

The Pre-service Training of Japanese Teachers of English

Suzanne Yonesaka

Hokkai Gakuen University

<http://www.jalt-publications.org/tlt/articles/1999/11/yonesaka>

Schooling mirrors the culture in which it is organized, and the process of inducing teachers into the teaching profession reflects that culture as well. (Shimahara, 1995, p. 213)

Japanese teachers of English (JTEs) are trained at general junior colleges and universities as well as in specialized teacher training universities and departments. Almost 70% of all two- and four-year colleges participate in teacher education (Aoki et al., 1998); thus native speaker (NS) teachers in general universities are likely to teach some students who are intending to get an English teaching license. Some of these NS teachers give special lectures, supervise practicums, or help students prepare for qualifying exams. However, most NS teachers know little about teacher training in Japan.

Reliable information in English about the pre-service education of JTEs is sparse. Unfortunately, "Japanese have not placed much emphasis on educational research . . . [resulting in] a dearth of research on SLTE [second language teacher education] practices in Japan" (Gebhard & Woo, 1992, p. 30). Tobin (1986) laments that "Japanese education is rarely simply described or analyzed in its own terms. Instead, it is either criticized or held up as an object of wonder" (p. 285). The purpose of this paper is to describe in *its own terms* the pre-service teacher education of secondary-level JTEs at general universities and junior colleges.

Two features of teacher training in Japan must be acknowledged. First, pre-service teacher training is less strongly emphasized than in-service teacher training. In fact, most newly-employed secondary teachers are graduates of general universities rather than of teacher training universities (Tanaka, Uesugi, & Shiraishi, 1993). Second, Japanese universities play a relatively small role in both pre-service and in-service teacher education. In general, Japanese universities prepare people for entry to employment, and employers provide training for particular roles; this is also true for the teaching profession (Hawley and Hawley, 1997).

Pre-service teacher education

There are three levels of teaching certificates for teachers in secondary schools. Prospective graduates of four-year colleges may apply for first class certificates to teach in lower-secondary and upper-secondary schools. Prospective graduates of two- or three-year junior colleges may apply for second class certificates for lower-secondary schools. There is also an advanced class for post-graduates. Promotion to a higher class can be obtained through additional schooling. According to Kobayashi (1993),

second class certificates are now regarded as temporary, with the definite intention of (a) making 4year university schooling the standard for all teachers, and (b) leading toward post-graduate schooling. (p.9)

Some anthropologists observe that due to relatively favorable (especially for women) employment conditions -- good income, security, and status -- the Japanese school systems attract a large pool of good applicants and are able to recruit qualified people (Benjamin, 1997; Cummings, 1980). How are these applicants selected?

1. As undergraduates, students complete course work (general education, subject area and pedagogy courses) for teaching certification.
2. During their final year of education, students carry out a student teaching practicum of several weeks.
3. During the summer before graduation, candidates take the Teacher Employment Selection Test, administered by prefectural or municipal boards of education.

What follows describes these three procedures for secondary-level JTEs.

Course work

Most new JTEs are graduates of English departments at general colleges which have been authorized to offer course work for teaching certification. Competition is keen: Although this course work is undertaken by exceedingly high numbers of students, there is a low rate of entry into the JTE profession. (See Table 1.)

As in other countries, the required course work is under constant revision. A major change was approved for April 1999, drastically reducing subject requirements and increasing pedagogy and psychology requirements. (See Table 2.) Social volunteer work will also be required for lower-secondary credentials. These changes were made in response to the need for better preparation for coping with bullying, deviant and violent behavior, and school avoidance.

Table 1: March 1996 Graduates Receiving First- and Second-class English Teacher Qualifications

Type	Type of institution	Ss	Ss hired*	% hired*
SHS	National education universities or departments	758	66	8.7
SHS	General universities (public and private)	8386	537	6.4
JHS	National education universities or departments	859	205	23.9
JHS	General universities (public and private)	8159	414	5.1
JHS	National education 2-year colleges or departments	19		
JHS	General 2-year colleges (public and private)	2729	41	1.5

* Number or % hired as teachers as of 6/96 (Compiled from Daigaku Eigo Kyouiku Gakkai Kyouiku Mondai Kenkyuu Kai, 1998 p.27)

Table 2: First-level certificate requirements for JHS and SHS teachers of English

Area I. Candidate must have (or be ready to complete) a 4-year university degree.

