



The Journal of Asia TEFL

<http://journal.asiatefl.org/>

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Learner Perspectives on National Identity and EFL Education in Japan: Report of a Questionnaire Study

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Although the Japanese discourse of *nihonjinron* argues that the increasing hegemony of the English language will have negative effects on the Japanese identity, some scholars have suggested the opposite, that English in Japan plays a significant role in strengthening and maintaining the ideologies of the Japanese national identity. This paper investigates the potential for both positive and/or negative impacts of English education in Japan by analysing the attitudes and perspectives of 97 Japanese tertiary-level EFL students towards the study of English on Japan's national and cultural identity. The findings suggest that support for the theories of the *nihonjinron* discourse are not as strong amongst the younger generation in Japan as what they once were. Participants identified the Japanese language as a constituent element of national identity, and it is therefore suggested that removing Japanese from the EFL classroom entirely, as has been advocated for in foreign language policies, may actually cultivate negative ideologies towards the study of English in general. The findings suggest the need to build a positive relationship between the English language as a support for Japanese identity if we are to see an improvement in Japanese students' attitudes toward, and development of, EFL on the whole.

Key words: national identity, national culture, Japanese EFL, EFL education, English and identity, Japanese identity

Introduction

The concept of national and cultural identity in Japan is a complex matter, made more so by an increasing influx of English language and Western-based influences. Giles and Johnson's (1987) ethnolinguistic identity theory suggests that the social world is categorised into ingroups and outgroups, which are defined by social identity. They argue that members seek to achieve positive identity by affording favourable comparison with outgroups to achieve "psychological distinctiveness", and suggest that "language comes into the picture when a group regards its own language or speech variety as a dimension of comparison with outgroups" (p. 71). Traditionally, Japan has identified itself as a linguistically and culturally homogenous society. However, in recent years, increased pressures of globalisation have threatened this homogenous status. From Giles and Johnson's (1987) ethnolinguistic identity approach, we can see Japan as protecting and differentiating itself as a distinct ingroup against the outgroup of the English language. The safeguard of the Japanese language is thus a dimension of favourable comparison that characteristically defines the Japanese identity.

Kubota (2002) claims that, while on the one hand globalisation encourages cultural homogenisation, on the other hand it works to promote a sense of cultural nationalism. This sense of nationalism has been prominent in Japanese history; so much so that an entire genre of discourse texts, known as *nihonjinron*,

or *the theories of the Japanese*, have been written on the topic. Befu (2009) defines *nihonjinron* as a discourse that

... asserts the uniqueness of Japanese culture and people, and spells out the ways in which they are unique. The discourse on exceptionality covers the whole gamut: from biological make-up of the Japanese, prehistoric cultural development, language, literary and aesthetic qualities, human relations, and social organisation to philosophy and personal character (p. 25).

The Japanese language plays a central role in the *nihonjinron* discourse (Befu, 2001; Liddicoat, 2007), considered by many to be the underlying manifestation of what it means to be Japanese (Sullivan & Schatz, 2009). Indeed, “the view that language contains the secret of the speaker’s worldview, thought processes, and the like is an old one” (Befu, 2001, p. 34). However, the increased pressure of globalisation in recent years has seen a rise in the influx of foreign languages (FL) and culture in Japanese society, in particular, the English language. The *nihonjinron* discourse argues that, as a representation of Western culture and ideologies, the increasing hegemony of the English language will have negative effects on Japan’s national and cultural identity (Fujimoto-Adamson, 2006). McVeigh (2004) suggests that, because of this attitude, “not being able to speak English signifies one’s Japaneseness” (p. 223), and that “acquiring English means becoming contaminated by non-Japaneseness” (p. 215), losing the uniqueness of their cultural identity in the process. In Japan, such adverse ideologies surrounding the English language have had negative effects on the education of English as a foreign language (EFL) in secondary and tertiary level schooling. EFL education in Japan has been under heavy criticism since the 1970s (Butler & Iino, 2005), which incidentally coincides with the period in which publication and focus on the *nihonjinron* discourse was greatest (Befu, 2001). Even today, Japanese students of EFL consistently score low in internationally recognised English language tests such as TOEIC and TOEFL (Machida & Walsh, 2015; McMillan & Rivers, 2011).

There are numerous factors underpinning the low level of communicative EFL abilities in Japanese students. Arguments from the *nihonjinron* discourse reflect an ideology that teachers and students alike are safeguarding their national and cultural identity from Western influences by not developing refined communicative English skills. As Befu (1983, as cited in McVeigh, 2002) suggests, “it is as if ineptitude of foreign language instruction and learning is maintained (though, needless to say, unconsciously) for the purpose of convincing millions of Japanese of their separateness from foreigners” (p. 148). In contrast, however, some scholars have suggested that the opposite is also true, and that globalisation and the hegemony of the English language in Japan plays a significant role in strengthening and maintaining the nationalistic ideologies of the Japanese people and *nihonjinron* discourse (McKenzie, 2010). Kubota (2002) identifies three tensions that have risen in Japan as a result of increased globalisation and influences from the West: “(1) ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity in the local communities; (2) the prevalence of English; and (3) nationalism endorsed by linguistic and cultural essentialism” (p. 14), in which the first two features threaten to undermine Japanese culture, and motivate the third to support it.

