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Faculty Development in Japan: MEXT Expectations and the Reality at Internationalizing Universities

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Abstract

Since the 1980's, MEXT has been working to improve higher education through twin aims of promoting internationalization and encouraging systematic teacher and professional development (PD) programs (MEXT, 2019). The student population decline heightens the urgency institutions feel to internationalize and innovate. Without PD, universities cannot identify best practices, build collaborative environments, or respond to the ever-changing needs of 21st century students (Murakami, 2019). This literature review explores PD in the West, Japan, and EFL before making the case for varied and multilingual PD opportunities in Japanese universities.

Beginning with the 1983 “Internationalization Strategy”, the Japanese Ministry of Education (known as MEXT or *Monbukagakusho*, or *Monkasho* for short) has been actively working to improve the Japanese tertiary education system through the cultivation of a more outward view towards the wider world (NIER, 2011). Initial attempts at internationalization focused on increasing the number of foreign students studying in Japan. Beginning with the 1983 goal of going from 10,000 students that year to 100,000 by the early 2000s, then, in 2008 establishing the goal of reaching 300,000 foreign students by 2020, it is clear that Japan’s definition of “internationalization” means non-Japanese faces in the country (NIER, 2011; MEXT UCJ, 2011). More recent government grants and programs (Global 30 Project, Top Global University Project, The Project for Promotion of Global Human Resource Development, etc.) began to include other measures of internationalization—courses being taught in English, the establishment of links with overseas universities and, for the first time, specifically including the hiring of foreign teachers as a part of their plan (NIER, 2011, MEXT, 2012; Huang, 2018a; Huang, 2018b).

Alongside these goals on internationalization, the Japanese government has been looking to improve the overall quality of tertiary education as the competition for an ever-shrinking student body ramps up. A shrinking Japanese population continues to threaten the future of higher education with the estimated number of 18-year-olds dropping below one million in 2031 (Nippon.com, 2015). Human resource service provider Recruit (2018) predicts that approximately one third of the country’s 600 private universities will shutter in the next 15-20 years because of the demographic shift. In its report *The Future of Japan’s Higher Education* (2005), MEXT identified professional development (PD) for staff and teachers, as a way to respond to this while innovating education for the 21st century to meet changing student needs (Murakami, 2019). It is crucial that universities be proactive in order to preserve their place in the future of

Japanese tertiary education.

Where then, do these twin goals of internationalization and educational improvement overlap? While there are numerous answers to this question, the focus of this literature review will be on how these relate to foreign faculty in Japanese universities. Effective PD needs to be available to all faculty, not only those proficient in Japanese, for MEXT to achieve its goals. In many fields, the academic professional language of Japan, in which the majority of its 8,000 foreign educators are fluent, is English (RILE, 2019). However, the vast majority of PD being provided is in Japanese (Murakami, 2019). This is a disconnect that needs to be explored to better understand the challenges going forward for universities trying to implement MEXT directives and innovate for the future.

The purpose of this literature review is to explore to what degree English-medium PD is being provided by Japanese institutions for its current foreign faculty population in comparison with that being provided in Japanese. The scope of this literature review is limited at present, focusing only on the PD opportunities available in English for those teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at the tertiary level. The reason for this is its relevance to the author's position within the English Language Institute (ELI) at Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS). It will begin with a comparison of definitions and characteristics of PD in the Japanese educational context, Western educational context, and field of second language education to establish where these terms, concepts, and expectations converge and diverge. From there, this literature review will explore what activities are being conducted in Japan that qualify as professional development, identifying what is being done in only the Japanese-medium, only in the English-medium, and that which is being conducted in both. It will close with an argument for increased PD in languages other than Japanese.

Definitions, Characteristics, & Examples

Before delving into definitions, it is important to clarify the usage of terminology as it they may have different or overlapping meanings between the contexts or fields. Furthermore, the terms in Japan are adopted from English, so while they are written in Japanese script, the words are essentially English, as are the abbreviations. For example, professional development (*purofeshonaru debelopumento*, or simply PD) is an umbrella term in Japan to refer to all forms, including staff development (*sutafu debelopumento*, or SD), while faculty development (*fakaruti debelopumento*, or FD) refers only to that of university faculty. In the broader Western context, professional development (PD) is an umbrella term, though teacher development (TD) is used when the focus is on classroom practices. Within the fields of English as a Foreign Language and Second Language Education, the term professional development was the predominant term until the last ten years. “Teacher development” is used more frequently to refer to what might be referred to as PD or FD in the Japanese context as well as PD or TD in the West as it is meant to refer to both the development of classroom skills as well as those which might involve joining a larger academic community. Evidence of this blending can be seen in the official job title of the author: Principal Lecturer of Professional Development: Teacher Development.

