

THE CURRENT SITUATION AND ISSUES WITH ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACTIVITIES IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN JAPAN AFTER SIX YEARS OF IMPLEMENTATION

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Article History

Received: December 18, 2019

Accepted: February 02, 2020

Published: March 30, 2020

Keywords

English language activities,
primary school, survey,
homeroom teachers

ABSTRACT

English education in public primary schools in Japan started in 2011 not as a subject but as an area of foreign language activities in Japan. However, the preparation was poor and homeroom teachers without proper training were required to teach English. Since then, the issue has become highly controversial in Japan. To clarify the actual situation, we conducted surveys three times between 2012 and 2017 and found many problems. Nevertheless, English will become a compulsory subject from April, 2020, but before we see any major improvements by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), more careful study on the problems is an urgent need and therefore, we would like to utilize the results of our research. This paper attempts to study the changing situation and to point out the necessary conditions for possible reforms by comparing and analyzing the results of the latter two surveys.

1. INTRODUCTION

English Language Activities (hereinafter called EL Activities) commenced in April, 2011 in the 5th and 6th grades of all public primary schools in Japan. This was the first time in Japan that English education was implemented in public primary schools. Lessons are only held once a week, but ordinary homeroom teachers have been required to teach English even though they are not skilled in it.

EL Activities are not considered a separate academic subject but, rather, an area or field of learning, according to the Course of Study for Primary School decided by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT).

In 2012, we researched some primary schools in the Tokyo Metropolitan Government regarding the program of EL Activities that had started just one year before. Then, we researched primary schools' EL Activities throughout Japan in 2014, three years after the program had started. There were some major problems. There were almost no English teachers to teach EL Activities. Classroom teachers were required to teach English even though they did not like English or did not have sufficient training. The Ministry of Education told the boards of education to use native English-speaking teachers in the study. But the ability to do that depended on the local governments' financial situation because the national government could not allocate the funds to hire them. Not every school had good teaching materials. Moreover, there were problems in training teachers.

Six years had passed since EL Activities began in 2011. Therefore, we again attempted to research primary schools throughout Japan regarding their EL Activities after six years of implementation. Six years' implementation of the EL Activities program was meant to determine whether it's a suitable program or not for children.

In this paper, we would like to demonstrate the changing situation of English education in primary schools in Japan by comparing the results of our surveys done in 2014 and 2017, respectively. We also would like to analyze the issues that stood out in the surveys.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

During those six years of implementation of EL Activities, some analyses about the issues and the results from similar kinds of surveys were delivered as follows.

Firstly, MEXT examined the situations of the implementation (MEXTb, 2016). However, they studied only the local governments' policies and did not deal with the states of classroom lessons except using Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

Secondly, a private think-tank researched about the EL activities and it also showed the possibility of using ICT (Eiken Foundation of Japan, 2015). This research asked for comments on the methods and the contents of EL Activities, but did not inform us about the actual situations of the lessons and teachers. Moreover, even though the research was conducted among not only public primary schools but also private primary schools and national primary schools, it did not mention correlations between teaching environments of those schools and results.

Benesse Education General Institute also researched about English education in primary schools in Japan in 2015. They questioned more than 1500 pairs of primary school students and their parents, but did not include primary school teachers.

In contrast, Yonezaki, Tara and Tsukuda (2016) researched primary school teachers' anxiety about teaching English and provided specific recurring examples of their anxieties. This was informative and useful to confirm our research results.

We also studied one of the latest research papers on the issue "Insights from Elementary School Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) in Japan" (Kano & Ozeki, 2018). This study analyzed ALT's' descriptive answers reported in the large-scale research (Yoshida, et al. 2015). When focusing solely on ALTs' situations, their analysis is greatly suggestive.

However, unlike the above, our research dealt with the situations of primary school teachers, ALTs and English Activity supporters (EASs). Furthermore, we attempted to find out how their situations were evolving by conducting the same surveys in 2014 and 2017.

In addition to the above-mentioned, we referred to a monthly magazine, New English Classroom (Koubunken) that has often featured the problem.

