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Searching for the Ideal through Systematic Language Policy Development

D. E. Ingram
Executive Dean,
School of Applied Language Studies,
Melbourne University Private,
Hawthorn, Victoria, 3122,
Australia.

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Executive Dean,
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ABSTRACT

Drawing on the Australian experience, this paper raises some practical issues with regard to language and language education policy development and key issues in a language education policy. The paper makes frequent reference to Japanese policy documents and briefly considers how relevant issues in them might relate to a comprehensive and systematic national language education policy. It refers to the desirability of having community support for a national policy and briefly outlines the steps taken in Australia when it was realised that it was essential to achieve a comprehensive national policy before progress would be made in language education. Reference is made to the sort of skills required of the people who are to develop and advise on a national policy and to the support services required for a national language or language education policy.

The paper refers briefly to key components of a policy and how they might be identified and developed, in particular identifying and building on the nature of the society, societal and individual needs, and the needs of industry. Reference is made to the desirable goals of language education and the design of language education to achieve them. In particular, reference is made to three central goals of language education: the development of cultural understanding, the fostering of positive cross-cultural attitudes, and attainment of practically useful levels of language proficiency, though many courses will have additional goals. Reference is made to how proficiency goals may be specified, the importance of ensuring that assessment procedures are compatible with the goals and methods proposed in the language education policy, and the paper offers a case for a nationally agreed certification system for language proficiency based around behavioural scales or competencies. A language education policy must also consider issues of the duration and continuity of language programmes and how to encourage learning to go on beyond the end of necessarily finite courses. Since the needs of a society and of its individual members for language skills in a globalised world are necessarily diverse, a national language education policy necessarily must consider how to cater for diverse language learning within the practical possibilities of the education system.

Language education policies have to be implemented through curricula, by certain methodology and by language teachers. Consequently, a national language education policy needs to consider the form that the curriculum will take and the methodology by which it can be implemented to achieve the specified goals. Most importantly, language teachers are “the pivot of policy” and a language education policy must give careful thought to how the quality and supply of language teachers are to be ensured. Reference is made to how the skills (both professional and language skills) required of language teachers can be specified. The issue of the use of untrained native speakers as language teachers is discussed.

Throughout the paper, it is emphasised that language education policy is meaningless if it is not articulated through into practice: an adequate language education policy must envisage all the necessary implementation steps required to achieve the goals. In brief, the paper suggests some of the fundamental issues that need to be considered in a policy that is “searching for the ideal”.

THE PRESENTER

Professor David Ingram is Executive Dean in the School of Applied Language Studies in Melbourne University Private, Melbourne Australia. He holds the Bachelor of Arts and Certificate in Education from the University of Queensland, Australia, and the Master of Arts in Applied Linguistics and Doctor of Philosophy degrees from the University of Essex, England. He taught for 14 years in Primary and Secondary Schools in Australia and overseas before entering teacher education in the early 1970s at the then Mt Gravatt College of Advanced Education. From 1983 to 1986, he was head of the teacher education programme at the (now) Charles Darwin University in the Northern Territory and was founding Director of the Institute for Applied Linguistics in Brisbane College of Advanced Education from 1986 to 1989. From 1990 to 2003, he held the Chair in Applied Linguistics at Griffith University, Brisbane, where he was also foundation Director of the Centre for Applied Linguistics and Languages. He was President of the Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations for 14 years to 1996, Vice-President of the World Federation for six years, and, from 1992 to 1996, a member of the Australian Language and Literacy Council. He has been a Fellow and Adjunct Fellow of the National Foreign Language Center, Washington DC, since 1993. He was the Australian representative on the joint British-Australian project to develop the IELTS Test in 1987-88 and was then IELTS Chief Examiner (Australia) for ten years to 1998. He is the co-author of the International Second Language Proficiency Ratings (ISLPR). He has published extensively in applied linguistics in journals, books and conference presentations around the world. In the Australian Honours List in June 2003, he was made a Member of the Order of Australia for *“service to education through the development of language policy, through assessment procedures for evaluation of proficiency, and through research and teaching”*.

