Sociopolitical Contexts of Second Language (L2) English Writing Instruction

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Introduction

With the dominance of English in business and academic activities at the global level, university students in Japan need to learn and acquire an advanced level of English. Such advanced English skills involve both oral and written skills, but writing is more difficult and takes more time to learn. Students should be able to communicate their ideas in expected structures of English writing (e.g., paragraphs, essays, research papers) with appropriate grammar and vocabulary. In addition, according to Al-Jarrah and Al-Ahmad (2013), "writing is a very complex skill with a cyclical nature different from other language skills; it needs a lot of time and effort to write, rewrite, organize and reorganize, and edit, …" (p. 91). The complexity and difficulty learning to write in English means that teaching English writing is more difficult than teaching other language skills.

In the field of second language (L2) writing, various teaching approaches have been developed. For example, the process approach emphasizes students' discovery of meaning through multiple drafts with revisions in a recursive composing process (see Casanave, 2004, for more details of the history and discussion of the process approach). Genre approach (e.g., Cheng, 2018; Hyland, 2004, 2007), on the other hand, focuses on helping students learn their target genres (e.g., journal articles for publication in their disciplines, business documents) by alerting them to structural and linguistic features of those target genres and the communicative purposes of those genres shared by their community members (e.g., researchers in a specific discipline and subdiscipline, members in a specific business circle). In addition, the use of peer response or peer feedback has been promoted so that students can help each other improve their writing through collaborative learning. More recently, though not categorized as a specific teaching approach, teacher response and feedback to students' writing has been extensively discussed (e.g., Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Bitchener & Stroch, 2016; Hyland & Hyland, 2006).

Writing teachers' possessing and utilizing such knowledge about different

teaching approaches to L2 writing can help them develop professionally and tackle the daunting task of teaching L2 writing. However, a more important factor to be considered for successful or difficult L2 writing instruction is a teaching context. The issue of context that easily comes to mind is whether teachers are teaching L2 writing in an English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. The distinction between ESL and EFL contexts mainly concerns as to whether English is used as a medium of everyday communication and educational activities. Based on that distinction, countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand are categorized as ESL contexts, while Japan, China, and South Korea, for example, are categorized as EFL contexts.

The ESL/EFL contextual distinction in L2 writing instruction has revealed mixed findings. Cumming (2003), for example, found more commonalities than differences in ESL and EFL writing teachers' reports on their instructional practices. Based on interviews with 48 highly experienced ESL/EFL teachers from six countries who were teaching adult learners of English, Cumming reported that those instructors demonstrated "considerable uniformity in their beliefs and claims about the teaching of writing" (p. 85) in terms of curriculum options including teaching writing in integrated curricula and for more general purposes. Cumming speculated such similarities among ESL and EFL writing teachers were due to the expanding influence of recent research and theory on L2 writing through teachers' postgraduate education and participation in professional networks and conferences and access to research publications.

In contrast to Cumming's (2003) small-scale interview-based study with experienced teachers, Ruecker, Shapiro, Johnson, and Tardy (2014) conducted a large-scale survey for members of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), an international professional organization, to better understand the importance, assessment, and difficulties of L2 writing in diverse instructional contexts. The analysis of 401 responses from teachers teaching at various institutional levels, ranging from Kindergarten and elementary school to college, revealed the followings. In terms of distinctions between ESL and EFL contexts, writing was considered less important in EFL than ESL contexts and that EFL teachers perceived more challenges in terms of lack of teaching resources, large class sizes and high workloads. Based on the findings, Ruecker et al. suggested a need for innovative teaching approaches suited for local instructional contexts.

While discussing similarities and differences in instructional issues between

ESL and EFL contexts is important, a more crucial consideration needs to be made regarding individual teachers' local instructional contexts. For example, L2 English writing instruction at the university level in Japan cannot be simply discussed from the perspective of EFL context, as students' levels of English proficiency and instructional goals are different among universities. In discussing individual local contexts of L2 writing instruction, the concept of sociopolitical contexts can be a key phrase.

