A Case Study Exploring Teachers’ Perceptions of English Teaching:  
Teacher Self-efficacy

Michelle KAWAMURA*

Abstract

Native English speaking teachers have been actively involved worldwide in the frontline of teaching English as a foreign language. The teaching contexts of English as a foreign language have evolved from the teaching of traditional skills of English, such as grammar, reading and translation, to the teaching of more complex thinking skills that include the understanding of our current global society. The development of such critical thinking skills is especially crucial in EFL classes since English is the most spoken and studied second language in many countries and it is used as a means of global communication. The awareness of international communities and emerging issues cross-culturally should be part of the EFL curriculum today. A hidden curriculum that includes the teaching of cross-cultural understanding and tolerance, whether taught intentionally or unintentionally, is already apparent in today’s EFL classrooms. Native English speaking teachers transmit their personal beliefs, experiences, education and cultures to the students in their classes. It is important for us to fathom teacher perceptions and beliefs due to the direct interaction and influence they have on their students with their educational theories and principles (Jia, Eslami & Burlbaw, 2006). This qualitative study was designed to examine the teachers’ self-efficacy in their role as teachers in university EFL core courses.

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Introduction

Even after 150 years of English education in Japan, various challenges, purposes and methods to improve its English curriculum continue to be part of active English education today. University English as a foreign language course was once a compulsory study, a language art fulfillment, and used as a prediction for student employment search success by their TOEIC achievement. However, increasingly, the educators in Japan are realizing the relationship between the English language learned and the potential effect on a student’s involvement and interest on an international level. As the number of outer circle non-native English speakers increases, using English as a tool for communication and cross-cultural learning is becoming more important. These effects inadvertently influence the growth of Japanese socio-economic involvement as well as humanitarian involvement cross-culturally. Emphasis on the four basic skills—reading, writing, grammar and listening—is just the foundation of a broader realm of learning about our global society. The role of English speaking teachers has changed from merely instructing repetitious drills of conversation practice or reading and writing; it has evolved into facilitating student analytical thinking skills, opening opportunities to world events and even bridging different cultures. More scholars are recognizing the importance of intercultural and cross-cultural learning via language classes (Tochon, 2009). This calls attention to understanding the native English teachers’ efficacy of teaching in our current global society. A qualitative study using an in-depth interview method will be conducted as a single case study for research to examine Japanese university EFL teacher-claimed perceptions of the importance of English and how it is taught in their classes. The reason that a qualitative study was selected as an appropriate research method was due to its unique nature in providing a way to explore and understand the meaning of a group or individuals of similar backgrounds (Creswell, 2009). In this case, all participants were native-English speaking university teachers who teach non-English major students. They also share the flexibility of selecting their textbooks and constructing their lesson plans.

Brief Literature Review

Behavior includes one’s goals, aspirations, expectations, affective proclivities, and perceptions in the social environment, and these are affected by one’s personal perceived efficacy (Bandura, 1995, 1997). A teacher’s personal efficacy influences the classroom activities and environment created by them (Bandrua, 1997). Studies have shown the positive relation between teacher self-efficacy beliefs and student academic achievement (Caprara, Barbaraneli, Steca & Malone, 2006). Teachers of
English as a foreign language have the potential to influence students through their personal attitude, method of instruction, the issues discussed and the environment created in class. Beyond academic achievement, EFL teacher self-efficacy can contribute to overall student attitude in English learning, as well as in future interests in international involvement, professionally or personally. (Caprara, Barbaraneli, Steca & Malone, 2006). A well-rounded, comprehensive education includes not only academic skills but also values, norms and beliefs that shape the ethical values, critical thinking skills and empathetic minds of students. The New Jersey Education Administrative Code 9 A: 1–1.2 gave “General Education” the definition of “instruction that presents forms of expression, fields of knowledge and methods of inquiry fundamental to intellectual growth and to a mature understanding of the world and the human condition.” Byram, (2008) stated, “Those who teach second and foreign languages have to think about how the language is offering a new perspective, a challenge to the primary language of identity, and a different vision of the culture(s) in which they live and have hitherto taken for granted.” Foreign language education is vital to an education for intercultural citizenship (Byram, 2008). This can be referred to as the “hidden curriculum”, in which values, norms and beliefs are transmitted via the structure of schooling and in each and every class. The knowledge in the hidden curriculum is learned inexplicitly, but is transmitted by the teachers’ attitudes, class contents, activities and instructions. These learning experiences will build or change student behavior and beliefs regarding their society and the societies around them. An example is a study that examined EFL teachers in China and reviewed that student values, moral judgment and development are affected by the values teachers tried to convey and communicate through the regular curriculum and hidden curriculum in their English classes (Zhu, 2011). Therefore, teacher self-efficacy and recognition of their role as an educator are important in today’s classrooms. Borg (2003) defined teacher cognition as, “what teachers think, know, and believe and the relationships of these mental constructs to what teachers do in the language teaching classroom.”

