

国際日本学研究科  
修士学位請求論文要旨

〔論文題名〕

**The Role of Homeroom Teachers in Japanese  
Elementary School English Education**

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### 修士学位請求論文要旨

English education in Japanese elementary schools has been implemented as *foreign language activities* since 2011. It is anticipated that it will become a subject and be expanded in terms of class hours and contents. The reason is that Japanese people are said to lack efficient English proficiency for living and working in the globalized world.

A theoretical basis for implementing English education in elementary schools is the effectiveness of early second language education. Although somewhat controversial, previous studies have indicated that it is reasonable to start early second language learning with a careful consideration of the learning environment.

However, some scholars have expressed concerns about English education in Japanese elementary schools in terms of its influence on other subjects (Otsu, 2014; Saito, 2013), teaching methods (Shirai, 2012), teacher training programs (Tokyo Gakugei University, 2016), and curriculum consistency between elementary schools and junior high schools (Naganuma and Koizumi, 2012; Wada, 2011). For addressing these issues, Tsuchiya (2011) maintains a necessity to conduct empirical research and examine what happens in elementary school English classrooms.

This study adopts sociocultural theory as a theoretical framework to understand English education in elementary schools. It came from Vygotskian psychology on children's learning and stresses the importance of children's interactions with environmental factors such as teachers' scaffolding. Lantolf and Poehner (2014)

summarize Vygotsky's views that a teacher has to mediate students' engagement with the social environment in order to foster students' responsibility to learn by themselves. In Japanese elementary schools, homeroom teachers (HRTs) are supposed to teach almost all the subjects including music, art, and physical education. The time elementary school pupils spend with their homeroom teachers is long compared to that in junior high and senior high schools, where every subject is taught by a specialized teacher. Therefore, HRTs in elementary schools are considered to play a crucial role in students' English learning, though they usually teach English with assistant language teachers (ALTs) or Japanese teachers of English (JTEs).

Previous studies of Japanese HRTs' role in English education have focused on the participation patterns of HRTs in team teaching with ALTs (Aline & Hosoda, 2006), HRTs' influence on pupils' language learning behavior (Oga-Baldwin & Nakata, 2013), role confusion between ALTs and JTEs (Cotter, 2011), and the perceptions of ALTs and JTEs about team teaching in junior high and senior high schools (Ogawa, 2011). These studies suggest a wide variety of roles HRTs play in classrooms and a diversity of teachers' and students' perceptions about HRTs' roles. Considering these studies, this study aims at understanding how Japanese HRTs' roles are perceived and constructed by teachers and students, thinking about what is necessary for English education in elementary schools to be successful.

This study adopts a case study method for examining Japanese HRTs' roles deeply, considering sociocultural contexts of each case. The four research questions are as follows:

1. How are the roles of Japanese HRTs perceived by elementary school students and the HRTs themselves?
2. Are there any similarities and differences among those perceptions of the students and the HRTs? If so, what are the reasons for this situation?
3. Are there any gaps between those perceptions and what is observed in the English classrooms? If so, what are the reasons?
4. How are the roles of Japanese HRTs constructed through interactions in elementary school English classrooms?

Based on these questions, this study focuses on three cases in two public elementary schools located in rural areas in Japan, employing three HRTs and 11 students as participants.

Interviews with the HRTs and the students were conducted to examine their perceptions about the HRTs' roles in English classes. Each interview was audio-recorded. In addition, English classrooms were observed in order to examine what roles the HRTs played during the lessons. Each lesson was video-recorded. The audio- and video-recorded data was transcribed by using a convention developed by Schegloff (2007). The transcribed data was analyzed using discourse analysis in order to

understand each participant's speech acts from sociolinguistic, interactional, and individual perspectives (Rymes, 2009). The analysis of the data was conducted repeatedly to find representative themes emerging from the collected data.

The results of the data analysis indicate that the HRTs' multiple roles are perceived by the students and the HRTs themselves. Moreover, various roles were observed in the English lessons. The roles perceived by the HRTs were linguistic translator, motivator, sympathizer, main teacher, and role model of English communication. On the other hand, the students perceived the HRTs' roles of supporting teacher, linguistic translator, role model of English communication, role model of English learning, evaluator, and motivator. The roles observed in the lessons were main teacher, linguistic translator, cultural interpreter, motivator, mediator, pronunciation instructor, and cultural instructor.

These perceptions indicate both similarities and differences about the HRTs' perceived and observed roles. It can be inferred that the participants' perceptions and teaching practices are influenced by the sociocultural contexts around the HRTs and the students and by how they perceive those contexts. To summarize the roles analyzed from the data, the HRTs are thought to play the role of facilitator, providing the students with the linguistic and affective support to help the students' English learning.

Based on the results, this study provides suggestions for elementary school English education and teacher training. The HRTs were observed to play the role of

main teacher in their classes despite that some of them do not consider themselves as fluent in English. Their role is not to leave all of the lessons to ALTs but to conduct lessons on their own initiative, trying to speak English as much as possible. Such HRTs' efforts can lead their students to consider them as a role model of English communication and learning.

Regarding teacher training, it is important for teachers to acquire basic English skills usable in a classroom. HRTs' use of simple expressions such as "Very good" and "Let's listen" can possibly encourage students. Moreover, for fostering such English skills and the ability to assist students, there should be more opportunities for teacher training because most of the current teachers have not experienced regular English education in elementary schools.

On the other hand, this study has some limitations in terms of the number of cases and observations. The longer the observations of each case are done, the deeper understanding of what happens in classrooms is attained. In addition, this study focuses on elementary schools in rural areas. Teachers' and students' perceptions in urban areas can be different from those in rural areas. Similarly, other stakeholders' points of view such as from ALTs, JTEs, school principals, parents, and members of education boards can provide more diverse insights. Involving such broader sociocultural contexts will make research on elementary school English education and the roles of HRTs more multidimensional and help practitioners think about the ways of developing effective

English teaching and teacher training programs. Therefore, for further studies, both longitudinal and cross-sectional perspectives are needed.

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