

***Issues in the Assessment and Evaluation of  
English Language Education at the Elementary  
School Level: Implications for Policies in South  
Korea, Taiwan, and Japan***

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While English as a Foreign Language at Elementary Schools (EFLES) has gained popularity in many parts of the world including East Asia, we have relatively little understanding about evaluation and assessment practices at the elementary school level. The present study synthesizes the information currently available (typically only at the local level) on assessments that have been used for the evaluation of EFLES programs in three Asian countries: South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan. By doing so, the study aims to identify what is known and what needs to be understood in order to advance our collective understanding of how EFLES may be more effectively implemented in East Asia. Previous research on EFLES has largely consisted of the following types of studies: (1) survey and interview studies that ask students, teachers and parents about their experiences with and/or their perceptions of the effectiveness of EFLES programs; (2) studies that use linguistic measures to compare the performance differences between those who have studied in EFLES programs and those who have not; and (3) studies evaluating students' language attainment based on some form of criteria-based reference measures. The present paper concludes with a series of suggestions for the assessment and evaluation of EFLES programs in those countries that are the focus of this study.

**Key words: EFLES: English as a Foreign Language at Elementary Schools**

**JMOE: Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, and Technology in Japan**  
**KMOE: Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development in Korea**  
**TMOE: Ministry of Education, Republic of China (Taiwan)**  
**Assessment, Evaluation**

## **INTRODUCTION**

While English language education as a foreign language at elementary schools (referred to as EFLES hereafter) has become increasingly popular in various parts of the world, in many respects it has been introduced via trial-and-error attempts at implementing such programs. East Asia is no exception to this trend. Among the many issues that have emerged from the implementation of EFLES, this paper focuses on issues related to evaluating EFLES programs and the assessments that are used for EFLES evaluations in three Asian countries: namely, South Korea (referred to as Korea hereafter), Taiwan, and Japan (in order of their official implementations of EFLES). As explained in detail below, these three countries were chosen due to the differences in their respective governments' approaches towards implementing EFLES. At the same time, these countries also share certain aspects of their socio-historical contexts with respect to English teaching.

In the present study, assessment refers to various means of collecting information on language performance and attitudinal data including test results, and evaluation refers to the systematic collection and use of such assessment data in order to make decisions and suggestions for EFLES policies. The present paper is primarily concerned with the outcomes of EFLES programs: namely, how well students learn English at the elementary school level.

Reviewing a broad array of source materials that have been identified, this project aims to synthesize information currently available on this topic in Korea, Taiwan, and Japan, and to identify what has been found empirically as well as what needs to be considered and investigated further in order to have a constructive discussion regarding the challenges in assessment and

evaluation. Due to the fact that many of the documents published on this topic are available only locally within each country (and published in the respective languages of each country), researchers, educators and policy makers in the focal countries do not appear to be aware of or to utilize the information and experiences gathered in each of their neighboring countries. This project attempts to narrow the information gap that exists and to advance our collective understanding of how best to assess young learners' foreign language performance as well as how best to evaluate the effectiveness of EFLES programs in East Asia.

With respect to methodology, the data that this project is based on comes from various government documents, published research articles in academic journals, professional conference presentations/proceedings, media reports, technical reports which were submitted to central and/or local governments, and the author's field observations which were conducted periodically between 2001 and 2008. Oral presentations at conferences and media reports were mainly used for gathering the most up-to-date information about EFLES policies, since the policies in the focus countries are constantly changing. The author acknowledges that there also are a growing number of unpublished master's theses and doctoral dissertations regarding the evaluation of EFLES in the three countries. However, these unpublished studies were not included in the present paper.

This paper begins with a brief description of the policy background of EFLES in Korea, Taiwan and Japan. The paper then reviews studies on assessment of student learning in EFLES in each of the three countries. The paper concludes with implications for practice and research.

## **BRIEF OVERVIEW OF EFLES POLICIES**

According to Kaplan and Baldauf (2005), the following seven policy agendas influence the overall success of language-in-education policies: (1) access policy; (2) personnel policy; (3) curriculum policy; (4) methodology

and materials policy; (5) resourcing policy; (6) community policy; and (7) evaluation policy. Table 1 summarizes the policies of the three countries based on Kaplan and Baldauf's framework. For the purposes of the present study, a few points need to be highlighted with respect to the information presented therein.