3. METHODS AND RESULTS

We used almost the same questions as in 2014 and added questions, taking into consideration the 6th year of implementation. We researched schools, assistant language teachers (ALTs) and English Activity supporters (EASs). We sent research papers to one of the schools in every city throughout Japan. All the research data was returned by fax. The response rate and other basic data are as follows:

3.1. The Research Method and Response Rate

Table 1

Research date	February to March, 2014	January to February, 2017
Research method	Sent three papers to primary schools and asked to return by fax.	Sent three papers to primary schools and asked to return by fax.
Research target	800 cities and research surveys sent to one school in every city-for primary schools, ALTs and EASs.	800 cities and research surveys were sent to one school in every city-for primary schools, ALTs and EASs.
Response rate (%)	1.160 public primary schools (20.1) 2.79 ALTs (9.9) 3.36 EASs (4.5)	1. 212 public primary schools (26.3) 2. 97 ALTs (12.5) 3. 40 EASs (5.0)

3.2. Results of the School Research and Considerations

3.2.1. Teachers in Charge

Table 2

Q: Who teaches the English Activities to primary students?	2017(N=212) Rate (%)
Answer category	
① Only classroom teachers	14.6
② Only teachers of English	0.9
③ Classroom teachers and EAS	7.1
④ Classroom teachers and ALT	67.0
⑤ Classroom teachers, ALT and EAS	6.7
⑥ Others	3.7

We asked about the structure and composition of the English Activity lessons and who was teaching the classes. Basically, more than 60 % of classes were taught by classroom teachers together with ALTs. Classes where lessons were taught only by a classroom teacher comprised 14.6%. And classes taught by an English teacher alone made up 0.9% of classes, which was the ideal that was hoped for by teachers.

3.2.2. Teaching Materials and Lesson plans

Table 3

Q: What teaching materials do you use?	Rate (%)	
	2014(n=160)	2017(n=212)
Answer category		
① Use only <i>Hi, friends!</i> with textbook plan	35.6	41.2
② Use only <i>Hi, Friends!</i> with original plan	23.1	26.2
③ Use <i>Hi, friends!</i> and original materials	29.4	29.4
④ Use only original materials	2.5	2.3
⑤ Use other ready-made materials	9.4	0.9

**Hi, friends!*: A textbook for primary students made by MEXT

MEXT prepared “*Hi, friends!*” as the textbook for EL Activities in 2012 to enrich English Activity lessons and distributed it to every primary school in Japan. When we researched in 2014, there were still some schools that used original materials but in 2017 almost all the schools used only “*Hi, friends!*”. They used only the manual plan that MEXT had made.

The research in 2014 indicated that the originality of each school was being lost rapidly and the tendency has been increasing year by year. However, it is also pointed out that there were still a few public primary schools using their own original materials.

3.2.3. The Content Used in the Lessons

Table 4

Q: What content in the category do you teach?	Rate (%)	
	2014(n=160)	2017(n=212)
Answer Category		
① To teach how to write the alphabet	62.5	71.7
② To teach phonics*	23.8	42.5
③ Easy grammar	24.4	28.8
④ Other foreign languages except English	16.3	14.2

*phonics: a teaching method relating to spelling and pronunciation

“*Hi, friends!*” dealt with letters and teachers used letters in their lessons. However, MEXT insisted that teachers should not use letters when they teach English to children in primary schools. In the lessons, children wanted to read and write letters eagerly and the MOE changed the method. The tendency was the same as 3 years before. The percentage of classes using phonics greatly increased because they were taken from the textbook, “*Hi, friends!*”. Other foreign languages were not being used much in the lessons.

3.2.4. Teachers in Charge of the Lesson Planning

Table 5

Q: Who wrote the teaching plans?	Rate (%)	
	2014(n=160)	2017(n=212)
Answer Category		
① Classroom teachers	37.5	47.6
② Through teachers' discussions	13.1	14.2
③ Teachers of English	18.8	24.5
④ ALTs (Native speakers of English)	32.5	44.3
⑤ Other	18.4	6.1

According to the official course of study for primary school, classroom teachers or teachers of English had to write the teaching plans. However, it is a little hard for classroom teachers to make their own lesson plans because most of them have no experience teaching English. They have to create their teaching plans in English when they teach English to children, alongside the ALTs.

