



Elementary School Foreign Language Activities

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Introduction

Beginning in 2011, all elementary schools in Japan will introduce classes for foreign language activities. There are already many ALTs engaged in team teaching in elementary schools, and this need is expected to rise with the new curriculum. This report will discuss how the new classes and textbook have impacted ALT activities at schools which have already introduced the new curriculum.

Objectives

1. Discuss survey responses and comments from ALTs concerning the new curriculum and the supplementary textbook, *eigo no-to*.
2. Evaluate changes in ALT activities at elementary school since the new curriculum was introduced, such as their role in lesson planning.

Method

National AJET conducted a survey of ALTs currently employed by one or more of the 614 pilot schools which have introduced the new English curriculum and received responses from 43 individuals. The survey included multiple choice questions as well as spaces to write additional comments and opinions. We hope to make available some of the opinions which these ALTs have communicated to us.

Survey Results

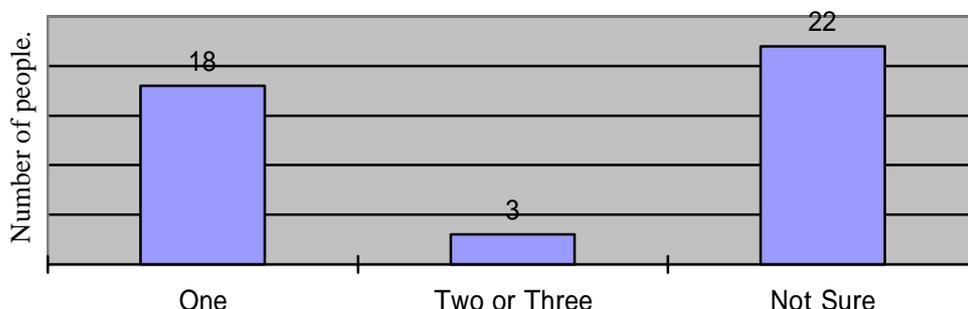
We received positive feedback regarding the introduction of regular English classes into the elementary school curriculum. ALTs mentioned that the increase in number of classes per week has already had a great effect on the communicative ability of their students. One respondent commented that “the teachers are always very positive and they always tell me how much students are looking forward to the lesson.” Other respondents noted positive developments such as having more time allotted for meeting with teachers and planning lessons, or receiving more input and feedback on lesson plans.

However, it seems that ALTs are largely unaware of what the new curriculum involves. While they understand that classes will become mandatory and that homeroom teachers will begin teaching English during the foreign language activities class hours, they are mostly unsure of how many classes their students have or what they will be required to learn.

We asked respondents to indicate how many foreign language activity classes their fifth and sixth grade students have per week. The results indicate that a significant portion of schools hold class one time per week. However, a larger number of ALTs are not sure how many

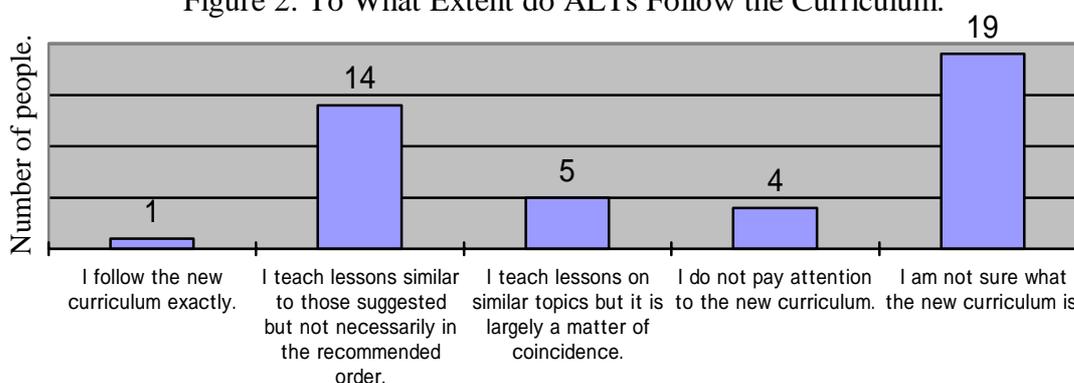
foreign language activities classes their students have each week, as indicated in the graph below.

