

Changing perceptions of English among Japanese teachers in Brussels

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ABSTRACT

Study abroad (SA) is regarded as a successful way to develop learners' English skills and intercultural understanding, and has also been incorporated into teacher training programs. Against this backdrop, ELF (English as a lingua franca)-oriented research which investigates Japanese pre-service and practicing teachers' evolving views of English propelled by their SA experiences has started to appear. This study, which is set in a nihonjingakkō in Brussels, sought to contribute to this area of research by examining the principal and English teachers' perception of English and its influence on their pedagogy and school's English education policy. Nihonjingakkō is a full-time day school for children of Japanese expatriates, and Japanese teachers are sent from the government of Japan, teach at the appointed schools for several years, and subsequently return to their work in Japan. The article demonstrates that while the school principal and English language teachers appreciated the diversity of English, the school's English education policy and classroom teaching were shaped by native-speakerism ideology and traditional assumptions of Standard English as the only recognized variety. Based on the study's findings, I make suggestions which can advance integration of ELF into ELT in nihonjingakkō and mainstream schools in Japan.

KEYWORDS: English as a lingua franca (ELF)¹, study abroad (SA), *nihonjingakkō*

1. By ELF, I refer to 'any use of English speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option' (Seidlhofer, 2011, p. 7). In contrast to the deficit perspective of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) which undermines dynamicity, diversity of English and expects learners to approximate the native-speaker model as closely as possible, I perceive

1. INTRODUCTION

As technological advances have accelerated globalization in which people need to communicate English effectively with people from different cultures and values, the desire among learners to improve their English language competence and intercultural understanding has been increasing. In these circumstances, study abroad (SA) has been perceived as an effectual method to achieve these goals since sojourners can be immersed into the target language community and regularly practice English with people from various linguacultural backgrounds. SA and its relationship to English learning has also gained respect among scholars, which is represented in large body of works encompassing diverse domains ranging from vocabulary acquisition, intercultural sensitivity, and identity negotiation (e.g., Kinginger, 2009; Jackson, 2010).

Likewise, SA has been gradually integrated to teacher-training programs (Kang & Pacheco, 2021), since English teachers are more than ever regarded as a necessary human capital who can upgrade students' English skills and intercultural competence. This is also the case in Japan where teachers are continuously facing pressure from the public for their perceived lack of English proficiency and intercultural understanding (Asaoka, 2019), and in response, Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (hereafter MEXT) has been recently endorsing teachers to SA as one efficient measure to solve the problem (Suzuki, 2021).

In this respect, several ELF-oriented studies investigating Japanese teachers' evolving beliefs on English through SA have been undertaken (Mayumi & Hüttner, 2020; Suzuki, 2021). However, a dearth of attention has been paid to *nihonjingakkō* teachers' and principal's perceptions of English. Given the fact that the majority of Japanese teachers and principals are dispatched from Japan and are provided with the environment of quickly implementing their thoughts into classroom pedagogy and policymaking, there is a need to explore how their experiences living abroad influence their perceptions of English, English teaching, and the school's English education policy. To fill out this gap and to provide contribution to the developing body of ELF-oriented SA research, the present article draws on data from my doctoral study of language ideology in a *nihonjingakkō* in Belgium (Mogi, n.d., 2017, 2020). While Japanese *nihonjingakkō* teachers in general do not take programs offered by educational institutions in the host country², in my view, their sojourn can be defined as SA since they are immersed into the local community which allows them to gain new insights and broaden their horizon.

Based on these considerations, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. How were principal and ELT teachers' perceptions of English influenced by studying abroad in Brussels?
2. How were principal and ELT teachers' evolving beliefs manifested in the school's English language education policy and classroom pedagogy?

ELF as a paradigm which prioritizes intelligibility and encourages fluid and flexible uses of English and multilingual resources (Jenkins, 2015; Seidlhofer, 2011).

2. Nonetheless, Shinichi – a Japanese English teacher who participated in my study – voluntarily took classes at a private French school.

In the following, I outline some brief overview of previous studies on ELF-oriented SA research and provide contextual background on *nihonjingakkō*, Belgium, and Brussel. This is then followed by discussing methodology and the research context of *nihonjingakkō* in Brussels. I end the article with implications for ELT of *nihonjingakkō* and Japan's mainstream schools.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW: ELF-ORIENTED ELF RESEARCH

In light of this rising interest to SA research, there is a growing body of ELF (English as a lingua franca)-oriented research which investigate if and how study abroad students' experience in the host country changes their beliefs toward English (e.g., Kalocsai, 2013; Nogami, 2020; Virkkula & Nikula, 2010). A cursory review of literature points to the fact that while students' SA experience and ELF interaction are idiosyncratic depending on multiple factors such as context (ESL or EFL), social networks (native or non-native), and student's inherent personal characteristics (outgoing or reserved), on the whole, their conformity to native-speaker norms decreased. Through SA, students welcomed the diversity and flexibility of English and its use, and took pride in their sense of self as a successful ELF user rather than an incompetent EFL learner.

