EFL Policy and Practice Disparities in Japan:

Can an Intercultural Communication Competency Component Help?

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要 旨

　2002年以降，文部科学省が行う英語教育は，従来行われてきた訳読ベースの教授法（GTM）からコミュニカティブアプローチのある言語教育（CLT）へと変換されてきています。ただし，教室での実践はこれらの提案を反映していないため，日本は世界の英語能力リーグの中でその地位をどんどん落としています。この研究では，異文化間コミュニケーション能力（ICC）に重点を置いた CLT ベースの方法を利用する西洋の外国語教育の実践から着想を得て，ICC コンポーネントを含めて学生中心英語教育の影響について，学生の認識とニーズを調査しました。学生へのインタビューと観察法を通じて，この調査から4つの分野で結果が出ました。学生は，高いテストスコアを達成する以外の明確な目的がないため，現在の英語教育のやり方に不満を抱き，学習意欲を湧かせることができません（これは，政策改革にもかかわらず，GTM に重点をおいた大学入学試験によって悪化している問題と言えます）。

　ICC インクルージョンを使用した学生中心の学習は，非ネイティブスピーカー同士の交流を主な対象に作られたコミュニケーション戦略の開発と実践と同様に，学生にとって望ましい（そして文化的に適した）ものです。ICC コンポーネントを使用すると，学生は将来，自分が職業上において，また個人的に英語を使っている姿を大きな目で捉えることができ，学習意欲を向上させることができます。

1. Introduction

English education practices in Japan often appear misaligned with policy due to conflicting interests of policy makers, educators, parents, and students (Bouchard, 2017). This results in students entering university with little insight into the value of their English skill, viewing it purely as an academic stepping stone (be it gaining entry into university, fulfilling course requirements, or as a prerequisite for employment). Their understanding of the necessity of English as a professional and recreational tool is minimal, contributing to low motivation (Tan & Chia, 2015), high anxiety (Andrade & Williams, 2009), and apathy (Powell, 2005).

According to the latest English Proficiency Index (EPI, 2019), Japan currently places 53rd out of 100 countries, below other Asian countries including China, Singapore, Malaysia, Philippines, India, South Korea, and Vietnam. Targets set out by the government aiming to have 50% of all third-grade junior high school students attain Grade 3 of the Eiken English Proficiency Test remain elusive -percentages over the last three years have stagnated below the 40% mark, shifting slightly from 36.3% in 2016 (The Japan News, 2017) to 39.3% in 2018 (The Japan Times, 2018).

One reason is the persistent emphasis in schools of accuracy over fluency and a lack of education in the place and purpose of English in the world (Anthony, 2016). According to Leaver (2008) insufficient sociocultural and sociolinguistic competence limits students to minimum proficiency levels. Oxford (2017) agrees that 'for linguistic abilities to be fully enriched, attitudes of curiosity, openness, and cultural awareness need to be fostered' (197). It has long been recognised that language and culture are inextricable (Xue, 2014, and Harley, 2014). The European Union (EU) in 2003 adopted a proactive approach to language learning promoting key attitudes towards other languages (Wray & Bloomer, 2006). This approach emphasised active over passive skills, effective communicative ability, and a move away from native speaker (NS) fluency, and has since evolved into an effort by the EU to marry intercultural communicative competence (ICC) with linguistic competence, resulting in the 2015 European Use of Full Immersion, Culture, Content, and Service (EUFICCS) (Oxford, 2017). Similar successful movements

occurred in North America with the development of the American Council of the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). A look through previous EPI rankings sees the top ten dominated by European countries, with Japan steadily dropping from 14th (rated as 'moderate proficiency') in 2011 to 53rd (rated as 'low proficiency'). This suggests that while approaches aimed towards fostering ICC are having a positive impact on linguistic and communicative ability in Europe, the methods applied in Japan are having the reverse.

