



## **ENGLISH IN ENGLISH: A SURVEY ON THE SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL 2013 MEXT POLICY**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

In recent months, much has been made of the MEXT-issued 2013 Course of Study, to be introduced in public high schools across Japan, which states that in order “not only to increase opportunities for students to come into contact with English and communicate in it, but also to enhance instruction which allows students to become accustomed to expressing themselves and understanding English in English,” “classes are to be conducted in English, in principle.” As AJET understands, this policy does not mean that using Japanese during English class will be completely prohibited, but rather suggests more focus on student-centred lessons rather than lecture-based English input, and student expression and communication rather than theory and grammar explanations, with more time spent on group activities. Although AJET is aware that the policy is a set of general guidelines to high schools and that they have the final say on how to implement them, we believe that doing so effectively could bring about significant improvements with respect to the team-teaching relationship, the role of ALTs in high schools, and the quality of foreign language instruction.

AJET further believes that the team-teaching relationship is the sound foundation of foreign language education in Japan, with many years of research and experience behind it. AJET is also aware of the similarities between the current guidelines for Oral Communication classes and the changes in teaching styles set forth under the new policy. We believe it would be useful to understand the potential difficulties and advantages of adapting this style of teaching to all English subjects. AJET believes that this could assist schools and JTEs in implementing the policy. Because of this, we would like to provide ALTs and possibly JTEs with appropriate resources and materials to encourage fluid implementation of the new guidelines.

This report will explore the following areas:

- Senior high school ALTs’ current understanding of the policy
- Suggestions on how to better inform ALTs on the guidelines
- The ALTs’ position within the new policy, including their role in school and in team-teaching lessons
- ALTs’ concerns with the policy
- Avenues for ALT participation when implementing the policy
- Discuss what (if any) training ALTs will receive in order to implement the policy



## **METHOD**

The data and analysis for this report is based on an on-line survey of 232 senior high school ALTs conducted in February and March 2011. No CIRs, junior high school or elementary school ALTs took the survey. Of those JETs that took the survey, 41.1% of them were 1st years, 26% were 2nd, 17.7% were 3rd, 8.9% were 4th and 6.3% were 5th. At the end of the survey, respondents were invited to read AJET's English translation of the relevant section of the Course of Study Explanation issued by MEXT in December 2009 (see Appendix).

## **PURPOSE**

One of AJET's most important goals is to promote the objectives of the JET Programme, including the improvement of foreign language education in Japan. We believe that one of the most effective ways to do this is to promote understanding of MEXT policy on the part of JET Programme participants, and to convey the opinions and desires of JET Programme participants to MEXT.

Also, bearing in mind that, as implementation of the new Course of Study is still two years off, some JETs may be unfamiliar with or misinformed about the new policy, AJET would like to begin promoting accurate understanding of it at an early stage, as well as providing a reference point for future reports on progress towards and beyond its implementation.

This report also aims to test the hypothesis that JET and JTE understanding of the policy could lead to a reduction in ALT underuse and an increase in teaching time for ALTs and their participation in extracurricular activities. ALT underuse is an often-raised theme, most recently in the 'Making the Most of Your Time on JET' report from May 2010 which found that many ALTs were not teaching anywhere near the standard of 3 classes a day.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **ALT opinion of the policy**

When surveyed, 33.5% of all ALTs strongly agreed that English classes in principle should be solely conducted in English. 40.7% agreed. Although this is not the objective of the policy, these percentages are encouraging. They suggest that ALTs would be a positive force in implementing the policy in schools. Later in this report, we will discuss the ways in which an ALT could support a JTE in the changes in the classroom.

### **Understanding of the Policy**

From the survey results we have discovered that although many ALTs are aware of the policy, some are confused about their role within, and whether their job description will change.

AJET provided ALTs with a translation of the policy in the survey, and we were pleased by the high percentage of ALTs that were already aware of it. However, 38.2% of the ALTs surveyed replied that they had either heard of it and knew nothing about it, or that they hadn't



heard of it at all. On top of this, although 61.8% of ALTs claimed to understand the policy, 64.5% of them believed that its main goal is to limit the Japanese spoken by the JTE in class.

