

ALTs VISITING MULTIPLE SCHOOLS

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INTRODUCTION

During the past few years Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) roles and duties have been changing from only visiting a couple schools on a regular basis to visiting five, ten or more than twenty schools during the academic year. This report will explore how these ALTs are working in their schools, explain challenges they face and give suggestions for CLAIR and MEXT to help better support these ALTs.

METHOD

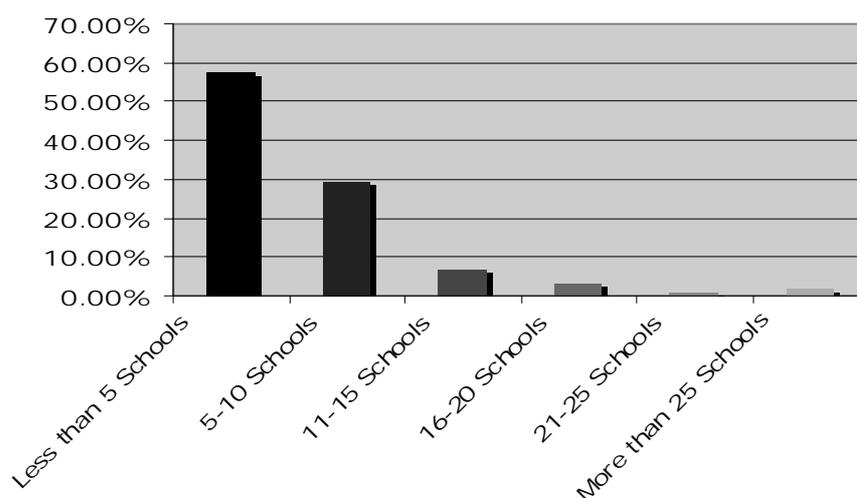
The data and analysis for this report is based on an on-line survey conducted in April 2009. There were 272 respondents representing 41 prefectures. Almost half were first-year ALTs. The types of questions asked were multiple choice, open ended questions and lists. The distribution method was via e-mail, social networking site Facebook, ajet.net, prefectural JET websites and word of mouth.

DATA

School Visits

Figure 1

As an ALT, how many schools do you/will you visit in the course of one year?

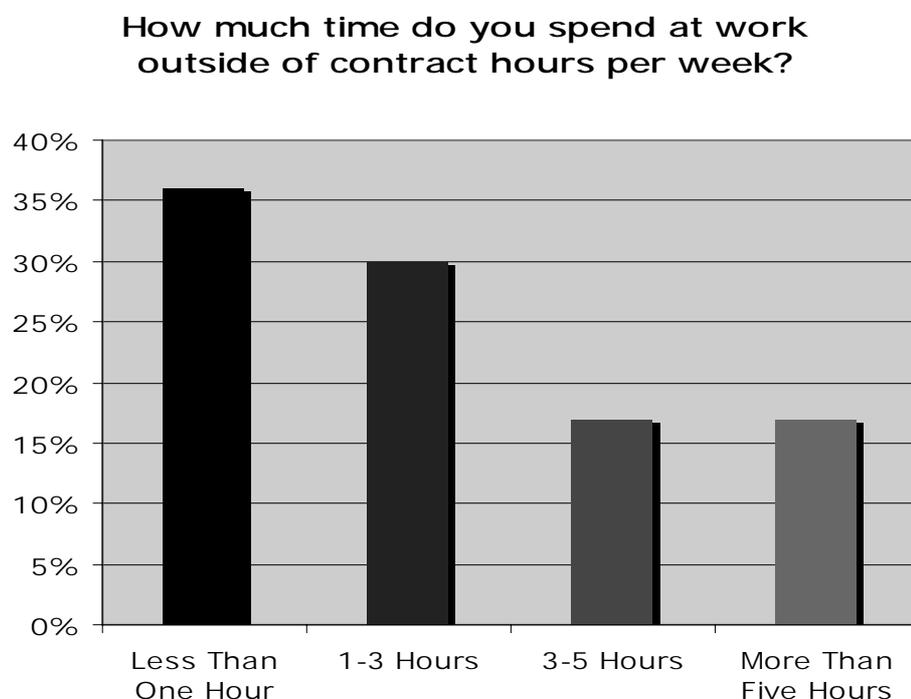


Of the respondents, 57% stated that they visit less than five schools and 29% visit five to ten schools per year 6% visit 11-15 schools, 3% go to 16-20 schools, 1% visit 21-25 schools, and 2% visit more than 25 schools. 69% have taught junior high schools and 68% have taught

elementary schools during their time as an ALT. 48% of ALTs visit their schools two to four times a month, 16% visit their schools 5-10 times a month.

