# Critical Analysis of English Education Policies in Japan Focusing on Two Discourses: *Developing Human Resources* and *Nurturing Japanese Identity*

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## Abstract

A growing body of research reports negative results, such as widening economic disparity, due to English education reform influenced by neoliberalism. Japan is no exception. Linguistic instrumentalism is intensifying in Tokyo, which is scheduled to host the Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2020. This article critically analyzes policy documents issued by the largest business lobby in Japan (Keidanren), Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), the Tokyo Metropolitan Government (TMG), and the Tokyo Metropolitan Board of Education (TMBOE) within Japan's social and political context. All of the documentary data are official-public and open-archival. The study reveals that two discourses, *developing human resources* and *nurturing Japanese identity*, are repeated throughout the policy documents. While MEXT, TMG, and TMBOE stipulate their intention to accelerate Japan's internationalization, their policy documents have potential to lead students in an opposing direction with an emphasis on fierce competition and pluralist multiculturalism, which dichotomizes the self and others by simplifying differences. In the discussion section I suggest implementing pedagogical practice based on critical multiculturalism to multiply the effect of these top-down measures. Ultimately, EFL teachers could form a bottom-up powerbase by critically analyzing the official policies and by implementing practice that fits to the particular setting.

**Keywords:** *neoliberalism; English education policy; multiculturalism; Japan*

## 1. Introduction

English education reform influenced by neoliberalism has been creating negative results in non-English-speaking countries such as widening economic and social disparity, commercialization of public education, and even aggravation of democracy (Guo & Guo, 2016; Park, 2011; Pillar & Cho, 2013; Ricento, 2015). Some researchers call the language education driven by neoliberalism *linguistic instrumentalism* (Guo, 2012; Kubota, 2011; Wee, 2010). Linguistic instrumentalism has been intensifying in Tokyo, which is scheduled to host the Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2020. Little empirical research has focused on Tokyo's policies although several studies have been conducted on English education in Japan (Barrett & Miyashita, 2016; Kubota, 2011; Terasawa, 2016).

One problem related to linguistic instrumentalism is that while policy documents stipulate their intention to promote intercultural understanding through English education, the same documents also tend to show characteristics of cultural essentialization or dichotomization because linguistic instrumentalism tends to promote competition rather than cooperation. Some researchers indicate that there are four approaches to multiculturalism: (a) denial of multiculturalism, (b) liberal multiculturalism, (c) pluralist multiculturalism, and (d) critical multiculturalism (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; Kubota, 2008).

The purpose of this inquiry is to critically analyze policy documents issued by the largest business lobby in Japan (Keidanren), Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), the Tokyo Metropolitan Government (TMG), and the Tokyo Metropolitan Board of Education (TMBOE) within Japan's social and political context. The study reveals that two discourses, *developing human resources* and *nurturing Japanese identity*, are repeated throughout the policy documents. The discourse of developing human resources emphasizes

fierce competition on the global stage and implies that students should be encouraged to serve the nation as a resource. The discourse of nurturing Japanese identity represents pluralist multiculturalism, which dichotomizes the self and others by simplifying and emphasizing differences although it respects differences among cultures. While MEXT, TMG, and TMBOE stipulate their intention to accelerate Japan's internationalization, their policy documents have potential to lead students in the opposite direction if they are implemented without caution.

This article seeks to be action-oriented, so in the discussion section I will present what English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers can actually do in and outside of the classroom to multiply the effect of neoliberal top-down policies. I suggest that EFL teachers implement pedagogical practice based on critical multiculturalism to counter-balance the effect of these top-down measures guided by pluralist multiculturalism. I conclude indicating that EFL teachers could form a bottom-up powerbase by critically analyzing the official policy and by implementing possible practice that fits to the particular context. The context of this research is specific, but the findings and suggestions can be applicable for TESOL professionals and policy makers in different settings in non-English-speaking nations.

