



Assistant Language Teachers as Solo Educators

Produced by the AJET National Council

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MIC ♦ MOFA ♦ MEXT ♦ CLAIR ♦ AJET



Assistant Language Teachers as Solo Educators

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Current Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme participants were surveyed in relation to the proposal currently under consideration by the Japanese government to allow Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) to take on the role of a solo educator in the classroom at least some of the time.

This report shows that there is general support for the proposed change amongst ALTs in the JET community, but that this feeling is tempered by a number of caveats and concerns. Specifically, further training and resources, as well as a clear method for determining an ALT's suitability for taking on this role, are critical precursors to the success of this initiative. In addition, ALTs believe there are a number of barriers that would make transitioning to a solo-educator model difficult, the foremost of which is limited Japanese language ability.

The report also addresses the current realities of teaching for ALTs, including the fact that many ALTs are already asked to teach in a solo capacity at least some of the time, despite not necessarily having the qualifications or confidence to do so.

Ultimately, while the proposed new system is generally supported, the majority of respondents noted a number of important changes to JET Programme infrastructure both pre-arrival and post-orientation that would be needed to effect such a change. The common consensus is that while the move to ALTs as solo educators may be a positive step forward for both the Programme and for students, it should not come at the expense of team teaching. Rather, there should be a balance of both systems with the above considerations taken into account.



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INTRODUCTION

In response to a number of potential changes and ideas proposed at the previous Opinion Exchange meeting in December 2013, the Association for Japan Exchange and Teaching (AJET) was keen to know how current Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme participants felt about these ideas. As such, the spring survey was designed to follow up on these ideas and collect feedback from JET participants that may help to guide the direction of the upcoming changes.

Specifically, AJET heard at the Opinion Exchange meeting that Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) is currently considering methods for Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) to teach solo in the classroom. The ministry is still considering how this may be implemented and commented on the valuable role that ALTs play in the classroom and in English education in Japan.

Given that MEXT and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) would need to collaborate in terms of who is being recruited to the Programme, how the suitability of ALTs for this role would be evaluated, and the types of information and training provided to potential applicants if this change is effected, AJET believes that current JET participants may be able to offer valuable advice to support this process.

This report presents the findings of AJET's survey asking about these issues.

METHODOLOGY

The data used in this report come from a survey conducted by the Association for Japan Exchange and Teaching (AJET) over the period 1–18 April 2014. This survey was distributed to JET Programme participants using an online survey development tool. The number of questions depended on the job type of the respondent: 49 for Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs), and 11 for Coordinators for International Relations (CIRs) and Sports Exchange Advisors (SEAs). The formats used included 'Yes' or 'No', multiple choice and open-ended questions. This survey was implemented in English.

The survey was divided into four key areas:

- Changes to elementary school English
- English-speaking coordinators in schools
- ALTs as solo educators
- Review of AJETs services

For ease of use, a separate report has been developed for each of these four key areas. This report presents the findings in relation to the idea of ALTs as solo educators, providing an assessment of survey results for each section and an analysis of the responses. The results presented in this report with regard to current JET Programme participants include both participants on their first appointment with the Programme and those on their second or more. All percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

Throughout the report, the following abbreviations will be used for the common terms used in relation to the JET Programme:

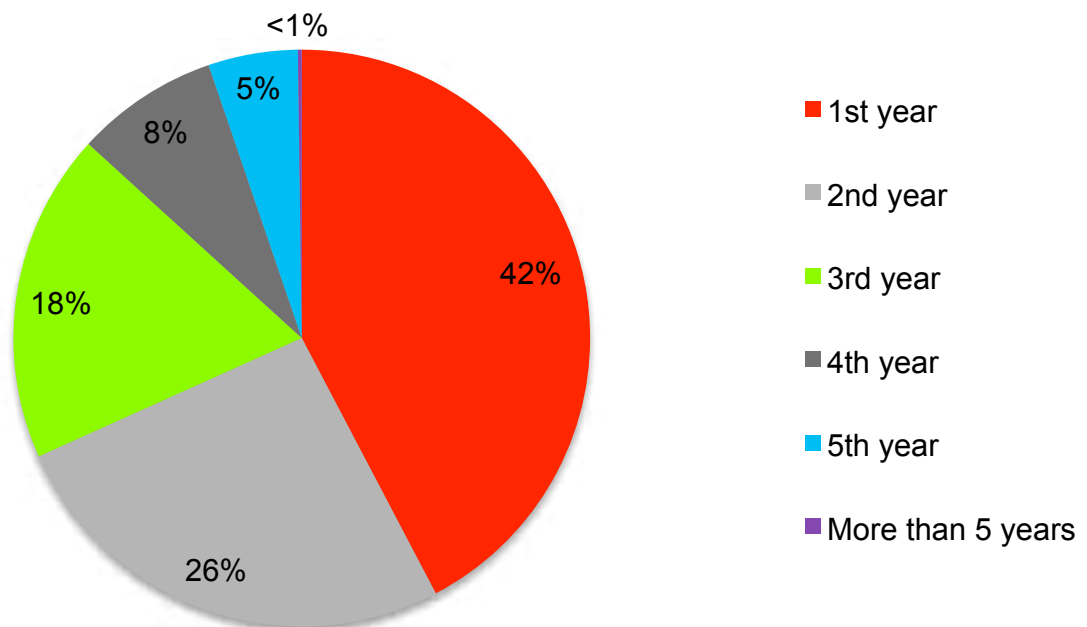
- ALT: Assistant Language Teacher
- CIR: Coordinator for International Relations
- SEA: Sports Exchange Advisor
- JET: Japan Exchange and Teaching (Programme)
- AJET: The Association for Japan Exchange and Teaching