The purpose of this paper is to advocate for research that looks into sociopolitical contexts of university-level L2 English writing instruction in Japan. The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. First, as a background, the concept of sociopolitical perspective is explained as related to the act of writing. Next, with a shift of focus to writing instruction, previous studies are reviewed regarding L2 writing instruction with the perspective of sociopolitical contexts. Those studies come from both ESL and EFL contexts, some of which address writing instruction in Japan. Finally, based on the previous literature, discussion is made as to what areas of inquiry future research in Japan needs to address and how such research can be implemented.

Writing as a sociopolitical act

In both first language (L1) and L2 writing scholarship, the view of writing as a social act has been widely accepted. The underlying idea is that writing entails social nature because writers' goals and purposes are to be shared by and communicated to specific audience (readers). Moreover, academic and research writing involves shared content expertise, as well as shared conventions and expectations regarding textual structures and vocabulary within specific discourse communities (e.g., academic disciplines and subdisciplines; see Swales, 1990, for more details on the concept of discourse community). With such underlying view of writing as a social act, the review of relevant literature in this section and after focuses more on the political nature and aspects of writing.

Casanave (2003), in her discussion about a need for more sociopolitically-oriented case study research in L2 writing scholarship, explained in what sense writing is a sociopolitical act focusing on three areas: the products or artifacts of writing, writing processes, and writing identities. First, written products are "political documents in the sense that they are produced in power-infused settings" (p. 87). In classroom and school settings, for example, Casanave noted that the evaluation of students' written products involves "institutional norms, instructor and gatekeeper criteria, feedback, and decisions of powerful evaluators" (p. 88),

which constitute a political context. Similarly, a high-stakes writing activity for students such as a written exam can be determined by institutional policies and evaluation criteria. Second, writing process, which seems to be neutral from a political context, can be political. By citing case studies conducted by different authors, Casanave showed how undergraduate and graduate students resorted to survival strategies in their processes of learning writing, such as acquiring and imitating professors' writing in order to meet the expectations of professors who had power over students, when they wrote course papers for those professors' classes. Third, regarding writing identities, Casanave commented that writers are "social and political beings who are participating in complex literate activities" (p. 94) and showed how struggles with identity construction by various L1 and L2 writers, ranging from novice to experienced academic writers, were portrayed in previous studies. Through the explication of writing as a sociopolitical act, Casanave called for future in-depth studies that would adopt case study inquiry to investigate writing practices from a sociopolitical viewpoint by detailed documentations of complex literate activities in specific individualized contexts.

Writing instruction from a sociopolitical perspective

Though Casanave's (2003) call for more socioplitically-oriented case studies was targeted at how writers operated to produce writing in individual sociopolitical contexts in which they participated, the field of L2 writing has evolved in paying increasing attention to the sociopolitical nature of writing instruction. Writing instruction is social as it is conducted through the interaction and communication between teachers and students in classroom, school, and university settings. However, writing instruction also entails political nature. Being political may indicate being ideological and there are cases where political ideologies affect L2 English writing instruction. As described in Al-Jarrah and Al-Ahmad (2013), in the country of Jordan, for example, the ongoing hostility to English due to both political leftists and rightists has had negative influence on English writing instruction. In the present study, however, rather than referring to political ideologies, writing instruction as sociopolitical mainly means that teachers deal with various kinds of power including external influences, which are beyond their control, in their daily practices of writing instruction. Previous studies introduced below show specific sociopolitical contexts within which L2 writing teachers at various instructional levels operate and how those contextual factors influence their teaching practices (see Table 1 for a summary of reviews).