**TABLE 1**  
**Overview of EFLES Policies in South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan (in October, 2008)**

Policies	South Korea	Taiwan	Japan
Access (what, to whom, and when)	Compulsive & academic subject/nationwide since 1997/ 40 min. per week for 3 <sup>rd</sup> and 4 <sup>th</sup> grades; 80 min. for 5 <sup>th</sup> and 6 <sup>th</sup> grades (since 2001)/ The government plans to increase the number of instructional hours	Compulsive & academic subject/ Nationwide for 5 <sup>th</sup> and 6 <sup>th</sup> grades for 80 min. per week since 2001/ 3 <sup>rd</sup> grade and beyond from 2005/ 1 <sup>st</sup> grade and beyond in selected areas	School and local governmental choice as part of international understanding since 2001/ Will be compulsive for 5 <sup>th</sup> & 6 <sup>th</sup> for 40 min. per week from 2011
Personnel (teachers)	Local teachers of English, homeroom teachers, NEs (Native English Speakers)/ The government plans to hire instructors who specialize in teaching oral English	Primarily local teachers of English, substitute teachers, homeroom teachers, NEs	Primarily homeroom teachers, NEs
Curriculum (objectives)	To develop basic communication skills/ To develop students' interests and positive attitudes towards English learning/ To learn different cultures and customs through English	To develop basic communication skills/ To develop students' interests and positive attitudes towards English learning/ To increase students' awareness of native and foreign cultures and customs	To understand different cultures/ To develop a sense of self and of what it means to be Japanese/ To develop basic foreign language skills and other communicative skills
Methodology and materials	One textbook based on National Curriculum for each	Multiple textbooks approved by the government/	Various types of materials have been used depending on

	grade approved by the government/ Primarily oral language / written language is introduced from the 2 <sup>nd</sup> semester of the 3 <sup>rd</sup> grade/ Teaching English through the medium of English (TETE) is strongly recommended	Teachers can choose from among these textbooks/ Balanced focused on four skills/ TETE is strongly recommended	schools/ From 2011, a textbook for each grade produced by the JMOE will be introduced
Resources	Supported by both the central and local governments/ other resources		
Community	Various after-school programs/ English villages/ Local English learning centers/ English TV channels/ Private English language schools	Various after-school programs/ TV and radio programs/ Private English language schools	Various after-school programs/ TV and radio programs/ Private English language schools
Evaluation (assessment and evaluation)	Teacher-based assessments (e.g., portfolios, interviews, checklists) are recommended/ Verbal descriptions by teachers but no numerical grading systems/ National Academic Achievement Test for select schools/ KICE (the Korea Institute of Curriculum and Evaluation) is developing an English test	Teacher-based assessments (e.g., portfolios, interviews, checklists) are recommended/ Rubric-based English item banks were developed for teachers/ various types of written tests offered by local governments/ Plans to implement Official Norm-referenced Achievement Examinations (ONEAE) for upper grade students	No assessment is required since English has not been taught as an academic subject

## Note:

This table is based on the following sources: Butler (2005a, 2005b, 2007), C.-F Chen (2007), S.-C Chen (2006); JMOE (2001, 2008b), Jung & Norton (2002), Kim (2008), KMOE (1997a, 1997b, 2000); J. Lee (2004); W.-K, Lee (2007), TMOE (2001, 2003). The information presented in this table may be subject to change given that the language education policies of the focus countries have continued to change over time.

First, it is important to note that while both Korea and Taiwan have implemented EFLES as a compulsory academic subject, Japan has allowed English to be implemented based on local policy decision-making since 2001. The Korean central government has taken a relatively strong initiative in its nationwide uniform implementation of EFLES since 1997. In Taiwan, EFLES was introduced along with a new local language policy in which local languages also could be taught at the elementary school level (S.-C. Chen, 2006). While the Taiwanese central government has a uniform curriculum, we find there a greater level of local autonomy with respect to the curriculum, textbooks, and professional training when compared to Korea. In Japan, while English was not yet a compulsive subject, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, and Technology in Japan (referred to hereafter as JMOE) (2008a), found that 97.1% of the Japanese schools had already begun what they called “English activities” in 2007. However, there has been substantial variability regarding “English activities” in Japan. The Japanese government in 2008 finally decided to make “English activities” compulsory for 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade students starting from the 2011 school year (JMOE, n.d.). Strictly speaking, “English activities” in Japan are not the same as EFLES, at least at the policy level, because Japanese government policy stipulates that English at the elementary school level is not formally conducted as an academic subject.<sup>1</sup>

A second aspect that should be noted is that while the objectives of EFLES are stated similarly in the government documents of each of the three countries, one can see some differences in approach among these countries,

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<sup>1</sup> At the policy level, “English activities” in Japan are not considered as EFLES. Instead, the policy regards “English activities” as communication activities inasmuch as they allow students to be exposed to English. However, in reality, it is hard to draw a clear line between “learning English” and “being exposed to English.” Based on the author’s observations, a growing number of elementary schools in Japan have already begun EFLES in their classrooms. It is also anticipated that many schools which have already conducted English activities at younger grade levels will continue to do so at those levels even after 2011.

particularly with respect to personnel policies (related to teachers) and methodologies and materials. In Taiwan, English has been taught primarily by trained local teachers of English, though this is not necessarily true in rural areas. In Korea, both homeroom teachers and local teachers of English have taught English. In Japan, homeroom teachers have been primarily responsible for their English classes. It is important to note, however, that many native English speakers (NSs) have been involved in English activities in Japanese elementary school classrooms in various capacities. Both the Korean and Taiwanese governments also plan to increase the number of NSs and one can already begin to see a growing number of NSs in their classrooms. While teaching English through the medium of English (TETE) has been strongly recommended in Korea and Taiwan, no such policy has been articulated in Japan. However, TETE has not necessarily been implemented in classrooms in Korea and Taiwan (Choi, 2007; Choi, & Lee, 2008).