Research Questions:

The study explored teacher perceptions of English teaching in how the language is used in our global society. The following research questions were formed to allow the exploration of the central research.

Question 1. What are the perceived levels of self-efficacy for teachers of English beyond the four basic language skills: grammar, reading, writing and listening?

Question 2. Do EFL teachers perceive themselves as a single subject teacher or an
educator of general education?

Research Method and Design

I. Participants
Thirty-eight native English-as-foreign-language teachers from six different cities, prefectures and regions of Japan were the participants of this research. These locations were Tokyo city, Chiba prefecture, Ibaraki prefecture, Nagoya city, Osaka city, Hyogo prefecture and Kyoto prefecture. Certain demographic and other criteria were stipulated for the participants of this research. The teachers’ home countries, education and years of teaching English were the elements in the selection of participants. As a result, the participants used in this research were teachers from native English speaking countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Great Britain. The participants also had more than one year of EFL teaching abroad in places other than their home countries, and they needed to possess at least a master’s degree. Although the teachers were native English speakers, their ethnic backgrounds varied for several reasons. A variety in the ethnicity of native English speakers added to the scope of the research to find out if these teachers brought any multi-cultural values and issues from their personal experiences. Participants were interviewed individually by prior appointment and each interview varied in duration between 30 to 125 minutes. The interview was recorded with permission and an assurance of confidentially was given and reassured before the interview. Names of the participants were guaranteed not to be exposed or revealed in the research results.

II. Procedure
This is a qualitative single case study design to explore native English teacher perceptions of English teaching and how they feel about the importance of the language in relation to our global society. In addition, the research will attempt to explore whether or not the EFL teachers perceive themselves as just a language teacher of a single subject or consider themselves as a general core curriculum educator, such as in mathematics, science, social science and subjects that are considered to be essential for building knowledge and character.

The process of this research involved emerging questions and procedures, data collected via the interview method, coding analysis, categorizing codes into thematic groups and interpretation. Case studies focus on developing an in-depth analysis to understand the phenomenon of the formation of individual views. The research instruments are the researcher and a set of interview questions that were developed to answer the two research questions (Appendix A). Interview questions were
designed to assure that all aspects of the defined research questions would be addressed. The interview questions were designed to be open-ended and were intended to be flexible and expandable. Certain interview questions were designed to ask the same questions but with different wording to increase validity. Interview and research question alignment are shown in the table above:

The first 4 interview questions inquired the teachers’ general background for this research. Interview questions 5, 7, 10 and 15 aimed to understand the teachers’ perception of English teaching, whether the teachers’ perceived English teaching as a single subject that involves language skills training, or they perceived English teaching as a means to foster other cognition such as intercultural awareness and cross-cultural understanding. Interview questions 6, 8, 9 and 10 focused on the class instruction and the materials teachers select for their classes. These questions were asked to explore whether or not the actual content of the class and/or the teachers’ actions involve teaching beyond the basic skills of English and into integrating foreign cultures by reading, discussing, or actually interacting as part of the curriculum. Furthermore, interview questions 12, 13 and 14 asked which specific cultures, if any, were included in the native-English teacher’s classroom curriculum. Question 16 is an additional question to find out if teachers integrate technology and how technology is used in their classes. Interview questions 18 and 19 sought to identify the teachers’ goals for their students’ English language utilization and involvement. The goals described in the interview allowed understanding of the teachers’ perception of English in real life for their EFL learners. Question 17 asked the teachers how their past experiences, education and other personal encounters affected their perception of English teaching. This was essential in understanding the paths teachers took, how their identity evolved, and how they perceived their responsibilities as educators.