Amidst this trend, teachers' SA is also seen as a means to foster and widen ELF-oriented pedagogy, and ELF-oriented SA research focusing on Japanese pre-service (Suzuki, 2021) and in-service (Mayumi & Hüttner, 2020) teachers has commenced. In short, similar to the foregoing SA research from an ELF viewpoint, both study report that most teachers' view on English became more ELF-oriented during their stay, and they considered intelligibility more important than nativelike accuracy. However, the findings also suggest that both teacher education courses explicitly instructing multilingual, hybrid nature of ELF communication and exposure to ELF reality must go hand in hand if we are to fully nurture teachers' ELF understanding and encourage them to practice ELF-oriented teaching in actual classroom setting. For instance, Suzuki (2021) found some of the participants in the SA teacher training program defined ELF communication synonymous with "communication with other L2 users" and distinguished it from "communication with native speakers". These two entities were positioned hierarchically, and while "communication with native speakers" was looked up to as legitimate and genuine form, "communication with other L2 users" was seen as impure form and disregarded. As can be seen, even though SA has the potential to develop sojourners a positive sense of ELF user, we should be mindful that it may have the danger of further reinforcing the native-speakerism and superiority of Standard English deep-seated in the established social structures and the consciousness of the general population.

3. NIHONJINAKKŌ, BELGIUM, AND BRUSSELS

Nihonjingakkō (*nihonjin* means "Japanese", and *gakkō* "school") is a full-day school for children of Japanese sojourners who are working abroad temporarily at local branches of Japanese multinational companies or governmental organizations (Murakami, 2020;

Sato, 2010). These schools were established by the government of Japan for parents who would not like their children to fall behind academically when they repatriate to homeland; therefore, the schools offer the same school curriculum used in Japanese mainstream schools (Kojima, 1999). However, taking advantage of being located overseas, *nihonjingakkō* often devote substantially more hours to English and have courses on official language(s) of the host country taught by locally hired language instructors (Fukuda, 2018), which are not usually given in schools in Japan. Responding to the calls of parents who are mainly comprised of elite businesspeople and diplomats with political influence (Goodman, 2012), the schools are approved by MEXT and receive support from the Japanese government ranging from financial aid to free distribution of teaching materials (Okamura, 2017).

And as noted before, MEXT also dispatches experienced teachers and principals from Japan to deliver high-quality education equal to schools in Japan (Kojima, 1999). They are selected from Japanese public and private schools through MEXT's multiple screening processes composed of document reviews and interviews (MEXT, 2021). Still, there is a paucity of preparation and pre-service training undertaken for these teachers, as MEXT only provides short-term teaching workshops which is run for a very short duration of a matter of days (MEXT, 2021). As teachers and principals lead very busy professional lives in Japan (Katsuno, 2019), they are often parachuted into foreign countries which they are extremely ill-prepared.

Despite this shortcoming, with the public monetary and human resources support, *nihonjingakkō* ensure educational standards equivalent to those of Japan, and are well-accepted by students, parents, and local Japanese communities (Sato, 2010; Okamura, 2017). According to the statistics by Japan Overseas Educational Services, a Public Interest Incorporated Foundation dedicated to support Japanese overseas education and works closely with MEXT, as of 2020, there were 94 *nihonjingakkō* -41 in Asia, 21 in Europe, 14 in Central and South America, 8 in the Middle East, 4 in North America, 3 in Oceania, and 3 in Africa - teaching 17, 218 students (Japan Overseas Educational Services, 2021). As can be seen, many *nihonjingakkō* are situated in multilingual countries, including Belgium where multilingualism is woven into the linguistic fabric of society.

A federal nation composed of highly autonomous three regions (Flanders, Wallonia, and Brussels Region) and three communities (Flemish, French, and German-speaking), Belgium is often viewed as a progressive multilingual nation where Flemish, French, and German are equally granted the status of official language (Blommaert, 2011; Vogl & Hüning 2010). Nevertheless, a closer look at the country's modern history reveals that Belgium is characterized by repeated, longstanding conflicts between Flemish-speaking people in Flanders and the French-speaking people in Wallonia³. Since its independence in 1830, these tensions were mainly driven by unequal linguistic status of Flemish and French, and uneven economic development of Flanders and Wallonia (see Blommaert, 1999; Ceuleers 2008; Vogl & Hüning, 2010, for extended discussions). Consequently, Flanders and Wallonia both exercise territorial monolingualism (van der Jeught, 2017) and people have been generally unwilling to learn each other's official language since it can be perceived as linguistic assimilation (Hambye & Richards,

2012). Contrary to the two regions, Brussels has official Flemish and French bilingual status and citizens are relatively tolerant to the use of both languages (Ceuleers, 2008). Nonetheless, the linguistic divide also exists in Brussels, where most inhabitants are Francophone (de Keere & Elchardus, 2011).

