Addressing Citizenship Teaching Objectives through English Language Classes in Japan’s Secondary Schools: Exploring Teachers’ Perceptions

Ian HOSACK

Abstract: Research from around the world suggests that, in addition to teaching language, foreign language teachers can make a significant contribution to nurturing knowledge, skills and values that are highly relevant to contemporary citizenship. While there has been considerable research interest in education for citizenship in Japan, little scholarly attention has been paid to the role Japanese teachers of English (JTEs) can play. This paper reports on a study that explored how JTEs believe they can contribute to aspects of citizenship education in Japanese secondary schools. Quantitative and qualitative survey data were collected from a purposive sample of 46 JTEs. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 teachers. The paper presents two sets of findings concerning i) how JTEs understand good citizenship, and ii) how they perceive the potential linkages between English language teaching and education for citizenship. Analysis revealed that teachers involved in the study tend towards a cosmopolitan view of citizenship. They believe JTEs can and should play a role in citizenship education, but they see their main contribution lying primarily in nurturing knowledge and values, as opposed to skills for active citizenship. The paper identifies a need for further research into how the immediate school context impacts upon JTEs’ ability to teach for citizenship.

Key words: foreign language teaching, citizenship education, Japanese secondary schools, intercultural competence, teaching objectives

1. Introduction

1.1 Citizenship Education

Citizenship education aims to equip young people with knowledge, skills and values that will facilitate their participation in society as citizens. In the field of educational research, over the past several decades there has been considerable interest in how state provision of citizenship education has evolved in response to ongoing globalization, international migration, increasing cultural diversity, and global challenges such as climate change and environmental degradation. With the globalization of human affairs, traditional state-centred notions of citizenship have been steadily undermined, which in turn has led to shifting emphases in the way citizenship is taught. One of the largest scale international surveys of the field, the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS, Schulz et al., 2016), found that while many countries still seek to promote a degree of national allegiance through schools, in virtually all countries citizenship education now incorporates teaching about international systems, human rights and the global dimension of...
Although scholars differ in how they characterize the citizenship curriculum in Japan, there is a consensus that it has been shaped by an ongoing tension between traditional notions of citizenship education that emphasize the nurturing of Japanese nationals with a strong national identity (kokumin kyouiku), and newer, post-national conceptions that include a global dimension and promote active participation in civil society (shimin kyouiku). For example, Parmenter, Mizuyama and Taniguchi (2008) discern an overwhelmingly Japan-centred curriculum along with a comparative lack of teaching for political literacy, which they see as promoting an uncritical acceptance of the state and discouraging the formation of post-national identities. Likewise, Higashi (2008) sees government efforts to propagate traditional national virtues through kokoro kyouiku ("education of the heart") as an attempt to nurture strong national identities that can withstand the perceived threats of globalization. On the other hand, Saito (2010) argues that although government attempts to promote patriotism (aikokushin) in schools demonstrate ongoing nationalist priorities in Japanese education, these have been balanced by more cosmopolitan elements of the curriculum that address human rights and intercultural understanding. Tegtmeyer Pak (2016) argues that while the informal school curriculum remains distinctively Japanese, the promotion of universal values and an element of global citizenship means Japan's formal citizenship curriculum conforms to international trends.

The ICCS studies revealed that while in many countries "citizenship" or "civics" is taught as a stand-alone subject, it is common practice for citizenship teaching to be integrated into different subjects across the curriculum, with social science teachers typically playing an especially important role. Japan conforms to this latter trend: formal teaching for citizenship occurs in social studies (shakai) classes, which cover modern society, politics and economics. In 2020, following changes to Japan's election law that allowed 18- and 19-year-olds to vote for the first time, a new subject, "public affairs" (koukyou), was introduced at the senior high school level, again under the umbrella of social studies. Aspects of citizenship are also addressed in moral education (doutoku), a separate subject taught by homeroom teachers that aims to nurture such values as diligence, sincerity, and a sense of public responsibility (McCullough, 2008). Many scholars (e.g., Motani, 2005) have pointed to opportunities for citizenship-related work provided by Integrated Studies (sougouteki na gakushuu no jikan), and also highlighted the importance of students' daily involvement in non-academic activities (tokkatsu) such as homeroom discussions, school cleaning, club activities and preparation for special cultural events (Tsuneyoshi, 2020).

### 1.2 English language teaching in Japan

English language teaching is one area of the school curriculum that is often neglected in the discourse on Japanese citizenship education. Although there is growing recognition around the world of the role foreign language teachers (FLTs) can play in nurturing the values, skills and knowledge that modern citizenship requires, in the Japanese context their contribution remains under-researched and often overlooked. For example, neither a comprehensive review of Japanese citizenship education published by Ikeno and colleagues (2011), nor a more recent study of multicultural education in Japan by Ikeno (2017), make any reference to work foreign language teachers might do in these areas.