Practical teaching and offering challenging values are the two purposes of foreign language teaching (Byram, 2008). Byram (2008) states, “social changes of the late 20th and early 21st centuries which are encapsulated in the words ‘globalization’ and ‘internationalization’ have given new meaning and significance
to foreign language learning” (Byram, page 10). Focus on skills such as grammar, reading, writing and listening are part of the fundamental building blocks in language teaching and learning. The learning of other skills, such as intercultural awareness, and understanding the current global, socio-economic, and political environments, as well as understanding humanitarian needs should be core learning in university English as foreign language classes. University English as a foreign language class should move away from the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) beyond the level of daily conversational skills. Content that arouses critical thinking in students and engages them cognitively using English should be considered in today’s tertiary EFL teaching. The technical skills of the language should assist in the learning of global issues and cultural awareness. These skills should intertwine and not proceed in parallel directions. Interview questions 12 and 19 aim to understand how native English teachers perceive their role in today’s global society in teaching the most spoken and studied language in the world.

Data Collection, Processing and Analysis

The actual interviews included 46 native English teachers. Each interview was recorded with permission and the confidentially explained. Eight teacher interviews were not included in this study because the data were jeopardized due to inadequate information and/or extreme inconsistencies in the data. As a result, 38 total interviews were part of this research. The recorded data for each interview was transcribed within three days of the interview. In many writings this is the suggested step that should be taken after an in-depth interview in qualitative research. The researcher had a fresh memory of the interviews while transcribing the data. This transcription procedure was an initial stage of data absorption and analysis.

The most difficult part of the case study was data analysis (Yin, 2009). The following steps were used to analyze the transcripts:

1. Review all transcripts without coding. At this step, the researcher read the transcript with no coding designation.
2. Review all transcripts again to find similar words, patterns and connections in the transcribed data.
3. Create thematic topics for codes.
4. Discover cluster-related codes and categorize them in thematic topics.
5. Examine codes and frequencies.
6. Interpret the results.
The first step of reading the transcripts before the actual coding process begins is essential in qualitative research in order to preview the entire transcribed documents for the content, structures, and words used in the data. It is a common practice to review the transcribed documents or transcripts several times before coding. The tasks of analyzing the words or language used and structuring the answers and literal contents takes place in the repetitious tasks of reviewing the transcripts. In the second step, groups of similar words are verified. Notes are taken for the groups and each group is highlighted in different colors for convenience and accuracy. The third step of coding requires creating thematic topics for each group. A more detailed analysis is required to detect a possible need for further code analysis and reorganization of groups (Saldana, 2009). Different words of similar meaning are clustered together and classified under the same groups or themes in the fourth step. An efficient way to examine the themes, codes, and frequencies is to prepare a chart for these data. In the fifth step a chart was prepared for result interpretation in the sixth step.

Results and Analysis

The data to answer both research questions were analyzed numerous times with manual techniques of note taking, highlighting and directly marking the transcripts. The final themes were generated after multiple reviews of the transcribed data. Three themes were derived from the data that are relevant to answering research question 1:

Question 1. What are the perceived levels of self-efficacy for teachers of English beyond the four basic language skills: grammar, reading, writing and listening?

Theme One: Teaching with the focus of the four basic skills of English.

Theme Two: Teaching with the focus of using content for developing the four basic skills of English. The content varies from domestic to international issues.

Theme Three: Teaching with the focus of teaching beyond the four basic skills of English. The main purpose of teaching intercultural awareness and global issues are emphasized in class. The four basic skills of English are not the focus of the class.

