their opinions on why Japanese students generally have poor oral communication skills in English. After my presentation I distributed the questionnaire to all of the JTEs who took away sufficient numbers of questionnaire packs, described in the previous section, for themselves and their colleagues to complete during the summer vacation. A week before the due date for questionnaire responses I rang schools to remind JTEs to respond to the questionnaires if time permitted.

3.7.3. One-On-One Interviews

During data processing I discovered information gaps left by the JTE questionnaire. To remedy this problem, and provide data on areas deemed lacking (see 3.9.4), I conducted two one-on-one JTE interviews. Because of the high English competence of both JTEs both

interviews were conducted in English. Predetermined questions were asked in the semi-structured interviews (see Appendix 7). Interviews were conducted in both Japanese and in English. Both interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim by myself the following day; Japanese sections were translated into English also by me. Key points from the interviews were then identified as they related to the research questions.

3.8. Student And Parent Questionnaire Administration

The student and parent questionnaires underwent several modifications before they were administered. Questions were reordered at the suggestion of some JTEs and some of the items were reworded to increase politeness. A question that asked if students should receive a good knowledge in foreign cultures and world affairs was added to both questionnaires at the request of the JTEs. Though the question was not central to my research questions it was included as a compromise in thanks and to ensure further cooperation.

Once the final copies of both questionnaires were accepted by the JTE who helped me with their design and make-up I printed 250 copies of both questionnaires and took them to her junior high school to administer. When I arrived at the school with the questionnaires the JTE informed me that she would now show them to the principal to receive his approval. It surprised me that this was the first time the principal had seen either questionnaire. I had mistakenly assumed that the JTE had included the school principal in the process and he had approved of the questionnaires. I was immediately informed, through the JTE, that the principal would not allow either questionnaire to be administrated until content changes were made. He demanded simpler item wording on the parent questionnaire and stated that one of the tasks, which asked students and parents to rank the importance of subjects taught in school, was culturally unacceptable. This meant that the ranking point system I intended to implement, as I did with JTE responses (see 4.4.1), could not be used. So, despite what the JTE thought or the fact that I had five hundred printed questionnaires, changes had to be made before administration. After both questionnaires were changed and approved by the principal parent questionnaires were

inserted into envelopes to be taken home by the school students for their parents to complete.

All students at this school completed the questionnaire during class and then took questionnaires home to be completed by their parents. Following this administration I contacted another principal about administering both questionnaires at his school. The principal of the second school was extremely receptive to the surveys as he had been in contact with the principal of the school that initially completed the questionnaires. The questionnaires were not completed or taken home by all students in this school, administration was done at the discretion of JTEs but all three junior high school grades were represented. The total number of completed student questionnaires that I received from the schools was 337. See Appendix 8 for both administered questionnaires (in Japanese), and Appendix 9 for both questionnaires in English.

3.9. Data Entry

Codes were applied to the items in all three questionnaires to simplify data entry. Ranking scores were inverted and totalled to show true preferences. In regards to questions 10, 12, 27, 28, and 29 on the JTE questionnaire, 3 and 6 on the student questionnaire, and 1 and 5 on the parent questionnaire, the number of choices were totalled to show beliefs. For questions 1, 19, and 26 on the JTE questionnaire the values written by the respondents were entered without any alteration. The data was initially entered into Microsoft Excel to provide a general overview and later applied to a statistical analysis system (SAS) program. Additional comments written on questionnaires were translated into English by a Japanese native speaking translator. These comments, along with comments taken from the focus groups and one-on-one interviews, were used to provide information and more detail to the text.

3.10. Data Collection Issues

This section focuses specifically on the issues that arose from my data collection methods and gives a detailed analysis on each of the methods that provided data for this research.

3.10.1. Focus Groups

Zorn, Roper, Broadfoot and Weaver (2006) warned of group conformity and dominant group members sometimes present in discussions. However, based on my history as a Kurashiki junior high school employee and my familiarity with one member of each focus group I felt the sessions were *uchi* or inside/in-group encounters based on trust, where participants spoke their mind freely and honestly. I decreased the threat of showing conformity in my results by recording the sessions and transcribing the discussion verbatim. By doing so I could identify negotiations that took place on key issues before opinions converged. Morgan (1996, p. 146) concluded that smaller groups were more appropriate when dealing with emotionally charged topics, therefore the small size of my focus groups in this case was apposite.

3.10.2. The Q-sort Process

Unfortunately, I could not complete the Q-sort process, as described by Nahm et al., perfectly (see 3.5.6). Whether my compromise of increasing judge numbers while only completing the process once was an effective solution is debateable, however, a good level of inter-judge agreement was reached in all three questionnaires. Nahm et al. emphasized that this procedure leans towards qualitative analysis rather than being a thorough quantitative test. Despite this it does highlight problems such as ambiguous items.

3.10.3. Back-translation

In his paper on questionnaire translation Griffee (1999) stated that documents become invalid through translation. This is because some words have no equivalent in other languages, or may have a looser or more figurative meaning. Though the Q-sort was in English and the administered questionnaires were in Japanese the questionnaires were subjected to back-translation. Questionnaire items were initially written in English and translated into Japanese, and then back again into English; each by a separate translator. When the initial English item list and the final, back-translated English list were compared, side-by-side, mistakes were easily identified and corrected by another translator. Furthermore, after the back-translation process the Japanese versions of the questionnaires were piloted by the groups that it would actually survey to check for any ambiguous or irrelevant items.

3.10.4. The JTE Questionnaire

Unfortunately questionnaire administration for this research was carried out only once. During data analysis I became aware of some shortcomings present in the questionnaire. One deficiency was the absence of in-depth questions on some central themes. Question 13, for example, could have been expanded upon. Though JTEs indicated whether their lesson content is affected by MEXT policy it would have been beneficial to know how they were affected. A question examining the level of JTE awareness on MEXT policy should have also been included. Such points were examined in the one-on-one interviews, yet this information can only be considered as the opinions of two JTEs and may not be applicable to JTEs in general. Another area requiring further research was looked at in questions 17 and 18, while general attitudes were received it is apparent that information on what elements of pre-service training were missing or what parts of in-service training are useful/not useful could have been pursued.

It may also have been wise to examine which student grade the respondent was currently teaching as this may have an influence on the amount of English use in class. In

my experience third grade EFL lessons featured far less spoken English because the JTEs focused on preparing their students for the senior high school entrance examination.

The official sanctioning and promotion of the questionnaire by the local Board of Education may have influenced JTE responses in certain sections. JTEs might have been concerned about confidentiality breaches resulting in answers being passed on to the Kurashiki Board of Education. However, responses to questions 13 to 16 showed policy makers, who are directly linked to the Kurashiki Board of Education, in a very poor light. These responses would indicate that JTEs were not overly concerned about this possibility.

Despite the issues detailed I felt a satisfactory response rate was achieved. 57 of the 90 possible JTE participants responded which is a response rate of just over 63%.

3.10.5. The Student Questionnaire

The student questionnaire only related to Research Question One so a long, in-depth questionnaire was unnecessary. Due to budget constraints and a desire for simplicity the questionnaire was only one A4 paper sheet long. In hindsight a more spacious format to allow for the addition of a comments section after each question may have provided some rich information to supplement the figures. An item examining why students felt they would or would not need to speak English in the future would have provided a useful insight into their motivation toward EFL.

3.10.6. The Parent Questionnaire

The point about a more spacious format alluded to in 3.9.5 is also relevant for the parent questionnaire. While there was no space designed for comments on this questionnaire some parents wrote comments beside and in between questions. One can only imagine how much rich data could have been gained with the addition of comment sections. This questionnaire may feature more bias than the other two questionnaires because, in all probability, respondents may have only been the parents positively active in their child gaining a good rounded education. Possibly the more highly educated parents made up

most of the respondents as they are generally the ones that care most about education, since they realise the benefits. They are also more likely to recognise the benefits of their children learning English.

A problem relating to response numbers was the number of hands that this questionnaire had to pass through before data analysis. It is impossible to know how many parents never saw the questionnaire, but it is probable that some parents failed to receive them from their children which obviously had a negative bearing on response rates. Despite this issue, of the 337 questionnaires given to the students for their parents 267 were completed and returned, a response rate of just over 79%.

3.10.7. General Questionnaire Issues

A problem inherent in all questionnaires is that the information gathered may only be applicable for a short time. Furthermore, in regards to the JTE questionnaire, there is no way to gauge if an answer was based on practice rather than beliefs, which is not to say that respondents are dishonest. Yet perception and reality are two different things. Questionnaires merely indicate what respondents state they are doing or provide an interpretation of 'their world'. In question 10 of the JTE questionnaire JTEs may have given answers more indicative of how much in-class English they would like to think of themselves using or how much they thought they should be using rather than how much they use in reality.

Another problem with categorical data like that gained from my likert scales is that there is no indicator of the degree of conviction in respondent answers. Though two respondents may have given the same answer one may have had far stronger feelings in their answer than the other. I tried to minimise this problem by having comment areas after questions in the JTE questionnaire.

3.10.8. One-On-One interviews

While useful in filling gaps, it must be remembered that these interviews can only realistically be considered as one person's opinion. However, more positively they did provide the rare chance to listen to teachers talk about their experiences, or "lived reality", in a Japanese public junior high school EFL classroom.

3.11. Summary

The focus for this research is the junior high school EFL environment in Japan. The research participants are those intimately involved– the JTEs, the students, and the parents. There were numerous stages undertaken in developing the questionnaires, particularly the JTE questionnaire, before they were administered. The method used to fill information gaps left by the JTE questionnaire was in the form of two, one-on-one interviews. There were numerous data collection issues in my research. The most prominent of these were the absence of in-depth questions in the questionnaire, general questionnaire issues such as inadequate indication of participant conviction in answers, and the bias potential of the one-on-one interviews. I was often completely dependent on my Japanese informants. While, without their assistance, I could not have undertaken this research, when one relies so heavily on others it can prove to be difficult, especially when communication breaks down. A fine example of such a time was when the JTE helping with the student and parent questionnaires did not show the principal copies of the questionnaires before 500 copies were printed. After the principal saw them, and rejected them, I possessed nothing but paper for recycling.

CHAPTER 4 - RESULTS

4.1. Introduction

This chapter reports on the data that were collected as a result of the processes described in the Chapter Three, beginning with data pertaining to the parents, moving to the student data, and lastly data on the JTEs. The first two sections– data from the parents and data from the students– focuses on: the perceived importance of EFL in junior high school, what focus EFL in junior high school should have, views on what the students should acquire from their EFL tuition in junior high school, and opinions of both groups on whether the students will actually need English speaking skills in the future.

JTE data is presented in three interconnected sections. The first section provides information on the difficulties that JTEs perceive themselves as facing in teaching oral communication. This is followed by a focus on JTE teaching methodology, and the activities used by JTEs in EFL lessons to develop student speaking skills. The second section presents data on MEXT policy and how it impacts JTEs. Information detailing the MEXT – JTE relationship is also provided. This chapter concludes with information on the pre and in-service training of Kurashiki JTEs.

4.2. The Parents

Data from the parents of Kurashiki public junior high school students was received through the administration of the questionnaire described in Chapter Three. The 267 returned questionnaires provided information in two ways: question responses and the additional comments written by approximately 30% of parents. The question responses were used for the tables and figures in this chapter while the comments were used to add depth and support to the results.

4.2.1. The Importance Of EFL In Junior High School

To investigate parent opinions of EFL's importance in junior high school the participants were asked to select any school subject that they believed important for their child's education. All selections counted as points, one for each selected subject, the total number of points was calculated to provide a school subject importance ranking. Japanese language studies were deemed most important by the parents with English a clear second (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: JHS Subject Importance Ranking: Parent Views

JHS Subjects	Importance Rating
Japanese	253
English	231
Social Studies	211
Mathematics	159
Physical Education	129
Science	121
Industrial Arts/Homemaking	116
Music	68
Art	63

Despite the parents clear tendency to see certain subjects as more important the following quote shows an opinion typical of those written by parents on questionnaires:

Children need all school subjects.

One parent provided reason behind their opposition to EFL tuition:

We are Japanese, so we should become fluent in speaking Japanese, we should study Japanese culture, and only then should we study English– by ourselves and only if we need it.

4.2.2. EFL For Academia Or Communication (Parent Views)

The issue over whether EFL should be taught in an academic way focused on grammatical details or as a tool for future communication is much debated in Japan. The data shown in Table 4.2 indicates strong support for EFL being taught for future communicative purposes.

Table 4.2: JHS EFL Should Be Taught Academically Rather Than For Future Communication: Parent Views

Response Options	Response Rates
Completely disagree	31
Generally disagree	149
Don't know	24
Generally agree	54
Completely agree	7

All additional comments written by parents supported communicative goals, two typical comments were:

> *Children should learn English as a communication tool not as a typical academic subject.*
>
> *To study for the high school entrance examination is important but it is more important to communicate freely and enjoy communicating.*

One parent pragmatically wrote:

> *It is wonderful for my child to learn to speak English but it is very difficult to do.*

4.2.3. What JHS Students Should Learn (Parent Views)

To cater for a wide variance in opinions participants had multiple options to choose from and additional space to write further skills that they believed to be relevant. Each

option chosen on the questionnaires counted as a point, the total number of points was calculated to provide a ranking of importance. Despite contrary claims in 4.2.2, after three years of EFL education in junior high school the most important thing to the parents is for their children to be able to pass the English section of the senior high school entrance examination– an examination based on grammatical accuracy in decontextualised sentences with little or no need for speaking skills. The skills ranked second, third, and fourth are all related to oral communicative competence (see Figure 4.1).

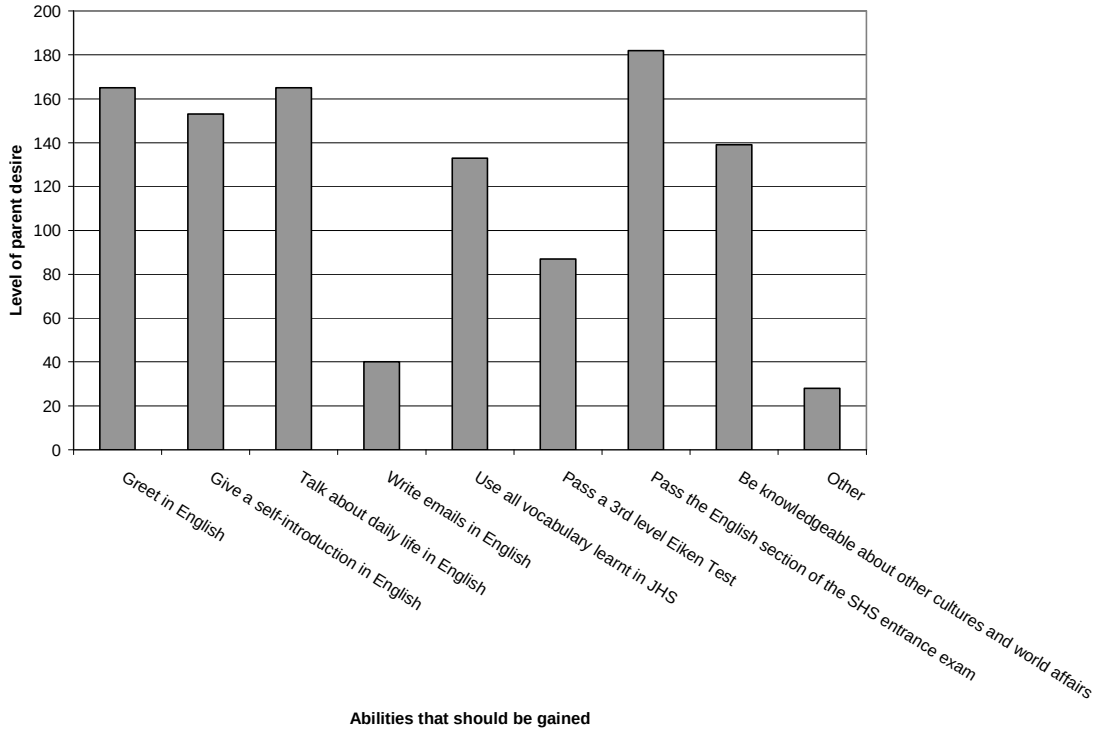

Figure 4.1: Abilities Parents Want Their Child To Gain From JHS EFL Education

Several parents took the opportunity to write additional comments on what their child should be able to do after three years of EFL education. Some promoted speaking:

To speak English in general conversation.

To have enough confidence to have a conversation with a foreigner.

Some were modern and practical but not related to speaking, yet still communicative in intent:

To understand the English on the internet.

Another may have been ethnocentrically based:

To study foreign culture and history and compare them to Japan.

Others were colourful:

To be able to sing English songs and read comic books.

In summing up, one parent wrote particularly poignantly about a problem within the Japanese public school EFL education system:

My child has studied English since elementary school and still knows nothing about English, this is regrettable.

4.2.4. The Need For English Speaking Skills (Parent Views)

More than 50% of the participants indicated that they felt their children would need English in the future (see Table 4.3). Parental opinion is relevant when considering student motivation and the promotion of English speaking skills by the parents.

Table 4.3: Students Need English Speaking Skills For The Future: Parent Views

Response Options	Response Rates
Completely disagree	6
Generally disagree	29
Don't know	50
Generally agree	130
Completely agree	50

Additional comments written on the questionnaires provided insight into parent beliefs. Although the majority of the comments were positive the comments detailed the wide spread of parental opinion. Two positive comments were:

If students can speak English they can converse with foreigners and open up their own worlds.

If students can speak English then their world opens up.

Other written comments betrayed uncertainty:

I hope English will be useful for my children's future.

The following quote pointed toward one of the current issues in Japanese education– test impact:

It will not be necessary for the students to speak English in the future but they have to learn it for educational reasons, especially for getting into senior high school and university.

4.3. The Students

Data on junior high school students was obtained through 337 returned questionnaires. The information was received in two ways: question responses and additional written comments by the students. Similar to the parents, the student question responses were used for the tables and figures in this chapter, while dictated by questionnaire design, student comments were restricted to the final item– these were used to add colour and to support the data findings.

4.3.1. The Importance And Popularity Of JHS EFL

To understand how important English is in the minds of junior high school students the participants were given freedom to select, without ranking, the three most important junior high school subjects. Each choice on the questionnaires counted as a point, the points were calculated to provide a ranking of importance. English was clearly third in the ranking, though not far below the first ranked subject– Japanese (see Figure 4.2).

School subject popularity rankings were in contrast to the subject importance ranking. To calculate the subject popularity data students were asked to rank junior high school subjects from 1-9, 1 being their favourite school subject. From the data gathered only the top three ranked subjects from each student were considered as these were the choices that the students would be most adamant about. Subject popularity is important because the more students enjoy a subject the higher their intrinsic motivation should be

resulting in higher achievement levels. The most vibrant and interesting class for the students will naturally be the highest ranked.