This paper is grounded in ethnolinguistic identity theory (Giles & Johnson, 1987) and the idea that the safeguard of the Japanese language is a dimension of favourable comparison that characteristically defines the Japanese identity, as well on the theories of the *nihonjinron* discourse (Befu, 2001), which argue that the hegemony of the English language in Japan is a potential threat to Japanese national identity. These theories are used as a framework throughout this paper to analyse the potential for both positive and/or negative impacts of EFL education on the Japanese national identity, as seen through the eyes of 97 tertiary-level EFL students. This paper also aims to determine the extent to which Japanese EFL students agree with the *nihonjinron* and *kokusaika* theories of national identity in relation to the West, and what influences this knowledge may have on FL policy and the teaching of EFL in the Japanese society in the future.

Literature Review

Japanese Identity and Internationalisation

The external pressures of globalisation and the unavoidable influx of the English language and Western culture into Japan have unquestionably challenged the ideologies of the *nihonjinron* discourse and the status of the Japanese society as a linguistically homogenous environment. But views against the threatening hegemony of the English language have not faded in recent years. As McVeigh (2002) suggests, “for some students, learning English well contaminates, or at least threatens, their ethnocultural and national identity” (p. 155). Such views have subsequently resulted in the need for a FL policy that both accommodates the economic pressures from the West whilst maintaining the underlying national identities of the Japanese people. This call was answered with the rise of the *kokusaika* discourse in the 1980s, literally meaning ‘internationalisation’.

Kubota (1998) states that *kokusaika* “harmoniously embraces both Westernisation through learning the communication mode of English and the promotion of nationalistic values” (p. 300). The discourse balances the fine tension between the study of English and the protection of national identity, which juxtaposes the idea of joining the West through the study of English with the maintenance and communication of Japan’s unique national identity to the rest of the world (Kubota, 2002). Suzuki (1999) discusses this notion, suggesting that the study of English does not necessarily mean the study and adoption of Western culture and societal norms, but rather, the acquisition of a language tool through which the Japanese people can express their own identity and explain Japanese culture to Western nations in English. Kubota (2002) refers to this argument as a “nationalistic profile of *kokusaika* discourse” (p. 27).

In other words, the *kokusaika* discourse can be seen as a “promotion of ‘Japaneseness’ in the international community” (Hashimoto, 2009, p. 22) equally as much as an attempt to welcome and accept the influx of the English language and Western ideologies. And yet, *kokusaika* has exerted a number of significant influences on FL policy in the Japanese EFL education system. McVeigh (2004) argues that, “In Japan, learning English is tightly linked, indeed, defined by, nationalist utilitarian purposes” (p. 214), with Sullivan and Schatz (2009) adding that “*kokusaika*—and its English education policies—serve to promote Japanese identity and culture, and thereby manifest Japanese nationalism” (p. 489). This notion has seen a slight change in some perceptions of the English hegemony in Japan, with some scholars suggesting that, in reality, English has played a significant role in strengthening the national identity of Japan and the Japanese people (McKenzie, 2010; McVeigh, 2002). Unfortunately, such views are yet to become mainstream in the Japanese society, and related policies and practices are yet to become standard in EFL classrooms throughout the country.

Japanese Identity and EFL Education in Japan

The Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has issued numerous FL policies based on the *kokusaika* discourse that have consistently advocated for the development of Japanese students’ communicative English abilities through approaches such as communicative language teaching (CLT), in which “English classes should be conducted principally in English in high school” (MEXT, 2011, p. 8). But MEXT is yet to be successful in achieving this goal, and there remains a significant gap between the government’s FL policies and the realities of EFL classroom practices in Japan (Nishino and Watanabe, 2008). Kikuchi and Browne’s (2009) exploratory study into the perceptions of 112 Japanese college freshmen looking back on their senior high school experiences regarding EFL classroom practices found clear evidence of a gap between the goals outlined by MEXT in their revision to the course of study and the actual teaching practices of EFL classrooms. Even in Oral Communication classes, students believed that their communicative EFL skills were not being developed. The authors suggested that the goals of MEXT’s *course of study* were not being effectively implemented,

and stated that: “[a]lthough it is true that the stated goals of these guidelines clearly emphasize the importance of developing students’ communicative competence, it seems equally true that Japanese teachers of English [...] are either unwilling or unable to teach English in a communicative manner” (p. 189). This may also be due to the fact that in MEXT’s (2009) explanation for the course of study for foreign languages at senior high schools, designed for teachers as further supplementary details to provide a rationale for the new policies, it is stated that Japanese *can* be used in the classroom, provided that the focus is on English language activities for communication. This, in turn, creates the possibility for EFL teachers in Japan to continue resisting MEXT’s policy that English classes should be taught predominantly in English, which may also show the government’s ambivalence toward mandating English-only classes.