I INTRODUCTION

This paper is supplementary to the keynote paper presented at the JACET 2003 Conference [Ingram 2003]. In that paper, it was argued, using the Australian experience as an example, that language and language education policy must be firmly based in the nature and needs of the society overall and of the individual people and organisations that compose it, be rationally developed and justified, and be carefully articulated from the identified needs through the policy aims and principles to their implementation in practice and the on-going evaluation and development of the policy and its implementation. It was proposed that the policy be presented and tested in “rational frameworks” that both provide a desirable discipline on policy development and assist the policy-maker to ensure that all aspects of the policy can be and are realised in practice and evaluated. This paper assumes that paper, considers how to proceed to develop a national policy, and briefly identifies some of the issues to be considered in “searching for the ideal through systematic language policy development”.

II ACHIEVING A NATIONAL LANGUAGE OR LANGUAGE EDUCATION POLICY

Though many nations have adopted a strategic plan, a national curriculum, or a common syllabus to guide their language teaching programme, such a document is not as securely based as a fully articulated national language or language education policy: it is rarely grounded in an adequate view of the society and its needs, it is rarely fully articulated in the ways discussed in Ingram 2003, and, without the involvement of the nation’s policy-makers, it is unlikely that it will be sufficiently resourced to reform, for example, the education system. On the other hand, a national policy that is merely imposed from above without involvement by the society in identifying its needs or the form it should take is likely to lack community support and be less closely related to the society’s real needs. The history of language policy development in Australia provides some lessons in this regard though, as a foreigner with little experience of Japan, it is not for the present writer to assert that what occurred in Australia in the late 1970s-early 1980s is applicable to Japan in the 21st Century.

As noted in Ingram 2003, despite the multicultural developments and related language teaching projects in Australia through the 1970s, the lasting effect on Australian language education overall was minimal, and the language education system was in a parlous state: there were few and declining students, few and declining language teachers, no serious opportunities for language teachers to develop specialist language teaching skills or even adequate language proficiency, and, though in some States (e.g., Queensland) curriculum development was very progressive, the standards attained in the education system at all levels (including university) were poor. Nevertheless, public surveys showed that community attitudes, largely as a result of the widespread public discussion of multiculturalism, were

reasonably favourable and decision-makers seemed to be starting to take notice. However, as enrolments continued to slide, it became increasingly evident that nothing would be achieved unless the whole language teaching system was comprehensively overhauled and a systematic policy on languages and language education adopted. Consequently, the professional associations of language teachers, especially the Modern Language Teachers Association of Queensland and the Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations, engaged in persistent lobbying with the eventual aim of having a national language policy developed and adopted in Australia. It was also evident that there was need for an organisation to provide on-going support for and advice on a national policy and so there was need for a national language policy advisory centre of some sort. The initial step in both of these endeavours was to prepare formal papers and submissions arguing, in one, for a national policy on languages and, in the other, for a national language information and research centre [Ingram 1978, 1978a]. Despite some initial opposition [see Ingram 2003a], the MLTAQ and AFMLTA as a whole were strongly supportive, numerous submissions were prepared, public statements were made, public meetings were convened, and strong support grew across the community, especially amongst the ethnic communities which also lobbied for a national policy. Eventually, in 1982, the Senate referred the matter of a national policy on languages to its Standing Committee on Education and the Arts. This Committee embarked on a lengthy public Inquiry but it is important that, in doing so, it actively encouraged individuals and community and professional organisations to call public meetings to discuss the issue of a national policy, to prepare written submissions to the Inquiry, and to appear before it at its hearings. Eventually the Committee's report was tabled in the Senate in 1984 [SSCEA 1984], some delay ensued as a result of elections but a formal policy was then developed and formally adopted in 1987 [Lo Bianco 1987]. As a result of the public discussion and even before the Federal Government had adopted its national policy, most States and Territories had moved to develop their own. This process involved active lobbying and arguing by professional organisations, expert input to both the Senate Inquiry and the formal policy development, widespread public discussion, and the formal involvement by the national decision-makers (the politicians and their Departmental advisers). The nature of this process proved to be very important since it ensured that community interests and societal need were taken into account in policy development and ensured that the society at large was strongly supportive of the national, State and Territory policies and the allocation of resources to support them. That does not mean, of course, that the policies adopted were without fault, as was demonstrated in the other paper [Ingram 2003], but the process was useful and the faults arose from defects in the structure of the policies and their lack of sufficiently rigorous articulation into practice.