The Western Context of Broader Professional & Teacher Development

There are myriad lists and models to approach effective PD suggesting there is no single definition of PD or TD that fits all circumstances. Nevertheless, there are some that stand out. Guskey (2003) performed an extensive review of 12 lists of characteristics of effective PD for education and identified the following as being the most common across the lists. Effective PD includes:

- Enhancement of teacher knowledge (both content and pedagogic),

- Providing sufficient time and well-organized resources,
- Promotion of collegial and collaborative exchange,
- Inclusion of specific evaluation processes that guide regular improvement,
- Alignment of reform initiatives with high-quality instruction,
- Being school-based or context-specific, and
- Building leadership capacity

It is worth noting, however, as Guskey warns, that many of these lists fail to draw on student learning data, nor are they derived from research evidence. However, there is other research that aligns with some of these points. For example, Vernon-Dotson and Floyd (2012) found that meaningful professional development which involved improved teacher leadership and mentorships were more effective. Similarly, Raelin (2016) argued that perceiving leadership as a practice within the environment rather than behaviors may produce sustainable collective practices. Another study found positive links between professional learning communities and effective professional development, particularly when focused on assessment compared to classroom practices (Popp & Goldmann, 2016). Drago-Severson's (2009) learning-oriented model of adult learning also references some of the common elements across all lists as the pillar practices that principals should be providing their educators: instances of teaming, promotion of mentoring, creation of leadership roles, and encouragement of collegial inquiry (also known as reflection).

Effective PD activities draw on the deep knowledge possessed by teachers, and that knowledge ought to be frequently and collaboratively shared among colleagues, promote leadership development or continual growth, and receive extensive support in terms of time and resources from institutions serious about improvement.

The Japanese Context of Broader Faculty Development

PD as understood in the Western context is a recent addition to Japanese education.

Prior to this, the dominant form of educational PD at all levels was *jyugyo gakushu* or lesson study. In this, lesson plans, either jointly or individually constructed, are actively critiqued along with related materials, under the guidance of a senior teacher (Yoshida, 2019). Though other forms of PD have since been introduced, this remains the dominant form particularly at the primary and secondary levels, and is also a mainstay of teacher education and tertiary education. Other interpretations of PD were first introduced in the late 20th century (Romaine, 1987; Yasuoka, Oigawa, Watanabe, Yoshikawa, Takano, Kosawa, & Kattori, 1993), beginning with the concept of student course evaluations as a method of tertiary FD. This was done through comparison of the Japanese and American contexts. By the early 21st century, there were clearer definitions outlined by MEXT's Central Council for Education as well as other influential university educators. MEXT displays the following definitions and explanations on its website, thereby making these officially sanctioned interpretations of FD in Japanese institutions (JCCE, 2005; MEXT, 2019b). The Central Council for Education considers the term FD to generally refer to a *systematic* approach of working to improve both classroom practices and methods by faculty, not one-off events or activities (JCCE, 2005). The council acknowledged this to be a rather broad definition and clarified it with examples of acceptable activities, for example research on classroom practices, faculty peer observation, and the training of new faculty. In his book comparing PD and FD in the United States and Japan, Arimoto (2005) defined FD as knowledge, more specifically knowledge of one's academic field, their institution's principles and purposes, and an understanding of their role in how to implement improvements based on knowledge.

Kinugawa and Tachi (2003) offer a much more detailed definition of FD, including a list of activities that could qualify as FD. They emphasize that good FD has a specific focus since the departments can easily fragment into disparate approaches. Furthermore, they state that it is necessary for FD to meet the needs of the institution rather than a

broad approach because faculty will have diverse and ever-changing needs that need to be met. If a specific focus is chosen for effective FD, it can be integrated into multiple elements at all levels within the institution. Their list of activities includes:

1. Workshops on the university's principles and purposes,
2. Veteran teachers providing guidance to new faculty,
3. Training in teaching techniques (e.g. learning theory, pedagogy, use of educational tools, etc.),
4. Curriculum development,
5. Development of learner support systems,
6. Understanding institutional principles vis a vis educational regulations and rules,
7. Assessment (e.g. student evaluations, peer evaluation, periodic evaluation of practices),
8. Recognition of excellent faculty and good practices,
9. Support for faculty research,
10. Creation of a system that allows for balance of teaching and research,
11. Understanding of and appreciation for the relationship between university administration and faculty,
12. Ensuring that faculty understand their ethical duties and responsibility to the public, and
13. Engaging in self-evaluation, holistically or with specific criteria.

