

Issues in the Effectiveness of Early Exposure to Learning English in an EFL Environment

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ABSTRACT

Since the Olympic Games will be held in Tokyo in 2020, there has been a growing interest not only in incorporating English in schools' curricula but also in exposure to learning English from a younger age. In this paper, the author will discuss issues regarding early exposure to learning English from a Second Language Acquisition (SLA) point of view. This paper attempts to show the necessary ideas that need to be understood when making good decisions about English education in an EFL environment.

INTRODUCTION

In second language acquisition (SLA) research, studies have focused on different areas such as language aptitude, age, and motivation. Within SLA research, a significant concern has been ultimate attainment or rate of acquisition. Birdsong (2006) states ultimate attainment is "the final product of second language acquisition (L2A), whether this be nativelike attainment or any other outcome" (p. 11). Consideration of the outcomes and what makes people learn language faster seems to be important in language learning. The study of Krashen, Long, and Scarcella (1979) suggested that although older language learners have an initial advantage over younger language learners, in the long run, younger learners have a

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tendency of achieving higher levels of success than older language learners. In 1992, research conducted by Hyltenstam showed that around the age of six or seven seemed to be a cut-off point for bilinguals to achieve native-like proficiency. Later, Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson (2003) argued that in general, after childhood, it becomes more difficult to acquire native-like-ness, but that there is no cut-off-point in particular. Their study also shows successful cases of L2 acquisition in adulthood.

In Japan there is a growing pressure to learn English to be a member of a globalized country. Companies are trying to use English inside and outside of the office in order to become globalized companies. At the same time great interest towards early English education is playing a big role in Japanese education. A questionnaire was conducted by MEXT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology) to 31,914 students in 123 public elementary schools in Japan in 2010. The subjects were grade 1 (6 years old) to grade 6 (12 years old). According to this questionnaire in 2009 to 2010, 83% of the students answered that they want to have competent knowledge of English. Also 90% of the students answered that English is important. The problem is whether English education should be implemented in early grades or not.

In fact, many parents are putting their children in English speaking environments, such as English conversation schools for small children (*Eikaiwakyoushitsu*) at an early age. This is because parents want their child to be able to speak English or to become bilinguals. Parents and society seem to believe that children will acquire English better if they start learning English at an earlier age. Early exposure to learning English seems to be a social trend. At the same time there is global and social pressure for Japanese to learn English so that children can live as a member of a global society in the future.

Recently, a TV commercial of an English conversation school for children showed the necessity of early English education. In this commercial, a girl says, "I can do it!" again and again with perfect pronunciation. This commercial is an example of the manifestation of the beliefs that exist about the needs and benefits of early exposure to learning English in an EFL environment. It gives the image that if your child starts learning English at a young age, he or she will be able to use English and say words such as "I can do it!". Thus this commercial is very effective for those people who want their child to be a competent speaker of English and who are feeling pressure to learn English as well.

Nowadays the number of children with early exposure to English seems to be increasing. Due to the bankruptcy of one of the big English conversation schools in 2007, the market of English conversation schools for adults has shrunk, but the market for schools teaching younger children is increasing. Sato (2012), a school consultant, mentions that there are still more than 10,000 English conversation schools across the country. However, in fact, when looking at the results of TOEFL score, according to ETS (Educational Testing Service),

the average score of Japanese students is 103rd out of 113 countries in 2010. If compared with Asian countries, Japan is 27th out of 30 countries.

In 2011, MEXT started to try to increase the numbers of English classes in public elementary schools. According to MEXT national curriculum for English 2011, English has become an obligatory class for grade 5 (10 to 11 years old) and 6 (11 to 12 years old). Though English class has been an obligatory class, it is only a one hour per week lesson.

However, at the same time there are children who have successfully attained English with late exposure to English. Otsu (2007) argues, “It is said that early exposure and English education in elementary school is necessary based on the theory of CPH (Critical Period Hypothesis) but there is no evidence for this in foreign language acquisition yet”(p. 77). Otsu also adds that, “even if students start English from junior high schools there are many examples that the students have acquired English at a high level if they were taught effectively and in the correct method” (2007, p.77).

