

Abstract

The role of elementary school teachers in the development of students' autonomy is critical for students to learn English and become global human resources. Although Japanese and Dutch governments have included the development of student autonomy as part of their educational goals, there is a huge difference in the student's English proficiency. The reason for this difference is expected to be the diverging viewpoints of teachers in both countries about fostering student autonomy. Using a mixed methods design, this doctoral dissertation examines the perceptions of English teachers regarding learners' autonomy in Japanese and Dutch elementary schools. Quantitatively, the questionnaire survey targeted 61 teachers each from Japan and the Netherlands. It consisted of Admiraal et al.'s (2019) 39 five-point Likert scale questions—analyzed using multiple regression analysis after confirmatory factor analysis—and 5 open-ended questions—analyzed using KH Coder and grounded theory approach. The qualitative analysis was conducted in a series of semi-structured face-to-face interviews with five Japanese teachers and online interviews with five Dutch teachers, analyzed using the modified grounded theory approach. Moreover, the textbooks and teachers' manuals for third to sixth grades were analyzed from the learner autonomy's perspective, using a checklist combining Reeve's (2016) three critical motivational moments of autonomy-supportive teaching and Reinders' (2010) eight autonomy aspects. The results showed that Japanese and Dutch elementary school teachers had common perceptions of

learner autonomy for six aspects (namely, freedom of choice, self-insight, self-expression, problem-solving, curiosity, and independence), which aligned with Admiraal et al.'s (2019) findings. However, unlike Dutch teachers, Japanese teachers lacked the awareness to foster students' responsibility for their learning. Teachers from both countries presented "collaborative group work" as a characteristic of their countries. However, Japanese teachers were likely to consolidate different opinions into one, whereas Dutch teachers were likely to respect different opinions. It was interpreted that these variations resulted in differences in how students developed their autonomy, influencing the difference in English proficiency. Although Japan and the Netherlands have different educational backgrounds and cultures, the goal for students to learn English is the same. Therefore, Japanese and Dutch teachers need to devise tailored methods for their country's contexts to help students learn English autonomously while increasing their motivation through dialogue at each learning stage.

Keywords: learner autonomy, elementary school, teachers' roles, Japan, the Netherlands