This list is by no means exhaustive as effective practices must be context-specific, but they stress that any activities which can be considered FD must involve a tendency toward natural and continual development.

The Japanese Central Council for Education released a 2005 report on graduate school education which emphasized the necessity of FD in Japanese institutions to draw

overseas students and improve international credibility. The report specifically identified activities that help make curricula systematic as one approach for programs to implement (Ejima, et al., 2015). In conjunction with this, programs supporting good practice (GP Programs) were introduced to encourage competition and innovation among national, public, and private universities to “support effective efforts to improve the quality of education” (MEXT, 2005, pg. 21).

It is difficult to condense these definitions and characteristics into a single description, though similar themes appear throughout, such as supporting new faculty, curriculum development, evaluation in some form, and a commitment to ongoing, systematic improvement over one-shot or intermittent FD activities.

The EFL/Second Language Education Context

For second language education, as with all specialized academic fields, effective PD/TD is closely connected with content competency. In the last 40 years, this has meant a shift from a transmissive approach to TD and teacher education drawing on a knowledge base, to a more sociocultural approach which incorporates teacher learning and cognition as well as professional knowledge alongside a broader collection of knowledge bases (e.g. content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge) (Crandall & Christison, 2016). Despite this change, Borg (2003) linked teacher cognition, specifically as it relates to prior language learning experience, teacher education, and classroom practices, as fundamental to implementing effective PD for language educators. Similarly, Richards (2010) identifies core areas of competency required for second language educators: language proficiency, teaching skills, contextual knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, the ability to theorize from practice, pedagogical reasoning skills, teacher identity, learner-focused learning, belonging to a community of practice, and exhibiting professionalism. Without these, effective PD is unattainable in the field.

McCrostie (2010) also identifies fluency in the local language as key to professional advancement within the field in Japan. Focusing more on the classroom, Farrell (2015) argues that reflective practice, a type of systematic reflection to ensure teaching beliefs are matching practices, is the most fundamental form of *language educator* TD.

The website for TESOL, the primary international professional organization for English language educators, refers to PD using verbs such as learning, growing, sharing, enhancing, or sharpening skills across numerous documents and descriptions (TESOL, 2019). These words suggest constant movement and improvement as a part of how the field conceptualizes effective PD. In one such publication, it is noted that “those who contribute most to the profession and to their students’ learning see their own continual learning and development as crucial to their work” (Byrd & Nelson, 2003, pg. v). It is critical then, that language educators have access to PD, not just for the sake of the students and the teachers, but for the reputation of the institution.

These descriptions of competency and effective practices emphasize several core ideas: that of collegial exchange, possessing deep knowledge of the subject, and connecting theory with practice, and a commitment to sustained action. Activities conducted by institutions related to this field must include these elements if it is to qualify as PD or TD. There is evidence to suggest that the transmissive approach still exists, so universities and their faculty must strive to actually implement the most effective practices rather than simply discover them (Lee, 2011; Montgomery, 2011). Those institutions that do so will become the leaders of change, just as MEXT intends. With its myriad resources, KUIS is well-situated to become one such leader in Japanese tertiary education.

In sum, there is a great deal of similarity among the three conceptions of PD. Western, Japanese, and EFL descriptions all suggest collaborative activities/information sharing, involve sustained improvement activities, encourage the mentoring of

newer/younger teachers by experienced or veteran teachers, and demand a deep understanding of content, pedagogic, and institutional knowledge. Of note, however, is the greater emphasis Japan seems to place on evaluation of faculty or practices, especially through student feedback, than the other two. Additionally, use of the word training or teaching is more common in Japanese documents than the other contexts, suggesting a preference for more top-down approaches, which would be in line with the national-level control of educational policies and curricula as well as the hierarchical social structure within academia. As effective PD should be context-specific (Kinugawa & Tachi, 2003; Guskey, 2003; Richards, 2010), for it to achieve cultural buy-in and be conducted in Japanese institutions, PD activities must generate data or a measurable element by which to evaluate its quality. Similarly, without such conditions, even activities that are common across all three contexts may not be perceived as worthy of pursuit.

