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THE DIVIDE BETWEEN POLICY AND PRACTICE IN EFL HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOMS IN JAPAN

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Abstract

This paper examines the current high school English language curriculum guidelines established by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport, Science and Technology (MEXT) in Japan, and the teaching approaches that are most prevalent in Japanese high school EFL classrooms by examining the implementation of the curriculum in the classroom. Results obtained from surveys, semi-formal interviews, and informal conversations with English language teachers at high schools in Kyushu and Hyogo, Japan, provide an overview of teaching styles and practices within classrooms, which differ to the approaches recommended by policy. Based on this evidence, the paper will explore what cultural and organizational factors are hindering the incorporation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approaches in the classroom by using a conceptual framework based on Hofstede's Large Culture.

Key words

CLT in Japan, Curriculum Implementation, Teacher Practice, Organizational Hierarchy.

1. Introduction

With the stated intention of improving Japanese ‘students’ communicative competence and creative abilities’, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport, Science and Technology (MEXT) created new curriculum guidelines phased in from 2013 and completed by 2016 (Monbukagakusho, 2010). The new guidelines focused on encouraging teachers to use more communicative focused tasks, discussions and debates in the classroom to attempt to foster learners who could ‘use English in their daily lives after graduating high school, and who could use English in the workplace after graduating from University’ (Humphries, 2015). Prior literature examining efforts to use CLT as an approach in Japan such as presented by Nishino (2011), and Tanaka (2009) has broadly formed a consensus that there exist various barriers to the incorporation of CLT in the English language classroom, including examination-focused attitudes (both formalized and in practice), teachers’ communicative competence, organizational structure and a lack of general practical understanding regarding CLT aims and methodologies. Hofstede (2004) identifies that in a Japanese workplace, there is a high power divide and uncertainty avoidance which limits dialogue within organizations. Such dialogues, of course, are necessary to promote change and understanding. Since the new curriculum and education policies have been established throughout all high schools in Japan, there are still a significant number of institutions displaying hesitancy in stepping away from Grammar Translation Methods (GTM) of teaching, and where CLT has not been as fully adapted as planners of the new curriculum policies had hoped to be the case. This research paper will collect original data from high school teachers in Japan to investigate what personal, cultural, and organizational limitations are present within their workplaces in an attempt to discover what factors need to be more fully addressed for implementation and understanding of the new curriculum to be successful. Additionally, considerations of socio-cultural factors that influence teacher practice, development,

organizational hierarchy, and teacher efficacy will be outlined by looking at results of surveys and interviews with teachers who work in the profession.

2. Literature review

2.1. The new curriculum

MEXT created the new curriculum with the intention to improve students' communicative abilities and increase their chances of speaking and listening to English. Due to Japan's aim of creating a more globally-focused educational program and its wish to improve its international influence in business, trade, and tourism, MEXT identified CLT as the best approach to allow communication and expression in English to be developed within the classroom. While CLT is an approach rather than an actual curriculum, MEXT's action represents an acknowledgement of the centrality of developing pragmatically effective English language education in the overarching plan for national development in an increasingly globalized world.

Pilot programs, such as the Super English Language High schools (SELHi) program, allowed for selected schools to create lessons and curriculum outside MEXT policy over a three-year period (2003-2006), to develop effective English teaching materials and curricula with the intention of exposing students to as much English as possible (Arita, 2002). From these pilot programs, the communicative focus of the newly-created materials and lesson plans were an influential factor in MEXT's decision to change the nationwide English language curriculum to one that incorporates more CLT tasks and provides space and time for discussions in the classroom. However, it is important to note that the schools selected for the pilot study were already viewed as high-performing schools in English.

Prior to the new curriculum, research had shown that Japanese teachers were more focused on GTM and rote repetition tasks, which were mainly designed to prepare students for Centre Examinations (used by all universities in Japan to make admission decisions) and university entrance examinations (created by and administered by individual universities to select

students for admission to these specific institutions); these examinations are heavily focused on multiple choice and translation tasks, and do not incorporate a spoken component (Browne, 1998). The new curriculum was created by MEXT as a way to allow more students opportunities to speak English in the classroom, and to improve students' overall communicative competence. Since 2013, new textbooks designed around a communicative pedagogy were created, and subject names were changed to promote a more communicative emphasis. These changes are summarized in Table 1 (Monbukagakusho, 2010).