Even today, Japanese EFL students of all levels of schooling maintain relatively low levels of communicative English skills, consistently scoring low marks in international English tests in comparison to their neighbouring Asian nations (Machida & Walsh, 2015; McMillan & Rivers, 2011). This raises the question of why, despite the policies issued by MEXT regarding FL education, are Japanese EFL students not achieving higher levels of practical English skills. For one reason or another, communicative approaches to teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) are still rarely seen in Japanese EFL classrooms (McMillan & Rivers, 2011; Taguchi, 2005). EFL education in Japan has a long tradition of employing *yakudoku*, closely resembling the grammar translation method. Hino (1988) defines *yakudoku* as “a technique or a mental process for reading a foreign language in which the target language sentence is first translated word-by-word, and the resulting translation reordered to match Japanese word order as part of the process of reading comprehension” (p. 46). The language of instruction is almost always Japanese, and despite MEXT’s policy goals, communicative oral and written English skills are not fostered (Gorsuch, 1998). During secondary school EFL education, the *yakudoku* method is employed to prepare students for passing university entrance examinations, which focus almost exclusively on receptive EFL skills and grammatical knowledge (Butler & Iino, 2005; Gottlieb, 2008; Kikuchi, 2006; McVeigh, 2004; Sato & Kleinsasser, 2004). Teachers are trained to engage students in literature analysis for such examination purposes, and have little training in CLT methods themselves as a result (Nishino & Watanabe, 2008). This long-existing relationship between EFL education and grammar-based university entrance examinations means that Japanese EFL students and teachers alike are reluctant to engage in the communicative aspects of learning English (Littlewood, 2007). McVeigh (2002) goes as far as to claim that, to many Japanese, English is a “deviancy that threatens one’s Japaneseness” (p. 155), and the argument can be made that the continued prevalence of the *yakudoku* method over CLT approaches in Japanese EFL is a reaction against the threat that the development of communicative English poses to Japan’s national identity.

Other researchers have suggested that the low level of communicative English abilities in Japan stems from Japan’s national *culture of learning*, which exerts a heavy influence over the psychological mindset and actions surrounding the Japanese education system. Samimy and Kobayashi (2004), for example, claim there to be “cultural mismatches between theoretical underpinnings of CLT and the Japanese culture of learning” (p. 253). The culture of learning in Asian EFL contexts is significantly different than those of the Western ESL environments in which such CLT methods were developed (Littlewood, 2007), and certain forms of CLT have been called “incompatible” with these Asian-based cultures as a result (Hobbs, Matsuo, & Payne, 2010, p. 46). In other words, the protection of Japanese culture and the separation of all that is foreign has prevented the cultivation of communicative English abilities in Japanese students of EFL.

In the past, little research has investigated the actual impact of national identity on Japanese EFL students’ attitudes towards studying English. One study that has examined this notion was conducted by Sullivan and Schatz (2009), who assessed the effects of national identification on the attitudes of 377 Japanese university students towards the West (specifically, the United States) and the study of English. They examined four concepts of identification in relation to perceptions of EFL: “patriotism (positive identification with and affective attachment to country), nationalism (perceptions of national superiority

and support for national dominance), internationalism (support for international goodwill and cooperation), and commitment to national heritage (devotion to national symbols and cultural heritage)” (p. 486). Their findings suggest that the concepts of nationalism, internationalism and pro-U.S. attitudes favoured positive attitudes towards EFL education, whereas the concept of patriotism did not. This lends further evidence to the discourses of *nihonjinron* and *kokusaika*. The fact that nationalism favoured EFL education supports the *kokusaika* claim that EFL education is a promotion of Japaneseness in the international community (Hashimoto, 2009), with the negative attitudes of patriotism toward the study of EFL supporting the nationalistic *nihonjinron* argument that Japanese people hold a strong sense of identity with, and affective attachment for, the Japanese nation against all that is foreign. However, this study does not look specifically at whether Japanese EFL students believe the study of English to result in a loss of Japanese national identity, as is often proclaimed in nationalistic *nihonjinron* arguments.

Methodology

Although previous studies have investigated the attitudes of Japanese EFL students toward English education on the whole (e.g. Ryan, 2009), and more specifically in relation to their EFL teachers (e.g. Shimizu, 1995), an in-depth review of the literature found no studies that have looked specifically at the perspectives of Japanese EFL students regarding the effects of the English language on Japanese identity loss, as is often proclaimed in the *nihonjinron* discourse. The present study thus aims to examine the perspectives of tertiary-level Japanese EFL students regarding the potential for a loss in their national and cultural identity through EFL education. To do so, the following research questions were investigated:

1. How do Japanese EFL students view the English education system currently employed in Japan?
2. What do Japanese EFL students consider to be important elements of the Japanese national identity?
3. What relationship do Japanese EFL students perceive between the study of English and a reduction/loss of their national identity?