It is AJET's understanding that MEXT has not advised JTEs to only use English during class time, but in fact it is at their discretion, based on the English abilities of the students, to use as much as they see possible. AJET also believes that the policy has a broader goal than increasing English exposure, by focusing on the teaching style - activity-based, student-focused lessons (leaning on communication and expression) rather than lecture-style, teacher-focused lessons (studying theoretical English and grammar).

Part of the lack of understanding could be due to the information sources. 21.5% of ALTs heard about the policy from other ALTs, possibly leading to miscommunication or misunderstanding. The highest percentage is hearing of the policy from JTEs (36.1%), which could also mean that facts are being lost in translation. 100% of JETs that had heard of the policy from their JTEs assumed the guidelines were to limit the Japanese spoken by JTEs. This could be part of the reason that ALTs are unaware of how the policy could affect them, and whether they have a role in it at all.

It is also enlightening to see that 8.3% of ALTs learned about the policy through their own research. This shows the interest of the ALT in the development of English education in schools. A Hiroshima ALT commented after conducting independent research through articles and the Internet:

*'I thought the idea was to make the English classroom a sort of English-only zone, for teachers and students, aside from the occasional unavoidable Japanese explanation of something complex.'*

This reveals a larger understanding of the policy perhaps than ALTs who have heard through other avenues. AJET believes that the Programme should respond accordingly to this interest and provide ALTs with informative explanations of their role within the policy. By supplying reliable sources and information for ALTs on the new policy and their position within it, we could encourage further independent research. AJET would be willing to use our various resources for distributing this information if the Ministries were able to provide it.

## **Suggestions**

If MEXT could provide AJET with reliable sources of information such as a detailed explanation of the Course of Study translated in English, we could write up an update for our website, Facebook page and distribute the information via block representatives.

AJET also suggests that workshops or question-and-answer sessions at the Mid-Year Conference or Team-Teaching Seminars would also help understanding. In fact, some prefectures have already taken the initiative and have presented workshops at their Mid-Year Conferences on the policy: Saga, Fukui, Hiroshima, Hyogo, Kyoto and Kumamoto were some of these. Requesting materials used to explain the guidelines or discovering what was successful and what was not in these seminars would help MEXT determine the level of explanation needed. AJET are able to contact and speak to the PAs that help organise these prefectures' seminars if MEXT would appreciate such data.

## **ALT position within the new policy**

AJET believes that although the position of ALTs in their school differs with every case, the policy could affect the situation that they are in now. AJET would like to understand the ways in which the ministries think the ALT might be affected.

Presently, 58.9% ALTs are leading their team-teaching classes. Of these, 40.2% say more than 80% of their class is taught in English. As leader, the ALT is probably responsible for explaining activities and planning lessons, thereby encouraging the high amount of English spoken in class. AJET believes that as a native speaker of English, it is part of an ALT's role to expand the amount of English used in and out of the classroom to expose the students to it as much as possible. The JTE may use Japanese as a back-up in class, but only as a support to the English-speaking ALT. A Fukuoka ALT provided us an example of their current style:

*'The JTE speaks mostly in Japanese. Also, the ALT will ask for the students to translate instructions/passages into Japanese to confirm that they understand.'*

This is a common description of the team-teaching style in low level schools and it has proved to be a mainstay of team-teaching classes.

However, AJET suggests that if JTEs believe that they should speak as much English as possible in class, then the position of the ALT might change. They may not continue to be the main English speaker in class. If the JTE also speaks as much English as possible, then a new balance in the team-teaching relationship will need to be established. The role of the native speaker may shift from general exposure to English to specialised focus on intonation or pronunciation. If this is true, then ALTs should be aware of how things might change within their school.

On top of this, team-teaching lessons are often set aside from other teaching lessons. One Nara ALT said:

*'The TT classes at my school vary a lot by grade, but none of them have a textbook...and its the ALT who is primarily responsible for the curriculum. We do have some English conversation textbooks available to look at for ideas, as well as the 1st year grammar book to see if we can tie the two together...but [their use is] totally optional.'*

Although perhaps not the ideal style, this is certainly not an isolated response. Team-teaching often focuses more on international understanding, dialects and cultural differences and similarities. The team-teaching lessons are separated from the set high school curriculum and focus on subjects not covered in other classes. AJET strongly hopes that the new policy will provide an opportunity for ALTs like this one to take on further responsibilities in classes in all English subjects as part of a kind of team teaching-oriented curriculum, in addition to the cultural exchange opportunities that they bring to the classroom.