Table 1 Summary of subject name changes

Old Curriculum	New Curriculum
English 1, 2, 3	Communicative English 1,2,3
Oral Communication 1,2	English Conversation
English Reading 1,2,	English Expression 1,2

English 1 / Communicative English: Classes are largely grammar and sentence translation focused. English Reading/ English Expression: focusing on comprehension and passage translations where students write their answers to questions in Japanese and English about the passage. Oral communication / English Conversation: is a general day-to-day conversation focused course, where students read passages of conversations before mimicking these conversation styles to create their own.

2.2. Teachers' communicative competence and understanding of CLT

Empirical research on both CLT and teacher education in Japan indicates a wide range of reactions from teachers to CLT, both pre- and post-2013, but in general it points to negative reactions from teachers to the Ministry's determination to introduce this policy with a communicative focus. Nishino (2011) discovered through interviews of English language high school teachers that their limited uptake of communicative tasks in the classroom was linked to poor understanding of the new curriculum and to CLT theory and practice as an approach, as well

as a failure to understand the curriculum and CLT's broader objectives (Nishino, 2008). In his investigation into Japanese teachers' and students' abilities in the spoken domain, Humphries (2015) surveyed teachers' reactions to the new curriculum, concluding that Japanese high school students and teachers are not competent in using English as a tool for communication, despite the new curriculum's full implementation at the time of research. Results of a survey conducted by the Kyoto Board of Education and released through the BBC showed that Japan is currently 40th out of 48 countries on the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) rankings, and that Japan's English proficiency rating fell from 'moderate proficiency' to 'low proficiency' as a result. This survey further revealed that only one in four teachers reached the threshold of language skills generally considered appropriate enough for most social context demands and limited work requirements. The results showed that most teachers who are employed as English teachers are not up to the standard required, or are not qualified to teach the language. (Pickles, 2017)

Reasons for reluctance to incorporate CLT tasks have been researched by Ruegg (2009) and Tanaka (2009). Teachers who have not seen CLT used in practice by other teachers are reluctant to break away from the currently established GTM method of teaching. Ruegg (2009) and Tanaka (2009) both suggested that since teachers themselves had been educated in GTM, and then became accustomed to teaching with the same methodology, therefore they were not motivated to adapt to it, or not confident enough in speaking English to do so. Thus, depending on the focus of the English subject being taught (grammar, reading, writing, translation, or discussion), some teachers see communicative and speaking-focused tasks as irrelevant to examination and future success (Kitao, 2007).

2.3. Organizational Hierarchy and skills development

Hofstede and McCrae (2004) stress the impact of culture when interpreting cross-cultural communication. In foundational research, he conceptualized broad features for describing national



culture though gathering data from over 116,000 ‘values’ questionnaires administered to IBM employees, encompassing data from 50 nations (1990 p.287). Based on this extensive data, Hofstede and McCrae (2004) suggested that enculturation occurs at every ‘institutional’ level of a culture, such as educational systems, family structure, and government. Therefore, people share a ‘culturally determined’, ‘invisible set of mental programs’ unique to their nation or region (1983, p. 76). However, Hofstede and McCrae. (2004) also caution that these general characteristics ‘[do]...not mean that every individual within that culture is mentally programmed the same way... Individual variation exists.’ (Hofstede, p. 78). Hofstede’s work is relevant to framing this study because his research on culture and enculturation included reflections on Japan. He suggested that in the Japanese case, there was a high level of power stratification and uncertainty avoidance in both inner and outer circles. This cultural factor explains what has been a hindrance to CLT approaches and changes occurring in the Japanese EFL classroom. Due to the senior teacher being the leader of the group, or *sempai*, based on age or years of experience (rather than academic qualifications or English ability), younger teachers, or *kohai*, feel pressured to fall into line with the approaches that are advised by senior management, even when these practices do not support explicit ministry recommendations, or even contradict them (Sugimoto, 2010). These conditions incubate a working culture that acts as an obstacle to the implementation and use of CLT approaches within the language classroom (Koosha, 2013). This resistance is also traceable to senior teachers’ insistence on the use of GTM approaches, which are still providing successful pass rates in both the Centre Exam and university entrance exams. Depending on the situation, when a younger or higher-qualified member of staff speaks up or expresses differing opinions, the hierarchy can interpret it as insubordination, and can in certain cases alienate the individual from the group (Bestor, 2013). Thus, the MEXT policy was brought into a country and educational milieu which was ill-prepared to accept and implement such changes (Hasegawa, 2017). Research prior to 2013 demonstrates that the nature of society and schooling reveals teachers’ resistance to

change and their lack of understanding of policy and its implementation, based on those teachers' positions within the organizational hierarchy. The low ranking of Japan on a global level for English proficiency does provide an explanation for why MEXT changed focus in teaching, but leaves more to say about how it could be successfully accomplished.