In spite of the fact that the majority of its citizens have French as the first language, English is being increasingly accepted as preferred second language for both groups (Hambye & Richards, 2012). This is especially evident in younger generations who do not want to be enmeshed in ongoing language ideological conflict by speaking Flemish or French (Dewaele, 2005), and it can be argued that English's attraction for people in Brussels lies in its neutrality and cosmopolitan status. Additionally, coupled with the presence of multinational corporations and international organizations such as the European Union and The North Atlantic Treaty Organization, English is highly regarded as a language which helps prepare people with additional credential that may potentially give them an advantage in the competitive global labour market (O'Donnell & Toebosch, 2008). Due to its geographical proximity, well-developed infrastructure, and environment in which English is widely spoken, Brussels brings large numbers of immigrants, expatriates, and tourists around the globe. Japan is no exception (Conte-Helm, 1996; Pang, 2009), and as of 2020, there were 5,780 registered Japanese in Belgium (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021).

As is evident, teachers in the *nihonjingakkō* in Brussels can have ample opportunity to practice English since it serves as a bridge language in Brussels - a crossroads of various languages and cultures.

4. THE NIHONJINAKKŌ IN BRUSSELS AND ITS PEOPLE

The Nihonjingakkō in Brussels is located in outskirts of Brussels, and at the time of my fieldwork, the school had approximately 300 students who are in the 1st to 9th grades (ages 5-15), which corresponds to compulsory education in Japan. As discussed in works by Pang (2009) and Conte-Helm (1996), students' parents are representative of Japan's elite class, and the majority work short-term (2-3 years) in Japanese multinational corporations or government agencies. This future prospect inevitably impacts upon the child's language choice, and while some students are fluent in foreign languages - mainly English - due to their itinerant lifestyle and studious academic behaviour, Japanese is the common means of communication at the school. For students who need to prepare for smooth educational and social transition upon return to Japan, the school is a precious place to interact and develop Japanese skills. To offer the large body of students the high-quality education, there were 26 teachers in the school. Out of these, 19 teachers were dispatched by the government of Japan, and 7 teachers were hired locally. Through well-equipped facilities and spacious campus, the school manages to carry out curriculum based on the Course of Study developed by MEXT. Notwithstanding, along with other *nihonjingakkō* that implement 'education for understanding the host society' (*genchi rikai kyōuiku*) (Kojima, 1999), the school also offers English and French conversation courses given by locally hired non-Japanese teachers.

5. PARTICIPANTS AND METHODOLOGY

The current study draws upon research data collected for author’s doctoral research examining language ideologies operating in the *nihonjingakkō* in Brussels (Mogi, 2017, 2020). Therefore, 11 language teachers and the school principal, who exercises preponderant influence toward school’s language education policies and teaching, were selected as participants. Due to the limited space and for the purpose of this paper, a focus will be put on the principal (Kazuhiko), 2 Japanese teachers of English (Shinichi and Sakura), and 3 non-Japanese teachers of English (Mary, Katherine, and Alice). I also included non-Japanese teachers to explore if their perceptions on English affect the school’s English teaching and education policy.

The following table shows the participants’ backgrounds gained from interviews and questionnaires. Information about other participants is given in Table 1 in appendix. As we can see from the table, most participants are multilingual; however, the commonly used language in their interactions inside the school tended to be English.

Table 1
Participants’ Profiles (names are pseudonyms)

Name	Gender	Role	Age	Nationality and Race	Linguistic repertoire
Kazuhiko	Male	Principal	60s	Japanese and Asian	Japanese and some English
Shinichi	Male	English language teacher	30s	Japanese and Asian	Japanese, English, and some French
Sakura	Female	English language teacher	40s	Japanese and Asian	Japanese and English
Mary	Female	English language teacher	30s	British and White	English, French, and Spanish
Katherine	Female	English language teacher	30s	Irish and White	English
Alice	Female	English language teacher	20s	British and White	English, Flemish, French, German, and Spanish

Since there is only one *nihonjingakkō* in Belgium, it was unavoidable of disclosing the school identity. Although I acknowledge the risk of revealing the actual school’s name, participants approved me of using it if it is for academic purpose; to preserve

a level of anonymity, dates from my study are removed and pseudonyms will be used when I refer to participants.