Participants

This study focused on the perceptions of Japanese L1 students who were taking English classes at the time at a tertiary-level institution. All participants had completed at least the mandatory six years of English education at the junior and senior high school level prior to partaking in the study. 97 (M=51, F=46) students enrolled in EFL courses at a large national university in Japan took part in this project voluntarily. The majority of the participants (57.73%) were aged between 18-20, 40.21% aged between 21-23, and the remaining 2.06% over the age of 24. The participants had been studying English for an average of 8.57 years in total since junior high school; 40.21% claimed to have had studied English overseas at some point in their past, both at the secondary and tertiary schooling levels, with experiences ranging from as little as one week to as much as five years (in one case only), averaging a total of 5.62 months overall.

Although official EFL test scores could not be collected as part of the present study, 12.37% of the participants categorised themselves as belonging to a beginner EFL proficiency level, with 25.74% identifying themselves as lower-intermediate, the majority, 45.30%, as upper-intermediate, and 16.58% as advanced. These participants were selected to partake in this study because of their shared status as learners who had all sat and passed the same standards of university English entrance examinations, and shared experience as learners who were currently undertaking the same standards of tertiary-level English education.

Questionnaire

A questionnaire (see Appendix A) was devised for use in the present study to answer the main research questions. A pilot study was conducted prior with a small group of 10 students to test the reliability and validity of the questionnaire. The pilot study participants were asked follow-up questions such as whether the instructions clear, any questions were difficult to understand or answer, the length of the questionnaire was acceptable; the survey was then refined accordingly.

The survey was split into three basic sections. In the first introductory section, participants were asked for their background demographic information, how they felt about studying English and their preferences for the language of instruction in the classroom. The second section in the questionnaire first determined what exactly participants believe it means to be Japanese, and then addressed the relationship that Japanese EFL students perceive between the study of English and a reduction/loss of their national identity. This section aimed to determine whether the theories of the *nihonjinron* discourse that have traditionally asserted a loss of Japanese identity at the hands of the English hegemony (McVeigh, 2002) are still prevalent in the minds of young Japanese studying English today. The third section of the questionnaire sought to investigate the issue of how Japanese EFL students view the English education system currently employed in Japan, and any changes that they believe may be necessary. This was aimed to determine whether the participating students agreed with the *yakudoku* (Hino, 1988) or examination-based nature of EFL education in Japan (Butler & Iino, 2005), and whether they held views for or against the FL policies advocated for by MEXT (2011) to develop communicative EFL skills by predominantly employing English as the language of instruction.

The questionnaire was comprised of both Likert-scale and short answer open-ended questions. Although they pose limitations, open-ended questions were included in the survey to allow for a “greater freedom of expression” on the participants’ behalf (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 36), and because it was unknown how the participants would answer on certain questions, making it difficult to provide pre-determined variables. Participants were given the option to answer in either Japanese or English, and all questions were written in both languages. The responses and comments displayed in the findings section of this article that were originally written in Japanese have been translated into English for the purpose of readership. Those quotes for which no Japanese translation is provided below were originally written in English by the participant. Specific details about each participant are displayed in brackets following their respective quotes, including their gender (M/F), age, and duration of overseas experience. For example, a bracket displaying (M, 18-20, N/A) would denote a male in the 18-20 age category with no experience studying English abroad, while (F, 21-23, 3m) would denote a female between 21-23 years old with 3 months experience studying abroad.

Procedure

The questionnaire was devised and posted on the Internet, where it could be easily distributed to participants via an online system. An appeal for participation in the project was made in EFL classrooms at a single Japanese university for uniformity. Project details were left in EFL classrooms, and those students who were willing to voluntarily partake in the present study were provided with a link and QR code to the online questionnaire. At the beginning of the questionnaire, the participants were informed that the study was completely anonymous and that they had the opportunity to pull out at any stage throughout. They were also asked to complete the questionnaire by themselves and in a single sitting. The responses were then collected and the Japanese sections translated into English for analysis.

The data analysis involved two facets. Closed-ended questions were coded objectively by converting each response into a numerical score relevant to predetermined variables. The short answer open-ended questions, which did not have pre-coded response options, were analysed via subjective interpretation by the researcher. The responses to each short answer question were condensed into a limited number of categories pertaining to each question, assigned a numeric value and analysed through content analysis

relevant to the overall purpose of the study.

Findings

In order to address research Q1 (How do Japanese EFL students view the English education system currently employed in Japan?) the following data were collected to examine the participants' preference for language of instruction in the EFL classroom (i.e. in favour or against the government's FL policies advocating maximum use of English), and their belief about the system's general ability to develop students' EFL competence.

In the present study, 47.42% of the participants viewed the study of English as being "so-so", closely followed by 44.33% who claimed to enjoy it. Only 8.25% of participants did not enjoy studying English. The ratio between the participants' preferences for the language of instruction in the EFL classroom was split in a relatively even manner (see Table 1). It is interesting to note that, despite being an English language class, only 29.90% of participants preferred an EFL learning environment in which English was employed all of the time. An equal amount expressed the desire for Japanese to be used *half* of the time, with only 9% of the total group suggesting a preference for Japanese to be used *most* of the time. In total, 68 participants (70.10%) expressed a desire for Japanese to be used to *some extent* in the EFL classroom.

