

Teaching English at Elementary Department of Special Needs Education Schools for the Deaf

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Abstract: Foreign Language Activity is supposed to be carried out at the fifth and sixth grades from 2011. Questionnaire survey was done to get information about present situation of Foreign Language Activity at 96 special needs education schools for the deaf in Japan. 66% of respondents answered that they have started some programs related to these activities. More than half of the instructors are classroom teachers. Some schools reported their successful experiences using the unique materials. More examples should be collected and the resources should be shared with teachers not only at special schools but also at local schools who have pupils with hearing impairment in their classes.

Keywords: Foreign Language Activities, school for the deaf

1. Introduction

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) announced the National Curriculum Standards Reform for Elementary School in 2008. According to the new National Curriculum Standards, elementary schools will offer their pupils in the 5th and 6th grades “Foreign Language Activity” once a week. The aim of the class is not to acquire a language but to enhance pupils’ communicative abilities.

The overall objectives of Foreign Language Activities are described in the guideline as follows:

To form the foundation of pupils' communication abilities through foreign languages while developing the understanding of languages and cultures through various experiences, fostering a positive attitude toward communication, and familiarizing pupils with the sounds and basic expressions of foreign languages.

It is not a school subject such as mathematics or physical education, but it is still a compulsory class. The reform will fully come into force from 2011. The school years from 2009 to 2010 have been a transitional period in which schools are to prepare for the up-coming new lessons of English activities.

Elementary Department of Special Needs Education Schools for the Deaf will also have to offer the same or a similar standard of the curriculum to their pupils even though MEXT never imagines the deaf student’s conditions. So in 2009, some schools started to implement the Foreign Language Activities or considering it. The authors are the faculty members of teaching English, ASL, and Deaf Studies at Tsukuba University of Technology, which is a unique national higher educational institution for the hearing impaired and the visually impaired in Japan, and often asked for an advice to teach English to the deaf pupils.

2. Purpose of the Research

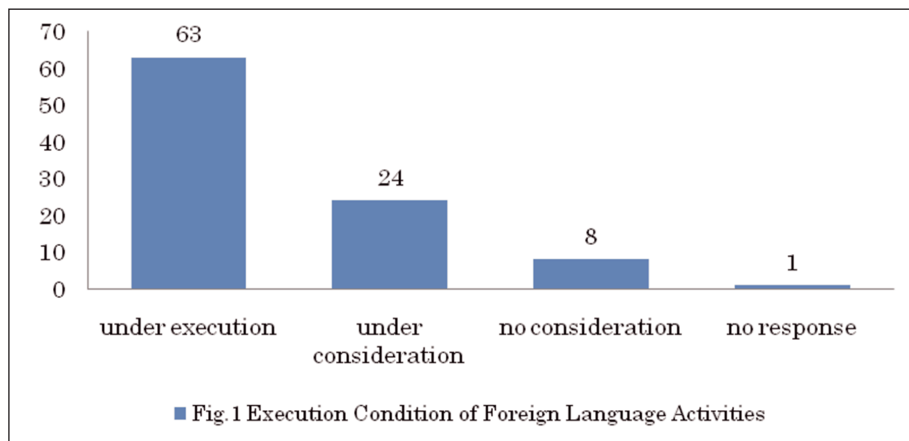
To make the present reality clear, identify problems, find good examples and share the results with whom it may concern.

3. Survey Procedure

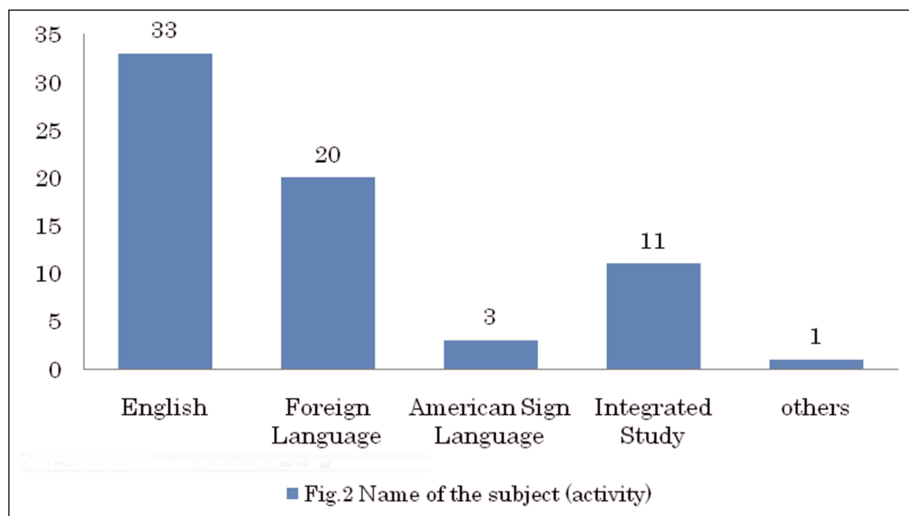
Sent a questionnaire to special needs education schools for the deaf, which have 5th and 6th graders, requesting for the answer to the status of implementation of Foreign Language Activities, methods, instructors, frequency, teaching materials and so on. We sent 96 sheets and collected 95 answers (collection rate 98%).

