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Challenges Faced by Student Teachers in Conducting English Lessons at Secondary Schools in Japan

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Abstract

The present paper analyzes the challenges that student teachers of English face during their three-week teaching practicum at junior or senior high schools in Japan. Previous studies have reported on these challenges in terms of personal factors among student teachers, such as a lack of English proficiency or confidence in speaking English fluently. However, this paper investigates the issue from the perspective of environmental and institutional factors by describing cases in which mentor teachers or host schools continue to rely on conventional methods of conducting classroom instruction in Japanese and, as a result, discourage student teachers from conducting more communicative English lessons primarily in the target language. For research and educational purposes, critical incidents—unplanned and often challenging events that may provide teachers with insights into their teaching practice—were collected through interviews with participants during their teaching practicums at their host schools. In this study, thematic coding and analysis of critical incidents reported by three Japanese university students reveal that the challenges student teachers experience may derive not only from a gap between what they have learned in teacher training courses at university and the realities of classroom practice, but also from differences in beliefs between student teachers and mentor teachers at host schools, particularly regarding the extent to which English should be used during lessons.

Keywords: Critical Incidents; English Education; Japanese Teachers; Teacher Beliefs; Teaching Practicum