The ratio of classroom teachers that make teaching plans was increasing and also the ratio of ALTs was increasing although the course of study did not indicate the role of the ALTs in making teaching plans. Many local boards of education contracted with staffing agencies and the agencies made teaching plans for the schools, and so the English lessons were done according to those plans.

3.3 Results of the ALT Research and Considerations

We asked ALTs 8 questions and they answered sincerely with a lot of comments and opinions in English. We translated them into Japanese and summarized them.

3.3.1. Status of ALTs

Table 6

Q: What is your status?	Rate (%)	
	2014(n=79)	2017(n=97)
Answer Category		
① English teachers hired by staffing agencies	46.9	55.6
② English teachers hired by schools	48.0	24.7
③ Just personal teachers	1.3	2.1
④ Volunteers near schools	0.0	0.0
⑤ Parents of school child	0.0	3.1
⑥ Others	2.5	13.5

⑥ includes the answers of those hired by their board of education and they are the same answers as ②. The numbers of cities that hired ALTs through staffing agencies increased. There were a lot of problems regarding the contracts.

3.3.2. Cooperative Lesson Planning with Classroom Teachers (CT)

Table 7

Q: Do you prepare for each lesson with your CT?	Rate (%)	
	2014(n=79)	2017(n=97)
Answer Category		
① Always	24.1	23.7
② Almost always but not enough	7.6	16.5
③ Sometimes	36.6	40.2
④ Never	10.1	7.2
⑤ Other	21.6	12.4

⑤ contained the ALTs who worked at several schools in a week. They had no time to talk with teachers. More than 60 % of ALTs had little time to discuss their classes.

3.3.3. Ways of Preparing the Lessons

Table 8

Q: How do you prepare for lessons with classroom teachers?	Rate (%)	
	2014(n=79)	2017(n=97)
Answer Category		
① Meeting and talking beforehand	59.5	62.2
② Exchanging plans by fax beforehand	5.1	3.6
③ Exchanging plans by e-mail beforehand	2.5	4.5
④ Receiving the prepared lesson plan just before each lesson	10.1	17.0
⑤ Others	22.8	12.7

More than 60% of the schools, classroom teachers and ALTs prepared for lessons beforehand, but around 20% of ALTs prepared for some just minutes before the lessons.

3.3.4. How ALTs Engage in Creating Lesson Plans

Table 9

Q: Are you engaged in creating lesson plans?	Rate (%)	
	2014(n=79)	2017(n=97)
Answer Category		
① Yes, lesson preparation is left entirely up to me	51.8	45.3
② Yes, I am expected to make some suggestions	20.3	36.5
③ Not at all. I just follow the prepared plans	7.6	5.2
④ Others	20.35	13.0

④ Others answered that it depended on the schools. The ALTs visited two or three schools a week and helped the classroom teachers. In many schools, the classroom teachers had to lead their classes.

3.3.5. Team-Teaching (TT) Situations

Table 10

Q: Do you teach in a team-teaching setting?	Rate (%)	
Answer Category	2014(n=79)	2017(n=97)
① Assist classroom teachers as an ALT	45.6	49.4
② I am told to play a main role	30.4	31.0
③ Not TT but I teach by myself	13.9	8.3
④ Others	10.1	11.3

Half of the schools taught EL Activities in a TT setting. But more than 30% of ALTs mainly taught EL Activities themselves and around 10% of ALTs taught the English lessons completely by himself or herself. This showed that the government forced classroom teachers to teach but in actuality, locally it was a little difficult for teachers to do so.

3.4. Results of the English Supporter Research and Considerations

We also asked English Activity supporters (EASs) about their work. The answer rate was 4.9% and this number was almost the same as the situation throughout Japan. It meant that only 5% of local governments hired EASs.