In the Japanese educational environment, the roles of teachers and students are predetermined. Aspinall (2013) states that “the teacher is seen as the holder of knowledge, and the students' roles are seen as being the receivers of that knowledge’. These actualities are out of line with CLT approaches in which each participant, be it teacher or student, should be free to express themselves. Furthermore, Hendry (2013) explains that the long-standing image of high school classes is one in which students accumulate facts but have little opportunity to discuss them, and of having views but being unable to express them. Hendry (2013) adds that the larger cultural view of Japanese virtues of self-control, dedication and singularity of purpose are admired and rewarded in the Japanese school and business environment. This group mentality, which according to Hofstede (1990) is prevalent in Japan, and makes it difficult for students to express their opinions within classroom discussions due to a fear of being seen running counter to a group-maintained consensus. This is due to a culture of conformity being both dominant and highly-valued in Confucian-based educational settings (McVeigh, 2014). Markedly, Humphries research shows that merely drawing up curricula, guidelines, and criteria does not by any means guarantee implementation. A more nuanced cultural understanding of ways in which imported CLT methodologies might run counter not only to the clearly powerful forces surrounding university examination and Centre exam preparation, but also to local expectations, practices, and norms is a necessary step in ensuring successful institutional change is inculcated.

For reasons outlined earlier, teachers also lack chances to express their opinions within this organizational hierarchy. As outlined by Nishino (2011), a way to improve understanding of the new curriculum is for teachers to be able to discuss openly their ideas and concerns about CLT. Yet



the traditional Japanese hierarchy and the Confucian practice of saving face has not allowed for these discussions to be able to take place in a safe environment. Nishino (2011) recommends that in order to improve and adapt to the CLT methodology, creation of chances to genuinely speak freely to other colleagues is essential. Nishino (2011) states:

Opportunities to learn from colleagues are necessary. These opportunities are essential as it takes a considerable amount of time for teachers to switch to new ways of teaching, to accumulate experiences using communicative approaches, and at the same time to overcome obstacles and constraints including class sizes and pressure from the grammar-translation university entrance examination system (p.149)

2.4. Examination focus

Research by Kitao (2007) suggests that in Japan, foreign language classes are traditionally used as a means for students to get high scores on multiple choice and reading for information-focused university entrance examinations and the Centre Examination. Thus, the amount of pressure put both on teachers, to teach students the appropriate skills to gain successful results on examinations (Kitao, 2007). Furthermore, since the success rate of students getting into prestigious universities is a key student recruitment tool for high schools looking to enrol new students, successful pass rates are seen as a key business asset and advertising claim for a school, a major draw for prospective students and their parents: a further indicator of the amount of pressure teachers are under from stakeholders (Seargeant, 2009). This brief survey of culture as part of the literature review shows that even where a nuanced cultural approach to specific aspects affecting a design for implementation of communicative methodology *is* possible, critical barriers may remain that result from the tension between MEXT-specified aims, and the understandably highly-valued external demands of examination preparation.

3. Research Issues

Thus, problems that can currently be identified based on past literature as outlined above are



that teachers either are not implementing, or are struggling to implement CLT within the language classroom based on personal, organisational, and cultural barriers. Therefore, this study will attempt to outline what pressures, opinions and motivations teachers have in the classroom and whether the policy that was created can be implemented under such conditions. Through looking at actual teachers' realities, the author investigates how likely is the uptake of CLT and the new curriculum in Japan and what considerations and further research need to be conducted to further understand why this is the case.

4. Methodology

For this research project, high school English teachers (n=24) from two high schools were surveyed and interviewed with a view to attaining an insight into their opinions and views related to their teaching practices and work environments post policy implementation. Mixed methods were used to obtain quantitative data, which was then triangulated using qualitative responses. 13 male and 11 female teachers participated, thus representing the opinions held by both sexes. Teachers are located in Oita Prefecture and Hyogo Prefecture and come from high schools of varying academic levels, although all of the institutions represented in the study are focused on university entrance success. Participants ranged from new teachers in their first year of teaching to teachers who have been teaching English for over thirty years.

Participants were provided with short answer questionnaires and were interviewed in person or via Skype to seek further clarity of responses attained in the first stage of data collection as a means to check for consistency, and to uncover further information about their teaching choices and workplace environments. Surveys were administered from July to September 2015 and interviews were conducted in November 2015. Participants were split into three groups based on age and years of experience teaching at the schools, and are outlined in the table below.