In Japan, the learning of foreign languages has been a national preoccupation since the Meiji Restoration, when the country’s elites began a spirited pursuit of Western learning through the close study of technical and scientific texts written in Dutch, German and English. Although viewed by some as a potential threat to the indigenous culture, foreign languages were embraced as a prerequisite for modernization and Japan’s
ability to hold its own in the world. This remains largely true today, though the overwhelming focus is now on learning English.

Over the past four decades, successive Japanese government initiatives have sought to promote proficiency in English. From the 1980s, this became a central plank in the policy of kokusaika (internationalization), one of the most prominent initiatives being the invitation of thousands of native-English speaking Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) to Japan as part of the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme. From the 1990s, the emphasis shifted to development of the human resources (guroobaru jinzai) being demanded by Japan’s business associations. In key policy documents such as the Action Plan to Cultivate “Japanese with English-Speaking Abilities” (MEXT, 2003), proficiency in English is presented as a core component of global literacy, and an essential tool for the pursuit of Japan’s national interests in the world economy. At the same time, the Course of Study (essentially, Japan’s national curriculum) identifies broader educational aims for the teaching of foreign languages, which include nurturing in learners an understanding of foreign cultures and a “spirit of international cooperation”, as well as “increasing their awareness of themselves as members of Japanese society” (MEXT, 2017, p. 11).

English thus occupies a prominent place in Japan’s education system, and now accounts for more classroom time than any other school subject, including Japanese (kokugo). Given the centrality of English to the high school curriculum, and growing international recognition that FLTs can make an important contribution to teaching for citizenship, it is surprising that few, if any, previous studies have been done to investigate the role Japanese teachers of English (JTEs) can play in citizenship education. The study reported in this paper sought to address this gap in the literature.

1.3 Foreign language teachers as citizenship educators

It is now widely acknowledged around the world that teachers of foreign languages can make a significant contribution to nurturing the knowledge, attitudes and skills that citizens of diverse societies require. The Council of Europe (2020), for example, has identified foreign languages as a key aspect of teaching for democracy. Both the aims of foreign language teaching and prominent language teaching pedagogies have been recognized as converging with those of citizenship education.

Foreign language teachers can contribute to citizenship education in at least three interrelated ways. First, the target language can be taught with materials that engage learners with contemporary social themes, thereby raising their awareness of issues that should concern them as citizens. Like teachers of other subjects, many FLTs feel a personal and professional responsibility to address such issues in their classrooms, and there are established pedagogies that endorse this approach from a language acquisition perspective. A variant of the communicative approach to language teaching, Content-Based Instruction (CBI), also known as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), involves the organization of language courses around topics or themes rather than linguistic items. Advocates of CBI/CLIL argue that language acquisition occurs most effectively when course content is of special relevance and interest to learners (Brinton, Snow, & Wesche, 2003). Where they employ content that is relevant to learners as citizens, FLTs can simultaneously address goals of language teaching and education for citizenship.

A second way in which FLTs can contribute to citizenship education is in helping learners acquire skills for participating in democratic dialogue. In its recommendations for the teaching of democracy in schools in England, the Crick Report (QCA, 1998) identified training for discussion and debate as an essential component of the citizenship curriculum (though Crick’s committee also appears to have overlooked the contribution FLTs can make in this regard). Over the past four decades, with the spread of the
communicative approach to teaching languages, foreign language classrooms in many parts of the world have become sites for learner-centred talk. Where this talk focuses on matters pertaining to the public sphere, learners are encouraged to reflect on issues that should concern them as citizens while also acquiring practical skills for dialogue. Through such activities, FLTs can also promote democratic values that ground discussion in mutual respect. As Starkey (2005) argues, “the skills developed in language classes are thus directly transferable to citizenship education” (p. 32).

A third area in which FLTs can contribute to citizenship education is in developing learners’ ability to interact successfully with people from other cultural backgrounds. Table 1 summarizes the model of intercultural competence (IC) proposed by Byram (2008). It outlines a distinctive role for FLTs in teaching for a range of competences (or savoirs) that are relevant to citizenship in culturally diverse communities, including, for example, knowledge of cultural practices, values such as openness and tolerance, and skills of interaction and mediation. For Byram (2003), one of the principal tasks for FLTs in schools is to “introduce young people to experience of other ways of thinking, valuing and behaving” (p. 18). He sees this as part of a process of “tertiary socialization” – “a concept invented to emphasise the ways in which learning a foreign language can take learners beyond a focus on their own society, into experience of otherness, or other cultural beliefs, values or behaviours” (Byram, 2008, p. 29). It is through this “experience of otherness”, Byram believes, that foreign language learners can acquire not only attitudes of respect and tolerance (savoir être) but also the “critical cultural awareness” (savoir s’engager) that he considers to be “the most educationally significant of the savoirs” (p. 236).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competence</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>savoir être</td>
<td>Attitudes: curiosity, openness, readiness to engage with other cultures/question one’s own.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>savoir</td>
<td>Knowledge: of cultural products/practices in one’s own &amp; other countries; history of relationships between countries; national memory; social institutions; sources of misunderstanding between different cultures etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>savoir comprendre</td>
<td>Skills: interpreting documents or events from another culture and relating them to documents or events from one’s own. Identifying ethnocentric perspectives/areas of misunderstanding; mediating between conflicting interpretations etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>savoir apprendre/faire</td>
<td>Skills: interacting with people from other cultures in real time; drawing on knowledge, skills and attitudes to acquire new cultural information or to mediate between one’s own and a foreign culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>savoir s’engager</td>
<td>Critical cultural awareness: the ability to critically evaluate aspects of other cultures and one’s own.</td>
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The three areas outlined above – teaching with citizenship-related content, developing skills for dialogue, and nurturing intercultural competence – comprise a clear role for FLTs in education for citizenship. Together they also constitute the theoretical framework employed in the study reported here.