Through these studies, the idea that early exposure is not always the most effective stage for learning English in an EFL environment comes up. When focusing from an age perspective, some results show that after puberty is preferable in acquisition of L2. On the other hand, when focusing on native-like-ness, pronunciation or performance, the results show that younger starters do better. Since the research of Oller, Jr. and Nagato (1974) was done in just one school, the determination that early exposure has no evidence in EFL still raises questions about whether treatments done in two or three 40-minute classes per week are effective or not. For example, if the classes were not 120 minutes per week or were 180 minutes, then they may have shown a different result. Or, if the classroom settings were different, such as the number of students in each class, it may have shown another result. Moreover the research has largely been done in an ESL environment. Since the effectiveness is often influenced by the first language of the learners, consideration of the connection between first language and second language is necessary in such research.

This paper seeks to explore whether early exposure to learning English in an EFL environment will produce desired outcomes and whether it is cost effective. The main focus of the discussion will be based on issues from these two perspectives. First the paper examines the learning issues that exist in relation to ultimate attainment and the rate of acquisition. Next, the paper discusses policy issues that surround young learners. Finally, this paper will conclude with the necessary suggestions and ideas that need to be understood when making good decisions about English education in an EFL environment.

ISSUES IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Now when focusing on issues from learning perspectives, issues can be considered from two main points. These points are ultimate attainment and rate of acquisition. As Birdsong (2006) mentions, the issues have been discussed for more than 30 years and still have not reached an accurate answer. However teachers and learners need to know these issues to guide students to effective learning stages.

Ultimate Attainment

When thinking about whether earlier exposure is better or not, it seems that it is important to think about the ultimate level of success. A great deal of research has focused on ultimate attainment. It has been commonly said that “younger is better”. In fact many people believe in this idea. However later research shows that there are exceptions that younger is not always better. Krashen, Long, and Scarcella (1979) state that, “One popular belief about second language acquisition is that younger-is-better, that younger acquirers are better at second language acquisition than older acquirers”(p. 573). However, there is controversy within the research, such as, “certain research reports claim to counter this early sensitivity hypothesis; several of these papers imply that the literature on age and language acquisition is inconsistent, some showing older, others showing younger performers to be superior”(Krashen, Long,&Scarcella, 1979, p.573). Through the research Krashen, Long, and Scarcella (1979) found consistency among three generalizations; in short, older is faster and younger is better. They add that adults proceed through early stages of syntactic and morphological development faster than children, older children acquire faster than younger children, and that acquirers who begin natural exposure to second languages during childhood generally achieve higher second language proficiency than those beginning as adults. Brown and Larson-Hall (2012) also discuss ultimate attainment. Here they say that, “But are children better learners in the long run than adults? The answer here is a clear yes, given some certain circumstances”(p. 12). Also, King and Mackey (2007) point out the dominance of younger children that they can catch up and reach higher levels when considered in ultimate level. However, it is necessary to consider that there are so many circumstances in learning English. Starting at a younger age is effective, however every student has different circumstances. For instance, besides their English classes at schools, the amount of time using English outside the classroom also plays an important role. It makes for a great difference between students with non-native English speaking parents and students with native English speaking parents. If parents are non-natives, the student will have few

hours of exposure to English in a week. On the other hand, if one of the parents is a native speaker of English, the student will have the chance of exposure to English and at the same time their chances to use English will expand.

Even though the amount of exposure will play an important role in language acquisition another research shows that this cannot be applied to all learners. By looking at the research of age constraints on second-language acquisition done by Flege, Yeni-Komshian, and Liu (1999), Brown and Larson-Hall comment that, “in a context with massive amounts of exposure to a language, children will generally end up with more native-like abilities in a language than adults” (Brown & Larson-Hall, 2012, p.19). However Brown and Larson-Hall add, “this result does not mean that in all types of situations children will be better language learners than adults”(p.19).

Singleton (2003) also discusses the critical period and the general age factor. Singleton reports that younger is better cannot be applied to all learners. He says the “younger=better in the long run view is valid only in terms of a general tendency” (Singleton, 2003, p.15). Also he answers about the issue of the existence or non-existence of a cut-off point such that would normally be associated with a critical period. He states “any decline in L2-learning capacity with age is not in the nature of a sharp cut-off but something rather more continuous and linear, which, again, is not in keeping with the usual understanding of the notion of critical period” (Singleton, 2003, p. 16).

Brown and Larson-Hall (2012) introduce research which also supports the idea that younger is not always better. This research is about the brains of London taxi drivers done by Macquire et al. (2000). The study found out that the size of hippocampus, where spatial information is stored, was substantially larger in London taxi drivers than in the normal population. Since the drivers presumably learned this information about the roadways of London as adults, it showed that adults’ brains are plastic enough to grow. The findings from this study suggests that it is not necessary to be strictly sensitive about early exposure because our brain still has the potential for learning new things even as we get older. Also as Singleton (2003) stated, one must realize that there are circumstances that do not follow general tendencies. It is important to not misunderstand a “general tendency” as referring to “all” cases. The limitations of the studies and the findings make it difficult to generalize these ideas.