To further analyze the data, codes are derived from reviewing the transcripts. Coding of particular words, clustered words and similar meaning answers are in table 2 below in the first column. The second column indicates the number of participants whose answers were expressed in the coded category. The third column
shows the percentage of participants who had the same answers in the categories. According to the frequencies of participants with answers including elements in the categories, percentages of the findings based on $n=38$ were calculated. The higher percentages indicate the answers in the interview expressed heavier the emphasis on the elements in the categories. In Table 2, 63% of the participants answered that their English classes included curriculum beyond the four basic skills of English. This does not specify the particular teaching materials included beyond the four basic skills of English. Fifty percent of the participants answered that they focus on the four basic skills of English in their English classes. These participants focus on improving the technical part of their language skills, with little or no focus on bringing intercultural awareness or cross-cultural learning in their curriculum. Around 39% of the teachers give research homework to enhance their students’ four basic skills of English, compared to 32% of teachers who give research homework emphasizing cultural learning. Only around 1% of the teachers actually utilize the internet in class to foster critical thinking skills, cultural learning and other foreign issues beyond the four basic skills of English learning. Forty-five percent of teachers use classroom materials in addition to textbooks that include cultures and other subjects of foreign countries. During the interview, most participants expressed that they are more comfortable in discussing their own cultures and comparing that to the students’ culture. This is evidenced by the high percentage, 76%, of the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th># of participants with answers included elements in the categories</th>
<th>% of participants</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Topics taught in issues beyond the four basic skills/drills</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on the four basic skills of English</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional activities and/or homework, such as research using the four basic skills of English, but cultural issues not emphasized</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional activities and/or homework, such as research using the four basic skills of English, with cultural issues emphasized</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet integration to foster learning and knowledge beyond the four basic skills of English</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials beyond textbooks that include cultures and other subjects of foreign countries</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultures compared between students and teachers</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultures discussed beyond the cultures of teachers and students</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>47%</td>
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participants who claimed to discuss various issues of their own cultures and often comparing it to their students’ cultures in class. Forty-seven percent of the teachers expressed that different cultures and issues are discussed in their classes.

Three themes were derived from the data that are relevant to answering research question 2.

Question 2. Do the EFL teachers perceive themselves as a single subject teacher or an educator of general curriculum in which the hidden education of building human characters are part of their role? These themes indicate that teachers believe their role as a teacher is more than teaching the technical parts of the language. They also transmit meaningful knowledge to help their students build better character and logical analytical skills in the global society.

Theme One: Teaching to promote language skills, with heavier emphasis on the skills of grammar, reading, writing and listening.

Theme Two: Teaching with the intention to promote cross-cultural learning and language skills.

Theme Three: Teaching with the strong intention to promote global citizenship and encourage continuous learning beyond graduation.

The coding process was identical to the procedures taken in analyzing data for research question one. A table with three columns similar to Table 2 is presented below for exploring the data for research question 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th># of participants with answers included elements in the categories</th>
<th>% of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly encourage and motivate language skills</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage and practice the teaching of various interests</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage and transmit English as a tool for international activities</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage students to use English for traveling and employment after graduation</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage students to use English beyond traveling and employment after graduation (Includes gathering knowledge and/or experience in foreign issues.)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Thirty-four out of 38 participants answered that their classroom plans and instructions strongly encourage and motivate the improvement of language skills. Two percent of the participants included lesson plans that promote other interests beyond the basic skills of the language. Only 1% of the participants have actual classroom activities that involve international interests, such as cross-cultural interactions or other inter-cultural communicative tasks. Many participants expressed that intercultural communicative activities are ideal but a few concerns set back their interests in pursuing such projects. Some of these setbacks include:

a. Long hours of teaching make intercultural communicative activities curriculum planning exhaustive.
b. Difficulty in finding foreign partners/foreign universities for all general English curricula.
c. Time differences between Japan and foreign countries make communicative activities inconvenient.
d. Concern for actual language improvement in such activities

All participants in this research expressed that they encourage their students to study English for the purposes of traveling and employment, even after graduation. Only 6% of the participants brought the possibilities of other international involvement in class to encourage English language learning.

