

Pre-service Teacher Training Practices for Primary English Education in Japan

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Abstract

When setting the standards for pre-service training for aspiring foreign language teachers, Japanese universities start by examining the current curriculum for foreign languages in relation to the Central Educational Committee's 2006 final report. However, many syllabi and standards fail to meet the quality assurance requirements for pre-service training for foreign language teachers. The purpose of this study is to introduce an innovative teaching practice in pre-service training and to suggest quality and ability changes for foreign language teachers. Discussions were held on how to meet the huge demand for making pre-service training compulsory in Japanese universities. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) publicized its latest policy, "English Education Reform Plan corresponding to Globalization," on December 13, 2013. The policy aims to enhance foreign language education substantially by strengthening English education in primary schools and advancing English education in lower/upper secondary schools. Given these discussions and the implementation of English education, some universities have restructured their course curricula to meet the Ministry's expectations; however, the reform is only partially complete. This paper commences with an overview of the current state of pre-service teacher training at Chiba University, Aichi University of Education, and Hiroshima University, and then provides examples of teaching practices focused on integrating the skills and knowledge that university students need. It concludes with a framework of pre-service teacher training practices for primary English education in Japan.

Key Words : Teaching Practices in Pre-service Training, Primary English Education

1. Overview of Primary Foreign Language Teaching

In 2006, MEXT published a report concerning the need to improve pre-service teacher training. Subsequently, Japanese universities offering pre-service teacher training courses discussed reforming their curricula to address the concerns in the report. This reform has focused on foreign language activities training for pre-service teachers, but the reform is only half complete. English education in primary schools has spread throughout Japan since 1992, when MEXT designated *Sanadayama Primary School* and *Ajihara Primary School* in Osaka as pilot schools. Since 2010, the foreign language curriculum has been compulsory in primary schools. As for the staff in charge of the foreign language teaching in the primary schools, the new course of study

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(MEXT, 2008) requires homeroom teachers or teachers in charge of foreign language activities to create teaching programs and conduct lessons. Strategies have been discussed for meeting the huge demand for pre-service teacher training in foreign language activities in primary schools. The overview of the current status of pre-service teacher training in Japan aims to address the following questions:

- 1) How do universities help students acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to conduct foreign language activities?
- 2) How do universities teach pre-service teachers to integrate the skills and knowledge they have acquired about teaching foreign languages and other subjects into their classrooms?

In 1986, a council of the Japanese government announced that “the start year of English education in primary schools needs to be examined,” and this launched the examination of foreign language education. Between 1992 and 1996, pilot schools were designated in every prefecture. The “foreign language activities” course of study for primary schools was introduced in 1998 as part of the education promoting international understanding in the new period for integrated studies. Then in 2008, the present foreign language activities course was introduced, and the subject became compulsory for fifth and sixth grade students in 2011. According to the Japanese government’s latest announcement, from 2020, English will be a formal subject for grades five and six. Therefore, the English curriculum is now a formal area of education at the primary school level in Japan. Figure 1 shows a brief history of primary English education in Japan.