Figure 1: Number of Classes per Week.



We asked our respondents to what extent they follow the new curriculum. The results show clearly that most ALTs are unaware of what the new curriculum is.

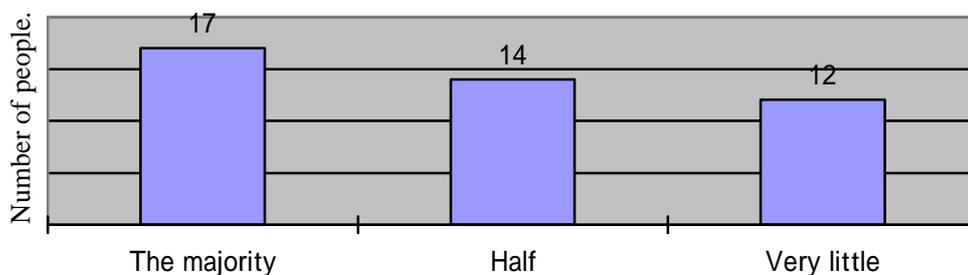
Figure 2: To What Extent do ALTs Follow the Curriculum.



So far, very little information on the curriculum and its goals has been made available in English. Even those ALTs in the pilot schools seem to be unaware of its specific structure and goals.

On the other hand, our survey suggests that a majority of ALTs do a significant amount of lesson planning for team taught lessons. This is demonstrated in the chart below.

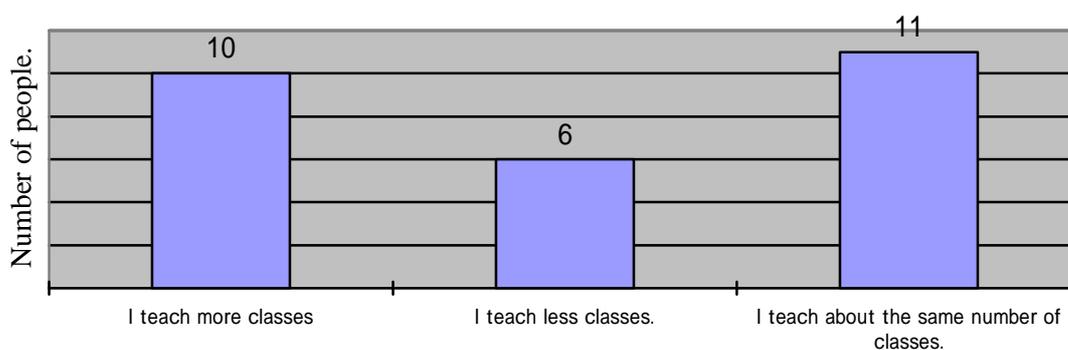
Figure 3: Amount of Planning Which ALTs are Responsible for.



While nearly a third of the respondents reported doing very little planning, two thirds of the ALTs we surveyed appear to be doing half or more of the lesson planning for their classes, in spite of knowing little of what the new curriculum entails.