3.4.1. Status of EASs

Table 11

Q: What is your status?	Rate (%)	
Answer Category	2014(n=36)	2017(n=40)
① Hired by a staffing agency	2.8	5.0
② Personal private English teacher	11.1	25.0
③ English teacher near the primary school	8.3	7.5
④ Just citizen	27.7	30.0
⑤ Parents	3.8	0.0
⑥ Others	44.4	32.5

⑥ Others contained supporters hired by local governments. Hence the number of citizens should be added. Almost all EASs were recruited by some kind of city bulletin.

3.4.2. Preliminary Meetings for Lessons the Teachers Have

Table 12

Q: Do you have preliminary meetings for the lessons?	Rate (%)	
Answer Category	2014(n=36)	2017 (n=40)
① Always	16.7	15.0
② Almost always but not enough	66.6	67.5
③ Sometimes	11.1	12.5
④ Never	2.8	2.5
⑤ Other	2.8	2.5

The state of the preliminary meeting was almost the same as 3 years before. In this situation, almost all EASs were good at English. They could prepare the lessons themselves. Hence they could have preliminary meetings for a short time in Japanese.

3.5. Results of the EL Activities Research and Consideration

We asked principals, ALTs and EASs about the results of the EL Activities.

3.5.1. The Effects of the EL Activities on Schools that Principals Found

Table 13

Q: What did you find as the effects of the EL activities?	Rate (%)	
Answer Category	2014(n=160)	2017(n=212)
① Children began to speak English positively	68.1	72.4
② Children began to have contact with foreigners	58.8	46.7
③ Children were positive to take part in other lessons	4.4	5.2
④ Relations among the children became better	21.9	16.0
⑤ Teachers took a fresh look at teaching other subjects	8.1	7.5
⑥ Cooperation amongst the teachers in schools became stronger because of the EL Activities	11.3	15.1

⑦ Others	5.6	6.1
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Children began not to have contact with foreigners (ALTs). Hence children were losing interest in speaking to foreigners.

3.5.2. The Effects of EL Activities for Schools that ALTs Thought Resulted

Table 14

Q: What did you find as the effects of the EL activities?	Rate (%)	
	2014 (n=79)	2017(n=97)
Answer Category		
① Children began to have interest in foreign cultures	16.8	16.5
② Children enjoyed the opportunity to communicate in a language other than Japanese	15.0	24.7
③ Children learned to communicate positively outside of the EL Activities	13.1	9.3
④ Children began to have confidence in learning English and preparing for junior high schools	10.3	14.4
⑤ Children had a pleasant experience studying English	10.3	4.1
⑥ Others	34.6	31.0

Children began to enjoy communicating in English but in other subjects they were losing interest. It meant that English Activity lessons were a kind of play or game for children.

3.5.3. The Effects of EL Activities for Schools that EASs Thought Resulted

Table 15

Q: What did you find as the effects of the EL activities?	Rate (%)	
	2014 (n=36)	2017(n=40)
Answer Category		
① To lighten the burdens of classroom teachers	60.0	80.0
② To coordinate between classroom teachers and ALTs	42.9	47.5
③ To give own points of view different from classroom teachers or ALTs	40.0	42.5
④ To support the understanding of students	65.7	52.5
⑤ Others	0.0	2.5

Classroom teachers were too busy and teaching English Activity lessons was hard work for them. It is obvious that EASs understood that well.

3.6. Questions and Problems

3.6.1 The Questions and Problems of the EL Activities for Schools that Principals Thought Resulted

Table 16

Q: What questions and problems did you find as the results of EL activities?	Rate (%)	
	2014(n=160)	2017(n=212)
Answer Category		
① Shortage of teaching materials for lessons	20.6	24.5
② Teachers didn't know how to teach	17.5	27.8
③ Shortage of time to prepare for lessons	56.3	57.5
④ Children wouldn't learn English	3.8	7.5
⑤ It was difficult to communicate with ALTs	24.4	26.4
⑥ Teachers didn't have confidence	25.6	32.5
⑦ The difference of ability among teachers	38.1	47.2
⑧ No opportunities to exchange teaching methods or study lesson information	33.8	27.4
⑨ Difficult to get parents' understanding	0.6	0
⑩ Others	7.5	8.0

The percentage of answers in almost all categories increased. This meant that questions and problems were being actualized year by year. Especially the differences of ability among teachers was becoming greater and greater.