Third, in considering non-formal schooling factors (Community Policies in Table 1) in Korea, Taiwan, and Japan, one cannot ignore the substantial influence of the private sector on students' English performance as well as their attitudes towards learning English. There are various types of English language learning institutes and programs available for young learners and it is estimated that a substantial number of students receive such extra lessons outside of school in all three countries. As we will see below, differences in the ability to access private lessons based on students' socioeconomic status (SES) and region appear to create substantial achievement gaps in English among elementary school students.

Finally, with respect to evaluation policies, while teachers in Japan are not yet required to do any form of assessment (since English has not yet been formally introduced as an academic subject), both the Korean and Taiwanese governments ask their teachers to implement both formal and teacher-based assessments. They strongly advocate the latter in particular. Teacher-based assessments include interviews, classroom observations, portfolio assessments, self-assessments, peer-assessments and so forth. Teachers have been encouraged to provide students with positive verbal feedback in report cards, as opposed

to giving their students numerical scores or grades. However, various types of English assessments, including standardized tests such as the Cambridge Young Learners English Tests (YLE) and the TOEIC Bridge test are available for students outside of school, and a growing number of students have taken such tests individually or through private English language institutes (e.g., Choi, 2008). One can imagine that this type of situation might give public-school teachers substantial pressure.

### **REVIEWS OF STUDIES EXAMINING STUDENTS' ATTAINMENT IN EFLES**

At this point, we still have very limited knowledge about the effects of English education at the elementary school level in Korea, Taiwan, and Japan. One can surmise a number of reasons for this lack of information. First, the introduction of English is still relatively new and thus it is still too early to have any substantial findings about the long-term effects of EFLES in these countries. Second, the governments of Korea, Taiwan, and Japan have not presented any systematic measures for evaluating student performance or program effectiveness in ways that directly correspond to the goals of their English language programs. This lack of specification is critical because the effectiveness of EFLES should be evaluated in light of the goals that each country has set. The Korean and Taiwanese governments have suggested that teachers use teacher-based assessments or informal observation-based assessments such as portfolios, but teachers often find it very challenging to administer such assessments without having clear guidelines or proper training for doing so for large numbers of students (Butler & Lee, 2005). Third, as briefly mentioned above, since many elementary school students receive various types of English instruction outside of school, the extent to which their performance can be directly attributed to their instruction at school remains unclear.

The limited body of research on the effectiveness of ELFES in Korea,

Taiwan, and Japan that does exist at present can be classified into the following types of studies: (1) survey and interview studies asking students, teachers and parents about their experiences with and/or their perceptions of the effectiveness of EFLES programs; (2) studies comparing students' performance between those who studied in EFLES programs and those who did not by employing linguistic measures; and (3) studies evaluating students' language attainment based on some form of criterion-based reference measurements.

In addition, the present paper also covers some studies concerning teacher-based assessment in EFLES. Although these studies do not directly address the effectiveness of EFLES *per se*, they provide us with useful information on the challenges that teachers face in implementing the assessments that are required and/or suggested by the EFLES policies in question.

So far, the majority of information on the evaluation of EFLES instruction has come from survey data. Studies that objectively assess the performance of students and programs in Korea, Taiwan, and Japan have been very limited in number thus far. Moreover, those studies that have been published to-date have shown mixed results. In the following review, one should note that many such earlier studies (ones that were conducted before the official implementation of EFLES in the public school system in each of the focal countries) examined the effectiveness of *any* English learning prior to entering junior high school as opposed to the effectiveness of EFLES as part of school curricula *per se*.

### **Survey and Interview Studies**

Various surveys have been distributed to elementary school students, middle/high school students, parents and teachers. The data from Korea generally has shown that students perceive positive effects in oral skills and reading but relatively limited effects when it comes to writing and grammar. With respect to Taiwan and Japan, since there are regional variations in the content of curricula and the hours and types of instruction that students receive in those regions, as one can imagine, students, teachers and parents

appear to have different perceptions towards the effectiveness of EFLES depending on their experiences with such programs.