Extra Curricular Activities

Figure 2



36% spend less than one hour per week at school outside of contract hours, 30% spend 1-3 hours, 17% spend 3-5 hours and 17% spend more than 5 hours. The reasons for ALTs not staying at school beyond their contract time will be discussed in the discussion section.

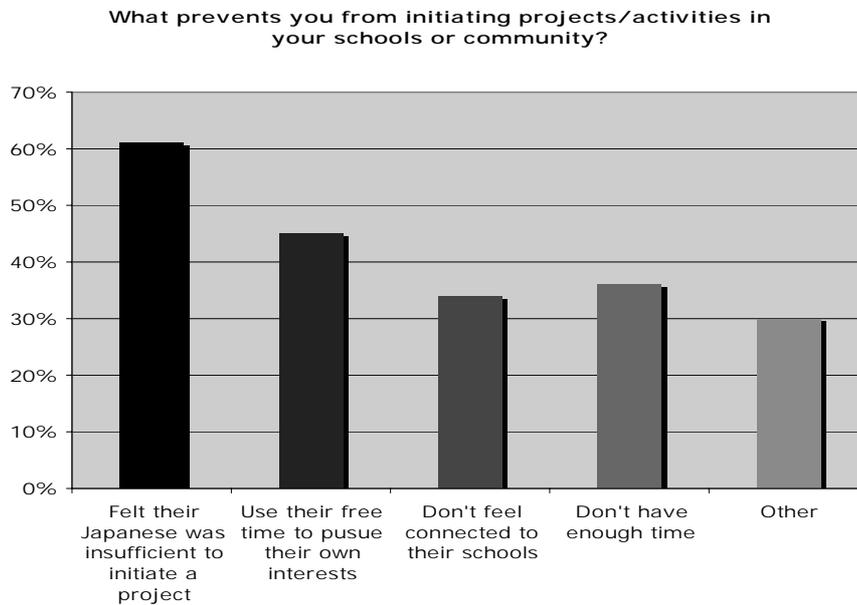
Time spent during contract hours

When asked “How do you spend your time during contract hours when you are not teaching English?” 80% spend time talking with teachers/staff, 65% spend time talking to students, 50% eat lunch with the students, 43% responded with “other” with a majority studying Japanese or preparing lessons, 45% work on special projects (English board, newspaper etc..) and 24% participate in non English classes.

Community Involvement

When asked “Do you initiate projects, activities, or events in your community or in the communities where you teach?” 77% said no, while 23% said yes.

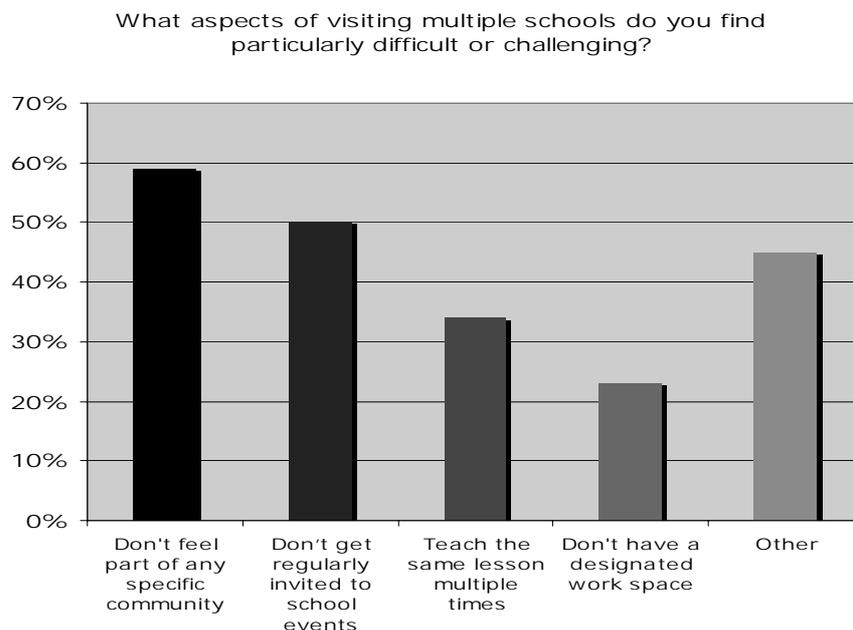
Figure 3



Job Satisfaction

50% like visiting multiple schools, 29% are indifferent and 21% dislike it. When visiting multiple schools 81% like being able to meet different students, 64% like meeting different teachers, 58% enjoy teaching students at various levels, 49% like that they can use the same lesson materials and plans, 19% responded with “other.”

