

From “Outsider” to Facilitator: A Case Study of a Japanese Non-Specialist University English Teacher’s Belief Development and Identity Construction

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Abstract

In Japanese higher education, English courses are frequently taught by faculty members whose primary research fields lie outside of English Language Teaching (ELT). This study examines the pedagogical beliefs and identity construction of one such “outsider” teacher, tracing how initial educational ideals adapted to classroom realities and how the instructor reconciled a non-specialist identity with his professional role. Adopting narrative inquiry, a longitudinal thematic analysis was conducted using fifteen semi-structured interview transcripts. These records documented the teacher’s reflections on practices, student responses, and an evolving self-image from the pre-course phase to the final evaluation. The findings reveal a three-stage transformation in teacher beliefs. Initially, in the “Idealistic Autonomy” phase, the teacher aimed to foster learner responsibility through portfolios. This was followed by “Confronting Reality,” where a gap between expectations and student engagement led to the abandonment of the portfolio system. In the final “Pragmatic Facilitation” phase, the teacher redefined his identity from a “transmitter of knowledge” to a “facilitator”. To compensate for a perceived lack of ELT expertise, he prioritized student-centred activities and digital interaction to encourage peer learning. This transformation is characterized as a “process of compromise and adaptation,” where the teacher strategically concealed internal struggles and conflicts while navigating his role as a logistical factor in compulsory English education. This study contributes to the field by demonstrating that an “outsider” identity can uniquely act as a catalyst for adopting communicative practices. The results suggest that institutional support should provide flexible pedagogical models rather than strictly demanding specialist expertise.

Keywords: Facilitation; Higher Education in Japan; Outsider Perspective; Teacher Beliefs; Teacher Identity