

Foreign Language Activities at Elementary School

-Correlation between Team-Teaching Patterns and Pupils' Performances-

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Abstract

This study investigates the correlation between team-teaching by Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) and Homeroom Teacher (HRT) and pupils' performances in foreign language. As the introduction of Foreign Language Activities into elementary school, both team-teaching style by ALT and HRT and pupils' outcomes through lessons have been in discussion. At this moment, however, the uniformed team-teaching patterns during the classes have not been decided, and the specific skills and abilities that pupils ought to gain during the classes have not been reported clearly by Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). Therefore HRTs participate in the classes in their own ways, and pupils do not have tests that measure their skills and abilities. The goal of this study is to see the correlation between team-teaching patterns and pupils' performances, and so questionnaire survey to HRTs and pre- and post- interviews with pupils in English are conducted at elementary schools in Japan.

Questionnaire survey puts focus on HRTs' participation patterns during Foreign Language Activities. It has been reported that there are basically four participation patterns of HRTs: Bystander, Translator, Co-learner, and Co-teacher. This questionnaire shows the HRTs' tendencies in terms of these participation patterns.

Keywords

Foreign Language Activities, elementary school, team-teaching, performances

Introduction

Since April in 2011, Foreign Language Activities have started at elementary school for the fifth and sixth grades. These pupils are now taking English classes once a week, totaling thirty-five lessons in a year. Considering that they will learn English at junior high and high school, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has decided that elementary school also introduces English as foreign language. One of the biggest

reasons of English introduction into the elementary schools is the rapid spread of globalization. Now people can easily get information concerning about other foreign countries and also they are more likely to go and visit abroad. It has been thought that this globalization trend will continue to spread further, and people living in the next generation in Japan cannot live without having mutual relationship with people in foreign countries, particularly in Asian countries. Therefore they are required to improve communication skills in foreign languages and raise international understandings. Though Japan lags behind other countries in foreign language introduction into elementary school, finally Foreign Language Activities has started in full swing.

As an overall objective of this activity, MEXT mentions that this aims "To form the foundation of pupils' communication abilities through foreign languages while developing the understanding of languages and cultures through various experiences, fostering a positive attitude toward communication, and familiarizing pupils with the sounds and basic expressions of foreign languages. (Chapter 4 Foreign Language Activities, elementary school, Courses of Study, MEXT)" What is significant here is that MEXT emphasizes the importance of forming the foundation and fostering the positive attitudes toward communication at elementary school level. Thus MEXT uses the word Foreign Language Activities instead of using Foreign Language Learning as the course name. This means that pupils are not taught the front-loading contents of junior high school, but they experience the various kinds of activities such as singing songs, expressing likes and dislikes, and interactions among pupils and teachers in English during the class. They have a lot of fun and acquire communication abilities in English at the same time.

These activities are conducted by two teachers, Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) and Homeroom Teacher (HRT). Most of ALTs are the native speakers of English and more than half of

them are from the United States. The statistics show that the total number of ALTs in 2010 is 3,974, and they participate in classes at elementary, junior high, or high school (The JET PROGRAMME official homepage). In principle, team-teaching among ALT and HRT is the main teaching style for Foreign Language Activities, but the way of cooperation varies in each school, and even each teacher. In this study, the team-teaching patterns among ALT and HRT are analyzed by putting focus on HRT's participation patterns. Also the correlation between team-teaching patterns and pupils' performances (abilities to use language in context) will be investigated in the future studies.

1 Literature Review

1.1 Study by Aline and Hosoda

Aline and Hosoda (2006) have researched team-teaching patterns of HRTs in Foreign Language Activities at elementary school. According to the research, there are four participation patterns of HRTs: Bystander, Translator, Co-learner, and Co-teacher.

1.1.1 Four participation patterns

First, Bystander participation pattern tends to observe pupils carefully if they can concentrate on the classes or understand correctly what ALT says, and refrain from making a position in a main sequence of teachers. They are likely to stand at side or back of the classroom and play a role of management of classroom.

Second, Translator participation pattern literally is apt to translate what ALT says in English into Japanese to make pupils understand. When pupils struggle to understand in English or ALT find it difficult to convey his/her messages in English, they use Japanese and play a facilitating role of class.

Third, Co-learner participation pattern shows the similar way of being a language learner to pupils. HRT and pupils are the same in that they are native speaker of Japanese and learners of English. Therefore they actively participate in the classes by answering ALT's questions or singing songs together, and play a role of good model of language learner.

Fourth, Co-teacher participation pattern is inclined to put him/her in a main sequence of teachers and offer activities to pupils with ALT. They stand on the platform as ALT, and sometimes they ask pupils questions, summons them, and are in charge of opening and closing sessions in English.

1.1.2 HRTs' tendencies

These four participation patterns have clearly different roles, and HRTs do not necessarily play the same participation patterns during the whole class. Depending on the situations, they change the participation patterns. However, there is a strong possibility that HRTs have their own tendencies of these participations patterns, and the way of getting involved with certain activities can be different among HRTs.

