



JETs and Japanese

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JETs AND JAPANESE

REPORT CONTRIBUTORS

SURVEY AND REPORT COORDINATOR

Rachel Brisson
Project Manager

REPORT CONTRIBUTORS

CJ Fischer
Chair

Rachel Boellstorff
Vice Chair

Giuseppe Di Martino
*Translation and Interpreting
Coordinator*

Sara-Jane Seery
*Director of Alumni
Resources*

Pierce Langdon
Website Coordinator

Olivia Retter
Block 4 Representative

Ellie Murphy
Block 9 Representative

Rebekah Lan
Block 7 Representative

Surie Vixaysakd
Block 2 Representative

TRANSLATION LEADER

Giuseppe Di Martino
*Translation and Interpreting
Coordinator*

TRANSLATION ASSISTANCE

Frank J/E Spinelli
Nicholas Kontje
Rachel Lam
Michiko Yoshino

LAYOUT AND DESIGN

Rachel Brisson
Project Manager

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report analyses the language level, utilisation of resources, and goals of JET Programme participants in regards to the Japanese language. This analysis was made possible by collecting responses to questions regarding exposure to the Japanese language before joining the JET Programme, participation in and motivation for taking the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT), utilisation of CLAIR's various Japanese study opportunities, support of Japanese language learning by Contracting Organisations, and the use of Japanese in everyday life.

The survey for this report was open to responses from the entire current JET Programme community from October 30, 2017 to November 12, 2017. In total, 1225 – or approximately 24% – of current JET Programme participants participated in the survey.

Before participating in the JET Programme, 27% of respondents had taken Japanese classes at a university level while 35% stated they had either a Japanese language major or minor upon graduation. In contrast, about 14% of participants come to Japan with no Japanese language background at all.

The JLPT is currently the most popular measure of Japanese ability today. However, a vast majority of JET Programme participants had not taken the exam before coming to Japan. On the JET Programme, nearly half of 2nd – 5th year respondents have taken at least one of the JLPT levels. The vast majority of survey respondents say they do plan to take the JLPT, at any level, citing professional development as their greatest motivation.

CLAIR graciously offers Japanese language courses, a Translation and Interpretation course, and a grant for participants who pass the JLPT N3. Over half of respondents have participated in at least one of CLAIR's language courses. Few have participated in the Translation and Interpretation course, but some respondents note that they would like the course to be open to more participants. Only a handful of 2nd – 5th year respondents report that they received the JLPT N3 grant, but the majority of respondents would be interested in grants for other levels of the JLPT.

Contracting Organisations can help support participants with their study of Japanese. A minority of respondents say their Contracting Organisation provides language classes, study references, or study leave.

Most JET Programme participants recognise a significant improvement in their current Japanese communication abilities compared with their communication abilities before joining the JET Programme. Solo study materials for Japanese are available to most respondents, but in-person study opportunities are not widely available for respondents.

Overall, Japanese language ability is a significant component of the JET Programme experience. Participants with various levels of Japanese come to Japan and become more effective in their work through improving these communication skills. Increasing the Japanese language learning support made available would not only improve the quality of life for JET Programme participants, but it would increase their efficacy as teachers, employees, and cultural ambassadors.

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INTRODUCTION

Many JET Programme participants, having gone to such lengths to live and work in Japan, have some knowledge of Japanese. There is also extra incentive for participants to study Japanese while in their placements due to interacting with native Japanese speakers in their workplaces and daily lives. Further study of Japanese helps to build bonds in participants' local communities, as well as helping participants to better integrate into their workplaces.

The goal of this survey is to provide both an examination of JET Programme participants' experiences with Japanese language study, and to offer suggestions to interested parties as to how to better facilitate this learning. By doing this, the AJET National Council hopes to empower JET Programme participants in their study of the Japanese language.

METHODOLOGY

The data used in this report came from a survey conducted by the Association for Japan Exchange and Teaching (AJET) over a period of 14 days, from October 30, 2017 to November 12, 2017. The survey was distributed to current JET Programme participants using an online survey development tool. The survey consisted of 44 questions that were written in English and Japanese. Questions were written in a variety of formats including yes/no, multiple choice, free response, and rating on a scale. The topics covered in the survey included demographic data on respondents, experiences with the Japanese language before and during the JET Programme, Japanese language learning assistance offered by Contracting Organisations (COs), and the utilisation of CLAIR Japanese language learning resources. For the purposes of this report, survey percentages have been rounded to the nearest first decimal point.

SURVEY SAMPLE

This survey collected responses from a total of 1,225 JET Programme participants, equivalent to approximately 23.7% of the total current JET Programme population in Japan. Of these respondents, 1,147 (93.6%) identified themselves as JET Programme Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) and 77 (6.29%) as JET Programme Coordinators for International Relations (CIRs). There was one response from a Sports Exchange Advisor (SEA). These results are congruent with the overall breakdown of JET Programme participants: 91.3% are ALTs, 8.6% are CIRs, and less than 0.1% are SEAs.

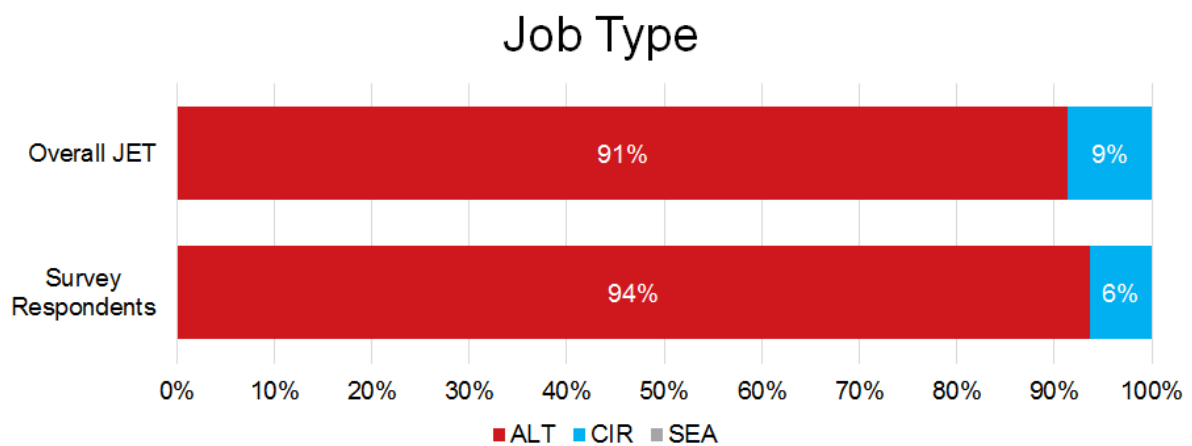


Chart 1

The largest proportion of respondents indicated that they are in their first year on the JET Programme (40.33%), with second and third year participants the next most populous groups (29.7% and 16.7% respectively). Overall, the results are comparable to the entire JET Programme participant population.