Among those studies, You's (2004) report of L2 English writing instruction

at a university in China provides a powerful portrayal of the impact the Chinese national guidelines and policies of teaching English made on a university's curriculum and teachers' teaching approaches. According to You, in Chinese universities, English is taught under the guidance of nationally determined syllabi, which prescribe basic and higher requirements in specific language areas, including reading, listening comprehension, speaking, and writing. In addition, students are required to take a standardized test called College English Test (CET)[1], in the writing section of which consists of a short composition (100 to 120 words) with a time limit of 30 minutes.

The CET made a huge impact on the English curriculum at one university You (2004) studied. To the university, their students' passing rate of the CET was crucial in order to compete against other universities. In terms of what students are expected in the CET writing section, correct form, that is, a three-paragraph format (Introduction-Body-Conclusion), is valued rather than a well-developed thought. As a result, most teachers, under the pressure for their students' passing rate of the CET, taught guided composition to help students prepare for the CET. For example, in one teacher's class that You observed, the teacher provided a model essay on the blackboard to be copied by hand so students could learn the correct form of writing by memorizing it. Since form is valued in the CET, the feedback to student writing teachers provided mostly concerned grammatical and lexical errors rather than exploration of ideas. Beyond what to teach in their English classes, the CET influenced teachers' monetary situations, as they were financially rewarded by the department in their correct guessing of the CET writing task and that the English division benefited from a cash reward from the university for a high rate of students' passing the test. With such immense influence of the CET on teaching and the financial operation of the English division, You commented that "(I)t is not an understatement that the CET is a gamble for both the teachers and students, an eminent power generator for the entire college English curriculum to function (2004, p. 108).

Other than the CET, Chinese English teachers' professional lives were under the influences of economic factors. To increase their income, many full-time teachers of government-funded schools were teaching almost the same number of hours beyond their regular teaching hours in language training schools and private universities. Such heavy workloads consequently curtailed those teachers' attention to individual students and time for professional training (You, 2004).

In more recent reports about English writing instruction in China, a test-driven instruction for writing is also reported for the K-12 (Kindergarten to the 12th grade)

level, while at the university level, positive changes are found. Ene and Hryniuk (2018) conducted surveys among K-12 teachers in three EFL contexts: China, Poland, and Mexico, to discover similarities and differences in the teachers' beliefs and practices of EFL writing instruction and the influence of macro-level policy on EFL writing. The responses from 15 teachers from China showed the following trends of L2 writing instruction in China. First, teachers' pedagogical choices were more connected to students' preparation for national college admission exam; writing instruction centered more on product or correct form (grammar) endorsed by a cultural belief that it is teachers' job to tell students what is right or wrong. Second, large class sizes and teaching multiple classes made it impossible for teachers to implement a process approach to writing, in which students were expected to develop their thoughts through multiple drafts with feedback.

Huang and You (2018), focusing on one university of foreign languages and trade, revealed this local institution's and their teachers' endeavors to negotiate with the national assessment mandates. In China, English major college students take two national exams, which are different from the CET mentioned earlier. Through document analyses and interviews with teachers, Huang and You discovered that this university's curriculum was not dominated by the two national exams as in the case of another university's curriculum dictated by the CET reported by You (2004). Thanks to the flexible nature of the national assessment mandates for English majors and this foreign language university's promotion of educational exchanges with universities in the US and Australia, two focal teachers in Huang and You's study developed instructional strategies in which they used the national assessment mandates as "a teaching and learning practice, not a system of accountability and control" (p. 164).

Though Huang and You (2018) revealed that a test-driven curriculum can be negotiated, reports by You (2004) and Ene and Hryniuk (2018) illustrated strong impacts of national level English tests on the instructional practices of L2 writing instruction in China. Adding to the influence of macro-level policies, a series of studies by Lee (2008, 2010, 2014) on L2 English writing instruction in Hong Kong revealed that teachers' instructional choices were affected by local political factors beyond individual teachers' instructional decisions. Focusing on teacher written feedback to student writing, Lee (2008) conducted a study with 26 secondary school English teachers from different schools in Hong Kong on their feedback practices and interviewed six of them to discover factors that influenced their feedback practices. The interview findings revealed that all the teachers were working in environments where detailed marking (marking every