Japan's struggle with English competency has not gone unnoticed by ministry officials; Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) has repeatedly called for change in teaching practices (MEXT, 2002, 2003, 2011, and 2014) yet gaps between policy and practice persevere (Glasgow & Paller, 2016). To understand why, and to attempt to find solutions to bridge the gap, a mixed-methods approach was used to answer the research questions: what is Japan's history with English education? What are the current education policies and teaching practices? How do the students feel about their English education experience in terms of their perceived needs? Echoing EUFICCS, can student-centred lessons including a non-NS interaction focussed ICC component improve students' perceptions of their English experience (and therefore be deemed a culturally suitable addition to classroom practices)? The first two questions are explored in the next section. The qualitative results of the latter two are reported later.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Japan's history with English education

Japan isolated itself from international influence for over two centuries (Koyama & Ruxton, 2004). This isolationist policy, enforced in the early 1600s, allowed minimal foreign contact (for trade purposes) limited to Dejima (an island off the coast of Nagasaki). 1853 saw the arrival of Commodore Perry who gave Japan the ultimatum of either voluntarily opening its borders for trade, or doing so through outside force (Seargeant, 2011).

The Meiji Restoration (1868) began with universities enlisting English as an integral part of their entrance exam from 1871, focussing on grammar-translation methods (GTM) as a way of understanding trade documents. The Ministry of Education ('*Monbusho*'), founded the same year, employed the renowned linguist Harold Palmer to review teaching

practices (Fujita-Round & Maher, 2008). Palmer's research served to heavily admonish GTM and instead strongly advocated an oral-aural method, with the support of local institutions. *Monbusho* ignored his proposals (despite his methods proving both effective and popular), instead allowing for the continuation of GTM. This display of caution and reluctance set the precedent for the coming centuries.

The early twentieth century witnessed an anti-western climate, resulting in the cessation of English instruction during the 1930s (Shimizu, 2010). Post World War II, however, saw both a rejection of extreme nationalism and recognition of the necessity of English, which subsequently became compulsory in schools. The 1970s was privy to a plethora of influential literature, labelled colloquially '*nihonjinron*' ('the theory of Japanese uniqueness') leading to suppression of English to preserve cultural values (Shimizu, 2010) followed by '*kokusaika*' (internationalism) in the 1980s which maintained a two-fold purpose: to emerge from cultural isolation and begin to acknowledge Western values (McConnell, 1996), and to promote '*nihonjinron*' to the international community (Hashimoto, 2002). The overriding theme was to 'be open to the outside world while protecting and promoting national culture' (Hagerman 2009: 53).

In the same decade the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) programme was proposed by Home Affairs official, Nose Kuniyuki (Hagerman, 2009). The stated aims were to provide students with direct contact with native English speakers, and to evolve towards a more communicative approach to language learning. Those in favour saw it as an active improvement of foreign language teaching by the government. Those against were concerned with the hiring of young, inexperienced, unqualified teachers. The lack of notable improvement in communicative competence did little to assuage concerns (Hagerman, 2009) and it was later admitted by Nose Kuniyuki that the underlying mission of the JET programme was less about revolutionising English language learning and more about placating growing friction between Japan and the United States (McConnell, 1996).

Japan's economic bubble burst towards the end of the 1980s, delivering the country into a lengthy recession. As it began to fall behind in economic terms the government once again recognised the value of English, again as a tool for strengthening its economy, acknowledging there was no alternative but to improve English standards within the country (Tukahara, 2002). This move echoes earlier motives in 1868 to understand trade documents for their economic value.

Overall, it is clear that despite 'pendulum shifts from eager interest to absolute rejection' (Hagerman, 2009: 48) English has always been kept at a safe distance, seen as a necessity to improve Japan's economic standing, or as an avenue to insert Japan into the international community. The idea of better understanding other cultures to enhance language learning gets lost between the desire to understand foreign thinking with regard to trade and economy, and the need to protect Japanese culture. It is perhaps this love-hate relationship with English, paired with its absence in societal systems or seen as a necessary means to gain status (in contrast to neighbouring countries including India and the Philippines as a consequence of colonial rule) that has contributed to a sense of apathy towards understanding the necessity of English in the modern globalized society.