4. Survey Results

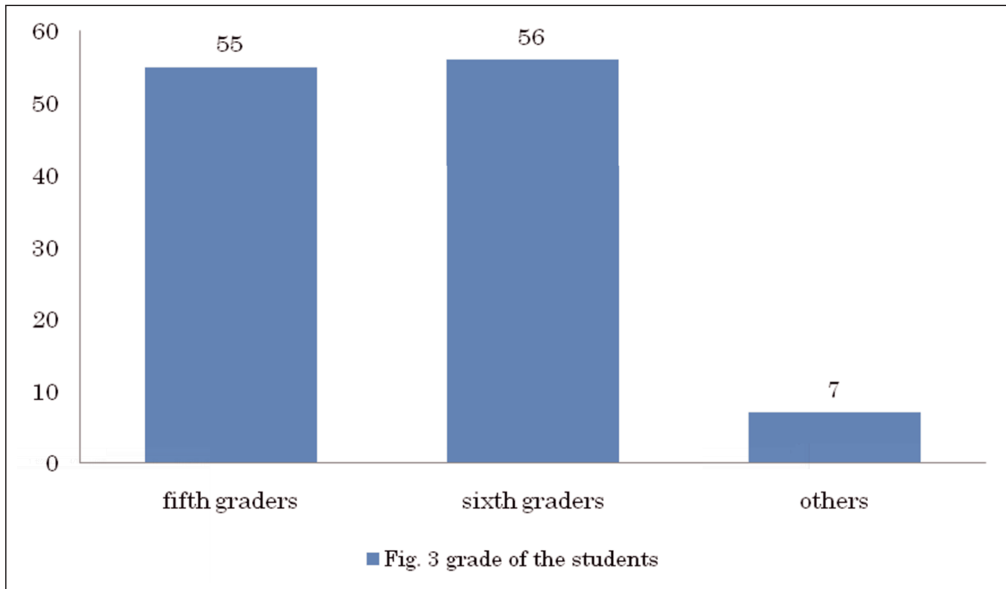
(1) In 2009, 63 schools (66% of the respondents) already conducted Foreign Language Activities in some way, 24 schools (25%) are under consideration, and 8 schools (8%) have no plan to enter the activity. More than 90% schools already began to approach this activity.



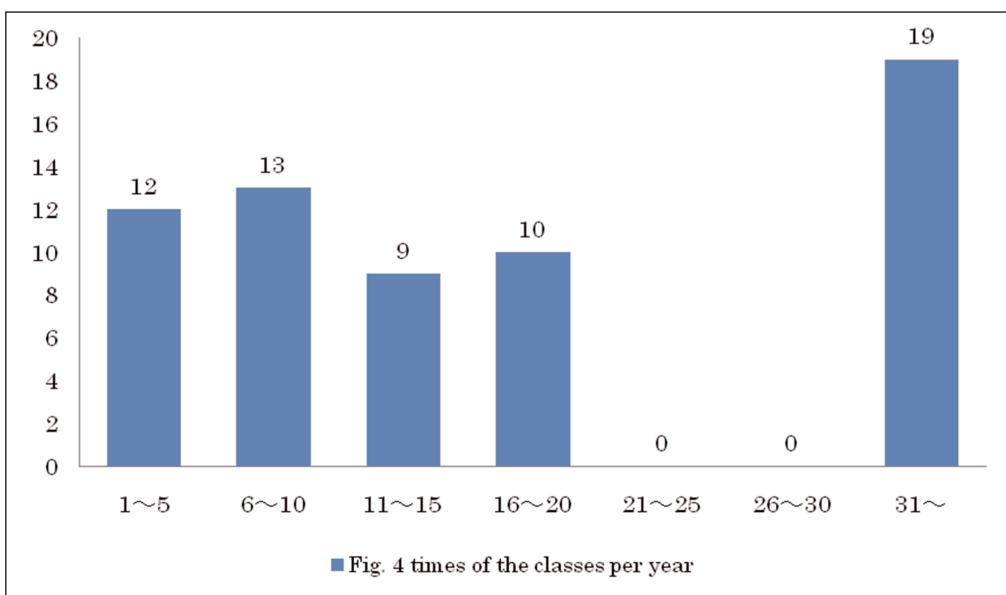
(2) The class names given to these activities are English (33 schools), Foreign Language (20 schools), American Sign Language (3 schools) and “Integrated Studies” (11 schools). The repetition answer is included.