1.2 Study by MARTIN

Martin (2011) has conducted the pilot research for developing EFL oral communication test at Japanese elementary school. Martin focused on pupils' language proficiency and adopted the rubric to measure it. The rubric consists of three categories: communicative competence, vocabulary/syntax, and interactional competence.

1.2.1 Oral communication test for pupils

The oral communication test is run among one pupil and one rater for five minutes. During the test, they use photographs that both of them bring as a tool for having some conversations in English. Two friends or families have to be in the photographs. In this test, pupils explain the detail of their photos such as location or date, answer the questions which rater ask them about photos, and talk about rater's photo relying on what they listen to. Through these steps, pupils' language proficiency is measured by rater.

The point is that photographs enable pupils to have conversations in English relatively easily, because they have relation with the contents of their photos. Thus this oral communication test aims to have active interactions among pupils and rater.

1.2.2 The rubric

As the rubric to measure the pupils' language proficiency, Martin sees it from three aspects: communicative competence, vocabulary/syntax, and interactional competence. Each of factors have the scores from 1 to 4, and 12 is the highest score in this test.

Communicative competence assesses how much pupils can share the information of photographs with rater. Vocabulary/syntax put focus on how much varieties of vocabulary/syntax pupils can display to share the information. Interactional competence reflects how much pupils can respond to the rater appropriately and can initiate the conversations. These three factors have been measured throughout the oral communication test.

2 Methodology

In this study, the HRTs' participation patterns during the Foreign Language Activities are investigated with the questionnaire survey.

2.1 Questionnaire survey to HRTs

In order to see the HRTs' tendencies of participation patterns during the Foreign Language Activities, questionnaire survey is conducted among HRTs. As appendix 1 shows below, all of the questions from 1 to 16 adopt Likert-scale rating (1 to 5). Also each of questions expresses one of the four participation patterns: Bystander (1 to 4), Translator (5 to 8), Co-learner (9 to 12), and Co-teacher (13 to 16). Therefore, HRTs' participation patterns are seen by the results.

Now ten HRTs, 5 for the fifth and 5 for the sixth grades, are in the act of taking this questionnaire survey. HRTs belonging to two different elementary schools are answering the questions. ALT in one elementary school is not able to speak Japanese, and ALT in the other elementary school is able to speak Japanese. Therefore there is a possibility that the participation patterns of HRTs are different between two elementary schools, because the Japanese skills of ALTs are different. Taking account of this different situation, HRTs' tendencies are analyzed. In future studies, more HRTs in other elementary schools will take this questionnaire survey.

3 Future Studies

In the future studies, the improvement of pupils' performances in foreign language will be analyzed by having pre- and post- interviews in English in the interval of six months. Interviews will measure the oral communication proficiency with certain rubric. In these interviews, the similar kinds of tests which Martin (2011) conducted in his research will be incorporated. Therefore pupils will talk about themselves, answer the questions which test-rater will ask, and explain what they listen to about test-rater.

After conducting pre- and post- interviews, HRTs' participation patterns during Foreign Language Activities which the questionnaire shows and the pupils' scores of oral communication interviews will be compared. Depending on the HRTs' participation patterns, the differences of improvements of pupils' performances will be found, and the effective participation patterns of HRTs will be suggested.

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Appendix 1

This is one part of the questionnaire which asks HRTs their participation patterns during Foreign Language Activities.

These 16 items listed below indicate participation patterns during Foreign Language Activities concretely. Using Likert-scale rating (1 to 5), you make a circle on the numbers which describes your participation patterns the most in each item.

1. Standing at the side or back of the classroom, you observe pupils if they can understand correctly.
2. You do not speak so much during the class to offer pupils most of the time sharing with ALT.
3. To make the class proceed smoothly, you keep an eye to each pupil and create a safe learning environment for them.
4. The model of English is ALT, and so you never speak in English during the class.
5. When you find the English expressions that ALT uses difficult, you translate them into Japanese and tell pupils in easy way.
6. When ALT feels hard to move forward the class, you speak in Japanese for another to pupils.
7. You translate in each explanation about the activities such as songs or games made by ALT in English into Japanese.
8. When pupils say 'I don't understand.' You explain in Japanese without using some gestures or simple English.
9. You actively participate in class as a good model of language learner for pupils.

10. In the activity of pronunciation practice of English following after ALT, you also participate in it as pupils.
11. When pupils feel difficult to answer the questions, you show them some examples of answers.
12. In the activity of singing songs, you also participate in it as pupils.
13. You are in charge of opening and closing sessions instead of ALT.
14. Standing in front of pupils as ALT, you summon pupils instead of ALT.
15. You communicate with pupils in English and ask them questions in English as ALT.
16. You offer the activities such as songs or games to pupils as ALTs.