single error) plus comments on student writing was encouraged and positively evaluated according to the feedback guidelines stipulated by their school English departments (the English panel). Moreover, accountability played an important role in those teachers' feedback practices. Even though they did not feel a need for detailed marking to improve student writing, they responded to student writing as guided by the English panel; not conforming to the panel policy would result in a negative appraisal from the school principal and an accusation of not fulfilling teachers' responsibility. Teachers were also held accountable to their students and parents by meeting their expectations in which they believed teachers were doing their jobs by providing detailed feedback to student writing. The interview findings also revealed teachers' attribution of their feedback practices to Hong Kong's exam-oriented culture and their acknowledgement of lack of training in providing feedback to student writing.

Summarizing those factors affecting teacher feedback, Lee (2008) commented that "teachers' feedback practices are socially and politically situated, shaped by unequal power relations and complex interactions among the stakeholders" (p. 81). Furthermore, Lee (2014), revisiting those teachers' accounts from her previous study, described the school policy of emphasizing meticulous attention to errors made teachers "reduced to marking machines in the accountability system" and feel "powerless to initiate change because of the hierarchical relationships in schools and their lack of autonomy … to implement change" (p. 207). Lee (2014) claimed that in order to improve such adversary situation, the existing rules of the school policy and power relations need to be changed.

Teachers' feelings of lack of power does not come from their power relations to the school stakeholders alone. In an interview-based study about four Chinese (Hong Kong) primary and secondary school teachers' professional development through an MA course focusing on writing, Lee (2010) noted that while those teachers learned new ideas about L2 writing research and practice including peer feedback through their MA course, it was not easy for them to implement change to traditional teacher-centered, grammar-focused approaches in their schools. Difficulties included lack of time, their colleagues' reluctance to change, teachers' relative lack of seniority to initiate change in their workplaces, and a potential problem to start a teaching practice remote from their colleagues' on-going practice. These findings indicate that to teachers, their relationships with their colleagues can be a political factor that can facilitate or discourage change and innovation in their teaching practices in their workplaces. Despite the obstacles to implement change mentioned above, Lee (2010) noted that those teachers started

a journey to bring innovation to teaching writing "in the broader institutional and political context of their work" (2010, p. 154).

Lee's (2008) claim of feedback practice as socially and politically situated practice based on the findings in Hong Kong resonated in an ESL context as well. Séror (2009) conducted longitudinal case studies on Japanese students attending a university in Canada to investigate the impact of institutional forces on their instructors' feedback practices and those students' writing development. Interviews and document analyses of instructors' feedback based on five focal students and four focal instructors revealed that there were gaps between ideal feedback practices and reality. While both students and instructors preferred face-to-face interactions in receiving and providing feedback, such opportunities were limited. Three institutional forces negatively contributed to reduced feedback practices and opportunities. First, the university's limited resources in hiring part-time instructors and not being able to employ enough teaching assistants (TAs) deprived instructors of their time and energy to fully engage in detailed feedback to student writing. Second, the university placed more emphasis on research and publications, by which instructors were discouraged from investing time and efforts in providing detailed feedback and meeting with students individually on their writing. Third, the university's grade distribution policies prevented instructors from providing constructive feedback; instead, instructors complied to the normal curve of the grade distribution and provided defensive feedback to justify writing with low grades. To conclude, Séror claimed that "ideal feedback practices were, in fact, incompatible with institutional pressures to limit resource expenditures, maximize research productivity, and adhere to strict grade distributions" (2009, p. 223).