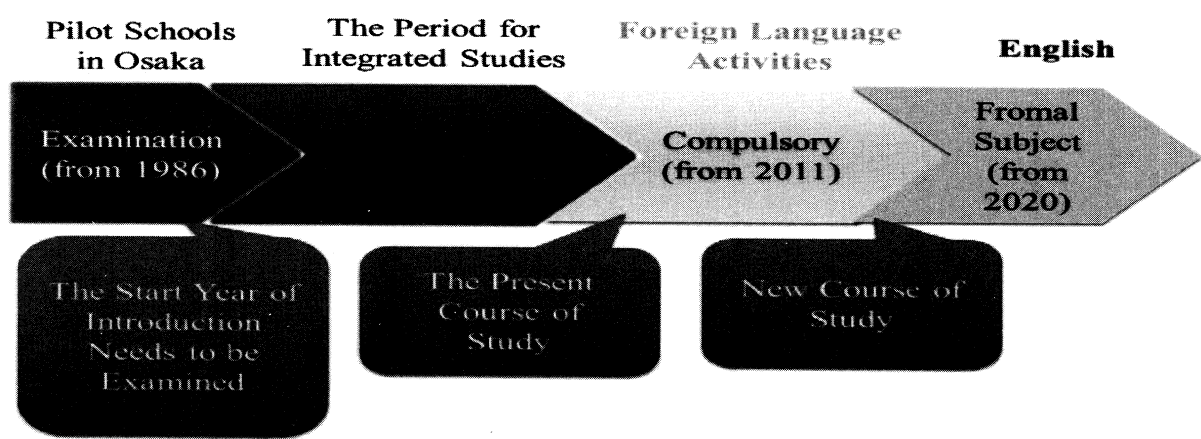


Figure 1. History of primary foreign language teaching in Japan

As for the staff in charge of foreign language activities in primary schools, the present course of study requires homeroom teachers or teachers in charge of foreign language activities to create their own teaching programs and conduct lessons. We contend that effort should be made to involve native speakers or local people who are proficient in the foreign language in the lessons, depending on the circumstances of the local community.

Table 1. Hours in which members of staff are in charge of foreign language Activities

	HRT (Homeroom Teachers)	NS (Native Speakers of the foreign language)	English Teachers of Junior High/ High School	Special Part Time Lecturer	Misc. (Principal, Vice- Principal)	Total
1 st Grade	148,775hrs (95.9%)	2,436hrs (1.6%)	511hrs (0.3%)	1,820hrs (1.2%)	1,615hrs (1.0%)	155,157hrs (100%)
2 nd Grade	152,911hrs (95.7%)	2,649hrs (1.7%)	542hrs (0.3%)	1,899hrs (1.2%)	1,745hrs (1.1%)	159,146hrs (100%)
3 rd Grade	265,398hrs (95.5%)	4,912hrs (1.8%)	1,105hrs (0.4%)	3,561hrs (1.3%)	2,923hrs (1.1%)	277,899hrs (100%)
4 th Grade	271,748hrs (95.2%)	5,106hrs (1.8%)	1,296hrs (0.5%)	3,706hrs (1.3%)	3,642hrs (1.3%)	285,498hrs (100%)
5 th Grade	300,303hrs (94.6%)	6,189hrs (1.9%)	2,545hrs (0.8%)	4,510hrs (1.4%)	3,990hrs (1.3%)	317,537hrs (100%)
6 th Grade	310,171hrs (94.0%)	6,299hrs (1.9%)	4,052hrs (1.2%)	4,870hrs (1.5%)	4,496hrs (1.4%)	329,888hrs (100%)

Research overseen by the Japanese government in 2012 clarified the hours and percentage of total hours in which each staff member was in charge of foreign language activities in 2011 (see Table 1 for details). In every grade, homeroom teachers were in charge of the foreign language activities for 95% of the total hours. This implied that the extent to which the homeroom teachers were in charge of the foreign language activities was extraordinary. This situation is assumed to have continued after English was introduced as a formal area of education at the primary school level in Japan. In addition, the Japanese government revealed that the hours that native speakers were participating in the foreign language activities were increasing. In spite of this, the homeroom teachers continue to play an important role in the foreign language activities. This, combined with the fact that English is conducted as a formal subject, highlights the need for establishing a curriculum for pre-service teacher training for those studying to become primary school English teachers. The strategies for meeting the huge demand for such pre-service teacher training will be discussed in the following section.

2. Pre-service Teacher Training for Primary Foreign Language Teaching

The Japanese government (2007) stated that to establish a course for primary school teachers, “universities must prepare lectures in which every primary school subject (there are nine subjects in Japanese primary schools: Japanese, social studies, arithmetic, science, living environment studies, music, art and handicrafts, home economics, and physical education) needs to be taught.” However, “Foreign language activities is not a subject now. Therefore universities do not have to prepare lectures to teach foreign language activities.” Nevertheless, as discussed earlier, the need to establish a course for primary school teachers of foreign languages is evident. The Japanese government (2006) outlined the needs of pre-service teacher training for foreign language activities as follows:

- In universities, the lectures should address the fact that there is huge difference between English education at the primary school level and at the junior high and high school levels.
- By making an amendment to teacher licensing laws, lectures for pre-service teachers should include methods of teaching English.

- In courses for teachers, universities should prepare compulsory lectures for such areas of study as foreign language skills, second language acquisition theories, education for international understanding, inter-cultural communication, and so on.