Findings and Implications

This study was guided by two research questions. The results of the individual interviews were transcribed and analyzed. Codes were generated and calculated for further analysis. According to the result of the coding and categorizing indicated in Table 1, over 50% of the teachers focus on the teaching of language skills. When cultures, or culturally-related topics and issues, are discussed, only the participants’ home cultures and the students’ cultures were part of the discussion. Homework and research were mostly assigned for skill training. Around 32% of the teachers emphasized cultural issues in their classroom activities and homework, and 47% of the participants expressed that cultures beyond the cultures of teachers and students are part of the classroom activities. The results showed that more than half of the participants perceive the teaching of English as a focus on language skills. This can also indicate the perception of their role as a single subject teacher, not as a general education teacher, where intellectual growth and the understanding of the world are part of their responsibilities. The connection between English as foreign language and multiple cultures has not being recognized or practiced by majority of the
participants. Some of the reasons may be the lack of recognition of English language utilized in an international context among the teachers or difficulties in planning and exercising such curriculum.

Language skills promote communicative competency and practical usage. Participants who encourage students to use English for traveling and future employment fall into theme one: which emphasizes grammar, reading, writing and listening. According to the findings indicated in Table 3, 100% of the participants encourage students to use English for traveling and employment purposes. Among the participants, 16% encourage students to use English for purposes beyond traveling and employment. These participants encourage further cross-cultural understanding and involvement in international activities. This result indicates that 16% of the participants perceive themselves as educators of general curriculum, which promotes intellectual growth and an understanding of the world.

**Conclusion and Recommendation**

Having educators understand the notion that language learning leads to broader purposes than just language skills is essential. Students can be influenced directly by the contents and activities taught in their English as foreign language classes. Harris (2008),” teachers’ perceptions of how English should be taught is formed by their personal philosophies, experiences, education, environment, and many other factors.” Teacher attitudes and their verbal and non-verbal expressions in class lectures and discussions also affect student cognitive growth in a variety of areas. Whether teachers transmit values, norms and beliefs to their students via the method of hidden education or directly by lecturing, they should be made aware of their roles in general education, and not just as a single subject teacher. From this study, many native foreign language teachers still see themselves as a single subject teacher. At the same time, many teachers transmit the awareness of differences in culture, intercultural understanding and international issues in their classes. These teachers may not realize they are acting the role of an educator in general education. This recognition is important for them in order to transform language studies from just practical skills to broader purposes in our global society.

**Reference**


Appendix A
Questions to Guide Personal In-Depth Interview

This research study is for teachers who are teaching English as foreign language in non-English-speaking countries, for a study being conducted by Michelle Kawamura. Participants are encouraged to expand on answers at will.

1. Where are you from?
2. What was your highest level of study in?
3. Did you teach English to foreign students in your home country before teaching abroad?
4. Do you have any certification in teaching English as a second language?
5. Describe what “English as a foreign language teaching and learning” means to you.
6. Please describe a typical class outline (or class breakdown).
7. What are some main focuses you feel necessary in your pedagogical practice?
9. What do the materials you are using focus more on:
   - Grammar
   - Reading
   - Translation
   - Listening
   - Other
10. Do you feel that learners should focus on learning “standard” English, such as the English used in the United States or England?
11. Do you think it is important that learners should try to reach a native-like English competence? Y/N Please elaborate.
12. Do the materials you use contain foreign cultures and issues?
13. What foreign cultures do you discuss in your classes (if you do)?
   - Your culture
   - Comparing your culture and the culture of your students
   - Various cultures
   - Focusing on western cultures
   - Focusing on Asian cultures
   - Other (please specify)
14. If different cultures were discussed in your classes, please give an example of the area of the culture covered. Example: Economy, politics, humanity?
15. Describe what “English learning in a global context” means to you.
16. Do you integrate technology in your classes? Please explain.
17. Please describe your beliefs regarding your cultural heritage, life experiences, and education that influence your teaching today.
18. What goals do you have for your students in English learning?
19. How do you encourage your students to be interested in English learning or usage after graduation?