Focusing on the situation in Japan, since MEXT is trying to add English classes to public elementary schools as an obligatory class, there are many people trying to start learning English at an early age. There also seems to be a belief that the younger is better in Japanese environment. It is understandable from the course of study of MEXT (2008) that MEXT is trying to promote English education in Japan to catch up with a globalized society. This change seems to offer equal opportunity for learners to acquire English. However, Otsu

(2007) argues that we need not start learning English in elementary schools.

From the ultimate attainment point of view, as we can understand from Krashen, Long and Scarcella (1979), older is faster and younger is better. However, it seems that even if younger starters are better, it is not applicable if they are not given the right conditions. In other words, even after puberty, if given the right conditions and right amount of time with guided instruction, older starters can acquire language effectively. Therefore it seems that it is important not to state decisively that if learners start late, older learners cannot acquire language to a similar level of proficiency as younger learners.

Rate of Acquisition

Another consideration necessary in learning issues is rate of acquisition. Some studies show that if adults have controlled amount of exposure, adults outperform children. On the other hand, some studies show that the advantage of older learners is in the short term. Oliver (2009) conducted a study on the negotiation of meaning and feedback in children. The results of this research found out that the way younger learners approach language tasks needs to be considered in instruction. Oliver (2009) states the danger of assuming younger second language learners will interact in the same way as older children. Especially in terms of their psychological, social, emotional, and physical development, children under the age of eight are vastly different from those who have already entered their middle childhood years. Moreover, even in the level of first language acquisition, it is clear that children aged five to seven are different beings from an older cohort of children.

Indeed, when looking at children from L1 acquisition or other subjects' point of view, there are so many individual variations. Their cognitive maturity levels differ so much. Some understand why they are studying and know the goals for studying as well. Also those children understand why the questions are asked when answering the questions. However, other children just do what they are told. Those children are not at the level of understanding the aim of the question. If a child is in such stage of acquiring L1, it seems that we might consider of appropriate timing of exposure to L2 for each individual because the readiness towards L2 depends on the child's cognitive maturity. Lightbown and Spada (1999) mention that, "All second language learners, regardless of age, have definitely already acquired at least one language. This prior knowledge may be an advantage in the sense that the learner has an idea of how languages work" (p. 32). Also Lightbown and Spada (1999) add that a "first language learner does not have the same cognitive maturity, metalinguistic awareness, or world knowledge as older second language learners" (p. 33).

In another study, Munoz (2006) investigated age and L2 acquisition, in Barcelona, Spain. In the project called Barcelona Age Factor (BAF) Project, students from state schools

in Catalonia (Spain) whose first foreign language is English were examined. The subjects were divided into four groups based on the age of onset: 8 years old, 11 years old, 14 years old, and 18 years old and up. Several tests such as cloze test and dictation were used in BAF. The result showed that in most tests the group with the age of onset 14 years old and also 18 years old and up to be improving much faster than the early starters. Munoz (2006) adds that “this study has suggested that age differences in a foreign language context favour older learners in the short term due to their superior cognitive development and probably to the advantages provided by explicit learning mechanisms, which also develop with age” (Munoz, 2006, p.33). Although it is not applicable to all learners, given individual variations the results from this study found that older learners outperformed younger learners.

Another result was found in Snow and Hoefnagel-Hohle (1978). This research was made to English speakers who were trying to acquire Dutch. The result showed that the fastest second language acquisition occurred in subjects aged 12-15 years, and the slowest occurred in subjects 3-5 years. The researchers found that “the result represented positive transfer from the first language, English, to the second language Dutch. Older second language learners would, of course benefit from more positive transfer than younger ones because their knowledge of English is better” (Snow & Hoefnagel-Hohle, 1978, p.1124). From the studies of Munoz (2006) and Snow and Hoefnagel-Hohle (1978) it seems to show that the best timing for learning second language is from puberty or older rather than from childhood.