Lastly, many of the political factors and their influences on teachers' instructional practices were reported in the case of Jordan as well. Al-Jarrah and Al-Ahmad (2013) conducted a study with 36 English teachers, ranging from primary school to university levels, based on interviews and class observations. They found that English teachers in Jordan faced challenges of large class size, low wages, and heavy teaching loads, which prohibited them from providing constructive feedback to student writing and even deprived them of motivation to teach writing. Though such labor conditions were better at the university level, teachers dealt with university students' lack of motivation in learning to write in English. Moreover, as in the case of Hong Kong, where teachers were evaluated based on their detailed marking on student writing, in Jordan, the same practice was implemented. In one private school showing a relative success of students' motivation to learn writing, teachers willingly corrected student writing because

their performance was evaluated, which affected their promotion and annual salary raise.

A synthesis of the findings from the previous studies illustrate the followings. L2 English instruction is indeed an act conducted in various sociopolitical contexts. Moreover, those sociopolitical contexts generally involve power relations among various parties. As shown in the reports from China, national-level exams, including college entrance exam and a college-level standardized test, CET, made a huge impact on English teachers, though another type of standardized test specific to college English majors was utilized positively for a teaching and learning practice. The college entrance exam and CET influenced teachers to the extent that they taught students what was expected in those tests; in other words, tests dominated teachers' writing instruction. In addition, the influence of the CET was so powerful that students' passing rate of the test affected the financial situations of the college English division within a university.

Besides the macro-level factor of national-level standardized tests, reports from Hong Kong, Canada, and Jordan revealed that local institutional policies greatly affected teachers' feedback practices. At the high school level, those policies included school feedback guidelines and adherence to accountability, non-conformity to which would result in unfavorable evaluations of teachers. As a result, teachers ended up engaging in detailed marking more than they felt the need to. If teachers' correcting student writing was reflected in their performance evaluation leading to their promotion and pay raise, teachers willingly corrected student writing. At the college level, deprioritizing education and promoting research, and grade distribution guidelines drove teachers to reduce the quantity and quality of feedback they provided to student writing.

Furthermore, the labor conditions of teachers were also an important political factor at both school and university levels. Heavy workloads, a large class size, extra teaching to increase personal income, and the university department's limited financial resources to employ enough teachers and teaching assistants all negatively contributed to teachers' engagement in feedback practices and professional development. Besides feedback practices, teachers felt lack of power to initiate change in L2 writing instructional practices in their workplaces depending on their relative status among their colleagues and the relationships with them.

Sociopolitical contexts of L2 writing instruction in Japan

Based on the reports cited above regarding sociopolitical contexts in L2 English writing instruction in a few ESL and EFL contexts, let us now turn to the

situation in Japan as to how L2 writing instruction in Japan is affected by the same sociopolitical factors introduced above (see Table 1 for a summary). Casanave's (2009) study revealed that a test-driven curriculum affected teachers' L2 writing instructional practices in Japan. Casanave conducted a study with 16 high school and university teachers who were attending a graduate TESOL program at an American university in Japan. While they acknowledged the importance of EFL writing in general, those teachers expressed many constraints in applying what they had learned in their graduate program, including theory and practice of L2 writing, to their own teaching contexts. Under the Japanese education system, which is "linked closely to governmental and corporate influences" (p. 270), the most difficult part of their local realities is the test-driven curriculum: to prepare students for university entrance exams in high school and the pressure to raise students' scores in TOEIC at the university level. Other constraints included students' lack of purpose and motivation in L2 English writing, few classes and little time devoted to writing, and a large class size that made it difficult for implementation of many writing assignments and detailed feedback. While those teachers' comments were collected toward future improvement of their graduate TESOL program, Casanave connected their comments to a larger issue of power relations and teachers' professional development. Teachers need to "learn how to negotiate the local institutional culture …, which can include the reality of teachers' having little power within a system to be able to make changes of any kind without risking losing their jobs" (p. 271).

