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Agents of change or products of compromise? How Japanese senior high school EFL textbooks (mis)represent foreign language curriculum reform

Gregory Paul GLASGOW

Daniel Leigh PALLER

1. Introduction

One unfortunate circumstance noted with respect to language-in-education planning (LEP) reform and materials development is that when ministries of education decree that a curriculum should change, textbooks do not (Garton & Graves, 2014). Central to the LEP implementation process is materials planning and development, in which textbooks, in theory, should be “consonant with the methodology, provide authentic language, and also be consonant with the expectations of teachers” (Liddicoat, 2004, p. 134). Liddicoat (2004) also suggests that for policy implementation to be able to be realized, a sufficient level of coherence between the four major goals of LEP implementation such as materials, methods, curriculum and assessment policy is necessary. This coherence might allow for curriculum policy, i.e. curricular goals and objectives, to be translated into materials policy and accurately represented in textbook content and activities.

The centrality of materials development in establishing coherence in the curriculum decision-making process was initially recognized by Johnson (1989), who suggested that coherence between stages of curriculum, policymaking is integral to implementation. Johnson’s perceptions of curriculum policymaking have influenced studies on LEP in China (Adamson & Davison, 2003; Tong, Adamson,

& Che, 2000; Adamson & Morris, 2007; Zhang & Adamson, 2007) in considering how materials reflect LEP, or how to conceptualize “slippage” between textbooks (or the *resourced curriculum*), curriculum policy (or *intended curriculum*) and teachers’ practices, (the *implemented curriculum*). For example, in the implementation of the Target Oriented Curriculum promoting task-based learning in Hong Kong primary schools in the 1990s, Tong, Adamson, and Che (2000) contended that the new curriculum goals were only moderately reflected in the English language textbook series, suggesting that “[p]ublishers have to resolve the tensions that arise between economic and curricular forces” (p. 150). Publishers also ensure sales by attempting to satisfy teachers who implement curriculum and by creating materials that will be “user-friendly” to them – or, minimally different from previous ones. This results from publishers making compromises between curriculum objectives and what they perceive to be teachers’ pedagogical skills.

As curriculum innovation and reform have been increasingly prevalent in the Asia-Pacific region, many governments have made efforts to revise their EFL curricula to promote communicative and task-based approaches by launching EFL in elementary schools, and increasing English as the main language of classroom instruction (Butler, 2011; Kaplan, Baldauf & Kamwangamalu, 2011; Nunan, 2003). Divergences in the extent to which textbook activities represent the goals and objectives of LEP as manifested in language curricula have arisen in the consistency and coherence with which textbooks validly represent policies that ministries of education wish to change, and this disconnect may account for issues concerning teacher agency at the local level such as in Vietnam (Nguyen, 2011), Hong Kong (Tong, Adamson, & Che, 2000), and Pakistan (Aftab, 2012). Therefore, the issue of how materials and curriculum planning intersect is at the heart of LEP reform, especially if teachers are expected to enact the new reforms.

Yet, the gap in Japan between the intended curriculum and the resourced curriculum remains a significant problem (see Glasgow & Paller, 2016; Gorsuch, 1999; Kobayakawa, 2011; McGroarty & Taguchi, 2006; Ogura, 2008) in pedagogy. Studies on ministry-approved speaking and listening textbooks found gaps between curriculum objectives and textbook contents. Ogura (2008), as well as McGroarty and Taguchi (2005), determined that in spite of educational ministry objectives to promote communicative competence through speaking and listening, the textbooks

for the subject *Oral Communication* predominantly included translation and mechanical exercises. In an analysis of textbooks for speaking and listening classes, Ogura (2008) found “cut and paste style dialogue practices” (p. 6) that did not promote spontaneous, open-ended communication. McGroarty and Taguchi (2005) similarly found textbooks in *Oral Communication A*, a speaking and listening course in the 1989 foreign language curriculum in Japan, lacked pragmatic information, overemphasizing structured and mechanical language practice instead. For writing courses, Kobayakawa (2011) examined writing activities in general four-skills English classes as well as writing classes in Japan and found an overemphasis on translation and controlled tasks, and less on open-ended activities for free composition. These studies, however, did not analyze how the textbooks aligned with specific goals represented in national policy guidelines.