3.6.2. The Questions and Problems of EL Activities for Schools that ALTs Thought Resulted

Table 17

Q: What questions and problems did you find as the results of EL activities?	Rate (%)	
	2014(n=79)	2017 (n=97)
① Correspondence to the children who lost confidence and passion for study	24.6	16.6
② Communication with classroom teachers	12.2	6.2
③ Attach no importance to writings	6.7	4.1
④ Correct the typical bad English pronunciation from Japanese	6.7	1
⑤ Lack of teaching programs made by Ministry of Education or local governments	6.7	3.1
⑥ The contents of textbook were wrong	6.7	4.1
⑦ Classroom teachers didn't have self-confidence in English	5.6	7.2
⑧ Too few English lessons a week	4.4	9.3
⑨ Not teaching how to read English	3.3	4.1
⑩ Difference of teachers' attitude to classroom	3.3	2.1
⑪ Too many students in a class	3.3	0
⑫ Too difficult to explain in English	3.3	7.2
⑬ Shortage of time to master English	3.3	0
⑭ Difference of English ability among children	3.3	3.1
⑮ Children don't have confidence	2.2	8.2
⑯ It's difficult to control the classroom	0	9.3
⑰ Lack of classroom teachers' motivation, negative and uncooperative attitude	0	7.2
⑱ Lack of classroom teachers' English knowledge and teaching method	0	6.2

The relations between ALTs and classroom teachers were becoming better but the attitude of classroom teachers towards EL Activities and the control of the classroom were becoming worse for ALTs. The success or failure of teaching depended on classroom teachers. 'The Report of Study Research on the Situation of ALTs in Primary, Secondary and High schools in Japan' (Yoshida, et al. 2015 & 2017) showed this problem as the highest percentage.

3.6.3 The Questions and Problems of EL Activities for Schools that English Supporters Thought

Table 18

Q: What questions and problems did you find as the results of EL activities?	Rate (%)	
	2014(n=36)	2017(n=40)
① Lack of teaching materials for lessons	22.9	17.5
② I don't know how to assist teachers	5.7	0
③ Lack of time to discuss about the lessons	40.0	37.5
④ Children didn't study English positively	5.7	2.5
⑤ It's difficult to communicate with ALTs	0.0	0.0
⑥ It's difficult to communicate with classroom teachers	0.0	0.0
⑦ The difference of ability by teachers	13.9	35.0
⑧ There are no chances to exchange methods or study information with others	42.9	45.0
⑨ The role of supporters is unclear	5.7	20.0
⑩ Others	20.0	15.0

As a whole, the relations between classroom teachers and English Activity supporters were becoming better. However, they thought that the role of assistants was becoming unclear. Some classroom teachers did well with them but others entrusted them and shifted their work onto assistants.

3.7. How to Make Improvements

We asked principals, ALTs and EASs about how to make improvements on such problems. As a whole, they answered according to their practical experiences.

3.7.1. The Improvements that Principals Wanted

Table 19

Q: What improvements do you want to see happen?	Rate (%)	
	2014(n=169)	2017(n=212)
① A budget to keep materials	31.3	29.7
② Proper study of materials and methods	55.6	59.9
③ To allow teachers to experience going abroad	10.0	5.2
④ To hire more teachers of English	48.8	63.2
⑤ To have more time to prepare lessons	51.3	50.5
⑥ To improve teachers' English abilities	57.5	61.8
⑦ Thoughtfully arrange usage of ALTs	33.8	36.8
⑧ To increase the number of EASs	18.8	23.6
⑨ To cooperate with junior high schools	34.4	29.2
⑩ To narrow the gap among regions	7.5	8.0
⑪ Others	2.5	1.4

In total, the percentages were higher than 3 years previous. Many principals especially wanted to hire more teachers of English. They thought it was difficult for classroom teachers to teach English.