Area II. Basic courses needed by all teachers: 8 credits required

	JHS	SHS
Japanese constitutional law	2	2
Physical education	2	2
Foreign language communication	2	2
Information technology	2	2

Area III: Pedagogy requirements: 40 credits required

(Representative courses)	JHS	SHS
--------------------------	-----	-----

Group A: Foundations in education	Foundations of education; Theories of teaching	2	2
Group B: Theory of education	Educational psychology; History of education	6	6
Group C-1: Methods	Moral education; Methodology	12	6
Group C-2: Guidance	Counseling; Guidance	4	4
Group D: Integrated seminars	Seminar in education	2	2
Group E-1: Practice Teaching	Practicum	4	2
Group E-2: Practice Teaching:	Preparation; Follow-up	2	2
Teacher development**	Counseling; Intercultural communication	8	16

**Universities may choose either pedagogy or subject area courses to fulfill this area- however. at least one course in counseling is recommended by the Ministry of Education.

Area IV: Subject area requirements: 20 credits required

(Representative courses)		JHS	SHS
The English language	Phonology; English grammar; Applied linguistics	2	2
English literature	American literature; British literature	2	2
English communication	Practical 4-skills courses	2	2
Comparative culture	American history; British affairs	2	2

Area V: (JHS only): 1 credit required

Practicum in social volunteer work: Candidate must receive a certificate attesting to the completion of this requirement from the institution at which the volunteer work was performed.

In general universities, pedagogy courses are generally taught outside the department, often during hours outside the regular schedule of classes. These pedagogy courses are adversely affected by their orphan status. For example, in a survey of 218 instructors of "Methods in TEFL" classes

(Daigaku Eigo Kyouiku Gakkai Kyouiku Mondai Kenkyuu Kai, 1998), most methods courses at general universities had from 30 to 50 students in the class, more than double the class size at teaching universities. English literature and linguistics departments at regular universities continuously adjust course offerings so that students can complete the subject area requirements while fulfilling their majors' graduation requirements. In a sense, this "service" may actually be a disservice to the future teachers because, according to Browne and Wada, (1998),

in most cases, prospective English teachers studying in literature departments are not required to take any additional courses in second language acquisition theory, ESL methodology and techniques, or testing. (p. 101)

Teaching practicum: Preparation

The teaching practicum, which takes place in the final year at college, lasts for about two weeks, an extremely short period by American standards. However, because only a small proportion of students will eventually become teachers, schools are very reluctant to disrupt their crowded timetables to increase the practicum length (Collins, 1989). Nonetheless, "*no matter how short it is* [my italics] and no matter how it is organized, student teaching seems to have a powerful impact upon most student teachers" (Shimahara, 1995, p. 146). I believe that, for Japanese pre-service teachers, the impact of the practicum is to invite them into the culture of teaching.

Perhaps because the practicum itself is so short, preparation during the previous year is seen as highly significant.

Student teachers visit the school at which they will do their practicum to meet the principal, vice-principal, and head teacher, and to get a sense of the surroundings. They may receive documents explaining the school's curriculum and educational approach as well as the textbook from which they will teach the following year. At my university, student teachers are instructed to study the English textbook carefully in the coming months, reading it from cover to cover at least three times.

This period of preparation is the beginning of the student teachers' acculturation into the teaching profession. They have been exhorted to behave as exemplary representatives of their university: they must greet school faculty and staff with loud, clear voices and always display appropriate demeanor and bearing. For the practicum, student teachers may be explicitly instructed to wear clean, conservative clothing with little jewelry or makeup. (*Hokkai Gakuen Daiaku Kyoushoku Iinkai*, 1998). As in other professions, the acculturation of student teachers into their profession begins with visible appearances (*katachi*).

Teaching practicum: The arrival

The student teaching practicum occurs during the students' final year. At the formal briefing that occurs one week before the practicum, student teachers bring the necessities: textbook, documents, practicum diary notebook (several publishers sell similar versions), and clean "indoor" shoes to wear inside the school building.

Student teachers are given administrative information -- the schedule of classes, special events, practicum hours -- which they carefully copy into their diary notebooks. Student teachers at upper secondary schools receive additional information about homerooms and clubs, for which they will also have some responsibility. They are expected to familiarize themselves with the layout of the school, its history, the numbers of students and teachers, and its present educational goals -- information which they summarize in their diary notebooks. This short but intense briefing quickly assimilates student teachers into the school's social organization.

The arrival of student teachers is a routine part of secondary schools' yearly calendars. Although present for only several weeks, the student teachers are regarded by faculty, staff and students as an integral part of the school. Their own universities acknowledge that during this period they are constituents of another organization by excusing them from classes. This strengthens the student teachers' sense of responsibility and provides them with a supportive network.