Fujioka and Otoshi (2020) revealed that the labor conditions of university English teachers made a great impact on their feedback practices. Based on interviews with eight full-time and part-time Japanese teachers teaching English at one Japanese university, their study indicated that teachers who regularly provided feedback to student writing in their writing classes all felt the task burdensome. The main reason for feedback as a burden was time constraints: for a full-time teacher, it was difficult to balance the time for feedback and heavy workloads as a full-time faculty member including teaching other classes and administrative work. Part-time teachers were teaching many classes across different universities and as a result they lacked time for detailed feedback to individual students. In fact, one part-time teacher commented on the difficulty spending time for providing feedback to student writing as follows: "I sometimes write comments on student writing while eating. Writing comments really invades my life. One time, I was writing comments in my dream. I thought commenting was done. But when I woke up, it was not done, so it was a nightmare" (p. 72 original in Japanese, translated

by Fujioka).

Related to time constraints from heavy workloads, the English curriculum specific to those Japanese teachers' university and their status as L2 English users turned out to be affecting their teaching and feedback practices. At their university, writing and oral presentation classes were offered in the same semester. This curriculum made some teachers double their workloads as they commented on student writing for oral presentations as well as writing assignments for writing classes. Regarding teachers' L2 users' status, one teacher found a way to overcome her disadvantage by utilizing an L1 English-speaking teacher's help to provide model essays to show to her students, while other teachers suffered from a lack of such opportunity. One teacher was struggling spending excessive time constructing feedback because of her status as an L2 English user herself. Another teacher lamented losing the opportunity she used to have to ask her L1-English-speaking colleague for help regularly about her questions on student writing. In the study, those teachers also voiced requests for future improvements of the curriculum, including a need for clearer course objectives and guidelines for more effective feedback practices. Fujioka and Otoshi (2020) emphasized the need to respond to those teachers' voices so that they can collectively increase accountability of their English curriculum.

As indicated above, English teachers in Japan were found to be operating in sociopolitical contexts and that some of the factors influencing their instructional practices were the same as the ones identified in the contexts outside Japan. Those factors included the text-driven curriculum (i.e., college entrance exam affecting the high school education and private sectors' tests such as TOEIC dominating a university's curriculum), deemphasizing writing instruction, and teachers' disadvantageous labor situations including heavy workloads as both full-time and part-time teachers. While these factors were more of the systemic level, factors related to local institutional and individual levels included a curriculum doubling teachers' workloads with a need for feedback on writing for oral presentations and writing assignments for writing classes, and access to L1 English-speaking colleagues' help. With these findings in mind, the next section addresses what other sociopolitical contexts need to be investigated regarding L2 writing instruction in Japan.

Future study in Japan

Focusing on L2 English writing instruction at the university level in Japan, one potential area of inquiry that can be explored is power relations among different

schools/departments or organizational levels within a university and how those power relations influence L2 writing instruction. In Japanese universities consisting of multiple schools (*gakubu*) and departments (*gakka*) within schools, English education for undergraduate students are generally classified into two types: (1) English instruction is run by the university English division that is responsible for all the English classes students from different schools take [the same as the college English division described in You's (2004) study in a Chinese university]; (2) English instruction is run by schools of discipline (e.g., engineering, medicine, science, law, economics), a system through which full-time English teachers are assigned to those schools and teach English to students in their schools only.

The two types of English instruction both involve power issues. Regarding the first type in which the college division of English is responsible for all the English classes across different schools and departments within a university, the following questions can be asked. Does the English division decide on the curriculum and what to teach independently? As shown in the report by You (2004) about one university situation in China, competition against other universities is severe in Japan as well and the drive for competitiveness can affect various aspects of university education, including English instruction. Under such circumstances, are English teachers under pressures from various stakeholders including the university board and administrators, students' parents, or prefectural or city council in the case of public universities? If under pressures from those stakeholders, does the college English division place more value on some areas of English skills over others, such as less attention to writing as reported in Casanave (2009) and why? Do English teachers agree with such decisions based on the voices from the stakeholders or do they try to promote writing instruction more? Do English teachers work collectively to respond to those pressures from the stakeholders, or do they experience internal conflicts among themselves, such as difficulty implementing change due to the relationship among colleagues, as reported in Lee (2010)? All these questions need to be examined through the analyses of the college English division as a unit in relation to the university and their stakeholders, as well as individual teachers' instructional decisions and implementations as members of the college English division.