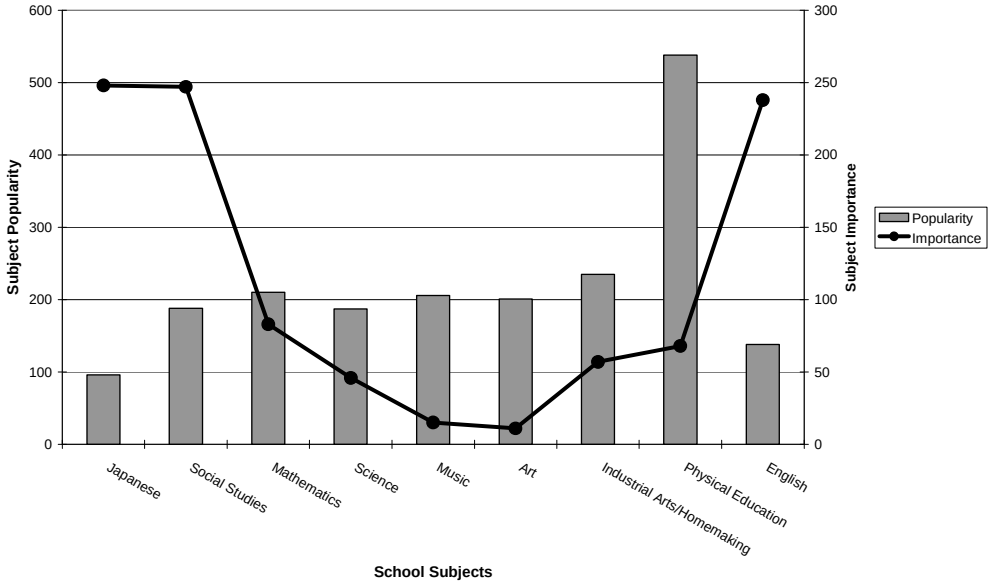

Figure 4.2: JHS Subject Popularity And Importance Ranking By Students

4.3.2. EFL For Academia Or Communication (Student Views)

The result over whether students believe EFL should be taught in an academic way focused on grammatical details or as a tool for future communication was inconclusive: 28.3% answered that it should not have an academic focus, 34.3% answered that it should have an academic focus, and 37.4% chose “don’t know” as their response. This does not mean the result was insignificant as it shows the wide range of student opinions. Students are under pressure to get good results but the data shows that there must be other motivations having some influence on student beliefs.

4.3.3. What JHS Students Should Learn (Student Views)

Similar to the parent questionnaire the students had multiple options to choose from and space to write additional comments on skills that they wanted to be able to do after finishing three years of junior high school EFL education. Each option chosen on the questionnaires counted as a point, the points were calculated to provide a ranking of importance (see Figure 4.3).

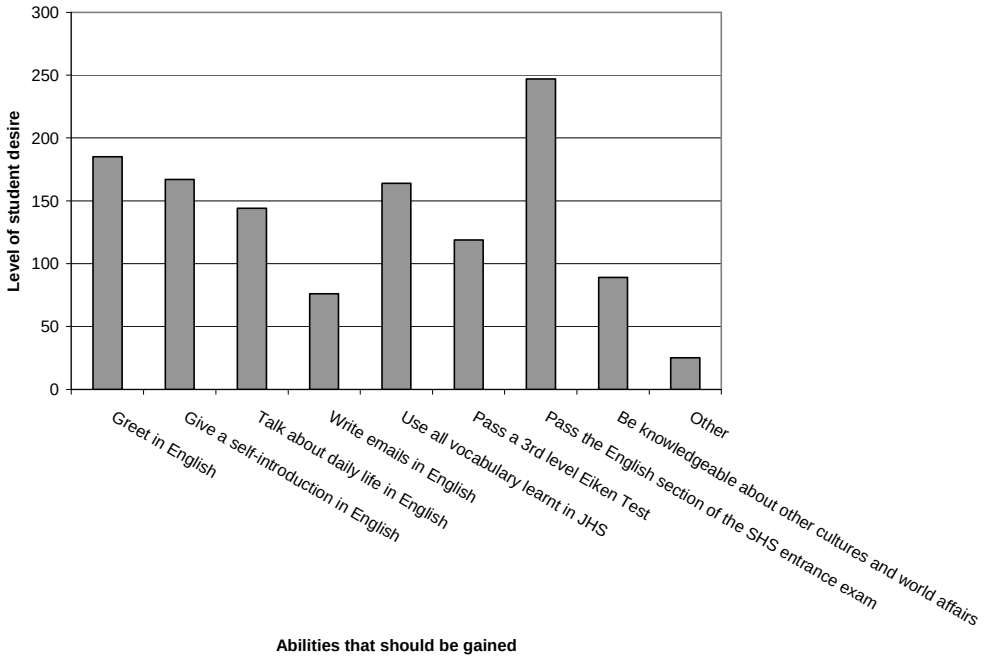

Figure 4.3: Abilities Students Want To Gain From JHS EFL Education

Clearly the most important thing to the students was being able to pass the English section of the senior high school entrance examination. Three of the four next favoured skills involve oral communicative competence, yet the gap between the top ranked skill and the second ranked skill is huge. Approximately 50% of the written comments received from students involved either communicating with foreigners or being able to live in foreign countries.

4.3.4. The Need For English Speaking Skills (Student Views)

Just over 50% of the students responded positively to this point but only about 20% responded negatively mirroring the opinions of their parents though not as emphatically (see Table 4.4).

Table 4.4: Students Need English Speaking Skills For The Future: Student Views

Response Options	Response Rates
Completely disagree	17
Generally disagree	41
Don't know	84
Generally agree	120
Completely agree	25

This data was significant because it is the students that are affected and they, in turn, affect the classroom environment most. This is the group that must be motivated for oral communication to occur in the EFL classroom. If a widespread belief in the need to have English speaking skills for the future exists amongst the students then logically students should be motivated, albeit extrinsically, to study communication skills in EFL lessons.

4.4. The JTEs

JTE data was gathered through a variety of methods: focus groups, a questionnaire, additional comments written on the questionnaire, and two, one-on-one interviews. Data from the questionnaire, which had a 63.3% response rate, was used to produce tables and figures. At every opportunity in "face-to-face" data gathering JTEs discussed the difficulties they faced in teaching EFL in junior high school. This inside expertise contributed background information that provided colour, depth and supported the results.

4.4.1. Difficulties In Teaching Oral Communication In JHS

In the questionnaire the JTEs were asked to rank the six biggest handicaps, in order– 1 being the biggest handicap that they faced in teaching oral communication. Only the top three choices were considered during data analysis because I surmised that choices 1-3 would be important but 4 -6 may be "fillers" for most JTEs to complete their six choices. A point system was allocated to the choices; first choices were 3 points, second choices 2 points, and third choices 1 point. All points were calculated to produce Figure 4.4.

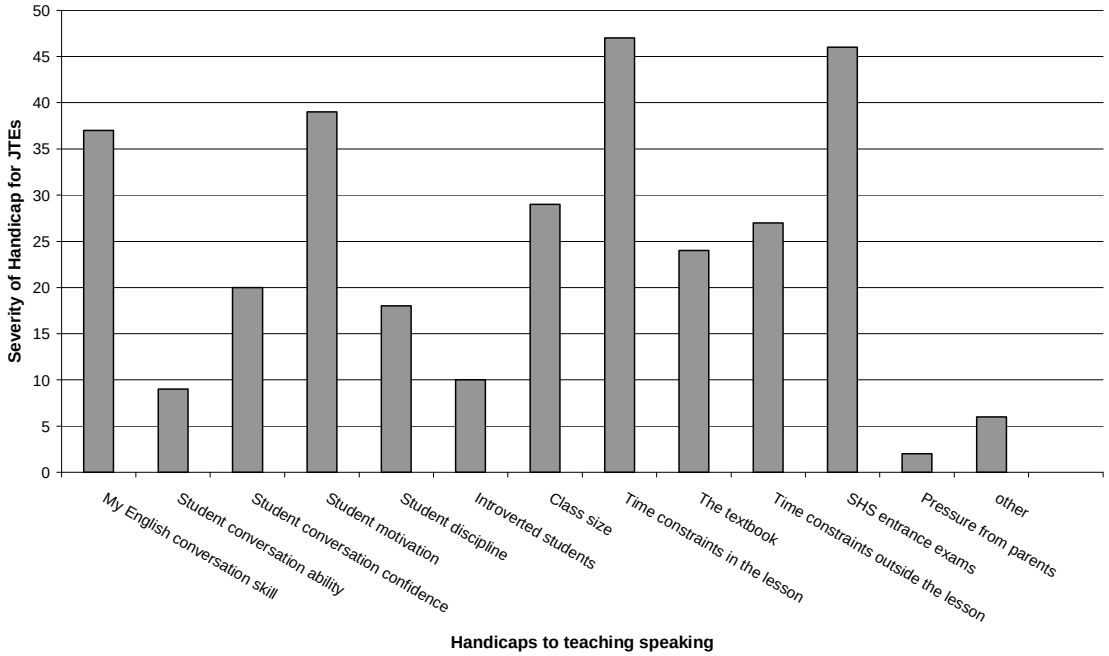

Figure 4.4: Handicaps To Teaching Speaking In JHS EFL Education: JTE Views

The most significant handicaps in teaching speaking in junior high school EFL lessons were time constraints and the senior high school entrance examinations. I contend that time constraints in lessons are caused by the senior high school entrance examinations as the JTEs felt that they must teach the material most relevant to the senior high school entrance examinations, before teaching something not examined, like speaking. Evidence of this can be seen in the following JTE quote that was written on a returned questionnaire:

Speaking is the least important for the students so when there is limited time, which is often, speaking is cut from the lesson.

On the level below these two perceived difficulties were student motivation and JTE English speaking competence. The next grouping of handicaps included class size, time constraints outside the lesson and the EFL textbook JTEs must use. The following sections (from 4.4.2 to 4.4.8) will now examine the seven main perceived handicaps listed above in more depth.

4.4.2. Test Impact

There was no other information on time constraints within lessons other than the quote provided by a JTE in 4.4.1. It is important however to remain mindful that this problem is a result of a phenomenon known as test impact. Therefore by giving data on test impact JTEs are detailing the root cause of the in-lesson time constraints they face.

It is shown in Table 4.5 that most JTEs generally believe that they teach for student success in the senior high school entrance examinations.

Table 4.5: JTE Views On Their Lessons Being Oriented Towards The SHS Entrance Exams

Response Options	Response Rates
Completely untrue	0
Generally untrue	8
Generally true	43
Completely true	5

A majority of the comments received with this data stated that this was grade level dependent; the third grade focuses the most on the entrance examinations. Two JTEs simply wrote:

Students should get the skills to get into senior high school.

JTEs have to focus on the senior high school entrance examinations; this prevents classes having communication activities.

Focus group participants generally asserted that they must think in the short-term– no further than the senior high school entrance examinations. They must do what they can to get their students into good senior high schools rather than provide them with the skills that would enable them to live in an English speaking country. However one comment made in the focus group sessions indicated that neither lesson content nor teaching methods may change if the JTEs did look beyond the entrance examinations. Once students enter senior high school they often just study grammar, writing, and reading making junior high school JTEs believe that teaching oral communication is pointless.

Most JTEs appear to believe that students are only interested in studying English to pass the senior high school entrance examinations (see Table 4.6).

Table 4.6: Students Are Only Interested In The SHS Entrance Exams: JTE Views

Response Options	Response Rates
Completely untrue	0
Generally untrue	5
Case by case	26
Generally true	20
Completely true	2

A JTE displayed optimism in writing:

I want my students to study for pleasure, not just for the senior high school entrance examination.

Others were pragmatic:

Most students think only of the senior high school entrance examination, they have no interest in English conversation.

90% of students think they study English for the senior high school entrance examination.

More conclusive results were received in regards to the students' parents (see Table 4.7).

Table 4.7: Parents Are More Interested In Their Child Studying For The SHS Entrance Exams Than Practising English Conversation: JTE Views

Response Options	Response Rates
Completely untrue	0
Generally untrue	4
Case by case	17
Generally true	29
Completely true	3

A JTE surmised:

> *Many parents think that it doesn't make any sense if their child is good at speaking English yet fails the senior high school entrance examination.*

Interview participants affirmed that parent attitudes towards speaking English have become more positive yet is still not a priority for parents. Clearly the main consideration for a parent was getting their child into a good senior high school. During an interview one JTE related an experience involving a student that was often absent from class. When the student tried to enter a specific senior high school she could not pass the English section of the entrance examination. Her parents confronted the JTE insisting that the JTE should have taught their daughter more "test English".

The other interview participant was very candid about parental influence on junior high school EFL education:

> They have a lot of influence, silent but powerful influence. Parents want their kids to pass the exam. If our teaching style is not for the test but for communication parents worry so much. There is a feeling that they think if you keep teaching in this style 'my kids won't be able get a good mark in the test'. Every JTE is scared; we don't want to be blamed. Even one parent has a big influence.

Interviewed JTEs stated that with placement into *good* senior high schools, where advancement onto university is expected, everything hinges on the senior high school entrance examinations. Reasons for this are that the examinations are objective and all students nationwide take the same test, whereas with junior high school exams all stages

are conducted in-house and thus internal assessment cannot be compared between schools. When students seek placement in vocational schools, where advancement onto university is not expected, junior high school records may be taken into consideration. These records include test scores, attitudes, and any special skills– such as in sport, the student may have. However, because JTEs are teaching to the student majority, who seek tertiary education, the individuals who will not advance to tertiary level have no perceivable affect on teaching method or lesson focus.

4.4.3. Student Motivation

According to interviewed JTEs, student speaking skills have not improved during the time they have been teaching, a period of approximately 20 years each. They assert that this is a direct result of an unchanging motivational level in students. One JTE elaborated stating that first grade students react more positively to speaking English these days than first grade students of the past, as a result of prior English tuition in elementary school decreasing the “fear level” of speaking English. Once students enter the second grade however, their attitude reverts to that of past students because of the focus on more academic sections of English such as grammar.

4.4.4. English Use By JTEs

The use of English during lessons varies markedly between JTEs in Kurashiki. However, a clear majority stated that they used English between 11- 40% of the time when they talk in lessons (see Table 4.8).

Table 4.8: The Percentage Of English Spoken In Lessons By JTEs: Submitted By JTEs

Response Percentage Options	Response Rates
0 – 10%	7
11 – 20%	17
21 – 40%	24
41 – 60%	8
61 – 80%	1
81 – 90%	0
91 – 100%	0

The amount and level of English used by JTEs, and how the lessons are conducted in general hinges on their perception of their own speaking proficiency. English conversation skill was a clear fourth choice by JTEs in their handicaps to teach oral communication (refer to Figure 4.4). Table 4.9 shows a large majority of JTEs agree that their English speaking proficiency influences their lessons.

Table 4.9: JTE Views On Their Speaking Proficiency Influencing Their Lessons

Response Options	Response Rates
Completely disagree	2
Generally disagree	7
Generally agree	36
Completely agree	12

From written comments it is unmistakeable that JTEs view a high speaking proficiency as extremely desirable:

If JTEs speak English well it motivates the students to speak English.

I want to be a model for my students.

One of the interview participants stated that "the students like me to use English because they are curious, they need to be stimulated." Yet Table 4.10 shows overwhelming JTE support for Japanese use in junior high school EFL lessons.

Table 4.10: Using Japanese In Class Is Natural For JTEs: JTE Views

Response Options	Response Rates
Completely disagree	2
Generally disagree	5
Generally agree	35
Completely agree	15

Based on written comments the principal reason for this is to maintain student interest by trying to maximize student comprehension. One quote summed up JTE opinions:

> *If JTEs speak English all the time some students won't understand and will lose interest. There is a huge range of mixed abilities in public junior high schools.*

The following quotes indicated when Japanese may be most needed:

> *JTEs should explain things in Japanese, especially difficult grammar.*
>
> *When we teach grammar we should speak in Japanese.*

Focus group participants alluded to the propensity to aspire to 100% accuracy in all pursuits in Japanese society. The nature of grammar is far more "black and white" and absolute than speaking, which is more negotiable and dynamic. Because of this grammatical rules appear to be far easier to translate into Japanese and teach to EFL students than the rules governing spoken English. Therefore, if one desires 100% accuracy in their students, achieving it in grammar, rather than speaking, is a far more realistic proposition– especially if you do not possess adequate oral communication skills to provide your students with sufficient spoken input. The focus groups also asserted that JTEs also strived for 100% accuracy in their students because that was the way JTEs were taught as students and therefore has become the way in which they teach. The participants indicated that this cycle was very hard to change.

4.4.5. Lesson Methodology

Yakudoku, Japan's answer to grammar translation, is a controversial subject and appears to be a "dirty" word in Japanese EFL circles. One of the interview participants stated:

> Yakudoku has a negative image amongst JTEs. Yakudoku is out of date, this teaching style prevents students from being able to speak therefore the image of yakudoku now is not good.

Figure 4.5 indicates that yakudoku use is declining amongst JTEs.
A clear majority of JTEs maintained that this is how they were taught English. One JTE stated that as a student:

> *I never spoke English in my class.*

More than 50% of JTEs contended that this was not how they taught their students, however many written comments supported the existence of yakudoku:

> *I use yakudoku but I also use other methods.*
>
> *When I read the text I translate.*

According to the focus group participants' prime reasons for the continued use of yakudoku were test impact, and JTE ignorance; yakudoku is the only style that many JTEs know and most think it is too hard to change their teaching method. One interview participant felt that both communicative and yakudoku methods were useful. The other interviewee surmised that though CLT sounded good it would not fit the junior high school environment.

The activities that JTEs stated they use regularly to develop student oral communication skills are shown in Figure 4.6. Clearly most of these activities are scripted and uncommunicative. Role-plays could be surmised as being free and non-scripted, yet there are many ways of conducting role-plays. From observation during my employment in Kurashiki junior high schools role-plays involved two people standing up and reading a written dialogue. Many JTEs supplemented the list given on the questionnaire by writing the extra activities that they used. One JTE stated that they gave the students a topic and the students had a conversation about it. However typical additional activities were far less communicative:

> *Self expression using key sentences*.*

Students memorize the text by sections.

Short skits and memorizing sections of the textbook.

Students read at their own pace and remember conversational stock phrases.

Students do choral reading without me leading them.

* Though the term *key sentences* appears ambiguous, from my experience working with JTEs, I understood it as meaning very basic stock phrases such as “How are you?”, “I’m fine and you?”.