Table 2. Outline of participants (Age and gender)

Group A	Group B	Group C
Age: 24~30	Age 31~40	Age: 41~60+
Gender: M:3 F:2	Gender: M:4 F:5	Gender: M:6 F:4

It is of interest to note that the retirement age at both schools is 60 years old, yet teachers over 60 are offered special contracts that allow them to continue working at the schools after retirement age up until the age of 70. These older teachers are the ones who are the ‘subject leaders’, and run the curriculum and faculty meetings, attend professional development days, and are responsible for reporting this information to the other teachers.

5. Results

All original data collected is provided in tables to outline the frequency of results attained from participants. Generally, all results show that even though the new policy and curriculum for English language education has been in operation since 2013, teachers have not adapted their approaches to meet the expectations and recommendations outlined in the policy.

Table 3.1. Participant results (CLT incorporation during class time)

	Group A	Group B	Group C
Less than 30%	M:2 F:2	M:3 F:3	M:6 F:3
Around 50%	M:1 F:0	M:1 F:2	M: 0 F:1
More than 70%	M:0 F:0	M:0 F:0	M:0 F:0

Survey results showed that even though all teachers stated that they had at least ‘briefly’ heard about CLT either in university training courses or during meetings at work, nineteen teachers felt that it was not a realistic approach that they could incorporate within their own classrooms, due to either a lack of confidence in speaking English, a lack of faith in CLT approaches, pressure from senior teachers to use designated approaches, or a lack of confidence that CLT would be of benefit to students’ examination results. Interviews revealed a lack of support or confidence using CLT



approaches within the classroom. Twenty of the participants indicated that a lack of communicative ability and the unpredictable nature of responses made it difficult for them to score students' responses. One Group C male stated that "because of the wide variety of answers that students could produce, evaluating students would be extremely difficult without the support of a native speaking ALT (Assistant Language Teacher). I feel more comfortable teaching in a GTM method from a textbook where answers are predetermined."

This is not to say that all teachers feel the same way. Four teachers from Group A (M:2; F:2) and five teachers from Group B (M:2; F:3) all stated that due to examination success pressures, they used past entrance examination materials for most of the class time, yet see the benefit of using CLT approaches alongside these materials, showing that younger / lower-ranked teachers who have quite a few more years of teaching ahead of them, were more receptive to the proposed changes, yet were also confined by the current examination structure. One Group A male and one Group B female similarly expressed that they would like to have more freedom to decide what tasks they use in the classroom, but that they were reluctant to do so due to Group C senior members' recommendation in meetings about communication not being tested, and the importance of test drill and GTM tasks for entrance examination success. All Group C members except one female stated that their job as teachers is to ensure students can get into high-level universities and that test scores rather than the students' communicative ability were more important to focus on during classes. Due to teaching academically-focused students who take university entrance examinations and the Centre Exam, the methodology of most classes was rote learning and translation tasks. The pressure on teachers to attain entrance examination success for their students was a highly influential factor in selection of methods and approaches that they chose to use in classes, thus endorsing earlier findings.

Further discussion with Group C participants indicated that these teachers felt that using CLT tasks with low-level students who were classified as not 'smart' enough to pass high-level

university entrance exams was a good way to keep the students entertained during English classes. Such responses indicate that while the communicative aspect of English as a foreign language is seen as irrelevant to the ‘prestige’ target of university entrance examinations (perhaps even counter-productive to that achievement, as suggested in the previous paragraph), is also seen by some as contrasting with educational achievement: as entertainment, rather than an object of genuine educational attainment.

Semi-formal interview results revealed an expected inversely proportional link between teacher age and enthusiasm / willingness to incorporate CLT methodologies. This confirmed that the hierarchical seniority system noted in earlier literature was a hindering factor. Younger teachers who had studied CLT approaches at university in preparation for the new curriculum or those teachers who had lived or travelled overseas felt pressured to conform to the current methods being dictated and utilized by senior / higher ranking teachers. One male teacher in his twenties states

Even though I think CLT is a good way to improve students’ understanding of English, since other teachers in the school are talking badly of it, I am not able to express my true opinions. Even though I want to introduce more communicative tasks and discussions in the classroom, I fear what problems may arise if I do so.

This statement is one demonstration of the group mentality and pressure to conform that is highly relevant and influential within these schools.

Table 3.2. Participant results (How do you feel about the new textbooks?)