Related to the issue of how a policy is developed is the issue of who develops it. This has been discussed in other papers [e.g., Ingram 2003, also Ingram 1989] where it has been argued that language policy development requires input from a cross-section of interested persons, including applied linguists with relevant specialist expertise. In brief, the organisation charged with the development of a language policy should include representation from

government departments, trade and industry, ethnic communities, the education system, the military and diplomatic service, demographers, and specialists in relevant areas of applied linguistics, and representatives of other bodies that can provide insight into their own needs for language skills. In addition, there is need for detailed information to be provided on the nature of the language skills already available to the nation, the skills that are needed, the uses to which language skills are to be put, and how those skills may be developed and maintained. It should also be emphasised that, in this discussion, it is assumed that, wherever reference is made to “languages” or “language skills”, cultural knowledge and understanding is also implied.

III SUPPORT SERVICES FOR A LANGUAGE OR LANGUAGE EDUCATION POLICY

A national language or language education policy requires at least two forms of support: an on-going advisory body to government on the national policy and a national research system [see Ingram 2003]. The role of the Advisory Body is to advise the national decision-makers on language and language education issues and should consist of members similar to those just identified for policy development. Part of the role of such an Advisory Body is to monitor the policy, its implementation and its success, to monitor the society and its needs, and to advise on the on-going development of the policy. The research system might be a national language or language education research centre or might be the research elements across the universities. The role of the research system is to continuously monitor the society and its needs and the changes that occur in them, to enhance curriculum design and methodology, and to continually evaluate the outcomes and the success of the policy and to advise on developments needed. In Australia during its most successful language policy era, these roles were carried out by the Australian Language and Literacy Council (the principal advisory body to the Federal Education Minister) and the National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia (NLLIA) (a nationally funded research organisation encompassing specialised research centres in a number of universities across Australia) [see Ingram 2001 for an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the NLLIA in the context of the roles, functions and management of language centres].

IV BASIC INFORMATION NEEDED FOR A NATIONAL LANGUAGE OR LANGUAGE EDUCATION POLICY

It is not possible in the space available to outline in full the basic information needed in developing a national language or language education policy but only to indicate in the most general terms the information required. Nor is it possible to clearly differentiate the information required for a national language policy and that required for a national language education policy.

Suffice it to say that there is some overlap and that, ideally, a language education policy will exist in the context of and be dependent on a national language policy, which, in turn, exists in the context of, and is determined by, the nature and needs of the society.

Nature and Needs of the Society: Most fundamentally, the policy must identify and respond to the nature and needs of the society both the current ones and those that can be predicted for the future [see Ingram 2003, especially Section IV.1]. Clearly this is a large issue which requires both an overview of the demography and linguistic nature of the society, in this case Japan, and the changes that are likely to occur in it as a result of its own evolution and world events. The Japanese government policies on education make frequent reference to the need for the education system to respond to internationalisation or globalisation and, in that context, they refer to the importance of English skills and of international exchanges [MEXT 2001, Toyama 2002, MEXT 2002]. The document *Developing a strategic plan to cultivate 'Japanese with English Abilities'*, for instance, states:

With the progress of globalization in the economy and in society, it is essential that our children acquire communication skills in English, which has become a common international language, in order for living in the 21st century. [MEXT 2002: 1]

Analysis of Japan's international relationships would undoubtedly suggest the importance of other languages in addition to English in a comprehensive national language education policy and there is some brief reference to the needs in other languages in the education policy documents surveyed [e.g., MEXT 2002]. In addition, though Japan, demographically, is undoubtedly more homogeneous than Australia, other reports indicate the presence of ethnic groups such as the indigenous Ainu [e.g., Maxwell 2003] and other ethnic groups resulting from a growing migrant and refugee presence [e.g., Asakura 2002: 3]. The presence of ethnic minorities raises issues for consideration in language and language education policy, as is implied by the "New Ainu Law" which, according to Maxwell [2003], recognises the Ainu as an ethnic minority and makes some provision for the maintenance of Ainu language and culture. Elsewhere, the Ministry documents also refer to fundamental concepts such as "the principle of respect for the individual", "equality of opportunities in education", and the need to encourage "the maximum growth of individuality and capability in each and every child" [MEXT 2001]. The issue of language rights and the importance of language policy's taking account of the needs of ethnic minorities has also been confirmed in numerous international covenants sponsored by various United Nations organisations, especially UNESCO [see UNESCO 2003 where the main international agreements are summarised and Cunningham 2003]. Clearly these issues have profound implications for language education policy, especially in a situation where there is already some ethnic diversity and, in the future with the increasing impact of globalisation and of global mobility, such diversity is likely only to increase.