After analyzing responses to a survey administered to middle school students in Korea, Park (2002) found that students believed their elementary school English had a positive effect on their English learning at middle school in the domains of reading, speaking, and listening. Similar results were reported in Lee, Choi, Boo, & Lee (2001). Middle school students in Lee et al. (2001) showed positive attitudes towards the EFLES instruction that they had received in general and towards their oral activities in particular. However, the students also saw gaps in difficulty levels between their elementary and middle school curricula; they thought that while reading and writing instruction should receive greater emphasis at the elementary school level, listening activities should be more thoroughly incorporated into curricula at the middle school level. The middle school students discussed in Boo, Lee, Lee, & Choi (2003) also wished to have more written instruction at the elementary school level. Corresponding to the students' responses, the middle school English teachers in Boo et al. (2003) felt that those students who experienced EFLES showed higher oral skills and motivation, while their knowledge of grammar and writing skills were not as good as among previous students who did not receive EFLES instruction. Finally, K.-Y Lee (2002) reported that middle school students who had received EFLES instruction had positive attitudes towards the EFLES experience but felt that the effectiveness of EFLES itself was questionable.

In Taiwan, middle school teachers in Hualien responded positively towards those students who had received EFLES with respect to listening, speaking, and reading, but not in writing, which is consistent with cases cited in Korean above (Pan, Wong, & Shi, 2004). Importantly, responses between population centers and remote areas were particularly large in the reading and writing domains; the teachers in remote areas did not see much improvement in reading and writing among their students who had received EFLES, at least in 2003 when the survey was conducted. Wide ranges in English performance by region and student SES background have been a major concern among

elementary school teachers, and a series of discussions have been held regarding how to deal with this issue, including options for dividing the students in English classes according to their performance (Chen, Huang, Xie, & Lin, 2006). While there are some indications that Taiwanese parents tend to support providing different types of English instruction according to their students' abilities (Chiang & Research Center for Children, 2002), teachers tend to hesitate implementing grouping in their English classes at the elementary school level (Butler, 2005b). In some schools, students are allowed to choose either basic or advanced classes on their own (Chiang & Research Center for Children, 2002), but it is not yet clear how well such an approach works. At this point, we do not yet seem to have good solutions for dealing with the growing achievement gaps in English among students from different regions and SES backgrounds.

In terms of non-verbal effects, Korean elementary school students who had received English instruction showed a higher interest in foreign cultures and languages as well as more positive attitudes towards communicating in English compared with students who had not (Lee & Park, 2001). Studies conducted among middle school students also generally have shown positive non-verbal effects from EFLES (Lee, Choi, Boo, & Lee, 2001). Similar effects have been reported in Japan as well (JASTEC Project Team, 1989, 1994, 2001; JMOE, 2008c; Matsukawa, 1997; Tanizuka, 2000). Positive attitudes also appear to lead to higher perceived competence in English (Kunimoto, 2006).

However, there are some studies that have shown either no effect (Takagi, 2002 for Japan) or negative attitudes towards English among students who had received EFLES when they entered junior high school (K.-Y, Lee, 2002 for Korea). It has been reported that English has already become the least popular subject among elementary school children in Korea (J.-P, Lee, 2002). Lee, Choi, Boo, & Lee (2001) also reported some negative effects of EFLES in Korea with respect to students' performance in grammar and writing. Lee, et al. (2001) attributed such negative effects to inconsistencies between the English curricula at the elementary and middle school levels. Kwon, Boo,

Shin, Lee and Hyoun (2006) indicated that Korean students' perceived effectiveness of ELFES both in terms of language development and confidence was the most positive at the 7<sup>th</sup> grade level, but that this positive evaluation gradually decreased as the students became older. Matsumiya (2005) found that Japanese 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders already showed greater anxiety towards "speaking-up in English in front of others" compared with younger grade level students. Other individual factors including extra English learning outside of school also were found to influence students' attitudes (Kym, 2004). Finally, in Japan, after experiencing learning English, elementary school girls were found to show more positive motivation to learn English than boys (Carreira-Matsuzaki, 2006).

Kim (2003) examined middle school students' attitudes towards English learning and intercultural awareness in both Korea and Japan, and compared the effects of EFLES in both countries. She argued that students' experiences in English classes at the elementary school level influenced their attitudes in Korea and Japan in different ways. For example, Korean students who had taken English as an academic subject at elementary schools emphasized the importance of English skills (such as good pronunciation and accurate grammar) in communicating with foreigners more than their Japanese counterparts, who had experienced less academically focused English activities.

In addition to their cultural and educational environments, students' attitudes and their evaluation of their English learning appear to be influenced by their perceived abilities and attitudes towards communicating in their L1. Kunimoto (2005) found a high correlation between self-evaluated English abilities and Japanese abilities among Japanese 4<sup>th</sup> grade students. Kunimoto also found that those students who demonstrated a strong motivation to communicate in Japanese also tended to show a strong motivation to communicate in English as well. We need more information regarding how students' communicative abilities and their attitudes towards their L1 and foreign languages are co-developed in order to foster a more systematic harmonization between EFLES and L1 curricula.