	Group A	Group B	Group C
Too easy	M: 0 F: 0	M:2 F:2	M:2 F:2
Adequate	M:3 F:2	M:2 F:3	M:4 F:2
Too hard	M: 0 F: 0	M: 0 F: 0	M: 0 F: 0

Table 3.3. Participant results (Do you think the textbooks provide enough grammar / test preparation tasks?)

	Group A	Group B	Group C
Yes	M:3 F:2	M:1 F:2	M: 0 F: 0
No	M: 0 F: 0	M:3 F:3	M:6 F:4

Survey results showed younger teachers who do not have as much experience working in these schools felt that the textbooks were adequate and contained the required grammar / test preparation tasks for examination success. Group B showed a divide between teachers about the usefulness of the textbooks. Group C indicated that they do not believe the materials are of an adequate level and agreed that the textbooks created for the new curriculum were a watered-down version of older textbooks, being too communication-focused, and as such constituted a barrier to the ultimate goal of examination preparation. They further indicated that the communication tasks outlined took time away from the more important grammar and rote learning tasks that will prepare students for examinations. Teachers from Groups B and C have said that they had resorted to copying hand-outs from old textbooks that were in use prior to the new curriculum policy, or used past university examination papers as study materials within the classroom due to their dissatisfaction with the new textbooks, a dissatisfaction they explicitly relate to these textbooks' stronger focus on communication and discussion. All Group A participants said that they were given prints from Group C members that they used in class to supplement the textbook.

Table 3.4. Participant results (Do you prefer the new curriculum or the old curriculum?)

	Group A	Group B	Group C
Old	M:0 F:0	M:3 F:3	M:6 F:3
New	M:3 F:2	M:1 F:2	M: 0 F:1



Survey results show that the younger participants prefer the new curriculum. This may also be because younger teachers had limited experience of the old curriculum. Group B teachers are divided, but around two thirds feel that the old curriculum was preferable. A majority of Group C participants felt that the old curriculum was better, with only one female teacher believing that the new curriculum was better.

Interviews with younger teachers showed that all three male teachers were not familiar with the old curriculum. The two female participants in Group A had experience with the old curriculum, and explained that the new curriculum allowed them to incorporate more tasks focused on speaking and communication within the classroom. These results show that in this limited sample, there is a higher resistance to change in male teachers than in female teachers who have been indoctrinated into a system of teachers for a long period of time, but who are now being asked to adapt to a new style of teaching.

Results from group B indicated that those who were more confident in their speaking abilities felt that the new curriculum was beneficial to improving communication, but also stated that there was a need for more test-focused tasks. Those teachers who prefer the old curriculum stated in interviews that they were not confident in using CLT approaches within the classroom without an ALT present, and were also concerned about assessment when students provided differing responses. One male teacher said

“If I ask a student a question from the textbook, such as:

Q: Do you want to go to the movies with me on Saturday afternoon?

The student could reply with varying responses like:

A: Yes

A: Sure, let's go.

A: Yes, I do.

A: Yes, I want to go

A Yes, I want to go to the movies.

A: Yes, I want to go to the movies with you on Saturday afternoon.

Because all the answers the student provided are correct, should I give the student who only answered

A: yes

the same result I give to the student who answered

A: Yes, I want to go to the movies with you on Saturday afternoon.

I don't know how I should mark such a thing. With the old curriculum and textbooks, because there was only one answer to the questions, it was easier to mark students."

Thus, there is confusion among some teachers about how to grade students in CLT-focused classes. This teacher went on to state that he is fearful about making too many mistakes in front of his students when talking in English in the classroom. Clearly, communicative tasks by their very nature represent a credible challenge when it comes to grading, given the range of possible responses, and the stark contrast between textbook-stipulated correct / incorrect answers, and a situation where teachers are unsure about how to provide feedback and / or scores.

All teachers in Group C, except one female participant, stated that they preferred the old curriculum over the new one, once again showing that female teachers are more receptive to the changes being asked of them. Interviews uncovered that this is not only due to the importance that senior teachers place on university entrance examinations, which currently do not test students' spoken English, but because they are also coming to the end of their careers and feel that changing their teaching style is too difficult. A 58-year-old male participant replied

I have been teaching English to high school students since I was 24, and suddenly I am asked to incorporate more CLT tasks within the classroom. I never used CLT approaches before. I am too old to learn how to communicate in English and since I will only be here for two more years, I don't see the point

in doing so.

