

Education Reform and Its Impact on Initial Teacher Education in Japan

Chitose Asaoka

I. Introduction

Initial teacher education (ITE) currently finds itself anchored in the confusion between the theory-practice dichotomy (Hartley, 1993). On the one hand, higher education institutes are expected to transmit theoretical knowledge for their trainees; this knowledge serves as their base for further professional development. However, what consists of theoretical knowledge is not always clear, and its uniformity and certainty often draw criticism from practitioners. On the other hand, schools are expected to provide practical teaching experience for their trainees, so that trainees can apply their theory to particular contexts. Nevertheless, student teachers may try to conform to a particular setting without the ability to capture the entire picture of pedagogy. Furthermore, political control may add more complexity to the theory-practice relationship, since plans initiated by the government often ignore the context of practices and participants' voices in these practices.

When society is rapidly changing, school teachers need to learn flexibility and autonomy in order to handle a myriad of issues, many of which characteristics may vary accordingly. This paper seeks to examine one example case of such a context—Japan—struggling to remain influential and competitive in a fast-paced globalized world. It first explores the

overall recent changes in educational policies in Japan, as well as the ones specifically in English language teaching, in order to reconsider the role of higher education institutes in training high-quality English language teachers. The current initial teacher education system in Japan is examined in comparison with the educational reforms in the UK as a reference point. Finally, the challenges Japan faces are clarified for future improvement in its initial teacher education system.

II. Overall recent educational reforms in Japan: Why now?

Bowe and Ball (1992) argue that policymaking is a continuous process that usually involves three dimensions. The first dimension is the *context of influence*, in which “public policy is normally initiated” (p. 19). In many educational contexts, including that of Japan, educational policy reforms are often initiated by claims made by society, including parents, entailing national bodies to discuss issues and make recommendations to the government. The second dimension is the *context of policy text production*. This dimension implies that produced texts may allow some constraints on or various interpretations by the participants involved. The final dimension is the *context of practice*, in which responses and consequences are carried out. In educational reforms, the context of practice usually implies classroom teachers who are responsible for making changes in practice accordingly; these teachers are, in turn, accountable for the outcomes of educational reforms.

To take Japan as a case study, there has been a series of educational reforms since the 1980s. According to Hooghart (2006), this series of educational reforms was carried out when Japanese society was struggling through a stagnant economy, and serious education issues, such as bullying or children unwilling to go to school, were increasingly common. On top of these conditions, there was also a drastic decrease in the youth population. In trying to respond to the changing situations in education and social issues, a final report, called the National Commis-

sion on Education Reform, was compiled in 2000, prompted by the then Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto. After careful consideration of the recommendations in the report, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) then produced the “Education Reform Plan for the 21st Century” in 2001, also known as the “Rainbow Plan.” The plan clearly delineates specific measures and issues of educational reforms to be taken. The following list enumerates seven priority strategies mentioned in this reform plan:

1. Improve students’ basic scholastic proficiency in “easy-to-understand classes.”
2. Foster open and warm-hearted Japanese through participation in the community and various programs.
3. Improve the learning environment to one which is enjoyable and free of worries.
4. Promote the creation of schools trusted by parents and communities.
5. Train teachers as “educational professionals.”
6. Promote the establishment of world-class universities.
7. Establish a new educational vision for the new century, and improve the foundations of education.

These seven strategies seemed to indicate that the reform was aimed at fostering a community where schools would be more open to external participants from the community, where problems would be solved jointly between these participants and students, and where students would learn how to enhance their individuality in a carefree setting. Above all, the major reform that actually took place after these recommendations was the implementation of a new national curriculum in 2002, with the introduction of a new “integrated study” course for both primary and secondary schools, as well as the reduction of instructional content and classroom hours, with the emphasis more on *yutori* (literally, *free time*) for students.

As pointed out earlier, once the recommendations for educational reforms are made, the implementation usually falls on the shoulders of classroom teachers. Hooghart (2006) maintains that teachers in Japan are

among those who are expected to implement educational policy changes in their practice “as the main actors,” and thus, “have a responsibility to all stakeholders in the education system” (Hooghart, 2006, p. 29). Due to the implementation of the new national curriculum, for example, Japanese teachers had to come up with a detailed curriculum of what, who and how to teach during an “integrated study” course within each school setting, and they had to be accountable for the outcomes.

Educational reforms under the Rainbow Plan seemed to cover a wide range of educational issues, and improvement in teacher training was certainly one of the issues to be tackled. The three recommendations specifically made for training teachers to become more “educational professionals” were threefold:

- 1) Introduce a commendation system and special increases in the salaries of excellent teachers.
- 2) Take appropriate measures for teachers who lack teaching abilities (e.g., not letting them teach until improvements are made).
- 3) Improve the teacher qualification system, establish a new teacher training system, and increase the opportunities to undertake work experience in the community.