Furthermore, the Japanese government (2009) stated that university courses for training primary school teachers should include teaching methods for foreign language activities. Considering these discussions and the implementation of foreign language activities as a compulsory subject, some national universities that offer pre-service teacher training take English education (selective) major courses for primary school teachers. It is thought that the universities have various kinds of programs for pre-service teacher training for foreign language activities, but there is no research that reveals the details of these programs. Therefore, we will introduce the current situations and issues of pre-service teacher training programs at three universities in Japan, and propose some teaching practices that the three universities developed were administered to the university students. We will also discuss whether these programs have been effective for university students taking the course for primary school teachers.

2.1. Overseas teaching practicum at Chiba University

The faculty of education of Chiba University offers an English major program for students pursuing a career as a primary school teacher. A maximum of 11 students can enroll in primary school teacher training for every grade. Chiba University's primary school teacher training course comprises the following lessons:

- Foreign language activities (1): introduction to primary school English
- Foreign language activities (2): instructing pronunciation in primary school English
- Practical lessons for English classes in primary school
- Practices for English classes in primary school
- Overseas teaching practicum

The contents of the foreign language activities are an introduction to primary school English and instructing pronunciation in primary school English. These classes are open to first to fourth year students. Practical lessons for English classes in primary school and practices for primary school English classes are also available to second to fourth year students. These lectures are designated as selective lessons at Chiba University. And overseas teaching practicum at Chiba University is one of our trials aimed at restructuring the curriculum to meet the university students' expectations.

2.1.1. The overseas teaching practicum in Europe

The faculty of education at Chiba University offers an overseas teaching practicum to English major students pursuing a career as foreign language teachers. This section reviews the overseas teaching practicum in Europe by the graduate/undergraduate students. The students who enroll in the practicum will plan and conduct lessons of Japanese culture in English at some local public/private schools in Vienna, Austria and Prague, Czech, and they also visit Japanese schools there. The students have chances to observe some lessons other than language classes and discuss the different educational system and language education in Europe (e.g. CEFR) with teachers there. The students are continuously encouraged to cultivate their intercultural understanding through teaching experience, to increase communication skills by requiring the use of English, and to acquire the ability to work

in teams and to understand their individual roles in the practicum. The significant features of this practicum are three-fold: (1) to develop practical instructional competence in consideration of the pupils with different cultural backgrounds; (2) to enhance the abilities in developing teaching materials through hands-on teaching experiences in English; and (3) to acquire the abilities to design, implement and evaluate programs for promoting global partnership. Among the major achievements by the participants through this practicum are increased awareness of how to manage their own lesson plans and development of communication skills in the classroom. It is hoped that this experience abroad will further enhance the Japanese students' competence in teaching and change their possible selves in language teacher development.

2.1.2. Changes observed in teacher trainees' concepts

The retrospective interviews for teacher trainees who participated in this overseas teaching practicum are as follows. In the analyses that follow, square brackets ([...]) denote the changes of the teacher trainees' concepts observed through the retrospective interviews.

Female Student (A): She faced with [the difficulty of using English as a foreign language to both students and teachers in class]. She [used to make a script saying what to speak in class] but in this program she [could not make a script] because of [a shortage of time]. However, she thought she developed [capabilities of immediate response to students.] Additionally, she keenly felt [the need to improve the way of giving back].

Male Student (B): He had an [anxiety about teaching in English] before the practicum started. After the practicum, he keenly felt [the need to learn classroom English] and indicated [a willingness to improve his English proficiency].

Female Student (C): As her background, she has [cross-cultural experience through English] and has [doubts about the teaching style focusing on tests and grammar]. Therefore, she tries to [put emphasis not only on four skills but a diversity of languages and cultures] and conduct an [English lesson comparing Japan with foreign countries]. Throughout the program, she could [go beyond herself with the support of her senior peers].

2.2. Characteristic practices at Aichi University of Education

Student teachers' beliefs have become an important research issue in the pre-service training context. A few studies have explored the change of student teacher beliefs. Promoting changes in the beliefs of student teachers is one of the critical issues in the pre-service teacher training. Student teacher's beliefs are likely to mature after they have experienced teaching practicum. Student teachers are more interested in observing the actual lessons after they experienced their teaching practicum (Takeuchi, 2012). It is true that observing lessons are one of the pre-service practices, but it does not directly enhance student teachers' beliefs without proper workshops or feedback. In this section, two actual sessions are focused on. One is primary school teachers as guest speakers, and the other is to lead a seminar-style discussion after observing lessons in a school.