2.2 Current policy and practice

In 2002 and 2003 MEXT released two documents outlining substantially renewed English education policies. The latter provided detail on education goals and the avenues deemed necessary to reach them. It promoted the increasingly popular communicative language teaching (CLT) approach (Stakanova & Tolstikhina, 2014) over GTM (reflecting Palmer's pedagogy in the early twentieth century), and aimed to improve student motivation, teaching ability, and university admissions systems (Hagerman, 2009).

In 2011 MEXT introduced new 'Course of Study Guidelines' for foreign language teaching, including in it 'Five Proposals and Specific Measures for Developing Proficiency in English for International Communication' (hereafter 'Five Proposals') which made English lessons compulsory for fifth and sixth grade elementary school students in order to foster a 'positive attitude to communication' (MEXT 2011: 3). The guidelines also called for more communication practice with primarily English instruction (Tahira 2012) for which teachers may be inadequately trained (Van Amelsvoort, 2014).

Five Proposals emphasize the need for student centred-learning (despite many researchers questioning its cultural suitability including Burrows 2008; Maftoon & Ziafar, 2013) and reveal an edge towards ICC (coming closer in line with EUFICCS and ACTFL):

> "… [develop the] capability of smooth communication with people of different countries and cultures … accurate understanding of your partner's thoughts and intentions based on his/her cultural and social background, logical and reasoned

explanation of one's own views, and convincing partners in course of debates"
(MEXT 2011: 3).

Another important aspect recognized within the guidelines is that students 'have few opportunities to feel the necessity of English' (MEXT 2011: 5) serving to negatively impact student motivation, especially by the time they reach university. It suggests pursuing several avenues including: use educational materials that introduce debate and discussion; show students the necessity for English in any given profession, allowing them to imagine their future English self; gain experience overseas 'at an impressionable age' to allow interaction with people of diverse cultures and backgrounds (MEXT 2011: 6). Abe (2018) expands on this, saying that apathy towards English education stems from 'deep-seated misconceptions' (para. 4) which include viewing English as a commodity rather than a necessity.

Despite these well-intentioned reforms that appear to echo successful Western approaches, disparity between policy and classroom practice persist. Although MEXT guidelines reveal a promising step towards teaching English as a communicative tool between cultures (and as a more intrinsically motivated measure for Japanese people to gain a deeper world view, to engage in debate, and to understand the necessity of English both within and outside of Japan), two prominent obstacles remain to be tackled in order to resolve contradictory practices:

(1) The need for teacher training:

Ambiguities surrounding the definition of CLT, how to implement it effectively, and the addition of the 'teach English in English' principle have contributed to teacher reluctance in implementation, stemming from a lack of confidence (Fenelly & Luxton, 2011) paired with the time it takes to convert from a familiar teaching method to an unfamiliar one (Tahira, 2012), a discord between policy and teachers' own principles (Sougari & Sifakis, 2007) and knowledge (Sifakis & Sougari, 2010). Although Five Proposals acknowledge the need for teacher training specific details of this remain vague, thus being somewhat of a disservice to already famously overworked teachers (see Tsuboya-Newell, 2018). Exacerbating this, both Hagerman (2009) and Glasgow and Paller (2014) note discrepancies between MEXT-approved textbooks and policy reforms. Textbooks continue to include minimal CLT-based content, contributing to apathy towards reforms; even if effective training were in place it would somewhat be in vain if textbooks ultimately restrict its application in classrooms.

As Five Proposals highlight, students must be made aware of the necessity of English both domestically and internationally. Going beyond the clashes between teacher pedagogy and CLT-oriented reforms, the situation is further complicated by technological advances allowing for more meaningful access to English and its associated varieties and cultures. To accommodate this, including non-NS interaction-focussed ICC components in lessons (in a similar vain to EUFICCS and ACTFL) would scaffold students with a deeper world view and a relatable image of their future English selves, whilst potentially increasing their communicative competency (as per Leaver, 2008, and Oxford, 2017).