This study considers the extent to which ministry-approved textbooks in Japan have represented and appropriated the guidelines of teaching for the EFL Course of Study (CoS) for Foreign Languages for senior high schools, implemented since 2013. Few studies have investigated, from a language policy translation standpoint (see Chua & Baldauf, 2011) the degree of coherence to be found between government-sanctioned teaching materials and the curriculum policies they are meant to represent. Therefore, we seek to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent do *English Expression I* ministry-approved textbooks validly represent objectives in the current *Course of Study*?
2. What do these results reveal about coherence in curriculum and materials policy in LEP?

Our study intends not only to contribute to research on textbooks in the current national curriculum in Japan, since very few systematic analyses of it have appeared in research literature. We also hope to contribute to theoretical perspectives on the complexities of materials creation at a time of curriculum change, especially as the 2020 *English Education Reform Plan Corresponding to Globalization* (MEXT, 2013) approaches, which is the latest comprehensive curriculum reform plan proposed by the Japanese Ministry of Education. Few studies have focused on how the materials planning process in LEP is reflected in the relationship between policy guidelines and textbook content. According to

Kennedy and Tomlinson (2013) methods and materials have not been viewed as “an integral part of language-in- education planning or causally linked to LPP decisions” (p. 260), hence our intention to point out potential problems that can ensue if methods, materials and LEP goals are not aligned.

2. Language Policy, Discourse and Recontextualization in Textbooks

In this study we recognize language policy as *texts* and language policy as *discourses* (Johnson, 2011) that are represented through text and talk. These discourses are intertextual and may or, may not, however, move consistently in a linear fashion. Policy messages, as discourses, become re-contextualized (see Wodak & Fairclough, 2010) as they move from one layer of formulation to the next, causing original policy messages to be reinterpreted and appropriated. Our interest is the recontextualization of discourses of “communication” pertaining to EFL teaching methodology in Japan, where turning classrooms into active communicative scenes is viewed to be priority. These discourses seek grammar to be de-emphasized but taught to support communicative purposes, and the cultivation of communication activities that take into consideration language function and language use situations according to the current national curriculum for foreign languages in senior high school (MEXT, 2011).

Regarding textbooks, as MEXT sets its guidelines at the level of macro policy, it devolves responsibility to publishers through the textbook authorization process. To fulfill this responsibility, a variety of local publishers ensure that proposals for textbooks meet MEXT guidelines and standards (McGroarty & Taguchi, 2005). Subsequently, textbooks that meet the guidelines are published and officially recognized in the curriculum. However, as LEP formulation moves from curriculum planning to materials planning, the policy messages become recontextualized, and may end up being ambiguous, or contradictory, especially if tensions remain between other policy subgoals such as assessment and methods policy (Liddicoat, 2004).

Some researchers have attempted to account for the recontextualization problem as materials planning moves from conceptualization to publication (Adamson & Davison, 2003; Kennedy and Tomlinson, 2013). This problem is especially acute in curriculum reform in English Language Teaching, as ministry directives call for

communicative approaches. One by-product of recontextualization is the creation of textbooks that fail to adopt the changes wholeheartedly. Kennedy and Tomlinson (2013) account for this problem by explaining possible causes of “slippage” between materials and curriculum planning such as 1) conflict between materials developers between “radical policies” and teacher perceptions; 2) contradictions in the materials when assessment planning (university entrance exams) purportedly conflicts with materials planning; 3) insufficient understanding by personnel in Ministries of Education who approve materials; 4) compromises sought by developers when curriculum planning is at variance with what is perceived as standard pedagogical practice amongst teachers. In the case of Japan, the *yakudoku* teaching method, which emphasizes translation and L1-L2 contrast, is a major aspect of pedagogical practice.