While it is essential to teach these stock phrases, in my experience in junior high school EFL classrooms there appeared to be no major rise in the difficulty of stock phrases between 1st Grade and 3rd Grade, therefore one could assume that this type of activity provided little benefit to student English speaking skills.

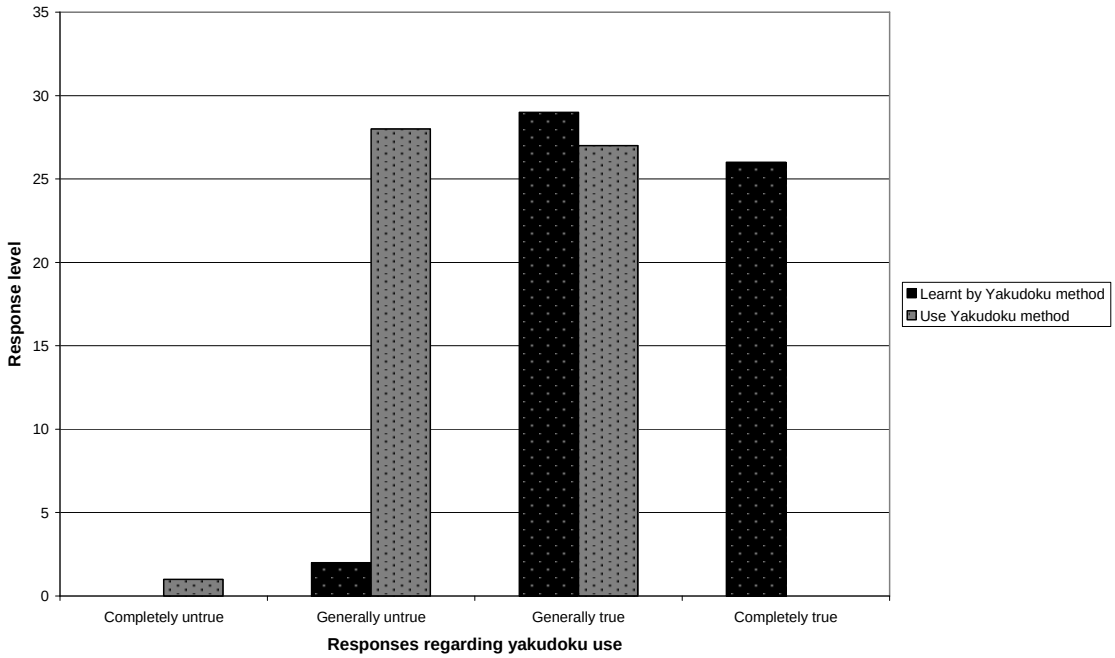

Figure 4.5: JTEs And Yakudoku Usage In JHS EFL Education: JTE Views

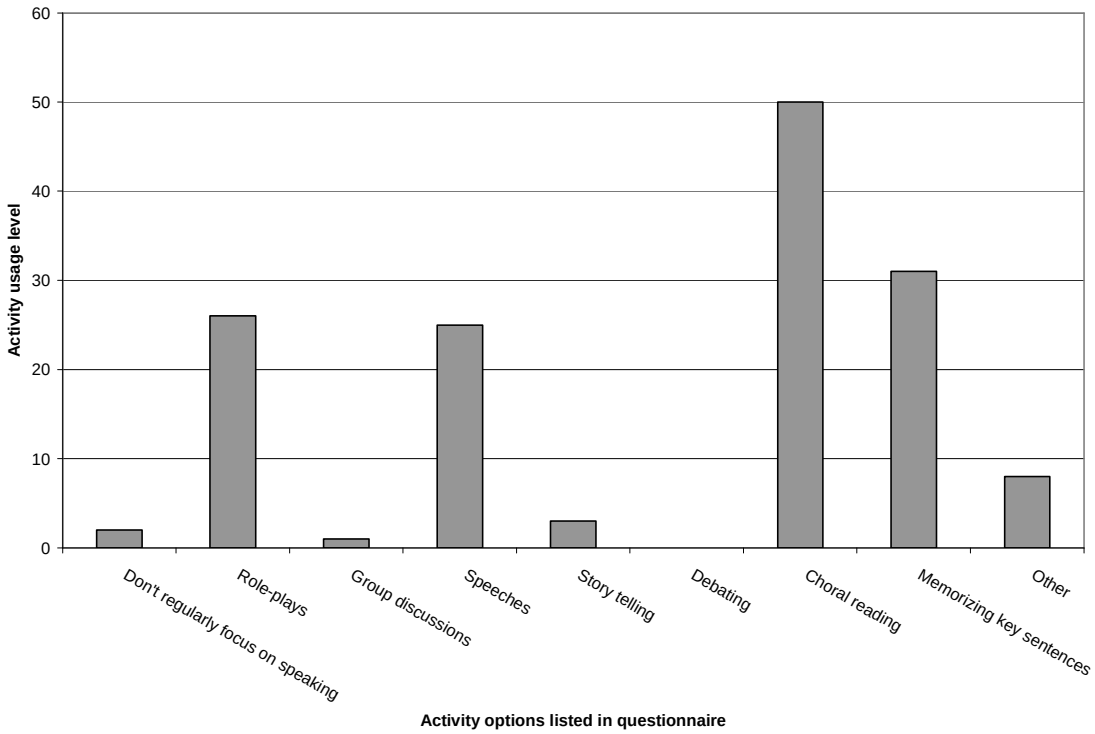

Figure 4.6: Activities Regularly Used By JTEs In JHS EFL Education

4.4.6. Class Size

Data from returned questionnaires showed that JTEs regard class size as a major impediment to teaching oral communication. When Table 4.11 and Table 4.12 are compared it is evident that JTEs are teaching to classes far larger than their perceived threshold. Student numbers greater than this, in the opinions of JTEs, makes teaching oral communication impossible. One quote on a questionnaire compared junior high school numbers to those faced in private language schools which the JTE stated had only 7-8 students. Other JTEs wrote about how the mixed abilities in public junior high school exaggerated class size problems. An interview participant stated that “the most difficult thing to do is teach speaking. There are 32 students in a class, that’s too many.”

Table 4.11: Maximum Class Size For Teaching EFL Speaking Skills (above which teaching speaking is impossible): JTE Views

Measurement Information	Student Numbers
JTE responses	47
Mean	11.4
Mode (19 responses)	10
Stated maximum	30
Stated minimum	3

Table 4.12: JHS EFL Class Sizes In Kurashiki

Measurement Information	Student Numbers
JTE responses	52
Mean	27.4
Mode (8 responses)	35
Stated maximum	38
Stated minimum	15

4.4.7. Time Constraints Outside Of Lessons

According to the focus groups and JTE questionnaire responses time constraints were not isolated to lesson time. The participants maintained that their numerous out of class duties did not allow sufficient time to improve their own English or create speaking activities for their students. They asserted that there was no break-time in their working environment. One JTE stated "we live with the students, not only in subject. We clean together, we eat lunch together, and we spend break-time together." Other JTE duties mentioned in the focus group sessions were *homeroom*– where the teacher is in charge of a particular class for the school year, *shido*– guidance, disciplining students, meeting parents, staff meetings, producing and marking tests, and leading club activities.

4.4.8. Textbook Issues

Textbooks are selected by a region's Board of Education. Therefore different regions within Japan may use a variety of EFL textbooks, all of which need MEXT approval. The Sunshine English Course textbooks, published by Kairyudo, are the texts currently used in Kurashiki. This series features three levels, one for each grade level in junior high school. The productive skills, writing and speaking, are the least catered for. The textbooks for the second and third grade students were analysed. These levels were selected because the second grade students have more time to practice speaking considering that they do not have to focus on senior high school entrance examinations whereas the third grade students do. Analysing these two textbooks should provide a general indication of the usefulness of this textbook series. Over 50% of speaking exercises in both textbooks involved substitution where students must substitute underlined phrases within model sentences with other stock phrases which are provided in lists below the sentences. These activities were designed to be done in pairs yet never give students more than two opportunities to speak. Below is an exercise from the level two textbook:

A: How was your vacation?
B: It was nice. I went to Tokyo with my family.

Example. *go to Tokyo with my family*
1. *go to Kyoto with my family*
2. *ski with my friends*
3. *play tennis with my friends*

Sunshine English Course 2, 2006, p.13

Both analysed textbooks had a very small number of free-speaking exercises.

Below is an example of one these exercises from the level two textbook:

Follow the example, introduce your new friends

Example.

Hello!

This is my new friend Sayaka.

She likes English.

She studies it every day.

She has a dog.

His name is Cookie.

Sunshine English Course 2, 2006, p.7

4.4.9. MEXT Policy And Lesson Content

The remaining sections (4.4.9 – 4.4.13) will now focus on JTE responses to questions regarding MEXT policy promoting the teaching of spoken English. While JTEs generally agreed that junior high school EFL education should produce students that can talk about daily life, most of the written feedback from JTEs was negative:

Junior high school students do not need to speak English in daily life.

In junior high school students should concentrate on understanding grammar.

I cannot agree with this point [that students should learn to be able to talk about daily life in English] *because of the current senior high school entrance exam situation.*

The student needs differ from the views and ideas of MEXT.

A majority of JTEs feel that changing their teaching style to match MEXT policies was difficult. Some quotes relating to this stated:

There are many difficulties in following the curriculum.

If the senior high school entry exam doesn't change then it is impossible.

Table 4.13: Changing Teaching Styles To Match MEXT Policies Is Easy: JTE Views

Response Options	Response Rates
Completely disagree	4
Generally disagree	29
Haven't tried	11
Generally agree	12
Completely agree	0

An interesting point in Table 4.13 is that 11 JTEs stated that they had not tried to match their teaching style to MEXT policy, one JTE simply wrote:

I don't know because I don't follow the curriculum.

It could also be assumed that many of those who answered negatively do not try to match their style to the policies either as they found doing so difficult. Unfortunately data from my questionnaire gave no concrete proof of this. However, interview participants were very candid on this point. One JTE felt that while most English teachers had "some awareness" of MEXT policies they could not follow them. The JTE asserted that MEXT policy did not affect teaching method as JTEs do not often think about the policies and contended she knew "what the students need and I teach them according to that". The other interview participant believed awareness level of MEXT policies among JTEs was "not high" and indicated that the policies have little affect on JTEs. She believed that the "policy is changing a lot so that is why we don't trust it. I don't think it [the policy] is important."

4.4.10. The Appropriateness Of JHS EFL Policies

> On MEXT's website the stated level for junior high school students to attain is: On graduation from a junior high school, students can conduct basic communication with regard to areas such as greetings, responses, or topics relating to daily life.[11]

[11] http://www.mext.go.jp/english/topics/03072801.htm

Surely this policy would appear to mean a move away from the academic approach prevalent in junior high school EFL education. Data from the JTE questionnaire responses were inconclusive as can be seen in Tables 4.14 and 4.15.

Table 4.14: JHS EFL Is Taught Academically Rather Than To Provide Students With Communication Skills: JTE Views

Response Options	Response Rates
Completely untrue	6
Generally untrue	17
Don't know	11
Generally true	21
Completely true	1

Table 4.15: People In Japan Need English Speaking Skills: JTE Views

Response Options	Response Rates
Completely untrue	0
Generally untrue	28
Don't know	7
Generally true	21
Completely true	0

Written comments by JTEs were also varied but negative comments were the majority. The most positive comment from a JTE was:

Students should learn to speak English as the number of foreigners in Japan is rising.

Some comments were neutral, such as:

Some people need English, some people don't.

Not everyone needs English conversation skills.

A JTE quote from a focus group session and another from an interview provided a good summary of the negative written comments:

> In some countries speaking English means you can get a better life but here in Japan it has nothing to do with it. Sometimes I look around the class and think how many students will go abroad and have a chance to speak with foreigners; I guess none, one, a few. But MEXT thinks about the money influence so they think that Japanese people need English to stay ahead in the world.
>
> The goal of English teaching is not communication, the goal of our learning English is just to read English, translate, and learn grammar.

4.4.11. MEXT – JTE Relations

Policy will often fail when policy designers and policy implementers have a poor relationship. JTEs believe that MEXT and teacher ideology are poles apart.

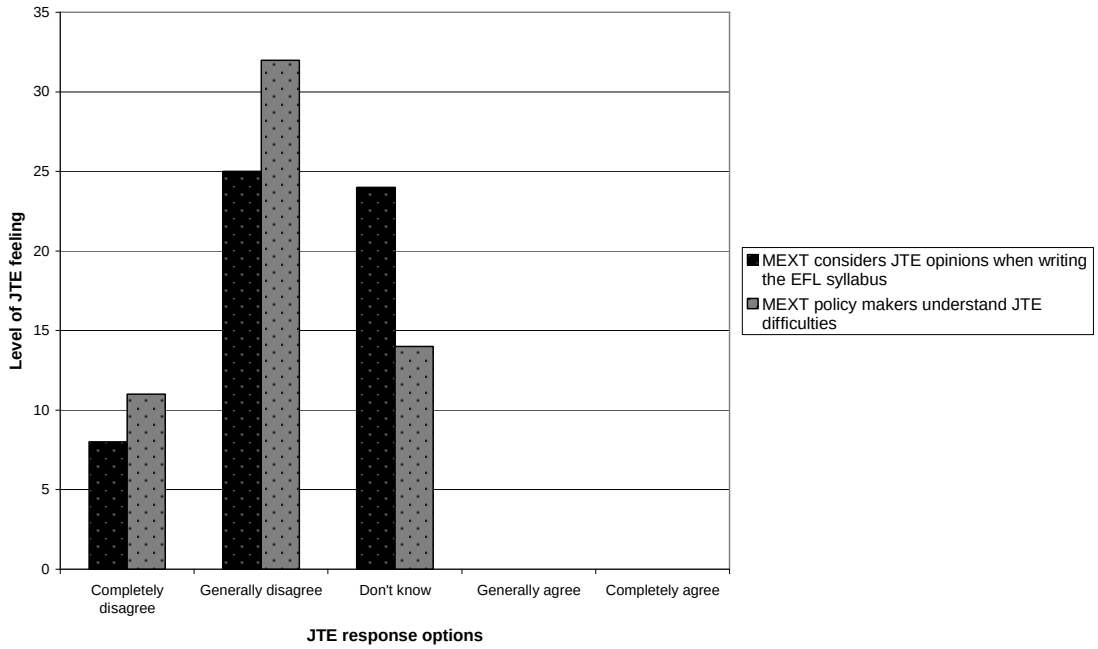

Figure 4.7: MEXT – JTE Relations

No JTE had a positive reaction to questions regarding MEXT – JTE relations, two written quotes sum up JTE feelings:

MEXT doesn't listen to opinions from schools.

MEXT don't understand JTE problems.

Focus group and interview participants were also frank on the MEXT – JTE relationship. Selected JTE quotes from these sessions are:

> JTEs don't trust the policy or MEXT.
>
> The policy makers are the elite, they probably went to private elite schools so they don't know about public education.
>
> They are not teachers, they don't know the students. They are unfamiliar with junior high school conditions. They don't even know the problems we are facing.
>
> We know the reality, they don't know the reality. They don't live in the real world.

4.4.12. JTE Training

JTEs felt more positively towards in-service training than towards their pre-service training in English oral communication. Comments written by JTEs on the questionnaire were all negative regarding pre-service training– 73% of JTEs who wrote comments stated that they did not receive any kind of oral communication training before becoming JTEs. Additionally pre-service training in general was said to have been ineffective. When asked about their pre-service training in general interview participants stated:

> It wasn't so useful. The student-teacher teaching section was a little useful but it was too short; only two weeks. Nowadays it is three weeks. We didn't learn about the real school life.
>
> It was not so useful. I learnt the teaching way and teaching method once I became a teacher.

A JTE's job in junior high school is teaching EFL but no JTE currently employed in Kurashiki graduated from university with any type of EFL teacher training.

Despite Figure 4.8 indicating a positive feeling towards in-service training the majority of written comments received from JTEs warned that if in-service training was not continuous it would be pointless. In the interview sessions participants were queried on what they valued about the in-service training run by the Kurashiki Board of Education. They have both participated in a 10-day English conversation course run in conjunction with the Kurashiki AETs and attended demonstration lessons held in various junior high schools in Kurashiki over the years. The 10-day course run by the Kurashiki Board of Education is an annual event that approximately 25 different JTEs attend every year. It began approximately five years ago and has been compulsory for all JTEs to participate in at some time. This is the final year for this course. The JTEs knew of no further in-service training of this type to be conducted in the future.

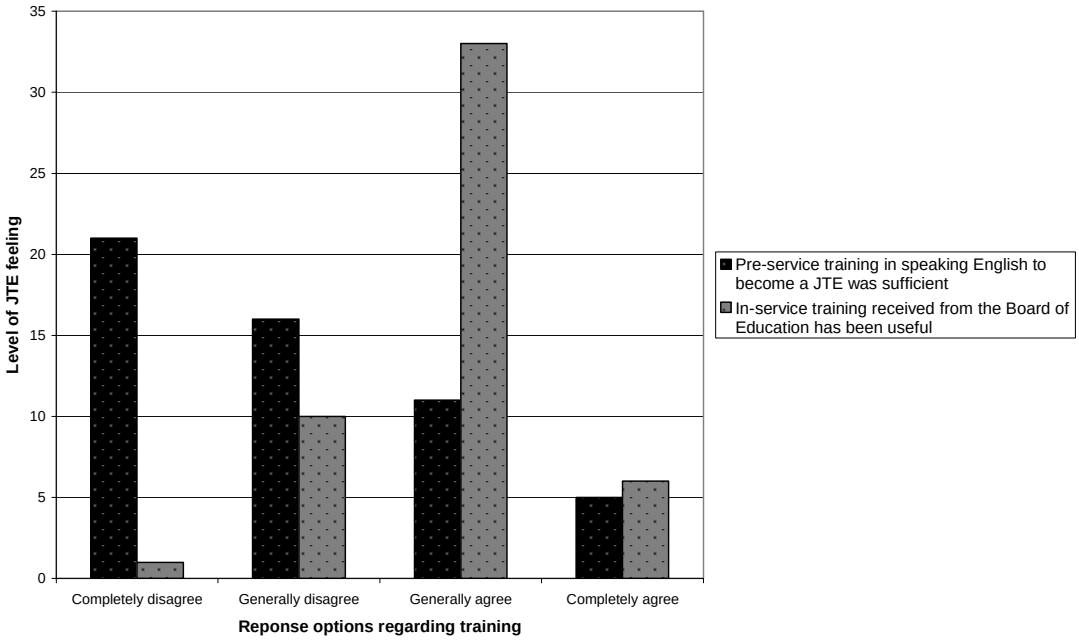

Figure 4.8: JTE Opinions Of Pre- & In-Service Training

Both interview participants expressed regret while explaining that the only type of relevant in-service training regularly available is a demonstration lesson. In the past these lessons were numerous but have now decreased to once per year. At these meetings JTEs learnt different methods and activities to try in their own lessons. JTEs also had opportunities to talk to other English teachers from Kurashiki schools about issues such as

student discipline. As one JTE in an interview stated “other teachers are far more useful at helping me than the Board of Education”. Both interview participants stated in-service training could be improved by increasing the number of demonstration lessons and want more opportunities to attend training courses. One JTE explained in the interview that “if a teacher wants to improve their own English they go to private language companies or go abroad on their own”.