After gaining an approval from the school to conduct research, I carried out two fieldworks with each period of 2 to 3 days. As recommended by Borg (2012), interview was selected as the primary data collection instrument since it is one of the most productive data collection methods for drawing out people’s perceptions and knowledge, and a series of semi-structured interviews in the form of individual (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015), group (Watts & Ebbut, 1987), and e-mail interview (James, 2007) were conducted. The interviews also dealt with main themes of this study, which were language use in Brussels, and participants’ perceptions on language, language pedagogy and language education policy. English was used in carrying out interviews to non-Japanese teachers of English, and Japanese was chosen as the language in interviewing Kazuhiko, Shiniichi, and Sakura. All the individual and group interviews were audio-recorded, and since my interest lied in the content rather than the form of the verbal data, I excluded nonverbal aspects of the interview data and transcribed in a ‘cleaned-up’ style (Elliott, 2005). Transcripts in Japanese were translated in English by the author who has proficient level in both languages.

Although I intended to carry out more fieldworks, since I was based in London at the time of the study, having prolonged engagement at the research site proved to be extremely difficult. Therefore, to compensate for this lack of data, assure the trustworthiness of research, and examine language ideological issues from multiple angles, I also garnered data from various sources and methods: questionnaires, e-mail interviews, and analysis of school policy documents. In particular, carrying out e-mail interviews and collecting data from school website helped me gain rich data without being concerned of practical constraints such as time and the costs of travel and accommodation.

Table 2
Total Number and Hours of Interviews, Questionnaires, and Classroom Observations

Name of Participants	Interview (For e-mail interviews, word count excluding my questions)	Questionnaire (Word Count Excluding My Questions)	Classroom Observation
1. Kazuhiko	1. 2 face-to-face interviews (66.09 minutes)	1 questionnaire (863 words in Japanese)	Not Applicable
2. Shinichi	1. 1 group interview with Sakura (22.10 minutes) 2. 3 email interviews (1506 words in Japanese)	1 questionnaire (407 words in Japanese)	1 observation of team-taught class with Mary (50.46 minutes)
3. Sakura	1. 1 group interview with Sakura (22.10 minutes) 2. 3 email interviews (2715 words in Japanese)	1 questionnaire (476 words in Japanese)	1 observation of team-taught class with Mary (48.28 minutes)

4. Mary	1. 1 group interview with Katherine and Alice (22 minutes)	1 questionnaire (70 words in English)	1. 1 observation of team-taught class with Mary (50.46 minutes) 2. 1 observation of team-taught class with Mary (48.28 minutes)
5. Katherine	1. 1 group interview with Katherine and Alice (22 minutes)	1 questionnaire (83 words in English)	None
6. Alice	1. 1 group interview with Katherine and Alice (22 minutes) 2. 2 email interviews (1916 words in English)	1 questionnaire (386 words in English)	None

However, due to a wave of terrorism in Europe during the study, I had to abandon further short-term fieldworks as I had to prioritize my personal safety. And amidst this perilous situation, I received a message from the school notifying that I cannot do fieldwork anymore. While I acknowledge the small sample size, the present study contributes to the research on ELF-oriented SA research, which I shall attempt to demonstrate.

The gathered data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis (Cohen et al., 2011; Dornyei, 2007). After intensive reading of the transcribed data, fieldnotes, and policy documents, I systematically categorized and coded the data. The collected codes were assembled and reviewed, and I constructed three core categories which I decided were pertinent in answering my research questions. These core categories were changing perceptions of English, native-speakerism, and Standard English. To interpret the relationships between the selected codes and extracts, I visited the literature relevant to the emerging themes. To be clear, the categories were not predetermined and imposed upon the data, and analytical procedures were guided by research questions.

6. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In opening this section, I first explain how the selected data extracts are organized and presented. To be considerate for some readers who are English-Japanese bilinguals, the English-translated transcripts are followed by the original Japanese transcripts. In doing so, the readers can grasp the subtle nuances and richness which is unobtainable by only providing English-translated texts. The interview and fieldnote data are formatted into line numbers starting from number 1 to facilitate the reading of the data; to keep the original state, line numbers do not follow the data taken from questionnaires. In order to faithfully demonstrate how the school displays itself to the public, the screenshot of school website will be presented. The title of the extracts is taken from the actual passage, which brings out emic aspect of the qualitative study. To secure space, some

extracts have been taken out, and the truncated parts are presented in the sign of [...]. Fuller transcripts are available in the appendix. Finally, to elucidate the meaning of the passage, I added words in some English and Japanese extracts, and these are in brackets.

