Summary

Language teacher cognition in the case of Japanese teachers of English at secondary school in Japan: an exploratory study

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Abstract

Japanese non-native English-speaking EFL (English as a foreign language) teachers in secondary education (JEFL teachers) work in a different educational context from language teachers in Europe. The purpose of this exploratory research is to identify the distinctive ways in which JEFL teachers think, know, believe and do. These concepts are subsumed under the general heading of JEFL teacher cognition, particularly as this applies to teaching and teacher education in Eigo Kyoiku (English education in Japan). The overall purpose of exploring JEFL teachers’ cognitions is reflected in four research guiding questions (RQs): 1) to identify the nature of JEFL teacher cognition; 2) to see any particular influences that might help shape JEFL teacher cognition; 3) to learn to what extent JEFL teachers’ cognitions are consistent with their actual practice of teaching; and 4) to discuss the ways in which the concept of language teacher cognition (LTC) may be understood and situated in the Japanese context. The research consisted of two studies: a) a quantitative Preliminary Study administered to 62 JEFL teachers and 81 modern foreign language (MFL) teachers in Scotland, in order to identify any areas regarding JEFL teacher cognition; and b) an in-depth Main Study based on a qualitative and ethnographic approach, featuring 10 JEFL teachers. This made use of qualitative data analysis and the applied KJ method, and also drew on complexity theory, through reflective and reflexive processes with particular reference to retrodictive qualitative modelling (RQM). The results of the Main Study are presented as 16 concept maps, each of which represents a featured aspect of JEFL teacher cognition (ATC). It represents the signature dynamics of each ATC and points to the variation and tension which JEFL teachers experienced in relation to each ATC. The research suggests that, although LTC have certain universal characteristics, it needs to be explored on the assumption that it is situated socially, culturally, locally and personally.
Acknowledgements

Scotland is one of my favorite countries, and I like the following quote by Sir Walter Scott:

*For success, attitude is equally as important as ability.*

It has really been my pleasure to study at the University of Stirling under the supervision of Professor Emeritus Richard Johnstone. Without his kind support and sustained encouragement, I could not have completed this thesis. Moreover, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all the researchers and teachers who have suggested fruitful ideas. My attitudes towards the present research have been especially supported by the following people: Dr Taeko Seki, who encouraged me to undertake my thesis at the University of Stirling; Joanna McPake, who was an ex-Scottish CILT acting director and gave me initial suggestions; Mandy Reeman Clark, Robert McKinstry, and Lesley Low, who helped me with teacher research in Scotland; Professor Simon Borg, who provided me with fundamental ideas about language teacher cognition research; Professor Motomichi Imura, who provided me with great suggestions regarding the history of *Eigo Kyoiku*; and all of the many other teachers whom I have met and supported this research in Japan and Scotland. So far I have talked with many researchers and teachers internationally. I do hope that my thesis research will help to make a contribution to research internationally on language teacher education and cognition. I would also like to offer special thanks to the late Professor Kuniaki Suenaga, who supported me as teacher-researcher all the time. Finally, I express my gratitude to my wife, Yuko and my daughter, Aya for their patience and their sustained and kind support throughout my entire period of study.

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Summary

There is no doubt that new demands and challenges have to be confronted by JEFL teachers, as Japan seeks to find its way in the global world while at the same time preserving the essence of its longstanding cultural and educational traditions. My interest lies in learning what JEFL teachers think about their teaching and teacher education, and indeed how they think about them at this very interesting time of major change, while discussing some terminological issues related to teachers’ thought processes.

Chapter 1 sets out the research background to LTC, including its relation to EFL teaching and teacher education in Japan and a complexity theory as one possible underlying theoretical perspective for the present thesis. In order to see the background knowledge about the present research, Chapter 2 describes what I consider to be the key educational issues in Japan and reviews EFL teaching and learning and teacher education for JEFL teachers. Then in Chapter 3, the issues of teacher cognition in JEFL teacher education are discussed. JEFL teachers’ wider role as schoolteachers with general as well as language-teaching responsibilities is a major requirement for them and makes a complex situation. Chapter 4 sets out the overall research design and the Preliminary Study. This chapter presents the philosophy, purpose, research guiding questions and research design consisting of the Preliminary Study and the Main Study undertaken in the present thesis. The Preliminary Study is also presented in Chapter 4, since a questionnaire survey of LTC conducted in Japan and Scotland extracts several distinguish characteristics of JEFL teacher cognition, which are necessary for the Main Study. In Chapter 5, the research methodology in the Main Study is presented, focusing on a qualitative research consisting of interview, classroom observation and ethnographic observation. The qualitative methodology comprises unique methods of collecting and analyzing the data: e.g. retrodicative qualitative modelling (RQM), interviews, classroom and ethnographic observations, the subjective and reflexive qualitative data analysis process, the KJ method, and the concept map. Thus in Chapter 6, the findings arising from the unique data collection and analysis are presented as 16 summary descriptions and concept maps of featured aspects of teacher cognition. Since the Main Study has been a qualitative exploratory research in nature, I provide discussion alongside each of the main findings. Finally Chapter 7 offers the conclusion which I have formed in the light of the research about JEFL teachers’ cognitions, and in addition it sets out a number of possible implications for EFL teaching and teacher education in Japan, based on the research findings.

