Abstract
This study examined the English education policy in Japan and the core French education policy in Canada for primary education by comparing the Japanese Action Plan with the Next Act and Plan 2013. It was found that there was a striking contrast between Japanese and Canadian language policies. The Japanese Action Plan has an independent area for teaching English in elementary schools under which 10 measures are listed, while the Next Act and Plan 2013 do not carry any strategic objectives for teaching French at the primary education level. One recommendation in Plan 2013 encourages each province and territory to implement intensive French programs at grades 5 or 6 to improve the core French programs. It was suggested by the author that Japan should keep track of this new move in Canada in order for us to learn something new.

Introduction

English teaching in public elementary schools in Japan officially started in 2002 as one of many options for enhancing students’ international understanding in the Period of Integrated Study. On the other hand, core French programs at the primary education level have been in practice for nearly 40 years in Canada (Foley, Harley, & d’Anglejan, 1988). Through comparison, the present study aims to draw some contrasts, as well as implications for English
education policy in Japan, although this study does not necessarily seek to determine which action plan is superior or inferior.

Making comparisons between language programs across countries requires great care as each program is situated in different historical and social contexts. For example, the education system in Japan is centralized, whereas education matters in Canada are controlled by the provincial government. However, four coincidences made this comparative study reasonable and unique. First, both action plans were released in March, 2003. Secondly, both action plans set their goals to produce bilinguals, in a broad sense, at the national level. Thirdly, it was the first time for both countries to present clear and measurable objectives concerning foreign or second language education policy. Fourth, the Japanese Action Plan and Plan 2013 have almost the same number of measures or recommendations. In addition, few studies have investigated the Japanese foreign language policy pertaining to Canadian second language education policy(2).

To compare the Japanese Action Plan with the Next Act and Plan 2013, core French education policy in the Next Act and Plan 2013 was focused because of the following three reasons. First, core French programs are comparable to English programs in Japan in that the target language is taught as a subject unlike immersion programs in which the target language is a medium of instruction. Secondly, core French programs play a central role in attaining the objective of the Next Act as the majority of Canadians are Anglophones and most French learners study in core French programs(3). Thirdly, though French is an official language at the federal level in Canada, its status at the provincial level is rather similar to a foreign language because only two provinces, Quebec and New Brunswick, designate it as an official language. This linguistic fact helps to make this comparison more valid given that English is a foreign language in Japan.

**Japanese Action Plan, the Next Act and Plan 2013**

The Japanese Action Plan is a 5-year plan issued by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, known as MEXT, following the strategic plan made the previous year. It sets two goals in order to cultivate Japanese with English abilities. One is concerned with English language abilities for all Japanese nationals: “On graduating from junior and senior high school, graduates can communicate in English.” The other goal is concerned with English skills required for specialized fields or for those active in international society: “On graduating from university, graduates can use English in their work.” This action plan includes 55 measures in six areas: Improvement of English classes (12 measures);
Improvement of the teaching ability of English teachers and upgrading the teaching system (9 measures); Improvement of motivation for learning English (9 measures); Improvement in the evaluation system for selecting school and university applications (4 measures); Support for English conversation activities in elementary schools (10 measures); Improvement of Japanese language abilities (6 measures); and Promotion of practical research (5 measures).

The Next Act is a 10-year action plan compiled by the Government of Canada to promote Canada’s linguistic duality. This action plan originated in 2001 when the Government of Canada made a formal commitment to make the promotion of Canada’s linguistic duality one of the priorities of its mandate (Government of Canada, 2003). It consists of seven chapters and issues of second language education are dealt with in the third chapter, Education. One of the highlights of the Next Act is an objective to double the number of bilingual high school graduates with a functional knowledge of second language by 2013. More specifically, based on the census data that the proportion of bilingual Francophones and Anglophones in the 15 to 19 age group is around 24%, the objective is to raise this proportion to 50%. To this end, four strategic objectives were set: Improve core English and French; Revitalize immersion; Increase the number of qualified teachers; and Provide bilingual graduates the opportunity to put their skills to use. In addition to these objectives, “Help promote research” is listed as an objective to enhance second language education in general.