2.2.1. Participants

Aichi University of Education (hereafter AUE) is a national university located in Aichi prefecture. 25 student teachers are majoring in English, and four student teachers are majoring in educational psychology. Most of

the graduates from English and educational psychology department are becoming teachers in either primary or secondary schools. The four-year teacher education program guided by practice-orientation is designed to train qualified teacher for primary and secondary education. Student teachers can go to some schools to do the observations once a week during the second semester in their 3rd year. Now we will show two characteristic practices at AUE.

2.2.1.1. Primary school teachers as guest speakers

Guest speakers, who graduated from AUE, are invited from two primary schools. One is a new-graduate teacher; the other is a middle-leader teacher who has experienced more than 10 years in teaching profession. The first teacher mainly talks about how busy it is in a school, as she has to prepare for multiple lessons. She also refers to how hard it is to manage a class as a homeroom teacher. On the other hand, the latter teacher focuses on English-related topics he delivers in his English lessons. His more than 10-year profession is full of useful themes and topics. For example, he emphasizes how important it is to design a curriculum. He uses questions to elicit what he wants them to understand. His concrete explanation seems to leave a clear image of curriculum designs and lesson plans. Through these practices, student teacher can learn two things, as follows:

- 1) To learn from the actual teacher's efforts and hardships in daily lessons.
- 2) To have a clear future image of being a teacher in schools.

2.2.1.2. Leading a seminar-style discussion after observing lessons in a school.

Student teachers have opportunities to observe English lessons, but they do not seem to fully comprehend how proficient teachers intend to deliver lessons. In order to see how they set goals in each lesson, we lead a seminar-style open discussion that prepares student teachers fully for their participation. The following are comments by student teachers.

Students can learn through by repeating which can stimulate their interest and make students fully involved in the language learning. (Interview 1, at the end of the discussion).

I think students cannot improve on their own will. The teacher should tailor their needs and design tasks according to their characteristics with their aims and plans. (Interview 2, at the end of observing the lesson).

After a seminar-style discussion, student teachers' beliefs developed an awareness of students. Student teacher's tendency is to be more focused on teacher-centered orientation. But through discussions, student teachers gradually follow student-centered or learner-centered approach. Without guiding learner-centered approach, student teachers do not have enough opportunities to be aware of students' way of learning. From above sessions, student teachers learn the following things;

- 1) To have a broad view of instruction through learner-centered approach.
- 2) To have a chance to see how proficient teachers' prepared each lesson.

2.3. Overseas teaching practices at Hiroshima University

As Chiba University and AUE's cases pointed out, the teaching practicum seems to have a strong impact for

students to alter and improve their beliefs in teaching. In this section an implementation at Hiroshima University is introduced. Hiroshima University offers graduate school students majoring education to join a teaching practicum course in the United States. It's an elective course and in previous years, students majoring primary education, English education and social studies majors have been joined this program. And also a few in-service teachers and ex-principals of elementary schools have joined this program while they were studying at this university as matured graduate students.

This teaching practicum in the U.S. is comprises of two main parts. First is the preparation session in Japan. Students and professors spend about five months for preparing lessons. And about two months before the practicum, the teachers of the schools (two elementary schools and one middle school) where students will do the practicum are invited to Hiroshima to have a workshop to improve students' lesson plans and also to share the information and the situation of the students in the schools, which is really helpful for Hiroshima University students to have an image of the children they would teach. And the second part is the practicum in the U.S. On the first day, students meet the teachers of the schools and talk on their lesson plans. And next day, students visit the schools and observe lessons and see facilities. And on the next day, they teach their lessons. In the evening of each day, professors and the students have a meeting to reflect what they have learned, seen, and experienced.