### **ALT concerns with the new policy**

Although ALTs are very much in favour of the new policy guidelines, they share some concerns with the JTEs as to its implementation. AJET believes part of the anxiety ALTs feel about the policy is due to their lack of understanding and their confusion on what their role will be.



ALTs say that the average team-teaching class is presently only taught 60% in English. Although this may at first seem a relatively low percentage, AJET believes that this is due to the large range of schools. Overall, the amount of English spoken in low-level high schools or commercial/technical high schools is lower than high-level high schools or "Super English Language High" (SELHi) schools. However, when looking at a particular case study from a Hokkaido ALT, AJET was surprised to find that high-level high schools can also have classes that were taught in a majority of Japanese.

*'In Oral Communication, the JTE and I try to use only English. All of our activity instructions and class commands are in English, but the JTE tends to give test instructions and important announcements in Japanese. If the students speak to us in Japanese, my replies are in English, but the JTE sometimes uses Japanese when asked a difficult grammar question. In general, 90% of what the JTE and I say is in English, but little of what the students say is in English. Students are the ones that who prompt us to use Japanese, because they will tell us they don't understand (in Japanese).*

*In Writing, the JTE speaks nearly only Japanese and I speak nearly only English. The JTE does most of the talking, and thus initiates the Japanese use. In general, the instruction is probably 70% Japanese. Students rarely speak English outside of being told to read their responses or being forced to use English as part of the activity.*

*In our ALT-lead elective class, the JTE and I both try to speak only English, but the JTE must offer hints and translations if the students do not understand, so probably 80% of the instruction is in English. We do many projects, so the instructions are often complex, requiring more Japanese translations. The JTE usually gives translations whenever he thinks it is necessary (which is NOT automatically after every English instruction).'*

From this study it is clear that the level of English exposure depends on the topic of English being taught and as the case study shows, the ALT uses English as much as possible in class time. However, in writing classes 70% of the lesson is taught in Japanese, even with the ALT present. This highlights the concerns of ALTs that with the current levels of English used in some classes, the policy would be extremely difficult to implement.

67.1% of ALTs claim that JTEs translate automatically if they assume that the level of English spoken by the ALT is too difficult. AJET believes that this is a time-consuming and detrimental to the students' confidence and understanding of English. A Hokkaido ALT informed us:

*'I think it's crucial to give important instructions and announcements in English. Otherwise, the students know they can be lazy and not listen to English and only pay attention when Japanese is spoken...'*

ALTs have shown concern that sometimes Japanese translations are offered too readily, causing the students to lose focus on the English explanations, or wait for an automatic Japanese translation. AJET believes that for the policy to be successful, it is vital for students, ALTs and JTEs alike to only use Japanese translation as a last resort.