Industry Needs: One aspect of societal need is the need of industry for language skills. Here, “industry” is used in the widest possible sense to refer to all vocational activity in such areas as business, commerce, industrial activity, public administration, international relations, the defence forces, and so on. Reference has already been made to globalisation and its impact on education in general and on language and language education policy-making.

As already noted, Japan’s education and English policies already recognise the need for education, including language education, to be responsive to industry needs. For this to occur, there are several issues relevant to language and language education policy that must be considered:

1. An overall picture of the needs of industry for language skills can be gained by surveying the demands made through whatever approach is adopted for recruitment. In Australia and the United States, for instance, the present writer has surveyed job vacancy advertisements both in major newspapers in Australia and in more specialised recruitment publications in the United States [see Stanley *et al* 1990, ALLC 1994: Appendix 3, Ingram 2000a]. Such studies can show the level of demand for language skills in industry, the change in demand, and the nature of the skills demanded (i.e., what languages, general proficiency or special purpose proficiency, and the level of proficiency). Such studies clearly have profound implications both for language education policy and for curriculum design.
2. More detailed information on both the availability of language skills and the needs for them can be obtained through language audits and needs analyses of individual workplaces or of industries as a whole. Such audits and needs analyses have clear implications for recruitment policies, specifically designed workplace language programmes for persons in different positions, and for the most economical and cost-effective way to meet the corporation’s language requirements. The limitation of surveys such as those referred to in Australia and the United States using job vacancy advertisements is that they show only demand and not need whereas a language audit and needs analysis conducted by an applied linguist together with relevant industry personnel can look at actual and projected operations and how language and culture skills can benefit the corporation or industry [see Ingram 1993: 96 – 98 and Ingram 2001a where the implications for Australian language education are discussed]. If language audits are not yet a part of language policy development in Japan, it is probably desirable that some exemplar audits be conducted to show the value of the procedure and what benefits may be brought to industry through them [cf. ALLC 1994: Recommendation 15, p. 97]. Language audits and needs analyses are well-established procedures in Europe though less common elsewhere. A detailed account of how they may be conducted is available in Reeves and Wright 1996.
3. The role of language skills in industry has important implications for the development of language education policy. First, industry needs to be

made aware of the benefits to be gained from the use of appropriate language and culture skills in better fitting their products to the markets, in exploring new markets, in promoting their products, in providing meaningful literature to accompany their products, and in negotiating more effective trade arrangements. Second, the surveys in Australia and the United States referred to earlier demonstrate that industry in those countries have difficulty identifying and specifying the language skills they need. If the same situation exists in Japan, there are implications for training programmes to make industry better aware not only of the value of language skills but how to go about identifying their needs and specifying their requirements (see below).

4. There are profound implications for the education system and hence for language education policy from identifying the needs of industry. Those implications relate to the nature of the courses, the focus on general and special purpose proficiency, the duration of courses to ensure that the necessary skills are attained, and for curriculum design and methodology.
5. If language education policy is to be properly oriented towards meeting the needs of society, including industry, it is essential that it identify precisely the nature and level of the skills required. For this to occur, appropriate proficiency rating instruments are required. In Australia, the *International Second Language Proficiency Ratings* (ISLPR) [Ingram and Wylie 1979/1999] provide a highly practical means by which to measure and state proficiency levels. In addition, both in Australia and in Britain in recent years, vocational language competencies have been used to specify workplace language and vocational skills. In Australia, for instance, the Centre for Applied Linguistics and Languages in Griffith University has developed sets of vocational competencies for language teachers and for the Australian tourism industry. In the case of second language teachers, these consist of a special purpose version of the ISLPR for language teachers and a set of professional competencies identifying the professional knowledge and pedagogical skills required by language teachers [see Wylie and Ingram 1995, Commins 1995]. Other examples include the vocational language competencies for the Australian tourism industry also developed at Griffith University [O'Neill 2000] and a set of vocational language competencies developed for Britain by the Languages Lead Body [1992, 1992a].
6. If industry is to make use of language skills and if the society is to encourage people to learn other languages, it is essential that language skills be valued, first, because they are legitimate marketable skills like other educational qualifications and vocational skills and, second, because the acquisition of language skills requires a long term commitment and considerable effort. Possibly the most fundamental way of showing that a society values language skills is through the formulation and adoption of a national policy, especially one developed following public discussion. An attitude of valuing language skills can