2. Overview of the study

Previous research suggests that although English occupies a central place in Japan’s secondary school
curriculum, prevailing methods of teaching the language may not facilitate the role in citizenship education outlined for FLTs above. The view that the foreign language classroom is a potentially important site for citizenship education assumes a certain kind of language teaching pedagogy, and not simply the teaching of grammar and vocabulary per se (Hennebry, 2012). Scholars who advocate a role for FLTs in teaching for citizenship (e.g., Cates, 2005; Starkey, 2005) envisage a student-centred, communicative classroom in which there are opportunities for learners to engage with meaningful content relating to other cultures and real-world issues. A considerable body of research, however, suggests these sorts of pedagogies are still marginal in secondary education in Japan, at both the junior high school (12 to 15-year-olds) and the senior high school (15 to 18-year-olds) level.

Numerous studies (e.g., Cave, 2016; Humphries & Burns, 2015) have found that English teaching in Japanese schools continues to be dominated by yakudoku, a traditional style of language instruction that is closely synonymous with the grammar-translation method (Gorsuch, 1998). Over the past thirty years, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has made successive amendments to the Course of Study to encourage a greater focus on practical English communication skills: new English Communication subjects were inserted into the curriculum; JTEs were required to team-teach some of their lessons with native English-speaking ALTs; and since 2009, JTEs have been formally expected to conduct their lessons in English. Such initiatives may have allowed communicative language teaching to make some inroads into high school English lessons in Japan, but the consensus among scholars is that grammar-translation remains entrenched. This is widely attributed to the overwhelming priority most schools place on preparing students for university entrance examinations, which typically evaluate students based on their reading comprehension, and knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. The consensus in the literature, then, is that English language teaching in Japan’s secondary schools is characterized by a teacher-fronted, grammar-focused approach, which, arguably, has little or no relevance to education for citizenship.

Although the teaching context outlined above would appear to discourage an active contribution by JTEs in citizenship education, a premise of this study was that individual teachers may be able to exercise a degree of agency to find or create opportunities for addressing citizenship-related teaching goals in their classrooms. The study sought to explore such possibilities through the perceptions, or beliefs, of JTEs who were identified as having a prior interest in education for citizenship. Previous research (Borg, 2006; Pajares, 1992) has established that what teachers believe – about the purposes of education, or the value of their chosen subject area, for instance – is worthy of scholarly attention, and, crucially, teachers’ beliefs have been shown to affect their pedagogical practices (Castro, Sercu, & Garcia, 2004).

The study reported here explored participating teachers’ beliefs concerning how JTEs might contribute to citizenship education, and focused on the following questions: “What do JTEs understand by ‘good citizenship’?” and “What links do they see between English language teaching and citizenship education?” A purposive sampling strategy was employed to recruit participants whose professional interests and experience were judged to be relevant to these research questions. The merits of collecting data from a purposively selected group of expert informants were judged to outweigh the limited scope for generalization allowed by this kind of sample. JTEs were invited to participate in the study if they had demonstrated an interest in aspects of citizenship education – for example, by authoring a citizenship-related journal article or attending a conference workshop dealing with similar themes. Appeals for participants were also circulated through two Japan-based professional networks – Global Issues in Language Education (GILE), a special interest group within the Japan Association of Language Teaching (HOSACK).
These purposive techniques yielded a sample of 46 JTE participants, which included 23 male teachers, 22 female teachers and one teacher of unspecified gender. Overall, these teachers were highly experienced, three-quarters of them having taught for at least 16 years. Participants were teaching in a variety of contexts: 30 teachers were based in publicly run schools, and 12 in private, fee-paying schools (four did not specify which). 13 teachers were based in junior high schools (JHS), 25 in senior high schools (SHS), and five teachers were teaching at both junior and senior high schools (three did not specify their school’s level).