TABLE 1
Participants' Preference for the Language of Instruction in the EFL Classroom

Language of instruction	Number of participants	Total percentage
All English	29	29.90%
Mostly English	30	30.92%%
Half English, half Japanese	29	29.90%
Mostly Japanese	9	9.28%
All Japanese	0	0

When asked whether they believe the current English education system in Japan to be adequate in developing students EFL abilities, the majority of participants (59.80%) said 'no', compared to just 15.46% and 10.31% who said 'maybe' and 'yes', respectively; 14.43% of participants 'did not know'. Accordingly, 52.58% of the participants believed a change in the system was necessary, compared to just 23.71% who thought 'maybe', 12.37% who thought 'no', and 11.34% who 'did not know'. When asked why they thought a change was or was not required, participants covered a range of pertinent topics in their comments. Some targeted the academic, examination-based system as a whole:

We should move to starting from everyday, practical English to begin with, only teaching academic English for entrance examinations to those people who need it. (F, 18-20, 1m)

(日常での実践的な英語から始まり、必要な人のみ入学試験のためのアカデミックな英語に移るべき。)

A change in the entrance-examination system. We should abolish Japanese translation questions and make it so that all answers are in English. (M, 21-23, 10m)

入試制度の変更。日本語訳問題の廃止、回答は全て英語で行うようにすべき。

Others focused on the lack of productive English skills:

We should improve speaking and writing. (F, 21-23, N/A)

(スピーキングとライティングを上達させるべき。)

We need to conduct practical classes that include speaking and writing. I think Japanese are the only people in the world who can't speak English that well. (F, 18-20, N/A)

(スピーキングやライティングを含む、実践的な授業を行うべき。世界のなかでもこんなに英語をはなすことが出来ないのは日本だけだともう。)

And some participants targeted the Japanese EFL teachers themselves:

English teachers in Japan cannot speak, and only teach from a textbook. I want a teacher who trained overseas and can teach real English. (M, 21-23, N/A)

Teachers need to be more eager to speak English. They can write, read and listen but won't (maybe can't) speak it. (F, 18-20, 3m)

In order to address Research Q2 (What do Japanese EFL students consider important in the make-up of Japanese national identity?) the participants were asked the open-ended question: "What do you think it means to be Japanese?". Some expressed uncertainly, seen through comments such as:

The concept of 'the Japanese person' is unclear, so I usually don't think about it. (F, 18-20, 1m)

(日本人という概念が不明瞭なので普段からそうは考えない。)

Others commented broadly, covering aspects of language, nationality, state of living, and mindset. The seven main points raised by participants in the present study have been summarised below in Table 2.

TABLE 2

A Summary of Participants' Views Regarding What it Means to be 'Japanese'

Elements of what it means to be Japanese	Number of participants	Total percentage
1. To speak Japanese	69	71.13%
2. To be born, grow up, and live in Japan	65	67.01%
3. To have Japanese citizenship	43	44.33%
4. To understand and follow Japanese culture and traditions	33	34.02%
5. To be proud of your Japanese heritage and nationality	13	13.40%
6. To possess a Japanese way of thinking and behaving	11	11.34%
7. To have Japanese manners, modesty, and peace	8	8.25%

Finally, with these constituent elements of Japanese identity in mind, and in order to address Research Q3 (What relationship do Japanese EFL students perceive between the study of English and a reduction/loss of their national identity?), the following data were collected. The participants were first asked "do you think studying English makes you 'less Japanese'?", i.e. resulting in the *weakening* or *reduction* of the above-mentioned identity characteristics. Although the majority of participants (67%, see Table 3) did not view themselves or others as being 'less Japanese' for studying EFL, exactly one-third of all participants did believe, to some extent, that there was some truth behind the statement.

TABLE 3

Participants' Perspectives Regarding a Reduction of one's Japaneseness Through the Study of English

Does EFL study make you "less Japanese"?	Number of participants	Total percentage
Yes, a lot	9	9.28%
Yes, a little bit	23	23.71%
No, not really	24	24.74%
No, definitely not	41	42.27%

Slightly different results were seen when asked “do you think that studying English could result in a loss of Japanese identity?”, i.e. resulting in the *death* or *disappearance* of the before-mentioned seven identity characteristics. Over half of the participants (52%) claimed that studying EFL would ‘*definitely not*’ result in a loss of Japanese identity, with nearly 80% of participants overall in opposition to the claim (see Table 4). Only 20.62% of participants believed that, to some extent, EFL education could potentially result in a loss of Japanese identity.