6.1 Changing Perceptions of English

The topic of ‘changing perceptions of English’ first emerged in the questionnaires which I received during the first fieldwork in the school. The following two extracts from the answers given by Kazuhiko and Shinichi brings a typical voice from Japanese participants on how they gradually came to realize that English is a shared communicative resource among people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Since both answers come from the same question, I will present their answers in the same extract.

Extract 1: ‘English is really a global language’ (K: Kazuhiko, S: Shinichi)

Part 2. Q5. 派遣国で暮らし初めた後、その国の言語に対するイメージに変化はありましたか。あれば、どのような変化ですか。無ければ、その理由をお聞かせください。(When you started living in the country you were sent, did you image toward the language(s) of the country changed? If yes, what kind of change? If no, please tell the reason.)

K: [...] 英語が大体通じることに驚いた、特にブラッセルは。また、多言語社会なので、色々な英語がある。例えば、私のご近所さんはスペイン人でEUに勤めていますが、ちょっとスペイン語訛りの英語。英語は本当にグローバルな言語だと感じた。([...] I was surprised knowing that English can be generally understood, especially in Brussels. And because it is a multilingual society, there are many kinds of English. For instance, my neighbour is Spanish who is working in EU, and [his or her] English is Spanish accented. I felt that English is really a global language.)

S: フランス語とフラマン語があるが、多文化が集まるベルギーで、英語が使える。オーストラリアでの留学時にも[英語の多様性を]感じたが、ベルギー、ブラッセルにも色々な英語があり楽しい。(There are French and Flemish, but in Belgium where many cultures gather, English can be used. I also felt this [diversity of English] when I studied abroad in Australia, but there are also many kinds of English in Brussels and I enjoy [listening to] it.)

As shown, by interacting with people in multilingual Brussels, Kazuhiko became to recognize that there are various English. While the use of ‘really’ implies that the principal had some knowledge that English is a language that connects people with different linguacultural backgrounds which may partly pertain from his experience of working as a physical education teacher in the *nihonjingakkō* in the Netherlands during the 1980s, the direct exposure to diverse English seemed to enhance his understanding of English’s role as a lingua franca. Unlike the principal, Shinichi apparently had rich interaction with speakers of different varieties of English when attending MA program

in Australia and had an understanding on diversity of English before being sent to Belgium. His prior study abroad experience, in conjunction with Brussels's environment in which English is widely used and understood, led to his appreciation towards many Englishes in the multilingual city. What is noticeable in these examples is that while English is not designated as an official language of Belgium, both participants provide accounts on their relationship with English, which indicates the prevalence of English. This may be attributed to how I framed the question, and the word 'changed' could have prompted them to share their thoughts on English.

Although I cannot provide entire data given the limited space available, all Japanese participants narrated similar experiences of being exposed to multitude of Englishes to be heard across in a multilingual city and developed or re-recognized the understandings in which English is truly a global language. Similar results were reported by Mayumi and Hüttner (2020)'s study that investigated Japanese teachers' changing beliefs on English who studied abroad in the United Kingdom. The participants of this study encountered "variation in the English spoken in the UK" (Mayumi & Hüttner, 2020: 273) which they did not experience in Japan where English is spoken in a very limited extent.

This attitude of embracing diversity of English was equally the case among non-Japanese teachers. The following extract taken from my fieldnotes written during the first fieldwork is one such example. During the lunchbreak, Katherine, an English teacher from Ireland, approached me and asked my impression of Brussels (line 1).

Extract 2: 'I like how people mix English with many languages' (Y: Yuta, K: Katherine)

1. K: So, how is Brussels?
2. Y: It is very interesting to hear so many languages, and so many kinds of
3. English. I really feel that Brussels is a multilingual city.
4. K: Absolutely. That's how I felt when I first came to Brussels. And not just
5. many languages and English accents, but I like how people mix English with
6. many languages, which is interesting.

In response to my comments praising the linguistic diversity of Brussels (lines 2-3), Katherine agrees and explains how speakers' multilingual resources inevitably affects their ELF interaction (Jenkins, 2015), and feels pleasure in witnessing and interacting with people who cross-linguistically employ their multilingual repertoire (lines 4-6).

The extracts above demonstrate that English is used predominantly as a shared language in superdiverse context of Brussel. Importantly, instead of conceiving languages as compartmentalized entities, many residents value the hybridity of language use. Furthermore, the corresponding extract taken from an e-mail interview with Sakura points to how she and some of her interlocutors exploit various communication strategies (CSs) to make oneself understood and develop mutual understanding in ELF communication.