Finally, Plan 2013 is a report commissioned to Reholick and others by the Official Languages Support Programs to suggest concrete steps towards the attainment of the Next Act’s 2013 objectives. For that purpose, 54 recommendations are provided in the following six strategic objectives: A priori (1-11); Program improvement and support: Making French real (12-29); Program improvement and support: Teacher development and post-secondary teacher education institution (30-44); Program improvement and support: New information and communication technologies (45-50); Research (51-54). This plan provides a menu from which the provinces and territories can choose to tailor their FSL (French as a second language) programs that suit their particular context, although it does not necessarily represent the policies or the views of the Canadian government (Official Languages Support Programs, 2004). Each recommendation is categorized either as a short term, mid-term, or long-term goal. These recommendations are mainly focused on high school core French programs which are considered vital to reach the 2013 objective. A small number of recommendations are geared toward French immersion programs and core English programs.
Comparison and findings

Six areas of the Japanese Action Plan were compared with the strategic objectives of the Next Act and Plan 2013 as shown in Table 1\(^{(6)}\). It was found that entrance exams and Japanese language abilities are featured only by the Japanese Action Plan. Meanwhile, both action plans regard issues related to classes, teachers, motivation for learning, and research as important to achieve their overall goals.

Table 1. Comparison between the Japanese Action Plan and the Next Act/Plan 2013

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Notes: The numbering of measures in the Japanese Action Plan was given by the author in the order they appeared. The objectives in parentheses indicate they loosely correspond with those the in Japanese Action Plan.
In the Japanese Action Plan, the ensuing 10 measures are included in “Support for English conversation activities in elementary schools.”

35. Publishing a handbook to promote activities for English conversation at elementary school
36. Implementation of a status report on the situation of activities for English conversation
37. Promotion of the system of pilot schools for research purposes
38. Enhancement of training for teachers in charge of English conversation activities
39. Promotion of the placement of ALTs with excellent experience
40. Promotion of the use of local personnel who are proficient in English
41. Promotion of the participation by junior and senior high school teachers in English conversation activities at elementary schools
42. Research and development of the curriculum
43. Ascertaining and analyzing the actual conditions of activities for English conversation at elementary schools
44. Research relating to future methods of English education at elementary schools

The number of measures in “Support for English conversation activities in elementary schools” is the second largest following “Improvement of English classes” which has 12 measures.

When it comes to Canada, neither the Next Act nor Plan 2013 contains specific objectives regarding primary education. However, core French programs being offered from elementary school up to high school, whether required or optional, are necessarily involved with the primary education level even when the Next Act and Plan 2013 put a primary emphasis on secondary education level. Thus, “Program improvement and support: Improve core English and French” and “Program improvement and support: Making French real” are both placed in parentheses in the table. At the recommendation level, Plan 2013 has one recommendation which is clearly geared toward the primary education: “18. Implement intensive core French in all provinces and territories as the approved program for Grade 6 (or Grade 4 or 5 if deemed more appropriate in the context of a province’s or territory’s program of studies)” (7).

**Discussion**

Comparing the Japanese Action Plan with the Next Act and Plan 2013 revealed some sharp contrasts at the primary education level. First, the Japanese Action Plan has an independent area for English teaching in elementary schools, whereas the Next Act and Plan 2013 do not have comparable objectives. Secondly, the Japanese Action Plan contains 10 measures for English teaching in elementary schools, while Plan 2013 provides only one recommendation
targeting elementary school. Thirdly, the number of measures in the area of “Support for English conversation activities in elementary schools” is the second largest following “Improvement of English classes.” These differences indicate the English education policy in Japan is much more focused and comprehensive than the Canadian core French education policy as far as the primary education level is concerned. This contrast can be ascribed to the fact that English teaching in public elementary schools in Japan was still in the early stages. It is, therefore, reasonable that teaching English at the primary education needed to be emphasized and holistically addressed in the action plan. Since 2002, a number of changes have been witnessed in English teaching in Japanese elementary schools. Most notably, English has become a requirement above Grade 5 starting in 2008, and the teaching materials called *Eigo Noto 1&2 (English Note 1&2)* (MEXT, 2009) were published. The measures in the action plan are assumed to have contributed to these changes.