Figure 4





When asked “What aspects of visiting multiple schools do you find particularly difficult or challenging?” 59% of respondents don't feel as if they are part of any specific community, 50% don't regularly get invited to school events, 34% teach the same lesson multiple times, 23% don't have a designated work space, and 45% responded with “other.” A discussion of these difficulties and challenges is found below.

DISCUSSION ANALYSIS

Through this survey we were able to analyze the varying responses for ALTs who visit a low number of schools versus ALTs who visit a high number of schools. The analysis revealed several notable points. ALTs who visit less than five schools spend much more time at their schools outside of contract time.

In a similar analysis, there were several interesting results for ALTs with a base school and ALTs without a base school.

	ALTs with a base school	ALTs without a base school
Responded, “I attend most school events.”	82.9 %	39.4 %
Responded, “I like being an ALT with multiple schools.”	53.0 %	43.0 %

For this analysis as well, the number of respondents without a base school found more aspects of their job difficult or challenging.

	ALTs with a base school	ALTs without a base school
I don't feel as if I'm a part of any specific community	50.3 %	80.9 %
I don't regularly get invited to school events	43.6 %	66.2 %
I teach the same lesson multiple times	30.1 %	44.1 %
I don't have a designated work space	20.2 %	30.9 %

The results from our survey show that ALTs with base schools have more job satisfaction and a sense of belonging to a group or community. If the ALT is satisfied with their situation, they may be more likely to be more effective in their teaching and more active in their school community.

Survey respondents were given the option of listing challenges and difficulties that were not included in the above table, such as difficulty in building relationships, feeling of being spread too thin and commuting difficulties. We compiled responses into categories of similarity.

Of the 103 open responses, 26 respondents stated that it is difficult to build relationships with students and the schools.



In another category, 20 respondents stated that they were “spread too thin” or “didn’t spend enough time in one place.” This individual’s response sums up this category:

“It’s hard for me to really get to know my students, which makes it hard for me to know just how much English they are really learning. I see students infrequently, I feel that their English is suffering because of their lack of contact with a native speaker.”

Other respondents noted the difficulties in dealing with different expectations at multiple schools as well as the challenges in identifying the needs of hundreds or thousands of students.

In this survey we asked a multiple choice question, “What did you wish you had known before becoming a JET visiting multiple schools?” Of the 162 people who provided an answer, several categories emerged from the responses. While 29 people responded “nothing,” many respondents listed the following:

What ALTs listed in response to the question “What did you wish you had known...”	Number of responses
Various expectations directly related to being an ALT with multiple schools	29
Job and schedule expectations	25
Teaching and classroom expectations	23
Better understanding of English abilities (for both students and teachers)	9
The need for Japanese abilities	5

Through this survey we identified a few common areas of challenge that ALTs with multiple schools face when teaching English. 197 of the 272 surveyed provided an answer. The common categories are as follows:

Identified category	Number of responses
Difficult to build relationships	67
Students receive infrequent English lessons	31
Not knowing the level of students’ English	17
ALTs make infrequent visits to schools	16
Logistical / Planning difficulties	14

The largest challenge in teaching English was the difficulty encountered in building relationships with both students and teachers when visiting multiple schools. Many ALTs see this as essential for providing motivation to students for English learning as well as creating opportunities for cultural exchange.

This respondent provided two specific items that can be implemented to help ALTs who visit multiple schools for overcoming the difficulty of building relationships:

“It would be most helpful for travelling teachers to have 1) a seating chart with names in Hiragana or English 2) a picture of the students with their names. I have found both of these immensely helpful.”

The second most common response addresses students' limited class hours where English is spoken. While it is obvious that communicative English learning can only happen when students are using English, many students do not get regular opportunities to do so in their classes.

Projects and Events of ALTs Visiting Multiple Schools

Despite the difficulties that ALTs visiting multiple schools face, many are still initiating projects and events in both their communities and schools. Of the 272 respondents, 59 listed specific things they have been involved in during their time as a JET. The following is a sample of salient projects, events and classes.