(2) Assessment procedures remain unchanged:

A prominent influence on teaching practice are university entrance exams (Shea, 2009), which continue to include a heavily weighted English component emphasizing grammar, translation, and reading capability. For the majority of students these exams are the sole pathway into further education, triggering repeated criticism from government officials (Kikuchi & Browne, 2009). Though teachers feel pressure from MEXT to reform their practices to include CLT, more immediate pressure from parents to guide students successfully through entrance exams that remain GTM centred exerts far more influence on classroom practice (Gorsuch, 2001), especially in a society with a 'credentialist ideology' (Shea, 2009: 99). Some universities may even prefer to maintain this tradition given the financial benefits from creating in-house tests (Shea, 2009). Starting 2020, MEXT encourages universities to include English segments that test all four language skills (McCrostie, 2017), meaning that for the first time productive skills are given equal importance. Abe (2018) questions the validity and efficacy of this move in terms of improving competency, arguing that adding a speaking tenet to entrance exams does not beget improvements in speaking ability and instead opens up the gateway for private-sector test organisations to compete for examinees through score inflation.

Despite continued effort and investment into English education reform in Japan, returns are often disappointing. Contradictions between incrementally progressive and vague policies, and teacher self-efficacy and assessment procedures remain persistent. In order to begin bridging the gap between policy and practice, assessment procedures must change to suit reforms. This would enable a trickle-down effect into materials-development and teacher training and support, and subsequently classroom practice. None of this, however, will be effective without centring 'students' own interests and choices at the core' (Abe, 2018, para. 3) as this is ultimately what drives motivation

(Amiri & Saberi, 2017).

3. Methodology

3.1 The participants

　　The study involved an experimental group and a control group (consisting of 26 male and 16 females participants, and 24 male and 16 female participants respectively) attending a compulsory English communication university-level course for one semester. All students were enrolled on various majors, excluding English. The experimental group received student-centred, non-NS interaction focussed ICC instruction in addition to the stipulated syllabus. The control group received teacher-centred instruction solely following the stipulated syllabus. Both groups met with the teacher weekly for a ninety-minute class.

3.2 Interviews

　　Five interviews were conducted. Four interviews (hereafter 'post-interviews') involved twelve randomly selected participants from the afore-mentioned groups. One interview (hereafter 'pre-interview') involved a participant who was a member of neither group. One week prior to the interviews, participants were given a written description of the research purpose and a verbal description of likely questions. Contact details were provided to allow participants to withdraw if necessary. Informed consent was obtained from each person prior to the start of each interview. To avoid interviewer-researcher bias and unnecessary transgression from the interview purpose, an interview schedule was used annotated with probe question suggestions. All interviews were conducted in Japanese and were translated, transcribed and coded immediately after completion. Participants were referred to by a number and either 'E' for 'experimental' or 'C' for 'control'. Pre- and Post- interview questions are given in Appendix I.

　　The pre-interview participant was a 47 year old Japanese businessman (hereafter 'BM') with extensive experience communicating with foreigners both domestically and internationally. This interview aimed to provide insight into the following areas: his experience of learning English in school; the strategies he uses to navigate through communication with other non-NS business clients. It was hoped this interview would go some way to illuminating any changes in classroom practice since BM was a school

student, and to inform the development of the ICC component.

Seven participants were interviewed from the experimental group, and five from the control group. The post-interviews were conducted towards the end of the semester. The aims were to: gain clear insight into the participants' experience of English education prior to attending university to understand current classroom practices, and to identify any differences in experiences between these participants and the earlier experiences of BM; compare the differences between their previous experiences and the instruction they received for the duration of the research, and investigate their opinions on these differences; gain insight into any alterations in their perceptions of their English learning experience that occurred over the course of the semester.