That core French has been in practice for a long time in primary schools and that Plan 2013 has only one recommendation for primary school core French do not mean the program is almost flawless. To the contrary, it has been harshly criticized by the public because many students fail to acquire basic French communication skills (Calman & Daniel, 1998). French immersion programs have been highly successful to produce bilinguals since the late 1960’s in Canada, but it only houses a small portion of FSL learners and it is not cost-effective to run the program largely because immersion resources are expensive (MacFarlane, 2005).

As seen in Recommendation 18, intensive programs are expected to be a possible solution to strengthen the core French program (8). According to Netten and Germain (2004b), intensive French is defined as “an enrichment of the core French program consisting of offering from three to four times the number of hours regularly scheduled for FSL in a concentrated period of time (five months) at the end of the elementary school cycle” (p. 283).

Plan 2013 recommends the intensive Core French program with the following reasons. First, the program has already been studied for three years in Newfoudland and Labrador from 1998 to 2001 and its positive results are documented. Secondly, with this success, similar programs have been initiated in other provinces since 2002, and over 3000 students participated in Intensive Core French. Thirdly, the program has the positive effects on the students’ attitudes to learning French at junior high school.

MacFarlane (2005) points out two advantages for offering the program in grade 5 or 6. First, students in grade 5 or 6 (between 10 and 12 years of age) are able to learn language implicitly and respond well to learning a second language without any of the negative attitudes exhibited at puberty. Secondly, students in grade 5 or 6 generally stay in the same classroom with the same teacher all day which makes scheduling of the intensive program easier than it would be.
in a rotation situation.

It is hard to predict where English teaching at elementary schools in Japan is heading. Should it become more and more communicatively-oriented and outcome-based like Canada, current program delivery models might have to be reconsidered and restructured in the future. At this point, it is not realistic to imagine that intensive English programs will be introduced in public elementary schools across Japan. Nonetheless, it is worthwhile to keep an eye on Canada’s second language education. It is known that some private schools here have adopted immersion programs to improve both English and Japanese. Given that an intensive program is less costly than an immersion program, it would not be surprising that some schools show interest in this intensive delivery model.

Conclusion

This study examined the English education policy in Japan and core French education policy in Canada at the primary education level by comparing the Japanese Action Plan with the Next Act and Plan 2013. It was found that there was a striking contrast between Japanese and Canadian language policies. That is, the Japanese Action Plan has an independent area for teaching English in elementary schools under which 10 measures were listed, while the Next Act and Plan 2013 do not carry any strategic objectives for teaching French at the primary education level. This finding probably reflects the fact that Japan recently started English education at public elementary schools which needed to be focused on and addressed in a comprehensive manner. However, one recommendation in Plan 2013 encourages each province and territory to implement intensive French programs at grades 5 or 6 to improve the core French programs. It was suggested by the author that Japan should keep track of this new move in Canada in order for us to learn something new.

Lastly, it should be acknowledged that limited attention was paid to studies other than the Japanese Action Plan, the Next Act, and Plan 2013 so that the author could concentrate on investigating these official documents. Nevertheless, it is strongly suggested that we should reexamine their outcomes more thoroughly after the Next Act is completed in 2013 when more related studies and reports are expected to be available.

Notes

1. Core French is defined as “French taught as a subject for one period each day, or a few times a week, with the objective of providing students with a basic knowledge of the French language and an appreciation of French culture” (Lapkin, 1998, p. xiv).
2. There is a study in which Takagaki (2003) reviewed elementary school English in Japan.
from the perspective of core French program in Canada.

3. Approximately 90% of Canadians speak only English excluding Quebec and New Brunswick (Statistics Canada, 2006), and core French is offered to about 85% of students learning French as a second language (Netten & Germain, 2004).

4. The Next Act is comprised of the following chapters: Introduction; Accountability; Education; Community development; An exemplary public service; Language industry; and Conclusion.

5. Second language education refers to minority language education as well as second language education.

6. This table was originally prepared for Takagaki (2010).

7. Two recommendations (19 and 22) are concerned with follow-up options for intensive core French program.

8. The history of intensive French in Canada can go back to early 1970’s. See Netten and Germain (2004a) for more details.

References