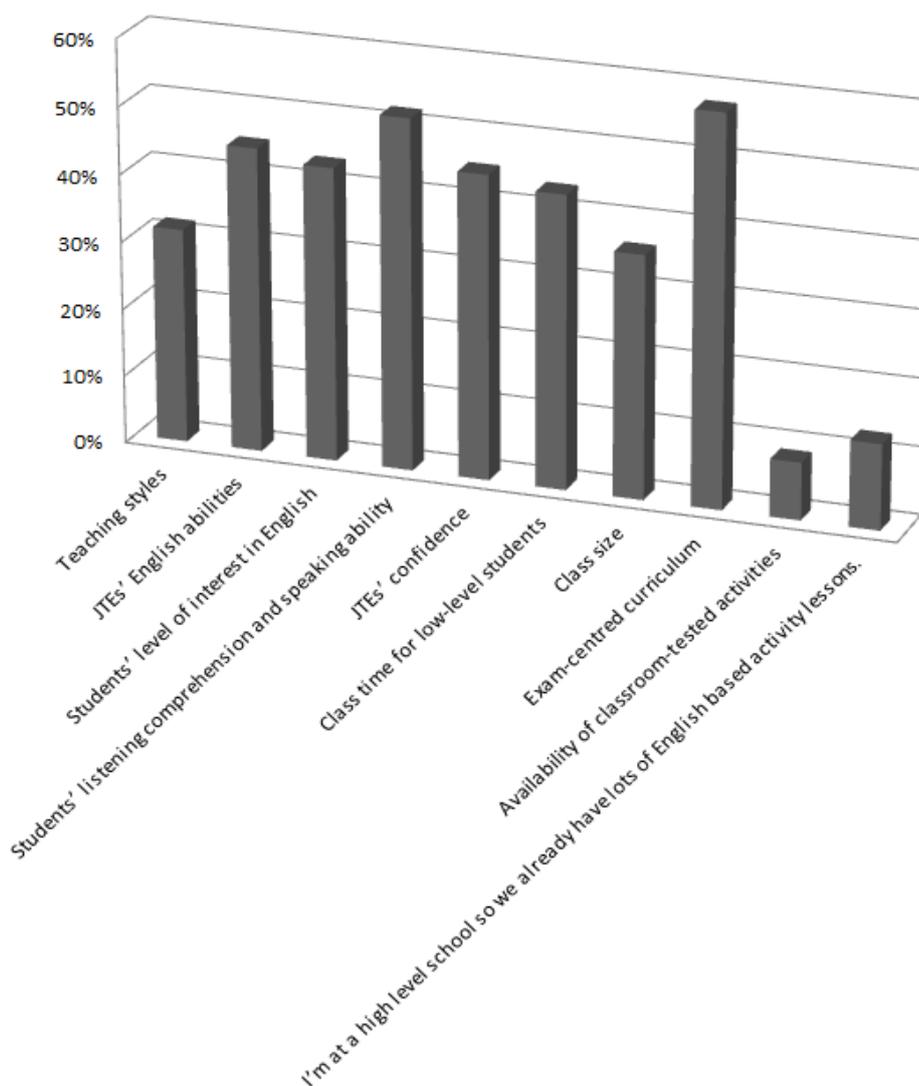
However, in schools where 80% to 95% of a team-teaching lesson was taught in English, 100% of the ALTs reported that they occasionally ask for translation when a point cannot be understood. Although there are concerns about time constraints on lessons and class size, perhaps with the introduction of the new policy guidelines this style will be more successful in encouraging students to practice their English rather than wait for an automatic translation. One Yamaguchi ALT explains how ALTs and JTEs can explain activities without relying on

Japanese:

*'We never explain the rules of our games in Japanese. The JTE and I just sit...down in a group, and pretend we are students while everyone watches what we do [as an example].'*

This is a common example of the advantages of a team-teaching relationship. By providing an example of the activity, the JTE and ALT are able to explain to the students without reliance on Japanese. AJET believes that a style such as this would be easily encouraged in other topics of English. For example, in a writing lesson, an ALT can provide a written example in English for the students to use as a model.

Below is the breakdown of ALT concerns with the introduction of the new policy.



51.9% of ALTs are ultimately concerned with the level of their students' listening and comprehension levels. AJET understands that this policy has been introduced to apply more focus on speaking and listening rather than reading and writing. However, current student comprehension levels, coupled with an introduction of a new style of teaching for many

could dishearten teachers, ALTs and students alike, and lead to mediocre attempts to continue.

Following this, 31.1% of ALTs also commented that current teaching styles were a concern. As AJET understands it, the new policy will lead to some older teaching techniques being limited in the classroom. Focus will shift from lecture-based classes focusing on the teacher, to student-based classes with activities and a more varied approach to the use of spoken English. If this is the case, then ALTs and JTEs alike may need more training.

### Suggestions

AJET suggests that the ministries provide further explanation to ALTs on how the policy transition will be suggested in schools of varying levels of English ability, and what their position within this policy will be. We suggest a comprehensive guide (in the style of the team-teaching handbook) to the relationship between team-teaching and the new policy.

AJET believes that for the policy to be successful in team-teaching lessons, a gradual introduction to the new guidelines will be needed, especially in low level schools. One example would be giving schools a long-term timeline of the future goals of the guidelines.

### ALTs contribution to the introduction of the policy.

As mentioned before, we believe that the current team-teaching training that ALTs receive at Tokyo Orientation and in prefectural team-teaching seminars appears to correspond with the new guidelines. Presently, 99% of ALTs teach Oral Communication, which by definition usually focuses on activity-based classes including a large amount of English speaking and listening.