The second type of English instruction can involve power issues between English teachers and disciplinary professors, as English teachers belong to specific schools and teach students in their schools only. Within a specific school (e.g., engineering, medicine, science, law, economics), do disciplinary professors have stronger voices over English teachers regarding the kind of English skills needed

for the students in their schools? Do disciplinary professors think English writing is important and endorse writing instruction in English classes? Do some schools emphasize continuation from the undergraduate and graduate education, such as science students learning an advanced level of English writing at the undergraduate level so they can make a smooth transition to writing for academic publications at the graduate level? Within the same university, different schools may have different goals and expectations regarding students' English proficiency. Moreover, different schools may present different dynamics between disciplinary professors and English teachers. Thus, a close examination is needed as to how English teachers operate within their schools in terms of their relationships with their disciplinary colleagues, and various rules and decisions within their schools and how those local realities affect their L2 English instructional decisions.

In pursuing research for either type of university English writing instruction in Japan, a naturalistic case study approach is probably the best research methodology. Focusing on specific cases (i.e., the college English division, schools within a university, individual teachers), a study needs multiple sources of data, including documents (e.g., university websites and pamphlets), interviews with disciplinary professors or stakeholders, if possible, in addition to English teachers, textbooks and teaching materials English teachers use, class observations, and written products of students. More specifically, those different data can help obtain the following details. University websites and pamphlets provide the information regarding the university's and specific schools' goals of education and focused areas of English skills. Through interviews with English teachers, information can be obtained about their English curriculum, purposes and goals for English writing instruction, and factors affecting their instructional decisions (e.g., the guidelines from the university or the schools they belong to, their relationships with their English-teaching colleagues and disciplinary professors). Though interviews with disciplinary professors and stakeholders (e.g., the university board members) may not be easy, information from those sources can help compare their perspectives on various factors affecting English instruction and English teachers' perspectives. Moreover, teachers' self-reports regarding their instructional decisions and approaches (e.g., writing guidelines, grading policies, feedback practices) can be checked through their textbooks and teaching materials, class observations, and students' written products. Through close descriptions and analyses of these multiple sources of data, power issues involving L2 English writing teachers, their university stakeholders, and their disciplinary colleagues in their schools can be illuminated, which will add further understanding of the sociopolitical contexts

involving L2 English writing instruction in Japan.

Conclusion

In the present study, based on the perspective of writing as a sociopolitical act, a review of the relevant literature was offered to show the sociopolitical nature of L2 English writing instruction. Though the review was not exhaustive, various reports from both ESL and EFL contexts revealed that the macro- and micro-level politics were involved in L2 writing instruction at various school and university levels. The macro-level politics included a national standardized college English test and a test-driven curriculum. Micro-level politics concerned local institutional policies, including the evaluations of teachers, accountability of English writing instruction in response to various stakeholders' requests and expectations, a university culture to promote research over teaching, and grade distribution policies. In addition, teachers' labor conditions, such as heavy workloads of both full-time and part-time teachers and lack of opportunities for professional development were common in both ESL and EFL contexts. Moreover, a large class size and low payment were common factors affecting L2 writing teachers and their instructional practices in many EFL contexts. All these political factors were affecting English teachers' decisions as to what to teach in writing classes and how they should teach writing and respond to student writing. These findings show that as reported by Lee (2008), L2 writing instruction is "a socially and politically situated" practice (p. 81).