## 2. Literature Review

Neoliberalism is generally defined as a revisionist approach to transform the welfare state into a post-welfare state that relegates every aspect of society to the wisdom of the market. This ideology usually adopts a trickle-down hypothesis in which economic wealth gathered within the upper levels of society later benefits unprivileged members of the society by improving the economy as a whole. Neoliberalism has been permeating into the area of education, especially English education. Some researchers call the language education driven by neoliberalism *linguistic instrumentalism* (Guo, 2012; Kubota, 2011; Wee, 2010). Linguistic instrumentalism can be defined as an ideology that emphasizes the utilitarianism of learning English for sustaining economic development as a society and for social mobility obtained by an individual.

A growing body of research has reported the negative effects of linguistic instrumentalism in many parts of the world: China (Guo & Guo, 2016); European countries (Grin, 2015), the Greater Mekong Sub-region (Bruthiaux, 2015), India (Sontag, 2015), Japan (Kubota, 2011); Nordic nations (Stensaker et al., 2009); Singapore (Wee, 2010); South Africa (Wright, 2015), South Korea (Park, 2011); and USA (Chun, 2009). English education policies driven by neoliberal logic serve widening disparity because of inequalities in terms of access to quality education, which can be a default mechanism for maintaining social divisions (Ricento, 2015). The corporate world tries to dominate education in an effort to produce consumers to service the economy rather than critical citizens (Phillipson, 2005). Despite policymakers' emphasis on merits of English proficiency, few individuals actually benefit from linguistic instrumentalism and nor does society as a whole (Romaine, 2015). In addition to economic matters, linguistic instrumentalism can contribute to aggravation of democracy such as suppression of free speech (Pillar & Cho, 2013).

The ongoing language policies influenced by neoliberalism need to be critically reviewed because "decision making about language policies in education tends to reflect the agendas of the most powerful groups, which includes seeking foreign investment and loans necessary to bolster their ability to maintain power, rather than the soundness and practicability of specific policies" (Ricento, 2015, p. 294). Despite the accumulating criticism of linguistic instrumentalism alleviating the negative effects is not an easy task because neoliberalism is now deeply rooted in societies to the extent that the situation can be called paralysis (Pillar & Cho, 2013; Norton, 1997). It is only natural in such a situation that the general public, the media, or even language professionals do not properly recognize the problems and do not openly criticize the neoliberal language policies.

Another characteristic of neoliberalism is that it tends to be connected with nationalism. Right-wing politicians and administrations with exclusive views have been gaining momentum in many parts of the world. People's anxiety over the growing wealth gap and the tension created by globalization can lead people to thinking that the nation or the group that they belong to is superior to others, through which they can falsely feel safe (Dower, 2015).

When we turn our eyes towards East Asia, the region has been struggling with its own challenges that are related to nationalism. The historically complicated relationships among East Asian nations such as China, Japan, and South Korea often become tense due to exclusive remarks produced by politicians and the general public. For example, in Japan *hate speech* demonstrations against Chinese or Korean people living in Japan conducted by ultra-right groups have been a social problem, and the media said that several members of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party of Japan (LDP) and other parties are related to these groups (Fackler, 2014; Sieg & Takenaka, 2014). Japan had to be urged by the United Nations to regulate hate speech by law in 2014 (Matsuo, 2014). Following this urge, the government enacted a law aimed at deterring hate speech in May, 2016.

In addition to linguistic instrumentalism, multiculturalism is a factor that requires careful observation in English language policies. Culture is not a fixed unitary substance but a multifaceted organism that is created through and impinges on political and economic power relationships. Weedon (1987) defined discourses as "ways or constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledge and the relations between them" (p. 108). Following Weedon's definition, culture is a discourse and it transforms; however, it is often manipulated as a fixed unitary substance specific to a particular nation or a community, which is called cultural essentialism. Cultural essentialism has been criticized in TESOL literature (Kubota, 1999; Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Lee, 2015; Pennycook, 1998).