4.4.13. JTE Achievement Of MEXT Directives

The JTE questionnaire also collected information regarding Kurashiki JTE achievement of MEXT directives. The information provided by the JTEs showed that achievement levels have not yet reached a satisfactory level– little over 50% of JTEs have attained that which MEXT stated in 2003, “almost all English teachers will acquire”.

Following data correlation a negative link between experience and the achievement of MEXT directives was obvious, that is– the more experienced JTEs are the less likely they are to have achieved the directives than their less experienced colleagues. Out of the 51 JTEs who answered both questions pertaining to these points 24 JTEs have not achieved the MEXT levels– 18 of which have over 14 years experience.

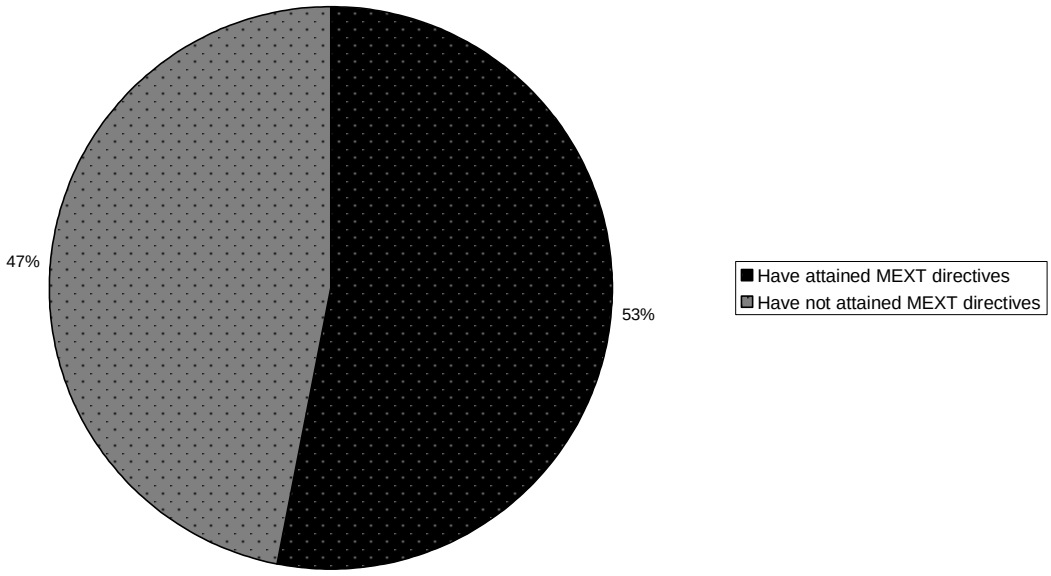

Figure 4.9: JHS JTE MEXT Directive Achievement Level

4.5. Summary

It appears that EFL in junior high school is regarded as highly important by both parents and students. Parents felt that their children need English speaking skills for the future and this was shown in both 4.2.2 and 4.2.4. Yet, this issue is complex as, in 4.2.3, parents also stated that passing the English section of the senior high school entrance examination was the ability they most wanted their children to acquire from junior high school EFL tuition. Students also overwhelming selected this option when answering about what they wanted to acquire from their EFL education.

Test impact appears to be the biggest handicap that junior high school JTEs face at present, though other issues such as student motivation– possibly influenced by test impact, JTE speaking proficiency, and class size are also perceived as presenting major hurdles to the teaching of English speaking skills. MEXT policies are not being implemented in

Kurashiki junior high school EFL classrooms. This deviation may be due to the way MEXT is regarded by the JTEs. The negative attitude that JTEs feel towards MEXT and the policy writers is shown graphically in Figure 4.7. Additional JTE quotes provided colourful descriptions of how MEXT are viewed. JTEs are not above blame in this poor relationship however; their achievement in MEXT proficiency directives is lower than MEXT has publicly demanded.

CHAPTER 5 - DISCUSSION

5.1. Introduction

Prominent findings will be discussed in this chapter based on how JTEs, students and, parents from Kurashiki view EFL oral communication in the Japanese public junior high school curriculum. The main handicaps JTEs perceive themselves as facing in the teaching of oral communication in their lessons will also be examined. This chapter will conclude with an analysis on whether MEXT policies and JTE teaching practices/beliefs match. The most prominent findings in the discussion to follow include the high importance that students and parents place on English tuition in junior high school, the presence of test impact brought on by the senior high school entrance examination, how students can dictate lesson content, and the strained relationship that seems to exist between JTEs and MEXT.

5.2. Research Question One

How do JTEs, parents, and students view public junior high school EFL oral communication education in Japan?

5.2.1. The Role And Importance Of JHS EFL

A significant finding was the universality in which English was seen as extremely important by both students and their parents. Understandably Japanese was ranked as the most important subject by students and parents, but English was ranked in the top three by both groups; above science, mathematics and, in the case of the parents, above social studies. While some comments on parent questionnaires stated non-support of EFL education (4.1.1) it was obvious from the data that EFL receives significant support.

However, despite its perceived importance English was rated by the students as the second least popular subject- matching Loveday's (1996, p. 98) findings. Possible reasons for this could be due to one or a combination of the following four factors. A lack of the variety, creativity, or physical movement common in subjects such as art or physical education compared to other subjects where students are more desk-bound, such as in language classes. The three elements listed above could be assumed as being motivating factors in many junior high school students. However, the ranking of mathematics as the third most popular subject may contradict this interpretation. A second explanation, which would probably at least be an element in most cases, is a negative attitude towards English being borne through the belief that English is not a practical subject outside of the education environment in Japan. Students may have deemed English as important only because it is an integral part of the senior high school and university entrance examinations (see 5.2.3 and 5.3.1) and simply view it as a necessary evil in scholastic advancement. The third point is that EFL may be taught in an over-academic, teacher centred way by JTEs who could focus too much on accuracy and fine grammatical detail to maintain student enjoyment. Finally, the popularity of teachers of other subjects may have promoted the popularity of those subjects at EFL's expense.

A large majority of parents indicated that they believed EFL should focus on future oral communication skills rather than have an academic approach, but the students did not concur. The JTE findings are significant; though the results are mixed, the result betrays the considerable variance in JTE opinions over teaching English speaking skills. The results show that 39% of JTEs believed that EFL in junior high school is an academic subject which could mean by choice these JTEs, and possibly some of the 11 respondents who answered "don't know", readily avoid oral communication activities. The findings for the JTEs and the students are similar to those of Taguchi (2005, p. 9) on EFL in Japanese senior high schools. Taguchi asserted that "English is often considered an academic subject rather than a communicative tool in Japan".

5.2.2. What Students Should Learn

This section provides a comparison between teachers', parents', and students' perceptions of what should be learnt in junior high school EFL lessons and provides, arguably, the most prominent finding in regards to Research Question One. Parents' main aspiration is for their children to gain the ability to pass the English section of the senior high school entrance examination and, as stated previously, the senior high school entrance examination does not feature a speaking component. While they asserted that EFL should be taught for communication, speaking English is not as important a goal as entering senior high school in the estimations of parents. An interviewed JTE believed that while parents would like their children to have some communicative competence the parents also felt it would be irrelevant should their child be unable to enter a good senior high school. This was also found by O'Donnell (2005, p. 311) who stated that parents generally approve of their children studying English for communication. He stated that while this is the case parents want their children to be thoroughly prepared to undertake the senior high school entrance examinations first and foremost. Parents desire their children to be able to communicate in English, but are most interested in their children gaining the skills that will allow them to move on to the next academic level.

The issue of students only being interested in studying for the senior high school entrance examinations was identified by over 40% of JTEs. JTEs were mistaken in the view that parents focused on senior high school entrance examinations more than students. Evidence from my findings suggested the opposite. Passing the English section of the senior high school entrance exam was the most important thing students wanted from their junior high school EFL education. This finding reveals the pressure on junior high school students to perform for themselves and their families. Data was gathered from students of all grades; had the survey focused on third grade students only views on the importance of the senior high school entrance examinations would have been more emphatic. Comments from JTEs supported this theory:

> *For 3rd grade students they focus on grammar and the senior high school entrance exam.*

The 3rd grade students should study for the senior high school entrance exam.

The 3rd graders especially focus on the senior high school entrance exam.

JTEs overwhelmingly stated that their lessons were generally oriented towards helping their students pass the senior high school entrance examinations– thereby becoming what Harmer (2003, p. 288) termed "client-satisfiers". The results show that JTEs saw their main role in the classroom as providing the students with the ability to move onto the next level of education.

The next most important abilities that parents wanted their children to gain from their EFL tuition were speaking skills and these are mentioned specifically in MEXT's stated goals for junior high school students: talk about daily life in English and greet in English. While greetings are specifically mentioned by MEXT, one parent suggested that greetings should be a skill learnt in elementary school, which is understandable considering students officially receive EFL tuition at this level nowadays. The phrase used by MEXT in its official mandate– "talk about daily life" – was in both parent and student questionnaires to see how compatible consumer desire was with MEXT policy, however the phrase is ambiguous since talking about daily life can occur on many levels. LoCastro (1996, p. 45) also questioned the vagueness of MEXT's stated aims. One must then question the level of speech which parents were advocating when they made this selection.

The next three abilities considered significant by parents were giving self-introductions, being knowledgeable about other cultures and world affairs, and using all of the vocabulary learnt in junior high school EFL lessons. Self-introductions, like greetings, should now be the domain of elementary schools. The desire for knowledge on world affairs and culture may be a reaction to globalisation or perceived tensions in Asia, however surely this is the sphere of social studies. The ability to use all of the vocabulary taught is an untenable expectation considering the small amount of time dedicated to EFL study in the students' hectic lives. Coupled with the need to study and perform in other subjects it would be a remarkable student who could do so. Yet, one could applaud those who selected this option because it demonstrates an active attitude to language learning where the students use the language rather than merely storing it in their heads.

Student results were similar to those of their parents, yet the stated importance of the senior high school entrance examinations was more emphatic and other abilities were deemed far less important. In the ranking students showed a desire to be able to greet, give self introductions, and talk about daily life in English. They too stated that they would like to be able to use all of the vocabulary learnt in junior high school. Students showed little interest in other cultures or world affairs. Perhaps they concur with my belief that this is the domain of social studies, but a more likely theory is that they are too busy with more pressing issues in their immediate future to be concerned with something that seems distant.

5.2.3. Communication Skills For The Future

JTEs felt the most negatively about the students needing to be able to speak English in the future. One JTE simply wrote on a questionnaire:

We don't need English here.

This comment is depressing and shocking considering that one of the main tasks for JTEs according to MEXT is to promote English speaking competency in Japanese students. Perhaps many JTEs feel guilty for not possessing the language skills to teach oral communication effectively and as a cop-out deny or understate the need for English speaking skills. However, one could assume that JTEs would probably be well informed about the need for English speaking skills, certainly in regards to the Kurashiki area. Drawing from their own experience those JTEs may have found that through their work with the English language they have not had many opportunities within Japan to speak it.

The group that most strongly supported the view that there would be a need for English speaking skills in the future were the parents. Numerous comments written about how the world would open up if students can learn to speak English indicate that parents are naturally looking to secure prosperous futures for their children. Students also reacted positively towards the need to be able to speak English in the future, but, identical to their parents, the senior high school entrance examinations were more important.

5.3. Research Question Two

What do JTEs perceive as critical factors in teaching oral communication in Japanese public junior high school EFL education?

5.3.1. Test Impact

The results indicating the strong existence of test impact in junior high school EFL education provided the most prominent finding in relation to Research Question Two. As stated in 4.3.2, time constraints within lessons and test impact are inseparable. Since JTEs need to give students the knowledge and skills to pass the senior high school entrance examinations the skill least focused on is speaking. If time does not allow for coverage of the lesson's main points and speaking practice, then speaking is cut. Gordon (2005, p. 465) asserts that the main task of junior high school teachers is in preparing students for the senior high school entrance examinations which will " determine their life options" . JTEs may question why MEXT wants Japanese students to acquire good speaking skills when in reality they do not need them for educational advancement. As Gates (2003, p. 205) found in analysing a senior high school entrance examination:

> In the exam itself, receptive skills receive almost all the evaluative attention comprising approximately 90% of the marks…Writing is the lone productive skill and is allotted the remaining 10%.

Kurashiki JTEs appear to be profoundly affected by the senior high school entrance examinations and generally orientate their lessons towards them. The amount of material that JTEs must cover in the set curriculum means that they must focus on the most important points for the students, which, considering the makeup of the senior high school entrance examinations, often eliminates speaking activities. Senior high school entrance examinations have become the beginning, middle, and end of the academic process; a working definition of negative test impact.

Consistent with other studies, such as LeTendre (1996), I found that student failure meant JTE and school failure. JTEs in the focus groups and interviews indicated that if the

EFL class average was low the principal would pressure the English department to increase the average by teaching more “test English”. JTEs believed that they were accountable and felt pressure to produce students who performed to standards judged sufficient by parents and principals, regardless of the students’ true ability. This has produced an environment where student results are all JTEs are judged on. Kuroda (1995, p. 5) stated that the teachers’ main role was “to keep all their students’ achievement above the nation wide standard”. Which has meant that talented students have often been neglected because teachers “concentrate their efforts on keeping their less talented students above the national standards”.

O’Donnell (2005, p. 311) noted that some JTEs feel their values as teachers are being compromised to keep parents and students satisfied. The pressure that JTEs perceive coming from parents and students is real. Though both parents and students had a belief that they would need English speaking abilities in the future passing the senior high school entrance examination was clearly the priority. The reason why parents and students focus so strongly on senior high school entrance examinations is because they are life altering. People who have no university education or have an education from a university with a low rating usually find themselves stuck in lower paying menial employment. As O’Donnell (2005, p. 301) noted, English in Japan’s schools has become a way of sorting students rather than providing them with any communicative competence.

It is conceivable that tests may also be focused on by the JTEs because, according to the JTE interviewees, the predominant teaching style– yakudoku– is not compatible with teaching oral communication. In school there is apparently no time for JTEs to design new activities. In lessons JTEs often use the same tried and true lesson plans and activities that they have used over their careers and rely heavily on the textbook. If lesson time constraints greatly inhibit Kurashiki JTEs in teaching oral communication then the problem must be far more intense in other Japanese cities considering Kurashiki’s status as a special district of English means students are taught 4 EFL lessons per week, while normal districts provide only 3 EFL lessons per week– a problem specifically mentioned by Loveday (1996, p. 96-97).

JTEs universally disputed the suggestions of LeTendre (1996) and Akiyama (2003) that internal assessment played an important role in senior high school placement. JTEs

asserted that internal assessment was impossible to compare across schools as it is school dependent, conducted by individual schools from the construction stage to the marking stage. Internal assessment is only considered in entry into vocational schools where the stakes are not high.

5.3.2. Student Motivation

Prodromou (1995) suggested that tests may be used as a way of increasing discipline through student focus; however I found no direct evidence of this, in spite of the fact that the students are aware of the contents of the senior high school entrance examinations and know what they need to study to pass them. It is clear that students feel test impact and therefore it is understandable that they may be unmotivated to practice skills that will not help alleviate some of the examination pressure. JTEs reported that students have sometimes refused to work or become disruptive if they did not think that a topic was relevant. A more likely explanation of these highly significant findings then is that the students use tests as a way of controlling proceedings and JTEs may focus on test relevant topics to appease students rather than control them. In reality JTEs are powerless in their efforts to make students speak if the students do not want to.

Information gained from the JTE interviews reiterate LeTendre (1996, p. 199), Kimura et al. (2001, p. 67), and Childs (2006), who all noticed falling student motivation levels once they became second graders. My findings suggest that this occurs at this stage for two main reasons: lesson content becomes more academically focused towards “test English”, and the students become more aware of the struggle for senior high school entrance: a struggle in which speaking skills are irrelevant.

5.3.3. JTE English Speaking Proficiency

Another significant finding was how JTEs believe that their English speaking competence influences the way they teach. This result mirrors Li’s (1998) findings on

South Korean English teachers who were very wary of a deficiency in their spoken English. Comments written on JTE questionnaires proved that there are confidence issues regarding their competence in spoken English, but from reading comments regarding in-service training, 5.4.3, the JTEs have few opportunities to increase their English speaking skills once they begin working. Whether the JTE perceptions about their spoken interactive competence are real is not the only issue, the apparent low confidence levels betray the self doubt in JTEs, which, in the face of Japanese society's propensity for accuracy and any teachers' fear of losing face in front of students, may result in a serious English input deficit during lessons.

Nunan's (2003, pp. 606-607) study found that the English language skills of teachers in Japanese public junior high schools were "inadequate… (and)…not sufficient to provide learners with the rich input needed for successful foreign language acquisition". Nunan believed that the low proficiency levels of many teachers resulted in a low input quality. It could also be assumed that low proficiency levels could also create insufficient input quantity as JTEs with low proficiency would probably lack confidence in their spoken English and avoid speaking it when possible. However, the perceived shortcomings in proficiency put forward by Nunan have, apparently, not impacted Kurashiki JTE English speaking percentages in lessons. According to the data provided by JTEs the amount of time teachers speak English in lessons is fair. However, interviewed JTEs asserted that the figures were exaggerated; they claimed that the amount of English speaking in lessons is probably less than 20%. This inconsistency may have occurred because respondents reported the percentages that they assumed were respectable. JTEs may have felt guilty or been embarrassed over the percentage of time they actually spoke English and thus answered in a bracket above that which was true. This would echo Porcaro's (2004, p. 80) suggestion that JTEs use Japanese over 90% of the time. My findings regarding JTE attitudes towards Japanese use in class adds weight to the theory of low English speaking percentages. The language level used by JTEs must also be considered. Phrases such as "Don't be silly", "Stand up", "Sit down", "Repeat after me", and "Open your books", while valid input, are not of a sufficient level of English to raise student speaking proficiency. Gorsuch (2001) noted that MEXT specifically stated that students should be helped in

developing a positive attitude to communicating. But without experiencing any true communication in English it is impossible for them to develop any attitude at all.