I believe that the research results may offer an opportunity to create new landscapes for understanding JEFL teachers’ cognitions or LTC on teaching and
teacher education. However, there must be many complex factors underlying JEFL teachers’ teaching and teacher education, hence my desire to explore the nature of their teacher cognition in respect of teaching and teacher education. Through a research approach that contains an initial quantitative component but that is essentially qualitative in nature, I will explore the influences on such JEFL teachers, and try to learn to what extent, if any, their cognitions are similar to or different from their actual behavior when teaching in class.

Chapter 1 Introduction: language teacher cognition (LTC) in personal, national and global perspectives

This introductory chapter provides background information on my own experience as an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learner, then teacher, teacher educator and researcher. The portrayal of this personal experience sets the context for my interest in choosing the thesis topic of Japanese EFL teachers’ cognitions when teaching at secondary school. There is an initial discussion of the historical and cultural context of EFL teaching in Japan. This leads to a discussion of some key concepts which seem to be associated with the notion of language teacher cognition (LTC). The present research takes the form of an exploratory study, and towards the end of the chapter there is a provisional presentation of some questions which arise from issues addressed thus far and which might guide the course of my exploration.

Chapter 2 Education in Japan: EFL teaching and teacher education

This chapter is necessary to understand the historical, societal and cultural background of the teaching and teacher education of JEFL teachers. It thus discusses education in Japan from historical, social and cultural perspectives. Especially, Eigo Kyōiku, the teacher education system, the Course of Study, language policy, and ESP (LSP) are particularly important concepts in this research, in order to set the context for eventually gaining an informed understanding of JEFL teachers’ cognitions about teaching and teacher education and of how they might develop these. Moreover, Chapter 2 refers to the future perspectives of JEFL teachers’ cognitions in order to help themselves more fully meet the challenges of globalization or the global society and to identify their own professionalism in relation to LTE from the past to the future.

Chapter 3 Teacher cognition and complexity theory in JEFL teacher education

This chapter aims to provide a theoretical and practical background to the research on the notion of LTC and its related research topics in relation to Eigo
Kyoiku. It begins by discussing teacher cognition at a general level, and then the notion of LTC is developed, leading to the specific instance of this in Japan in the form of JEFL teacher cognition on teaching and teacher education. While the work of distinguished experts in the international field has brought great benefit to the current study, it is argued that none of the current models of LTC may capture the complex or situated cognitions of JEFL teachers in a local context. Accordingly, a provisional network model to represent JEFL teacher cognition is developed, drawing on ‘complexity theory’ which might help generate insight into JEFL teachers’ cognitions and Eigo Kyoiku.

Chapter 4 The overall research design and the Preliminary Study

This chapter presents the philosophy of this research and also explains how the research is designed and conducted: i.e. purpose, research guiding questions (RQs), research design (e.g. research methodology, mixed methods, deliberate research procedures, trustworthiness, credibility, and reflexivity), and the Preliminary Study including the Language Teacher Cognition Inventory (LTCI) and questionnaire survey. The study consists the Preliminary Study (questionnaire research) and the Main Study (interview, classroom and ethnographic observation), the applied KJ method, RQM, and the research results presentation). The preliminary Study identifies 16 aspects of LTC, which the Main Study focuses on, through the quantitative analysis by contrasting JEFL teachers with MFL teachers in Scotland.

Chapter 5 The research methodology in the Main Study: interview, classroom observation and ethnographic observation

The Main Study focuses on a qualitative research consisting of interview, classroom observation and ethnographic observation. This chapter describes the research process: sampling, ethical issues, the relationships between the researcher and the PTs, mixed-methods data analysis process, subjectivity and reflexivity, trustworthiness and credibility, using the applied KJ method, creating concept maps, and research dissemination. This chapter specifically explains how to conduct interviews and observations and how to analyze the qualitative data, such as the process of noticing, collecting (recording) and thinking (reflecting). It also describes the reason why the researcher adopts the applied KJ method and develops the complex four-area diagram as a concept map in this chapter.

Chapter 6 Results and discussion of the Main Study

This chapter presents the background information on 10 PTs as the research
subjects and the main findings and discussion of the Main Study with respect to the topics of 16 ATCs. By presenting the 10 PTs’ cognitions as one collective group, the findings emerging from systematic and collaborative application of the applied KJ method are discussed from a complexity theory perspective. The results show the complex features of each ATC by depicting the concept map or the four-area diagram in order to better see the nature of JEFL teacher cognition. This chapter accordingly highlights and disseminates 16 ATCs, each of which summarizes the 10 PTs’ cognitions collectively and represents the process and product of the researcher’s exploration.

Chapter 7 Conclusion: the nature of JEFL teacher cognition

Four RQs are discussed based on the results of the Main Study while representing the nature of 10 PTs’ cognitions, possible influential factors, and differences between teacher cognition and actual behaviours in this chapter. It is important to consider LTC as CAS through conducting the Main Study, and the findings show that LTC is situated socially, culturally, and locally. This chapter thus presents a summary of the research results and the implications for further research on LTC. Ten further suggestions related to the research results are added as part of the implications in relation to 16 concept maps of ATCs. A complex network model for JEFL teacher cognition, which has been demonstrated by the research results, is also represented as the final research summary. Seven research topics are finally discussed with the implications for LTC research.

A complex network model regarding the nature of JEFL teacher cognition
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