2.1 The Centrality of “Expression” in the Japanese Course of Study for Foreign Languages

The CoS for Foreign Languages is a national curriculum in Japan which contains goals and objectives for what subjects are to be taught, and is revised every 10 years. Japan’s current senior high school Course of Study for Foreign Languages, implemented since 2013 by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT hereinafter), emphasizes communication and the increased use of English in the classroom as a language of instruction. Two subjects created for the current curriculum, *English Expression I* and *II*, are designed to further achieve this goal by centering on speaking and writing and enhancing students’ critical thinking ability. Revisions to the CoS for senior high schools have already been proposed in 2018 and will be implemented from 2022 (McMurray, 2018). The 2018 CoS revisions have the new courses *Logic and Expression I, II and III* (MEXT, n.d.), as shown in Table 1 (in Section 2.2).

MEXT has been emphasizing reforms in foreign language curricula for senior high schools, recently promoting a more student-centered, communicative approach with EFL classes, to be conducted in English (MEXT, 2011; 2013). However, the delivery of the curriculum has been problematic due to difficulties Japanese teachers of English face implementing communicative activities using MEXT-approved textbooks (Cook, 2010; Kikuchi & Browne, 2009; O’Donnell, 2005). As the curriculum has already been in effect since April 2013, it is worth investigating

how its objectives are reflected in required textbooks, and the degree to which curriculum and textbook activities cohere. The emphasis of this study is on the textbooks related to the *English Expression* subject, which allow us to explore and address current issues regarding their publication that should be taken into consideration for the upcoming 2022 curriculum.

2.2 English Expression I: Objectives and Content

The English courses in the previous, current and newly proposed curricula (MEXT, n.d.; MEXT, 2011) are shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Subjects in the Course of Study for Foreign Languages

1999 Course of Study (implemented in 2003)	2009 Course of Study (implemented since 2013)	2018 Course of Study Proposal (to be implemented 2022)
Oral Communication I	English Communication I	English Communication I
Oral Communication II	English Communication II	English Communication II
English I	English Communication III	English Communication III
English II	English Expression I	Logic and Expression I
Reading	English Expression II	Logic and Expression II
Writing	English Conversation	Logic and Expression III

In creating course and subjects for the current national curriculum, Yoshida (2009) claims that MEXT emphasizes the development of Japanese students' higher-order thinking skills in all subjects, including English (Yoshida, 2009). Students are expected to develop abilities to present, debate and discuss a wide range of topics through speaking, and to develop their writing skills through review and revision, as reflected in the objectives for *English Expression I* in Article 2.III.1 of the CoS:

1. Objective: To develop students' abilities to **evaluate facts, opinions, etc. from multiple perspectives and communicate through reasoning and a range of expression**, while fostering a positive attitude toward communication through the English language (MEXT, 2011, p. 3, authors' emphasis in bold).

The focus on communicating *through reasoning* and *expression* is a key objective of this subject. Its contents are presented in Article 2.III.2:

2. Contents (1): The following language activities, designed for specific language-use situations in order to encourage students to **apply their abilities to understand and convey information, ideas, etc., should be conducted in English.**
 - A. **Impromptu speaking** on a given topic. **Speaking concisely** in a style suitable for the audience and purpose.
 - B. **Writing brief passages in a style suitable for the audience and purpose.**
 - C. **Summarizing and presenting information, ideas, etc.,** based on what one has heard, read, learned and experienced (MEXT, 2011, p. 3, authors' emphasis in bold)

The current curriculum also stresses that the points below be taken into consideration to ensure effective delivery:

- **Speaking with due attention to the characteristics of English sounds** such as rhythm and intonation, speed, volume, etc.
- **Writing with due attention to phrases and sentences** indicating the main points, connecting phrases, etc. and reviewing one's own writing.
- **Learning presentation methods**, expressions used in presentations, etc. and applying them to real-life situations.
- **Forming one's own opinion** by comparing what one has heard or read with opinions from other sources, and identifying similarities and differences. (MEXT, 2011, p. 3, authors' emphasis in bold).

In short, the objectives above suggest that speaking and writing skills be developed for students to communicate more spontaneously and in a manner appropriate to a variety of situations. To determine how the course objectives were translated into the textbooks, we examined them more closely in the next section.