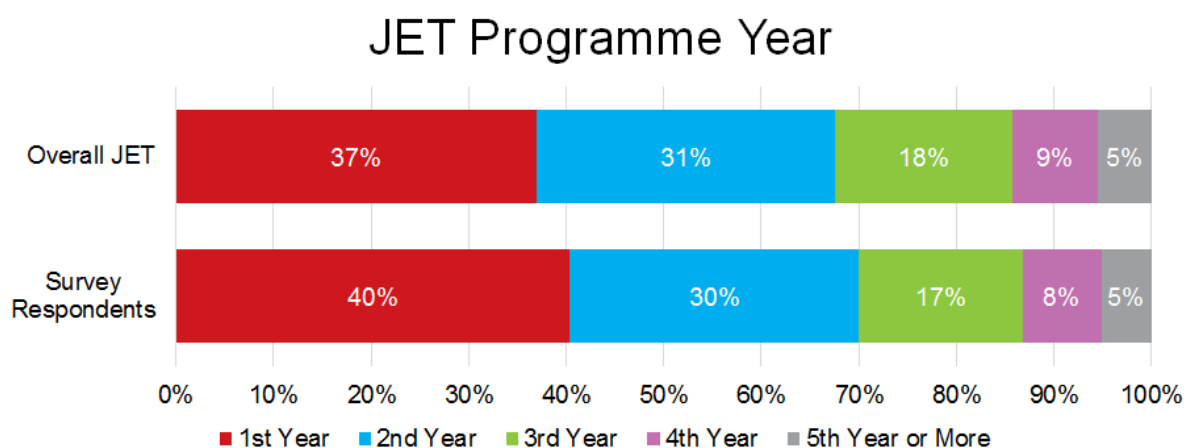


Chart 2

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

PREVIOUS JAPANESE LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE

JET Programme participants arrive in Japan with a variety of Japanese language experience. In the following section, respondents’ pre-JET Programme experiences with Japanese language study, communicative abilities in Japanese, and attempting the JLPT will be discussed.

JAPANESE LANGUAGE STUDY

Most respondents reported that they had studied Japanese before joining the JET Programme. Many reported studying Japanese at the university level, with “some university classes” (26.9%), followed by “Japanese Language major at a university” (21.7%) and “Japanese Language minor at a university” (13.1%). Only 14.3% of respondents said they had not studied Japanese prior to joining the JET Programme.

Highest Level of Japanese Studied Before the JET Programme

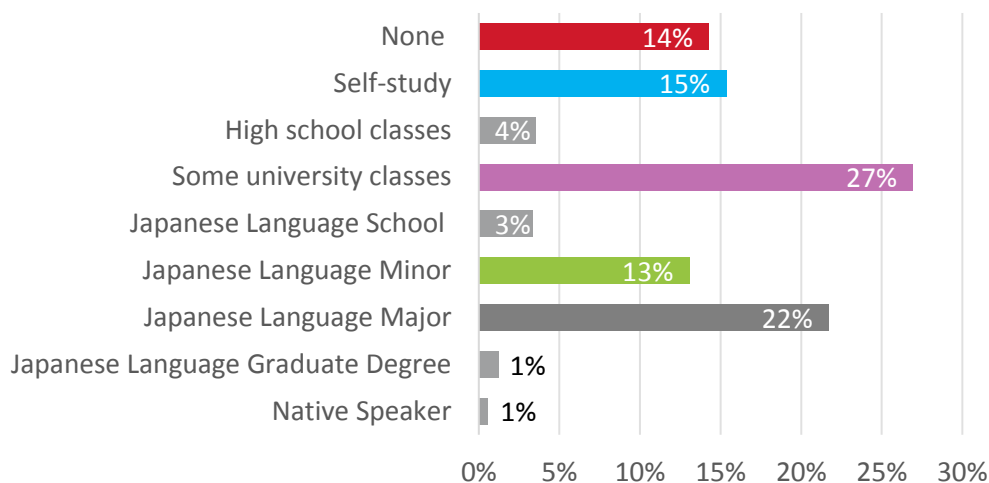


Chart 3

JAPANESE COMMUNICATION ABILITIES BEFORE THE JET PROGRAMME

Respondents’ prior exposure to Japanese is also reflected in their pre-JET Programme Japanese communication abilities. Respondents were asked to rate their level of Japanese communication before joining the JET Program. Some respondents (27.8%) felt they knew a moderate level of Japanese, while 24.1% felt they knew some basic Japanese. Only 13.6% said they could not communicate in Japanese, and 2.0% said they were fluent.

Japanese Communication Abilities Before the JET Programme

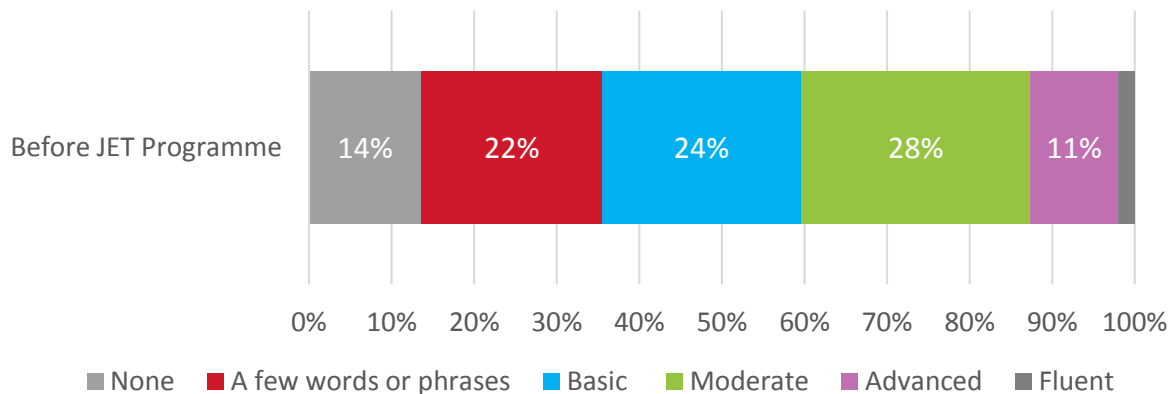


Chart 4

THE JLPT BEFORE THE JET PROGRAMME

Despite respondents' overwhelming familiarity with the Japanese language, few took the JLPT before becoming JET Programme participants. Most respondents (78.9%) say they did not take any level of the JLPT before becoming participants. Five percent of respondents say they had taken a level of the JLPT, but had not passed. While most respondents had not attempted any level of the JLPT before becoming participants, the N2 seemed to be the most passed exam among participants before the Programme, with 5.4% of respondents saying they had passed it. The other levels of the JLPT had less than 5% of respondents attempt or pass them before joining the JET Programme.