also come from other actions that might be taken in the context of an articulated national language policy, for example, by ensuring that language programmes produce practically useful skills and proficiency levels, by ensuring that language skills are given at least equal recognition with other educational qualifications for progress to the next stage of education or employment, and through preferential employment opportunities and salary benefits that reflect the level of language proficiency maintained. The document “Developing a strategic plan to cultivate ‘Japanese with English abilities’” urges corporations “to attach importance to individuals with English abilities” and commits the Education Ministry to doing so [MEXT 2002: Section I (2)]. However, if industry and society in general are to value language skills, it is necessary for language education policy and its implementation to ensure that real language skills are produced and their nature accurately specified in ways already suggested.

Setting Goals: On the basis of the nature and needs of the society, language or language education policy must identify goals for the policy. Though the detailed objectives will differ from programme to programme according to the immediate needs they are intended to meet, the three central goals of language education relate to the development of language proficiency, the development of cultural knowledge and understanding, and the fostering of positive cross-cultural attitudes.

The development of **cultural understanding and the fostering of positive cross-cultural attitudes** are of very great importance and are identified as priority goals in most language policies and language curricula worldwide as priority goals. They have been discussed at length in many other papers and won't be discussed here other than to emphasise that, as goals within a language or language education policy, they have important implications for programme design and methodology [see Ingram *et al* 2003, Ingram 2002, 2002a, 2000, 2000a, Ingram *et al* 1999]. Cross-cultural attitudes do not seem to be included in the Ministry documents that have been referred to [MEXT 2001, 2002]. However, there are strong references to Japan developing “as a member of the international community” [Toyama 2002], to Japanese education “aiming to foster children with rich humanity”, and to cultivating “the feeling of sympathy and compassion for others”. Elsewhere, concern is expressed at a trend for children “to be less capable of smoothly handling relationships with friends and other people” and being “very immature in forging ties with friends or other people” [MEXT 2001]. Such issues are highly relevant to the affective role of language education and are legitimate issues to be concerned about in language education policy. However, in a foreign language programme, their natural extension is to those central goals of fostering cultural understanding and positive cross-cultural attitudes. Such goals and the issues that have just been referred to as elements in a national language education policy also have profound implications for curriculum design and methodology. In particular, interaction or “community involvement”, “culture shock”, and “cerebration” (or thinking about issues of inter-cultural relationships and, more generally, of relationships with other people) are vital components of a language programme designed to foster

positive cross-cultural attitudes [Ingram et al 2003, Ingram et al 1999, Ingram 2002, 2002a, 2000b] but they are also pertinent to some of the other issues referred to above that the Ministry policies seek to address. The need is for the implications for language education policy and thence for curriculum design and methodology to be more fully developed and to be incorporated into language education policy and language curricula.

The Ministry policies for education and for “cultivating Japanese with English ability” refer to the impact of globalisation on the economy and society [MEXT 2001, 2002]. The English teaching policy identifies as the first “objective” that Japanese children “acquire communication skills in English” [MEXT 2002: 1] i.e., that they develop appropriate levels of practical **language proficiency**. Subsequently, it goes on to set more specific objectives for key exit points. These are set in behavioural terms and in terms of the STEP test, thus:

ENGLISH-LANGUAGE ABILITIES DEMANDED OF ALL JAPANESE NATIONALS ->

***On graduation from junior high school:** Ability to hold simple conversations (and a similar level of reading and writing) comprising greetings and responses (... the third level of the STEP .. test, on average.)*

***On graduation from senior high school:** Ability to hold normal conversations (and a similar level of reading and writing) on everyday topics (... the second level or semi-second level of the STEP test, on average).*