Now when looking from Japanese students' L2 perspective, there is research by Oller, Jr. and Nagato (1974). The research focused on the long-term effect of FLES (Foreign Language in Elementary School) instruction in Japanese schools. From grades one (6 to 7 years old) to grade four (9 to 10 year old) the students had 120 minutes of English class per week in three 40-minute sessions. In grade five (10 to 11 years old) and six (11 to 12 years old) they had two 40-minute classes per week. For this experiment, a cloze test was used and seventh grade (12 to 13 years old), ninth grade (14 to 15 years old), and eleventh grade (16 to 17 years old) students were tested. The acquisition level of English of the students who started learning English from grade one in elementary school and the students from grade one in junior high school were compared in the research. As a result, “in spite of the fact that FLES students had an advantage of six years of EFL study before they entered junior high school, the non-FLES students were able to overtake them by the eleventh grade” (Oller, Jr. & Nagato, 1974, p.18). They conclude the discussion with: “even though FLES programs do impart some proficiency in the FL, there is no evidence that students with FLES background will progress more rapidly than non-FLES students in FL study at the secondary and college levels” (Oller, Jr. & Nagato, 1974, p.18). In future research, the consideration of other intervening perspectives is necessary. As mentioned before, the above research needs to

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consider whether two to three 40-minute classes was an effective hour of classes or not. Also in future research, the consideration of parents' language, whether students had family members of native English speakers or not, and the amount of hours of exposure to English outside of the classroom is necessary because it plays a significant role in language acquisition.

POLICY ISSUES

In this section policy issues will be considered. Starting with a brief history of English education in Japan, policy issues such as time, teachers, and cost will be discussed.

Brief History of English Education in Japan

There is a different history between private elementary schools and public elementary schools in Japan. When looking at private elementary schools, the research of the English Japan Private Elementary Federation in 1992 shows the number of private elementary schools that had English classes from the 1870's. The figures show that in the 1870's there were only two private schools with English education. After World War II, in the 1940's to 1950's, these numbers had drastically increased to 45 private elementary schools. Koike (1995) mentions that the numbers increased from 45 to 130 private elementary schools in the 1990's. This was because of the expansion of export and import businesses, and the exports of automobiles and televisions drastically increased. Thus, there was a need for English education in Japanese society.

For public elementary schools, in 1986, MEXT started seriously to think about starting English classes in public elementary schools. MEXT started to choose several public elementary schools for researching and as a trial. Based on that research, in 1998, MEXT decided to start English in a period for Integrated Studies for the students to learn English for international understanding. In 2008, MEXT decided to start English once a week in Grade 5 and 6 as an obligatory class from 2011 April. According to the survey conducted by MEXT in 2012, there were more than 140 schools out of 216 private elementary schools that had English classes in 2011. The objective for this obligatory class is:

“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” (MEXT, 2010).

It is necessary to keep in mind this objective when determining the issues of English education in Japan because there seems to be a great gap between the objective of MEXT and the actual English classes.

Policy Issue

Even though English has become an obligatory class in elementary school, one of the issues we need to consider is that it is only from grade 5 (10 to 11 years old) and 6 (11 to 12 years old). Moreover it is only one hour per week class. It seems that parents need to realize that there is a great gap between the actual lessons and the parents' goals. There seem to be many parents who think that their children will become bilinguals with this one hour a week class at school or one hour a week lessons at English conversation class outside the school. As King and Mackey (2007) state, "findings about bilingual advantages generally apply to children who have advanced proficiency in the two languages" (p.7). This idea is important because the idea is frequently misunderstood by parents. Some parents misunderstand that their children will be bilinguals though children are just grasping simple skills such as greetings and counting numbers in a very occasional exposure to second language, such as in the once a week English conversation classes. Also Brown and Larson-Hall (2012) state that "schools that teach second languages should provide high number of contact hours" (Brown & Larson-Hall, 2012p.19).

Moreover, when considering from a language point of view, a study conducted by Omaggio-Hadley (2000) shows the difference of impact to L2 acquisition depending on the first language. Omaggio-Hadley (2000) examined the speed of second language acquisition by adults in the U.S. foreign service. Brown and Larson-Hall (2012) discuss this research, "With languages that are typically easiest for native English speakers to learn, such as Spanish, Dutch, or French, after 24 weeks (or 720 hours in a six-hours-a-day, five-day-a-week program) motivated adults with normal levels of language aptitude reached a level of 2+ (Advanced High)" (p.8).