### **Comparisons Based on Linguistic Measures**

The second type of evaluation study done to-date compares students' performance between those who have received English instruction and those who have not based on some form of linguistic measurement. A limited number of such studies have been reported to-date; those that have been announced are primarily from Japan where English has not yet become a mandatory subject at the elementary school level (as of 2008).

Matsukawa (1997) reported a case study in Japan that evaluated the effects of English activities at an elementary school by examining students' oral skills one year after their graduation from elementary school. Both students who had received English instruction at elementary school and those who had not were given oral interviews in English for ten minutes. The former group had received activity-based English language education for two years (70 hours per year). It was found that those students who had been taught English at elementary school could answer a series of questions more promptly, accurately, and fluently. These students were quantitatively more articulate than those who had not been taught English at their elementary schools. They also showed more confidence and tended to engage in conversation with the interviewers more positively. The Chuo Institute for Educational Research (2002) tested 818 3<sup>rd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> grade students and found that those students who experienced English instruction at the elementary school level outperformed non-experienced students in vocabulary, phonemic awareness, word recognition and listening comprehension. Shizuka (2007) also reported that the effect of EFLES in listening was greater for those students who had experienced EFLES for more than three years compared with those who had less experience. There are a few other studies in Japan that have reported similar advantages to having early English learning experiences in listening (e.g., JASTEC Project Team, 1988, Katsuyama, Nishigaki, & Wang, 2006; Megumi, Yokokawa, & Miura, 1996).

In contrast, Takada (2004) reported that students who did not have EFLES outperformed their non-EFLES counterparts in listening a year after the

students entered junior high school. Shirahata's (2002) case study reported that the effect of English education on students' oral performance was minimal. Shirahata chose a pilot school which had provided its students with oral-based English activities from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> grades (35 hours per year). The students' oral performance (in this case, their ability to discriminate English phonemes, their general pronunciation abilities, and their ability to speak fluently) was compared when they entered middle school with students who had not received English instruction at their elementary schools. The results showed that there were no significant differences between the two groups in any of the three domains that Shirahata examined.

It is not very clear where the inconsistent results in such previous studies come from. However, one can assume that the inconsistent results can be attributed to differences in the types of instruction that the students received and the ways in which the outcomes were measured.

It has been reported that the effects of EFLES on students' pronunciation appears to be minimal in Japan. Shinohara (1999) examined 116 high school students' mastery of pronunciation at a private high school in Japan. Half of the students had received oral-focused English language instruction (as an academic subject) during their elementary school years since the 1<sup>st</sup> grade, and the other half had not received English instruction until the 7<sup>th</sup> grade.<sup>2</sup> Those who had received EFLES outperformed the other group only in the categories of rhythm/stress and vowels/consonants. No differences were found in their intonation, in combining vowel and consonant sounds, or in their holistic scores (i.e., overall pronunciation). Moreover, Shinohara's small

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<sup>2</sup> The school in question was a private K-12 school where English was taught as an academic subject from the elementary school level. The formal group (the treatment group) received the following amounts of English instruction at the elementary school level in groups of 20 students: from 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, 2 x 20 minutes per week; 4<sup>th</sup> grade, 2 x 40 minutes per week; and 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades, 3 x 40 minutes per week. Both the treatment group and the control group (10<sup>th</sup> graders at the time of the experiment) received 4 hours of instruction per week in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades, and 5 hours of instruction per week in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

data set comparing pronunciation between 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade students indicates that these positive effects on elementary English instruction do not seem to be retained over time. These results suggest that the quality of oral instruction might be more important than the time of first exposure to the target language in EFL settings. Kajiro (2002) also reported that lower grade students in Japan were not necessarily better at repeating English words that they had just heard when compared with upper grade level students.

Takada (2003) examined middle school students' performance in oral reading, vocabulary, and grammar over a period of three years. She found that by the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, students who had received EFLES (at a private school) outperformed those who did not only in the area of oral reading; no differences were found in other domains. Moreover, no differences were found in any of the three domains that she examined by the time they reached the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Interestingly, those students who had EFLES experience performed well on items which required a lighter memory load (e.g., items related to simple syntactic structures, single-syllable words, and so forth), but they tended to have more trouble with items which required a heavier memory load. As Takada has indicated, students with EFLES experience might have a hard time in making the transition from elementary school English to middle school English given that the latter often takes a very different instructional approach from EFLES.

A number of studies in Japan, including ones that found advantages for listening skills from early English learning, found no significant effects on reading and writing skills (JATEC Project Team, 1988; Megumi, Yokokawa, & Miura, 1996). Focusing on grammar in writing, Takada (2005) found variability among students who had experienced EFLES and suggested that individual factors such as aptitude, attitude and L1 abilities might have a larger effect than the timing of the onset of English learning.