Responding to these measures, particularly the second point, a new law, the *Licensing Act of Educational Personnel*, was enacted in the Diet on June 20, 2007, and the teaching certificate renewal system is now to be implemented from April 2009. When this law comes into effect, practicing secondary school teachers need to renew their qualifications every ten years by participating in conferences and seminars for thirty hours. Although this change seems to have more of an impact on practicing teachers, it may also entail some (either positive or negative) impact on pre-service teachers in that they will be made aware that teaching is a lifelong profession, and that teachers must continue to work on their professional development throughout their careers.

In addition, in response to the third point above, the longer length of school-based training and one-week-long of hands-on experiential train-

Education Reform and Its Impact on Initial Teacher Education in Japan

ing were enacted. This newly implemented measure will be elaborated in detail later in this study.

III. Recent policy changes in English language teaching: Why now?

Not only in the overall educational framework, but also some drastic changes, specifically in English language teaching, have been proposed in Japan. For instance, the Japanese government formulated and published an action plan (MEXT, 2003) in which they urged society to upgrade the general level of English education in order to compete with other countries in the global society. In addition to globalization as a reason to promote this plan, Honna and Takeshita (2005) assert that this plan was promoted based on the idea that English should belong to all Japanese citizens, and not only to an elite few. They argue that every person in Japanese society needs to be encouraged to learn English as an additional language so as to fill the gap created by the so-called “English divide.” This English divide is a syndrome currently seen across many regions in Asia such as China, South Korea and Taiwan (e.g., Chang 2003; Kang, 2008; Tsuda, 2008). For example, in South Korea, when the new president, Lee Myung-buk, was elected in early 2008, one of the policy pledges he made was the introduction of immersion education, in which all English classes, including those in primary schools, would be taught fully in English. Although this pledge faced stiff opposition from various quarters, the original reason for its implementation was due to the divide between rich families who could afford private education and who could provide English teaching for their children from an early age, and those who were not able to do so. The 2003 action plan in Japan also arose from this rationale; as a result, the government hoped to provide better English education for all through public education.

In order to upgrade the overall English teaching system, it was necessary to upgrade the quality of Japan’s English teachers. Thus, in this

action plan, four goals regarding English teachers were established to be achieved before 2008:

1. Almost all English teachers will acquire English skills (STEP^① pre-first level, TOEFL 550, TOEIC 730 or over) and the teaching ability to be able to conduct classes to cultivate communication abilities through the repetition of activities making using of English.
2. Centering on leading teachers at the local community level, the improvement of English abilities in the community will be enhanced.
3. A native speaker of English will attend English classes at junior and senior high schools more than once a week.
4. People living in the local community proficient in English will be positively utilized.

In addition to hiring more Assistant Language Teachers (ALT) or using people with high English proficiency in the community as an easy solution, the improvement of the teaching abilities of prospective English teachers is one issue to be achieved in the action plan above. The plan recommends that secondary school English teachers attain a certain proficiency level of English, such as a TOEIC score of 730. However, this proposal needs more consideration, for target language proficiency is not equivalent to teachers' professional expertise. According to a study conducted by the Japan Association of College English Teachers Special Interest Group on English Education (2005), a quantitative survey's results tentatively showed that some high school teachers expect pre-service teachers to have achieved a certain level of English proficiency, demonstrated by the TOEIC or STEP, before they start their practicum. However, the same study also suggested that among practicing junior high school teachers, many placed greater importance on the student teachers' willingness to work with ALTs, who are native-speakers of English, and their ability to conduct a class in English, the target language, rather than their high English language proficiency or subject matter knowledge. Thus, it seems that there is no agreement, even among practicing teachers, in term of teachers' professional expertise necessary to become an effective English teacher. It should also be pointed out that the majority

of practicing English teachers have not reached the language proficiency level required by the action plan, and any concrete measures for in-service teachers to achieve this level have not yet been carried out.

Additionally, graduate-level teacher training programs through the National Centre for Teachers' Development started in 2003, with the aim of developing leading teachers who can promote English education in local communities by, for example, becoming training instructors in local communities. Also, as a part of in-service training, more teachers with high capabilities are to be sent overseas for further studies. However, this proposal has also faced a problem; although 19 graduate schools in teacher training started in April, 2008, seven of the programs are already under-enrolled, reflecting the low level of interest in professional development at higher education institutes among practicing teachers (Business i., 2008).