This shows that some teachers who are coming to the end of their careers are not motivated to try to incorporate more CLT tasks within their classrooms and that they do not feel comfortable or knowledgeable enough to do so. Since in Japan seniority and hierarchy are closely based on age, and older teachers are not inclined to change, there has been a slow uptake of the incorporation of CLT tasks within the Japanese high school classroom. The data also shows that more training and professional development days are needed to support teachers in how to incorporate CLT-based approaches within the classroom and how to evaluate their students. This also shows that some teachers do not possess the relevant communicative competence to be able to incorporate CLT tasks in the classroom even if they wanted to.

Table 3.5. Participant results (If more training or professional development days about CLT were offered, would you attend?)

	Group A	Group B	Group C
Yes	M:3 F:2	M:3 F:4	M:2 F:3
No	M: 0 F: 0	M:1 F:1	M:4 F:1

Survey results show that the younger the teacher, the more inclined they are to want to improve their knowledge and skills about CLT and how to implement it within the classroom. Older teachers were less inclined to want to do so based on the data collected. These results show that female teachers are more willing to attend professional development days and were more receptive to incorporating change and developing their skills than their male counterparts.

During interviews, all Group A participants voiced concerns about not receiving enough information about professional development days that senior teachers / subject leaders attended on their behalf. All Group A participants expressed their dissatisfaction with the senior teachers' reports about what information was discussed and shared during these professional development days. One Group A male participant stated:



I would like the opportunity to attend these professional development days. When I ask for information from the senior teacher, he doesn't explain in detail what was discussed. He isn't interested in incorporating CLT approaches within his classroom so doesn't take these professional development days seriously and doesn't share any of the information with us.

This demonstrates that if senior teachers are not engaged with the new curriculum and adding CLT tasks to the classroom, it will make it difficult for others to do so.

6. Conclusions

Although the new policy and curriculum for English language classes in high schools have, in principle, been fully introduced, teachers are still not implementing changes within their classrooms accordingly. Results attained show that examination pressures, language competence and motivation of teachers are all contributing factors to the limited uptake of CLT and correlate with similar results attained by McVeigh (2014). Further teacher training and development is essential to the success of the new curriculum. At present, teachers currently do not feel that they possess the required skillset to be able to do so, which is consistent with the findings presented by Koosha (2013). It also seems like there is a lack of knowledge about CLT theory and its benefits to a holistic understanding of not only communication, but also its benefit to grammar and linguistic understanding of a language it provides (Hasegawa, 2017). More training for teachers, as well as more evidence of how CLT can benefit examination results, provided within the Japanese context, would assist with the attempt to change the view that communication and linguistic competence are detached and need to be taught separately. In the meantime, providing rubrics for communicative assessment may be the first step to motivate teachers to begin incorporating communicative tasks in the classroom.

More opportunities to create leader teachers who can assist with and start conversations about CLT, its implementation, along with discussions about teachers' individual fears would



allow for teacher development to occur within these schools and faculty. A loosening of the rigid hierarchy by allowing teachers to attempt to create their own lesson plans and attend professional development days, along with creating a supportive environment where teachers feel comfortable to express their concerns without prejudice is essential. Although conversations occur frequently among members of the same groups, the opportunity to discuss these factors, regardless of standing on the organizational hierarchy in a formalized setting would benefit the teachers and these schools and would allow for the new communicative MEXT policy and curriculum to be better understood, implemented, and tested. By doing so, the policy can be better incorporated and the Japanese communicative competence levels should begin to rise. Allowing students more time to practise communicating in English in a safe and supportive environment would also help to improve the standing of the Japanese communicative score on TOEIC examinations, which was the original goal of the new curriculum in the first place. Subsequently, it would be of assistance to teachers who lack the skill and opportunity to communicate in English. Creating an atmosphere where teachers can also practice their speaking in the classroom with their students is essential to the success of the proper implementation of this curriculum in more classrooms throughout the country. Finally, even where the above measures are possible, one major barrier to the uptake of CLT methodologies, and the communicative competence of generations of Japanese English language learners still remains in the nature of university entrance examinations.

Until the university entrance examination and Centre Examination styles change to include a communicative component, the likelihood of teachers incorporating more CLT tasks in the classroom seems low. If nothing else, this investigation into the current state of CLT implementation in high schools has revealed an entanglement of social and educational forces that seem set on maintaining the status quo. Without some potentially disruptive actions, such as those stated above, Japan can continue to expect a painfully slow departure from traditional GTM classrooms toward a future involving more CLT methods.

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