The lessons students teach varies in topics. Some are giving lessons on the subject they major, and others teach about Japanese culture. The topic can be decided by each student and professors give advises accordingly. To teach American children in English is very tough experience for the students. One reason is of course their limited English proficiency. And also, how to convey information and messages for those who are not sharing the same cultural background is another tough thing for them. For example, if we are living and brought up in Japan, it is easy to agree that June is in a rainy season, and the word "rainy season" in Japan means we have rains almost every day and it is gentle drizzling one. But if somebody have never experienced Japanese rainy season and heard a word "rainy season" he/she might think that it's something like a sudden strong shower with squall in tropical areas. So more careful explanation is needed than when they teach Japanese children. This careful preparation to guarantee each child to understand lead students' better understanding on how to create universal lessons which can be used not only at the practicum in the U.S. but every day's lesson in Japan, too since there're nearly 40 children in a class and each is different in many ways though they all might be Japanese or brought up in Japan. From here, the voices from the participants on their changes in beliefs are shown.

I realized that I only knew and was interested in Japanese education and leaned the main obstacle for me not to see other countries' education and children was my lack of confidence in English. But to do this teaching practicum, I had to communicate with American teachers and children, and this experience became a big confidence for me since I learned that I could convey what I wanted to tell by using gestures and other means of expressions, even if my English is limited. And this confidence made me think that I want to try more. This change, I think, will lead me to better international understanding.

What I leaned the most was the importance of preparation for a lesson. When I teach in Japan, I can talk to Japanese children in Japanese so I didn't have to be so careful to the detail but in the U.S., along with the language difference, classroom culture and school culture were different greatly. So how to make children understand is a big task for me and to do that, I found it's important to know the each child's

situation. These kind of things are important not only at this practicum but in teaching in Japan, too. So from this practicum, I realized the importance of preparation to tell what I want to tell.

When I was giving a lesson, young children in the classroom showed their eagerness and patience to listen to and understand me. Their attitude to try to understand what I was saying made me impressed. When I'm in Japan, I take it granted that everyone understand Japanese language so when somebody don't understand me, I tend to feel irritated rather than feeling sorry or appreciate their effort to understand. But I realized that my messages are delivered to listeners since they also try to understand me and I need to appreciate their effort and also need to do everything to let them understand.

I felt how this project would be more wonderful and fulfill one if I could speak English better. And this experience made me thing that I want to study English hard.

From the voices above, we can see that what they learned from the practicum in the U.S. are something important in daily teaching in Japan, too especially when they want to make their lessons universal for each child with different needs. And also, what they realized are important for elementary school teachers to teach English, since it requires teachers to speak English to pupils and the English should be clear and easy to understand for those children who have very limited knowledge of English. To enable that, teachers need to analyze carefully what they can understand and with what aids or scaffoldings they can understand. What students in the program shown above experienced can be transferred to English education in elementary schools so in the future, this program or some essence of this program hopefully would be experienced by those who study in undergraduate elementary school education course to prepare for coming English education from 3rd grade.

3. Conclusion: Standards of Pre-service Training for Foreign Language Teachers

We commenced with an overview of the current state of pre-service teacher training for primary English education in Japan, and then provided examples of teaching practices that focuses on integrating the skills and knowledge that university students need. However, we think it necessary to propose a framework of professional standards for foreign language teachers. The most important thing is to establish standards for pre-service training for foreign language teachers and to suggest quality and ability criteria for teachers who conduct primary English education.

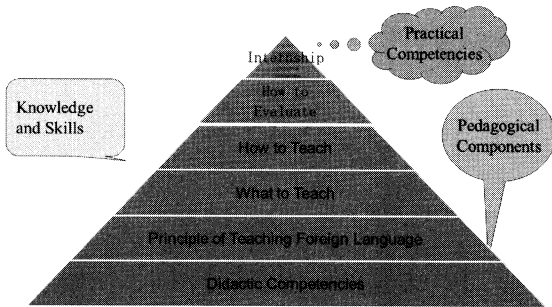


Figure 2. Professional standards of teachers conducting primary English education