One Yamaguchi ALT provided us with a breakdown of her usual team-teaching lesson style:

*{Our} lessons are more task-based. We usually start with a 10 min warm up activity or game, such as telephone, or race to the board (and write the answer). The meat of the lesson will be ALT/JTE showing what we will do, and then having the students do it. [An] example [of this] is our Valentines Day [lesson]. I printed out 10 pictures of famous girls/guys (and some of my friends for fun) and wrote out descriptions of them. What they like. What they don't like. Like a [match.com](http://match.com) kind of description (an online dating site). All the information was hidden throughout the room, or tacked up on the walls. Each girls group had to find all the information on all the boys, and each boys group had to find all the information about the girls. Only two people per group can be up looking for the information. The answer/fill in the blank sheet must be left with the group, so that the people standing must verbally communicate the information to the writers. Their homework assignment that week to write a love letter to one of the people of their choosing.*

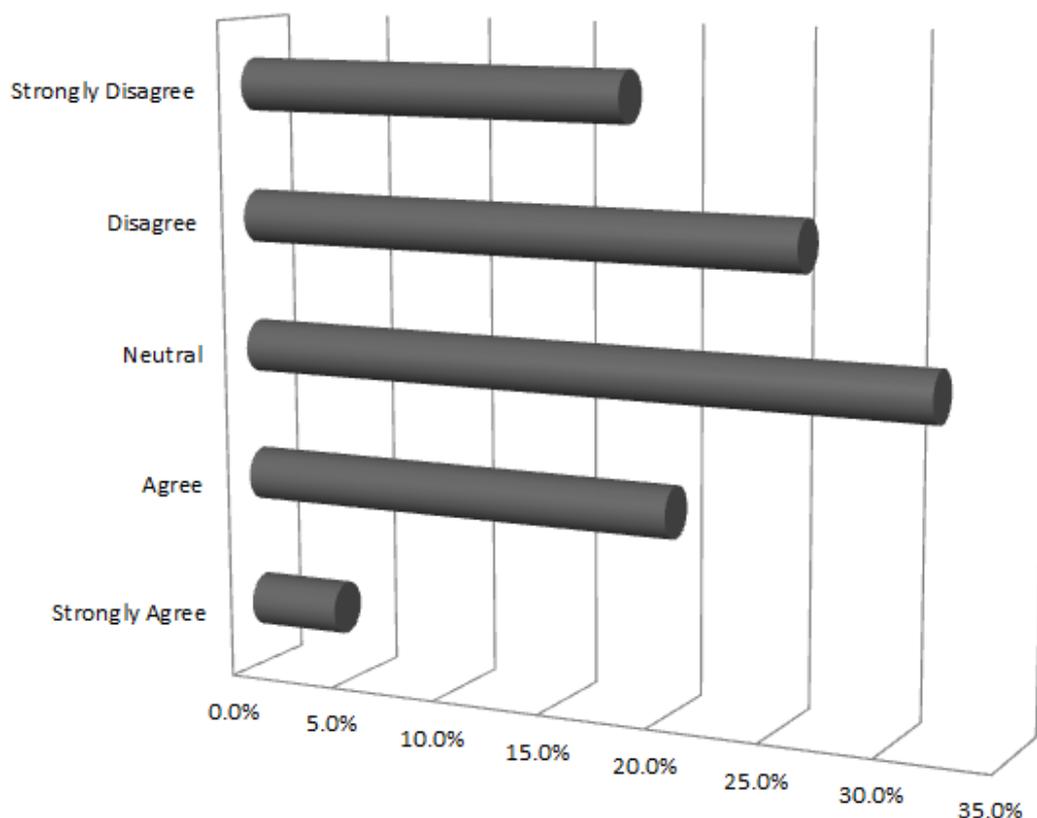
This explanation of a task-based lesson appears to correspond with the new guidelines. Therefore, AJET suggests that ALTs and the team-teaching style be utilised in other topics of English teaching to encourage a smooth transition to the new policy.

Currently, 54.4% of ALTs are already teaching writing lessons, 45.1% are teaching reading and over 70% of ALTs are confident that the new guidelines could be applied to these topics. These are encouraging percentages, suggesting that the team-teaching style classes are already being utilised in many schools for topics other than oral communication. It also highlights ALTs' willingness to be part of the transition, if utilised correctly.