There are four approaches to multiculturalism. The first one is denial of multiculturalism. Some conservative advocates criticize multiculturalism as a factor that could divide a nation or a community. The second one is liberal multiculturalism. Liberal multiculturalism accepts multiculturalism and respects differences among cultures. However, while liberal multiculturalism emphasizes essential equality regardless of race, culture, gender, or social class, it could mask disparities that exist in reality. The third one is pluralist multiculturalism. Pluralist multiculturalism also respects differences among cultures, but it could dichotomize the self and others by simplifying and emphasizing differences (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997).

The fourth one is critical multiculturalism. Critical multiculturalism, which is closely related to critical pedagogy, deals with political aspects that liberal and pluralist multiculturalism have avoided, aiming at transforming the social system in the long run. Critical multiculturalism recognizes social and economic inequalities that exist in reality and analyzes how the inequalities are created and maintained in relation to power. Certain characteristics that define a particular culture exist, but the characteristics are not fixed. Critical multiculturalism recognizes this vagueness and analyzes how the discourse of culture is related to politics (Kubota, 2004).

## 3. Methodology

This article critically analyzes policy documents issued by Keidanren, MEXT, TMG, and TMBOE. This is a critical discourse study in that, first, discourses are considered to be shaped by and simultaneously shape social realities and, second, power is thought to be embedded in discourses, which should be revealed for social justice (Wodak & Meyer, 2016).

The following is the list of the documents that are investigated in this study. All of the documentary data are official-public and open-archival. MEXT and TMG have issued some of their policy documents in both Japanese and English. The English versions are considered literal translations. As a result, I use the English versions for analysis if both Japanese and English versions exist. On the other hand, TMBOE has not issued English versions of their measures. For analysis of policy documents that are not issued in English, I use the Japanese ones. The English translation of the policy documents in this study, which is done as literally as possible, is my own.

- "グローバル化時代の人材育成について" [On developing human resources in the era of globalization] created by Keidanren (2000).
- "The second basic plan for the promotion of education" (provisional translation) created by MEXT (2013b)
- "English education reform plan corresponding to globalization" created by MEXT (2013d)
- "Statement by Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan on the October 12 International New York Times article: Japan's Divided Education Strategy" created by then MEXT Minister Shimomura (2014).
- "東京都長期ビジョン" [The Long-Term Vision for Tokyo] created by TMG (2014)
- "東京都教育施策大綱" [Tokyo Metropolitan Educational Policy Framework] created by TMG (2015)
- "The Long-Term Vision for Tokyo: The Governor's message" created by then Tokyo Governor Masuzoe (2014a).
- "Announcement made by the Governor Masuzoe at the press conference on December 25, 2014" created by then Tokyo Governor Masuzoe (2014b).
- "東京版英語村開設について" [On establishing Tokyo-version English Village] created by TMBOE (2015a)
- "都立小中高一貫教育校の設置に関する検討結果" [The result of investigation on establishing

Tokyo Metropolitan school integrating elementary, junior high, and senior high school] created by TMBOE (2015b)

■ "都立高校改革推進計画・新実施計画（案）" [Provisional plan to promote Tokyo Metropolitan Senior High Schools reform and new implementation plan] created by TMBOE (2015c)

First, I analyze these documents in order to identify how neoliberal agenda is incorporated referring to Japan's social and political context. I especially focus on the term *jin-zai,* which is translated in English as 'human resources.' Japanese *jin* means 'human' and *zai* means 'resources,' so it is a direct translation used in the official documents that are analyzed in this study. In their policy documents MEXT, TMG, and TMBOE repeatedly use the phrase global *jin-zai*, which literally means global human resources, but the wording itself is problematic. The term 'human resources' is a phrase originally used in businesses. It is not used in any law concerning education in Japan, in which the word citizens, nationals, or people is used instead, but MEXT and other government agencies have come to use the phrase human resources to refer to the students. I investigate how and in what context the term 'human resources' is used in policy documents.