Extract 3: ‘People in Brussels are kind and I should learn from them’ (Y: Yuta, Sa: Sakura)

7. Y: ベルギー、特にブラッセルでは英語が広く使われています。可能な限りで結構ですので、ベルギーでの英語についての経験や考えをご記入下さい。
10. S: ベルギーで私自身が使っている英語は、日本で使った英語と同じです。
11. 英語に自信がないので、いつも悪戦苦闘しながら英語を喋っています。
12. ジェスチャーもよく使います。それでも、ここの人たちは私の拙い英語でも優しく聞いてくれます。また、私がわからない時は、何度も繰り返し返してくれたり、簡単な単語にしてくれます。こうしてくれると、
15. 会話が成立するので、本当にありがたいです。ブラッセルの人たちの寛容さは、英語教師として、学ぶことが多々あります。

7. Y: In Belgium, especially in Brussels, English is widely used. As best as possibly as you can, would you please write down your experiences and thoughts about English in Belgium.
10. S: The English I use in Belgium is the same English that I used in Japan.
11. Since I am not confident in English, I always struggle speaking in English.
12. I also often use gestures. But still, people here kindly listen even to my poor English. And when I cannot understand, they repeat many times or switch to simpler words. By doing this, we can hold a conversation, so I really appreciate it. As an English teacher, I learn a lot from the generosity people in Brussels have.

In answering to my question, Sakura exudes insecurity in her competence in English speaking (lines 11-13) which is common among Japanese schoolteachers of English (Butler, 2015; Kobayashi, 2012; Underwood, 2012) as they strive to achieve a native-like proficiency in English. Still, what is remarkable about this segment is that even when Sakura regularly encounters difficulties conveying message in English (line 11), some of her collocutors respond by employing cooperative CSs to co-construct a meaningful interaction (lines 13-14), such as ‘self-repetition’ and ‘self-rephrasing’ (Sato et al., 2019). Her frequent uses of gestures (lines 12-13) and final remark (lines 14-16) indicates her recognition of CSs and accommodation which is crucial in having a successful communication with speakers of various English. In sum, Sakura seems to find solace by interacting with some Brussels inhabitants accustomed to CSs, which can improve confidence in her English and foster welcoming attitude toward diverse English.

Thus far, I have demonstrated how multilingual Brussels provided opportunities for participants to be immersed to varieties of English with multilingual influences and helped develop the understanding in which English is an international lingua franca, and that interaction in English can be accomplished by making use of CSs and showing tolerance toward different Englishes. However, when examining the school’s ELT policy and practice, we can see that participants’ ELF-oriented views was not much

incorporated into the school policy and actual teaching.

6.2 Native Speakerism and Standard English

The school's reverence for native speakers can be seen in the following screenshot taken from the school website explaining its English and French educational policy of conversation courses offered by local teachers.

Extract 4: 'Teachers are native English speakers'

-Eveil de l'intérêt pour les langues et la culture occidentale. Ouverture sur le monde.

Introduce the students to western cultures.

国際性を育てます。

-Enseignants « Native speaker »

Teachers are native French/English speakers

教師はみんな ネイティブ スピーカー です。

As is clear, while English currently has more non-native speakers than native speakers (Seidlhofer, 2011), the *nihonjingakkō* assumes that linguistic norms determined by native speakers are the ones to be aspired to. It can be argued that this school policy confines students to Anglocentric view towards English and its learning, overlooking the linguistic diversity found within English (Saraceni, 2015).

This school's inclination toward native-speakers and Standard English becomes apparent in the following excerpt taken from a group interview with non-Japanese English teachers. Here, Alice unabashedly expresses that British English was chosen as the linguistic model as all are proficient in the dialect (lines 18-19).

Extract 5: 'It's British' (Y: Yuta, A: Alice)

17. Y: So, I am curious to know what variety of English is taught.

18. A: It's British, because we are not American (**laughter**). We all speak

19. British English, but some of our kids lived in America. So, sometimes they

20. can be confused. They understand that there are many Englishes, and we

21. speak different Englishes. So, sometimes we explain that there are

22. different Englishes.

(Emphasis added by the author from fieldnotes during the interview)

Even though the account above demonstrates that both teachers and students have some knowledge on the diversity of English because of their migrant lifestyle

(lines 19-22), it seems that the integration of different varieties of English in classroom teaching that can help foster students' awareness of global spread of English was not emphasized in the school education, which can be inferred by the word 'sometimes' (line 21). Instead, the school venerated native English speaker teachers' linguistic competence assuming students communicate mainly with native English speakers. This feature was revealed when I observed the classroom team-taught by Sakura and Mary. One of the focuses of this class was having students practice singing English songs to be ready for the school choir concert. Each time students finished singing the song, Sakura repeatedly sought for pronunciation evaluation from Mary (line 23), who was positioned as an English speaker having the correct pronunciation.