The Japanese government has been trying to respond to the claims pertaining to educational issues made by society. Nonetheless, it can be tentatively concluded (although longer-term effects need to be monitored) that these top-down imposed requirements are not as effective or welcomed by teachers in local contexts, as well as teacher training institutes. As was already argued, teachers in practice are the ones who must respond to the proposals and figure out how to deal with the changes in their practice, while these reforms may ignore the context of practice and the voices of practicing teachers. The implemented laws may not directly benefit practicing teachers, as well. For example, attending conferences or seminars in order to renew teachers' qualifications may not lead to the fulfillment of the original objectives: it is often the case in Japan that, in these seminars, one-way lectures are given on Western foreign language teaching theories without referring to practical knowledge (Lamie, 1999). Thus, teachers may not necessarily learn to solve their everyday problems that they encounter in the classroom. Another challenge regarding the recent changes is that there seem to be no specific improvements observed regarding ITE, except for a slight extension of

school-based training. No common goals or standards for ITE have been set. There has not even been any discussion on developing more collaborative partnerships between higher education institutions and schools or on training school mentors.

The quality of education cannot exceed the quality of teachers; thus, ITE should assume a higher responsibility than the current situation. I will next delineate the current initial teacher education system in Japan by referring to the one in the UK as a reference point in order to explore possible improvements for Japan's future.

IV. The role of higher education institutions in ITE in Japan

Under the current situation, teacher training can be roughly classified into two components: in-service teacher training and pre-service teacher education. I will focus on the latter case.

In order to become a teacher in Japan, students need to attend an ITE program offered at the undergraduate-level at higher education institutions (HEI hereafter) and acquire a teacher's qualification upon graduation. There is usually no specific requirement in order for students to join teacher training programs at general universities. ITE can be further divided into two levels: one for primary school teachers, and the other for secondary school teachers. ITE for secondary school prospective teachers are provided in various subject areas; however, the focus of this study is only on training for secondary school English teachers.

One of the characteristics of ITE in Japan is its "principle of openness" (Ota, 2000, p. 45), which is similar to many other regions in East Asia, such as Taiwan or South Korea (Asaoka & Ito, 2006; Chang, 2004; Kim, 2005). ITE in Japan is mainly offered at the undergraduate-level in the *open* system by education colleges, departments of education at universities, along with teacher training programs at more than 800 general universities. With a Bachelor's degree, the first-class certificate is given, whereas with a Master's degree, the advanced certificate is award-

ed. Finally, at a two-year junior college graduate level, the second-class certificate is issued. Most Japanese teachers hold first-class certificates; in 2004, for example, 73.9% of upper secondary school teachers held these certificates, while 25.1% held advanced certificates, and 0.4% held second-class certificates. Regarding lower secondary school teachers, 90.3% held first-class certificates, whereas 4.0% held advanced certificates, and 5.4% held second-class certificates (MEXT, 2005). These statistics imply that most secondary school teachers receive ITE at the undergraduate-level in Japan, whereas in the UK system, for example, the majority of prospective teachers receive their ITE training at the post-graduate level program called PGCE (TDA, 2008) in order to achieve a Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), although there are four other routes to becoming a teacher, including undergraduate-level courses and more employment-based training.

In Japan, along the lines with its open principles, the contents of ITE programs are at the discretion of each HEI. As Ota argues, “a degree of academic freedom has been maintained” (2000, p. 46) at HEIs, although the minimum requirements of the curriculum, prescribed by the *Educational Personnel Certification Law* and the *Regulation for the Establishment of University Standards*, need to be met for accreditation. For instance, teacher trainees in ITE programs are required to meet the specific qualification criteria in order to be licensed by the local government upon exiting the program, which is usually four years long, starting on their matriculation. Under the current system in Japan, proposed in 1997 and partially revised and implemented in 1999 and 2000 (EPTC, 1997), trainees in ITE programs are required to complete 31 creditsⁱⁱ regarding general education-related courses at a minimum, such as educational psychology, educational philosophy or moral education. These trainees are also required to earn 20 credits of subject-specific courses at a minimum, including target language skills, literature, and linguistics. During their third year, trainees must complete two methodology courses (two credits each) in their subject-specific areas, each lasting for one semester.

However, these methodology courses are counted as a part of their general education-related courses in the current curriculum. Table 1 below shows the number of credits currently required in ITE programs at the secondary level in Japan.

Table 1: The number of course credits required in ITE in Japan

Courses	Lower-secondary school level	Upper-secondary school level
Subject-specific courses	20	20
General education-related courses	31	31
Electives	8 ⁱⁱⁱ⁾	16

Before the legislation for teacher certification was revised, the minimum requirement for subject-specific courses was 40 credits, much more than that in the current situation. Instead, the post-revision minimum requirement for general education-related courses has increased in the current ITE system, mainly to address the criticism from society that many teachers do not possess enough knowledge or skills to deal with various problems in the classroom, such as bullying or class disruption, also mentioned as issues to be tackled in the Rainbow Plan. In addition, this increase in general education credits was a result of the recommendations made by the EPTC (Educational Personnel Training Council), approved by the Ministry of Education in 1996, which says that by “creating a new kind of teacher” (Ota, 2000, p. 47), serious social problems such as bullying or school phobia need to be resolved by their new capabilities.