3. Methods

3.1 Materials

A purposive, convenience sample of six out of the seventeen MEXT-approved textbooks for the subject *English Expression I* was acquired from publishers. Textbook selection was based on previous English textbook sales market share in

the previous curriculum, as indicated in a Sanseido Corporation (2009), a publishing company in Japan; the focus was on textbooks tending to have a larger market share. This consideration was made because, as Kennedy and Tomlinson (2013) noted, compromise may result from a textbook with a high market share being more conservative in representing intended curriculum reforms. The textbooks ranged in ranking by their market share to better represent the availability of materials to senior high school teachers and students. Five out of the six publishers produced textbooks under the same title for the previous curriculum, while one was selected since it was newly added to the roster of textbooks for the 2013-14 academic year. We refer to them as Textbooks A, B, C, D, E, and F¹.

3.2 Procedures

A two-stage, mixed methods approach was performed combining quantitative analysis of the amount of communicative activities and qualitative analysis of activity content. The provisional English version of the CoS (MEXT, 2011) available on MEXT's website was downloaded and analyzed for content, with *English Expression I* course goals examined in detail and cross-referenced with the activities in the textbooks. Then, both researchers performed a quantitative analysis of activities in the textbook's core units. Extra units often marked as "supplemental" or "optional" were not examined since teachers tend to skip them, and they are not required in the teaching manuals. Textbook units tended to move from structured activities to activities where students had to carry out communicative tasks, a standard progression following Richards (2005).

As per research question 1, we explored the connection between the representations of communication in the textbooks and the course's overall objectives. As stated, the course intends "to develop students' abilities to evaluate facts, opinions, etc. from multiple perspectives and communicate through reasoning and a range of expression, while fostering a positive attitude toward communication through the English language" (MEXT, 2011, p. 3). Therefore, we examined all textbook activities to determine how they reflected these broad aims. We considered a "textbook activity" as any instance where the textbook attempted to get the learner to do some exercise or task. At the same time, however, we intended to determine how the textbook's activities "developed students' abilities to communicate" by applying Richards' framework (2005): "mechanical practice," "meaningful

practice,” and “communicative practice.” Definitions for each are shown in Table 2:

Table 2: Types of Communicative Activities. (Richards, 2005, p. 16)

Mechanical Practice	Meaningful Practice	Communicative Practice
Refers to controlled practice activity, which students can successfully carry out without necessarily understanding the language they are using.	Refers to an activity where the language control is still provided but where students are required to make meaningful choices when carrying out practice.	Refers to an activity where practice in using language within a real communicative context is the focus, where real information is exchanged, and where the language is not totally predictable.

We utilized Richards’ (2005) framework to tally all textbook activities, gain a clearer picture of the nature of communicative activities in the textbooks, and determine how validly the textbook activities represented the objectives in the Course of Study for the course *English Expression I*. As both authors tallied and coded activities, we ensured inter-coder reliability, and the reliability coefficient was calculated as $r = 0.86$.

Next, we considered the textbooks’ alignment with the specific course objectives of *English Expression I* (communicating through reasoning and expression), and its content (impromptu speaking, writing for the audience and summarizing/presenting information). In other words, we determined how each textbook, based on the composition of their activities, reflected curriculum objectives. This information then allowed us to draw conclusions about the coherence of materials and curriculum policy. We also conducted qualitative content analysis on the textbooks by further exploring the layout of units, and how their activities reflected the contents and objectives of *English Expression I*.

4. Results

The results of the analysis of how the six *English Expressions I* textbooks aligned with course objectives are shown in Table 3. By further analyzing the activities in terms of each category of the Richards’ (2005) tripartite framework, we can gain a better sense of how much textbook contents can actively promote a positive attitude

toward communication:

Table 3. Results of analysis of communicativeness of textbook activities

Textbook	Mechanical Practice	Meaningful Practice	Communicative Practice
Textbook A	59 %	33 %	8 %
Textbook B	41 %	51 %	8 %
Textbook C	59 %	40 %	1 %
Textbook D	53 %	36 %	11 %
Textbook E	62 %	32 %	6 %
Textbook F	69 %	25 %	7 %

4.1 Mechanical Practice

The data shows that over fifty percent of the activities in all textbooks but Textbook B contained mechanical practice, which seems to initially contradict the intentions of the *English Expressions I* course objectives. Textbook F (69%) contained the highest percentage of activities, while Textbook B had a relatively lower percentage (41%) compared with the other textbooks. In Example 1, students correctly order words:

Example 1

Put the words in the right order and make answers to the questions:

- (1) Would you like some snacks?
- No, thank you. I (had, just, have, lunch).
- (2) Do you like to travel a lot, Keiko?
- Yes, I (to, have, seven countries, been).