Faculty Development Underway in Japan

For clarity in this section, all activities described will be referred to as FD even if the original document uses PD or TD. As previously stated, this is because FD is the term used in Japan to refer to tertiary-level PD, though individual institutions may refer to their activities in various ways.

General FD

Since the FD-promoting policies and grants have been outlined, there has been an increase in implementation of activities in Japan. There are three types of universities, national (national government-funded), public (prefectural/municipal government-funded, and private, and it is expected that national universities and other innovative institutions are leading the way forward. Between 2000 and 2004, the percentage of universities engaged in FD rose from 52% (341 institutions) to 75% (534 institutions) (MEXT, 2019a).

MEXT indicates that within national universities, 98% of undergraduate or graduate programs were implementing FD, while 68% were at public universities, and 73% were at private universities. The activities of these schools were categorized into the following: training for new faculty, training for faculty that do not qualify as new, peer class observation, peer course evaluation, lectures on improving teaching practices, meetings regarding improved teaching practices, establishment of centers focused on improving teaching practices, and other activities established within the institutions. The most popular FD activities being implemented are lectures on improving teaching practices (43.4% overall), training for non-new faculty (36.2% overall), and meetings regarding improved teaching practices (34.6% overall) (MEXT, 2019a). One clear divide in the data is that national universities are significantly outpacing public and private universities, often with 20+% of their departments engaged in FD compared to that of other school types. The government continues to encourage an increase in these activities by awarding various government grants (NIER, 2011).

Government promotion of FD has dramatically increased the availability of activities as well as collaboration between universities. Large consortiums, such as the Consortium of Universities in Kyoto and International Consortium for Universities of Education in East Asia, are providing large-scale forums and symposia open to faculty from member institutions as well as those of others (Ejima, et. al, 2015; CUK, 2019). In late 2018, The Kanda University of International Studies PD Working Group (2018) performed a review of practices at other institutions and found that activities such as new faculty training, workshops, and regular newsletter publication have been in practice at some universities since 2010 (e.g. Daito Bunka University, Osaka Institute of Technology, and Kyoto University of Foreign Studies). Osaka Institute of Technology holds regular in-house workshops by faculty on subject such as classroom fundamentals and use of technology. Tohoku University built and maintains an extensive website which has resources for new

faculty, continuing faculty, and recordings of PD seminars publicly available (Tohoku University, 2019). Chiba Institute of Technology is implementing activities such as syllabus design workshops, grading training, and discussions on active learning (Nagao, 2018). Kyoto University of Foreign Studies holds regular events, including an internal poster session, where faculty share current research projects (Murakami, 2019). Three things are worth noting with these university programs. First is that activities are predominantly being carried out by those within the institutions and not through the invitation of others from outside. While such actions are commendable and certainly better than nothing, there is a danger of isolation and missing innovation if the schools do not engage with the larger university community in Japan. Another point worth commenting on is that much of the activities appear to focus on the mechanics of teaching and less on methodology or practices. There appears to be a preference for certain types of activities within the list that MEXT refers to (Kinugawa & Tachi, 2003), those which are lecture-focused and centered on training incoming faculty. A final note is that none of these reviewed suggest any of this is occurring in a language other than Japanese. There are good practices being conducted, but it remains to be seen if it is available to those without Japanese language skills.

English-related FD

As mentioned previously, MEXT is calling on universities to internationalize in a variety of ways. One of the main approaches is by providing more content courses in English (English medium of instruction, or EMI) so that international students not fluent in Japanese can attend Japanese universities (NIER, 2011; MEXT UCJ, 2011). Predictably, this has created a niche within FD for events and support that assist Japanese professors in improving their English language skills for the purpose of teaching in English. One such example is from Kansai University, at which a “Global FD Series”

hosted an event called “English Skill Up Session 2018”. Those unaccustomed with Japan might not know immediately, but those in education here would most likely interpret “skill up” as a reference to language skills, not professional teaching knowledge (Ikeda, 2018). While English ability *is* a necessary skill for Japanese faculty to develop, this is an activity that would benefit those using English as a second language but would hold little value for those who are highly fluent multilinguals or for whom it is their first language in terms of meaningful professional development. Furthermore, while it cannot be confirmed from the literature, it is likely that this event, though advertised in English, would have still been largely conducted in Japanese. Further still, as Carty and Susser (2015) note, international faculty “are being asked to convert their EFL content-based instruction (CBI) courses into subject matter courses for EMI programs” (pg. 1), often incorrectly conflating EMI and Content and Language Integrated Learning, or CLIL. Publications seem to explore the challenges related to implementing such programs and policies or focus on the call for language support for Japanese faculty rather than on pedagogical skills, content knowledge, or other elements that would qualify as FD according to MEXT definitions (Brown, 2014; Hanami, 2011; Leong, 2016).