The study followed a sequential explanatory design (Cresswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003), employing an initial quantitative phase of data collection and analysis followed by a second, qualitative phase that sought to build on earlier findings. First, a questionnaire survey was conducted in Japanese with the 46 purposively selected JTEs. Section One of the questionnaire explored teachers’ beliefs about what Japanese citizenship should entail, suggesting 30 “citizen attributes” (see Table 2 below) and asking participants to rate the importance of each attribute on a 5-point, Likert-type scale. The citizen attributes were chosen to represent important dimensions of citizenship discussed in the literature, including national and post-national citizenship, liberal conceptions of citizenship foregrounding the rights of individuals, and republican conceptions focusing more on civic responsibilities and active participation (e.g., Davies, Gregory, & Riley, 2005; Heater, 2004). Japanese sources, including the government’s Declaration on Citizenship Education (Keizai Sangyousho, 2006), were consulted to ensure that the suggested citizen attributes were relevant to the Japanese context (see Hosack (2018) for the full survey instrument).

In the second part of the questionnaire, participants were asked to consider the extent to which fostering the kinds of citizen attributes introduced in Section One could be seen as viable teaching objectives for JTEs. Participants were presented with 25 teaching objectives covering knowledge, values and skills related to citizenship, and asked to rate the extent to which they believed each objective could be furthered by JTEs in their English lessons.

The questionnaire concluded with an open-ended item inviting respondents to write freely as to any links they perceived between teaching English and teaching for citizenship, and about any aspects of their own classroom practice they believed to be relevant to citizenship education. 34 JTEs responded to this open-ended survey item.

To explore issues raised by the survey in greater depth, semi-structured interviews were carried out with 14 of the survey respondents. Once again, interviewees were purposively selected based on what the survey data revealed about their prior interest in addressing citizenship-related goals in their teaching.

3. Key Findings and Discussion

3.1 How participants perceive good citizenship

Table 2 ranks the 30 citizen attributes from Section One of the survey according to the importance participants attached to each of them on a 5-point, Likert-type scale. All but the bottom three attributes attained a mean score of at least 3.0, suggesting that most teachers judged them to be important to some degree. Nevertheless, the data do reveal certain tendencies in the way participants conceive the requirements of Japanese citizenship.
Overall, the data suggest that teachers place far more importance on values and knowledge than they do on active citizenship. There was an overwhelming consensus that Japan’s citizens must respect human rights, democracy, gender equality and cultural diversity, and strong agreement on the need for citizens to be informed about global issues. However, although there was almost universal agreement that exercising one’s right to vote is a basic duty of citizenship, other forms of political participation were deemed far less important (ranked 27th), as was participation in activities to benefit the local community (24th).

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the data presented in Table 2 is the comparatively low priority teachers placed on nationally focused attributes of citizenship. Patriotism and wishing to promote Japan’s national interests in the world appear in joint 28th place, with as many as one third of teachers judging these attributes to be unnecessary. Moreover, although most teachers thought Japanese citizens should want to preserve their national culture, even this was ranked in the bottom third of the table (in 23rd...
place). The fact that teachers accorded much greater weight to respecting human rights and people from other cultures, and to citizens being aware of their responsibilities to the global community, suggests a view of citizenship that is less nationally focused and more post-national in orientation.

The semi-structured interviews provided further insights into these survey findings, and cast light on the low priority participants accorded to patriotism and promoting the national interest. As many as nine of the 14 JTEs interviewed expressed a strong aversion to Japanese government attempts to encourage patriotic feelings among school students by mandating the use of the national flag (hinomaru) and the singing of the national anthem (kimigayo) at school ceremonies. Three teachers described how they show their opposition to such “patriotic education” by refusing to sing the anthem on these occasions.

This wariness towards patriotism may partly be explained by the age profile of the sample; 41% of the JTE participants were in the 50+ age range, so part of a generation for whom memories of the war and Japan’s post-war reconstruction are still potent. In the words of one participant, “Japan experienced a big catastrophe more than 60 years ago. In those days patriotism was too strong and we [caused suffering for] a lot of people in Asia and also in our own country” (Teacher 40, public JHS). Comments like these illustrate how, for many participating teachers, the term “patriotism” (aikokushin) can be hard to distinguish from “nationalism” (nashonarizumu). Indeed, for teachers who participated in the study, the two terms appear to be more or less synonymous: as shown in Table 2, “being patriotic” and “wishing to promote Japan’s national interest” were ranked together in joint 28th place.

While participants showed a strong aversion to nationalistic sentiment, the survey data indicated a clear consensus (97%) on the importance of citizens having a strong cultural identity and wishing to preserve Japan’s cultural heritage. Nevertheless, in the interviews, teachers were hesitant to label this attachment to Japanese culture as patriotism/aikokushin. As one high school teacher put it,

culture itself is important ... so, yes, aikokushin is important; but not in the sense that the government uses that term. Rather, it’s important to cherish this country called Japan that we live in – which is no different from respecting other countries, is it? This is the real meaning of loving one’s country, not the aikokushin being promoted by the government. And this is how we need to teach students to be ‘patriotic’. (Teacher 14, public SHS; author’s translation)

In the qualitative data, teachers’ views broadly resonate with Appiah’s (1997) cosmopolitan patriotism which embraces world citizenship based on universal values, but which is simultaneously rooted in more local cultural attachments. According to another high school teacher,

To respect our identity and respect our culture is very important. ... Even the global citizen has a [national] identity, and if they have their own identity, ... I think the people will be more strong, ... have some confidence, and think about other cultures more carefully. (Teacher 4, public SHS)

In summary, then, participants in the study tended towards a cosmopolitan view of citizenship that incorporates a clear global dimension. They reject nationalism but embrace a benign attachment to Japan’s cultural heritage within a broader commitment to universal human rights, democracy, and respect for cultural diversity. When participants were asked to rate attributes of good citizenship suggested in the survey, they placed more importance on knowledge and values than they did on active involvement in politics and society. With these findings in mind, the following section moves on to how JTEs perceive the
potential links between language teaching and citizenship education.