Textbook E Lesson 7 (p. 23)

In this activity, students need some grammar knowledge, particularly the present perfect, but do not need to use these sentences in spoken or written communication in context. Similar activities were found in all six *English Expression I* textbooks, showing that mechanical activities still constitute a major proportion of these textbooks, with these activities being far from types that would encourage reasoning through communication using a range of expression.

4.2 Meaningful Practice

Textbooks ranged from 25 to 51 percent of meaningful practice activities. Textbook B contained the most (51%), while Textbook F contained the least (25%). The other four textbooks ranged between 30 and 40 percent. This suggests that “meaningful practice” may provide a safe space for textbook publishers to represent “communication” in a way that does not apparently differ from what teachers are used to. The following excerpt shows a meaningful practice activity from Textbook B where students converse about travel as fictitious characters “Mary” and “Takumi”. In step 2 of one of the unit activities, students are asked to write a text message from Mary to Takumi, but to do this they need to understand the conversation in step 1:

Example 2

STEP 2: A text message from Mary

Hi Takumi, (1) 私は今東京のバスツアーに両親と乗っているところです . This morning we went to Asakusa and Sky Tree. (2) 私たちは今皇居に向かって (head for) います . Later we will go to Roppongi Hills. I will send you some pictures. We are having a good time. (3) 私はこのツアーが好きです . It's exciting. I appreciate your suggestion. See you tomorrow. Mary

(Textbook B, p. 30)

The activity above could be considered meaningful, since the language is provided for the students in Japanese, which will then require them to convert that language into English while taking the situational information into account. Mary, on a bus tour, is reporting on her whereabouts, which would be helpful for the students to understand. The activity requires the students to convert the three numbered Japanese sentences above into English. The likely translations of the sentences are *I am on a Tokyo tour-bus with my parents* (sentence 1), *We are heading for the Imperial Palace* (sentence 2) and *I like this bus tour* (sentence 3).

However, arguably, students could just translate the sentences from English to Japanese, and not carry out the more challenging endeavor of completing the text by thinking in English of possible sentences to insert. This activity precludes the need for the students to draw on a wider range of expression to communicate as

stipulated in the course guidelines, especially if the Japanese sentences are provided for them. Many activities in Textbook B and other textbooks involved similar activities as in Example 2.

4.3 Communicative Practice

Despite the content and objectives of the *English Expression I* subject, we found that the six textbooks had a very limited number of communicative practice activities, or activities that align with the CoS. Textbook C, the most highly ranked textbook in terms of market share in the previous curriculum, provided the fewest communicative practice exercises, at a mere 1%, while Textbook D provided the most, at 11%. Both Textbook A and Textbook B were at 8%, Textbook F at 7%, and Textbook D was at 6%. Example 3 below shows one type of communicative practice activity we encountered. In this activity, there is an initially brief reading introducing the topic, “Wrong calls in sporting events”, or when referees make an unpopular judgment about a sports play. After the reading, the students must listen and answer two comprehension questions, followed by the communicative activity below. This activity is called *Real-World English* and is found at the end of Lesson 24:

Example 3

Let's Chat

Talk with your partner about wrong calls in international sporting events. -> Do you know what happened in the 2010 World Cup match between Germany and England?

(Textbook A, p. 111)

To conduct this activity, students need some topical knowledge. It is a prototypical example of communicative practice, usually accompanied with a prompt that encourages the learners to use *their* language and not language provided for them to carry out the task. They would be independently expected to come up with a range of expressions to logically express their ideas. However, it was striking that these activities were in the minority despite ministry directives to communicate through reasoning and a range of expression. Therefore, the analysis of the six textbooks suggests that in general, the textbook developers still tend to make “safe” choices in how to represent activities focusing on productive skills. Considering the

objectives in the Course of Study for *English Expression I*, “to develop students’ abilities to evaluate facts, opinions, etc. from multiple perspectives and communicate through reasoning and a range of expression, while fostering a positive attitude toward communication through the English language” (MEXT, 2011, p. 3), it was difficult to find coherence between curriculum planning decisions and the results of MEXT’s materials planning efforts. This shows the uneven nature in which the curriculum objectives espoused by MEXT are translated into the ministry-approved textbooks selected in this study.