Supporting the possibility of JETs helping in the transition is that over half of the ALTs surveyed are leading their team-teaching classes. This shows their experience of teaching in English and suggests that they have good insights on how to solve transitional issues. Combining ALT insight with JTE experience and theoretical education could minimize student and teacher anxiety. Corresponding to this, many JETs commented in the survey for the report 'Making the Most of your Time on JET' that they didn't feel utilised as well as they could; many said they spent a lot of time sitting at their desk. An ALT (who didn't specify their prefecture) commented that they felt that their Oral Communication lessons were taught too infrequently: *'One class every two weeks simply does not suffice.'*

With the new guidelines, ALTs could perhaps increase their lesson time and be utilised in other classes other than Oral Communication - not necessarily in the full team-teaching style, but at least as support for the students and the JTE.

Some ALTs also commented on the 'Making the Most of your Time on JET' report that they were not considered a teacher by other teachers and team-teaching classes were often treated as comic relief or time out from the strict English schedule of other classes. However, if ALTs could be involved with more classes and perhaps encouraged to share opinions on the policy, then they will be able to contribute more to the school and gain more job satisfaction.





Presently, 38.8% of ALTs surveyed believe that they have had adequate training in the present team-teaching style. However, 55.4% of ALTs either feel neutral or disagree that they have had adequate training.

We believe with the right instruction and with co-operation between the COs, ALTs, schools and JTEs, the new guidelines could be introduced without causing anxiety and stress to teachers used to a different style of teaching.

### **Suggestions**

AJET suggests that JTEs be provided with examples of how ALT-supported lessons could ease anxieties of students and schools alike in regards to the policy. Also, a guide for ALTs on how they could assist JTEs in the implementation would be a useful resource. AJET also suggests that at Tokyo Orientation, Mid-Year Conferences and Team-Teaching seminars, the ministries, BOEs and PAs could offer examples and training in regards to implementing the policy.

We recommend more time spent at the Tokyo Orientations on the team-teaching styles. Although it is vitally important to know the ideal team-teaching style, a workshop on common problems in the classroom and in a team-teaching relationship, and solutions to these problems would also be useful.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, AJET is interested in ways in which the JET Programme can contribute to the implementation of this policy, with a view to working more closely with the Ministries in developing the Japanese education system in the future. The ALTs believe that the policy is definitely a positive shift in the teaching of English education, and therefore are willing to support and be a useful resource for JTEs in a time of transition. Keeping the ALTs informed with well distributed information about developments, and suggestions for ALTs at mid year conferences on how best to be involved would allow ALTs to contribute positively through English exposure and to help overcome lack of confidence within the students. It would also help to dispel any anxieties the ALT may have about their role within the school, therefore contributing to the smooth running of the JET Programme too. A combination of JTE experience with the Japanese education system and the students themselves, and ALT insight and experience through teaching in a foreign language and team teaching, would also contribute to the research in how well the transition will be received by students. AJET believes that the MEXT policy will be widely well received at introduction, and is excited to cooperate with the ministries in the development of English teaching in Japan.

### **Appendix: excerpts from the 2013 Course of Study and Explanation issued by MEXT December 2009 (English translations by AJET)**

From the Course of Study

Regarding English classes, in view of each subject's special characteristics, in order to expand opportunities for students to come into contact with English, and make classes into sites of real communication, classes are to be conducted in English, in principle. In doing so, due consideration is to be given to using English that takes into account the level of students' understanding.

#### From the Explanation

The phrase "Classes are to be conducted in English, in principle" should be taken to signify that by means not only of teachers conducting class in English, but also of students using as much English as possible in class, the conducting of language activities in English is to be made the focus of the class. The objective of this is not only to increase opportunities for students to come into contact with English and communicate in it, but also to enhance instruction which allows students to become accustomed to expressing themselves and understanding English in English.

The phrase "each English subject's 'special characteristics'" refers to making the acquisition of that particular linguistic skill the objective. However, the opportunities to use English necessary to acquire these skills are extremely limited in the course of Japanese students' daily lives. From the above, in classes in each subject, it is necessary to take due care that English-Japanese/Japanese-English translations and grammar instruction not become the focus, and to expand opportunities to come into contact with and communicate in English.

In class, the teacher gives explanations, instruction and demonstration of how students are to conduct activities, assists students in understanding so that activities go smoothly, and provides criticism and encouragement regarding students' performance. Conducting class in English means that instruction such as the above is also to be done in English. It is important, rather than to give only simple directions in English, to ensure that the class is conducted in English—for example, by rephrasing sentences into simpler language when explaining or assisting students in understanding.