Highest JLPT Level Attempted Before the JET Programme

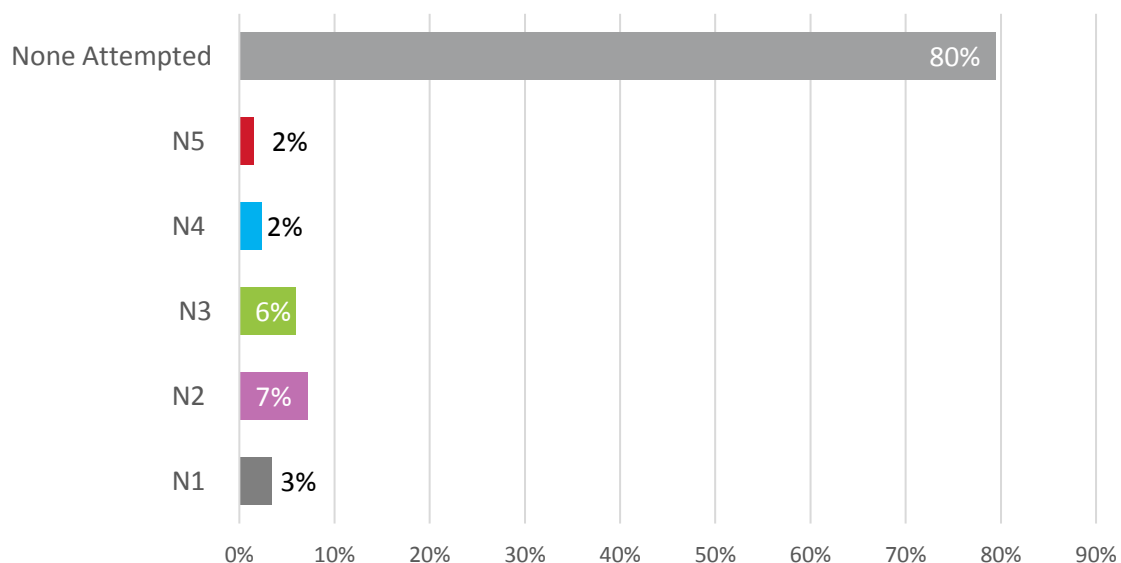


Chart 5

Highest JLPT Level Passed Before the JET Programme

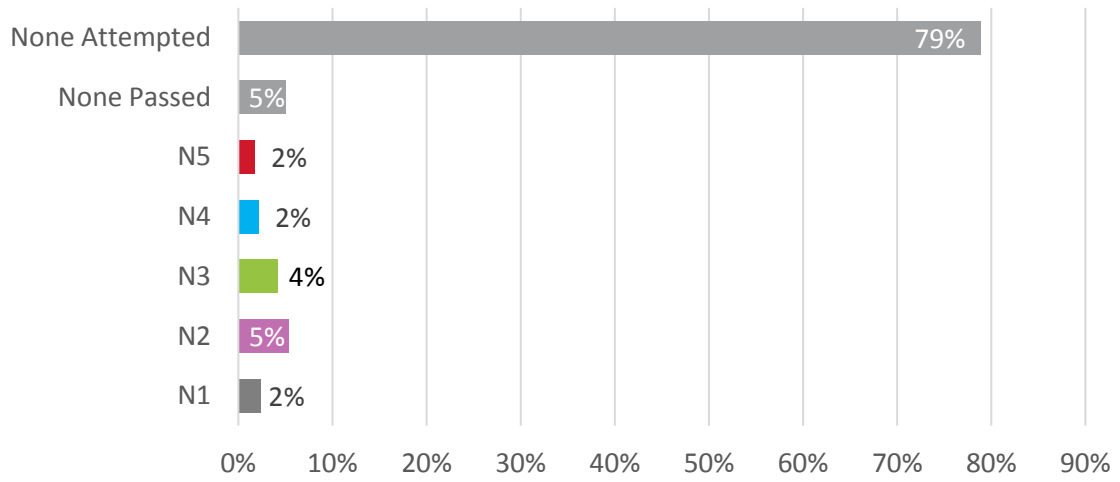


Chart 6

THE JLPT WHILE ON THE PROGRAMME

While in their placements, JET Programme participants have the opportunity to study for and take the JLPT. Below are some insights into respondents' taking the JLPT while on the JET Programme, their motivations for doing so, and reasons why some participants do not plan to take the JLPT.

TEST LEVELS TAKEN AND PASSED BY PARTICIPANTS

The JLPT provides participants with measurable results of their Japanese study. First year participants at the time of the survey had not had the opportunity to take any level of the JLPT since starting their time on the JET Programme. Thus, examining 2nd – 5th year respondents (725 respondents) shows how participants approach the JLPT. About half of 2nd – 5th year respondents say they have not taken any level of the JLPT while on the JET Programme. The most attempted exams were the N3 (14.5%), the N2 (14.3%), and the N4 (8.0%). Some respondents (14.2%) took a level of the JLPT and did not pass their attempted level. The N3 and N2 are the most commonly passed exams on the JET Programme among 2nd – 5th year respondents (12.1% and 9.8% respectively). The N4 also has 6.2% of 2nd – 5th year respondents passing it.

Highest Level of the JLPT Attempted
While on the JET Programme
(2nd – 5th Year Respondents)

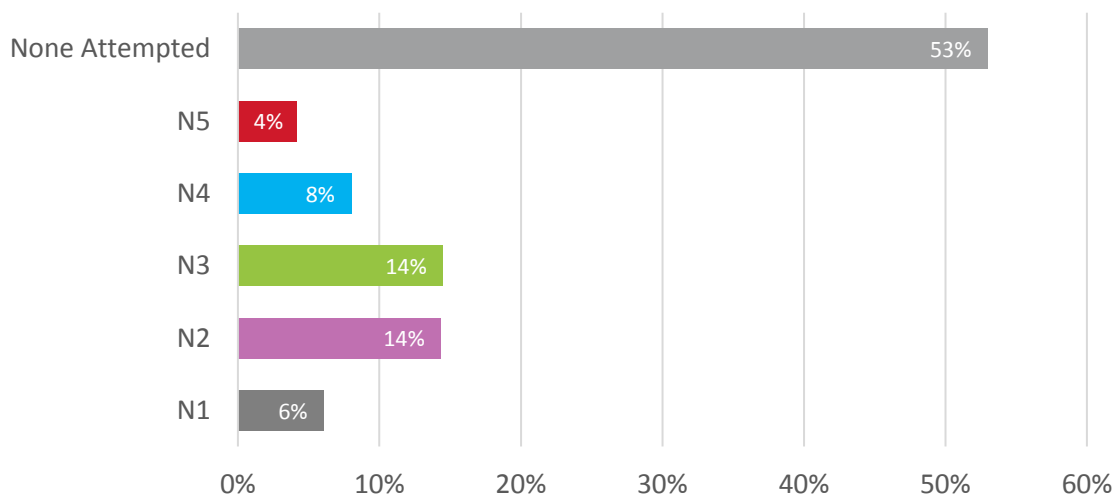


Chart 7

Highest Level of the JLPT Passed
While on the JET Programme
(2nd – 5th Year Respondents)

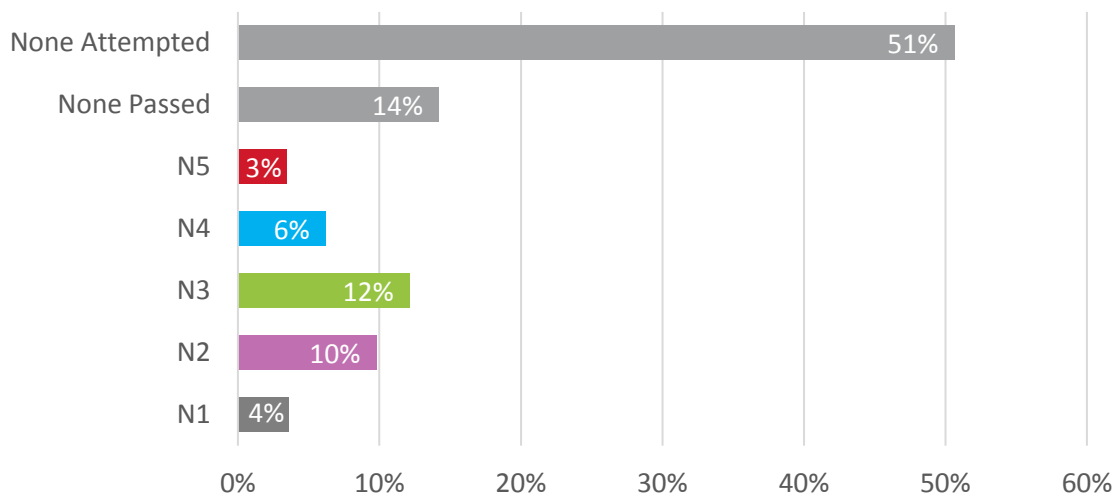


Chart 8

MOTIVATIONS FOR TAKING THE JLPT

Examining the overall responses, 79.4% of respondents say they plan to take at least one level of the JLPT while on the JET Programme, and 20.6% said they do not. For respondents that plan to take the JLPT, 30.2% cited post-Programme employment in Japan as their main motivation, followed by resume/CV improvement (20.1%), post-Programme employment involving Japanese in another country (15.4%), and ease of everyday life (16.5%). Few cited social life, hobbies, or extracurricular activities as their main motivation.

Do you plan to take any level of the JLPT
while on the JET Programme?