3.3 Observation Diary

To provide greater insight into the learning experiences of both groups an observation diary was kept by the teacher each week. Diaries provide avenues for analysing and understanding of the social processes of the classroom (Sā, 2001), and also illuminate unexpected and potentially significant phenomena (Whyte, 1984, cited in Richards, 2003: 110). Knowing one is being observed carries with it a sense of intrusion. In light of this, students in both groups were exposed to the teacher's 'Memory Aid' from the first week of instruction. This was a notebook within which field-notes were kept alongside notes concerning notices and reminders not pertinent to the investigation. Students thus quickly became used to the teacher making notes, partially reducing the effect of observers paradox described by Richards (2003). Consent to observe students was obtained at the start of the course.

To ensure the diary was used to its fullest potential, several factors were kept in mind, as outlined by Sā (2001) and Richards (2003), including the following: aim for detail; 'Observe and look for nothing' (Richards 2003: 134) to avoid recording only events deemed pertinent to the investigation; immediately after each lesson transfer field-notes to a structured observation sheet allowing for observation to remain open and unbiased during the lesson. Structured write-ups took approximately twelve hours per week. Participants were referred to anonymously, using notation such as 'Ss' to refer to 'students' or 'S1' to refer to an individual participant. All notes were kept with the researcher at all times during observation and write-up, and locked in a filing cabinet when not in use.

4. Results and Discussion

After initial coding of the pre-interview and post-interviews the following themes emerged: the prevalence of GTM in both junior high school and high school English lessons paired with the lack of a specified purpose and awareness of the necessity English influencing motivation; open-mindedness towards other cultures and non-NS; a desire for more communication strategy instruction; a desire for teachers to be more aware of students' language learning wants and needs (echoing Abe, 2018).

Some notable points that emerged from the observation diary and deserve discussion are: student responses to activities that focussed on strategy practice; student reactions to other cultures, particularly with reference to creating and challenging stereotypes.

4.1 Classroom practice, purpose, and motivation

The interviews show that classroom practice appears to have changed very little within the last thirty years, with content still leaning towards GTM (as per Glasgow & Paller, 2014). Teachers appear either inadequately trained in CLT (as per Fenelly & Luxton, 2011, and Tahira, 2012) or in pedagogical conflict with policy outlines (as per Sougari & Sifakis, 2007; and Sifakis & Sougari, 2010). Unchanged university entrance test methods remain an overriding influence on class content (as per Tahira, 2012). Communication lessons (that should balance all four language skills according to MEXT, 2011) remain GTM focussed.

Extract 1: Lesson purpose (pre-interview)

BM:　If, see, they had told us the purpose … for example if you learn something other than Japanese, like English, you'll have these chances in life, this will happen for you … to begin with … the purpose was missing so … right … how do I say? If I think about it now it is so useful me now and now I am an adult I can see this.

Extract 2: Classroom practice and purpose (post-interview: control group)

C1:　Yeah, seriously, it was all about the entrance test for me.

C2:　Yeah, so even in our last lesson the teacher gave us a printed copy of the test. We just had to memorise the answers.

C1:　So your lessons really had no meaning!

C2:　Yeah that's right … I think it's because the teacher thought that was the best way to learn.

IR: I see.

C3:   It's so different to now. Also for me it really depended on the teacher. Many teachers would talk a lot and we would just listen. They always told us that was best.

Extract 3: Classroom practice and purpose (post-interview: experimental group)

IR: So, the grammar lesson was just writing and listening?

E6:   Didn't we do that in both though? In communication and grammar we had long sentences—

IR: Long sentences?

E6:   Yeah translate the sentences then tell the teacher. Translate it then say it.

E7:   Yeah that was our communication lesson too.

The value of maintaining English communication skills is not explored by the educational institutions beyond this point, being a disservice to students who likely need communicative English for their future professional and recreational purposes. For this to change, teachers should be provided with ample and continuous training in CLT and ICC approaches, materials need to reflect these approaches, and assessment procedures need to change to sufficiently accommodate reforms.

Perhaps one flaw in MEXT (2011) is the restriction of 'future English self' (6) to professional realms. The interviews show a clear desire for participants' English skill to be applied both professionally and recreationally, domestically and internationally.