One popular choice of events is holiday-themed parties. JETs mentioned hosting or organizing these events for both students and community members. This is often a simple and fun way to get together with Japanese people, and can serve as a way of breaking the ice for planning events as well as for the community in which the JET lives. There is opportunity for meeting foreigners, teaching about cultures and simply having fun.

24 of the 59 respondents listed being involved with multiple projects or events. It is clear from these responses that there is a population of JETs who are going above and beyond their normal work duties to achieve the goals of the JET Programme. One respondent listed:

“One of my schools wrote letters to a Japanese club in America. I have fun quizzes on an English board each month and students get prizes for their efforts. I also host after school English holiday parties”

Another involved JET responded that he or she is involved with projects planned by a group of JETs in their prefecture:

“With other people, we organize a film festival to which JETs and non-jets as well as Japanese citizens can produce and enter their own movie into the film competition, it also works as a fund raiser for charities that I plan ahead of time to participate ... We also formed an art group called SouZou to display our photography or drawings as a way of reaching out to others. We are at our second annual show that also acts as a fundraiser for charity.”

The range and scope of the projects listed is quite wide. Several JETs mentioned initiating Pen Pal projects. Other school projects were starting English clubs, and hosting an International or English day. One respondent started an “English Pals” project between his or her high school and elementary school where older students came to the elementary school and gave English presentations. There was also a wide range of community projects and classes. Several JETs started adult English clubs, cooking clubs or other cultural clubs. Several JETs listed unique projects such as interviewing community members for a local TV Program, creating a bilingual website about tourist spots in the JETs town, writing for local newspapers, and organizing an Easter-egg hunt.

It is clear that many projects and events require the organizational support of someone who knows Japanese, whether this be a JTE, Japanese friend or the JET. When asked, “What has



hindered you from initiating projects, events or activities in your community?” the largest response was “I feel my Japanese abilities aren’t sufficient” with 61.3% answering in this way. Of the respondents who listed their Japanese abilities as “advanced,” 81.8% initiate projects, compared to only 30.8% of JETs who listed their abilities as “intermediate” and 18.4% who listed their abilities as “beginner.” As a result of these findings, we encourage contracting organisations and the JET Programme to work together to send JETs with high proficiency in Japanese to COs that will use the JET in multiple schools.

AJET SUGGESTIONS

Many of the issues raised through this survey are directly related to communication and relationships with Contracting Organisations. Therefore, many of the suggestions proposed below are things that individual JETs with multiple schools should be doing in order to be successful and effective. The role of AJET, CLAIR and the Ministries is to distribute these valuable methods and information to both current and incoming JETs. Currently there is little information in the General Information Handbook specifically addressing issues relevant to ALTs with multiple schools. It would be useful for an additional chapter or section on this topic to be included in the next edition. AJET will continue to utilize its methods of communication including forums and resources on our website to distribute information. Additional specific suggestions are provided under the relevant topics below.

The members of this report team sent a follow-up email to respondents asking three questions. These questions were posed in order to discover concrete and practical methods for addressing the major issues raised by the survey. The three questions addressed were 1) Overcoming communication difficulties with contracting organisations and between schools, 2) How to be a better initiator, and 3) What should be included in a Tokyo Orientation workshop for ALTs with multiple schools.

Communication

- **Advance meetings.** ALTs who visit multiple schools should schedule a meeting with each school prior to a visiting period (whether that be in a “one-shot” context or once a week context). If possible, these meetings should be in person, though a meeting by telephone will suffice. These meetings are to determine the expectations that the school has for the ALT as well as to talk about lesson plan ideas. Schools should be made aware that ALTs can use contract hours to meet with their various schools.
- **Standardised Evaluations.** ALTs need to be evaluated on a regular basis so that they understand the needs and goals of their various schools and can build confidence and direction for teaching. One suggestion is having the ALT bring a standardised sheet to each school where the school contact person would provide feedback. These would then be submitted to a Supervisor.
- **Learning Japanese.** Unfortunately, there is not always a contact at each school that is able to communicate in English. While it is already expected of every JET to be learning Japanese, it needs to be explicitly emphasized at Tokyo Orientation that JETs with multiple schools are recommended to study Japanese in order to attain a level of functional fluency.