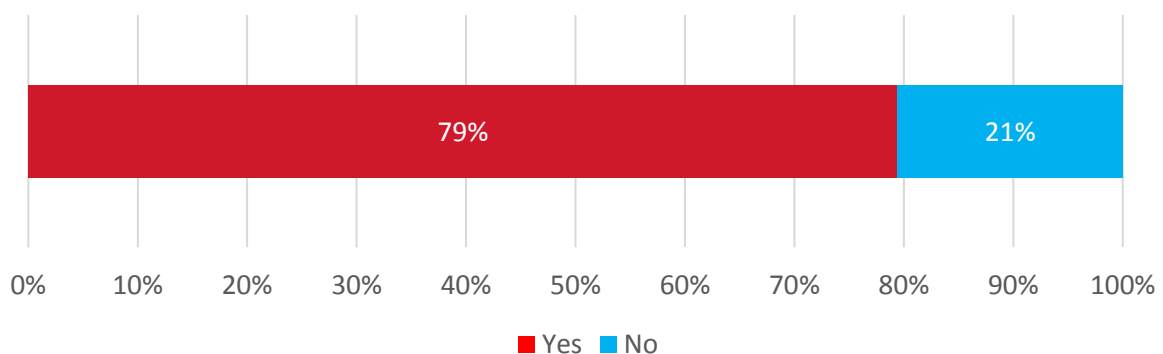


Chart 9

Motivations for Taking the JLPT While on the JET Programme

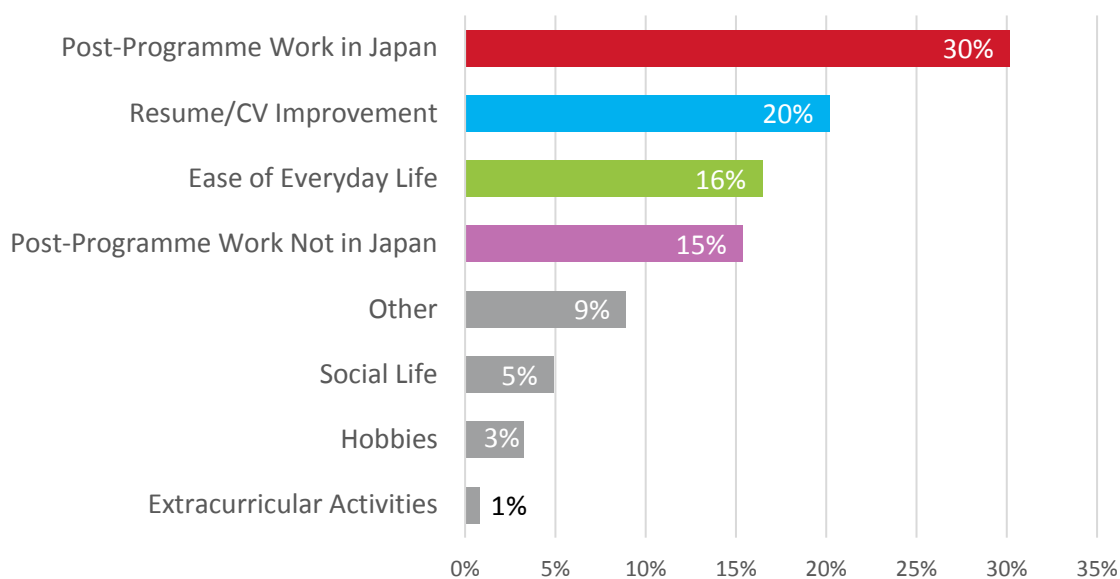


Chart 10

PARTICIPANTS NOT PLANNING TO TAKE THE JLPT

For the 364 respondents not planning to take the JLPT while on the Programme, the most commonly cited reasons were having other goals for their time on the Programme not involving the JLPT (26.7%), being satisfied with their progress in studying Japanese without taking the JLPT (26.7%), and having already passed the N1 (11.9%). Few cited not understanding the test requirements or test fees as their reason for not planning to take the JLPT. Respondents reiterated some of these categories in the “Other” option.

Reasons for Not Attempting the JLPT While on the JET Programme

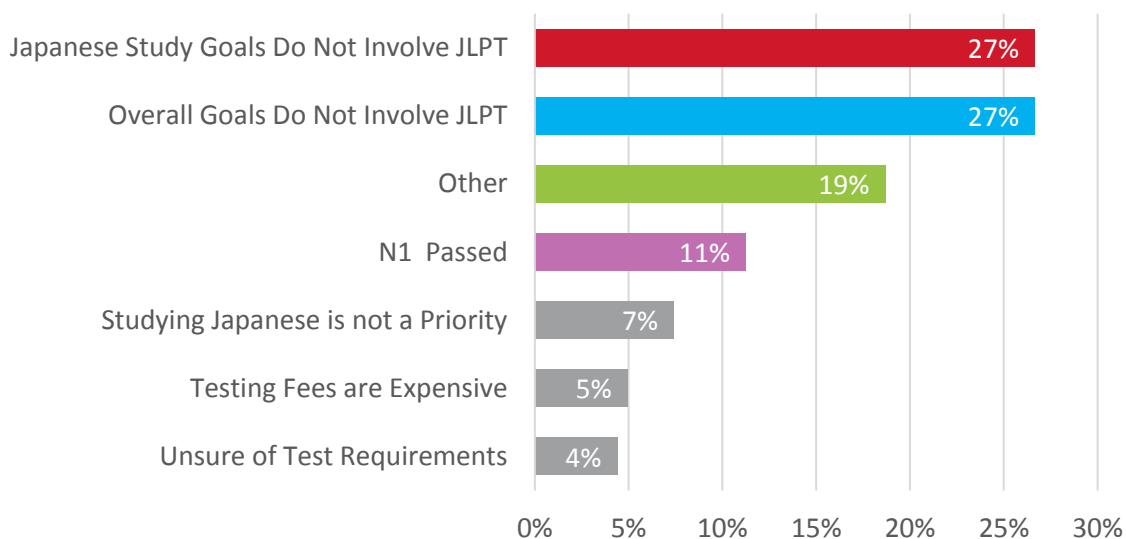


Chart 11

CLAIR LANGUAGE LEARNING RESOURCES

CLAIR offers several opportunities for participants to study Japanese according to the participants' levels. CLAIR offers Beginner, Intermediate, and Advanced Japanese language courses. For participants with a high level of Japanese, CLAIR offers a Translation and Interpretation course. The recent JLPT N3 grant from CLAIR provides additional motivation for participants to study Japanese. Respondents' experiences with each of these opportunities will be examined in this section.

LANGUAGE COURSES

CLAIR offers Beginner, Intermediate, and Advanced Japanese courses. Over half of respondents have participated in at least one course, and 44.3% have never participated in a CLAIR language course. About a quarter of respondents participated in or are currently participating in the Beginner course (25.2%), followed by Intermediate (21.3%) and Advanced (19.8%). Of respondents who had taken at least one course or are currently participating in a course for the first time, 47.9% said it was somewhat useful, while 34.0% said it was not useful. Only 14.5% said it was useful and few found it very useful (3.6%). For respondents who enrolled in a course, 57.4% stated they completed it and 42.6% said they did not complete the course. When asked for comments on the CLAIR language courses, 325 respondents offered feedback. Frequent comments stated that the courses were confusing, technical difficulties existed, respondents' Japanese levels were too high for the courses, and respondents wanted more time to review. Some respondents stated that they liked the focus on the ALT role, and they liked the courses since they had moved to the Visual Language Japanese company. Some respondents felt the time limitations for the course were too difficult.