Student teachers often return to their own former secondary schools, where an especially nurturing atmosphere welcomes them into the acculturation process. My students report feeling great nostalgia and joy upon meeting former teachers and staff. These schools obviously feel a certain obligation to their graduates to make their teaching practicum a relatively positive, non-threatening experience. Student teachers' stress is further reduced by heavily structuring the practicum for a minimum of uncertainty. For example, my university's handbook notes that on the first day, student teachers can expect to give a one-minute self-introduction, get a final briefing, observe their supervising teacher's English classes, and write a report in their diary notebook.

Teaching practicum: In the classroom

However, despite such predictability, experiences vary greatly:

Some student teachers are given ample opportunity to participate actively in lesson planning, activity development, students evaluation, and actual teaching; others, unfortunately, are relegated to the back of the classroom to sit passively during the lesson only to observe... (Leonard, 1997, p.39)

Many of my own students spent much of the practicum observing classes, but not necessarily "passively," as careful observation is an intense activity. Some of them had the opportunity to team-teach with ALTs, and a few had complete control of English classes for almost the entire practicum.

Toward the end of the practicum, student teachers give a demonstration lesson which is observed not only by the supervising teacher, but often by the head teacher, the principal, and a teacher visiting from the student teacher's university. Obviously, the student teacher is being evaluated under immense pressure; at the same time, the participation of so many diligent educators is also extremely supportive. I have observed classes in which the principal joked with the students, helped to pass out papers, and kept some of the wilder students under control.

This demonstration class, called a "research class," can be observed by other English teachers as part of their own in-service training. Thus there is a sort of supportive reciprocity, that even experienced teachers have something to learn from novices. Their presence also reminds the student teacher that this practicum has only been an induction into the profession, and that the real training will occur later.

Teaching practicum: The diary notebook

One of the student teachers' major responsibilities is the completion of the practicum diary notebook, often at the end of a long, exhausting day. However, even this task is highly structured and supervised, so that student teachers are set up for success rather than for failure.

In the full-page diary entry for each day, student teachers briefly record their activities during each class period, homeroom, before and after school. They write a paragraph of evaluation and reflection to which the supervising teacher responds. Each diary entry is stamped with the seal of the supervising teacher, the head teacher, and the principal.

The student teachers complete a separate observation and comment page for each class that they observe. One of my own students observed eleven English classes during his student teaching at a junior high school this year. His first entries were bare outlines followed by superficial comments such as "I think it was a class that interested all of the students." However, his later observations became quite detailed; for example, noting how activities were carried out: "individual Q & A-> 2 Ss."

Before teaching a class, the student teacher records a one-page class plan, and on a second page, the specific objectives and teaching points of the class. After teaching the class, she writes a short, reflective paragraph, which is commented on by the supervising teacher.

The demonstration class -- the highlight of the practicum -- calls for an extremely detailed lesson plan and two full pages of comments. Twice as much space is allotted for positive comments as for negative comments, perhaps to tip the balance toward a positive experience. In the comments about one of my students' demonstration lessons, the supervising teacher directly addressed him as "*sensei*." His acculturation into the profession had been successful.

The practicum diary notebook is the core of the practicum: a permanent chronicle, an opportunity for reflection, and a forum for feedback.

The Teacher Employment Selection Test

The Teacher Employment Selection Test is administered every summer by the boards of education of all prefectures and of selected cities. A standard certificate is technically valid anywhere in the country and is good for life.

Appointment examinations provide opportunities for all applicants -- education majors and others -- to compete universally and equally. The aim of the examinations is to select the best qualified applicants from the competitive pool where achievement is a major concern. (Shimahara, 1991, p. 270)

There are constraints on who may take the Teacher Employment Selection Test. Evidently, most prefectures allow candidates without Japanese citizenship to take the exam, although they may not be able to rise to administrative positions. Another limit is age, although recently this restriction has eased up considerably. Eight years ago, more than half of the forty seven prefectures required that applicants be under the age of thirty (Shimahara, 1991); however, today only six do (*Kyouin saiyoushiken kenkyuukai*, 1998, p.66). Candidates can circumvent age requirements by taking the test in another prefecture. For example, one of my students came to Hokkaido because she was over the age limit for getting the English teaching license in her home prefecture.

According to Horiuchi and Muzumoto (cited in West, Jarchow & Quisenberry, p.1073), 80% of the candidates began to prepare for the test six months in advance, generally by cramming the collections of past tests that are on the market. Unfortunately, these candidates claimed they did not find their college education helpful in preparing for the test. Below is a description of the Teacher Employment Selection Test in Hokkaido. Its general format is typical of the 59 tests given in the 47 prefectures and 12 municipalities (Aoki et al., 1998).