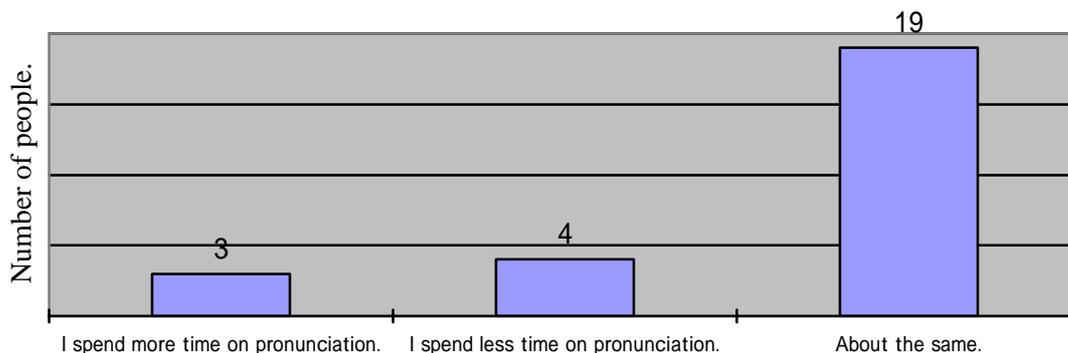
For respondents who had experience teaching at the same school before the new curriculum was introduced, we asked some additional questions regarding how their role may have changed. Our results show almost no overall change. For example, when asked whether they teach a larger or smaller number of classes, our survey shows some ALTs teaching more, a similar number teaching less, and the largest number teaching the same number.

Figure 4: Change in Number of Classes Taught.



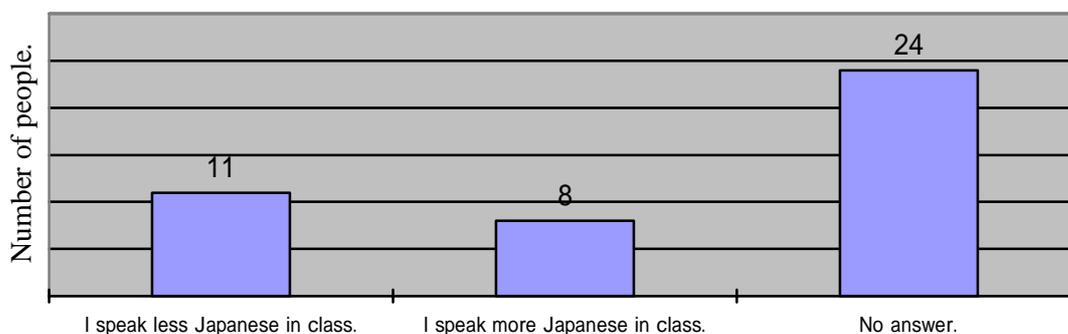
When asked if they spend more or less time practicing pronunciation, the results were very similar. The graph below shows that the overwhelming majority did not notice any change.

Figure 5: Change in Amount of Class Time Spent on Pronunciation.



Finally, when asked whether they speak more or less Japanese in class, there was also no significant difference between candidates, as the below graph highlights.

Figure 6: Change in Amount of Japanese Used in Class.

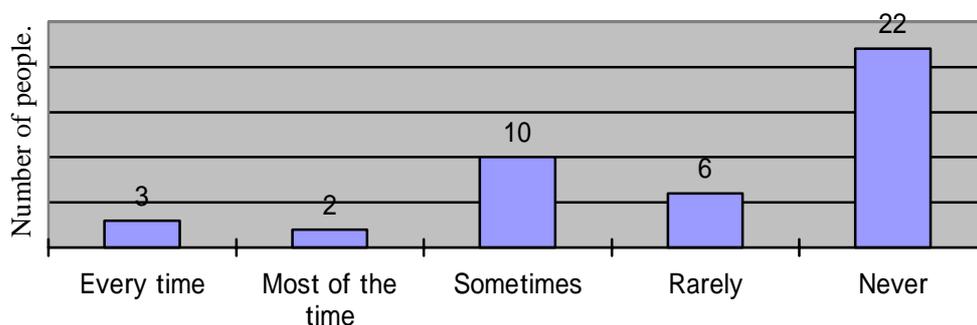


Our survey suggests that ALTs are either unaware of the new curriculum or do not follow it in their classes. The new curriculum has likely not affected team taught classes to a great degree.