3.2 How participants believe JTEs can contribute to citizenship education

There was a strong consensus among participants (85%) that JTEs can make a distinct contribution to education for citizenship, with 80% believing that they personally can play such a role. Given the purposive approach adopted by the study, there is likely to be an element of circularity in this finding: participants were selected because of the prior interest they had displayed in teaching for citizenship. The main value of the study lies in what it reveals about how participants believe JTEs can contribute to education for citizenship, and in the implications this could have for citizenship teaching in Japan’s high schools.

Table 3 lists the eleven citizenship-related teaching objectives that teachers saw greatest potential for pursuing through English classes in Japanese high schools. All 46 participants agreed that each of these objectives could be addressed to some extent by JTEs, but they appear to see most scope for nurturing values – particularly openness towards people from other cultures, and respect for human rights. Many appear to view English classes as a forum for addressing the global dimension of citizenship, by raising awareness of global issues and nurturing a sense among learners that they belong to a global community. Many teachers also believe they have a role to play in teaching critical thinking and intercultural communication skills. Additionally, there was some support for the idea that JTEs can help their students develop skills for engaging in democratic dialogue: more than one third of participants believe that English classes have great potential for developing students’ ability to express opinions in front of others.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching objective</th>
<th>% of teachers who believe objective can be furthered to a great or very great extent (n=46)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developing respect for &amp; tolerance towards people from other cultures</td>
<td>56.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing increased respect for human rights</td>
<td>54.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning about global issues</td>
<td>45.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing the ability to view things critically, from multiple perspectives</td>
<td>45.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing the ability to communicate with people from other cultures</td>
<td>43.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning about the society &amp; culture of English-speaking countries</td>
<td>43.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing the habit of thinking about the environment</td>
<td>41.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing a sense of being a ‘global citizen’</td>
<td>41.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning about current affairs</td>
<td>41.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing the ability to express one’s opinions in front of others</td>
<td>39.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning about democratic values</td>
<td>39.1</td>
</tr>
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Overall, participants believe that as well as teaching language, JTEs can help to nurture the kind of cosmopolitan citizenship they tended to align with in Section One of the survey – a conception of citizenship based on shared democratic values and positive attitudes towards cultural diversity which, while being grounded in emotional attachments to Japan’s cultural heritage, simultaneously embraces membership of a global community. That participants see JTEs as being able to play such a role appears closely linked to how they perceive the English language itself. Being teachers of the world’s foremost lingua franca, JTEs are seen as better placed to address topics related to global issues or foreign cultures than colleagues who teach other subjects in Japanese. According to one teacher.
what's distinctive about English teachers' role is that we can introduce a topic from abroad, in English, as the ‘way of thinking’ in the English-speaking world. Social studies teachers can talk about these ideas in Japanese, but in English classes we can present them in English, whatever the topic. (Teacher 42, public JHS; part translation)

English is perceived as a medium through which Japanese students can relate directly to the outside world, and teachers see this encounter as having the potential to challenge parochial attitudes and encourage openness to different perspectives and ideas.

As described earlier, key policy documents such as the Action Plan to Cultivate “Japanese with English Speaking Abilities”, frame English as an essential tool for economic prosperity and the pursuit of Japan's national interests overseas. In the qualitative data gathered for the current study, however, participants made virtually no reference to the instrumental benefits of English proficiency, either to the individual student or the nation. Participants focused rather on the wider, educational purposes of learning English, particularly in terms of developing positive attitudes towards people from other cultures. In this respect, several teachers contrasted their own purposes as JTEs with what they see as the government’s aims for language teaching in schools:

Reading the government policy, it’s like, ‘we have to be the top of the world, the top of Asia’... If the government has that kind of attitude, we really cannot educate students in the right way... We have to make students who can make friends anywhere in the world, and they have to work together in the future, right? They do not learn English to compete, or beat others. (Teacher 9, public JHS/SHS)

Another teacher made a similar point, contrasting the demand of Japan’s business community for global jinzai with what she believes are the aims of JTEs:

for us English teachers, we just hope... students become global citizens who understand... other people without any prejudice and, who respect human rights, of people of any race.... A kind of broad view we want our students to have. (Teacher 19, public SHS)

These examples from the qualitative data illustrate how participants embrace aims for foreign language teaching that are directly relevant to citizenship education. Data from the study also provide some indication as to how participants believe JTEs may be able to pursue such aims in the classroom. As outlined above, previous research suggests three principal ways in which foreign language teachers can contribute to education for citizenship in schools: by providing lesson content relating to social issues that should concern students as citizens; by nurturing skills needed to engage in democratic dialogue; and by developing intercultural competence. Based on the data collected for this study, participants believe JTEs have a contribution to make in all three areas, but it is in the thematic content, the topics that are addressed in English lessons, that they see the primary link with education for citizenship.