However, there is a caveat that the decrease in subject-specific courses may affect prospective teachers’ subject matter knowledge, which is one of the significant components of teachers’ professional expertise (San, 1999), particularly for upper secondary school teachers. Shulman (1987) asserts that the central feature of teachers’ knowledge base with which they make choices and actions in the classroom must be the blending of

subject matter knowledge *and* teaching strategies. In many cases, absorbing theoretical knowledge and consolidating one's knowledge base take place at HEIs (Eraut, 1989). With a decreased emphasis on subject specialism, however, it is not explicitly stated what the major sources of prospective English teachers' knowledge base for teaching will be. Hence, the impact of the decrease in subject-specific courses is an issue to be further examined.

V. The role of school in ITE in Japan

The quality and quantity of time trainees actually spend in school may have the same specific gravity on trainees' professional expertise as a theoretical knowledge base provided through HEIs. In the case of the UK, after major educational reforms in the late 1980s and 1990s, the length of school-based training is currently extended to 160 days for a four-year BEd (Bachelor of education) degree, 90 days for primary teachers, and 120 days for secondary teachers in one-year PGCE (Postgraduate Certificate in Education) courses. In addition, usually serial and block practice are carefully implemented during school-based training so that trainees can regularly go back to HEIs for both academic and emotional support and follow-up (Furlong et al., 2000).

Similarly in Japan, experiential training in ITE has been considered to be more important than before in order to keep up with drastic societal changes and to gain the confidence of the public with respect to education. As one measure to tackle the issues, one week of hands-on experiential training, such as at a facility for the aged or at a school for children with disabilities, has been implemented as a requirement during student teachers' third year of training. This hands-on training provides prospective teachers with work experience in the rapidly changing community, which faces a sharp drop in the birthrate, as well as increasing urbanization. Another change implemented in 2001 was the extension of the length of the practicum. During their fourth year, students are required

to go to a local secondary school of their choice for a teaching practicum. It was only for two weeks for both upper and lower secondary schools until 2000; however, for the same reasons mentioned above, the length of time was extended to four weeks for lower secondary school teachers in order to gain a better understanding of the work of schools (i.e., administrative work, counseling, supervision of extracurricular activities, etc.) and of various problems such as bullying, non-attendance at school or class disruption, which more commonly take place at lower secondary schools.

The length of teaching practice—two weeks for upper secondary schools and four weeks for lower secondary schools—is a minimum requirement. Thus, on the one hand, colleges of education may offer a longer period of teaching practicum with the cooperation of affiliated schools. For example, Joetsu University of Education offers a one-week class observation and participation period at school during the first and second year, then a three-week classroom-based training period during the third and fourth years (Joetsu University of Education, 2008). On the other hand, secondary schools may make their own interpretations of the new law, as Bowe and Ball (1992) explain, and these schools are allowed to take students for only three weeks, and not four, owing to their various work circumstances. As a result, the majority of the trainees, particularly those who are in teacher training programs at general universities without strongly established partnerships with schools, seem to experience their practice teaching only for three weeks.

Considering other contexts in which trainees gain longer-term school-based experiences, such as six months in Taiwan (Chang, 2004) or at least one month in South Korea (Asaoka & Ito, 2006), or at multiple sites, such as in the UK (Lawes, 2004), the ITE system in Japan does not seem to offer enough practical experience. San (1999) asserts that this shortcoming is partly due to the fact that “the university faculty values liberal arts more than teaching skills in teachers’ preparation” (p. 17). Moreover, with no additional financial compensation, schools are unwill-

ing to accept student teachers for a longer term, since “supervising student teachers will increase the workload of teachers” (p.18). School teachers’ unwillingness to mentor student teachers also arises from the fact that not many student teachers will actually enter the teaching profession after graduation (Sato, 1992). Hence, the educational policy changes in ITE has led to a more challenging issue (Ota, 2000, p. 53) to be handled in ITE in Japan, such as finding suitable schools and mentor teachers for school-based training.

The following description elaborates a typical process of school-based training in Japan. It is usually the student teachers who choose which school to go for their practicum. In most cases, they return to a school at which they were previously educated. Prior to the practicum, student teachers are provided with a series of pre-practicum induction sessions at HEIs for asking questions and sharing concerns. Very often, expert teachers in the local community or teachers who are graduates of the programs are invited to share their expertise and experiences. During the practicum, which usually takes place sometime in the first semester during their fourth year, student teachers are required to keep action logs and reflections in Japanese by keeping a record of what they do each day (e.g., observing teachers and peers across subjects, preparing for lessons, teaching classes, supervising students, homeroom activities, club activities and feedback from peers and mentors). Student teachers receive written feedback from their mentors at the end of each day. A teacher trainer from an HEI normally pays a visit during a practicum, observes his or her *kenkyu jugyou* (final demonstration lesson) and sits with a student teacher and a mentor afterward for feedback. If a student teacher is from a remote town, however, nobody from a HEI may go to observe his or her lesson at all. After the practicum, a post-practicum session is provided by the HEI, in which student teachers share with cohort students their experiences and reflect on their own teaching practices. An assessment of the practicum is first provided by the mentors; however, HEI teacher educators finalize the grades based on the mentors’ assessment.