Second, I analyze the policy documents issued for English education reform in order to identify how and in what context multiculturalism or the idea of 'nurturing Japanese identity' is incorporated. To be more specific, each discourse related to multiculturalism or the idea of 'nurturing Japanese identity' is analyzed to be categorized into one of the four approaches to multiculturalism mentioned in the literature review section: (a) denial of multiculturalism, (b) liberal multiculturalism, (c) pluralist multiculturalism, and (d) critical multiculturalism.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1 The National Context: Japan's Initiatives to Reform English Education

4.1.1 The National Policies and Business Lobbies

Educational policies in any country tend to be influenced by the demands of the business sector, and Japan illustrates one of the most explicit examples (Kubota, 2011). Keidanren (Japan Federation of Economic Organizations), which later developed into new Keidanren (Japan Business Federation), the nation's largest business lobby, when it absorbed Nikkeiren (Japan Federation of Employers' Associations) in 2002, released a document entitled "グローバル化時代の人材育成について" [On developing human resources in the era of globalization] to make clear their attitudes toward national educational reform (Keidanren, 2000). The document regarded strengthening communicative skills in English as one of the urgent challenges in Japan and presented several suggestions to achieve the goal such as: (1) Improving English conversation skills at elementary, lower secondary, and upper secondary schools, increasing Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs), (2) Developing English language proficiency of Japanese EFL teachers using TOEIC, TOEFL, or other commercial tests, and (3) reforming the system for university entrance, where many of the English tests put most of the emphasis on reading comprehension. These suggestions can be seen as a manifestation of "communicative imperialism" that Phillipson (2005, p. 353) defined.

Keidanren traditionally donates a large amount of money to the ruling party, especially to the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). The LDP collected 2.21 billion yen in corporate donations in 2014. The amount increased after Prime Minister Shinzo Abe began his second administration in 2012. Among all the donations from businesses to political parties in Japan, the LDP's share accounted for 98 percent, in which new Keidanren played an important role (Tajima & Kyuki, 2015). MEXT later released plans for English education reform in 2013, and almost all the suggestions made by Keidanren were included in the plans.

MEXT (2013a) drew up a plan called "第２期教育振興基本計画" [The second basic plan for the promotion of education], which was adopted by the cabinet on June 14, 2013. MEXT (2013b) also provided an English version of the document. The plan exhibited four basic policy directions, eight achievement targets, and thirty basic measures. Focusing on items related to English education, one of the four basic policy directions is "developing human resources for a brighter future," and one of the five achievement targets is "human resource development to initiate and create social changes and new values." MEXT thought that the "increasingly severe economic environment and migration toward a knowledge-based society" (Part 1-1) was one of the "crises facing the country" (Part 1-1) so that they have to develop human resources to win the competition on the global stage. Several months after the Second Basic Plan for the Promotion of Education (MEXT, 2013a, 2013b) was adopted by the cabinet, MEXT (2013c) announced the "グローバル化に対応した英語教育改革実施計画" [English education reform plan corresponding to globalization]. An English version was also provided (MEXT, 2013d). The plan is again characterized with a neoliberal agenda (Barrett & Miyashita, 2016).

4.1.2 Exchange between the New York Times and MEXT on Education Reform

On October 12, 2014, an article entitled "Japan's divided education strategy" was published in the New York Times (NYT), stating:

Japan's simultaneous embrace of nationalism and cosmopolitanism is generating ambiguous signals from its education policy makers. They are rewriting textbooks along what they call "patriotic" lines, alienating their Asian neighbors in the process. But at the same time, they are promoting Japanese universities as globalized and open, in a bid to compete internationally. (Fitzpatrick, 2014)

Shimomura (2014), the MEXT Minister at the time, reacted to the article and released a statement written in English on October 31, 2014. The statement is valuable for understanding MEXT's intentions. The followings are three controversial arguments, among others, that are related to the discussion here. First, Shimomura stated that "a dramatic change in the direction of education is underway in Japan in order to respond to globalization – not to promote nationalism" (the second paragraph). This part shows that Shimomura regards globalization as an undoubted premise while it is well advised to see globalization more carefully with wider historical perspectives among academics (Blommaert, 2005; Willey, 2005). Second, Shimomura stated that "… we are promoting the internationalization of high schools and universities in order to develop human resources that can compete on the global stage" (the sixth paragraph). This part reveals Shimomura's understanding of students not as citizens to be matured but as human resources to serve the nation.