3.7.2. The Improvements that ALTs Thought Needed

Table 20

Q: What improvements do you want to see happen?	Rate (%)	
	2014(n=79)	2017 (n=97)
① Teach writing	10.1	4.1
② Efficient and effective use of Team Teaching with ALTs	10.1	10.3
③ Teach phonics	8.9	4.1
④ Classroom teachers or ALTs explain lessons in Japanese	7.6	5.2
⑤ Improve communications with classroom teachers	7.6	3
⑥ Improve teachers' classroom management skills	7.6	3
⑦ Increase lessons to twice a week	6.3	7.2
⑧ Improve teachers' English skills	5	4.1
⑨ Increase time to discuss lesson planning	5	0
⑩ Decrease number of students in a class	3.8	0
⑪ Develop classroom teachers' positive attitude towards teaching English Activities	2.5	2
⑫ Increase the number of teachers who are skilled to teach English	2.5	8.2
⑬ Review the lessons	2.5	0
⑭ Thoroughly monitor students' current abilities and knowledge	2.5	0
⑮ Increase chances to use English outside the classroom	2.5	0
⑯ Study English Activities in every grade	2.5	4.1
⑰ Revise the curriculum	0	8.2

⑮ Use better materials	0	7.2
⑯ ALTs should learn how to teach	0	5.1
⑰ Put importance on students' self-respect	0	2

ALTs also thought it was better to increase the number of teachers who have the ability to teach English. Another point of improvement would be to make the curriculum and materials better.

3.7.3. Improvements That EASs Thought Were Needed

Table 21

Q: What improvements do you want to see happen?	Rate (%)	
	2014(n=36)	2017 (n=40)
① Don't use volunteers but paid workers	2.9	7.5
② Continuous employment	28.6	45.0
③ Study about materials and methods	42.9	50.0
④ Teach as licensed teachers	25.7	45.0
⑤ More time to prepare lessons	22.9	30.0
⑥ Others	0.0	5.0

EASs were almost always hired as part-time workers. They had to move to other schools every year according to the schools' needs. They knew English well, but did not know how to teach English to primary students. They also wanted to teach as licensed teachers.

3.7.4. The Principals' Requests for the National and Local Governments

Table 22

Q: What did you request from the National and Local Governments?	Rate (%)	
	2014(n=160)	2017(n=212)
① To offer teaching materials	29.4	41.0
② To hold training sessions with the boards of education	26.9	27.8
③ To take part in open study meetings of other schools	24.4	17.9
④ To take part in training sessions held by private organizations	5.6	5.7
⑤ To study abroad	13.1	12.7
⑥ To hire teachers of English	47.5	60.4
⑦ To hire ALTs	30.0	29.7
⑧ To hire EASs	20.6	28.8
⑨ Others	8.1	2.8

To hire teachers of English was the most urgent desire for primary schools in Japan followed by offering teaching materials.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

According to the research above, we explained the characteristics of EL Activities implemented between 2014 and 2017. Here we chose 7 points to outline the problems of EL Activities in Japanese primary schools and analyze the research results. All these points were taken from the research.

Points to consider:

4.1. English Activities Should Be Taught by Classroom Teachers or Teachers of English

The course of study by MEXT required that classroom teachers or teachers of English should teach English Activities. The Ministry's director always said in the training sessions that classroom teachers were best because they knew their students through spending time with them teaching multiple subjects. However, teaching English is totally different from teaching other subjects. They need specific training for that and, a matter of course, English language skills. The research showed that the more EL Activities were practiced, the more teachers of English were wanted by not only classroom teachers but also principals, ALTs and EASs. However, there are not enough well-prepared teachers at all. Therefore, even EASs were expected to act as the main teachers, because of their English language skills and capability in communicating with classroom teachers, ALTs and administrative staff in both English and Japanese.

4.2. The Role of ALTs and How to Best Use Them

The course of study also said that teachers should cooperate with ALTs according to the situational needs of each lesson. Many local governments hired ALTs as per their budgets only, while more than 80% of schools adopted ALTs into their English Activity lessons. It was a good way for students to make contact with foreign peoples and different cultures. Research from 2014 already showed that students were greatly motivated to learn foreign languages. Moreover, the rate of children who enjoyed the opportunity to communicate in a foreign language increased almost 10%. On that point, the significance of ALT was great. However, the number of ALTs who felt unable to control students increased significantly, and the rate of the ALTs who had difficulty in responding to students who lack confidence or motivation is still high. In addition to that, the answers from the principals showed that primary schools ultimately preferred teachers of English and EASs. Local governments hired ALTs yearly and schools had to correspond to this. They had to discuss teaching in English even though they were not good at English. They wanted the same ALTs to come back every year.