5.3.4. Class Size

Porcaro (2004, p. 83) boldly claimed that Japan's public schools have class sizes that are comparable to those in developing countries. While this was an exaggeration Japan's average of 33.7 students per class was second highest, behind Korea, of the 35 countries surveyed by OECD (OECD, 2004). Among those surveyed were countries considerably poorer than Japan, such as Mexico (30.1 students), Brazil (33.4 students), the Slovak Republic (22.8 students), and the Czech Republic (23.2 students). It defies logic that an economic superpower dedicated to maintaining a nation of well educated people can maintain such large classes. Most literature promotes small classes that give teachers the ability to provide students one-on-one attention. Small classes would also decrease the level of speaking anxiety among students in EFL lessons– a problem often noted by JTEs in focus groups and interviews. Large classes make speaking activity control more precarious because teachers cannot monitor all students at once. In these cases individual needs can not be met and as a result discipline, another problem often mentioned by JTEs, decreases. An easy solution to this scenario is to avoid speaking activities.

LoCastro (2001) concluded from research conducted by various scholars that a class of 15 or more students is too large for EFL; most Kurashiki JTEs concluded that even this number is excessive. JTE responses in regards to the highest limit of student numbers for productive learning were calculated and showed an average of 11.38 students– although 64% of JTEs stated 10 students or less. However, the actual number of students that Kurashiki JTEs face in EFL classrooms is over two-and-a-half times greater than the average above. This along with the serious mixed ability problems found in Kurashiki EFL classes strain JTEs further.

5.3.5. Time Constraints Outside Of Lessons

The results showed that time constraints outside of lessons also impact on JTEs in teaching English oral communication. Focus group and interview participants emphatically asserted this point. JTEs are involved in numerous non-lesson related duties, including school club activities, sports, and class trips. This information concurs with what Gordon (2005, p. 467) found from her research.

JTEs, like teachers of other subjects, have an almost parental responsibility towards the students. JTEs are often homeroom teachers, which makes them responsible for a group of up to 40 students. In Western educational environments once students leave school at the end of the day a teacher's responsibility to student welfare ends. This is not the case in Japan where responsibilities are not just tied to the school environment but also extend to the outside community, night-time and weekends included. One focus group participant related how she had to monitor students from her junior high school at a festival on a Saturday night, quite distant from her home, to make sure they were not smoking, drinking alcohol, or causing trouble.

As mentioned in 3.2.1 many JTEs are women who, due to Japan's patriarchal society, have huge responsibilities at home as well. Therefore JTEs usually have no opportunities to attend private English lessons to increase their interactive oral communicative competency levels. The proficiency concerns caused by the lack of English practice have created the self-doubt and low confidence in their spoken interactive competence that JTEs mentioned in 5.3.3. It is important to note that many JTEs indicated a willingness to raise their speaking competence levels if given the opportunity. One focus group participant related how while she had a one year sabbatical for study she attended private English lessons once a week, paid for with her own money, to increase her proficiency. However, once she returned to fulltime teaching again she had to quit the lessons due to time constraints.

5.3.6. Textbook Issues

Samimy and Brutt-Griffler (1999, p. 135), in a general study comparing native and non-native English speakers, claimed that non-native speaking English teachers tend to rely on textbooks. As I suggested in 5.3.1 this is true of Kurashiki JTEs who rely on their textbooks due to time restrictions. The textbooks used in Kurashiki junior high schools are not designed for communicative activities. The findings from the textbook analysis showed that communicative activities– especially of a freer nature– are almost nonexistent, resulting in students receiving practice at reading aloud rather than communication. This echoes Rubrecht's (2004, p. 126) and Gates' (2003, p. 207) findings of gaps between MEXT policy and MEXT approved textbooks.

Time does not allow for Kurashiki JTEs to design true communicative activities themselves. Textbooks also tend to be regarded as a "life-raft" for many teachers who have competency issues and using textbooks has become the easiest way to teach lessons for some JTEs. Some JTEs suggested that parents and students become uneasy if the textbook is neglected because they believe that JTEs are teaching the wrong material– not the material needed to pass the senior high school entrance examinations. Judging from my data it is evident that JTEs are aware of textbook shortcomings but use them regardless because of student and/or parent pressure, competency issues, and time constraints.

5.4. Research Question Three

Are there gaps between MEXT's public junior high school EFL policies for oral communication and the current practices and beliefs of public junior high school JTEs?

5.4.1. MEXT – JTE Relations

The MEXT – JTE relationship is extremely strained. It is evident from comments made in focus group sessions, interviews, and from questionnaire data that JTEs do not

respect MEXT. In describing MEXT JTEs used phrases such as “elite”, “out-of-touch”, and “unreal”. MEXT appears to be ignorant of junior high school EFL realities. The major source of resentment seems to come from MEXT forcing policies on the JTEs yet never consulting them or even trying to understand the difficulties faced in junior high school. In turn MEXT tend to think that the JTEs are incompetent (Childs, 2005). Shimahara (1998, p. 256) stated that the Japanese government has “consistently viewed the teachers as servants of the state, not professionals”. Prior studies have stated that for reform to be successful the group implementing the changes, in this case the JTEs, need to have some say in the planning phase (Savignon, 1991, p. 274; Lamie, 2002, p. 152; Pacek, 1996; Li, 1998). However, LoCastro (1996, p. 43) pointed out that Japan is a very hierarchical country where policy makers have little regard for the beliefs of those putting reforms into practice. Despite tradition much of the JTE reluctance to implement policies comes from MEXT’s attitude. It also seems that the philosophy on student needs of many JTEs is incongruent with MEXT policy and as O’Donnell (2005, p. 314) commented about MEXT policy adoption “it will only occur when a majority of teachers believe that change in the classroom is truly beneficial to their students.”

5.4.2. MEXT Policy And Lesson Content

The most significant finding in regards to Research Question Three was that policy and lesson content did not match. The policies that MEXT has set out for the JTEs to implement simply describe expected outcomes but provide no details on how to achieve the outcomes. Gorsuch (2000, p. 687) suggested that the omission of instruction details has created “a loophole through which teachers can continue teaching as they always have, yet believe they are operating within The Course of Study”. Most Kurashiki JTEs do not follow MEXT policies. They have a philosophy on student needs and teach accordingly. Reform has not resulted in a change of teaching styles in Kurashiki. A huge majority of JTEs stated that they learnt English by yakudoku, but more than half of the JTEs claimed they do not teach using this method. According to both interview participants, however, this claim is not true. Both interviewed JTEs stated that yakudoku was in widespread use and the

method of choice of Kurashiki JTEs. O'Donnell (2005, p. 313) also concluded this on a Japan-wide scale while Porcaro (2004, p. 80) stated that approximately 80% of JTEs rely on yakudoku. One interview participant asserted that the best students may not need to be taught by yakudoku but the slower learners absolutely rely on it.

The likely discrepancy between reported and actual practice in this regard may have been due to the negative image of yakudoku in current EFL thinking. The interview participants maintained that JTEs would be ashamed and embarrassed to admit that they used yakudoku because it is viewed as out-of-date and, possibly more importantly, an impediment to students speaking English. Both participants said that while they were ashamed to use it yakudoku was a necessary evil for senior high school entrance examination preparation and they must use it to ensure high levels of student comprehension. This may not be the only reason that this method is still in widespread use as a number of critical commentaries identified that teachers are the product of their prior learning experiences, Lamie (1999) and Borg (2003), for example, and as seen in 4.3.5 most JTEs stated they learnt by the yakudoku method.

The yakudoku method is conducted almost exclusively in Japanese, meaning that students are starved of the valuable input that much of the literature emphasises, e.g. LoCastro (1996, p. 53). A reliance on yakudoku may also explain the strong JTE support for speaking Japanese in EFL classes, which conflicts with the 2003 MEXT mandate that asserted that the majority of EFL classes be conducted in English; the same mission statement which also openly condemned the use of yakudoku.

Though most JTEs generally agreed that the education junior high school students receive should produce students that can talk about topics relating to daily life in the current learning environment, beliefs and practices can appear to be very different. This point is clear from data on the types of activities JTEs stated they use to develop student speaking skills. Choral reading was the most popular of these, while the only activity listed by the JTEs that had potential to be communicative was role-plays. However, in my experience, junior high school role-plays have meant students reading short dialogues from their textbooks in pairs in front of the class– dialogues like the exercise listed in 4.3.8. This echoes the findings of Taguchi's (2005) research on Japanese senior high school EFL communication classes. Most activities used involve memorizing key phrases, which are

important for the initial stages of fluency development. However, it is a widely held premise that activities should progress from the memorisation of key phrases level to something freer as students advance, but I found no evidence of this happening. The results show that JTEs are using the same activities for all grades. So, while the MEXT 2003 "Action Plan" stated that the junior high school focus was on cultivating abilities in listening and speaking, I do not believe this is happening.

The Japanese Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, Atsuko Toyama (2003), wrote in an open statement regarding the implementation of the "Action Plan"[12]:

> The cooperation of all parties will be greatly appreciated. It is hoped that all relevant parties can understand the purpose and significance of these changes, and further address the task of improvement positively and voluntarily in accordance with their individual responsibilities.

MEXT and Toyama are asking teachers to implement policies while it appears that MEXT is ignoring its own role in policy implementation– the implementation of proposed reductions in EFL class size, for example– so it should not expect trust or action from JTEs. Rather than being an "Action Plan", MEXT proposals have been more an "Inaction Plan". MEXT stated that students will be streamed according to proficiency in junior high school English classes. There is no evidence of streaming in Kurashiki– an issue often mentioned by JTEs in the focus groups, questionnaires, and interviews. The adoption of small-group teaching proposed by MEXT has not occurred in Kurashiki; the average class size is 27.4 students, and the mode still stands at 35.

5.4.3. JTE Training And The Achievement Of MEXT Directives

The second most prominent finding in regards to Research Question Three was the evidence of poor pre- and in-service training that JTEs have had and still receive. This has made a considerable contribution to the non-implementation of policy in lessons and is

[12] http://www.mext.go.jp/english/topics/03072801.htm

more than likely the most significant cause of the Kurashiki JTEs' low achievement levels of MEXT directives regarding speaking proficiency tests. The pre-service training in oral communication was viewed by most JTEs as insufficient. This is consistent with Nunan's study on JTEs (2003) in which he stated that their pre-service training was "inadequate". Astonishingly no Kurashiki JTE claimed to have had any training in teaching EFL. Similar to Browne and Wada's (1998, p. 101) research results, most of the JTEs in Kurashiki graduated in English Literature and only received a two week teaching section before graduating as teachers. Interview participants related how they learnt their teaching method "on-the-job", which they asserted was the Japanese style of education; university provides entry into the workplace, but specific skill learning occurs once employed. The future training of JTEs must be brought in line with the MEXT policies for JTEs to deliver the curriculum effectively.

Kurashiki JTEs have not achieved the targeted qualification levels in the STEP, TOEFL, or the TOEIC tests in the numbers that MEXT wanted; 53% is nowhere near the "almost all" suggested by MEXT. According to Childs (2005) MEXT blames the JTEs for this lack of achievement. This attitude is unrealistic in the current environment. If JTEs want to increase their English competence they are responsible to find and pay for their tuition. Furthermore, MEXT provides no financial or logistical assistance to JTEs taking any of the competency tests listed in its mandate. Upon achieving a MEXT directive JTEs receive no tangible credit. According to an interview participant MEXT does not even check to see whether JTEs have achieved the directives. JTEs know what is needed to become fluent in a second language but it is not surprising that many JTEs are not increasing their abilities given the pressures of time, money, and the lack of financial incentives.

I found an obvious link between experience and non-achievement of MEXT directives. Gorsuch (2000) also noted significant differences between teachers based on experience. One may surmise that student proficiency levels will rise in the future as the "less qualified" JTEs retire and the new, "more qualified" JTEs take their places. However, two points challenge this theory: as a true EFL environment Kurashiki JTEs and students lack chances to practise authentic English; and as long as the senior high school entrance examinations remain the same JTEs will always face pressure to teach towards them.

In-service training in Kurashiki in the form of the *once only* relatively short speaking proficiency classes and the annual demonstration lessons appears to be inadequate to meet the needs of the JTEs if they are to implement MEXT policy on cultivating spoken English in the students. However, surprisingly, most JTEs had a generally favourable view of the in-service training that they have received. Yet this positive feedback could be more a reflection of the social aspects of training. Both one-on-one interview participants stated that the annual demonstration classes conducted by colleagues provide a good chance for English teachers to catch-up and have a break away from the classroom, but serve little purpose in improving English speech education. The other in-service training provided by the Kurashiki Board of Education is a 10 day English conversation course. Some JTEs noted on the questionnaire that without continued in-service training this course had no meaning. Unfortunately in Kurashiki JTEs only receive one opportunity to attend these conversation courses and any competence that the JTEs may have gained from these sessions would be lost due to a lack of opportunities to use English in authentic situations. Gorsuch (2001) commented on the great variance between prefectures in regards to the frequency and the content of in-service training, so it is likely that some prefectures provide better in-service training to their JTEs than Kurashiki.

5.5. Summary

Key points arriving from the discussion on Research Question One are: the high regard parents and students have for EFL in junior high school. Despite this, English is one of the least popular subjects amongst students, possibly because of their EFL teachers' personalities, the instruction method employed, their perceptions of the practicality of English, or simply because English is a non-physical-movement subject in junior high school. JTEs and students were divided over whether English should be taught academically or for future communication. The main aspiration of both parents and students was passing the senior high school entrance examination and for this reason JTEs orientate their lessons towards students being able to achieve this.

The most prominent finding in relation to Research Question Two was the influence of test impact from the senior high school entrance examination. JTEs feel compelled to

enable their students to pass the English section of this exam above all else as a student failure is seen as equating to a JTE and school failure. Students also seem unmotivated towards lesson content that will not be covered in the English section of the senior high school entrance examination which, in turn, pressures JTEs to focus on the content of this exam or face discipline problems in class. Spoken English input during lessons is inadequate as the interactive speaking proficiency confidence in many JTEs is low, resulting in many JTEs conducting their lessons in Japanese to save face. Though many JTEs are interested in increasing their speaking skills, the limited time that they have outside lesson time means this is impossible. Class sizes are far in excess of what JTEs consider to be the highest limit for productive learning– meaning that potential discipline problems are exaggerated– providing more incentive to just teach "test English" and less incentive to speak English.

Key issues regarding Research Question Three are: the poor relationship between MEXT and the JTEs. MEXT has consistently viewed JTEs as incompetent, while JTEs see MEXT as the ignorant elite. Policy and teaching practices in junior high school were found not to match. Though MEXT states that junior high school should be a place where speaking skills are cultivated in the students I concluded that the activities JTEs were using were not communicative. MEXT policies are prescriptive creating a loophole through which JTEs can continue to use yakudoku– which can be conducted entirely in Japanese. From information provided by the JTEs it has been concluded that the pre-service training of current JTEs was insufficient. The current in-service training program in Kurashiki is also inadequate in providing JTEs with the skills to teach oral communication. This inadequacy may have influenced the Kurashiki JTE achievement levels of MEXT speaking proficiency directives which are below the levels publicly demanded by MEXT.

CHAPTER 6 - CONCLUSION

6.1. Introduction

In the final section of my research journey I will: address the three research questions, examine the main method– the questionnaire– employed to gather my data, explain the conclusions reached, such as the use of yakudoku as the method of choice in junior high school EFL classrooms, look at the practical implications of this research focusing on what both JTEs and MEXT need to do in the future, and provide a guide to future research that could be carried out in this field, including research to build on my findings regarding the MEXT – JTE relationship. I will conclude this chapter with a frank closing statement.

6.2. Research Summary

Parents and students see English as having an important role within junior high school education, although it was found to be the second most unpopular subject amongst students. Parents generally felt that EFL in junior high school should have a communicative rather than an academic focus, but only a slight majority of students and JTEs concurred. JTEs reported accurately that the parents and students were more interested in learning EFL to prepare for the English section of the senior high school entrance examination. In accommodating this wish JTEs overwhelmingly orientated their lessons towards these exams. Oral communication has far less prominence to all three groups questioned compared to preparing for the senior high school entrance examinations and suffers greatly as a result. Put simply, because a JTE's worth is based on their ability to get students into senior high school JTEs focus on "test English", which, due to the lack of a speaking component in the entrance examination, does not include speaking skills.

Senior high school entrance examination test impact was by far the greatest handicap the JTEs reported facing in teaching oral communication. The influence is so

strong that JTEs reported spending most of the lesson time teaching towards the exams, cutting speaking activities if lesson time was limited. The senior high school entrance examinations also influence student motivation, which was also cited as being a major handicap; students are not motivated to focus on skills that will not help them in the senior high school entrance examinations. JTE English speaking proficiency is another stated handicap that negatively influences the amount of English spoken in class, resulting in inadequate input for the students. Class size is also a major issue: the JTEs teach classes far in excess of the size that they consider optimal. This has exaggerated the discipline and the mixed ability problems that JTEs face. The scarce free-time available to JTEs has meant that JTEs cannot undertake private English speaking tuition to increase their proficiency. It has also meant that they have no time to create communicative activities for their students. Without communicative activities it is impossible for the students to increase their speaking proficiency because the textbook– the sixth ranked handicap– is non-communicative despite having official government approval.

Gaps exist between MEXT EFL oral communication policies and JTE teaching practice in junior high school. MEXT is pushing the cultivation of student speaking abilities, yet the official policy is ambiguous allowing the JTEs to continue to use yakudoku in lessons– though inadequate JTE training is also partly to blame for the reliance on this method. As yakudoku is conducted in Japanese by JTEs, it has undermined MEXT's instruction that EFL classes be taught almost exclusively in English. Speaking activities that students are completing in lessons are non-communicative and often rely on rote memorisation. While JTEs generally agree that students achieve the stated MEXT goals for junior high school they believe that they possess a better understanding of student needs which, according to most JTEs, does not include English speaking skills. Perhaps the main reason for the poor adherence to official policy by JTEs is the unhealthy relationship between them and the policy makers, MEXT. Inadequate JTE training, both pre- and in-service, has meant a lower level of achievement in proficiency tests by Kurashiki JTEs than the achievement levels desired by MEXT.

6.3. Methodology

The development of the main tools in data gathering, the three questionnaires, was a very thorough process. Questionnaire development took over six months before acceptable final copies were administered. All three questionnaires were based on prior studies and information provided by focus groups. Question items were written and then analysed by language experts for relevancy, ambiguity, and appropriateness. To ensure accuracy, the questions were translated into Japanese, back to English and then once again back to Japanese by three separate translators. The questionnaires were piloted by a selection of JTEs, principals of participating schools, students, and parents for further relevance, ambiguity, and appropriateness checks. The suggested corrections/adjustments were made to the questionnaires, printed in Japanese to promote response rates, and then they were finally administered.