Extract 4: Future English Self (post-interview: control group)

IR: I'd like to know how you see yourself using English in the future. Maybe at work or—

C2:   Go travelling and … without problems … I can use English with the locals. Maybe it's impossible but I want that!

C3:   Also I want to be able to use it at work. Maybe I can't.

IR: No, I think you can.

C3:   Because now, even in Japan, we have to use English a lot, even online in Google and so on. So, I need English.

IR: How about you?

C1:   For me? I want to be able to use it smoothly in Japan, either at work or with tourists.

The focus on its professional value may reinforce negative internal dialogue such

as 'If I do not do well in English, I will not succeed in my career'. Adding a recreational tenet allows for the exploration of enjoyment with English, in terms of interacting with foreign exchange students, or traveling to foreign countries. This would improve motivation levels, which were arguably low for some interview participants during their school years, as shown in the extracts below.

Extract 5: Motivation (pre-interview)

BM:　We had no idea, because look, everyone … it was mandatory. To study or learn how to speak for yourself? We never thought about that. So we never wanted to learn. So the lessons were never fun.

IR:　So, motivation—

BM:　Yeah, completely unmotivated.

Extract 6: Motivation (post-interview: control group)

C3:　Yeah, it was so boring!

IR:　Did any of it go in?

C3:　No and that's why I started to really dislike English. It was only grammar and writing.

MEXT (2011) proposals to allow students to see the necessity of English beyond the entrance test are being disregarded. More recent proposals (outlined in McCrostie, 2017) to adapt current admissions tests by 2020 could have a trickle-down effect into school classrooms, influencing teaching and materials development, and subsequently motivation.

4.2 Perspectives and desires: communication strategies and ICC

A salient theme is that participants felt what they need most is a set of practical communication strategies, to the point of them being no longer strategies but habits (as per Oxford, 2017). This is indicated in the extracts below.

Extract 7: Communication strategy desires (pre-interview)

BM:　I want to be able to better catch what they are saying … or know how to show I don't understand. Now my English conversation school teachers tell me that it comes naturally but it doesn't for me, so I get a bit annoyed.

Extract 8: Communication strategy desires (post-interview: control group)

C3:　I'm really worried about whether what I'm saying is being understood because my level is so low.

IR: Like … did my message get across or not?

C3:   Yeah like that.

C1:   Me too.

IR: You too? OK

C2:   The other person. I'm worried about if they can understand me.

A large proportion of the participants' English learning experience was devoted to receptive over productive skills (harking back to Meiji era methods described by Hagerman, 2009, and Shimizu, 2010), yet what they desire appears to be the reverse, more in line with EUFICCS approaches described by Oxford (2017). If student interests and choices form the central core of English education (after Abe, 2018) then persistent and explicit communication strategies (not limited to non-NS interactions) should be an integral part of this.

Diary Extract 1 illustrates students' reactions to communication strategy exercises taught during the ICC component, further supporting the sentiments above. By contrast, Diary Extract 2 for the same week paints a different picture, exhibiting well-documented strategies such as avoidance and abandonment (Tarone & Yule, 1987):

Diary Extract 1: Experimental Group (Circumlocution task)

"All responded very positively and proactively to this activity. Most could convey their meaning — even those with lower confidence levels discovered they could be understood through applying gestures with words, or sometimes in place of them."

Diary Extract 2: Control Group (Discussion task)

"Very reluctant to say they don't understand something, will often choose a dictionary over formulating a clarification question. It seems they give up quickly, and often resort to interjecting Japanese words."

With regards to ICC, O'Connell (2015) generalises that Japan is largely stereotypical toward the 'other'. While this may be true, Diary Extracts 3, 4, and 5 show steps towards understanding how negative stereotypes can make others feel (and therefore hinder successful communication) was taking effect. The first activity asked students to draw their image of a woman in Nairobi sitting outside her home eating a snack. The second asked students to compare two almost identical images of a family eating dinner, the only difference being the ethnicity of the families.