Responses to *eigo no-to*

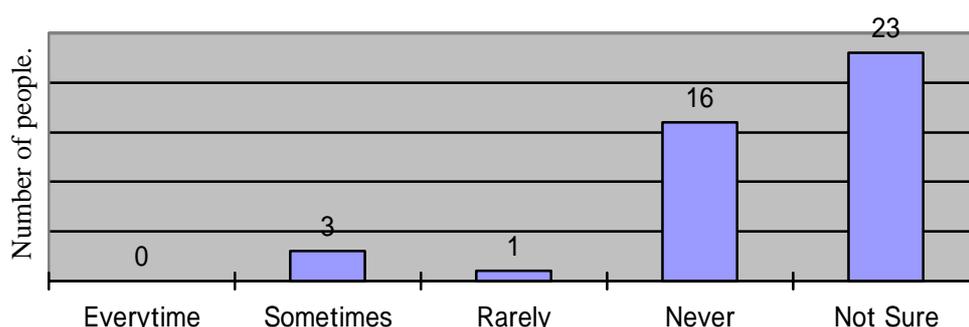
We gathered responses from ALTs regarding their experience with the new supplementary textbook, *eigo no-to*. First, we asked the respondents to describe the frequency with which they use *eigo no-to* in their own classes. Although 21 respondents reported using the text at least “rarely,” 22 respondents, or about half, reported “never” using *eigo no-to*.

Figure 7: Frequency of Use in Team Teaching Classes.



This was expected as *eigo no-to* is intended as supplementary material for homeroom teachers and the book and accompanying teacher’s guide do not have any English translation. However, we were surprised that ALTs also claim *eigo no-to* is used very rarely in classes in which they *do not* participate. The graph below shows that more than half of the respondents were unsure, but a significant number asserted that the text is never used in other foreign language activities classes.

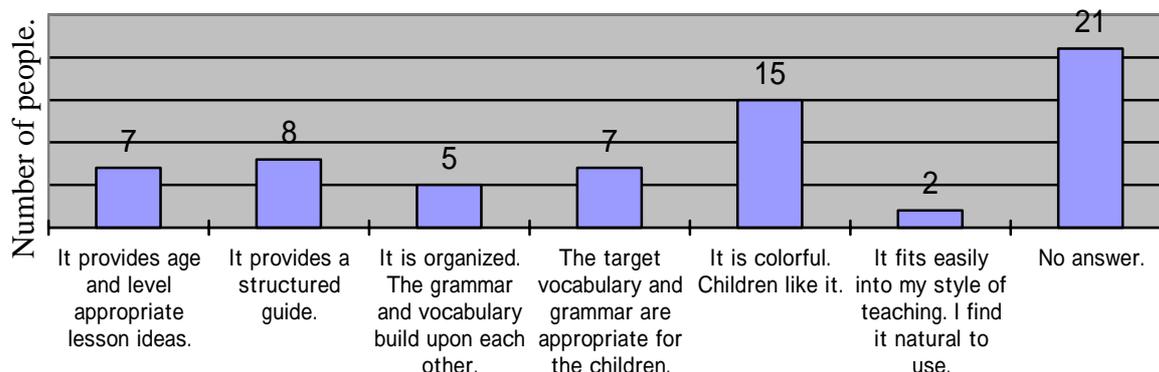
Figure 8: Frequency of Use in Classes Without ALTs.