English-medium FD

Either very little English-medium FD is being conducted at Japanese universities or it is not being documented as there is little to no literature on the subject. One of the few articles that does exist was written in part by the author of this literature review. There appear to be more online resources or videos available than publications. The University of Tokyo holds regular FD seminars, however, the only English on one website is the title of the talk, not the description. Non-Japanese speaking faculty would not be able to navigate the website, let alone receive the full abstract or outline of the event planned. More positively, the guest speaker in a recent seminar on EMI was non-Japanese and the

talk was given in English (University of Tokyo, 2019a). Also promisingly, Tokyo University is now also offering non-Japanese FD through its Global Faculty Development Project (University of Tokyo, 2019b). This is a national university, however so it is somewhat expected that they would be engaged in more innovative practices. Other universities can learn from this model.

Milliner and Dimoski (2018) provide one of the few publications detailing meetings and activities held in English in their EFL department which would qualify as FD according to MEXT. Members of their department gave lectures, poster presentations, sharing sessions (of useful materials and tools), and orientations to incoming faculty. Additionally, they gave pedagogy workshops and held informal discussion sessions on classroom or research related topics. They also presented their report on FD activities to the larger faculty so that other parts of the university would be aware of their work. While less detailed, a similar article by Kushida, Lege, Lyon, Murphy, Nguyen, Owens and Roloff Rothman (2018) describes the situation at their university (KUIS) where there is a large EFL department of foreign faculty for whom English is the predominant medium of interaction between colleagues. This article includes the history of FD activities conducted in the department as well as the goals for its future. All FD in this department takes place in English, though faculty are welcome to participate in or present in Japanese, though few do. Murakami (2019) stated that the FD activity in his department encourages faculty to share their poster sessions in either English or Japanese, though the faculty of his university is predominantly Japanese nationals for whom English is a second language and it was for all faculty, not only EFL faculty. Again, while positive, the choice of language is presented as a personal choice rather than as the language the event was conducted in.

While there does seem to be a variety of practices going on that do, according to the definitions and characteristics across contexts and fields, qualify as FD, there is a paucity

of it occurring for EFL educators who are looking to their institutions to provide something beyond improving their English-speaking abilities. That which exists in English is predominantly outside institutions, provided via professional organizations such as the Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT), Filipino English Teachers Japan (FETJ), or English Teachers in Japan (ETJ). There are few publications indicating English-medium FD is occurring in Japanese universities, but there is evidence to suggest it may be happening. Further research must be done to document what is being conducted and to investigate whether or not adequate FD support of all English-speaking faculty, not just for EFL educators, is being given.

Conclusion

Developments in tertiary FD in Japan have grown considerably over the last few decades. Understanding of the concept has expanded beyond lesson study and administration of student course evaluations, though they remain a fundamental part of FD activities. FD has come to mean much more, demanding that faculty have solid bases of institutional, content, and pedagogic knowledge. An emphasis on collaboration and sharing has led to the development of vibrant communities of professionals in universities across the country; however, there is still work to be done. Not all the activities suggested by MEXT are being implemented, with a dominant few, such as new faculty training, or lectures by experienced faculty given to less experienced faculty, occurring more frequently across the board. More investigation is needed into what is meant by definitions of activities as well, because the Western concepts of workshops and symposiums, of which small group discussion or attendee interaction are crucial, may not be included in the actual practice here in Japan. It has been the experience of the author that events billed as workshops, symposiums, or discussions are simply lectures. MEXT definitions of FD activities do not explicitly mention lectures, however (Kinugawa & Tachi, 2003; JCCE, 2005;

Arimoto, 2005; MEXT, 2019a) evidence suggests that this is a predominant approach for implementing FD. As with faculty classrooms, where relying heavily on lecturing may not reflect good practice, so too may its application to FD. Teachers will teach in the way they are taught, so it is crucial that the Japanese government and institutions pursue a variety of sound FD activities.

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