Diary Extract 3: Experimental Group (Creating and challenging stereotypes — adapted

from Johnson and Rinvolucri 2010: 27)

"When explaining why S1 drew an overweight woman sitting outside a simple hut for the activity, she commented that in her mind Kenyan people had little money to buy healthy food or afford a 'proper' house, yet was surprised to find out from her internet searches that Nairobi was in fact an affluent city and that she had 'got it totally wrong'."

Diary Extract 4: Experimental Group (Communication strategies review through image comparison)

"When describing the differences between two images of families eating dinner, S4 commented that she would prefer to eat with the Asian family because they were eating salads, whereas the other family (a group of white people) were probably eating steak or a barbeque. S3 pointed out that the food in both pictures was the same. S4 reacted with surprise, admitting 'I didn't even look, I just assumed'."

Diary Extract 5: Experimental Group (Course Reflection Activity)

"Students were commenting on what they could remember. One noted that he was understanding better the idea that stereotypes are easy to make and difficult to break and how important realising this had been for him. When another member questioned him, he described feeling uncomfortable that others saw Japanese people as cold or formal and that this made him aware that his negative beliefs of others had the same impact."

The control group remained attached to NS ideals. This perhaps stems from: struggling to identify a NS from a non-NS (Extract 9) and thus assuming that all foreigners who speak English are NS; what little exposure to foreigners they have is usually in educational institutions who employ largely NS teachers (Extract 10); viewing NS countries as places they are more likely to visit (Extract 11). The experimental group views had expanded to included non-NS ideals (Extract 12).

Extract 9: Differentiating NS from non-NS (post interview: control group)

C2:   I often have foreigners visit my work and use English.

IR: OK. Do you know where they are from?

C2:   No idea but maybe native speakers? I'm guessing American or maybe European? They speak English.

Extract 10: NS teachers at school (post-interview: control group)

C5:   We had a foreign teacher.

C4:   Ryan

C5:   Bryan

IR: What, you had the same teacher?

C5: No Ryan. His nickname was Lion.

C4: Yeah mine was Bryan … Bald Bryan. He would be in the corridor outside the classroom. We would go out and talk to him one by one.

C5: Wow!

Extract 11: NS ideals influencing travel choices (post-interview: control group)

C4: Yeah I'm not interested in … India.

IR: Oh? Why?

C4: I'd never go there, or even meet an Indian person. If it was someone that I think I'd meet like an American or Australian or … somewhere where I want to go—

IR: Oh I see so it's as much about where you want to go as it is about the people you would meet here?

C4: Yeah.

Extract 12: Non-NS interaction acceptance (post-interview: experimental group)

IR: OK thank you. So next section … for example, I am a native speaker, but what if I wasn't a native speaker? Would you be OK with that? For example, I am Malaysian … but I can speak English.

E6: Yeah, that's no problem.

IR: Why?

E8: If I'm honest I don't understand that much English.

E6: Yeah, they're much more experienced than me.

IR: So it doesn't really matter what nationality your teacher is?

E5: No, not really.

E6: For me too.

IR: OK so … so who do you speak more often with?

E7: Non-native speakers, right?

The use of non-NS teachers in English education would help students recognise that speaking fluidly and employing strategies to navigate through communication mishaps does is a more attainable, practical goal than endeavouring to achieve elusive NS fluency, and towards helping learners understand the diversity of both native and non-native Englishes as well as the legitimacy of the latter.

In the Five Proposals a call is made for increased debate and discussion in classrooms;

some proportion of lessons should be student-centred and collaborative. The experimental group lessons were predominantly so, which appeared favourable with students:

Extract 13: Student-centred learning (post-interview: experimental group)

E8:　　I hate TOEIC but Communication is … fun.

E7:　　Yeah, fun.

IR:　　Thanks … so … why?

E8:　　We have a lot of group work and pair work.

E6:　　Yeah it feels like I'm doing something, being productive.