Third, Shimomura stated that "to succeed as a truly globalized person, however, requires a sense of one's own identity. To nurture that identity, the learning of Japanese traditions, culture, and history—the elements that make up the Japanese identity—is essential" (the eighth paragraph) and "I do not believe that it is a problem with Japanese students individually, but rather that Japanese schools have not properly taught Japanese traditions, culture, and history" (the ninth paragraph). This part shows that Shimomura's understanding of identity is something fixed. It is a characteristic of pluralist multiculturalism, which dichotomizes the self and others by simplifying and emphasizing differences (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; Kubota, 2004). If Shimomura or MEXT as a whole takes the positon without realizing the potential defect of pluralist multiculturalism, it is only natural for Shimomura to state that "there is no contradiction between Japan placing great value on its traditions, culture, and history on the one hand, while coexisting in the international community on the other" (the 12th paragraph). The same kind of uninformed discourses are observed in Tokyo's measures as well.

*4.2 The Local Context: Tokyo's Measures Corresponding to the National Initiative*

4.2.1 The Tokyo Metropolitan Government (TMG)

The national initiative is intensifying in English education reform in Tokyo, which is scheduled to host the Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2020. Tokyo is the capital city and has an enormous budget. Table 1 shows the transition of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government accounts, which are announced every year in March. As is clear from the table, the budget related to developing global human resources has drastically increased while the general account and the budget for Education and culture have stayed almost stagnant.

**Table 1.** Education Budget within the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Accounts

| Fiscal year | General account annual expenditure<br>Unit: million yen | Budget for Education and culture<br>Unit: million yen | Budget for developing global human resources<br>Unit: million yen |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2011 | 62,360 | 10,132 | - |
| 2012 | 61,490 | 10,060 | 300 |
| 2013 | 62,640 | 10,101 | 800 |
| 2014 | 66,667 | 10,125 | 2,500 |
| 2015 | 69,520 | 10,553 | 5,100 |
| 2016 | 70,110 | 10,962 | 4,800 |

*Note*. All the figures are from Tokyo Metropolitan Government News issued by TMG (2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, and 2016).

TMG (2014) released a document entitled "東京都長期ビジョン" [The Long-Term Vision for Tokyo], in which eight strategies and 25 policy principles for becoming "the world's best city" were articulated. One of the eight strategies is "realizing a global city that leads the world." Two policy principles related to English education, from among the 25 policy principles, are "raising human resources to sustain Tokyo and Japan" and "advancing city-based diplomacy to make the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games a success and to contribute to development of Tokyo."

Masuzoe (2014a), the Governor of Tokyo at the time, emphasized the importance of boosting the economy, stating in the preface of the Vision that "a more dynamic economy to support prosperous living is indispensable for our residents to feel truly satisfied about their lives in Tokyo … this long-term vision also focuses on efforts to boost Tokyo's economy" (the seventh paragraph). Masuzoe (2014b) added in a press conference that "the Vision also shows how Tokyo will change with the hosting of the Games, clarifying the basic direction for legacies that will be left to succeeding generations and carried on to the future" (p. 1) and "through such policies, we will … win in the international competition among cities" (p. 2). The next remark of Masuzoe made clear the same mind-set as Shimomura's that students should serve as human resources for national development: "From the aspect of human resources, corporate needs for employees with global competence are growing higher. We will strengthen our efforts to raise people with the high English language ability and international sensibilities needed for overseas transactions" (pp. 2-3). In the following document, the discourse of developing human resources is coupled with the discourse of nurturing Japanese identity.