Based on the review of the relevant literature, the study offered an area of inquiry in future study in Japan. Such inquiry included an exploration of power issues on university English writing instruction according to two types of organizational structures: (1) the college English division as a unit in response to various stakeholders of the university, and (2) the dynamics of English teachers and disciplinary professors in specific schools within a university. In addition to little research on sociopolitical contexts of L2 English writing instruction in Japan, the proposed study should be promoted for the following reasons. As mentioned in the beginning of this study, teaching English writing is more difficult than teaching other English skills. For the daunting task of teaching English writing, university English writing teachers need to develop their expertise and maintain the quality of their work. However, if those teachers cannot exert their teaching abilities or engage in professional development due to factors beyond their control, those factors need to be investigated. Thus, closer analyses of various sociopolitical contexts involving L2 English writing instruction is a first and necessary step toward future improvement of English teacher professional development and

resulting improvement of Japanese students' writing skills in English.

Acknowledgment

Note

1 In You (2004), College English Test (CET) Band 4 was reported.

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Table 1. Summary of sociopolitical contexts in L2 English writing instruction

Study Country/region Instructional level	Major sociopolitical factors	Resulting instructional practices
You (2004) China University	College English Test (CET) The pressure of students' high passing rate of the CET, heavy workloads, extra teaching for personal income	Teaching what is expected in the CET, feedback focusing on form, reduced attention to individual students' writing lack of time for professional development
Ene & Hryniuk (2018) China K-12	National college admission exam, large class size, teaching multiple classes	Product-centered writing, emphasis on correct form
Huang & You (2018) China University	National assessment mandates for foreign language majors	National assessment as a teaching and learning practice
Lee (2008) Hong Kong Secondary school	Guidelines by the English panel, appraisal of teachers, accountability, exam-oriented culture, lack of training in providing feedback	Detailed marking on student writing and writing comments, which are against teachers' will
Lee (2010) Hong Kong Primary and secondary school	Relationships and dynamics among colleagues	Traditional approaches to teaching writing (teacher-centered, grammar-focused)
Séror (2009) Canada University	Three institutional forces: limited financial resources; promoting research over teaching; grade distribution policies	Limited opportunities for detailed feedback to student writing

Al-Jarrah & Al-Ahmad (2013) Jordan Primary school to university	Large class size, low wages, heavy teaching loads	Teachers' lack of motivation to teach writing and provide feedback
Casanave (2009) Japan High school and university	Test-driven curriculum, students' lack of purpose and motivation in L2 English writing, large class size	Raising student test scores, difficulty providing detailed feedback
Fujioka & Otoshi (2020) Japan University	Heavy workloads (both full-time and part-time teachers), curriculum doubling workloads, teachers' L2 English status	Feedback as burden, lack of time for detailed feedback

Abstract

Learning an advanced level of English writing is necessary for Japanese students' future success in academic and business activities in a global world. To help students learn the complex skill of writing, English teachers need to exert their expertise and potential abilities in their teaching practices. However, previous studies in the field of second language (L2) writing instruction in various countries and regions reveal that L2 English writing instruction is conducted in sociopolitical contexts, where teachers deal with various kinds of power in their daily practices. Such power involves both macro- and micro-level politics. The macro-level politics includes a national standardized college English test and a test-driven curriculum, while the micro-level politics concerns local institutional policies, including the evaluations of teachers, accountability, pressures from various stakeholders, and grade distribution policies. In addition, teachers' labor conditions, such as a large class size, low payment, heavy workloads, and lack of opportunities for professional development are common factors affecting L2 writing teachers' lives and their instructional practices.

Though English teachers in Japan were found to face many of the challenges mentioned above, the present study suggests an area of future inquiry exploring power issues on university English writing instruction in Japan according to two types of organizational structures: (1) the college English division as a unit in response to various stakeholders of the university, and (2) the dynamics of English teachers and their disciplinary colleagues in specific schools within a university. Such inquiry will further illuminate sociopolitical factors that promote or discourage English teachers' instructional decisions and professional development. Exploring English teachers' professional development by attending to their daily instructional practices is a first step toward helping Japanese students improve their writing skills in English.