E5:　　Like I'm studying.

E8:　　Liar!

IR:　　Really?

E5:　　I feel like I'm learning English.

E6:　　I guess … we do a lot of games, activities, then we speak and try to use it together like … in reality.

　　This suggests that, contrary to Burrows (2008), these approaches to language education in Japan appear not only culturally suitable but also desired, and more credit should be given to learners' ability to engage productively and collaboratively in lessons.

　　Experimental group participants were quick to accept the interconnectedness of language and culture whereas this required some explanation for the control group interviewees:

Extract 14: Intercultural Communication Comprehension (post-interview: experimental group)

IR:　　OK, next one. Do you know what intercultural communication is?

E2:　　Yeah it's communicating with people from other cultures.

IR:　　OK, so do you think language and culture are connected?

E3:　　Totally!

E2:　　Uh … Yes?

E1:　　Wait, but didn't we study that? Haven't we been learning that since the beginning of the … the first lesson?

IR:　　OK, so do you feel that learning about intercultural communication helped your English skill?

E2:　　Yeah, for me it did.

E1:　　Me, too. I relaxed more.

IR: How about you?

E3:   I don't know …

E2:   I feel that my knowledge increased

E4:   Yeah, that's right.

E1:   I feel more confident … like … it's OK to ask if I don't know.

Extract 16: Intercultural Communication Comprehension (post-interview: control group)

IR: OK. Have you heard of intercultural communication?

C4:   No, not really.

IR: So, it's all about learning how to communicate with people whose culture is different to yours … Would you be open to that?

C5:   It depends on the country.

The experimental group participants valued the influence the ICC component had on their linguistic abilities; it seemed to serve well in terms of reducing apathy and anxiety, and increasing motivation.

5. Conclusion

With policy and practice in conflict, ultimately it is the students who lose out. A sense of quiet frustration with persistent GTM-based practices, vague lesson purposes, and a lack of explicit instruction in the necessity of English for both professional and recreational uses (in Japan and overseas), is palpable. Students quite clearly desire student-centred approaches that involve clear-cut communication strategy instruction, and recognise the benefits of a non-NS interaction focussed ICC component as it serves to both develop their English linguistic abilities and relieve pressures to achieve NS accuracy. In this respect, student needs and MEXT reforms are in alignment. To better serve our students throughout their English education (and, ultimately, better serve Japanese society), assessment procedures must adapt to accommodate for student-centred learning and intercultural communicative competency development. In doing so, teaching materials and teaching practices will surely follow suit. Additional research into the effects of student-centred learning and ICC component inclusion on students' semester scores could yield some interesting insights.

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Appendix I: 'Pre-Interview' Schedule

	Pre-interview	Post-interview
1. Can you describe a typical school English lesson you had?	☑	☑
2. What were your feelings about those lessons?	☑	☑
3. What did you think the purpose of learning English was?	☑	☑
4. Do you continue your English education now? (In what way? Does this suit you better? In what ways?)	☑	
5. How do these classes compare to your English education at Junior High School and High School?	☑	☑
6. Where do you use English the most?	☑	
7. Who do you use English with? (native/ non-native)	☑	☑
8. Does communication come easier with NS or NNS?	☑	
9. What are you worried about when talking to NS? And NNS?	☑	☑
10. Have you heard the phrase "intercultural communication" before? What do you think it means?	☑	☑
12. Do you think schools should include an intercultural communication section in their English programs?	☑	
13. How would you like to continue your English education in the future?	☑	☑
14: How would you like to use your English skill in the future?	☑	☑
15: Is there anything else you would like to add that I didn't think to ask you?	☑	☑
5. What would you like to change about your Junior High School and High School English lessons?		☑
6. Would you be happy with a NNS teacher?		☑
8. Do you think it is better to try to speak with NS or NNS?		☑
10. Do you aspire to speak like a native speaker one day?		☑
11. After studying this course, do you feel more comfortable talking with NS and NNS?		☑
13. Do you think about culture and language are connected?		☑