There is usually no discussion between a mentor and an HEI teacher educator, either over student teachers' professional development or on finalizing their grades. This lack of partnerships between schools and HEIs, along with fewer established expectations for mentors' roles in school-based training, are other challenges that must be taken into account in a Japanese context so as to improve ITE.

Another challenge in addition to the length of the practicum and a lack of partnership systems between schools and HEIs is the wide range of school experiences that each student teacher undergoes. Although the typical process of the practicum is as described above, each school has a different context in terms of school characteristics and students; consequently, student teachers often go through various experiences during the practicum. For instance, schools may ask student teachers to teach various grades. Some student teachers may be asked to teach only the first grade, while other student teachers may have to teach all of the grades, from the first to the third grades. Furthermore, the number of classes to teach in two to four weeks varies considerably, ranging from four or five, to more than thirty. Some may be asked to team teach with ALTs in the target language, English, while others may have to teach solely in their mother tongue, Japanese. Many student teachers often find this very problematic because of the variety of school expectations and contexts, as well as the huge disparity between what they learn as theories at HEIs and what actually happens in particular teaching contexts. The great variety in student teachers' experiences with school-based training may also result in difficulty with respect to standardizing student teachers' final assessment.

As discussed so far, school-based training in Japan still faces many problems, in comparison with other contexts such as the UK, where the trend is leaning more toward practical experience. The role of school and school mentors are not yet clearly defined; student teachers do not have a long enough time to be exposed to classroom practices to test their personal theories. It must be pointed out, though, that even after major

educational reforms toward an emphasis on school-based training in the UK, it has been reported that student teachers perceive the importance of both school and HEI in their training; in particular, these student teachers see HEIs as a major contribution to their professional expertise development (Furlong et al., 2000). Without building a firm theoretical knowledge base first at HEIs, student teachers cannot test or critically examine their practical experiences against theory; instead, they are forced to conform to a particular school culture or a universal model of competencies. In other words, Holligan (1997) maintains that student teachers may perceive the goal of becoming a teacher as merely the acquisition of a set of competencies rather than fully developing their expertise and becoming an autonomous teacher. On the other hand, the principles of openness and academic freedom, which HEIs in Japan still maintain, may be a considerable asset in the creativity, autonomy, and flexibility in teacher expertise development. This point will be further discussed in the next section.

VI. Challenges facing ITE in Japan

Furlong et al. (2000) assert that student teachers' experiences with ITE may vary in terms of skills, knowledge and values to which students are exposed. This variety of trainees' experiences is one of the major issues that ITE in Japan currently faces. As was mentioned earlier, it is up to each HEI to decide the contents of the curriculum in the ITE program within its guidelines. Student teachers' experiences in school-based training may greatly vary, as well; as a result, the trainees' professional expertise that they develop, their overall experiences with ITE, as well as their values as teachers may diversify. In addition to institutional differences, individual teacher educators', as well as school mentors' interpretations and values, may lead to various professional expertise and experiences to which student teachers will be exposed.

This challenge can be attributed to unclearly defined goals and stan-

dards to achieve. The goal of ITE in Japan stated by MEXT is to grow the *minimum necessary* qualifications and abilities of course instruction and student counseling and guidance. The Central Council on Education in Japan (2006) states a little more specifically that there are three goals at which Japanese pre-service teacher trainees should aim. These are namely “passion for teaching,” “professional expertise,” and “a well-rounded character.” The term, “professional expertise” itself, nevertheless, is not clearly defined by the Council. They provide only five elements as examples of professional expertise: 1) an understanding of child development; 2) student guidance; 3) group leadership; 4) class management; and 5) practical expertise in teaching. Therefore, both teacher trainers and mentors, in addition to prospective student teachers, are not clear in terms of what to expect from ITE programs, and what is necessary to achieve before they become teachers.

On the other hand, to cite ITE in the UK as an example, the QTS standards are explicitly stated for trainees to achieve, and the standards are provided by the Training and Development Agency for schools (TDA) in three categories: professional attributes, professional knowledge and understanding, and skills. Each category is divided into sub-sections and is described as outcome statements (see the Appendix for full details). For example, under the first category of professional attributes, there are four sub-sections, namely: 1) relationships with children and young people; 2) frameworks; 3) communicating and working with others; and 4) personal professional development. The first sub-section is further divided into two rational statements:

- Statement 1: Have high expectations of children and young people, including a commitment to ensuring that they can achieve their full educational potential and to establishing fair, respectful, trusting, supportive and constructive relationships with them.
- Statement 2: Demonstrate the positive values, attitudes and behaviour they expect from children and young people.