One can find a few large-scale studies based on general proficiency tests, although the number of such studies is still very limited. In Korea, Kwon, Boo, Shin, Lee, and Hyoun (2006) compared the English proficiency of 4,019 Korean 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade students in 2006 (who were taught English

at elementary schools) with the proficiency of 4,043 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> graders in 2003 (who were not exposed to English lessons at the elementary school level). The study used a general proficiency test known as the Global Test for English Communication, or GTEC. The results showed that high school students who were taught English at the elementary school level significantly outperformed those who did not in the domains of listening, reading and writing. Using the same outcome measure as Kwon, et al. (2006), Kanamori (2007) divided Japanese 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade students (3,700 in total) into four groups based on their experiences in early English learning as follows: (1) those who learned English only at school; (2) those who learned English only outside of school; (3) those who learned English both at school and outside of school; and (4) those who did not learn English at the elementary school level. The highest mean score (based on a total score for listening, reading and writing) was obtained by the group of students who had studied English both at school and outside of school, followed by those who had learned English outside of school and those who learned only at school. Unfortunately, Kanamori did not report a statistical analysis of his data and so the magnitude of the effect of early English learning is not totally clear.

These studies certainly provide us with useful information. However, there are a number of limitations that must be kept in mind when considering how these findings might apply to larger contexts. The first is a sampling issue. With the exception of Kwon, et al. (2006) and Kanamori (2007) as mentioned above, most of these studies are case studies and as such they limit our ability to generalize the results. In the case of Japan in particular, since there is substantial diversity in current educational practices, we are prevented from drawing any broad conclusions from studies with limited sample sizes. A second limitation concerns the validity and reliability of the measurements being used. One may argue, for example, that discrete linguistic items might not be able to capture the kind of English proficiency that students might gain through EFLES. As Johnstone (2000) pointed out, it is not yet totally clear what counts as foreign language proficiency among elementary school students, who are still developing their L1. We first need to clearly identify

constructs for foreign language proficiency among young learners and to develop instruments to capture such constructs. A third limitation concerns the insufficient alliance between elementary schools and junior high schools with respect to English language curricula, teaching methodologies, materials, and assessment. Unfortunately, it has been reported that the transition from EFLES to English at junior high school is often problematic in each of the three countries studied herein (Butler, 2005b; Taipei Municipal Bureau of Education & English Language Division of National Education Guiding Group, 2002). In Japan, it is not unusual for students who had EFLES to have to start learning English from the beginning again at middle school because ELFES has not yet been made mandatory for all students in Japan. Such discrepancies in practices and assessments between elementary schools and junior high schools might potentially have a negative impact on certain students once they enter middle school. The last limitation that must be kept in mind, again, relates to the potential influence of English learning that takes place outside of formal school settings, as Kanamori's (2007) study clearly indicated. Assuming that large numbers of students receive English lessons outside of school both at the elementary school level and the secondary school level in Japan as well as in Korea and Taiwan, this factor cannot be ignored.

### **Examinations Based on Criterion Reference Measurements**

The third type of evaluation study that has been done are studies that employ criterion reference measures and analyze the extent to which students have mastered the content of the curricula being taught. In Korea, KICE (the Korea Institute of Curriculum & Evaluation) has administered achievement tests based on the 7<sup>th</sup> National Curriculum since 1999 to randomly selected students, and English is one of the subjects they assess. KICE does not release detailed information about the test results. However, according to a summary report released in 2002, approximately 7,000 6<sup>th</sup> grade students were sampled and their average score in English was 71 (out of 100). The

report also indicated that girls outperformed boys. There also was an achievement gap between rural and urban areas, and this gap widened at higher grade levels (Im & Lee, 2003). Starting in 2008, the Korean government began implementing these achievement tests, including their English test, nationwide. As such all students from the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and beyond are now required to take these achievement tests a few times each year (Oh, 2008).

Local governments such as those in Seoul and Taipei have begun administering various types of in-house measurements. In Seoul City, the Seoul Elementary School English Teachers' Association developed an achievement test for assessing English listening skills (*Seoul Teukbyeolsi Chodeung Yeongeo Deukgipyongga*) and started administering this test from July 2007. Taipei City started implementing criterion-reference tests in 2003, where sample items and/or item banks were prepared in order for individual schools to create their own assessments. By doing so, the city can secure a certain level of uniformity in assessment among schools within their districts, while giving individual schools a degree of autonomy (Taipei Municipal Bureau of Education, 2008). Each item corresponds to a standard developed by the TMOE (for the standard, see Taipei Municipal Bureau of Education, 2007). According to a survey of 696 teachers, 1,423 students and 913 parents from 140 elementary schools in Taipei in 2004, 83% of the parents and 74% of the students thought that the criterion-reference tests were appropriate, while only 50% of the teachers felt this way (Chen, 2006). In any event, the results of these locally-based assessments are not usually available to the general public and thus the detailed results of these assessments remain unknown.