The written qualification exam

The written qualification exam contains four parts:

Aptitude test

Hokkaido's aptitude test evidently investigates the patience and endurance of the candidates, who complete a set of 25 single-digit addition problems. After one minute, they continue to the next set of 25 numbers. After fifteen sets there is a five-minute break, followed by fifteen more sets. Flagging attention appears in the response pattern, so candidates must be able to pace themselves properly. This portion of the test is dreaded because it is so tiring, pointless and distracting.

General education and pedagogy qualifying test

This multiple choice exam tests basic knowledge of natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities. The more difficult pedagogy section includes questions on school laws and regulations; principles of education; educational psychology and moral education.

Subject area qualifying test

Candidates with the pre-first level of the Eiken test, 520 on the TOEFL, or 650 on the TOEIC are exempted from this portion of the test, which tests high-school level written English.

Essay test

Candidates write an essay in Japanese on a general theme related to education.

The oral qualification exam

The oral qualification exam, administered approximately one month after the written exam (the same day in some prefectures), consists of two interviews in Japanese and an oral test (practical skills) in English.

Individual interview in Japanese

Two examiners interview one candidate for approximately fifteen minutes, with questions ranging from the personal to pedagogic. Because special activities (club activities, guidance, excursions, and school cleaning) are formally addressed as an aspect of the required curriculum, many of the questions concern the personal guidance of pupils (Okihara, 1986).

This interview is crucial in the selection of candidates that appear likely to acculturate into the profession. The interviewers look for evidence of specific character and personality traits as reflected in a suitable appearance and demeanor: neat, polite, energetic, and cheerful. More ominously, Tsuchiya (cited in West, Jarchow & Quisenberry, p.1072) contends that the freedom of thought and of religion have been violated during these interviews.

Governmental preferences for the "type" of person with whom they wish to staff public schools do exist but they *only* [my italics] have a bearing during the interview aspect of the prefectural

teacher-employment examinations Thus, while it is no longer possible to control the training of teachers to ensure that they conform to governmental expectations, a similar end may be achieved through the interview process" (Collins, 1989, p. 225)

Group interview in Japanese

A group is formed of five or six candidates ("Ms A," Ms B" etc.) who are applying for teaching licenses in a variety of subjects. Candidates are given a broad discussion topic such as "school rules," and three examiners (one of whom is from a non-education profession) observe them while they discuss this topic for thirty minutes. The candidates are given no preparation time or ground rules, but they may choose a discussion leader if they wish.

Practical skills test

An English teacher interviews one candidate for ten minutes. After answering simple questions about daily life and teaching, the candidate is given a card with a high-school level written passage. After reading silently for one minute, the candidate reads it aloud and answers questions about the content. Candidates with the pre-first level of the Eiken test, 520 on the TOEFL, or 650 on the TOEIC are exempted from this portion of the interview.

Candidates do not consider this section to be difficult. In fact, one concern is what to do if the candidate's English is far better than the interviewer's.

Demonstration class

Most prefectures (but not Hokkaido) also require the candidate to give a demonstration class.

Candidates receive the results of the Teacher Employment Selection Test in late autumn. Candidates are not informed of the relative weight given to each part of the test, but the interview is rumored to carry the greatest weight. Candidates are not given separate scores for the various sections, but receive a comprehensive score, indicating whether they qualified or not.

Openings for the prefecture's teaching posts are filled in February depending on supply and demand. In Hokkaido, candidates receiving an "A" or "high B" qualification are assigned teaching posts for the following school year and candidates with a low "B" qualification are assigned teaching posts later in the year as they open up. Candidates with a "C" qualification may be given a temporary teacher certificate which is good for three years. Such teachers would teach English courses at one or several schools but would not have other responsibilities.

Conclusion

In this paper I have explained pre-service training and selection of secondary school JTEs graduating from *general* universities only. As this partial survey has indicated, however, Japanese education is not monolithic: pre-service teachers and their training institutions have a wide range of expectations. Other teacher trainers may perceive the Japanese system differently, and I hope that my limited interpretation will provoke more exchange of information.

There are many related issues that I have not touched upon: training at specialized universities of education; in-service training; the impact of assistant language teachers (ALTs) on JTEs development; the impact of the imminent introduction of English at primary schools on teacher training. Other researchers' work in these areas should provide us with a bigger picture of JTE training and its impact on English education in Japan.

Note

Many thanks to my colleagues for patiently answering my many questions and to my students for so generously sharing their experiences.

Author

Suzanne Yonesaka is an associate professor in the Faculty of Humanities at Hokkai Gakuen University in Sapporo, where she coordinates the EFL program and is doing some teacher training. She can be contacted at suzanne@jin.hokkai-s-u.ac.jp.