Contents of *eigo no-to*

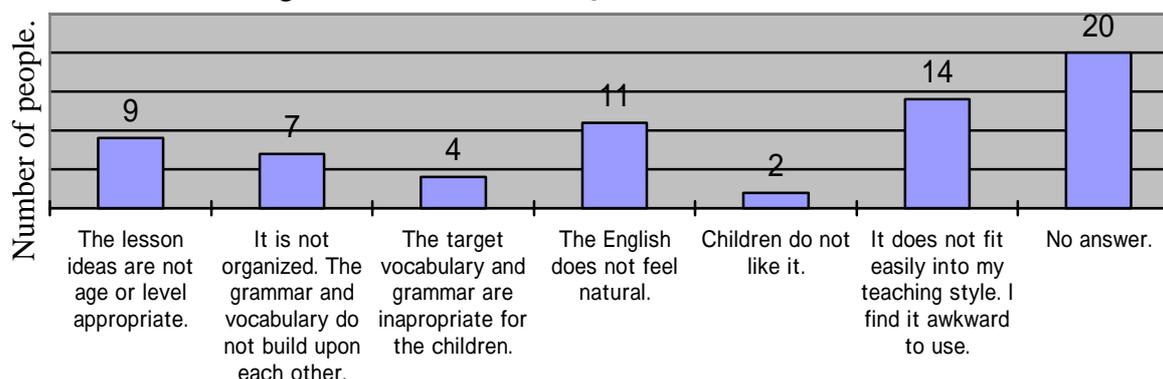
When asked what makes *eigo no-to* easy to use, many ALTs cited the fact that it is colorful, and that children like it. Several respondents also agreed that it provides a structured guide. Respondents were able to select multiple responses.

Figure 9: What Makes *eigo no-to* Easy to Use.



We also asked respondents what makes *eigo no-to* difficult to use. The two highest scoring responses were that “the English does not feel natural,” and that it is “awkward to use.” This is displayed in the following graph. Many of those ALTs who responded that the English does not feel natural cited the phrase “let’s chant” as an example.

Figure 10: What Makes *eigo no-to* Difficult to Use?



Additionally, many respondents made comments regarding the difficulty level of the content. They described it as too easy for their fifth and sixth grade students and noted a risk that students might become bored or disinterested. In the words of one respondent, “I think that it doesn’t challenge the children enough- they are capable of higher grammar and vocabulary.” Several others expressed a wish for a more extensive vocabulary list. In addition, some respondents expressed concern that some elementary school teachers new to teaching English may follow the textbook too closely or not take advantage of the various resources which ALTs offer.

On the other hand, many activities, such as the lessons built around making a schedule and running a store, were very well received. For example, one ALT commented that “the students enjoyed the projects on future dreams and the countries they wanted to visit.” Many ALTs discussed ways in which they had built on a particular activity to adjust it to a particular class.

Several ALTs praised *eigo no-to* for offering a resource common to both homeroom teachers and ALTs. It appears that sharing a set of activities and lessons greatly improved communication and team teaching classes. However, we also received comments suggesting that this important use of *eigo no-to* was in many cases thwarted by a lack of English translations for the explanations of activities inside the textbook and the accompanying



teacher's manual. In situations where the ALT and homeroom teacher have difficulty communicating, an English translation of the *eigo no-to* materials could greatly improve team taught classes.

Conclusion

The responses to our survey have shown that ALTs teaching in these pilot elementary schools have been very welcoming of the regular foreign language activity classes. We received comments regarding both the difficulty level and contents of the supplementary text *eigo no-to*.

In order to improve the team teaching activities and contribute to the success of English education, AJET recommends that information regarding the new curriculum and its goals, as well as the contents of *eigo no-to*, be translated into English and distributed to ALTs who are engaged in team teaching classes at applicable schools. Understanding the goals and structure of the new curriculum will allow ALTs to more easily come forward and offer assistance to elementary school teachers giving English lessons for the first time.

Questions for MEXT

1. What plans does MEXT have for future revisions of *eigo no-to*?
2. Does MEXT plan on printing a revised version of the Practical Handbook for Elementary English Activities? If so, will the changes to curriculum be reflected in the new version? Alternatively, does MEXT have any other plans to distribute information on team teaching to elementary school teachers?
3. MEXT previously mentioned that the number of elementary school ALTs is expected to rise as the new curriculum is introduced. Although the curriculum is designed so that a homeroom teacher can conduct class alone, is this rise in numbers still expected?
4. What specific role does MEXT see ALTs playing in contributing to the success of the new curriculum?
5. Does MEXT, who are primarily in charge of the ALT training, have thoughts on ways to improve the merits of a JET compared to a non-JET? Do you have any suggestions on how to motivate JETs?