Prior to the sessions I did not plan to use information from focus groups for anything other than questionnaire development, but the information gathered in the two focus group sessions was so insightful it could not be ignored as stand-alone data in its own right. The data from these sessions was used consistently throughout the process of data analysis where the interplay between the focus group session transcripts and data from the questionnaires was analysed. Focus group data was also used in the discussion writing to provide explanation and insight into the meanings of questionnaire responses.

Weaknesses in the questionnaires became apparent after administration. One such weakness was the absence of in-depth questions on some central themes, in particular JTE policy awareness and what things JTEs value about in-service training. It therefore became essential to develop individual JTE interviews to provide information as an extension to the questionnaire findings. The information from these methods restated and extended the findings from the questionnaire. Unfortunately it was logistically impossible to undertake either focus group or interview sessions with groups of parents or students.

Researching in the Japanese junior high school environment posed predicted and unforeseen challenges. I was aware of the possibility of group settings presenting barriers for Japanese to express their own opinions candidly which is the main reason I opted for focus groups containing few participants. By doing this I managed to minimise this cultural

trait. An unforeseen challenge occurred when I was expecting to administer the parent and student questionnaires in the first junior high school. I was unaware that the school principal had not read either of the questionnaires prior to my printing of 500 questionnaires and arrival at the school to administer them. The JTE involved with the design process and I corresponded regularly, making numerous alterations to the questionnaires as we perfected them for administration to the students and their parents. The JTE and I both felt that the questionnaire design was completed, but when the principal read the questionnaires he had issues with some of the wording and felt that one item in particular was culturally unacceptable. I was left with no choice other than to dispose of the 500 pre-printed questionnaires and to make the alterations demanded by the principal before he would let either questionnaire be administered in his school. The lesson here is that the principal has absolute authority and the final word in the school.

6.4. Research Conclusions

In the questionnaires parents and students stated that they regard EFL in junior high school as being very important. This finding deviated from the suggestions made by scholars such as Guest (2006), who have stated that English is not considered important by Japanese people. However, the theories of these scholars may contain a lot of truth as the importance ratings in my results were most probably positively influenced by the senior high school entrance examinations. The JTEs in my research generally believed this to be the case, matching the research conclusions of Finkelstein et al. (1991), Johnson and Johnson (1996), and Atake (2003). Additional data from my research indicated that both parents and students desired the skills to pass the English section in the senior high school entrance examination above all else. My findings echoed the conclusions of O'Donnell (2005) in regards to the parents. The implication of these findings is that should English be dropped from the senior high school entrance examinations EFL's importance rating in junior high school would in all likelihood plummet. Loveday's (1996) opinion regarding the low popularity of EFL amongst Japanese school students has been reinforced by my findings. Loveday suggested the reason for the low popularity of EFL came from the continued use of yakudoku. While my questionnaire data suggested that yakudoku use was

in serious decline this was refuted in JTE interviews, matching the findings of Porcaro (2004), Rubrecht (2004), and LoCastro (1996).

Yakudoku may be used to control students in large classes because it gives students little freedom to become disruptive; they must simply listen, read, and write. Kurashiki JTEs teach classes far larger than what they consider to be an optimal size for teaching oral communication and as a result probably draw on any tool they think will assist them during lessons– yakudoku being one of those tools. Another reason for yakudoku's maintenance is test impact. While much of the literature has focused on test impact created by the university entrance examinations I found strong evidence of its existence at the junior high school level in response to the senior high school entrance examination. This has created gaps between junior high school EFL policy and teaching practice. The main issue is that JTEs are expected to teach speaking skills by MEXT yet the senior high school entrance examinations continue to lack an English speaking component. When one considers that a student failure is viewed as equating to a teacher failure it is not surprising that JTEs orientate their lessons towards the senior high school entrance examinations. I found strong evidence of this occurring in Kurashiki which concurred with the findings of LoCastro (1996) and Takanashi (2004). Few JTEs seemed willing to change their teaching style to match MEXT policies perhaps because of the prescriptive nature of MEXT policies and the laxity in policing policy implementation by MEXT. An additional reason for JTEs maintaining old methods could be the lack of respect that JTEs hold for MEXT and its policy makers. I found strong evidence of hostility from JTEs towards MEXT. This hostility appears to stem from the perception that MEXT does not try to understand the difficulties that JTEs face or consider JTE opinions when creating new policies. It appears that because of this relationship any future policies will meet with the same fate, non-implementation. MEXT must mend their relationship with JTEs before progress can be made.

The activity types submitted by JTEs in the questionnaire were not free or creative but relied on rote memorisation, matching the findings of previous research, for example, George and George (1995) and Le Tendre (1999). JTEs may have considered these activities as being communicative but in many contexts the activities they submitted would not be viewed as being communicative at all. While choral reading and rote memorisation

may develop the foundations of proficiency JTEs are not building on these initial skills and use the same activities throughout all grades in junior high school, undermining the foundation that students may have developed. A reason for the lack of true communicative activities could be low JTE proficiency. My data indicated that many Kurashiki JTEs were not confident with their speaking skills. This has most probably created an environment deficient in spoken English where students receive inadequate comprehensible input.

Pre-service JTE training data matched what other scholars, such as Browne and Wada (1998), had suggested: it is inadequate and the university qualification of most JTEs is in English literature. Most JTEs received no specific training in foreign language teaching in their pre-service education, meaning that they had no method to fall back on once teaching other than the method by which they learnt English– more often than not yakudoku. In-service training in Kurashiki to an outsider seems very limited, but the questionnaire data showed that JTEs seemed satisfied. This is surprising considering that JTE interview participants asserted that Kurashiki has no regular in-service training for JTEs other than one annual demonstration class conducted by a JTE. Accordingly, Kurashiki JTE 53% achievement of MEXT directives is far below the levels expected by MEXT, yet better than the 2005 nationwide JTE achievement level of 10% asserted by Childs (2005). It appears though that MEXT is not concerned by a lack of JTE achievement of directives since interview participants maintained that individuals are not monitored by MEXT to see if they have achieved mandates– matching the assertions of Rubrecht (2004). Furthermore, MEXT offers no incentives to JTEs who aspire to and reach the desired proficiency levels. For the proficiency directives to have any major effect on the current JTEs I believe that this situation must change.

Parents generally thought that students should learn how to speak English, however, the students and, more importantly, the JTEs were divided in their view on whether junior high school EFL should be taught for academia or communication. This finding is significant due to the high number of JTEs who oppose MEXT directions to teach English speaking skills. The parents based their view on the general belief that their children would need speaking skills for the future. Despite the divisions between students over EFL for academia or communication many students felt they would need English speaking skills, contradicting Bruthiaux's (2002) belief but matching Atsuko Toyama's (2003) written

statement in her role as the Japanese Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. The JTEs had mixed views on whether students needed English speaking skills for the future, which must demotivate JTEs in teaching speaking to students. Most literature tends to concur with the opinion that the majority of students will never have to speak English in "the real world". Attitudes may differ in JTEs teaching in cities such as Osaka or Tokyo, where contact with English speakers outside of an educational environment can occur daily, but in "rural" cities such as Kurashiki the only English speaking foreigner students are likely to encounter on a semi-regular basis is their school's AET. Even if students seek opportunities to practise their English in authentic situations the opportunities are usually non-existent.

6.5. Practical Implications

The English language research on the Japanese junior high school EFL environment is inadequate. There should be much more English language research on this sector as thousands of native English speakers are currently employed in Japanese public junior and senior high schools to teach EFL. Many of these EFL teachers have insufficient Japanese language skills to comprehend any studies conducted and written in Japanese. If accessible research was available to these teachers detailing the pressures faced by all those engaged in junior high school EFL education, then I am positive that they would have a greater understanding and sympathy towards their students, and their JTE colleagues. In junior high school many of the educational decisions made by students have huge ramifications on their future. Entry into senior high school is a "make or break" period in Japanese life. In light of this, it is surprising that junior high school EFL education has been neglected as a research domain. It is important that this research is made available to the public for two reasons: so that people are aware of some of the problems evident in Japanese public junior high school EFL education, and so future researchers can build on my findings to benefit this domain.

The implications for JTEs is that they must be more demanding of both the local Board of Education and MEXT on a number of issues, particularly in matching the senior high school entrance examination to junior high school EFL policy by adding a spoken

component to it, decreasing EFL class sizes, providing more free time and incentives for JTE speaking skill development, and providing adequate regular in-service training with a focus on the speaking skills aspect of teaching.

There are two main implications for MEXT. It should begin working more collaboratively with JTEs: after all both parties share the common goal of providing the students with a sound English education. MEXT needs to ask JTE opinions because JTEs know the junior high school EFL environment the best, without this information MEXT is blind as to how to make this domain most effective. It appears from the results that JTEs would appreciate being consulted on junior high school EFL matters and would be more likely to implement policies that they had a hand in writing. Secondly, MEXT needs to alter the makeup of the English section in the senior high school entrance examination. It needs to have a spoken component in the examination to validate its policy on cultivating speaking skills in junior high school students. If no spoken component is put in the examination there will be no shift in junior high school teaching practice by JTEs and gaps between this and policy will remain.

6.6. Future Research

Japanese senior high school and university EFL environments have been the focus of numerous studies whereas junior high school has received minimal attention. My research has revealed details on the mindset of JTEs, students, and parents regarding the junior high school EFL environment in a typical “rural” Japanese city. This thesis also provides further evidence of the struggles that EFL teachers in general face, not only in Japan but elsewhere in other Asia communities, such as those examined by Hu (2002) and Li (1998). More importantly for the EFL policy writers in Japan this thesis provides evidence of the prevailing attitude that JTEs have towards MEXT policies and MEXT in general.

My research focused on the implementation level of EFL policy in junior high school. Now that the opinion of numerous JTEs is understood it may be a worthy pursuit to research MEXT’s estimation of the junior high school EFL environment, rather than only relying on newspaper column opinions written by scholars such as Childs (2005) as to how

MEXT views JTEs. It would be enlightening to interview the policy makers. The hurdle that would impede the research would be gaining access to those people. MEXT displays an aloof attitude evident from the ignoring of my letter sent to the government department inquiring about inconsistencies between OECD and MEXT research results.

It would be worthwhile analysing if Kurashiki is truly a typical Japanese "rural" city, especially in consideration of its *special district of English* status. I suggest performing the same research using the same questionnaire on other similar sized cities within Japan. Another research area could be a focus on the differences between the "rural" JTEs, such as those from Kurashiki, and "urban" JTEs, such as those from Kobe, Osaka, or Tokyo, to gauge if there are any attitudinal differences between JTE groups. Alternately this research could focus on students and/or parents to see how their attitudes differ between the "rural" and "urban" environments.

To conduct in-depth studies on the issues this research has uncovered would be invaluable. I assert that my research simply revealed the issues involved with junior high school EFL policy implementation and the poor relationship that JTEs and MEXT appear to have. We need to explore further the issues raised in this research, in particular, why parents and students hold JHS EFL in such high regard, the reasons for persistent yakudoku use by JTEs, and the changes needed before JTEs would willingly implement MEXT policy. Another reason for further exploration is to cover the gaps left by my research, for example: comparing EFL success between schools and analysing why one school has a more successful EFL program than another, how current JTE pre-service training compares to the past and how well it is poised to enable future JTEs to implement MEXT policy, and getting MEXT reaction to my data.

It would be rewarding to conduct further research on the students. I concluded that all parties involved in junior high school were predominantly concerned with the senior high school entrance examination. Students felt that English was very important in their education but also stated their dislike for it as a subject. According to interviewed JTEs student motivation towards speaking English decreases as they progress through the grades. Longitudinal research on motivation towards learning English speaking skills would provide evidence on whether this is true. Data should be collected from students on junior high school entry and at the end of each grade to provide comparisons on student attitudes

to speaking English. Interviews with third year students may provide detailed reasons as to why attitude changes occur.

6.7. Summary

This chapter has examined the prominent conclusions from this study. Clearly students and parents both regard junior high school as very important but it is likely that this is because of senior high school test influence. Test impact from the senior high school entrance examinations seems to have influenced the JTEs, students, and parents to a high degree. It has created divisions within these groups over whether EFL in junior high school should be taught academically or for future communication. JTEs asserted that test impact was the biggest hurdle to teaching speaking skills in lessons. They stated that they focus their lessons towards the senior high school entrance examinations. Other important handicaps were low student motivation toward lesson content not relevant to the senior high school entrance examinations, JTE spoken English proficiency, and class size. Together with other factors, these problems have resulted in gaps between MEXT JHS EFL policy and JTE teaching practices. The policies state the results desired by MEXT but no instructions on how they can be achieved; this allows JTEs to continue using yakudoku, which can be conducted exclusively in Japanese. I consider that the activities used in EFL lessons for communication would not be regarded as communicative in other contexts. The pre- and in-service training of Kurashiki JTEs appears to be ineffective in providing JTEs with the English speaking skills necessary to teach English oral communication, and may also be a contributing factor in JTE achievement levels of MEXT directives being lower than MEXT desired. However, this low achievement level may also be a result of a lack of incentives from MEXT, a lack of checks done on JTE achievement conducted by MEXT, and the poor JTE – MEXT relationship that I found. The most prominent practical implications from my findings were: JTEs need to be more demanding of both their local Board of Education and of MEXT on issues relating to teaching conditions, matching the senior high school entrance examination to EFL policy, and providing adequate in-service training. MEXT must consult JTEs when designing policy and must change the senior high school entrance examination to match the current junior high school EFL policy.

A breakdown of the methodology was provided giving a brief description of the techniques used to gather information that was used in my research. Along with this I detailed some of the weaknesses I thought existed in my method and the challenges I faced in gathering data on the Japanese public junior high school EFL environment. I also suggested some areas that I consider to be worthy of future research, these included surveying MEXT in light of my findings here, providing a more in-depth analysis of issues in junior high school, for example, examining the JTE – MEXT relationship in detail, and doing a more detailed analysis of the students attitudes toward EFL.

6.8. Final Statement

This thesis has shown that teaching oral communication in Japanese junior high school EFL classrooms is only a priority for the policy makers, MEXT. Regardless of whether English continues to cement itself as *the* language of the world this problem will not be remedied until Japanese senior high school entrance examinations match language teaching policy. I predict that a match between policy and reality would only be the first step in a long and arduous process as I contend that JTEs have not been provided with the English speaking or the pedagogic skills to enable a rapid shift in teaching methodology.

井の中の蛙大海を知らず(I no naka no kawazu taikai o shirazu) is a well known Japanese proverb that can be translated as *people are satisfied to judge things by their own narrow experience, never knowing of the wide world outside*. This is the situation facing many native English speakers working within Japanese junior high schools as assistant English teachers. Most statements made by these assistant English teachers are short on facts and based on limited observation, and cultural prejudice. The *narrow experience* these assistant English teachers have is based on their classroom experiences, while the *wide world outside* relates to the intricate systems and beliefs that operate beneath the surface of Japanese EFL education. From the outset my aim has been to provide these people with a deeper understanding and underlying facts on Japanese junior high school EFL education. My message to any native English speaker working in a Japanese junior high school is simple: have sympathy, show respect, encourage and make suggestions, but do not make

culturally based judgements, and never give up and decide to look out the window and count money.

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APPENDIX 1: KURASHIKI JHS EFL CLASS SIZES