TMG (2015) issued "東京都教育施策大綱" [Tokyo Metropolitan Educational Policy Framework] in November, 2015. It presented seven agendas, one of which was "developing human resources who are active around the world." Four policy principles to achieve the goal are articulated: (a) promoting English education in which students acquire four integrated skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) throughout elementary, junior and senior high schools; (b) promoting measures in which students develop awareness and pride as Japanese; (c) promoting measures in which students foster internationality; and (d) promoting establishment of new types of senior high schools with rich international environment to develop human resources with awareness and pride as Japanese, high intelligence, and English abilities to be active around the world. The coupling of the two discourses, developing human resources and nurturing Japanese identity, is the same as MEXT's, and the tendency is further intensified in specific measures made by TMBOE.

4.2.2 The Tokyo Metropolitan Board of Education (TMBOE)

Following TMG's policy principles, the Tokyo Metropolitan Board of Education (TMBOE) has been setting out various measures to improve English education since 2012 such as: (1) a new program called "Program for the Development of Next-Generation Leaders," in which students are sent overseas with financial support, (2) sudden placement of a JET teacher and rapid increase of ALTs at every high school, (3) newly establishing an International Baccalaureate course at a high school, which is the first attempt of Japan's public schools, (4) "Global Ten" metropolitan high schools, where English education is further promoted, (5) large-scale Japanese EFL teachers training, (6) senior high school reform and new implementation plans focusing on English education (TMBOE, 2015c), (7) a new facility called "English Village" (TMBOE, 2015a), and (8) a new school integrating elementary, junior and senior high schools with intensified English education, the first attempt by Japan's public schools (TMBOE, 2015b).

Two measures among eight listed above were investigated. The first one is a new facility called "English Village." TMBOE set up an expert committee in 2015 to prepare for establishing "English Village," where students are supposed to *use* English in virtual real-time situations while they *study* English at school. TMBOE (2015a) and the committee issued an interim report entitled "東京版英語村開設について" [On establishing Tokyo-version English Village] in October, 2015. It presented three main concepts of the English Village; it is a place for students to (a) try using English, (b) exchange with people with various nationalities, and (c) find motivation to learn English. These concepts are not problematic, but the document repeatedly emphasizes developing global human resources. It stated that "developing global human resources in less than five years by the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo is an urgent challenge" (p. 8). The discourse comes with another twin-like discourse, nurturing Japanese identity. It stated that to develop global human resources, "it is important that students deepen their understanding of our country's traditions and culture and also foreign culture while having experiences to understand diversity and differences" (p. 10). As an aside, the composition of this *expert* committee seems inappropriate. The committee consists of nine members, and only one professor, who used to be an interpreter rather than a researcher, is included. Most of the others are not from the academic or education sector but rather the business sector, including two comedians, one of whom is an American national who speaks fluent Japanese.

The other one investigated is a new type of school integrating elementary, junior and senior high schools with intensified English education. TMBOE announced that it would establish the new type of school in 2022. Schools integrating junior and senior high schools are common in both public and private schools in Japan, but this type of public school that also integrates elementary education is unprecedented. TMBOE (2015b) issued an document entitled "都立小中高一貫教育校の設置に関する検討結果" [The result of investigation on establishing Tokyo Metropolitan school integrating elementary, junior high, and senior high school], and it stated that Japan's business sector is struggling in the fierce competition of the globalizing world and that developing global human resources is an urgent agenda. The school is scheduled to teach English more and earlier than other schools and include a study abroad program at a higher grade. The three educational mottos of the school are high English proficiency, rich internationality, and awareness and pride as Japanese. The document stated that establishing the school is important because the school should be able to develop human resources more effectively by integrating elementary, junior and senior high schools. This purpose can be regarded as brainwashing if it is wrongly used.