ENGLISH-LANGUAGE ABILITIES DEMANDED OF THOSE ACTIVE IN THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY -> *attainment targets to be established by individual universities with a view to cultivating human resources capable of using English in the work place. [MEXT 2002: 2]*

It is very appropriate that behavioural targets be set in this way: language proficiency is definable in terms of the communication tasks that can be carried out and how they are carried out. Most convenient for this purpose are comprehensive proficiency scales such as the ISLPR [Ingram and Wylie 1979/1999], which define proficiency in these terms on a developmental scale which also serves as an overarching framework within which language programmes can be designed at any level. In addition, as noted above, for language education policies and programmes that aim to develop vocationally relevant language skills (as the third objective above intends), vocational language competencies provide a precise way of setting goals as well as detailed information on possible programme content. Since the needs of a society are unlikely to be fully met within the formal education system, the use of a common means by which to specify proficiency or vocational competencies provides some basis on which the aims of different education providers can complement, or be evaluated within, the national language and language education policies. The MEXT documents note, for instance, the

importance of strengthening cooperation with private providers [MEXT 2002: Section I (1)].

Certification and Assessment of Language Abilities: In addition to ensuring that a viable means of assessing proficiency or vocational competencies are available, it is desirable that language and language education policy that identifies the need for language proficiency consider how those skills are to be assessed and certified and by whom. Reference has already been made to the usefulness of behavioural and developmental proficiency scales and of sets of vocational language competencies but three other issues warrant consideration in a policy and its implementation:

1. Assessment must match the goals and the methods by which those goals are to be attained. If the principal focus of language programmes is on the attainment of proficiency, then, however difficult it may be to implement proficiency assessment methods, it is essential that that be done and be seen by the providers, including the teachers, as being done. Otherwise, as noted in the report on the Akita study in the other paper [Ingram 2003], the approach to assessment will rapidly come to dominate the curriculum content and methodology and militate against the achievement of the policy goals. A language education policy which fails to ensure that the assessment methods used are compatible with its goals and the curriculum and methods by which the policy is implemented will be doomed to failure [see also Ingram 2001b, 2000c].
2. A common means of measuring and stating proficiency goals can also provide the basic instrument needed to certify language skills wherever and however they are attained, whether through, for example, the formal education system, through private providers, or through travel and living in the environment where the language is spoken. A nationally endorsed certification system can, therefore, encourage more diverse language learning, encourage individuals to take advantage of the range of learning opportunities, encourage them to take the initiative in developing their own language skills, and give added value to skills sought by the policy and the society. It can also help to replace systems, such as the use of TOEFL or TOEIC, which are less adequate in identifying practical language skills than more behavioural, proficiency-based approaches.

The Ministry education policies appropriately refer to local governments issuing certificates that recognise learning achievements through lifelong learning centres [MEXT 2001]. However, general certification from most education systems provides little useful information on such issues as what a person can do in a language or what language tasks they can carry out in the workplace. A form of certification using nationally endorsed behavioural scales or vocational language competencies would be much more meaningful, more practically useful both to the person with the language skills and to the end-users (the employers, higher education institution, and so on), and more

comprehensive being applicable to language skills gained outside of the education system as well as to those gained through the education system.

3. Just as in some countries there are accreditation schemes for translators and interpreters (cf. the National Authority for the Accreditation of Translators and Interpreters, NAATI, in Australia), there would be value in a national language or language education policy considering the usefulness of having an accreditation system for language assessors. Such persons would be available, for instance, to certify language skills as just proposed and to conduct language audits and needs analyses as discussed earlier. A basic training for such persons would require that they become familiar with the principles and practice of language testing, not least of proficiency assessment, and could be provided through such programmes as a Graduate Certificate or Diploma in Language Assessment such as was previously offered in the Centre for Applied Linguistics and Languages at Griffith University.