CLAIR Japanese Language Course Participation

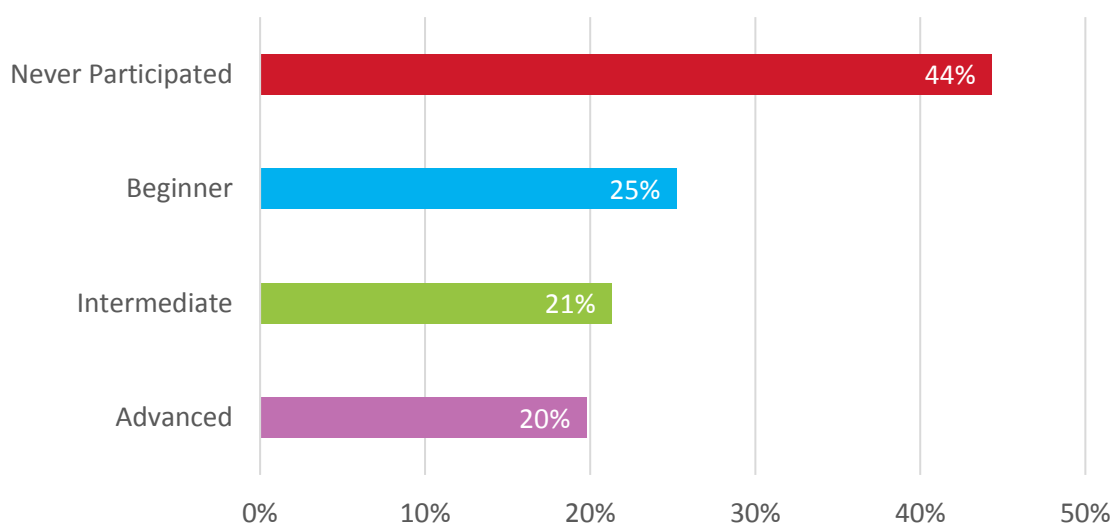


Chart 12

CLAIR Japanese Courses Usefulness Scale

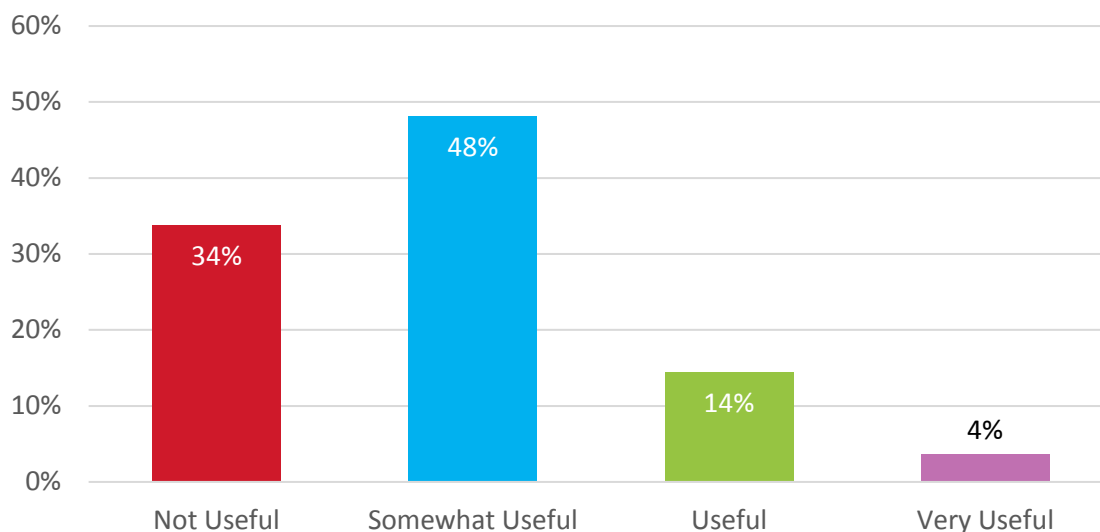


Chart 13

TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETATION COURSE

Very few respondents have participated in CLAIR’s Translation and Interpretation course, with 3.4% saying they had taken the course and 3.3% saying they are currently enrolled in it. When asked for comments on this course, respondents expressed that they wanted to take the course, but were not allowed to by their Board of Education. Other respondents said that the textbook did not satisfy their needs, citing outdated content, awkward English translations, or the Japanese content being too low for CIRs’ needs. A group of respondents hailed the weeklong training in Shiga as a positive experience. Some respondents mentioned that the coursework was too fast paced.

THE JLPT N3 GRANT

CLAIR offers a grant for participants who pass the N3 of the JLPT. As first year participants would not have been able to apply for the grant at the time of the survey, only 2nd – 5th year respondents (725 responses) have been included. Most respondents (95.6%) say they have never received the JLPT N3 grant. Respondents were asked their main reason for not applying for the grant, and 668 respondents answered. Some respondents (37.4%) felt their Japanese level is not high enough to attempt the JLPT N3, and 13.6% say they have already passed a higher level of the JLPT. For the “Other” option, respondents cited no interest in the JLPT and having a Japanese level that is higher than the N3 as reasons for not applying for the grant. Only 9.0% of respondents said they did not apply for the grant because they were unaware of it.

Reasons for Not Applying for CLAIR's JLPT N3 Grant

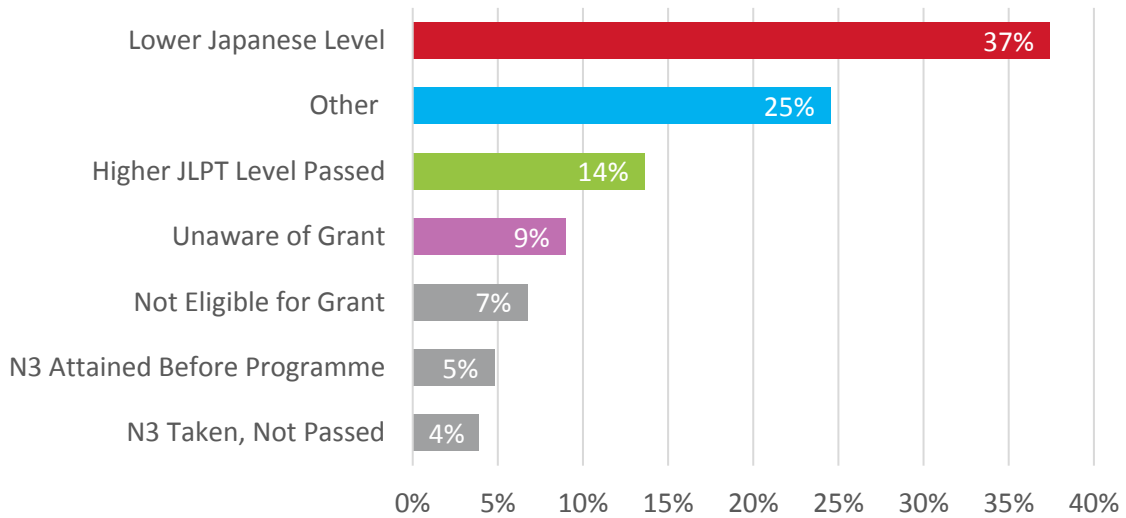


Chart 14

Including first year respondents, 35.5% of respondents say they plan to apply for the JLPT N3 grant. When asked about their interest in applying for grants for other levels of the JLPT if offered by CLAIR, the overwhelming majority of respondents (88.6%) said yes.

Do you plan to apply for CLAIR's JLPT N3 grant?

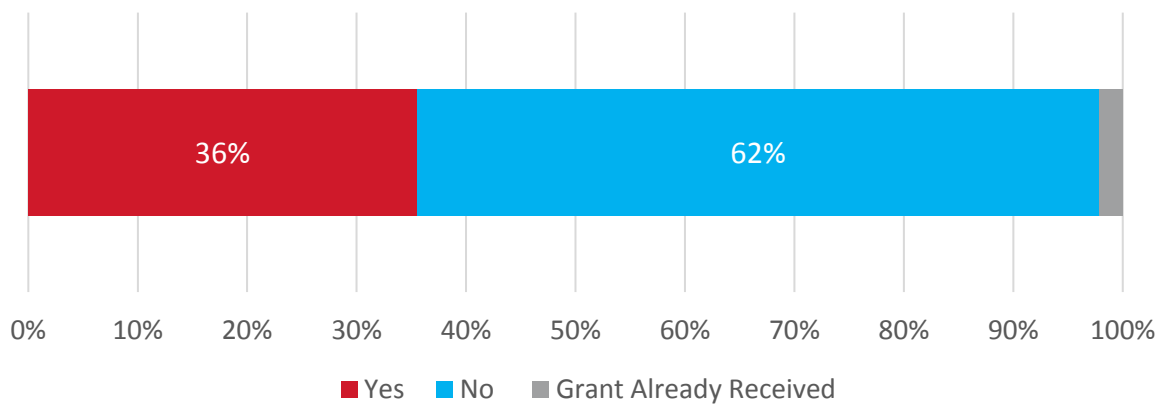


Chart 15

If CLAIR offered grants for other levels of the JLPT, would you be interested in applying for them?