Brown and Larson-Hall also informs of the interaction between languages: "for the more difficult languages for native English speakers to learn (Arabic, Chinese, Japanese or Korean) about 80-92 weeks would be required (that's 2,400-2,760 hours of classroom study)" (p.8). This seems to show that the interaction between English and Japanese is difficult compared with other languages. Thus, even if learners start learning English from grade one (6 to 7 years old) of elementary school, if schools continue to have only one class a week, this will not facilitate sufficient improvement in English. If so, it is important to consider that due to being in an EFL environment, the real issue is the insufficient number of contact hours in English, and to consider that learners need many more hours for English classes at school

than MEXT is expecting.

Intensive or Slow Drip

The first part of policy issue we discussed was the backgrounds of English education in Japanese public and private elementary schools. The literature revealed that it is unrealistic to expect students to become fluent bilinguals given the insufficient number of hours of English study. While some studies have found that intensive programs are much more effective than regular courses, others indicate that the extent to which they are effective depends upon the student's proficiency. The issues here will consider the adaption of hours in a practical classroom situation. Serrano (2011) discusses the time factor in EFL classroom practice. He analyzes whether the distribution of hours of classroom practice has any effect of students' foreign language gains by comparing two types of EFL programs. One is long sessions over a short period which is an intensive course. The other is short sessions over a long period of time which is a regular course. There were 152 participants who were examined with a variety of tasks. The intensive course was done in 4.5 weeks during the summer, over 5 hour sessions for 5 days a week, for a total of 110 hours. The regular course was done throughout the academic year with a 2-hour session twice a week for 7 months. The aim of the program was to develop the four language skills and the students at two proficiency levels were analyzed. The levels were intermediate and advanced. The results of the analysis indicated that intermediate-level students tend to make more language gains in intensive programs than in regular classes. For advanced EFL students, they did not seem to benefit from intensive classroom practice as much as intermediate students did. From the results, Serrano (2011) mentions that "time increase is generally beneficial (which is in line with the claim that "practice makes perfect"), whether time concentration alone usually leads to more modest gains" (p.136). The results suggest that generally intensive study is beneficial but the results differ depending on the learner's proficiency. Serrano (2011) states:

"When the interval between sessions is too wide, learners may have problems retrieving previously learned concepts/structures, making proceduralization and automatization harder for them. On the other hand, when there is not much spacing between practice sessions, the knowledge acquired is more readily available for retrieval and thus also for proceduralization. According to this claim, intensive courses should lead to greater gains. However, the type of knowledge that advanced learners need to acquire is different from learning that takes place at lower proficiency levels. Advanced students need to acquire infrequent collocations or complex, grammatical structures whose presence in intensive courses is also scarce (as compared to the most frequently used patterns that the intermediate students still need to learn)" (pp. 137).

From the above result it can be understood that if applied to beginners or intermediate level students, intensive courses can be effective. On the other hand, for advanced learners the approach should be different. Though a great deal of research has been done on intensive and slow drip, some results show intensive is effective and others do not. Since the research was done with a variety of ages and levels, it is difficult to adapt one research result to one curriculum. Regardless if it is intensive or slow drip, the result varies if we do not adapt to the right level. This issue also involves the administrative level. The school needs to consider how to fit in to school curriculum, or how to choose intensive or slow drip. Moreover, for the Japanese education system, the school's criteria must follow MEXT requirements.

OTHER ISSUES

In this section some other issues that need to be considered in early exposure in learning in EFL environment will be briefly discussed. The issues are social issues, cultural issues, matter of money, and teacher issues. It is commonly said that children acquire language faster because their brains are like a sponge. One of the reasons is that children acquire language faster is that most of a child's learning environment is through playing with friends. King and Mackey (2007) explain that children and adults also have very different language learning opportunities: "For instance, children often have many more chances to use English outside the home-in school, in the neighborhood, and playing with peers-than their parents. The language children need to use socially is much less complicated" (p.21).

King and Mackey (2007) also add that, since children are less anxious about making mistakes, children are able to jump into the second language environment and can often make rapid progress. Though there seems to be a great difference between an adult's learning environment and a child's learning environment, it seems that at some point, especially parents misunderstand or have an illusion about the speed of children's language acquisition that young learners can acquire language faster.

Besides the above-mentioned social issue, there seems to be cultural issues regarding children's second language acquisition. One of the cultural issues can be understood by the research done by Spada (2009). Spada (2009) examined the interaction in second language classrooms. In her study she mentions about comparison of Japanese immersion classrooms and French immersion classrooms. It was found that "when the teacher used recasts more than any other type of corrective feedback, the Japanese learners almost always repaired their utterances after recasts, while French immersion learners rarely did" (Spada, 2009. P.167). The result seems to show that Japanese learners tend to put priority on forms rather than the meaning of the language, it is necessary to know such tendency when teaching English. It is necessary to think about EFL from the learners' cultural background because

each learner has cultural differences.