All trainees are expected to understand these rational statements and

meet the standards in order to achieve QTS standards. In addition to trainees, all stakeholders in ITE, including school mentors and HEI teacher educators, need to have a clear understanding of what these statements imply and what it means for trainees to meet these standards. This system entails quality control by the government, though TDA insists that the current system allows initial teacher training providers to design their programs with more increased flexibility than before.

This strict quality assurance system based on competencies in the UK, however, is not without criticism. Many researchers and teacher educators argue that it is impossible to prescribe one single set of skills that can be used in such diverse teaching contexts (Pring, 1995). Some argue that student teachers should be allowed to experience alternative and idiosyncratic skills and approaches in order to accommodate themselves to various teaching contexts, especially later in their careers when standards are redefined. In addition, Moore (2000) claims that the universal model of competencies will deprive student teachers of their creativity in teaching; he argues that “there is no one model of good teaching, any more than there is any one model of the good student or the good school” (p. 127). Moreover, Elliott (1993) argues that this approach is supported by a social-market view, which implies that teacher education needs to produce teachers with “desired behavioral outcomes in the form of practical skills and competencies” (p. 15). In this view, teachers may end up becoming merely deliverers of a set curriculum and “technical operatives” of craft knowledge (Elliott, 1993, p. 15).

Criticism against competency-based teacher training seems to suggest that student teachers should develop a theoretical knowledge base with alternative views and approaches, which can mainly be provided by HEIs, in order to flexibly modify or adjust their knowledge and skills in practical contexts, as occasion demands. The principles of openness and flexibility of ITE in Japan could become one of the strengths of the system in creating such a professional teacher if other conditions are improved. Many issues remain for HEIs to resolve, however. What content

of teachers' professional expertise, including subject matter knowledge, can or should HEIs transmit to student teachers? What process will be most effective for student teachers to understand, use and theorise their knowledge? Will it be possible to practice theorising before and after they experience school-based training? If so, then how? These issues need to be reconsidered in order to produce rationally autonomous English teachers who can upgrade the level of future English education in Japan.

VII. Conclusion

Developing a quality language teacher is always vital in any language education; nevertheless, pre-service English teacher training in Japan still faces many challenges. There is no standardized system, and much is at the discretion of each HEI and school. What student teachers may acquire at HEIs may vary, while their experiences at schools may also differ and may not be a long enough practicum, either. In short, there is not enough collaboration between HEIs and schools to link theory and practice.

In society, which is quickly and dramatically changing, educational issues and problems change accordingly; school teachers, hence, need to learn to be flexible and autonomous in order to effectively solve these problems. The question still remaining regards what content of theory base HEIs can offer, and what process will be more effective in developing such a teacher and having student teachers discover their profession within this challenging context. Student teachers' perceptions of the system and their own development through ITE should be examined, as well. More comparative and qualitative work, which seems to be scarce in the Japanese educational context (LeTendre, 1999), needs to be conducted so as to further investigate the impact of educational reforms and the roles of initial teacher training in Japan.

Notes

- i) STEP is an English language proficiency test conducted by a Japanese non-profit organization, the Society for Testing English Proficiency.
- ii) Two credits are usually provided after attending a 12–15 week-long course in Japan. Earning 20 credits is roughly equal to the completion of five semester-long courses.
- iii) Student teachers can take either subject-specific courses or general education related courses as electives.

References

- Asaoka, C., & Ito, M. (2006). Kankoku no eigo kyoin yosei [English teacher training in Korea]. *Eigoka Kyoshoku Katei ni okeru Eigo Kyojoryoku no Yosei ni Kansuru Jisshoteki Kenkyu [An Empirical Study of How to Nurture English Teaching Skills in the Teacher Training Program]*. 79–95. Tokyo: JACET.
- Business i. (2008). Graduate schools of teacher training. Retrieved August 16, 2008, from <http://www.business-i.jp/news/pdate/index20080330.nwc>.
- Bowe, R., & Ball, S., J. (1992). *Reforming education and changing schools: Case studies in policy sociology*. Routledge.
- Central Council for Education. (2006). Kongo no kyoin yosei menkyo seido no arikata ni tsuite (toshin) [The final report on the system of teacher education and teaching certificate programs in the future]. Retrieved from December 7, 2007, from http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/shingi/chukyo/chukyo0/toushin/06071910.htm.
- Chang, V. W. (2004). Training of English teachers at the secondary and primary levels in Taiwan. Paper presented at the lecture during the JAFAT Taiwan Study Tour, National Taiwan Normal University, Taiwan.
- Educational Personnel Training Council. (1997). Aratana jidai ni muketa kyoin-yousei no kaizen housaku nitsuite: Dai ichiji toshin [The first report on policy for improving teacher training towards new times]. Tokyo: EPTC.
- Elliott, J. (1993). Three perspectives on coherence and continuity in teacher education. In J. Elliott (Ed.), *Reconstructing Teacher Education: Teacher Development* (pp. 15–19). London: The Falmer Press.
- Eraut, M. (1989). Initial teacher training and the NVQ model. In J. W. Burke (Ed.), *Competency Based Education and Training* (pp. 171–185). London, New York, Philadelphia: The Falmer Press.
- Furlong, J., Barton, L., Miles, S., Whiting, C., & Whitty, G. (2000). *Teacher Education in Transition: Re-forming Professionalism?* Buckingham and Philadelphia: Open University Press.