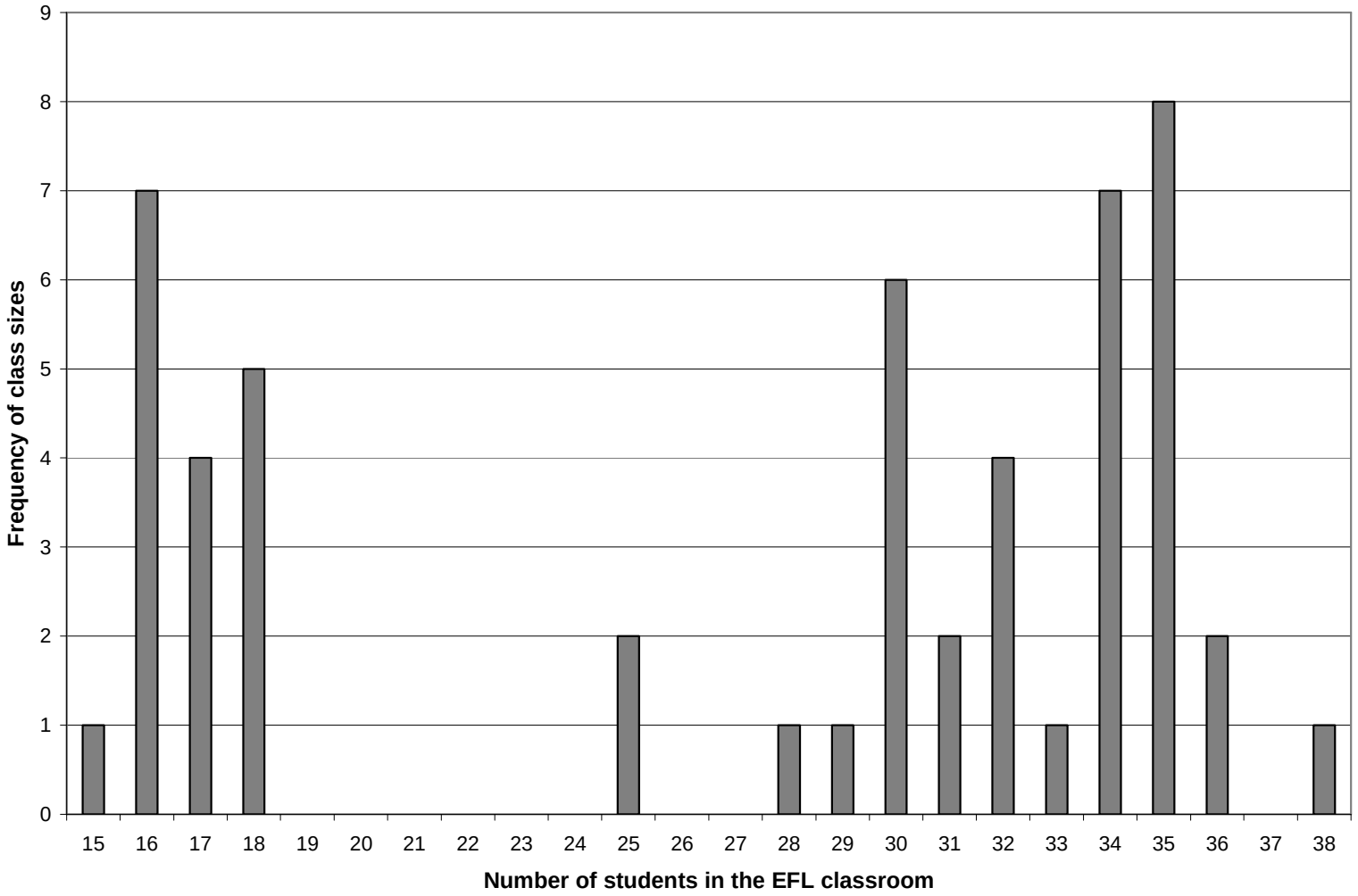

Figure A1: Kurashiki JHS EFL Class Sizes

APPENDIX 2: KURASHIKI JHS JTE EXPERIENCE LEVELS

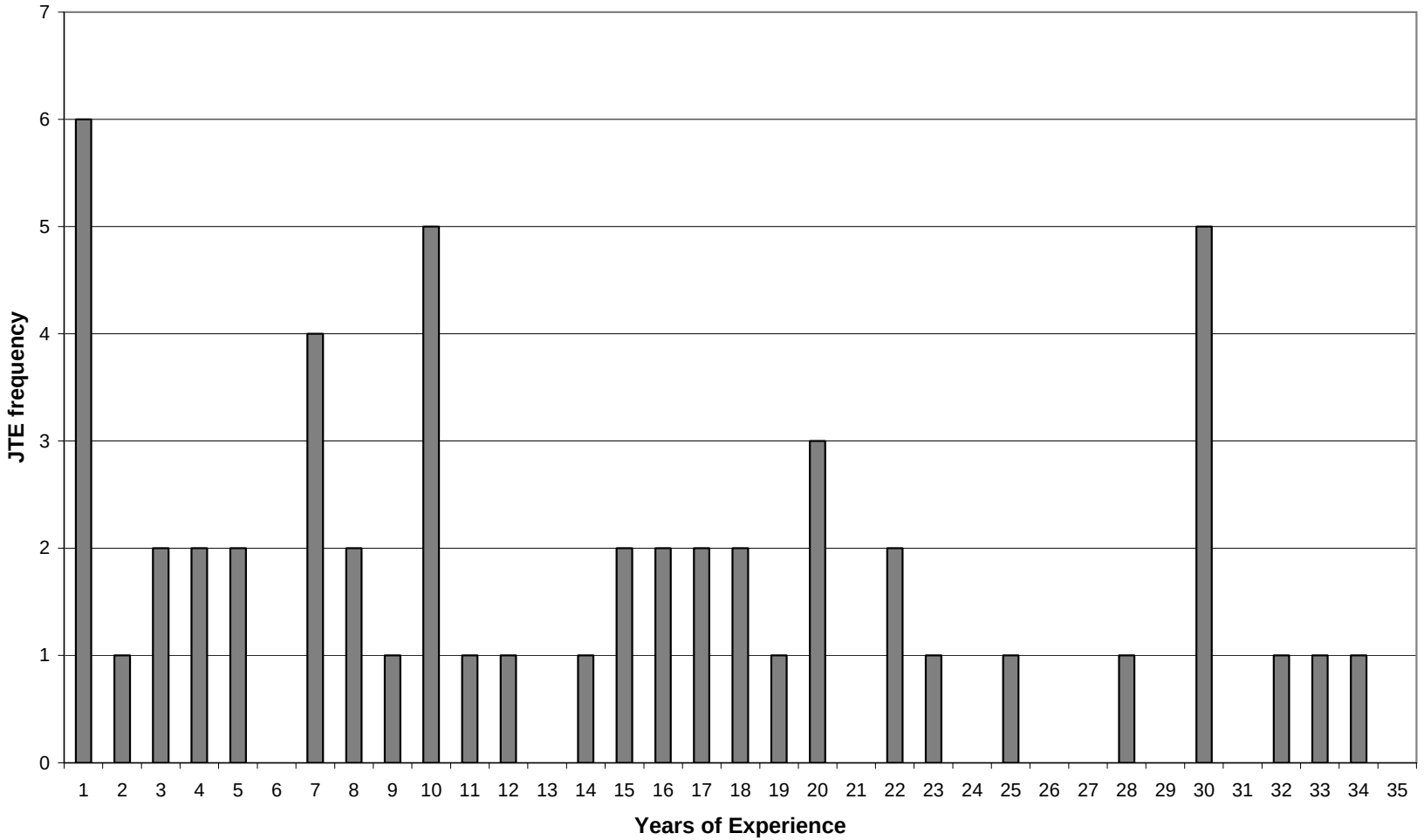

Figure A2: Kurashiki JHS JTE Experience Levels

APPENDIX 3: DOCUMENTS SENT TO Q-SORT JUDGES

Dear ,

The three sets of papers you have received are for a validity and reliability test on the questionnaire I have designed to use as the primary data collection tool in my Masters thesis. Obviously, for such an important research report, validity and reliability are paramount. I hope that you can find time in your busy schedules to do these tests for me. Your kind support and effort in completing the tests will be greatly appreciated. As soon as you have completed the tests, mail the construct papers back to me, using the Kawasaki internal mail system, at;

Douglas Rapley,
English Dept.,
5th Floor,
Kawasaki Medical School.

If you have any problems or questions please call me at 85099

Thank you very much for your time and effort.
Yours Sincerely,
Douglas Rapley

Explanation of Terms

JTE = Japanese teacher of English

MEXT = Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology

The MEXT policy for junior high school =

"On graduating from a junior high school, students can conduct basic communication with regard to areas such as greetings, responses, or topics relating to daily life."

Source: http://www.mext.go.jp/english/topics/03072801.htm

Validity and Reliability Test Instructions

1. Please ensure that there are 3 sets of papers in front of you;
    a. Parent items for q-sort & parent constructs
    b. Student items for q-sort & student constructs
    c. JTE items for q-sort & JTE constructs

2. Complete each set of papers separately

3. On the items for q-sort papers there are long lists of statements/questions – these statements/questions, depending on the test results, will be in my final questionnaire sent to the relevant groups. On the construct papers there are headings featuring numerous subheadings with boxes below them.

4. Please write only the statement/question numbers from the questionnaire paper in the boxes beneath the relevant subheadings on the construct paper. If a statement/question does not fit into any particular box write the number in the box below 'Ambiguous Statements' heading at the bottom of the page. These statements/questions will be deleted from the final questionnaire question pool. If you have any helpful suggestions, please write them at the bottom of the constructs page.

5. Please send all three constructs pages back to me (the items for q-sort papers can be discarded). Three other people will also be completing this test. Upon receiving all tests I will compile and statistically analyze them, delete ambiguous statements/questions and act upon your suggestions.

Thank you for your support.

Parent Items for Q-sort

1. My child should be taught how to respond accurately in English
2. My child will need to be able to speak English in the future
3. My child should be taught how to greet people in English
4. English should be taught as an academic subject rather than as a tool for communication
5. My child should be taught how to talk about his/her daily life in English
6. My child should only be taught the things that will help him/her enter a good high school
7. Please rank the following junior high school subjects in order of importance for your child's education (from 1~9, 1 being the most important)

____ Mathematics
____ Physical Education
____ Science
____ English
____ Social Studies
____ Japanese
____ Industrial Arts/Homemaking
____ Art
____ Music

Parent Constructs

Parent Opinions about Junior High School EFL

Why English is taught in junior high school

What English their children should be taught in junior high school

The ranking in importance of junior high school subjects their children are taught

Parent Opinions about Their Children's Future Use of English

The need of English in their children's future

Ambiguous Statements

Statements/questions that don't fit into a specific category

If you have any comments about the statements/questions, please write them at the bottom of this page

Student Items for Q-sort

1. I should be taught how to greet people in English
2. English should be taught as an academic subject rather than as a tool for communication
3. I should be taught how to respond accurately in English
4. I should only be taught the things that will help me enter a good high school
5. I will need to be able to speak English in the future
6. I should be taught how to talk about my daily life in English

7. Please rank the following junior high school subjects in order of importance for your education
(from 1~9, 1 being the most important)

____ Mathematics
____ Physical Education
____ Science
____ English
____ Social Studies
____ Japanese
____ Industrial Arts/Homemaking
____ Art
____ Music

8. Please rank the following junior high school subjects in the order in which you like them
(from 1~9, 1 being the subject that you like the most)

____ Mathematics
____ Physical Education
____ Science
____ English
____ Social Studies
____ Japanese
____ Industrial Arts/Homemaking
____ Art
____ Music

Student Constructs

Student Opinions about Junior High School EFL

Why English is taught in junior high school

What English they should be taught in junior high school

The ranking of junior high school subjects in importance

The ranking of junior high school subjects in preference

Student Opinions about Their Future

The need of English in their future

Ambiguous Statements

Statements/questions that don't fit into a specific category

If you have any comments about the statements/questions, please write them at the bottom of this page

JTE Items for Q-sort

1. If high school entrance exams had a speaking section I would teach more oral communication in my lessons
2. Parents are more concerned about their child preparing for high school entrance exams than practicing English conversation
3. Changing my teaching style to match MEXT policies is easy
4. In Japan people need to be able to communicate in English
5. Junior high school English classes should produce students who can talk about daily life
6. Good test scores in junior high school are essential for securing good employment as an adult
7. My English speaking proficiency influences my lessons
8. To learn to speak English the students need to hear a lot of English
9. My students are motivated to speak English
10. Junior high school English classes should produce students who can respond accurately
11. I have time in class to do activities that are not in the textbook
12. I use the traditional 'yakudoku' method to teach my students
13. English in junior high school is studied as an academic subject, rather than to provide the students with the ability to communicate using the language
14. Policy makers in MEXT understand the difficulties JTEs experience
15. To become a good English speaker you need a teacher who is a good English speaker
16. The English teaching syllabus made by MEXT provides useful instructions on how to teach with their policies in mind
17. English lessons should focus on 100% accuracy
18. MEXT policies have no effect on my lesson content
19. Teaching my students English oral communication will be useful for them in high school
20. I learnt English by the traditional 'yakudoku' method when I was a student
21. My students have the skills to do English speaking activities
22. The NET at my school should be the teacher who speaks English in the lessons
23. Speaking tests can be graded objectively
24. To become a proficient English speaker you must practice speaking English
25. The English textbook I use is useful for developing oral communication skills
26. Using Japanese in class is natural for JTEs
27. Students are only interested in studying English to pass high school entrance exams
28. MEXT considers the opinions of JTEs when they write the English syllabus
29. My lessons are orientated towards helping students pass high school entrance exams
30. The courses I completed while I was training to be a JTE in university were useful after I began working as a JTE
31. I have time to teach things that will not be in exams
32. How comfortable do you feel using your English conversation skills during lessons?
33. Choral reading is a form of oral communication practice
34. The training in oral communication that I received to become a JTE was sufficient
35. The in-service training that I have received from the Board of Education has been useful for me
36. What is the average number of students in your English classes? _____

37. Above what number of students does it become impossible to teach oral communication? _____

38. How many years have you worked as a JTE? _____

39. Please circle the letter beside the statement that is true for you

a. I passed a TOEIC test with a score of 730 or over

b. I passed a TOEFL test with a score of 550 or over

c. I passed a STEP test with a pre-first level attainment or higher

d. I have taken one or more of the above tests in the past

e. I have not taken any of the above tests

40. Please circle the letter beside the people in the list below whom you feel pressure from to focus only on entrance exam preparation?

a. from no-one

b. the principal

c. the vice principal

d. the students

e. the students' parents

f. your JTE colleagues

g. non JTE colleagues

h. other (please explain)_____

41. Please choose and rank the 10 biggest handicaps to teaching oral communication in your lessons (1 being the biggest problem)

____ My English conversation skill

____ Student conversation ability

____ Student conversation confidence

____ Student motivation

____ Student discipline

____ Introverted students

____ Class size

____ Time constraints in the lesson

____ The textbook

____ Time constraints outside the lesson

____ Too noisy for neighboring classes

____ High school entrance exams

____ Pressure from your principal

____ Pressure from your colleagues

____ Pressure from parents

____ Pressure from students

____ Other (please explain)

42. Please circle the letter beside the percentage of time you speak English during your lessons.

a. 0~10%
b. 11~20%
c. 21~40%
d. 41~60%
e. 61~80%
f. 81~90%
g. 91~100%

43. Please circle the letter beside the types of activities that you regularly use to develop the students' English oral communication skills during your lessons

a. I don't regularly focus on speaking
b. role-plays
c. group discussions
d. speeches
e. story telling
f. debating
g. choral reading
h. memorizing key sentences
i. other (please explain)

44. Please circle the letter beside the responsibilities that you have in your school

a. homeroom
b. lunch
c. club
d. student guidance
e. teacher
f. other (please explain)

45. Please circle the letter beside your university major

a. English Literature
b. English Linguistics
c. TESOL
d. Education
e. Other (please explain) _____

46. Please rank the English skills in importance for your students' future from 1~4
(1 being the most important)

____ reading
____ writing
____ listening
____ speaking

JTE Constructs

JTE Opinions on Self

English speaking proficiency & confidence

Preferred teaching method

Attitude about amount of
English speech within lessons

JTE Opinions of Students & Parents

Student English speaking ability

Student & parent attitude towards English

Student future needs (near and distant)

JTE Opinions to English Oral Communication

How to acquire English speaking proficiency

Speaking activities

If you have any comments about the statements/questions, please write them at the bottom of this page

JTE Opinions on Junior High School

Why English is taught in junior high school

Usefulness of speaking tests

Time constraints in class

Textbook usefulness for speaking activities

High school entrance exams influence

Class size

The most critical factors in teaching oral communication

JTE Opinions on Pre & In-service Training

Usefulness of training courses

JTE & the MEXT

MEXT's understanding of junior
high school EFL & the JTEs 'world'

JTE attitudes to achieving MEXT policy

MEXT syllabus usability for JTEs

Facts

Experience & qualifications

Method by which JTEs were taught
in junior high school

Class size

Other duties

Ambiguous Statements

Statements/questions that don't
fit into a specific category

APPENDIX 4: COMPLETED Q-SORT CONSTRUCT TABLE

Students Q-sort Judge's Overall Results - Based On The Moore And Benbasat (1991) "Hit Ratio" Evaluation Indices

	1	2	3	4	5	NA	T	%
1	**4**						**4**	**100**
2	***1*** *(q.6)*	**14**			***1*** *(q.4)*		**16**	**87.5**
3			**4**				**4**	**100**
4				**4**			**4**	**100**
5					**3**	***1*** *(q.5)*	**4**	**75**

A. Total items placement = 32
B. Number of agreements (correct entry placements) = 29
C. Actual overall correct hit ratio (B/A =) = 90.63%
D. Overall correct hit ratio percentage taken from '% column' in above table = 92.5%

*Numbers in **Ariel Black** = correct entry placements (agreements)/100%*
Numbers in *italics* = incorrect entries and their placements/less than 100%
NA = Items that could not be categorized by judges
T = Total number possible of correctly placed items for the given category

APPENDIX 5: QUESTIONNAIRE PACK DOCUMENTS

Policy and reality: The teaching of oral communication by Japanese teachers of English in public junior high schools in Kurashiki City, Japan.

Researcher
Douglas Rapley, Lecturer, English Department, Kawasaki Medical School, Kurashiki
Contact details: (086) 462 – 1111, ext. 85099

Supervisor
Professor Dr. Cynthia White,
School of Language Studies, Massey University, New Zealand
Contact details: 64 6 356 – 9099, ext. 7711

Dear JTE,

This questionnaire has been sent to all JTEs in Kurashiki-shi and will be used in a master's thesis to be submitted to Massey University, New Zealand. All questionnaires will be confidential, anonymous and stored securely after I receive them. After data extraction the questionnaires will be destroyed. Do not write your name on the questionnaire, but please answer honestly. Answers that seem negative are just as valuable as positive answers – they make the survey accurate – which is essential.

I chose my research topic to examine the difficulties faced by junior high school JTEs. Although recent MEXT policy statements promote English speech development in junior high school, little change in speaking levels has occurred. JTEs are often blamed for this however this opinion is ignorant to the difficult working conditions that you face. It is not a simple problem – the numerous elements involved in public school education make teaching English speech very difficult.

My research gives you an opportunity to voice your opinion on these difficulties. I hope that from my research some change in policy or attitude towards JTEs may result. Please complete the questionnaire as soon as possible, it should take approximately 20 minutes to do, and using the stamped, self addressed envelope return it to me before September 29th. You will receive a copy of the survey results once I have completed processing the data. Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Douglas Rapley,
English Dept.,5th Floor,
Kawasaki Medical School,
Matsushima 577,
Kurashiki-shi,
701-0192.

Yours Sincerely,
Douglas Rapley

JTE Questionnaire

Teaching Speaking Skills
in
JHS EFL Classrooms

Dear JTE, thank you for your time and effort in answering this questionnaire.
This questionnaire will provide information to be used in a Masters thesis submitted to Massey University, New Zealand.

Instructions

- This questionnaire will take approximately 20 minutes to complete.
- Please answer using your honest opinions - what may be considered a negative answer is just as valuable to this study as what might be considered a positive answer.
- Please try to answer all questions.
- Please answer the questions using a red pen.
- If you would like to supplement your answers by adding comments, please write on the 'comment' lines provided below each question.
- When answering the Likert Scales please circle in the box that is true for you. Circle only one box per question.

For example

強く反対する	やや反対する	やや賛成する	強く賛成する

Please use the paid, self addressed envelope supplied and send your finished questionnaire back **before September 29th, 2006** to;

Douglas Rapley,
English Dept.,5th Floor,
Kawasaki Medical School,
Matsushima 577,
Kurashiki-shi,
701-0192.

1. 英語の授業クラスの平均的な生徒数は何人ですか？_____

2. 中学校でよい成績をとることは、将来良い職業につくために不可欠なことだ.

全くそう思わない	そうは思わない	分からない	そう思う	強くそう思う

コメント_____

3. 日本では英語でコミュニケーションができる必要がある.

全くそう思わない	そうは思わない	分からない	そう思う	強くそう思う

コメント_____

4. 英語の授業では、生徒が日常生活について英語で話せるまで指導すべきだ.

強く反対する	やや反対する	やや賛成する	強く賛成する

コメント_____

5. 自分が学生のとき、伝統的な『文法訳読法』で英語を学んだ.

全くそう思わない	そうは思わない	そう思う	強くそう思う

コメント_____

6. 生徒に教えるとき、伝統的な『文法訳読法』を使っている.

全くそう思わない	そうは思わない	そう思う	強くそう思う

コメント_____

7. 高校入試合格に向けて、授業をしている.

全くそうではない	ややそうではない	ややそうである	全くそうである

コメント_____

8. 中学校では英語を、言語を使ったコミュニケーション能力を育てるために教えているというよりも、ひとつの学問教科として教えている.

全くそう思わない	そうは思わない	分からない	そう思う	強くそう思う

コメント_____

9. 教師の英語能力が授業に影響を与えている.