Duration of Programmes: The level of language proficiency achieved is largely (but certainly not solely) dependent on the time spent in learning the language. Unfortunately but for the obvious reason that such studies are difficult to structure because of the number of variables involved, there are few adequate research studies or publications that indicate the likely time required by learners to achieve different proficiency levels [but see Foreign Service Institute School of Language Studies 1973]. For practical purposes, the Centre for Applied linguistics and Languages works on the basis of average students requiring a ten-week full-time ESL course (i.e., 250 hours of classwork in an English speaking environment) to increase their proficiency by half an IELTS or ISLPR level. If language education policy sets proficiency goals for various exit points, as was noted earlier to be the case in the MEXT policy documents [MEXT 2002], then, as a corollary, it should identify an appropriate minimum number of class contact hours for the language programmes. If it is not practicable to increase the weekly contact time to achieve the desired levels, then the duration of language learning needs to be increased and, for this reason, many education systems extend language learning into the early years of formal education, as is implied as desirable in the MEXT policy [MEXT 2001]. However, it must be emphasised that merely introducing language teaching into the Primary School will not necessarily enable the desired proficiency goals to be attained; it is necessary to take into account the total number of contact hours to be offered throughout the child's education as well, of course, as the nature of the learning experiences. In addition, consideration needs to be given in language education policy to **continuity** of learning so as to ensure that students who commence a language at any stage are able then to continue it through the different levels of schooling until they have their desired proficiency levels.

Nevertheless, educational programmes are inherently finite and it is rare that language education policy is able to stipulate the ultimate level of native-like proficiency [see Ingram and Wylie 1979/1999] as the target for the formal education system. The MEXT policy on education acknowledges the

importance of lifelong learning in general but there are many opportunities for language learning to occur without necessarily being involved in extension classes [MEXT 2001]. If learners are to continue to develop their language skills beyond the end of the formal courses, it is essential that the courses be designed so that, while they are learning the language, they are also **learning how to learn**, in particular, that they are learning how to utilise all the resources available in the community, on-line and through travel to continue developing their language proficiency. In other words, it is desirable that language education policy take account of the finite nature of language programmes, the many opportunities beyond them for learners to go on developing their language skills, and the need for learners to be taught through their language learning programmes how to go on developing their language skills. Unfortunately, the sort of teaching that goes on in most classrooms and exemplified in the Akita study [Ingram 2003] tends to make learners more dependent on the teacher rather than more independent and able to direct their own learning using the resources that are available to them.

Catering for the Diversity of Languages and Cultures: The issues just raised are also pertinent to the need for a language education policy to be responsive to the diverse language needs resulting from the nation's international relationships and its own demography. As has been found in Australia [Ingram 2003], it is not possible to focus all language education policy around a single foreign language and the needs of industry and of individuals will inevitably make it necessary for a language education policy to consider how it can reasonably cater for a diversity of languages and needs when the practicalities of the education system demand that a choice be made. If, however, the assessment and certification of language skills gained in other ways, as discussed earlier, is possible, then it becomes somewhat easier for policy-makers to cater for the diverse needs. The Australian situation may provide some guidance. Though Australia's language policies have identified some 14 national priority languages for widespread teaching, they also allow for the teaching of 50 or more other languages on a more limited scale [DEET 1991:16]. Other issues to consider include making effective use of technology both to maximise learning effectiveness and to facilitate autonomous learning, maximising the use of community resources, and the use of distance mode teaching and alternative providers to enable learners to study languages not available from their local education institutions.

Curriculum and Methodology: Language education policies are realised, ultimately, through the curriculum, syllabuses and methodology. These are too large to discuss here other than to note that they must be compatible with the societal and individual needs, the goals, and the policy principles and, in addition, as already noted, the assessment system must also be compatible with, and reinforce, the policy goals, the curriculum and the methodology. In particular, if the goals include the development of language proficiency, cultural knowledge and understanding, and positive cross-cultural attitudes, the curriculum and methodology must be designed to best achieve those goals: interactive methods based around "community involvement" would

seem to be especially desirable [see, for example, Ingram 2002, 2002a, 2000a, 2000c]. Other issues of curriculum and methodology to consider in language education policy include the specific purposes of the programme; the design of materials that are compatible with the goals, curriculum and methodology; the competence of the teachers in using the materials; the technology to be made available; the intensity and duration of the programmes; the possible use of immersion language teaching to increase the students' use of the language, to diversify the cultural context in which the language is experienced, and to increase dramatically the time spent on experiencing and learning the language; and the possibility of the students' spending some time in a country where the language is spoken together with the support mechanisms required to enable all learners to participate in such experiences.