- Hartley, D. (1993). Confusion in teacher education: A postmodern condition? In P. Gilroy & M. Smith (Eds.), *International Analyses of Teacher Education* (pp. 83–93). Abingdon: Carfax Publishing Company.
- Holligan, C. (1997). Theory in initial teacher education: Students' perspectives on its utility—a case study. *British Educational Research Journal*, 23 (4), 533–551.
- Honna, N., & Takeshita, Y. (2005). English language teaching in Japan: Policy plans and their implementations. *RELC Journal*, 36 (3), 363–383.
- Hooghart, A. M. (2006). Educational reform in Japan and its influence on teachers work. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 45 (4–5), 290–301.
- JACET SIG. (2005). Kyoikujishu no ukeiregawa no ishiki ni kansuru chosa [A study on attitudes of supervisors of pre-service teachers]. *Eigoka Kyoshoku Katei ni okeru Eigo Kyojiryoku no Yosei ni Kansuru Jisshoteki Kenkyu* [An Empirical Study of How to Nurture English Teaching Skills in the Teacher Training Program]. 23–42.
- Joetsu University of Education. (2008). Heisei 20 nendo Kyoiku Jisshuu jishikeikaku [The 2008 plan for school-based training]. Retrieved August 6, 2008, from <http://www.juen.ac.jp/contents/coe/practice/practice.pdf>.
- Kang, H. K. (2008, January 23). New administration struggling to tackle English divide. *The Korean Times*. Retrieved from http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2008/01/116_17811.html.
- Kim, Woon-jong. (2005). Cultivating and securing qualified teachers. Talk presented for the Thailand Education Ministry delegation to the Ministry. Korean Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development. The teacher education and development division. September, 9.
- Lamie, J. (1999). Teacher education and training in Japan. *Journal of In-service Education*, 24 (3), 515–534.
- Lawes, S. (2004). *The end of theory? A comparative study of the decline of educational theory and professional knowledge in modern foreign language teacher training in England and France* Unpublished PhD, University of London, London.
- MEXT. (2001). *Education reform plan for the 21st century*. Retrieved December 5, 2007, from <http://www.mext.go.jp/english/org/reform/07.htm>.
- MEXT. (2003). *Regarding the establishment of an action plan to cultivate, "Japanese with English abilities."* Retrieved August 15, 2008, from <http://www.mext.go.jp/english/topics/03072801.htm>.
- MEXT. (2005). Heisei 16 nendo gakko kyoin toukei chousa [The 2004 school teachers statistical survey]. Retrieved August 15, 2008, from http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/toukei/001/002/2004/index.htm.

Education Reform and Its Impact on Initial Teacher Education in Japan

- Moore, A. (2000). *Teaching and Learning: Pedagogy, Curriculum and Culture*. London and New York: Routledge/Falmer.
- Ota, N. (2000). Teacher education and its reform in contemporary Japan. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 10 (1), 43–59.
- Pring, R. (1995). Standards and quality in education. In T. Kerry & A. S. Mayes (Eds.), *Issues in Mentoring* (pp. 188–199). London and New York: Routledge.
- San, M. M. (1999). Japanese beginning teachers' perceptions of their preparation and professional development. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 25 (2), 17–29.
- Sato, M. 1992. Japan. In H. B. Leavite (Ed.), *Issues and Problems in Teacher Education: An International Handbook* (pp. 155–168). New York: Greenwood Press.
- Shulman, L. S. (1987). Knowledge and teaching: Foundations of the new reform. *Harvard Educational Review*, 57, 1–22.
- Training & Development Agency for Schools. About the QTS standards guidance. Retrieved June 16, 2008, from http://www.tda.gov.uk/partners/ITEstandards/guidance_08/qts.aspx.
- Training & Development Agency for Schools. (2008). Annual evidence to the school teachers' review body 2007. Retrieved August 16, 2008, from <http://www.tda.gov.uk/upload/resources/pdf/a/tdaevidecetostrb2007part1.pdf>.
- Tsuda, Y. (2008). English hegemony and English divide. *China Media Research*, 4 (1), 47–55.

Appendix: QTS Standards

Attributes

Relationships with children and young people

1. Have high expectations of children and young people, including a commitment to ensuring that they can achieve their full educational potential and to establishing fair, respectful, trusting, supportive and constructive relationships with them.
2. Demonstrate the positive values, attitudes and behaviour they expect from children and young people.