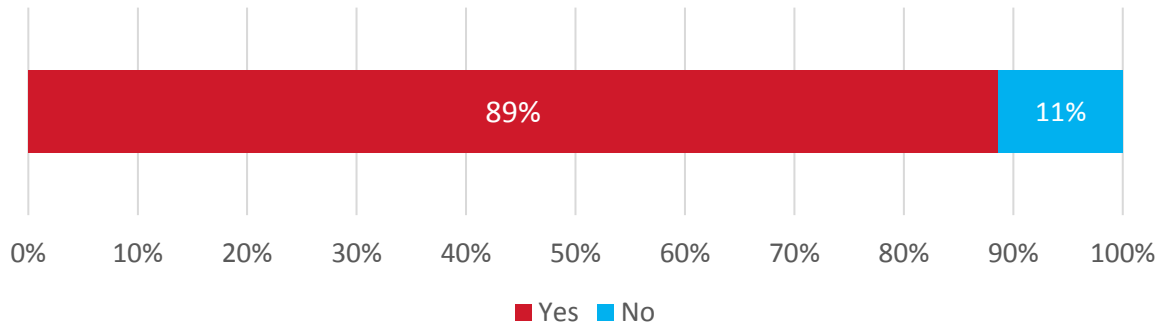


Chart 16

CONTRACTING ORGANISATION ASSISTANCE

COs provide invaluable support to JET Programme participants across all stages of their appointments. In particular, the AJET National Council is interested in how COs support participants in learning Japanese. The following section explores Japanese language learning assistance by COs and the availability of study leave.

JAPANESE LANGUAGE LEARNING ASSISTANCE

Respondents were asked about Japanese language learning resources offered by their COs, and 64.0% stated that their CO does not offer any sort of Japanese language learning assistance. Less than ten percent of respondents said their CO offers summer classes, scheduled classes, study leave, or study references. Some respondents were unsure if their CO offered any resources. In the “Other” category, some respondents mentioned that their CO offers some language instruction upon arrival. For study opportunities outside of COs, 22.5% of respondents say their CO informs them of Japanese study opportunities within their communities.

Japanese Language Learning Assistance Offered by Contracting Organisations

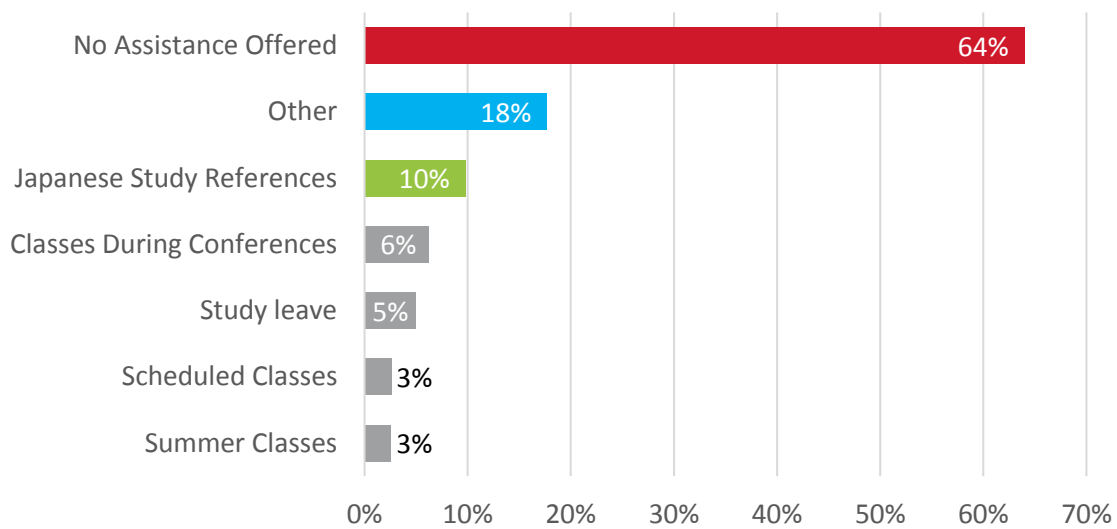


Chart 17

STUDY LEAVE

Some COs offer study leave. The majority of respondents (63.7%) do not know if their CO offers study leave, and 30.0% stated that their CO does not offer it. Only 6.8% of respondents said their CO offers it.

Does your Contracting Organisation offer study leave?

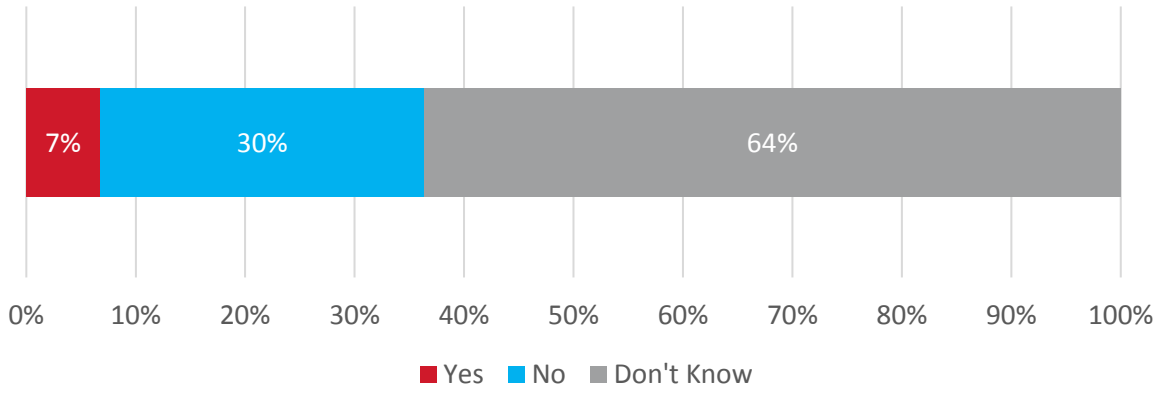


Chart 18

JAPANESE IN EVERYDAY LIFE

With heightened Japanese language abilities, participants have the opportunity to better integrate into their communities and placements. In the following section, respondents’ current Japanese abilities, motivations for studying Japanese, and resources for studying Japanese will be discussed.

CURRENT JAPANESE COMMUNICATION ABILITIES

While in Japan, Programme participants have many opportunities to improve their Japanese. While 13.6% of respondents say they could not communicate in Japanese before starting their time on the JET Programme, this number drops to 0.9% when respondents evaluated their current Japanese communication abilities. Overall, respondents feel their Japanese ability has greatly increased with their time in Japan, with a moderate level of Japanese being reported by 38.3% respondents (versus 27.8% pre-JET Programme) and an advanced level being reported by 18.3% (versus 10.6% pre-JET Programme). However, few respondents say they were fluent before joining the JET Programme, and few say they are currently fluent (4.4%).