Language Teacher Quality and Supply: No reference to the issues to be considered in "searching for the ideal" in language education policy could be complete without serious consideration of the quality and supply of language teachers. The Australian Language and Literacy Council [1996] rightly termed language teachers "the pivot of policy" since, without an adequate supply of well-qualified, language proficient teachers, language education policy will founder. The MEXT policy papers also state:

The success of school education depends considerably on the quality and ability of teachers who have direct contact with children. [MEXT 2001]

There are numerous instances where highly desirable policy has broken down because it has failed to take adequate account of the quality and supply of language teachers. Kwon has noted, for example, how the policy decision in Korea to introduce English across Primary Schools has broken down because it relied on using generalist Primary School teachers without adequate English language proficiency and without specialist language teacher training [Kwon 2000]. In other papers [e.g., Ingram 2003], the present writer has noted how successive language education policies in Australia have also broken down because of an acute shortage of language proficient teachers with specialist training in language teaching methods.

There are many issues to be considered in relation to the quality and supply of language teachers. Most fundamentally, a language education policy needs to consider the minimum skills that a language teacher requires. As noted earlier, the Centre for Applied Linguistics and Languages in Griffith University has developed a set of vocational competencies for teachers, which, in one part, describes the language skills required in terms of a special purpose version of the ISLPR [Wylie and Ingram 1995] and, in another part, describes the professional competencies (the applied linguistic knowledge, attitudes and teaching skills) that language teachers require [see Commins 1995, and, in summary form ALLC 1994]. The minimum language proficiency requirements usually proposed for language teachers are S:3, L:3, R:3, W:3 on the ISLPR though the Australian Language and Literacy Council recommended 4 in all macroskills as most desirable [ALLC 1996: 171]. The

professional competencies that language teachers require must include an informed understanding of the nature of language, of the intrinsic and extrinsic values of languages, positive cross-cultural attitudes, and facility in the language teaching methodology required to implement the policy.

Serious consideration needs to be given in the context of Japanese language education policy to whether it is appropriate to use untrained native speaking teaching assistants. While a methodology that encourages students to interact with native speakers is highly desirable [see Ingram 2002, 2002a, 2000a], it is no more appropriate to have a native speaking English teacher without training in second language teaching methods teach ESL than it is to have a Japanese person off the street teaching Japanese. Language teaching has its own specialist discipline of applied linguistics, methodology is not simply the intuitive presentation of whatever aspect of a language the “teacher” chooses, methodology is the rational outcome of an understanding of such fundamental sciences as linguistics, sociolinguistics, education theory and principles, and, in particular, developmental psycholinguistics, evaluated through specific theoretical and empirical applied linguistic research [see also Ingram 1980]. Consequently, within the context of a rational approach to national language education policy-making in Japan, serious consideration should be given to whether it is appropriate to employ “assistant language teachers of foreign nationality as regular teachers” [MEXT 2002: Note 2 and Section III]. In a press release [Arita 2003], it was stated that there were no plans to introduce “an official accreditation programme for English teachers in elementary schools” but, if this means that persons lacking adequate proficiency in English and/or lacking specialist language teacher training are to be used to teach English in elementary schools, it is as inevitable as it was in Korea that the policy will break down. Nevertheless, the Ministry document “Developing a strategic plan to cultivate ‘Japanese with English Abilities’” does indicate a policy identifying minimum proficiency levels for English teachers and a desire to improve their teaching qualifications [MEXT 2002: Section III]. Such policy statements would be made more informative and provide a surer basis on which to develop the necessary training programmes if they were expressed in terms of professional competencies, proficiency scales or language competencies.

V CONCLUSION

This paper has provided a necessarily cursory overview of some of the key issues to be considered in “searching for the ideal through systematic language policy development”. It has not attempted to be comprehensive in listing all the issues to be considered but it has tried to emphasise the importance of a rational and systematic approach in which language policy is based in the nature and needs of the society and is articulated through policy goals into implementation and on-going evaluation and development. The approach recommended exerts considerable discipline on the policy-makers both to justify their policy and to ensure that the policy principles that are set are realised in practice through implementation procedures, curricula and

methods that are informed by the accumulated knowledge of applied linguistics.

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