TABLE 4
Participants’ Perspectives Regarding a Loss of Japanese Identity Through the Study of English

Does EFL study result in identity loss?	Number of participants	Total percentage
Yes, a lot	8	8.25%
Yes, a little bit	12	12.37%
No, not really	25	25.77%
No, definitely not	52	53.61%

One comment in particular reflects the view that, whilst studying English may not lead to a loss of Japanese identity, it can certainly affect and reduce it:

To me, I think being Japanese means speaking Japanese, having an understanding of Japanese culture, and having an attachment to Japan. I don’t necessarily think that these points will be lost by studying a foreign language. However, I have experienced being influenced by a language’s way of thinking when having a lot of contact with foreign languages and cultures, which shook my Japan(ese) way of thinking. So, in that meaning, being Japanese might be affected by the study of foreign languages. (M, 24+, 1y)

(私にとって日本人であるというのは、日本語を話し、日本の文化に理解があり、日本に愛着を持っていることだと思います。外国語を勉強することによって、上記の点が必ずしも失われるとは思いません。ただし、外国語や外国の文化との接触が多いと、その言語の考え方に影響されて日本（語）的な考え方を揺るがすことになった経験があるので、その意味では、日本人であることは、外国語学習によって揺るぐことがあるかもしれません。)

Because 52.58% of the participants believed a change in the system to be necessary, they were then asked whether they believe a change in the current Japanese EFL education system could result in a loss of Japanese identity. Once again, the majority of the participants (57.73%) claimed that it would *not* result in a loss of Japanese identity. However, 1/4 of the participants believed there was at least the potential for a loss in identity, with 13.40% claiming that it would, and 11.34% that it might. The remaining 17.53% of participants did not know. Some participants commented outright that there was no connection between EFL education and national identity:

I don’t think there is a relationship between language education and identity. (F, 21-23, N/A)
(言語教育とアイデンティティは関係ないと思う。)

I think that speaking English and the issues of Japaneseness are completely separate. (M, 18-20, N/A)
(英語を喋ることと日本人らしさの問題は全く別だと思う。)

Others suggested that, as long as the EFL education system does not become ‘too Western’, and that the Japanese realise that the point of EFL education is not to become Western but to promote intercultural communication, then English would not result in a loss of Japanese identity:

As long as we don't impose western values. Students have enough exposure to Japanese values and culture (they live in it), so a few hours a week studying English wouldn't contribute to losing their "Japaneseness". (M, 21-23, 1m)

Studying English is intended to develop mutual understanding between people of the English-speaking world, so I don't think we are trying to become one of them. Japanese people are only Japanese. With that in mind, I don't think that learning English will weaken the Japanese identity. (M, 18-20, N/A)

(英語を学習することは英語圏の人々との意思疎通を目的としたもので英語圏の人間になろうとしているのではないと思います。日本人は日本人でしかないのです。そのことを踏まえた上で英語を学習する事が日本人としての意識を薄めないと思います。)

Interestingly, many of the participants suggested that, whilst there was a connection between the two, EFL education might actually work to strengthen Japan's national identity, not threaten it. Simply put, one participant stated that *"learning about foreigners' mind and way of thinking will strengthen one's Japaneseness"* (F, 21-23, N/A). Some participants commented on how the relationship between the English and Japanese languages can strengthen Japanese identity:

I think that studying English becomes an opportunity to think about the Japanese language as well as becoming the trigger to realise that you are Japanese. (M, 21-23, N/A)

(英語を勉強することで、改めて日本語のことを考えるきっかけになり、ひいては自分が日本人であることを再認識するためのきっかけになると思います。)

I think that by gaining English skills you can undertake intercultural exchanges smoothly, and through that you can heighten your awareness and identity as a Japanese person. (F, 18-20, 1m)

(英語力を身につけることで異文化交流をスムーズに行うことができ、それを通じて日本人としての自覚、意識を高めることができると考える。)

Others commented on how the comparison of cultures can raise one's awareness of their own identity as a Japanese:

By studying foreign languages, you deepen your comprehension of your own culture and become more conscious of yourself as a Japanese person. (M, 21-23, N/A)

(外国語を学ぶことで、自文化への理解が深まり、より自分が日本人であることを意識することになる。)

I think that studying English is an opportunity to make Japanese people realise their Japanese identity and culture in relation to other cultures. (M, 21-23, 1m)

(英語学習は日本人にとって異文化に対する日本文化や日本人としての意識を再認識させる機会だと思う。)

Also, some participants commented on the powerful relationship between language and culture and its subsequent effects on the strengthening of Japanese identity:

I think that if you increase the opportunities to speak (in English etc.) and the frequency in which you convey ideas and culture as a Japanese person, your identity as a Japanese will grow. (M, 21-23, N/A)

((英語などで) スピーキングの機会を増やし、日本人としての考えや文化を発信する回数を増やせば日本人としての意識は高まると思う。)

Perhaps, through the study of English, paradoxically, one can compare the languages and cultures, and an awareness of oneself as a Japanese might grow. (F, 21-23, N/A)
(もしかしたら、英語学習により逆説的に、言語と文化が対比でき、日本人として自覚が芽生えるかもしれない。)

In this sense, English plays a significant role in strengthening the national identity of Japan and the Japanese people (McKenzie, 2010), which McVeigh (2002) summarises as the phenomena in which “English preforms the role of the linguistic Other, mirroring and thereby defining Japanese identity” (p. 154).