3.2.1 Teaching with citizenship-related content

When participants were asked to describe how learning done in English lessons might be relevant to citizenship education, they referred overwhelmingly to topics that might be covered – that is, the thematic rather than linguistic content. Similarly, in response to the open-ended survey item, where participants
were invited to write freely about their own teaching practice. 70% of the 34 JTEs who responded listed specific topics they had taught. Typically, these were related to global issues such as peace and conflict (the war in Okinawa, or landmine clearance in Southeast Asia, for instance), the environment (climate change; deforestation) and human rights (Martin Luther King and the US Civil Rights Movement).

For virtually all JTEs, the main – if not only – source of this material are textbooks that have been approved by MEXT and which teachers are required to use by law. While teachers are formally free to use whatever supplementary materials they wish, previous research has found authorized textbooks to be the single most important factor in shaping what JTEs do in the classroom (Browne & Wada, 1998). Though these textbooks follow what is essentially a grammar-based syllabus, there was a clear consensus among participants that they have increasingly touched on cultural topics or global issues relevant to citizenship, and this aligns with previous research. Hasegawa (2011), for example, examined 36 English textbooks approved for use in senior high schools and found that 86% included material related to intercultural understanding, human rights, the environment, and issues of war and peace. Publishers appear to be responding to guidelines included in the Course of Study that suggest teachers should employ material which is useful in “heightening students' awareness of being Japanese citizens living in a global community” (MEXT, 2008, p. 8).

While all participants welcomed this trend among publishers, many drew attention to the rather limited scope of the cultural topics featured in MEXT-approved textbooks, and the focus on what Hasegawa (2011) referred to as the “3Fs” – “Food, Festivals and Fashion”. Similarly, participants observed that global topics tend to be dealt with in a simplistic, matter-of-fact way that is “not aimed at raising [students' critical] thinking skills or their global awareness” (Teacher 30, public SHS). According to one teacher, since the authorized textbooks “only present things in a superficial way. … unless you prepare your own supplementary materials to develop the topic, there's not much you can do” (Teacher 14, public SHS).

Although the Course of Study encourages teachers to employ supplementary materials, participants believe relatively few JTEs do this. The consensus was that for most teachers, the overriding concern is with finishing the grammar-based syllabus, which typically involves close coordination with colleagues to ensure all students keep up with a prescribed schedule of teaching and testing. Participants also felt that, in practice, whatever the topic featured in the textbook, JTEs are likely to focus on teaching the grammar points that ultimately their students will be tested on. As one interviewee put it, teachers “just treat such kind of materials for global education as simply … information to introduce new words, new phrases, new English sentence structures, and they don't pay attention to the content itself” (Teacher 30, public SHS).

Pulverness (2003) notes the tendency for language teaching materials to treat content as merely a vehicle for introducing linguistic teaching points and suggests that the onus is on teachers to develop topics they wish students to reflect critically upon. For JTEs with a strong interest in pursuing citizenship-related teaching objectives, the textbooks may offer a “way in” to engaging students with relevant content, possibly with supplementary materials, but given the pressures on them to cover the grammar syllabus, finding time in their schedule is likely to be a challenge.

3.2.2 Teaching skills for dialogue

With regard to skills for engaging in democratic dialogue, in the survey one third of teachers saw great potential for nurturing students' ability to express their opinions in front of others. The qualitative data suggest this is again related to material found in MEXT-approved textbooks: participants referred to the increasing opportunities for discussion that these provide:
in recent years, in addition to... readings [on various global issues], and the grammar practice exercises, there are always pages that aim to cultivate attitudes by setting up discussions or debates, or an exchange of views between students. (Teacher 19, public SHS; author’s translation)

Nevertheless, the general picture to emerge from the interviews seems to counter the more optimistic view suggested by the survey data. When talking about their own teaching, participants tended to focus on how they avoid doing much discussion work in class, primarily because they perceive discussion activities as cutting into time required for teaching other, grammar-focused aspects of the syllabus. Indeed, the teacher quoted above believes she is unusual in making use of the discussion activities included in textbooks:

I myself am one of those teachers who are interested [in promoting discussion], so, as far as possible, I use them. But more teachers skip these sections, I think. (Teacher 19, public SHS; author’s translation)

The curriculum outlined in the Course of Study (MEXT, 2018) includes clear opportunities for students to engage in discussion and debate, apparently giving JTEs scope for addressing many of the skills for democratic dialogue outlined by Starkey (2005) and others. While participants in the current study acknowledge this potential, however, based on the qualitative data, in practice they see JTEs making little contribution to this aspect of citizenship education.