Thus, we will focus on the potential components of the knowledge, skills, and competencies required of foreign language teachers (see Figure 2 for details). This pyramid consists of six layers. The components of each layer can be categorized into some pillars, and the components are interrelated. First, the knowledge and skills for teaching English in primary schools will be examined. Although some practical benchmarks are required, further research is necessary to compile a complete list of the knowledge- and skills-based descriptors of foreign language teachers. Second, the components of pedagogical competencies will be examined. Some attempts to conceptualize the knowledge and abilities that are necessary for effective classroom teaching will be checked. Some potential descriptors for each of the competence stages—novice, veteran, and expert or mentor teachers—will be suggested. In addition, foreign language teachers are required to possess the personal qualities necessary for coping with the professional demands outside the classroom. Moreover, extensive teaching practice as internship will be discussed as an example of a possible program for pre-service teacher training for foreign language education. Although universities provide the contents of lectures including teaching methods, second language acquisition theories, micro-teaching, and practical learning in primary schools, opportunities to learn primary English education are limited to the classroom, and there is few programs outside the classroom for foreign language teachers in overall pre-service training. This leads us to the possibility that there is some room for establishing successful pre-service teacher training for primary English education by introducing such programs as short-term learning at schools in foreign countries and a seminar-style discussion after observing lessons in a school. This study provides examples of overseas teaching practicum focused on integrating the skills and knowledge that university students need, and reports the impact of the practicum on their conceptual change about teaching and on their perceptions of English education. The students also see the seminar-style discussion with primary school teachers as a positive experience that causes them to increase reflection on and revitalize their teaching. Some changes are noted from pre- to post-program in the university students' beliefs and views of instruction about learning and teaching English. Overall, the pyramid includes all professional development activities conducted individually or collectively. In order to introduce a training system that integrates these components, it is necessary to set appropriate professional standards for teachers who conduct primary English education.

This study also focuses on the relationship between pre-service teacher training courses for primary English education and practical teacher training, and discusses a solution to the problem regarding what kind of preparation system is needed. As the Japan Association of Universities of Education (2008) stated, MEXT requires standards in universities offering pre-service teacher training courses, and the idea of standards was reflected in the introduction of the practical teacher training program. The standards proposed in this study will contribute to the students' understanding of what they need to pay attention to in their fieldwork, what they must revise from what they learned through their fieldwork, and how to link what they learned in their fieldwork and at university.

Endnote

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日本の小学校英語教員養成のための教育実践

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要約

教育再生実行会議のグローバル化への対応などに関する提言案が示され、世界で活躍する人材育成に向け、現在小学校高学年で行われている英語教育について正式な教科にすることや、開始学年を引き下げることが進言された。また、文部科学省(2013)「グローバル化に対応した英語教育改革実施計画」の具体化のため、英語教育の在り方に関する有識者会議が開催され、国際共通語である英語力の向上は日本の将来にとって極めて重要であるという認識のもと、英語力を向上するための改革案が提示された。各教員養成系大学及び教育学部では、改革案で提言された事項を踏まえ、教員養成における開講科目や履修基準を検討している。また、小学校教育課程に英語が教科として追加されることに伴い、小学校教科及び教職科目の履修基準を見直し、カリキュラム改正を審議している。しかしながら、課程認定を受けている大学のうち中高教員養成課程（外国語科）に小学校英語関係の科目を開講したり、小学校教員養成課程に英語関係の科目を開講している大学などもあるが、英語の指導において高度な教育実践力を身につけた教員を養成することには至っていない。本稿は、このような諸課題に対応するため、教員養成の高度化を考慮した千葉大学、愛知教育大学、広島大学の教育実践を紹介する。例えば、千葉大学教育学部では、小学校教員養成課程の中に英語選修を設置し、国際理解教育や異文化理解、外国語活動の授業（「外国語活動Ⅰ」「外国語活動Ⅱ」等）、さらには小学校において英語が教科として位置づけられることを踏まえて、小学校英語の授業（「小学校英語演習」「小学校英語実践」等）を開講している。また、海外の小学校での実習体験を通して異文化理解能力を高めるとともに、教育実習を学生自ら企画・運営することによって、マネジメント能力を身につける「海外教育実習」を実施している。これらの教科化する小学校英語に対応するための各大学の取り組みを通して、小学校英語を担当する教員にとって必要な資質や能力を明確化し、英語を指導できる小学校教員を養成するための授業科目とカリキュラムの体系化を考察する。また、教科に対する高い専門性と現場の教育課題に的確に対応できる実践的指導能力を有する小学校教員を育成するため「小学校英語のための教員養成カリキュラム」を議論する。

キーワード：初等教育教員養成，教育実習，小学校英語教育

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