Discussion

How Do Japanese EFL Students View the English Education System Currently Employed in Japan?

60% of the participants thought the current system to be inadequate in developing students' EFL abilities. The prominent arguments they proposed regarding why they believe a change in the system is required have been mentioned on numerous occasions by researchers in the past. The participants targeted the examination-driven nature of the EFL education system (Gottlieb, 2008; Kikuchi, 2006), the lack of productive, practical English skills (Butler & Iino, 2005; Hosoki, 2011) and the lack of abilities held by Japanese EFL teachers themselves (Kikuchi & Browne, 2009; Nishino & Watanabe, 2008). Interestingly, over 70% of the participants expressed a desire for Japanese to be used to some extent in the EFL classroom. Because the Japanese language was identified by participants in the present study as a constituent element of Japanese identity, one possible explanation for their continued desire for the use of Japanese in the EFL classroom is that students are attempting to maintain their national identity through the use their native language (McVeigh, 2002).

What Do Japanese EFL Students Consider to Be Important Elements of the Japanese National Identity?

Ethnolinguistic identity theory suggests that the participants in the present study are promoting the safeguard of the Japanese language as a dimension of favourable comparison that characteristically defines the Japanese identity (Giles & Johnson, 1987). This claim is further supported by the fact that the presiding culture of learning and pedagogical approach dominant in Japanese EFL education (*yakudoku*) favours first language use over predominantly English-based CLT methods. Past research has suggested similar findings. Burden's (2001) study of 290 Japanese tertiary-level EFL students found that 73% of students wanted the teacher to use Japanese in the classroom. Stephens' (2006) study of 167 Japanese tertiary EFL students found that 60% of students indicated a preference for the teacher to speak in their L1 (Japanese) more than 50% of the time. Saito and Ebsworth's (2004) study of 50 ESL and 50 EFL Japanese students, all of high-intermediate to advanced proficiency, found that the EFL students studying in Japan favoured teachers who could speak and explain concepts in Japanese, and felt disturbed when native English speaking teachers objected to their use of Japanese in the classroom. Of course, the notion of native language use in the FL classroom is in conflict with MEXT's (2011) revision to the educational course of study, which stipulates that “English classes should be conducted principally in English in high school” (p. 8). Although this policy is yet to be adopted throughout many schools across the country, minimizing the use of the students' native language when they so clearly favour its use is unlikely to result in positive attitudes towards the English language overall.

What Relationship Do Japanese EFL Students Perceive Between the Study of English and a Reduction/Loss of Their National Identity?

In the present study, 1/3 of the participants still considered EFL education and the study of the English language and western ideologies to result in a reduction of one's national identity and a weakening of one's sense of *Japaneseness*. This suggests that one in every three students studying English in Japan may consider themselves and others to be 'less Japanese' for doing so. In other words, approximately ten students in an average class of thirty may associate EFL education in Japan with a reduction in Japanese identity, supporting claims made by McVeigh (2004) that "for some students, learning English well contaminates, or at least threatens, their ethnocultural and national identity" (p. 155). Slightly different results were seen regarding the notion that English could result in a complete loss of Japanese identity, in which only 20% of the participants in the present study agreed to some extent. However, this also suggests that two in every ten students in an average Japanese EFL class are potentially fostering such extremely negative ideologies towards the English language that they consider it a complete threat to their identities as Japanese. In summary, the findings of the present study suggest that, on average, 3/10 students believe the study of EFL could result in a reduction of Japanese national identity, with 2/3 of *those* students believing it could result in a complete loss of Japanese identity altogether. This finding must be taken into consideration when planning new FL policies and pedagogical approaches for EFL education in Japan on the whole.

However, the majority of participants in the present study suggested that EFL education could actually result in the *strengthening* of Japan's national and cultural identity. They suggested that the learning of the English language and culture could result in the strengthening and vitalisation of identity in the minds of Japanese EFL students, as it provides an opportunity for them to reflect on their own language, culture and identity as a Japanese. This idea is reflected in McVeigh's (2002) notion of English as the "linguistic Other" (p. 154), which mirrors and therefore defines Japanese identity. In the present study, a number of participants' comments reflected the notion that: "*Learning English could help students see the value of their own culture and deepen their identity as Japanese*" (F, 21-23, 11m). This concept was not given as a pre-set option in the questionnaire which participants filled out as part of the present study, and thus the fact that so many of the participants made comments on the matter creates a strong argument for the positive relationship between EFL education and national identity in Japan.

Conclusion

The present study is not without its limitations. Firstly, the present study provides only a localised cohort of data from a single institution, examining only a limited number of participants' perspectives. Future research should aim to examine a broader number of participants from a variety of schooling types, institutions, proficiency levels, and personal and educational backgrounds in an attempt to overcome this limitation and develop a more comprehensive understanding of identity and EFL education in Japan. Secondly, there are issues when utilising questionnaires as the basis of data collection. In the present study, a number of deep open-ended questions in particular may have been difficult for some participants to answer, and some may have skipped this question as a result. Brown (2009) refers to this as the "squeaky wheel syndrome" (p. 214), whereby it is not possible for the researcher to know whether those participants who did answer the questions are representative of the entire group. This must be recognised as a weakness of the present study.