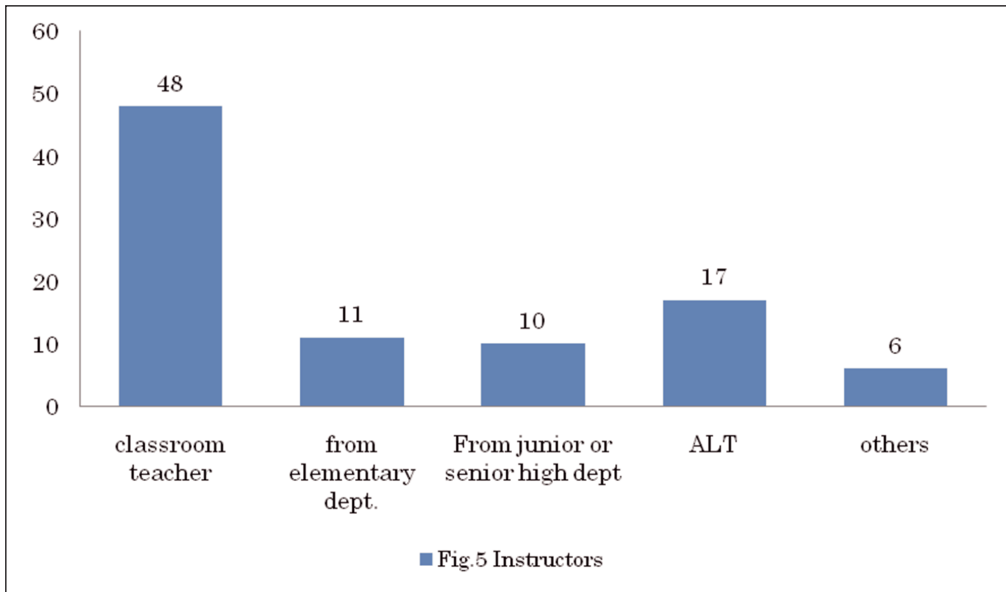
(3) The participants of these activities are almost all fifth and sixth graders, and some schools include younger pupils as well.



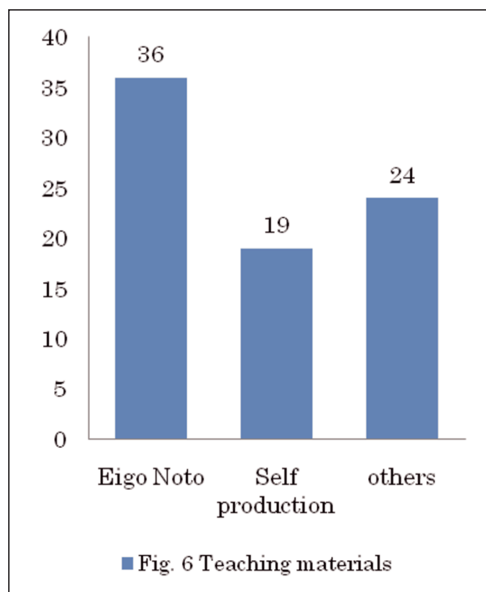
(4) As for the frequency, 19 schools conduct classes more than 31 times, i.e., almost once a week, which is the average, while 12 schools hold classes once to five times, thirteen schools hold classes six to ten times, nine schools conduct classes 11 to 15 times, and 10 schools conduct classes 16-20 times.



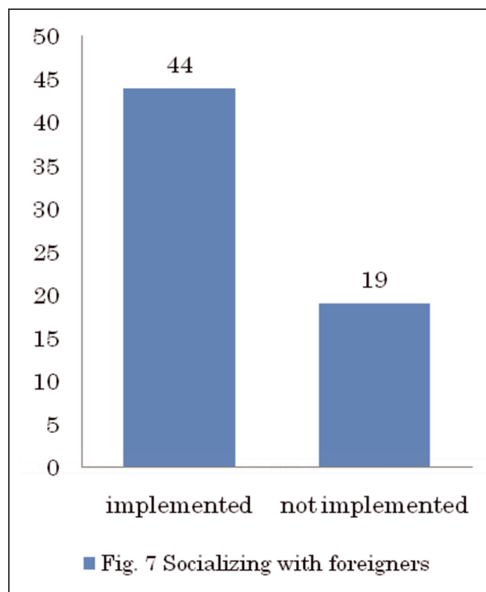
(5) The most popular instructors are classroom teachers. They teach at 47 schools. The second are ALTs at 17 schools. At 11 schools, teachers in elementary department other than the classroom teachers hold classes, and at 10 schools, English teachers from other departments hold classes. The repetition answer is included, which suggests team teaching with ALT and Japanese teachers.