4.3. The Role of English Supporters

Many of ALTs could not speak Japanese well and it was difficult to teach English Activities using Japanese. That made them difficult to correspond with students well. They were also supposed to use only English. But this research showed that ALTs felt the necessity to use Japanese in their lessons and the importance of smooth and sufficient communication between classroom teachers and them. Herein EASs could play the important role of a coordinator utilizing their language skills in both Japanese and English.

However, they were hired as part-time supporters and their status was unclear. Some classroom teachers asked them to mainly teach the lessons and others asked to them to only make materials. That could have made them unmotivated through no fault of their own. This was also due to financial problems. Only 5% of local governments hired EASs.

4.4. Students Who “Hate” English in Primary School

About 80 % of the Japanese primary students appeared to eagerly learn English (Benesse, 2015). However, in our research, teachers and ALTs who were actually teaching classes revealed that the reality was not so positive and there were a lot of students who “hated” English even from the beginning of primary school. Moreover, there were a lot of problems such as the huge gap among students’ skills and willingness and teachers’ abilities to motivate them. If the current situations did not improve, the number of the students who “hated” English would increase. The research showed that not only principals but ALTs were troubled by this problem. Public schools should cultivate all students’ abilities and interests in language learning. Urgent improvement is strongly required.

4.5. Textbooks and Materials

MEXT prepared the textbooks “*Hi, friends! 1*” and “*Hi, friends! 2*” for EL Activities in 2012. However, the research shows that classroom teachers and ALTs were not satisfied with the textbooks, commenting on their insufficient contents and the need for other teaching materials. Therefore, some local boards of education prepared their own textbooks and used them.

In 2018, MEXT provided every primary school with the second textbooks “*We can! 1*” and “*We can! 2.*” It seemed to be a step forward, however, the teachers still had difficulties to utilize them in their lessons. In addition to that, from April 2020, new authorized textbooks will be used. Every local board of education has already chosen one textbook among seven offered. These textbooks will not be used for the EL Activities but only for English study as an academic subject. The EL Activities will start from the third grade of primary schools. We should explore how these new textbooks will work.

4.6. Appointment of Teachers of English

The research in 2014 showed that primary schools wanted teachers of English and the research in 2017 speeded up the necessity of it. This tendency was also shown in another study. (Eiken Foundation of Japan, 2015). English is a foreign language different from other subjects. If it is hard for classroom teachers to speak English, how much harder it must be to actually teach English.

Although principals are aware of the great capabilities classroom teachers have, when it comes to teaching English as a required subject, it is indispensable for schools to have specialized English teachers. That is what has been claimed throughout the six years of implementation of EL Activities.

4.7. Early EL Activities and Curriculum

In the survey, we asked about the introduction of the subject of English from the fifth grade and the start of the EL Activities from the third grade. Many principals in primary schools had anxieties and doubts about that especially because of the lack of teaching competencies and sufficient time for preparations, and the difficulty in communicating with ALTs, the result showed. Since there have been no concrete and major improvements on the problems of foreign language education in primary schools in Japan, the principals represent those who take part in EL Activities who hope to cultivate every student's willingness to learn a foreign language and communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds.

Since the introduction of English Education into public primary schools was suggested by The Provisional Education Council in 1986, there have been revisions of the course of study and implementations of different forms of English education. However, our research has revealed that MEXT has not adequately discussed their consequences, nor allotted the necessary budget for precise and satisfying preparations for proper implementation. To our regret, despite such current conditions, the primary school English curriculum as an academic subject will commence from April, 2020.

This research is a little behind the times, however, currently, it is apparent that we still have the same problems that need urgent solutions in many of the ways we mentioned above. At this point we should conduct an even more detailed research study on the issues and continue to require concrete reforms.

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