3.2.3 Teaching for intercultural competence

Participants see intercultural competence as the main area in which JTEs have a role to play in education for citizenship. Most teachers agreed there is considerable scope for teaching about other cultures – the knowledge dimension (savoir) in Byram’s model of IC. Once again, they see authorized textbooks as providing the main opportunity for this and point to a trend towards these books including more diverse cultural topics. This appears to confirm research findings by Yamada (2010) that Ministry-approved textbooks are including a greater variety of cultural content, from not only English-speaking but also non-English-speaking countries.

Alongside textbooks, teachers frequently mentioned the role of native-English-speaking ALTs in teaching for intercultural competence. Most teachers participating in the study are required to teach some of their lessons with an ALT, and these team-taught lessons appear to provide some opportunities for JTEs to diverge from the grammar-based syllabus and to address objectives that are more citizenship-related. A few teachers described communicative activities in which students had opportunities to interview ALTs about cultural matters, suggesting some scope for addressing the skills dimension of IC. Such references were rare, however, and when teachers discussed the contribution of ALTs it was overwhelmingly as providers of cultural content rather than as partners in the teaching of cross-cultural communication skills.

The broadest agreement among teachers concerns the values dimension of intercultural competence (savoir être). More than 95% of survey participants believe JTEs can help promote “respect and tolerance towards other cultures”, and more than half (56.5%) think they can do this to a “great” or “very great” extent. According to one teacher,

Through English education, I think students can deepen their knowledge of English-speaking societies and cultures and get the opportunity to increase their awareness of the differences between Japan and
other countries. Also, through team teaching with ALTs, we can reflect on different cultures, learn about the differences and similarities between [people from those cultures] and us Japanese, and nurture respectful attitudes. (Teacher 43, public JHS; author’s translation)

As this teacher has done, JTEs interviewed for the study tended to pair the acquisition of cultural knowledge with the development of positive attitudes towards cultural others, apparently hoping that the former necessarily leads to the latter. Byram himself acknowledges the difficulty of specifying how the values dimension of IC can be taught:

You can’t think of specific teaching methods to change people’s attitudes, but you try to use your teaching methods to teach other objectives and hope that that will happen at the same time, rather than saying: ’In this lesson we’re going to develop your attitudes.’ That’s not possible.
(Byram quoted in Porto, 2013, p. 147)

Diaz (2013) argues that foreign language teachers tend to put particular emphasis on the knowledge dimension of IC since it is relatively easy for them to provide students with cultural content and to test learning in this area. Findings from the current study appear to support Diaz here: participants focused on the cultural content students are exposed to in textbooks and in lessons taught with ALTs, and, with Byram, they hope that respectful, tolerant attitudes will be acquired “at the same time”.

In fact, several participants did try to connect the development of positive attitudes towards cultural others with the experience of studying a foreign language. In the interviews, several teachers talked at length about the importance of this “encounter with difference” and the bearing it can have on attitude formation. As one teacher expressed it,

English itself is something different from our usual life.... so, we’re forced to accept something new, or something we cannot understand. I believe that’s the first step towards coexistence... kyousei.... First, we couldn’t understand it, but by learning, little by little, we begin to understand it.... So, I think English is a first step for the students to ‘co-live’ with others from different backgrounds, in harmony.
(Teacher 46, public SHS)

The “encounter with difference” which this and other teachers refer to is key to the process of tertiary socialization described by Byram (2008), whereby learners become able to view their native culture from the perspective of an outsider, and to critically appraise cultural assumptions that were previously taken for granted.

Almost half of the survey participants saw great potential for JTEs to encourage students’ ability to “view things critically,” but there was less support for the idea that learning English can help Japanese students to “think critically about Japanese culture and society.” In the qualitative data, several teachers talked about the educational value of students making comparisons between Japan and other cultures, but this tended to be in terms of encouraging pride in their own cultural heritage rather than helping them to take a critical perspective. There is a strong impression from the data that participants see JTEs as contributing to intercultural learning in ways that are essentially outward-looking, focused on values, knowledge and skills that students will require for encounters with people overseas or with foreign visitors to Japan. This contrasts with the views of Byram and others who see intercultural competence as directly
relevant to cultural and ethnic diversity within a country, as well as to cross-border encounters at the international level.

4. Conclusion

This paper began by considering what quantitative and qualitative data from the study reveal about how participating teachers perceive contemporary citizenship, and about the values, knowledge and skills they see as most important to a programme of citizenship education. It was found that participants tend towards a cosmopolitan view of Japanese citizenship grounded in commitments to universal human rights, democracy and respect for cultural diversity. They are wary of the patriotism being promoted in schools by the government, believing that Japanese citizens need to balance a national identity rooted in benign attachments to Japan’s cultural heritage with a strong awareness that their citizenship entails responsibilities to the global community. No doubt there is an element of circularity in this finding since many participants were recruited through professional networks whose aims are avowedly cosmopolitan. At the same time, it is perhaps unsurprising that anyone drawn to a career in foreign language education should exhibit such views. Indeed, according to Osler (2005), “Good language teachers must necessarily be cosmopolitan citizens” (p. 20).