(6) Just more than half, namely, 48 schools provide plans for teaching, and 36 schools use “Eigo Noto” the textbook published by MEXT in 2008-2009.



(7) It is noted that 44 schools have experience in socializing with people from abroad including ALTs.



5. Discussion and Problems

It is clarified that now in Japan, more than two thirds of elementary departments at special needs education schools for the deaf are offering the class of Foreign Language Activities, and various activities are being done at school. However, some problems are seen at schools which hesitate to implement the Foreign Language Activity.

The problems include lack of preparation such as common understanding of Foreign Language Activity, what to teach, methods of instructions, and materials to be used at the class. They also think that the instruction in Japanese language is more important and hearing impaired students have limited competence for it. They don't know how to teach hearing oriented activity to the pupils who cannot hear voice. They said that the activity should be done to become familiar with the sounds and rhythms of the foreign language.

It is impossible and unnecessary for pupils with hearing impairment to do the same activity which includes hearing sound as being done with the hearing pupils. There should be the different way for them to be aware of the interesting aspects of language and its richness, and fun.

In the special needs education for the deaf, pupils rely on visually displayed information. Some schools reported their successful experiences using unique materials such as flash cards with illustrations and letters, color tags, printing hand outs, wall charts and so on. Manual alphabet and signs for English words were reported to be helpful. Pupils also enjoyed oral conversations with ALTs when their pronunciations were accepted. They developed their interest to the things and people of the wider world.

In the special needs education for the deaf, there are other departments than elementary school, and it is possible to get English teachers from junior high or high school department to teach the pupils directly or to give some advice to the elementary school teachers. In fact, here is an example: an English teacher with hearing impairment at junior high department is teaching at elementary department and develops lessons without relying on their voices.

We must collect and share the good examples. The activity at school for the deaf will show examples to schools which have hearing impaired pupils in the ordinary class.

6. Conclusions

It is sad to say that MEXT had no consideration for the pupils with hearing impairment when they said that the instruction should be given so that the pupils were to become familiar with the sounds and rhythms of the foreign language, to learn its differences from the Japanese language, and to be aware of the interesting aspects of language and its richness. They even did not imagine how strong the special needs education schools for the deaf are restricted from such activities when the schools want to introduce this kind of classes to their schools.

The problem would be more serious for the pupils with hearing impairment at local elementary schools. We asked MEXT if they had a plan to show a guide to teach pupils with hearing impairment at local elementary schools. The answer was that they had no special guidance for those pupils and they also expected those pupils to be taught just according to the National Curriculum Standards.

We must collect good experiences and develop good teaching materials to teach pupils with hearing impairment. Those efforts and tools will become good resources. The resources should be shared with teachers at special schools and at local schools who have pupils with hearing impairment in their classes that mostly consist of hearing pupils. We have already started to work.

References

http://www.mext.go.jp/component/a_menu/education/micro_detail/___icsFiles/afieldfile/2010/10/20/1261037_12.pdf

Appendix

A questionnaire to special needs education schools for the deaf
on the present situation of “Foreign Language Activities”

Name of the school _____
Number of 5th graders _____ Number of 6th graders _____
Name of the respondent _____
Position of the respondent _____
Mail address of the respondent _____
Telephone number _____ FAX number _____

Note: in this questionnaire, “Foreign Language” includes such languages as “English”, “French”, “American Sign Language” and so on.

1. Is your school conducting “Foreign Language Activities” in 2009? Please circle one of the three

- (ア) Conducting→Go to 2.
- (イ) Not conducting, but considering→Go to 3.
- (ウ) Not conducting nor considering→Go to 4.

2. If conducting:

- ① What name is given to that activity? (e.g. English, American Sign Language) _____
- ② What graders are taught it? _____
- ③ Do you form classes for each graders? _____

④ How many times do you teach it in a year? You can also answer times per week.

⑤ Who is the instructor? _____

⑥ How do you decide the policy for it?

⑦ Do you make the lesson plan throughout the year?

⑧ What materials do you use?

⑨ Do you offer the opportunity to socialize with foreigners?

⑩ What effect or change do you find in the pupils?

3. If not conducting, but considering:

⑪ What is the reason for not conducting it?

⑫ Who is considering the plan?

⑬ Do you have relationships with other departments, such as junior high?

⑭ What problems do you foresee?

⑮ Do you have plans to conduct it?

⑯ What do you want to know from experience of implementation at other schools?

4. If not conducting nor considering:

⑰ What is the reason for not conducting it?

⑱ Do you have prospects to start considering?

①9 What do you want to know from experience of implementation at other schools?

5. Any comments