Finally, in Japan, since there has not yet been a standard curriculum as of 2008, a couple of studies used general proficiency tests in order to evaluate students' oral performance. Butler and Takeuchi (2008), using the Junior STEP Silver Test, tested 6,541 3<sup>rd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> grade students who had received various types of EFLES education across Japan. While the Silver Test is not an achievement test but a general proficiency test which was designed to

measure basic oral skills among young learners who experienced oral-based English instruction for at least two years, the test was developed through careful examination of curricula and materials used in pilot schools across Japan. The study found that the students scored on average 73%, and that their grade levels and the frequencies of instruction that the students received outside of school were good predictors of their performance on the test. Other variables such as the total hours of instruction that the students received at school and the frequencies of instruction led by foreign teachers did not turn out to be influential variables when it came to the students' oral performance. Interestingly, the data in the study also suggested that the one-hour of English instruction typically conducted at school may yield a qualitatively different influence on students' oral performance between middle grade level students (3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> graders) and upper grade level students (5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders). In other words, even if the number of hours of instruction is equal, middle and upper grade students may show differences in their learning. The authors suggested that policy makers need to carefully examine the quality of instruction at each grade level as well as how best to utilize foreign teachers as a resource before hastily making policy decisions to introduce EFLES at younger grade levels and/or to increase the number of foreign teachers working at elementary schools in Japan.

Yukawa and her colleagues developed a test called the YTK Test<sup>3</sup>, which included a pair speaking assessment (in which two students held a conversation with a native speaker for three minutes) as well as a listening assessment (Yukawa, 2007; Yukawa, Takanashi, & Koyama, 2008). They administered the test to 975 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade students from 6 schools who had received one to two hours of instruction per week at school from the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade onwards. With respect to their listening performance, the students on average scored 78% on the YTK Test (out of a top score of 100%), which the authors took as representing satisfactory performance. However, the authors also

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<sup>3</sup> The YTK Test was developed based on the curricula of six participating schools. For this reason, Yukawa et al. (2008) considered the YTK Test to be an achievement test rather than a proficiency test.

pointed out that the students' performance was weak on a task where they had to summarize the contents of an orally-delivered picture-book story. The students did not seem to develop the ability to listen to a certain length of oral text and to grasp the main storylines. In the speaking test, the students achieved an overall score of 77% which was also considered to be satisfactory. However, the test results also showed substantial differences in performance among the schools that they examined.

## **ISSUES REGARDING TEACHER-BASED ASSESSMENT**

So far, we have reviewed a number of studies which examined the outcome of EFLES, namely, how well students have learned English through EFLES. In reviewing these studies, the author found that there are a growing number of studies which focus on teacher-based assessment in EFLES. While these studies do not directly address the effectiveness of EFLES per se, they do have some relevance to the evaluation of ELFES in that these studies are concerned with how best to assess student performance, which in turn influences the evaluation of EFLES.

As mentioned before, both the Korean and Taiwanese governments strongly advocate teacher-based assessment in EFLES. Since teacher-based assessment (terms such as "alternative assessment" or "non-traditional assessment" have also been used in prior studies) has traditionally been less valued in English language education systems in East Asia, teachers seem to have some difficulties in conceptualizing and implementing teacher-based assessments systematically in their classrooms. A few survey studies have reported that Korean and Taiwanese teachers indeed tried different teacher-based assessments in their classrooms, but that they faced a number of difficulties including: (1) a lack of knowledge about teacher-based assessment; (2) large class sizes; (3) a lack of sufficient time to administer teacher-based assessment; and (4) a lack of information on how best to use information gained through teacher-based assessment for formative and/or summative

purposes (e.g., Butler & Lee, 2005; Hwang, 2006; Ryu, 2007 for Korea; Chan, 2008; Hsieh & Hsiao, 2004; Hsu, 2003 for Taiwan). Hsieh and Hsiao (2004) also reported that English teachers' attitudes towards teacher-based assessment differed depending on their characteristics; younger teachers have more positive attitudes towards teacher-based assessment, and similarly, those who have more training and experience with teacher-based assessment also have more positive attitudes towards it.

In Japan, while assessment is not required for teachers and schools under the current policy, a review of school reports submitted to local and central governments showed that many schools appeared to incorporate some form of self-assessment (or sometimes peer assessment) as part of the assessment exercises in EFLES classes and/or evaluations of the EFLES programs themselves. However, the items often were not carefully constructed, and it is often unclear to what extent the information gained from such student self-assessments accurately reflects their attitudes and performance, much less how best to utilize such information effectively in order to improve EFLES teaching and learning.