References

Aoki, K., Arai, A., Ito, M., Satou, H., Shimizu, K., Yaosaka, O. (Eds.). (June, 1998). *Kyouiku deitarando* [A databook of educational statistics]. Tokyo: Jiji Tsushinsha.

Benjamin, G. (1997). *Japanese lessons: A year in a Japanese school through the eyes of an American anthropologist and her children*. New York: New York University.

Browne, C. & Wada, M. (1998). Current issues in high school English teaching in Japan: An exploratory study. *Language Culture and Curriculum* 11(1) 97-112.

Collins, K. (1989). The development of teacher education in Japan 1898 -1980's. *Teaching and Teacher Education* 5 (3), 217-228.

Cummings, W. K. (1980). *Education and equality in Japan*. Princeton, NJ.: Princeton.

Daigaku Eigo Kyuouiku Gakkai Kyouiku Mondai Kenkyuu Kai (1998, February). *Eigoka kyouiku hou zenkoku chousa houkokushou* [Report on a nationwide survey on "Methods in TEFL" courses]. (Available from Japan Association of College English Teachers, 55 Yokoji-machi, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo.)

Gebhard, J. G. & Woo, C. W. (1992). Second language teacher education in Japan. *The Language Teacher* 16 (2), 29-32.

Hawley, C. A. & Hawley, W. D. (1997). The role of universities in the education of Japanese teachers: A distant perspective. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 72 (1), 233-244.

Hokkai Gakuen Daigaku Kyoushoku Iinkai (Eds.) (1998). *Kyoushoku katei risshu youkou* [Handbook for course of studies for teacher-training.] (Available from Hokkai Gakuen University, 4-1-40 Asahi-machi, Toyohira-ku, Sapporo 062 Japan.)

Kobayashi, T. (1993). Japan's teacher education in comparative perspectives. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 68 (3), 4-14.

Kyouin saiyou shiken kenkyukai (Eds.) (Oct. 1998). *Kyouin saiyou shiken Hokkaido ban*. [Study guide for Hokkaido Teacher Employment Test]. Tokyo: Osaka Kyouiku Zushou.

Leonard, T. (1997). Evaluating student teachers' teaching practice. *The Language Teacher*, 21 (6), 39.

Okihara, Y. (1986). The wide-ranging nature of the Japanese curriculum and its implications for teacher-training. *Comparative Education* 22(1) 13-18.

Shimahara, N. K. (1991). Teacher education in Japan. In E. Beauchamp (Ed.), *Windows on Japanese education* (pp. 258-280). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Shimahara, N. K. & Sakai, A. (1995). *Learning to teach in two cultures*. New York: Garland.

Tanaka, M., Uesugi, T., & Shiraishi, Y. (1993). Teacher training in the research university: A survey of teachers' opinions. *Peabody Journal of Education* 8 (3), 58-66.

Tobin, J. (1986). American images of Japanese secondary and higher education. In W. Cummings, E. Beauchamp, S. Ichikawa, V. Kobayashi, & M. Ushioji (Eds.), *Educational policies in crisis: Japanese and American perspectives*. New York: Praeger.

West, B. B., Jarchow, E. & Quisenberry, N. L. (1996). Teacher education research in international settings. In J. Sikula, T. Buttery, & E. Guyton (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teacher education* (2nd ed.) (pp. 1047-1107). New York: Simon and Schuster MacMillan.

Appendix

English-Japanese Glossary

- aptitude test-*tekisei kensa*
- coursework for teaching certification-*kyouiku katei kamoku*
- demonstration class-*mogi jugyou*
- essay test-*ronbun kensa*
- evaluation and reflection-*kansou/hansei*
- first class certificates-*isshu menkyojou*
- general education and pedagogy qualifying test-*kyoyou kensa*
- interview test-*mensetsu kensa*
- observation page-*jugyou nado no kansatsu/sanka no kiroku*
- practical skills test-*jitsugi kensa*
- practicum diary notebook-*kyouiku jissu nikki*
- research class-*kenkyuu jugyou*
- second class certificates-*nisshu menkyojou*
- standard class plan-*hondoki no shidou keikaku*
- student teaching practicum-*kyouiku jissu*
- subject area qualifying test-*kyouka ni kansuru senmon kensa*
- Teacher Employment Selection Test-*kyouin saiyou kouhosha senkou kensa*
- teacher training (education) department-*kyouiku gakka*
- teacher training (education) university-*kyouiku daigaku*
- temporary teacher-*hijoukin*