

An Ethnographic View of Elementary School English Language Policy Implementation

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Abstract : In 2018, Japan's Ministry of Education revised the public elementary school curriculum. As part of widespread reforms, the recent Course of Study established English as an academic subject in Grades 5 and 6 plus lowered the starting age of 'foreign language activities' to Grade 3. These changes were implemented in April 2020. This presentation will examine the process and effects that policy implementation had on schools and teachers. A critical analysis of the 2018 Course of Study policy documents revealed several discourses were expressed concerning not only English education and foreign language acquisition, but that larger political and socioeconomic ideological beliefs on globalization, language, nation, culture, and identity were also articulated. Using excerpts from document analysis, the presenter will demonstrate how competing discourses were expressed in policy texts. Data from interviews with national policymakers also exposed several challenges policymakers faced as they tried to balance competing discourses and articulate important pedagogical concepts while having their voices heard. Findings show that some stakeholders were marginalized during the processes of policy creation, transmission, and implementation. This presentation is part of a larger multiple case study that utilized ethnography of language policy and critical analysis of discourse to examine how English education language policy was implemented into the national elementary school curriculum in Japan, and how stakeholders at the various educational levels contended with the creation, interpretation, and appropriation of the language policy.

Keywords : ethnography of language policy, elementary school EFL, language ideologies, discourse analysis

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