Extract 6: 'Pronunciation is, has improved a lot' (S: Sakura M: Mary)

23. S: Mary, what do you think [about students' pronunciation]?
24. M: That was really good and well done. I can hear that you have been
25. working very hard on 'the'. Last time, it was very strong 'the'. Today, I,
26. especially the boys, I can hear 'the'. So, great work, and good job. So, I
27. think the singing is beautiful. Yes, and pronunciation is, has improved a lot
28. since last time. So, you've been working very hard. So, good and well done
29. and I'm very happy.
30. S: Thank you.

As we can see, this passage clearly illustrates the supposed native supremacy and linguistic prescriptivism which are consistent with what other researchers found when examining the English team-teaching in Japan (Machida & Walsh 2015; Tajino & Tajino, 2000). Despite the findings of ELF studies which shows that pronunciation of native speakers is not necessarily the most intelligible (Jenkins, 2000; Walker, 2010), Mary is committed to make students' English pronunciation closer to British standard that is represented by her being particular about the pronunciation of 'the' (lines 24-26). Assessing students by how well they can reach a native speaker level could adversely affect students and have them "fall prey to the demotivating native speaker learner fallacy" (Matikainen, 2018, p. 175).

As I hope is clear by this stage, the school placed excessive emphasis on students acquiring native-like English accuracy. This policy was further reinforced by hiring English conversation teachers based on native-speaker criteria common in Japan (Hashimoto, 2013; Wang & Lin, 2013). The school's ELT that overlooks the fluid, multilingual nature of English bear a strong resemblance to those in Japan's primary and secondary schools (Kubota, 2019; Toh, 2019), and can be more problematic in context like Brussels where English plays the role of ELF.

7. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The data and its analysis I have presented allows us to answer the two research questions addressed in the opening of this paper. To conclude, interaction in English with speakers

from diverse linguacultural backgrounds in a multilingual city increased participants' awareness of the existence of different Englishes, which aligns with the findings of the previous studies exploring how Japanese teachers' SA experiences influenced their beliefs on English (Mayumi & Hüttner, 2020; Suzuki, 2021). However, even though the participants appreciated English used as a lingua franca in Brussels and had opportunities and authority to manifest their perceptions into policymaking and teaching, it appears that there was little uptake in the school's English education policy and practice. Rather than incorporating Brussel's rich ELF environment to increase students' awareness of the existence of multiple English varieties and encourage students to develop communicative skills necessary for ELF interaction in the global world, the school seemed to uncritically legitimized conventional, Inner Circle English varieties and prescribed these as the only linguistic models for ELT. Indeed, the school expected student to imitate native English speakers which can discourage students to study English. These findings seem to run contrary to Mika and Masa – Japanese teachers participated in Mayumi & Hüttner's study (2020) – who apparently departed from native speaker-oriented view during their SA in the UK and incorporated their modified views to their teaching in Japan by placing more importance on helping students achieve successful communication than acquiring native-like accurateness. In sum, this study indicates that institutional norms of *nihonjingakkō* in Brussels were greatly influenced by deep-rooted beliefs about Standard English and native-speakerism (Holliday, 2006). To put it differently, the exposure to ELF reality alone may not lead teachers to adopt ELF-informed pedagogy, since there is an overwhelming support for using native speaker English in Japan's ELT class and school entrance examination (Houghton et al., 2018).

Nonetheless, the study's findings also suggest that *nihonjingakkō* can be an ideal place for students and teachers to experience a range of different varieties of English, develop CSs, and empower themselves as confident ELF users. Therefore, in order to introduce ELF-informed pedagogy, it is indispensable to offer teacher training program designed on ELF principles to *nihonjingakkō* ELT teachers and principals face-to-face or remotely. While the courses imparting the significance of ELF could be given prior to their dispatchment to *nihonjingakkō*, it is highly advisable to provide teachers the opportunity to practice what they have learned in the courses to real classroom setting. This teacher training program can be adopted from courses developed by ELF researchers in Japan (Hino, 2018; Suzuki, 2011). Moreover, the participants reported that they had rarely or never held any professional discussions about their beliefs about English language diversity in the *nihonjingakkō*, which indicates that they (may) were not fully aware of the significance of including ELF component in their teaching practices. This leads us to suggest that an environment must be provided in which both Japanese and locally hired teachers engage in dialogue and practice reflecting on each other's teaching, which are crucial for putting ELF-informed education into practice. Lastly, to further promulgate ELF-informed approach, these collaborative practices can be expanded to schoolteachers in Japan by employing CALL (Computer-Assisted Language Learning) facilities. Online interaction between *nihonjingakkō* and mainstream schoolteachers can provide space that may help teachers to further nurture

ELF understanding and develop ELF-informed pedagogy. Since Japanese ELT teachers and principals of *nihonjingakkō* have strong ties with their former working schools in Japan and use similar curriculum and teaching materials, in my view, this collaborative dialogue is feasible, worthwhile, and can have a sustained impact on participants. Through these collective efforts, teachers of *nihonjingakkō* can continue to apply the practical knowledge they have gained upon returning to schools in Japan.