In order to make language activities the focus of the class, with regard to reading, it is necessary to incorporate as many activities as possible in which students widely read English passages appropriate to their level of understanding, attempt to grasp the main points, and summarize rather than translate. With regard to writing, it is necessary to incorporate as many activities as possible in which students read, paraphrase in English what they have read, then write compositions based on the themes of their reading. Even when doing English-Japanese translations, it is important to conduct activities where students must sort out what content is important and devise ways to convey it using words and phrases which they know. Further, it is important to incorporate a balance of speaking, listening, writing, and reading activities in lesson plans for all Foreign Language subjects.

If it is found that instruction in English subjects is leaning toward explanation of grammar, the teacher should make an effort to revise these practices and to incorporate experiential language activities into class. As previously mentioned, consideration is to be given to effectively relating grammar to activities conducted in English. From the above, if language activities are the focus of the class, switching to Japanese for grammar explanations can be considered. In order to conduct class in "English that takes into account the level of students' understanding," it is important to give due consideration to factors such as word

selection and rapidity of speech. In particular, when students' communication ability is a concern, the teacher must make efforts to adequately grasp their level of understanding and give due consideration to speaking slowly and using simple English. Even in a case where a student cannot understand the teacher's explanation or instructions and the teacher switches to instruction in Japanese, bearing in mind the provision that in principle, classes are to be conducted in English, it is still important to strive to expand instruction which helps students become accustomed to the use of English.

In this way, this provision emphasizes the need to conduct class in English in order to expand opportunities for students to come into contact with English and to make classes into sites of real communication. However, it does not mean that without fail classes must be conducted entirely in English. If language activities are indeed the focus of the class, when necessary, even switching to Japanese to conduct the class can be considered.

Moreover, the emphasis of instruction for spoken and written communication is different. With spoken communication, it is important to convey meaning in a limited time, and so it is necessary to instruct students to speak and converse in ways that prioritize the flow of the class. Therefore, teachers may wish to take the approach of correctly rephrasing any language whose meaning may not be clear, taking care not to undermine students' positive attitude toward attempting spoken communication. On the other hand, precise and appropriate language becomes more important in written communication, and the teacher may take a much more exacting stance in correcting students' written errors and vague expressions in order to improve their ability to use grammar and vocabulary.

## **QUESTION**

1. As stated, the policy has been widely well received by the ALT community. What are ministries' opinions on the appropriate role of the ALT within the policy, and how would they suggest that ALTs offer support to their JTEs?
2. AJET is aware that the guidelines have been announced officially, that further explanations have been offered by MEXT, and that BOEs, schools and JTEs are to use their own discretion when implementing the policy. Apart from issuing the Course of Study, what measures will MEXT take in order to promote the policy?

Follow up

- a. How does MEXT measure progress towards implementation of the Course of Study?
  - b. From the survey results, we understand that one of the largest concerns for ALTs is their students' comprehension of English. Has MEXT planned a timeline for the complete integration of the policy within high schools? How will MEXT assist local authorities that face difficulties?
3. Beyond theoretical guidance such as that in the Course of Study, what additional practical training have/will JTEs receive in order to adapt their current teaching practices to compliment the 2013 policy?

Follow up

- a. This policy will be introduced to a fresh year of ALTs and AJET understands that it has already been discussed at this year's Tokyo Orientation. How does MEXT intend to provide



training/resources to current ALTs in accordance with the training and guidance JTEs will receive?

Follow up

b. Have the proposed changes to this year's in-service training seminars for JET ALTs been finalized? If so, how do they reflect the 2013 Course of Study? If not, when can we expect them, and will they?

4. The MEXT-published Handbook for Team Teaching was revised in 2002 in accordance with changes to the Course of Study for 2003. Does MEXT plan to revise the Handbook for Team Teaching to reflect the significant changes to the Course of Study for 2013?

Follow up

How so or why not?

5. AJET is concerned that students may struggle with the significant differences between the way English classes are to be conducted under the new guidelines in comparison with the lecture-based style of other subjects. What problems, if any, does MEXT foresee given these differences?

6. What immediate suggestions do the Ministries have for current ALTs to prepare their students for the transition?

7. What suggestions do the Ministries have for future AJET National Councils to help promote successful implementation of this policy?