The selected textbooks for this study diverged widely in how they align with the more specific course goals and objectives for *English Expression I*. They generally did not offer students the chance to speak in an impromptu manner, or produce language spontaneously, due to the overemphasis on mechanical practice. To be sure, while exercises on presenting and summarizing information were present in most the textbooks, they were often placed at the very end of a regular unit, or in optional supplemental lessons. Table 4 provides an overview of how core objectives were represented:

Table 4. Alignment of *English Expression I* Course Objectives with Textbook Activities

Textbook	Impromptu Speaking in accordance with audience/purpose	Writing passages in accordance with audience/purpose	Summarizing/ Presenting
Textbook A	+	+	+
Textbook B	-	+	+
Textbook C	-	-	+
Textbook D	-	+	+
Textbook E	-	+	+
Textbook F	+	-	+

+ = Evident, - = Absent

Table 4 suggests that the *English Expression I* objectives of summarizing and presenting were translated into textbook activities, but not impromptu speaking. Writing in accordance with situation and purpose, on the other hand, was better represented across our corpus of textbooks. However, as stated, the proportion of

these activities was small in comparison to more structural, discrete-point, mechanical activities. The writing activities were often controlled similarly to what Kobayakawa (2011) had found, rather than encouraging, drafting, revising and composing, all practices essential to allowing students to develop their skills in the process of second language writing.

In summary, despite the goals of the *English Expression I* course, all textbooks in this study tended to contain a disproportionate amount of mechanical grammar and vocabulary exercises, and fewer meaningful and communicative activities to develop students' independent, impromptu speaking and writing skills. To be sure, this is not to discredit the value of doing grammar exercises. However, the frequency of such exercises *in spite of* course intentions to improve students' communicative skills is problematic at the delivery stage, and serves as another example of incongruence between materials developed and language-in-education policies proposed.

5. Discussion

Taking into consideration both the qualitative and quantitative data, we consider each of the two research questions in detail. First, concerning the degree to which ministry-approved *English Expression I* textbooks validly represent objectives in the current *Course of Study*, we determined that curriculum objectives tended to be re-contextualized to make them 'manageable' for teachers, thereby compromising between their perceptions of classroom realities and curricular reform goals, and filtering the original message of the Japanese Ministry of Education. Grammatical exercises and those that required students to manipulate or substitute information at the sentence level predominated, as seen in the analysis of the results showing the dominance of mechanical activities. Some activities may provide the option for meaningful practice but "play it safe" in how much autonomy students can be given in completing the task, as seen in the example in the Results section.

Also, it was clear that most of the textbooks *did not* provide ample opportunities for students to develop their 'impromptu speaking skills', though this objective was explicitly stated in the CoS, a possible example of uncoordinated implementation. The *Let's Chat* example mentioned previously is one of very few activities we found that give students opportunities for communicative practice, even though the

curriculum stipulates that this is the sanctioned approach. As stated, radical policies may result in teacher resistance, and could potentially affect textbook sales, so textbook writers may display conservatism in materials development; this conservatism could reflect their desire to maintain a high position in market share.

Nevertheless, it would be presumptuous to attribute this solely to individual beliefs of textbook writers. Kennedy and Tomlinson (2013) suggested that textbook writers themselves are caught between fully translating the objectives as stipulated by the national curriculum and their own perceptions of *teachers'* knowledge about language. The fact that the textbook activities tended not to stray far from exercise types generally familiar to many teachers is an example of how the writers engage in re-contextualizing and reformulating discourses, where “English Expressions” activities that represent “communication” articulated in the policy texts are reimagined as mostly hybrid tasks. This must be taken into consideration since many of the authors themselves are English language educators, and may subconsciously create these alternative perceptions of communicative activities rather than activities that are a valid representation of the goals of *English Expression I*.