## 5. Summary of Findings

In conclusion, two discourses, developing human resources and nurturing Japanese identity, emerge from the policy documents related to English education reform issued by MEXT, TMG, and TMBOE. The use of the phrase human resources in the area of education is a result of neoliberalism that is deeply rooted in Japan's society and can even evoke nationalism in that students are considered someone who should serve the country as economic soldiers. Article 1 of Japan's Basic Act on Education stipulates that "Education shall aim for the full development of personality and strive to nurture the citizens, sound in mind and body, who are imbued with the qualities necessary for those who form a peaceful and democratic state and society," but the discourse of developing human resources observed in the official measures to reform English education seem to deviate from the original aim of education. English education reform has potential to improve the exclusive attitude of the people if it is well designed and implemented, but at the same time if it is guided by deeply-rooted linguistic instrumentalism and implemented without any caution, it can be used to accelerate nationalism.

As for the discourse of nurturing Japanese identity, MEXT, TMG, and TMBOE have been trying to promote intercultural understanding through English education, but the attempt tends to end up in cultural essentialization and dichotomization. The discourse of intercultural understanding in Japan often "reinforces cultural nationalism through constructing a rigid cultural boundary between Us and Them" (Kubota, 2002, p. 23). The attitude of TMBOE, TMG, and MEXT can be regarded as pluralist multiculturalism, which can lead the students to exclusivism or even nationalism combined with other neoliberal factors in the society.

## 6. Discussion

### 6.1 Overview

MEXT's documents are influenced by Japan's largest business lobby's suggestions. What is noteworthy in the policy documents released by MEXT, TMG, and TMBOE is that the repeated discourse of developing human resources is coupled with the discourse of nurturing Japanese identity by teaching Japanese traditions and culture.

The discourse of developing human resources, which stresses the fierce competition on the global stage and the importance of communication skills, can falsely affect students' desire, unfairly control required skills, generate educational disparity among students, and deprive students' intrinsic motivation to learn English. As for the discourse of nurturing Japanese identity, it could generate exclusive attitudes in students creating conflicts in classrooms, where greater racial and ethnic diversity is expected, and lead to nationalism.

EFL teachers have responsibility to better serve the complex interests and identities of students. I argue that EFL teachers can implement pedagogical practice based on critical multiculturalism in the classroom and throughout the school curriculum to diversify the top-down policy guided by pluralist multiculturalism.

### 6.2 Teachers' Potential Roles

If an EFL teacher who has questions over the ongoing policy on English education in a non-English-speaking country aspires to go beyond just analyzing the current situation, what options does the teacher have in hand to make a change? One approach is to try to change the social and political system. Williams and Cooke (2002) stated that people with specialist knowledge have to act simultaneously on each front of the economic, social, and human problems to make a change, and "it is up to TESOL professionals to share this knowledge with politicians and

economists in both rich and poor countries who are in a position to influence matters" (p. 317). Not only quality research but action is required to make a change in any society.

Another option is to capitalize on the policy by extracting a positive slant in a way that the government, policy makers, or businesses did not expect. Deep-rooted neoliberalism will not be altered anytime soon. If so, while great caution should be paid to the ideology itself, EFL teachers are well advised to make the most use of the products of this ideology. This kind of balancing act to find an optimum spot in the wide range of gray area should be valued more in addition to fundamental approaches that aim at choosing either black or white.

Schiffman (2003) presented the concept of distinguishing overt policy, which is the officially announced ideals at a macro level, from covert policy, which may show ulterior motivation at a micro level. Covert policies on the ground can function as a form of resistance against unfair policies (Canagarajah, 2005). Teaching is a cultural practice, and teachers can play an influential role with both the teaching contents and the methods at the micro level to alter dominant discourses (Kubota, 2008; Kumaravadivelu, 2001; Norton, 1997).