- **“JET Life” for Supervisors and JTEs.** Even though each contracting organization receives the General Information Handbook, there is still a widespread misunderstanding about the ALT’s role, responsibilities, and how to use them effectively. A plethora of information is provided to the new JET participant; however, relatively little information is currently provided to Supervisors and JTEs. CLAIR, along with AJET, could produce a JET Life DVD in Japanese *for the Supervisor/JTE* detailing the job of an ALT, how to use an ALT effectively (both in the classroom and outside the classroom), and how to evaluate an ALT.
- **AJET Online Community.** This would be a place for ALTs to discuss tips and strategies, lessons and activities that have worked for ALTs visiting multiple schools. Hopefully by doing this the lack of vertical handovers can be alleviated with lateral handovers.

Initiating Projects

- **Creating an English presence.** One simple project that all ALTs can do is put up an English board in a visible location in each of the visited schools. This board should be attractive and may contain simple games, announcements or information about the ALT. This can be a springboard into initiating other English related projects involving the school.
- **Establish relationships.** If the ALT is interested in starting a new project, the ALT should attend any planning meetings for regular events, such as the culture festival or holiday parties. This way, the ALT can learn planning methods and build rapport with other teachers who may be willing to help with new projects. Building relationships with teachers allows the ALT to feel comfortable presenting new ideas.
- **Enlist the help of a specific JTE.** In initiating new projects, the ALT should ask a JTE to join the planning and executing of the proposal, suggesting specific tasks that would be helpful.
- **Advertise.** As any new project comes into fruition, the ALT should actively advertise the project in as many ways as possible including making an announcement during meetings, explaining it in relevant classes and putting up posters.

Workshop for JETs visiting multiple schools

This year AJET will be hosting a new workshop at Tokyo Orientation called “JETs Visiting Multiple Schools.” At this workshop AJET plans to distribute ideas and information to the new ALTs on how to make the most out of their visits to multiple schools. The information that will be distributed will be methods and resources that have been used or are currently being used by ALTs. The following is a list of general topics to be covered in the workshop:

- Provide an outline packet for each JET, this packet would include space for the JET to write down detailed information about each of their schools such as location, directions, number of classes, number of students, clubs, contact names and phone numbers, etc. they must find or figure out in the first few weeks of their contract. A

paper copy would be provided at Tokyo Orientation as well as an electronic copy being available for download on the AJET website.

- Highlight the importance of studying Japanese
- Stress open-mindedness and flexibility
- Provide methods of connecting with students who are seen infrequently, such as creating an English board in the school, creating English lunch event, etc.
- Briefly address lesson planning by providing useful methods and resources such as:
 - o How to access resources such as helpful websites, YouTube videos and/or BOE handbooks
 - o How to adapt lessons to fit various situations and English levels
 - o How to actively involve learners
 - o Advice for JETs to keep lessons fresh, especially when they are constantly repeating the same lesson.
 - o How to compile a large binder or briefcase with curricula, lesson plans and teaching materials to bring to various schools.

CONCLUSION

The role of the ALT is changing from visiting a couple of schools to visiting five or more schools and in some cases more than twenty schools. Those who are visiting a large number of schools face unique challenges. The resources and information available from the JET Programme are not sustainable for the amount of ALTs that are visiting multiple schools. This creates dissonance between ALTs and their Contracting Organisations. However, AJET's suggestions and the new Tokyo Orientation workshop for ALTs visiting multiple schools may increase job satisfaction and the support system for ALTs to help foster more school and community projects, greater job satisfaction and overall effectiveness.



QUESTIONS

1. Does MEXT or CLAIR plan on creating any resource materials for ALTs who visit multiple schools or are considered “one-shot” ALTs?
2. It is AJET’s opinion that standardised handover procedures would help to alleviate some of the challenges ALTs who visit multiple schools face when first starting their new job in Japan. As a follow-up question to the previous Opinion Exchange, what has been done to standardise handover procedures? What new information or materials have been given to Prefectural Advisors since the last OE that will help JETs better inform their successors of their job expectations?
3. How is CLAIR adjusting Tokyo Orientation and subsequent workshops to accommodate the ALTs visiting multiple schools?
4. Does the Supervisor’s Manual and Contracting Organisation Manual have any information available concerning specifically the role of ALTs visiting multiple schools?
5. Does CLAIR, MEXT, MIC, or MOFA have any suggestions for material that they would like to have included in the AJET workshop for ALTs Visiting Multiple Schools?