The divergence in interpretations can be detected particularly in how speaking and writing skills are represented across all the textbooks in representing the reformed curriculum. With respect to writing, Textbook A units give students opportunity to understand the audience as well as their writing goal. The tasks require students to draw on linguistic resources. However, in other textbooks, the representation of writing for communicative purposes was reduced to work at the sentential level, where fill-in-the blank and translation exercises predominated; writing exercises did offer students a purpose and an audience, but provided them with a template to complete and suggested what grammar points to use (Textbook E).

With respect to speaking, in other textbooks (Textbook D), students were just provided with a speaking template to repeat or fill in with their own phrases. This shows that communicative practice activities allowing for free, open-ended expression in speaking or writing are still underrepresented in textbooks that still privileges syntax and grammar practice. In part this is due to the assessment policy in Japan (university entrance exams) still assessing linguistic and not

communicative competence, as would be required to reflect the curriculum policy. Therefore, “communication” as intended by MEXT is re-contextualized into a hybrid form of exercise/tasks that do not provide the types of opportunities for deeper engagement in communication through logical development of ideas.

The pervasive influence of the assessment policy (university entrance exam) inevitably has an influence on the extent to which textbook writers have the agency to make a clear connection between content and curriculum objectives. While some textbooks made a concerted effort to intersperse units with more speaking activities, others tended to save them for the end of the unit and failed to provide speaking activities reflecting communicative practice. As for writing, activities were generally at the sentential level, providing the chance to compose according to the situation or purpose according to the curriculum guidelines, but not providing students with autonomy when doing so – this suggests that grammar competence is the *de facto* focus of the curriculum.

As a result, the notion of “communication” provided in the textbooks is inconsistent, revealing disconnects as noted by previous authors (McGroarty & Taguchi, 2005; Ogura, 2008). For example, in Textbook A, grammatical points were connected to their communicative purposes (e.g., using “may I” to make requests) and scaffolded the activities to prepare the students for the final task, consisting of open-ended speaking and writing activities. In contrast, Textbook C had a predominant emphasis on mechanical exercises, with a speaking task that did not encourage impromptu interaction. Nor did it have any writing activities that allowed students to produce their own ideas based on writing prompts. This was also the case in sections of Textbook C intending to focus on speaking, which contained virtually no communicative practice activities encouraging students to come up with their own language.

In Textbook F, while the grammar exercises contained sentences related to the topic, the later stages of the unit were not able to expand on these sentences to support students speaking and writing for particular purposes. Exercises and sections designed to support students’ ability to develop speeches, presentations and write paragraphs are found in supplementary sections of the textbook rather than in the main units. In sum, the content and objectives of the *English Expression*

I subject varied substantially amongst the textbooks in terms of how they were represented in the activities of a unit. This indicates that publishers are key stakeholders in the language-in-education policy representation process, and that it can be challenging to translate objectives of a course that has not been taught before in consistent ways among textbooks, and congruent with the curriculum policy.

Regarding the second research question, the results reveal that maintaining coherence between curriculum and materials planning in LEP is an acute problem that needs to be addressed more carefully by stakeholders in the process. Hopefully this problem can be tackled more forcefully as the 2020 curriculum reforms approach. Recurring tendencies to represent change as moderate end up reinforcing status-quo pedagogical practice. As this study shows, with respect to the representation of the objectives and content of *English Expression I* in textbook activities, the alignment of the materials policy with the curriculum policy was moderate, with an uneven representation of speaking and writing activities in the textbooks as had been articulated in the *Course of Study*. Engaging students to speak in EFL classrooms is a challenging endeavor, especially when considering class sizes, teacher proficiency and student aptitude (Butler, 2011). Therefore, this discrepancy implies that by reinforcing *de facto* pedagogical practice through incorporating familiar, mechanical practice activities, change may end up being subverted rather than promoted. Indeed, discrepancies between textbooks and ministry of education discourse have been documented extensively in the research literature in EFL in Japan, as pointed out previously.

Therefore, unless professional development at the pre-service and in-service level attempts to account for these gaps, little will change in terms of how teachers respond to policy representation through textbooks. By empowering teachers with more critical awareness of the connection between pedagogy and policy from the perspective of textbooks, teachers may be able to choose books that are most aligned with the new curriculum. A further challenge is how to empower textbook writers to represent curricular changes more validly, and then ensure that writers are equipped with the tools to translate intended practices to the local level, where teachers can adopt them in an informed manner. Those responsible for conceptualizing changes will need to engage in further discussion and consultation

with materials writers to ensure consistency.