全くそうではない	ややそうではない	ややそうである	全くそうである

コメント_____

10. 授業中、英語を話す時間の割合で当てはまるものに○をつけてください
   a. 0-10%
   b. 11-20%
   c. 21-40%
   d. 41-60%
   e. 61-80%
   f. 81-90%
   g. 91-100%

11. 授業で日本語を使うことは、JTE にとっては自然なことだ.

全くそうではない	ややそうではない	ややそうである	全くそうである

コメント_____

12. 授業中に生徒のオーラルコミュニケーション能力を高めるために、
よく使うもの 次の中から選び、○をつけてください.
   a. スピーキングにあまり重点をおいていない
   b. ロールプレイング
   c. グループディスカッション
   d. スピーチ
   e. お話会
   f. ディベート
   g. 声を合わせて音読
   h. キーセンテンスを暗記
   i. その他（詳しく書いて下さい）
   _____

13. 文部科学省の方針は授業内容に影響していない.

全くそうではない	ややそうではない	ややそうである	全くそうである

コメント_____

14. 文部科学省の方針に合うように、指導法を変えることは容易だ.

全くそうではない	ややそうではない	まだ試していない	ややそうである	全くそうである

コメント_____

15. 文部科学省は英語教育概要を作成する際、JTE の意見を取り入れている.

全くそう思わない	そうは思わない	分からない	そう思う	強くそう思う

コメント_____

16. 文部科学省の方針立案者は JTE が直面する問題を理解している.

全くそう思わない	そうは思わない	分からない	そう思う	強くそう思う

コメント_____

17. 教員になるために受けたオーラルコミュニケーションの研修は十分なものであった.

全くそうではない	ややそうではない	ややそうである	全くそうである

コメント_____

18. 教育委員会から受けた現職研修は役に立っている.

全くそうではない	ややそうではない	ややそうである	全くそうである

コメント_____

19. オーラルコミュニケーションを教える場合、何人までなら可能ですか？_____

コメント_____

20. スピーキングのテストでは、客観的にその能力を評価することができる.

全くそうではない	ややそうではない	ややそうである	全くそうである

コメント_____

21. 英語のスキルで重要だと思うものを１～４で示して下さい。
（１は最も重要）
___読む
___書く
___聞く
___話す

コメント_____

22. 生徒は入学試験に合格することだけを考えて、英語を学んでいる.

全くそうではない	ややそうではない	その時々に応じる	ややそうである	全くそうである

コメント_____

23. 保護者は子供が英会話を学ぶよりも、入試のための勉強をすることに関心がある.

全くそう思わない	そうは思わない	その時々に応じる	そう思う	強くそう思う

コメント_____

24. 授業でオーラルコミュニケーションを教えるにあたり、障害となっているものを10項目選び、その順位をつけてください（一番障害の度合いの大きいものを１とし、順に２．３．４・・・・１０）。
___自分の英会話能力の不足
___生徒の英会話能力の不足
___生徒の英会話に対する自信の無さ
___生徒の意欲の無さ
___生徒のマナー 授業態度
___おとなしい生徒
___１クラスの生徒の人数
___制限された授業時間
___教科書
___制限された準備時間
___オーラルの授業は騒がしくて他クラスに迷惑をかける
___高校入試
___校長からの圧力
___教頭からの圧力
___ほかの英語教員からの圧力
___英語教員以外の教員からの圧力

___保護者からの圧力
___生徒からの圧力
___その他（詳しく書いてください）
_____

25. 熟練した英語を話せるようになるには、英語を話す練習をしなければならない.

全くそう思わない	そうは思わない	分からない	そう思う	強くそう思う

コメント_____

26. 英語を話せるようになるには、英語をたくさん聞くことが必要である.

全くそう思わない	そうは思わない	分からない	そう思う	強くそう思う

コメント_____

27. JTE としての勤務年数は何年ですか？_____

コメント_____

28. 大学での専攻に○をつけてください
a. 英文学
b. 英語学
c. TESOL（ノンネイティブに英語を教える教師の会）
d. 教育学
e. その他（詳しく書いてください）_____

29. 自分に当てはまるものに○をしてください。
a. TOEIC のスコアは 730 点以上だ
b. TOEFL のスコアは 550 点以上だ
c. 実用英語検定で準 1 級だ
d. 過去に上記のテストのうち 1 つ以上、受けたことがある
e. どのテストも受けたことはない

コメント_____

You have finished!

Thank you very much for you time and effort.

APPENDIX 6: JTE QUESTIONNAIRES IN ENGLISH (NOT ADMINISTERED)

1. What is the average number of students in your English classes? _____

2. Good test scores in junior high school are essential for securing good employment as an adult.

Completely untrue	Generally untrue	Don't know	Generally true	Completely true

Comment_____

3. In Japan people need to be able to communicate in English.

Completely untrue	Generally untrue	Don't know	Generally true	Completely true

Comment_____

4. Junior high school English classes should produce students that can talk about daily life.

Completely disagree	Generally disagree	Generally agree	Completely agree

Comment_____

5. I learnt English by the traditional 'yakudoku' method when I was a student.

Completely untrue	Generally untrue	Generally true	Completely true

Comment_____

6. I use the traditional 'yakudoku' method to teach my students.

Completely untrue	Generally untrue	Generally true	Completely true

Comment_____

7. My lessons are orientated towards helping students pass the senior high school entrance exams.

Completely disagree	Generally disagree	Generally agree	Completely agree

Comment_____

8. English in junior high school is studied as an academic subject, rather than to provide the students with the ability to communicate using the language.

Completely untrue	Generally untrue	Don't know	Generally true	Completely true

Comment_____

9. My English speaking proficiency influences my lessons.

Completely disagree	Generally disagree	Haven't thought about it	Generally agree	Completely agree

Comment_____

10. Please <u>circle</u> the letter that indicates the percentage of time you speak English during your lessons.

a. 0~10%
b. 11~20%
c. 21~40%
d. 41~60%
e. 6 1~80%
f. 8 1~90%
g. 91~100%

11. Using Japanese in class is natural for JTEs.

Completely disagree	Generally disagree	Generally agree	Completely agree

Comment_____

12. Please circle the letter beside the types of activities that you regularly use to develop the students' English oral communication skills during your lessons.

a. I don't regularly focus on speaking
b. role-plays
c. group discussions
d. speeches
e. story telling
f. debating
g. choral reading
h. memorizing key sentences
i. other (please explain)

_____

13. MEXT policies affect my lesson content.

Completely disagree	Generally disagree	Generally agree	Completely agree

Comment_____

14. Changing my teaching style to match MEXT policies is easy.

Completely disagree	Generally disagree	Haven't tried	Generally agree	Completely agree

Comment_____

15. MEXT considers the opinions of JTEs when they write the English syllabus.

Completely untrue	Generally untrue	Don't know	Generally true	Completely true

Comment_____

16. Policy makers in MEXT understand the difficulties JTEs experience.

Completely untrue	Generally untrue	Don't know	Generally true	Completely true

Comment_____

17. The training in oral communication that I received to become a JTE was sufficient.

Completely disagree	Generally disagree	Generally agree	Completely agree

Comment_____

18. The in-service training that I have received from the Board of Education has been useful for me.

Completely disagree	Generally disagree	Generally agree	Completely agree

Comment_____

19. Above what number of students does it become impossible to teach oral communication? _____

Comment_____

20. Speaking tests can be graded objectively.

Completely disagree	Generally disagree	Generally agree	Completely agree

Comment_____

21. Please rank the English skills in importance from 1~4

(1 being the most important)

____ reading

____ writing

____ listening

____ speaking

Comment_____

22. Students are only interested in studying English to pass the senior high school entrance exams.

Completely disagree	Generally disagree	Case by case	Generally agree	Completely agree

Comment_____

23. Parents are more concerned about their child preparing for the senior high school entrance exams than practicing English conversation.

Completely untrue	Generally untrue	Case by case	Generally true	Completely true

Comment_____

24. To become a proficient English speaker you must practice speaking English

Completely untrue	Generally untrue	Don't know	Generally true	Completely true

Comment_____

25. To learn to speak English the students need to hear a lot of English

Completely untrue	Generally untrue	Don't know	Generally true	Completely true

Comment_____

26. How many years have you worked as a JTE? _____

Comment_____

27. Please <u>choose and rank</u> the 6 biggest handicaps to teaching oral communication in your lessons (1 being the biggest problem)

____ My English conversation skill

____ Student conversation ability

____ Student conversation confidence

____ Student motivation

____ Student discipline

____ Introverted students

____ Class size

____ Time constraints in the lesson

____ The textbook

____ Time constraints outside the lesson

____ Too noisy for neighboring classes

____ High school entrance exams

____ Pressure from your principal

____ Pressure from your vice principal

____ Pressure from other JTEs

____ Pressure from other teachers (not JTEs)

____ Pressure from parents

____ Pressure from students

____ Other (please explain) _____

28. Please circle the letter beside your university major
    a. English Literature
    b. English Linguistics
    c. TESOL
    d. Education
    f. Other (please explain) _____

29. Please <u>circle</u> the letter beside the statement that is true for you
    a. I passed a TOEIC test with a score of 730 or over
    b. I passed a TOEFL test with a score of 550 or over
    c. I passed a STEP test with a pre-first level attainment or higher
    d. I have taken one or more of the above tests in the past
    e. I have not taken any of the above tests

Comment_____

APPENDIX 7: ONE-ON-ONE JTE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Follow-up Questions for JTEs

1. What percentage of JTEs in Kurashiki are women? Is this a nationwide trend?
2. How are student high school placements made? Are they solely on HS entrance test scores or are other things considered?
3. How many hours, on average, do junior high school students receive per week for a school year?
4. What is the awareness level of MEXT policy amongst JTEs?
5. In what ways does MEXT policy directly affect your teaching method in lessons?
6. What are the difficulties in following MEXT policies?
7. How was your pre-service teacher training useful? How was it not useful?
8. What useful things were missing from your pre-service training?
9. What do JTEs value about in-service training?
10. In what areas/ways has in-service training been useful? In what areas/ways is it not useful?
11. Do JTEs apply things learnt in the in-service training sessions to their lesson methodology?
12. How could in-service training be improved?
13. Most JTEs answered in the questionnaire that they didn't use yakudoku but in other questions their answers show that they do? Do you think most JTEs use it?
14. Why would some JTEs say that they don't use yakudoku? Does it have a negative image?
15. Do you think yakudoku is necessary in teaching English to Japanese junior high school students?
16. Has CLT been taken on by JTEs? If not, why not?
17. What is your opinion of CLT?
18. How do you feel about using English in your classroom?
19. How much influence does the PTA have on what is taught in English classes?
20. How much influence do parents have on what their children are taught in English lessons?
21. Do you think that parents support English education in JHS?
22. What elements of English education do parents support?
23. What elements of English education do parents not support?
24. Do you think that parents are becoming more positive or less positive in their attitudes to English education in junior high school?
25. What positive or negative experiences have you had with parents over their child's English education?
26. What do you think parents want their children to learn in JHS English lessons?
27. Do you think that junior high school students have become better at speaking English or worse?
28. Do you think that students are becoming more positive or less positive in their attitudes to English education in junior high school?
29. Do you think that one day many Japanese people living in Japan will have very good English speaking skills?
30. What is a 'Special District of English'?
31. Who decides what areas should become a 'Special District of English'?
32. What does a 'Special District of English' receive that areas that are not 'Special Districts of English' receive?

APPENDIX 8: PARENT AND STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRES IN JAPANESE (ADMINISTERED)

保護者の皆様

秋冷えの候，保護者の皆様にはますますご健勝のこととお慶び申し上げます。私こと Douglas Rapley は 倉敷市の英語指導助手として市内中学校に勤務いたしました。多くの先生や生徒に出会い,共に英語の授業ができた 6 年間は大変楽しく有意義なものでした。その間、生徒の読み 書きの力に比べ，話す事がやや苦手である事に気づき、さまざまな方法を試みました。

現在も英語講師をしながら、どうすれば中学生の英語を話す力が伸びるのか、効果的な 指導方法を研究しているところです。

研究の趣旨をご理解いただき、協力してくださいますならば下記のアンケートにご記入の上、封をしてご提出下されば大変ありがたいです　協力できない場合にも、白紙のまま 封をしてご提出くださいますようお願い申し上げます。どちらの場合も無記名で結構です。ご協力ありがとうございます.

Douglas Rapley

*あなたの率直な御意見をお聞かせ下さい。
*すべての質問にお答え下さい。
*下記の答えから一番当てはまるものに○印を 1 つだけつけて下さい。

全くそう思わない	そうは思わない	分からない	そう思う	強くそう思う

****

1. 中学校の教科の中で、子供達に特に必要と思われるものに○をつけてください。いくつ選んでもかまいません。

国語	数学	社会
理科	音楽	美術
体育	技術・家庭科	英語

2. 将来、自分の子供は英語で話せるようになる必要があると思いますか。

全くそう思わない	そうは思わない	分からない	そう思う	強くそう思う

3. 将来子供は英語を話せるようになって欲しいというより、一つの教科として英語を学べばよいと思う。

全くそう思わない	そうは思わない	分からない	そう思う	強くそう思う

4. 英語の授業では高校へ入るのに必要なことだけを教わればよい。

全くそう思わない	そうは思わない	分からない	そう思う	強くそう思う

5. 中学校 3 年間の授業を受けて、子供達が出来るようになって欲しいことは何ですか。
あてはまるものに ☒ をつけて下さい。いくつつけてもかまいません。

☐ 英語で挨拶
☐ 英語で自己紹介
☐ 英語で自分の日常生活についての会話
☐ 英語でメールを送る
☐ 学んだ言葉を使って文章を書く
☐ 英検 3 級に合格する
☐ 高校の入学試験に合格する
☐ 外国の文化や世界の出来事に関心を持つ
☐ その他(説明してください)

_____

生徒用

*あなたの率直な御意見をお聞かせ下さい。
*すべての質問にお答え下さい。
*下記の答えから一番当てはまるものに○印を１つだけつけて下さい。

全くそう思わない	そうは思わない	分からない	そう思う	強くそう思う

****

1. 次の中学校の教科を好きな順に１から９まで番号をつけてください。

___国語　　___美術
___数学　　___技術・家庭
___社会　　___体育
___理科　　___英語
___音楽

2. 将来、英語で話せるようになる必要がある。

全くそう思わない	そうは思わない	分からない	そう思う	強くそう思う

3. 中学校の教科の中で、自分の学習で特に重要だと思うもの３つに○をつけてください。

___国語　　___美術
___社会　　___体育
___数学　　___技術・家庭
___理科　　___英語
___音楽

4. 英語は将来話せるようになるために勉強するというより、教科の１つとして学べばよい。

全くそう思わない	そうは思わない	分からない	そう思う	強くそう思う

5. 英語の授業では高校へ入るのに必要なことだけを教わればよい。

全くそう思わない	そうは思わない	分からない	そう思う	強くそう思う

6. 中学校３年間の授業を受けて、できるようになりたいことは何ですか。
あてはまるものに ☒ をつけてください。いくつでもかまいません。

☐ 英語で挨拶
☐ 英語で自己紹介
☐ 英語で自分の日常生活についての会話
☐ 英語でメールを送る
☐ 学んだ言葉を使って文章を書く
☐ 英検３級に合格する
☐ 高校の入学試験に合格する
☐ 外国の文化や世界の出来事に関心を持つ
☐ その他(説明してください)

_____

APPENDIX 9: PARENT AND STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRES IN ENGLISH (NOT ADMINISTERED)

Dear Parents, I hope that this questionnaire finds you all well. My name is Douglas Rapley, I taught English as in AET in Kurashiki City Junior High schools for 6 years. During my employment I met many students and discovered that they were not good at speaking English in comparison to their reading and writing skills. I am currently researching about the students speaking levels. Please help me by answering this questionnaire and returning it to me. Please do not write your name on the questionnaire as it is anonymous. Thank you very much for your cooperation.

- Please answer using your honest opinions.
- Please try to answer all questions.
- When answering the Likert Scales please circle in the box that is true for you. Circle only one box per question. *For example*

Completely disagree	Generally disagree	Generally agree	Completely agree

1. Please choose any junior high school subject that you think is important for your child

____ Japanese
____ Science
____ Physical Education
____ Social Studies
____ Music
____ Industrial Arts/Homemaking
____ Mathematics
____ Art
____ English

2. My child will need to be able to speak English in the future

Completely disagree	Generally disagree	Generally agree	Completely agree

3. My child should learn English as an academic subject rather than for future communication

Completely untrue	Generally untrue	Don't know	Generally true	Completely true

4. In English class my child should only learn the things that will help him/her enter a good senior high school

Completely disagree	Generally disagree	Generally agree	Completely agree

5. After completing 3 years of English lessons in Junior High School, what do you want your child to be able to do? Please check as many boxes as you want. *For example* - ☒

☐ greet in English
☐ give a self-introduction in English
☐ have a conversation about his/her life in English
☐ write emails in English
☐ use all vocabulary learnt in composition
☐ pass a 3rd level Eiken Test
☐ pass the English section of the senior high school entrance examination
☐ have a good knowledge in foreign cultures & world affairs
☐ other (please explain)

_____

- Please answer using your honest opinions.
- Please try to answer all questions.
- When answering the Likert Scales please circle in the box that is true for you. Circle only one box per question. *For example*

Completely disagree	Generally disagree	Generally agree	Completely agree

1. Please rank the junior high school subjects in the order in which you like them

(from 1~9, 1 being the subject that you like the most)

____ Japanese ____ Art

____ Social Studies ____ Industrial Arts/Homemaking

____ Mathematics ____ Physical Education

____ Science ____ English

____ Music

2. I will need to be able to speak English in the future

Completely disagree	Generally disagree	Generally agree	Completely agree

3. Please choose the 3 subjects that you think are most important

____ Japanese ____ Art

____ Mathematics ____ Physical Education

____ Social Studies ____ Industrial Arts/Homemaking

____ Science ____ English

____ Music

4. I should learn English as an academic subject rather than for future communication

Completely untrue	Generally untrue	Don't know	Generally true	Completely true

5. In English class I should only learn the things that will help me enter a good senior high school

Completely disagree	Generally disagree	Generally agree	Completely agree

6. After completing 3 years of English lessons in Junior High School, what do you want to be able to do? Please check as many boxes as you want. *For example* - ☒

☐ greet in English

☐ give a self-introduction in English

☐ have a conversation about his/her life in English

☐ write emails in English

☐ use all vocabulary learnt in composition

☐ pass a 3rd level Eiken Test

☐ pass the English section of the High School entrance examination

☐ have a good knowledge in foreign cultures & world affairs

☐ other (please explain)

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