Japanese Communication Abilities
Before the JET Programme and Current

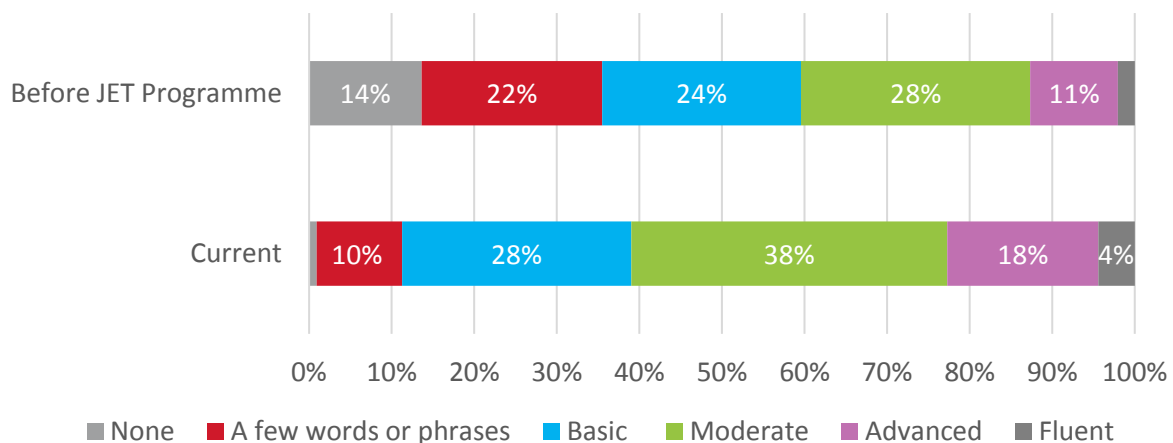


Chart 19

MOTIVATIONS FOR STUDYING JAPANESE

Respondents were allowed to give multiple reasons for studying Japanese. Ease of everyday life was the most popular option, with 87.0% of respondents selecting it. However, current employment, future employment, social life, and hobbies were also popular options, with over 50% of respondents selecting them as well. Only 4.4% of respondents said they do not study Japanese.

Motivations for Studying Japanese

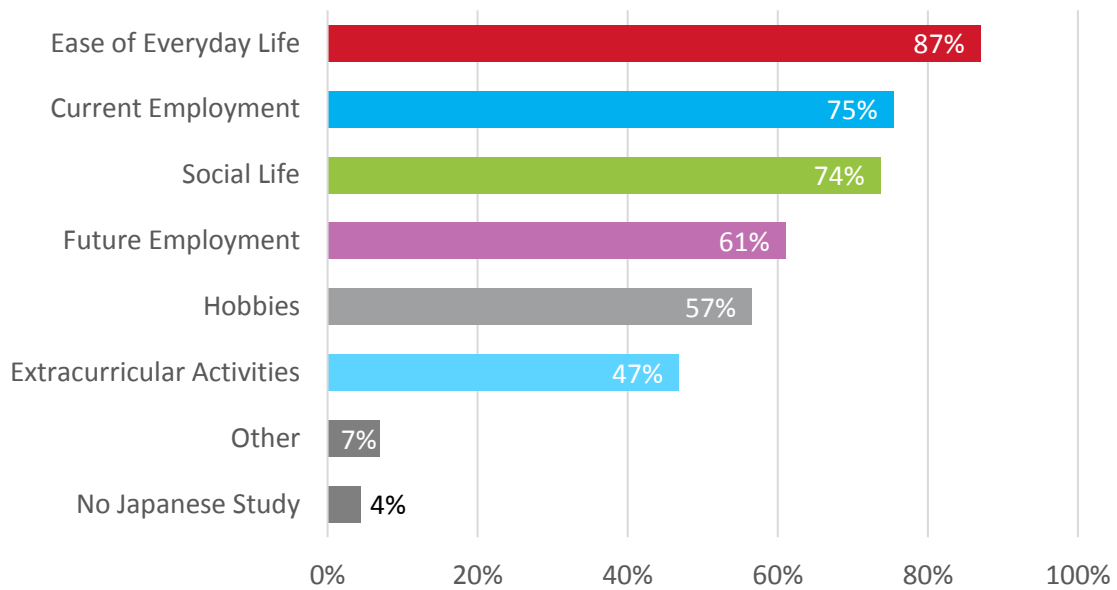


Chart 20

RESOURCES FOR STUDYING JAPANESE

Respondents were asked what resources are available for learning Japanese in their immediate community, defined as within 30 minutes of their living situation. Respondents widely reported that solo study materials were available, such as Japanese textbooks (80%), websites/phone applications (77.3%), and native Japanese media (73.3%). However, respondents reported fewer in-person opportunities, such as volunteer-led community classes (45.1%), language exchange (28.5%), and group study (11.8%). The availability of resources for rural respondents was comparable to the overall respondents' reports. However, rural respondents noted that community classes, language exchange, and language schools were less available to them.

Japanese Study Opportunities Available in Communities, Overall and Rural

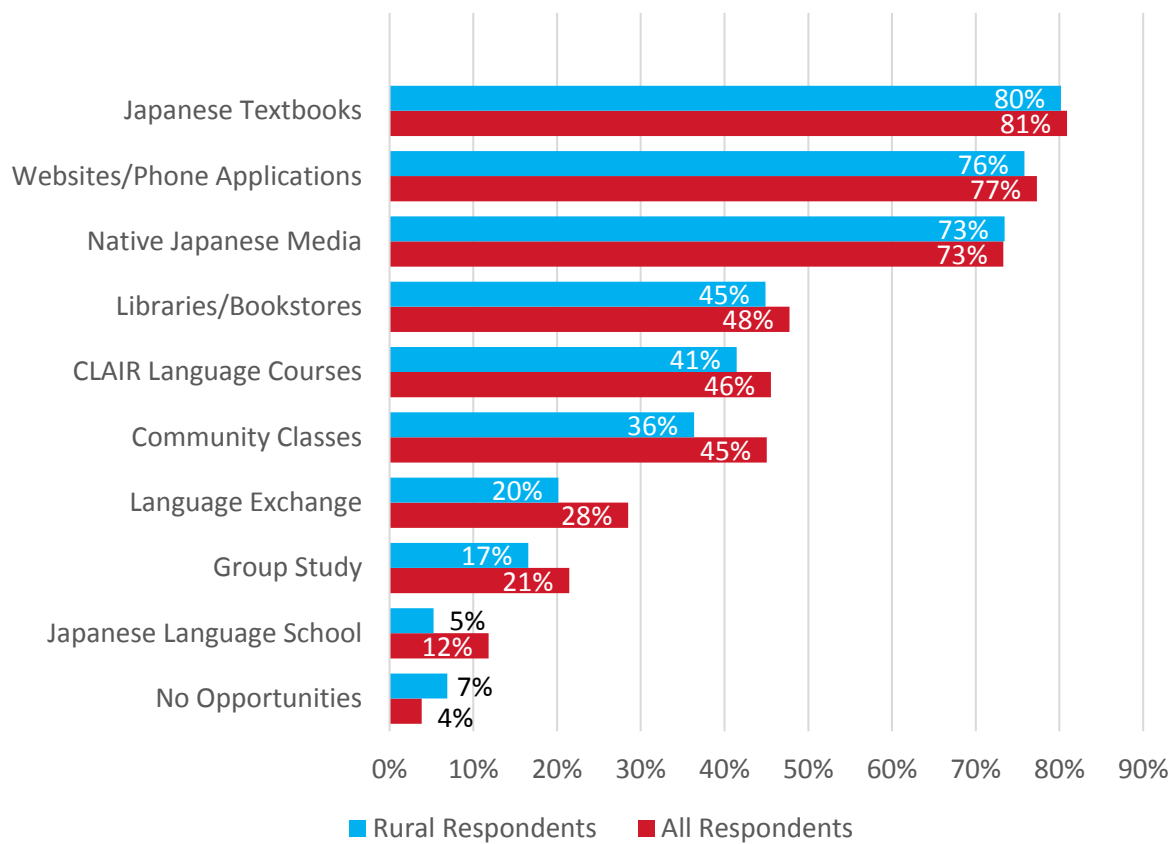


Chart 21

OBSERVATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, respondents find their Japanese communication abilities improve greatly in Japan. Respondents are interested in opportunities to study Japanese. Expanding these opportunities will benefit participants and their COs.