Materials writers in turn will need to develop a consistent understanding of communication in textbook activities that reflects the intentions at the macro-level. Overall, as Johnson (1989) has suggested, effective feedback loops need to be incorporated into the system to allow for resolution of discrepancies between objectives and textbook content. Lastly, teacher education programs, both pre-service and in-service, will need to support teachers more in understanding their roles as applied to materials creation and development (see McGrath, 2013). Further efforts in professional development that support teachers in utilizing textbooks in a communicative manner need to be prioritized.

6. Conclusion

This study has investigated issues in coherence – or lack thereof – that may exist between the sub-goals of curriculum and materials planning in LEP, using Japanese MEXT-approved textbooks of the subject, *English Expression I*, as evidence. It highlights potential problems when the objectives of a nationally mandated EFL curriculum to promote communication are re-contextualized in the form of textbook activities that fail to represent ministerial perceptions of “communication”, and ultimately to promote significant change in pedagogy. Our data suggests a divergence of interpretations in how speaking and writing activities in new textbooks reflect the curriculum, and the overemphasis on mechanical activities may not align teachers’ practices sufficiently with course intentions. This study hopefully provides a more detailed understanding of the complexities in translating policy sub-goals into materials creation. It highlights the question of how “policy [can be] reconciled with pragmatic constraints” (Johnson, 1989, p. 23) coherently in Japan.

Our results suggest that those responsible for approving *English Expression I* textbooks may have views of “communication” which does not mesh with the consensus in the TESOL field, resulting in re-contextualization of activities which do not fully reflect course aims. Textbooks, therefore, become “products of compromise” instead of agents of change. To be sure, it is reasonable for there to be divergences between publishers for a new course. However, the uneven manner in which it seems to have been done, as shown in the analysis of the six textbooks,

has the potential to lead to inconsistencies in how teachers interpret the course, and thus will have potentially negative consequences for the outcomes intended for the course as a whole. All actors in the LEP process—policy makers, curriculum and textbook writers, teacher trainers and teachers—need to work in a coordinated fashion to ensure that teachers can confidently exercise agency when using new textbooks. The most recent *2020 English Education Reform Plan Corresponding to Globalization* (MEXT, 2013), including the 2022 senior high school curriculum revisions, will cease to have significant impact and continue to reinforce the status quo if this issue continues to be skirted.

Finally, since the curriculum requires that classes be conducted in English, textbooks ought to contain more English metalanguage. This was not the case for the textbooks examined in this study; all differed with respect to the amount of English. Further studies should investigate how the *language* of the target language in textbooks contributes to proficiency. Longitudinal studies should also be conducted to discern teachers' attitudes towards textbooks. Textbook writers and publishers should be interviewed to determine motivations for creating units and activities. Student opinions and attitudes should also be investigated. Though it is often stated that teachers are the key agents in filtering or modifying the information in a textbook to make the input salient to learners, the textbook *itself* can be considered a change agent, having a significant effect on what teachers actually *do* in the classroom in an era of methodological reform.

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Abstract

One key issue in materials development and language-in-education policy (LEP) that has received little attention in the research literature is the degree to which content and activities of textbooks represent proposed reforms in English education curricula. Conceptualizing language policy as recontextualization through texts and discourses (Johnson, 2011), the current study explores the tension between curriculum and materials planning in a Japanese high school EFL subject. It determines the extent to which the subject's goals objectives are reflected in the content and activities of its textbooks. Findings revealed inconsistencies in translation of reform objectives into activities across several textbooks, which may have implications in terms of consistency in curriculum delivery.

Keywords: language education policy, materials development, curriculum reform, Japan, English language teaching

¹ NOTE:

The six textbooks used in this study were as follows:

Ichikawa, Y., Shiokawa, H., Ishii, Y., Takahashi, K., Tanabashi, M., Hagino, S., et al. (2012). *Unicorn: English Expression I*. Tokyo: Bun-Eido Press.

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