The majority of participants in the present study considered the current EFL education system to be inadequate in developing students' English abilities. They did, however, express a continued desire for their native language, Japanese, to be used in the EFL classroom. The Japanese language was identified by participants as a fundamental element of Japanese identity, and it is likely that their desire for its continued use in the EFL classroom is an attempt to maintain this identity against the English hegemony

despite the fact that excessive native language use in the EFL classroom is in direct conflict with MEXT's FL policies. One-fourth of all participants in the present study believe there was the potential for a loss of Japanese identity if the current EFL education were to change dramatically. Careful consideration must be given to this notion when planning FL policies in future if Japanese EFL students and teachers alike are to develop positive attitudes toward the study and use of English in Japan. Because the Japanese language is an underlying constituent of the Japanese national identity, it cannot and should not be banned from the FL classroom. We must work to build a positive relationship between the English language as a support for Japanese identity if we are to see an improvement in Japanese students' attitudes toward, and development of, EFL skills on the whole. As long as students continue to see English as a threat to their national identity, this simply cannot happen. Japanese teachers of EFL must frame the study of English and Western ideologies to all students as a tool through which the Japanese identity may be promoted, and as a unique concept that is not under threat by the so-called 'English hegemony'. In other words, English should not be framed as the enemy, but actively promoted as a contributor to the maintenance and vitalisation of national identity in Japan.

Having said that, it does appear as though support for the theories of the *nihonjinron* discourse are not as strong amongst the younger generation in Japan as what they once were, as 80% of the participants in the present study disagreed with the idea that EFL education results in a loss of Japanese identity. Further empirical research is required to test whether the harbouring of such views in support of, and against, the concept of EFL education resulting in a loss of Japanese identity actually affects students' learning of English on the whole. Until then, however, EFL education policy in Japan must take the implications presented in this paper into consideration in its approach to the teaching of English, and find a unique balance between the development of EFL skills for use on the global stage and the promotion and maintenance of Japan's distinct national and cultural identity.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire

Age / 年齢: 18-20 () 21-23 () 24-26 () 27+ ()

Gender / 性別: male/男性 () female/女性 ()

How long have you been studying English? どのくらいの期間英語を勉強していますか。

Have you studied English overseas before? 海外で英語を勉強したことがありますか。

Yes () No ()

If so, for how long? ある場合、どのくらいの期間でしたか。 _____

What is your current level of English? 今の英語能力はどのくらいですか。

- () Beginner (初級)
- () Lower intermediate (準中級)
- () Upper intermediate (中級)
- () Advanced (上級)
- () Native-like (ネイティブレベル)

Do you like studying English? 英語を勉強することが好きですか。

- () Yes (はい)
- () No (いいえ)
- () So-so (まあまあ)

In which language would you prefer your English class to be taught? 英語の授業はどの言語で教えて欲しいですか。

- () All English (全部英語で)
- () Mostly English (主に英語で)
- () Half English, half Japanese (半分英語、半分日本語で)
- () Mostly Japanese (主に日本語で)
- () All Japanese (全部日本語で)

What do you think it means to be Japanese? あなたにとって、日本人であることはどういう意味ですか。

Do you think studying English makes you less “Japanese”? 英語を勉強することで日本人らしさが減ると思いますか。

- () Yes, a lot (はい、とても)
- () Yes, a little bit (はい、少し)
- () No, not really (いいえ、あまり)
- () No, definitely not (いいえ、全然)

Do you think that studying English could result in a loss of Japanese identity? 英語を勉強することで日本人としての意識がなくなると思いますか。

- () Yes, definitely (はい、とても)
 () Yes, a little bit (はい、少し)
 () No, not really (いいえ、あまり)
 () No, definitely not (いいえ、全然)

Do you think the current English education system is adequate to develop students English abilities? 現在の英語教育制度は、日本人の学生の英語能力を向上するには十分であると思いますか。

- () Yes (はい)
 () No (いいえ)
 () Maybe (多分)
 () I don't know (わかりません)

Do you think a change in the system is required? 現在の英語教育制度は変わるべきだと思いますか。

- () Yes (はい)
 () No (いいえ)
 () Maybe (多分)
 () I don't know (わかりません)

If you do think change is necessary, what do you think needs to change? 変わるべきだと思う場合、何が変わらなければいけないと思いますか。 _____

Do you think a change in the current system may result in a loss of Japanese traditional culture and identity? 現在の英語教育制度が変わることで日本の伝統的な文化や日本人としての意識がなくなることあると思いますか。

- () Yes, I think so (はい、思います)
 () No, I don't think so (いいえ、思いません)
 () Maybe (多分)
 () I don't know (わかりません)

Why do you think this? なぜそう思いますか。 _____