The main focus of the paper has been on how participants believe JTEs can address citizenship-related teaching objectives through their English teaching. The survey data revealed a strong consensus that JTEs can play such a role, particularly in terms of raising students’ awareness of the global dimension of citizenship and nurturing cosmopolitan values of tolerance and respect for cultural others. More than anything else, participants emphasized the importance of the thematic content of teaching materials, and the question of whether JTEs can teach for citizenship appears to hinge largely on the nature of topics included in the authorized textbooks most of them are required to use. In this respect, teachers were generally positive about the tendency for these textbooks to deal with global issues and topics related to intercultural understanding, though the consensus was that treatment tends to be superficial and JTEs wanting to engage students with these topics in greater depth will need to supplement textbooks with other material. ALTs were viewed as another valuable source of cultural input, but once again teachers tended to emphasize the content covered in team-taught lessons, and the positive attitudes they hoped students would acquire as a result, rather than any intercultural communication skills that could be developed through interactions with the ALT. There was some support in the survey for the idea that English discussion activities could equip students with the skills for dialogue envisioned by Starkey (2005), but in the qualitative data participants tended to focus on reasons why they thought most JTEs avoid doing much discussion work; such activities are seen as cutting into lesson time needed to cover other aspects of the syllabus.

In fact, it is because of such time pressures that participants believe relatively few of their colleagues are likely to find space for addressing teaching objectives related to citizenship. Typically, they perceive JTEs as being mindful of the expectations emanating from students, parents and colleagues that they cover everything in the predominantly grammar-based syllabus that students will be tested on. As one teacher responded in the survey,

The constraints imposed by university entrance exams, school tests and the common teaching schedule are a major obstacle. If it weren’t for that we would be much freer to teach [aspects of
While these appear to be powerful constraints, however, the study also suggests that they operate on teachers differently depending on factors related to the immediate school environment. Space does not allow for a thorough consideration of these contextual matters here, but the data does point to factors related to school type that facilitate or hinder JTEs in their efforts to address citizenship-related teaching objectives. For example, while some teachers interviewed for the study described having opportunities to utilize the school’s Integrated Studies period for citizenship-related projects, others reported that in their own schools Integrated Studies was taught exclusively by homeroom teachers or reserved for other purposes such as careers guidance. Especially important in determining whether a JTE can find space for citizenship teaching appears to be the degree of emphasis the school places on test results. All three participants based in private institutions described their schools’ curricula as essentially focused on entrance exam preparation; the emphasis placed on regular testing and tracking students’ test scores appears to allow them few opportunities to teach anything but grammar. On the other hand, four participants who were more optimistic about their role in citizenship teaching were based in what they described as academically “low level,” public secondary schools where it was expected that few, if any, students would go on to higher education. Although these teachers referred to other constraints on their teaching such as poor student motivation and problems with class discipline, since they felt under no pressure to finish the assigned textbook, they believed they had more freedom to expand upon global issues-related topics with supplementary materials. Further investigation is required to cast more light on how the kinds of contextual factors described here might impact upon JTEs’ ability to teach for citizenship.

Scholarship on Japanese citizenship education has tended to overlook the role of foreign language teachers, even though research from around the world suggests they can play an important role in teaching values, knowledge and skills that are highly relevant to citizenship in culturally diverse and globally interconnected societies. While further research is needed to clarify their role, the exploratory study reported here, conducted with a purposively selected group of informants whose views merit attention, strongly suggests that English teachers in Japan’s secondary schools deserve to be recognized as potentially important contributors to Japanese citizenship education.

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日本の中等教育における英語授業によるシティズンシップ教育目標への取り組み：教師の認識を探る

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外国語教師の役割が、言語教育だけでなく、現代のシティズンシップに関わる知識、スキル、価値観の育成にも大きく貢献することは、多くの先行研究により国際的に示唆されている。日本でも、シティズンシップ教育に関する研究が盛んに行われているが、英語教師が果たす役割については、これまでほとんど注目されていなかった。本論文では、日本人の英語教師（JTE）が「シティズンシップ」をどのように理解しているか、また、英語教育とシティズンシップ教育との関連性をどのように認識しているかについて報告する。調査は、46名の英語教師を対象に量的および質的調査データを収集し、14名の教師へはさらに聞き取り調査を実施した。データ分析の結果、研究に参加した教師は、シティズンシップについてコスモポリタンな見方をする傾向があることがわかった。また、JTE は自身がシティズンシップ教育に役割を果たすことができ、また果たすべきであると考えているにも関わらず、自身の主な貢献がアクティブ・シティズンシップのためのスキルとは異なる知識や価値の育成であると考えていることもわかった。本論文は、学校に於ける教育の現状が、どのように JTE のシティズンシップ教育への貢献の可能性に影響するかについて、さらなる研究の必要性を指摘している。

キーワード：外国語教育、シティズンシップ教育、日本の中等教育、相互文化的能力、教育の狙い

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