OBSERVATIONS

PREVIOUS JAPANESE LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE

The majority of respondents started their time on the Programme with Japanese language experience. About 60.0% had studied Japanese at a university level, whether it was a few university classes or a Japanese language major or minor. Despite this familiarity with the Japanese language, about 78.9% of respondents had not taken any level of the JLPT before joining the JET Programme.

THE JLPT WHILE ON THE PROGRAMME

Approximately half of 2nd – 5th year respondents report taking at least one level of the JLPT since starting their time on the JET Programme. The N3 and N2 were the most passed exams among 2nd – 5th years (12.1% and 9.8% respectively). For all respondents, 79.4% plan to take at least one level of the JLPT while on the Programme, with most citing professional development as their main motivation. A minority of respondents (20.6%) do not plan to take any level of the JLPT while on the Programme, for various reasons.

CLAIR LANGUAGE LEARNING RESOURCES

Over half of respondents have participated in or are currently participating in at least one of CLAIR's Japanese language courses. For respondents who had participated in at least one course or who are currently participating in one, 47.9% said the course was somewhat useful, 34.0% said it was not useful, and 14.5% said it was useful. Few participants (6.7%) have participated in CLAIR's Translation and Interpretation course. Some respondents expressed interest in the course, but were not allowed to enrol by their CO. For CLAIR's JLPT N3 grant, 95.6% of respondents had not received it. However, 88.6% of respondents said they would be interested in applying for grants for other levels of the JLPT if offered by CLAIR.

CONTRACTING ORGANISATION ASSISTANCE

When asked about the Japanese language learning assistance offered by their CO, 64.0% of respondents state that their CO does not offer any assistance. In particular, over half of respondents are not sure if their CO offers study leave.

JAPANESE IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Most respondents report a significant increase in their ability to communicate in Japanese while on the JET Programme, with over half rating their current Japanese communication abilities as moderate or above. Solo study materials for Japanese are widely available for respondents, but in-person opportunities are not as available.

RECOMMENDATIONS

THE JLPT WHILE ON THE PROGRAMME

The AJET National Council recommends offering grants for passing levels of JLPT besides N3; specifically, a grant for the N2 would be beneficial, as the survey results show an equal number of respondents taking these exams and greater value is placed on the N2 in the Japanese workforce. Additionally, a grant for the N4 would be beneficial. Many 1st and 2nd year respondents may not be able to pass the N3 before completing their time on the Programme. The N4 may prove more achievable for these respondents, and would give them additional motivation to solidify their Japanese study. A grant for passing the N4 would also help participants with basic to moderate Japanese ability.

CLAIR LANGUAGE LEARNING RESOURCES

The AJET National Council is grateful for the improvements CLAIR has made to its Japanese courses since this topic was last discussed in 2012, such as the transition from using textbooks to an online module and implementing Visual Language Japanese with video examples.

In addition to the courses focusing on the common situations ALTs experience, JLPT focussed courses would help motivate participants to attempt the JLPT, as half of 2nd – 5th year respondents have not taken any level of the JLPT while on the Programme. A trial course for the JLPT N4 could be a starting point to gauge interest. The AJET National Council also recommends adding a course of higher difficulty than the current Advanced course.

The AJET National Council recommends having a course calendar placed more prominently at the beginning of the Japanese language courses. This can help participants have effective time management. The current course manual includes a diagram with recommended studying times, and this could be emphasised even further.

Increasing accessibility to the Translation and Interpretation course would benefit many JET Programme participants and their COs. Expanding this course may not prove feasible, due to the weeklong interpretation training in Shiga. In lieu of expanding the overall course, the AJET National Council suggests allowing more participants with sufficient Japanese ability to take the translation section of the course, separate from the interpretation section. This may enable COs to have more candidates enrol in the course.

Finally, the AJET National Council recommends CLAIR and COs clarify whether or not studying Japanese at work is permissible or encouraged.

CONTRACTING ORGANISATION ASSISTANCE

The AJET National Council suggests that COs promote and foster Japanese language learning for participants. COs may consider creating guides to Japanese classes and other Japanese language learning opportunities within their areas. For paid lessons, COs may consider partial or complete subsidisation. In cases where in-person opportunities are not widely available, COs may consider offering some courses at the prefectural or municipal

level.

The AJET National Council recommends and encourages COs to consider offering study leave to participants. In particular, study leave could be available to ALTs during student holidays, such as winter, spring, and summer vacation.

JAPANESE IN EVERYDAY LIFE

With the survey results in mind, the AJET National Council will encourage local AJET chapters to promote Japanese study opportunities within their communities. The AJET National Council's website currently has a section dedicated to Japanese study materials, and this section could be promoted to participants via local AJET chapters. The AJET National Council will also consider promoting in-person study opportunities that are available via the Internet, such as italki.com, or smartphone applications, such as HiNative or HelloTalk.

QUESTIONS

QUESTION 1:

What progress has been made in expanding the availability of the JLPT grant for levels other than N3? An equal number of respondents said they were working towards passing N2 as N3. In addition, many cited N2 as being more beneficial, as this level is the cut-off for employment with most Japanese companies. A grant for N4 would also benefit participants who stay for one or two years.

QUESTION 2:

Currently, the JLPT N3 grant is offered to 1st – 3rd year participants. Would CLAIR consider expanding the grant to 4th and 5th year participants, especially if grants for other levels of the JLPT become available?

QUESTION 3:

Would CLAIR consider expanding their offerings of courses? For example, could the Translation and Interpretation course be open to more participants? Is it possible to have JLPT-focussed Japanese courses? Is there potential for a Japanese language course above the current Advanced level?

QUESTION 4:

Does CLAIR have an official opinion on JET Programme participants studying Japanese in the workplace?

QUESTION 5:

Some COs offer study leave to their JET Programme participants. Would CLAIR be willing to encourage COs to expand this opportunity to more participants?

QUESTION 6:

Would CLAIR be willing to assist National AJET in sharing our surveys via email with current JET Programme participants?

QUESTION 7:

What plans are in place to inform ALTs about the upcoming Elementary School English Curriculum change? Will more extensive training be available as ALTs take on more responsibility in the classroom? What role can National AJET play in help preparing ALTs for this significant change?

QUESTION 8:

Are there plans to increase the amount of training ALTs receive before arriving at their placement? As more participants work in elementary and kindergarten environments, they tend to become solely responsible to plan lessons and have slightly more than basic ability to communicate in Japanese.

QUESTION 9:

What steps have been taken to ensure employer/employee confidentiality in regards to seeking mental health assistance? Specifically, has any progress been made in offering JET Programme participants the chance to contact their Prefectural Advisors, rather than their COs, when accessing CLAIR's mental health services?

QUESTION 10:

What role do the three ministries and CLAIR have in training/selecting training materials for English Education Preparation for JTEs, especially for homeroom teachers in elementary schools? If CLAIR does have a role in this selection process, what is the logic behind the majority of the material being written in English?

QUESTION 11:

What kind of information/guidelines do participating COs receive from CLAIR? (i.e., a CO-focussed G.I.H.) Would the AJET Executives be able to receive a copy of any materials provided to COs?

QUESTION 12:

Would CLAIR consider encouraging COs to offer their JET Programme participants the equivalent 3-5 days of summer leave that their Japanese counterparts receive?

QUESTION 13:

Would CLAIR be interested in coordinating with other language professional groups, such as JALT, JII, ESTEEM, or JACET to find lecturers for skill development seminars or to sponsor such seminars to increase professional presence?

QUESTION 14:

What are the standards and policies surrounding skills development seminars nationally? For example, what are the minimum requirements, etc.