8. CONCLUDING REMARK

While this ethnographic-informed case study is the first to investigate and shed light on the perceptions of the principal and ELT teachers in the context of *nihonjingakkō* from an ELF viewpoint and provided a springboard for future exploration of the domain, I acknowledge that this study has a number of limitations. Firstly, due to the relatively short research period and the fact that this article derives from my doctoral research which was not designed to examine the perceptions of principal and ELT teachers about the place and relevance of ELF to school education, I was not able to further delve into the disconnection between participants' views on English and the school's English education policy and classroom pedagogy. There was a need to scrutinize if factors such as students' and parents' expectations, and MEXT's strict policy mandates left little autonomy for teachers to try out instructions and assessment grounded on their perceptions of English. Secondly, it is important to note that the current study's data do not have concrete examples of ELF interactions illustrating how the participants employed their linguistic repertoire and various communication strategies, which can be turned into fruitful materials for classroom teaching.

Given these limitations, I suggest research be conducted in *nihonjingakkō* across the globe with a longitudinal design intended to study in-depth the relationship between principal and language teachers' exposure to ELF scenario and their teaching practices. For example, a future study in which teachers' perception of English are examined before, during, and after their dispatchment to *nihonjingakkō* can illuminate how the development of teachers' expertise on English proceeds and affects their teaching. Such larger-scale research would provide insights into how ELF can be efficiently integrated in teacher training program and classroom teaching in the *nihonjingakkō* setting.

Despite these limitations, this study makes a valuable contribution by demonstrating that sending teachers to *nihonjingakkō* can facilitate them to be more ELF-oriented. Additionally, *nihonjingakkō* can be a desirable place to implement teacher education programs that aim at enhancing teachers' knowledge of ELF since they can soon translate ELF-informed pedagogy into classroom practice. And most importantly, *nihonjingakkō* can offer opportunities for teachers and students to embrace diverse English, recognize the effectiveness of CSs, nurture accommodation, and improve their self-esteem as ELF users. In this respect, *nihonjingakkō* is an important educational institution to foster ELF education and an interesting area for future ELF research.

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APPENDIX

Table 1

Participants' Profiles (names are pseudonyms)

Name	Gender	Role	Age	Nationality and Race	Linguistic repertoire
Wataru	Male	Japanese language teacher	30s	Japanese and Asian	Japanese
Kanako	Female	Japanese language teacher	30s	Japanese and Asian	Japanese, English, and German
Louise	Female	French language teacher	40s	Belgian and White	English, Flemish, French, and Japanese
Emma	Female	French language teacher	40s	Belgian and White	English and French
Elena	Female	French language teacher	30s	Belgian and White (Mother is Japanese)	English, French, and Japanese
Diego	Male	English language teacher	50s	Spanish and White (Father is British)	English, German, and Spanish

Truncated Parts are Underlined

Extract 1: ‘English is really a global language’ (K: Kazuhiko, S: Shinichi)

Part 2. Q5. 派遣国で暮らし初めた後、その国の言語に対するイメージに変化はありましたか。あれば、どのような変化ですか。無ければ、その理由をお聞かせください。(When you started living in the country you were sent, did you image toward the language(s) of the country changed? If yes, what kind of change? If no, please tell the reason.)

K: フランス語はやはり難しいが、簡単な日常会話ができるようになりたい。オランダ語も難しいが、懐かしい響きがあった。英語が大体通じることに驚いた、特にブラッセルは。また、多言語社会なので、色々な英語がある。例えば、私のご近所さんはスペイン人でEUに勤めていますが、ちょっとスペイン語訛りの英語。英語は本当に

グローバルな言語だと感じた。(As I thought, French is difficult, but I want to be able to have easy, daily conversations. Dutch is also difficult, but it had nostalgic sound. I was surprised knowing that English can be generally understood, especially in Brussels. And because it is a multilingual society, there are many kinds of English. For instance, my neighbour is Spanish who is working at EU, and [his or her] English is Spanish accented. I felt that English is really a global language.)