*6.3 A Strategy to Diversify the Top-Down Policy Guided by Pluralist Multiculturalism*

One possible strategy for EFL teachers to diversify the top-down policy guided by pluralist multiculturalism such as the one observed in MEXT, TMG, and TMBOE's policy documents is to implement practice based on critical multiculturalism, which analyzes how discourses on culture are related to politics (Kubota, 2004). In other words, EFL teachers can try to grow students' understanding of and tolerance to different cultures by letting students see their own identity critically from the meta-level and construct a new type of identity, which is not fixed to a particular nation. This can be a bottom-up movement from micro level settings.

One important aspect derived from the research on identity is that identity, which constructs and is constructed by language, shifts in an individual across time and place (Norton, 2000). Ricento (2005) stated that "identities in multilingual contexts are transformed, complex, dynamic and variable" (pp. 897-898). House (2003), in referring to Norton, stated that "linguistically determined identity need not be unitary and fixed, but can be multi-faceted, non-unitary and contradictory" (p. 560). The possibility of building an identity that combines multiple elements from different cultures has been indicated (Canagarajah, 2007; Cervatiuc 2009; Norton, 1997; Pavlenko, 2003). Transformability of identity offers a possibility in envisioning a new social mechanism in the future.

Researchers have presented suggestions for practice based on critical multiculturalism. Freire (1998) argued that critical awareness can be developed not by banking education, where knowledge is passively transferred from teachers to students, but by engaging in dialogues. Freire also presented an idea of *praxis*, which is defined as critical reflection and collective action, as an important factor for critical pedagogy.

It is not enough to conduct only a few events in a year to develop critical understanding of cultures. Rather, activities to understand different cultures should be incorporated at various occasions at school throughout the whole curriculum by "the quiet seeking out of potential moments" for effective and deeper understanding of cultures (Pennycook, 2004, p. 342).

Kramsch (2011) criticized the superficial practice of communicative language teaching (CLT) and stated that the development of intercultural competence "is also a matter of looking beyond words and actions and embracing multiple, changing and conflicting discourse worlds, in which the circulation of values and identities across cultures, the inversions, even inversions of meaning, [are] often hidden behind a common illusion of effective communication" (p. 356). This approach is called critical content-based instruction (critical CBI). Kubota (2012), in referring to the insight of Kramsch, stated that "Kramsch argues that what is unsaid and may be unsayable can become a point of departure for critical discussions to foster deeper cultural understanding" (p. 42).

## 7. Conclusion

The study revealed that two discourses, developing human resources and nurturing Japanese identity, are repeated throughout the policy documents issued by MEXT, TMG, and TMBOE. Careful attention should be paid to these measures because they have potential to lead students to exclusivism or even nationalism without extra care. While this inquiry is a critical discourse study to investigate the policy documents, what remains to be explored is how and to what extent the two discourses are affecting teachers' practice and students' mind-set. Further research such as case study on the topic is required in the future.

Teachers have potential to play an influential role by analyzing social, economic, and political contexts from broader perspectives without being paralyzed by the status-quo, by being intentional about what we do, and by raising voices

when necessary. If such professionals increase to a certain number in society, the collective intelligence will become a strong bottom-up powerbase.

Critical multiculturalism does not deny the system of nation states and is not supposed to be an antiestablishment movement, so it must be balanced in practice. Nationalism must be criticized from a democratic point of view, but the concept of nation states itself cannot be easily denied. A sensitive attitude to critically analyze a subject is different from an attitude to deny or attack the subject. Concerning practice of critical multiculturalism, further research such as action research is required in the future to share various practices that can fit to various settings.

My focus in this inquiry was on the current situation in Japan, or especially in Tokyo, but the findings and suggestions can be applied to other EFL settings. The rapid spread of English or any language on this scale is unprecedented, so we might need a paradigm shift with more action-oriented research to flexibly create and implement appropriate practice to rightly correspond to the unknown situation in each specific context.

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