We still have very limited knowledge about how best to conduct teacher-based assessment among young learners of EFLES in general. With respect to self-assessment, for example, Butler and Lee (2006) compared the validity of two types of self-assessment in Korea, off-task self-assessment and on-task self-assessment. Off-task self-assessment, which is commonly observed in schools, asks students to generally assess their performance in a somewhat decontextualized manner. On-task self-assessment is designed to ask students to evaluate their performance in specific tasks or activities immediately after the students conducted such tasks or activities. The study found that, in the on-task self-assessment condition, elementary school students could more accurately assess their own performance and their judgment was less influenced by their attitudes and personality factors. There was a developmental effect as well; 6<sup>th</sup> grade students more accurately evaluated their performance than 4<sup>th</sup> grade students.

In sum, we have very little understanding regarding how best to implement

teacher-based assessment in EFLES programs. The role that teacher-based assessment is presumed to play in the EFLES policies of the three countries studied herein is also unclear. More empirical research and policy discussions are urgently needed in order to provide teachers with better assistance.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, there is still very limited information available as of yet about the evaluation of EFLES in Korea, Japan, and Taiwan. There is an urgent need to develop systematic ways to assess students' performance in EFLES programs and to evaluate the overall effectiveness of such programs themselves. While the three countries differ with respect to their implementations of EFLES, there seem to be a number of common issues and challenges.

The first challenge is identifying the abilities that we want elementary school students to develop through EFLES programs. Various types of assessments have been implemented in previous studies. However, we still don't have a clear understanding of what counts as foreign language proficiency for young learners. For example, we may simply assume that accurate comprehension in listening and reading is important and that assessments are developed to check the accuracy of young students' comprehension. However, one may argue that developing various strategies to repair miscommunication and/or to tolerate ambiguities in communication might be the abilities that need to be the focus of assessment. How then can we capture such abilities using various types of assessments including teacher-based assessment? The current study found that we need a more thorough discussion of the role of teacher-based assessment in policies. In sum, we need a deeper theoretical discussion of assessment as well as an alignment between assessments and such theoretical underpinnings. These are necessary if we are to adequately observe and characterize the various types of language abilities that young learners of foreign language develop through EFLES programs.

Second, we need studies which carefully examine the relationship between the types and quality of instruction and student performance. Even within the same country (i.e., under the same policy framework), we could find differences in students' performance and attitudes across studies. It would be very informative to identify the methods of instruction, teacher qualifications, and materials that work well in various teaching and learning environments. Similarly, we need to pay serious attention to the substantial achievement gaps that are emerging among students from different SES and regional backgrounds. It is also very important to investigate how and why such achievement gaps are developed in their respective contexts and how we may be able to deal with this issue.

Third, we need to examine the effects of introducing EFLES by looking at multiple dimensions in larger socio-economic contexts. The present paper focused on students' language performance and their attitudes as an outcome of EFLES. This decision was made partially because the present author could find very few studies which examined the different aspects of the effectiveness of EFLES in the three countries under study. Some of the possible dimensions for further study include: (1) the impact on English education, not only on students' performance but also on instructional methods and strategies, curricula and material development at the secondary and post-secondary levels after the introduction of EFLES; (2) the effect of EFLES on other subjects, especially language arts (i.e., Korean, Japanese or Chinese) at the elementary school level; (3) the mutual effects of the private education sector on EFLES education and vice-versa; and a number of other aspects of the introduction of EFLES. Both the short-term and long-term effects need to be thoroughly investigated.

The present study also offers a few suggestions for EFLES policies in Korea, Taiwan, and Japan. First, comprehensible and feasible assessment tools should be prepared and made available for teachers along with adequate assistance for implementing these. Clear guidelines should be presented to teachers if informal teacher-based assessments are expected to be used. Considering the wide range in English proficiency among students, reliable

diagnostic assessments also need to be prepared. A growing number of assessment tools have been specifically designed for elementary school teachers in Asian EFL contexts in recent years. Such tools, however, need to be carefully examined for their validity, reliability, and practicality, and should be shared with teachers to determine if they are appropriate given the local context. Even in Japan where English has not yet been introduced as an academic subject at the policy level, assessment is necessary as long as instruction takes place in order to improve instruction and enhance learning.

Second, teachers need more systematic and hands-on training on assessments. While the Korean and Taiwanese governments are making substantial efforts to offer various types of training to their teachers, assessment does not yet seem to be given sufficient attention in such training programs. So far, there is almost no systematic hands-on training on assessment available for Japanese teachers. It is important for teachers to have a clear understanding of the purposes and roles of assessment in EFLES, how to implement various types of assessments, and how to use the information gained through such assessments in order to help the students' improve their performance. After all, assessment is an indispensable component for effective language education planning as well as for improving EFLES teaching and learning.

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