Frameworks

- 3a. Be aware of the professional duties of teachers and the statutory framework within which they work.
- 3b. Be aware of the policies and practices of the workplace and share in collective responsibility for their implementation.

Communicating and working with others

4. Communicate effectively with children, young people, colleagues, parents and carers.
5. Recognise and respect the contribution that colleagues, parents and carers can make to the development and well-being of children and young people, and to raising their levels of attainment.
6. Have a commitment to collaboration and cooperative working.

Personal professional development

- 7a. Reflect on and improve their practice, and take responsibility for identifying and meeting their developing professional needs.
- 7b. Identify priorities for their early professional development in the context of induction.
8. Have a creative and constructively critical approach towards innovation, being prepared to adapt their practice where benefits and improvements are identified.
9. Act upon advice and feedback and be open to coaching and mentoring.

Knowledge and understanding

Teaching and learning

10. Have a knowledge and understanding of a range of teaching, learning and behaviour management strategies and know how to use and adapt them, including how to personalise learning and provide opportunities for all learners to achieve their potential.

Assessment and monitoring

11. Know the assessment requirements and arrangements for the subjects/curriculum areas they are trained to teach, including those relating to public examinations and qualifications.
12. Know a range of approaches to assessment, including the importance of formative assessment.
13. Know how to use local and national statistical information to evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching, to monitor the progress of those they teach and to raise levels of attainment.

Subjects and curriculum

14. Have a secure knowledge and understanding of their subjects/curriculum areas and related pedagogy to enable them to teach effectively across the age and ability range for which they are trained.
15. Know and understand the relevant statutory and non-statutory curricula and frameworks, including those provided through the National Strategies, for their subjects/curriculum areas, and other relevant initiatives applicable to the age and ability range for which they are trained.

Education Reform and Its Impact on Initial Teacher Education in Japan

Literacy, numeracy and ICT

16. Have passed the professional skills tests in numeracy, literacy and information and communications technology.
17. Know how to use skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT to support their teaching and wider professional activities.

Achievement and diversity

18. Understand how children and young people develop and that the progress and well-being of learners are affected by a range of developmental, social, religious, ethnic, cultural and linguistic influences.
19. Know how to make effective personalised provision for those they teach, including those for whom English is an additional language or who have special educational needs or disabilities, and how to take practical account of diversity and promote equality and inclusion in their teaching.
20. Know and understand the roles of colleagues with specific responsibilities, including those with responsibility for learners with special educational needs and disabilities and other individual learning needs.

Health and well-being

- 21a. Be aware of the current legal requirements, national policies and guidance on the safeguarding and promotion of the well-being of children and young people.
- 21b. Know how to identify and support children and young people whose progress, development or well-being is affected by changes or difficulties in their personal circumstances, and when to refer them to colleagues for specialist support.

Skills

Planning

22. Plan for progression across the age and ability range for which they are trained, designing effective learning sequences within lessons and across series of lessons and demonstrating secure subject/curriculum knowledge.
23. Design opportunities for learners to develop their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills.
24. Plan homework or other out-of-class work to sustain learners' progress and to extend and consolidate their learning.

Teaching

25. Teach lessons and sequences of lessons across the age and ability range for which they are trained in which they:
 - (a) use a range of teaching strategies and resources, including e-learning, taking practical account of diversity and promoting equality and inclusion.

- (b) build on prior knowledge, develop concepts and processes, enable learners to apply new knowledge, understanding and skills and meet learning objectives.
- (c) adapt their language to suit the learners they teach, introducing new ideas and concepts clearly, and using explanations, questions, discussions and plenaries effectively.
- (d) demonstrate the ability to manage the learning of individuals, groups and whole classes, modifying their teaching to suit the stage of the lesson.

Assessing, monitoring and giving feedback

- 26a. Make effective use of a range of assessment, monitoring and recording strategies.
- 26b. Assess the learning needs of those they teach in order to set challenging learning objectives.
- 27. Provide timely, accurate and constructive feedback on learners' attainment, progress and areas for development.
- 28. Support and guide learners to reflect on their learning, identify the progress they have made and identify their emerging learning needs.

Reviewing, teaching and learning

- 29. Evaluate the impact of their teaching on the progress of all learners, and modify their planning and classroom practice where necessary.

Learning environment

- 30. Establish a purposeful and safe learning environment conducive to learning and identify opportunities for learners to learn in out-of-school contexts.
- 31. Establish a clear framework for classroom discipline to manage learners' behaviour constructively and promote their self-control and independence.

Team working and collaboration

- 32. Work as a team member and identify opportunities for working with colleagues, sharing the development of effective practice with them.
- 33. Ensure that colleagues working with them are appropriately involved in supporting learning and understand the roles they are expected to fulfill.