Another important issue in acquiring foreign language in EFL environment is the cost. Although it depends on English conversation schools, some schools cost \$85 a month for weekly English lesson. Brown and Larson-Hall (2012) warns that “if parents find they are paying large amounts of money for one or two hours of language instruction per week in the misguided belief that this is the best time to learn a language, they are wasting their money” (p.19). When spending money, consideration of cost performance is necessary. If parents pay a lot and children spend plenty of time to have exposure in English, some children will acquire English. However it will need expensive fees and time. If not, it seems that learners and their parents are wasting money and precious time as well.

Lastly it is important that issues of teachers should not be forgotten. In most elementary schools in Japan, ALTs (Assistant Language Teachers) teach with homeroom teachers. ALTs are mostly hired by a company running an organization of ALTs. In some suburban areas, homeroom teachers use CDs because they cannot employ foreign ALTs. According to the survey conducted by MEXT in 2005, English classes were pursued in more than 90% of 21,000 public elementary schools. However, only 60% to 70% of schools had ALTs in English classes. It means that still about 30% of the schools do not have the opportunity to have native speakers in English classes. Also though ALTs are native English speakers, they are assistant language teachers. In other words, most ALTs teach English without worrying about classroom control. In general, teachers plan lessons thinking of classroom control as well, but most ALTs do not. Therefore in some cases the class is for having fun. This issue needs to be considered immediately. Since in Japan, English is not included in elementary teachers’ certificates, it seems that including it in the certificate is one idea to improve this situation. If English is included in elementary teachers’ licenses, homeroom teachers can teach English and at the same time, they can have control over the students. This will take a shorter time than having ALTs trained to meet the requirement of an elementary school teacher’s certificate in Japan.

DISCUSSION

This paper began by discussing learning issues and moved on to policy issues. As mentioned before, parents tend to think if they put their child in English classes, children will learn English easily. However having children acquire a foreign language in an EFL environment is not simple, it is very complicated. As Brown and Larson-Hall state, “the idea that children are faster learners than adults is not accurate”(p.18). In addition, it is not always “the earlier the better.”

The literature reveals that parents and educators need to understand that there are many issues in early exposure to learning a language in EFL environment. In fact, from the language acquisition point of view, it seems that the satisfaction of parents having their children going to English lessons or having one hour a week of English class at school is larger than the quality of the actual language acquisition. As seen from the several studies, when students get to the age of going to junior high school, their cognitive level becomes ready to acquire another language besides their first language. If their cognitive levels reach a certain level, the students can start learning syntactic matters.

In Japan, companies are expected to compete globally and as a result many firms are now using more English in the offices and expect workers to have a minimum English ability. Due to this social pressure, there is a tendency for parents to want their children to be exposed to English at a very young age, and the younger the better. Early exposure is not the only way to become proficient. There are other important things to do before learning foreign languages, such as learning their first language. The literature suggests that other choices can be considered, such as age, time, speed, or environment, including social and policy issues. Parents also have the choice to wait until the stage when cognitive levels are ready to acquire foreign languages. Or, learners can start later and learn intensively. Parents need to watch their child and think of the best time to start learning English for their own child. There is no need to compare to other children and society. Also it is important that parents not be swayed by the sales talk of English conversation schools who do not know their child. Parents can spend a lot of money if parents want to and are able to afford it. However, parents always need to think about whether it is worth paying for the cost in order to have their children acquire a second language. In this way, there are other choices if the issues are considered when making the decision of when to introduce English.

Above all, these issues are certainly necessary to be considered by teachers and schools. Besides everyday lesson plans, consideration from an administrative level is necessary. Future research should consider the effective hours of English classes in a week. A total framework planning in schools seems to be important. Just good lesson plans cannot change this situation. Unless the school offers a sufficient number of hours for English classes and well-trained ALTs, English education in Japan will not change.

Now in Japan, not only the globalization of the companies but also society itself is trying to be global for 2020 Olympic game. There is a trend of acquiring English and many still believe that earlier is better. However, it is important not to be swayed by things around us and to get the correct information and knowledge to make decisions in early exposure in learning foreign language in EFL environment. It is necessary to consider from both sides, parents and schools.

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