Survey Sample

The survey collected responses from a total of 1135 JET Programme participants, or approximately 26% of the total current JET Programme population in Japan. Of these, a significant portion were CIRs or did not provide responses to the section of the survey relating to ALTs as solo educators, so their data has been excluded from the analysis presented in this report, leaving a sample size of 936 respondents, or 22% of the JET population. All of these 936 respondents currently works as an ALT on the JET Programme.

In terms of how long the 936 respondents have been on the JET Programme, the largest proportion identified themselves as being in their first year (42%), with second- and third-year participants the next most populous groups (26% and 18%, respectively). The graph below shows the complete breakdown of respondents by year on the JET Programme.

Year on the JET Programme



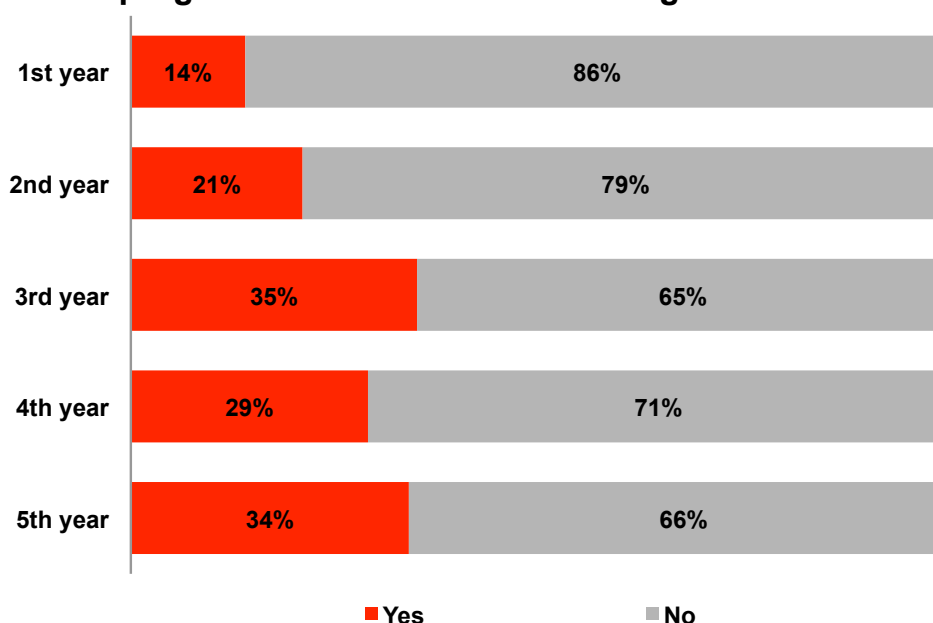
Note: Although the maximum JET Programme tenure is 5 years, 'More than 5 years' is used to denote JET participants who have a combined total of more than 5 years over 2 or more separate appointments. With such a small sample size for these participants, their results have been left out of most graphs within the report.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Education-related Qualifications

The results of this survey show that half (50%) of all current ALTs had some form of teaching qualification or experience before coming to Japan. Subsequent to arriving in Japan, anywhere from 21% to 35% of 2nd to 5th year ALTs have taken, or are currently undertaking, education qualification/certification programmes. Comparatively, only 14% of first-year ALTs are currently undertaking some kind of certification program, though this is likely a function of having just arrived in Japan during the past year and spending time settling into their new job and lifestyle (before potentially undertaking some kind of course in the future). Nevertheless, these results suggest that a reasonable proportion of the ALT population have or are working towards some kind of teaching qualification and/or experience, which is thought to be a positive result for the JET Programme.

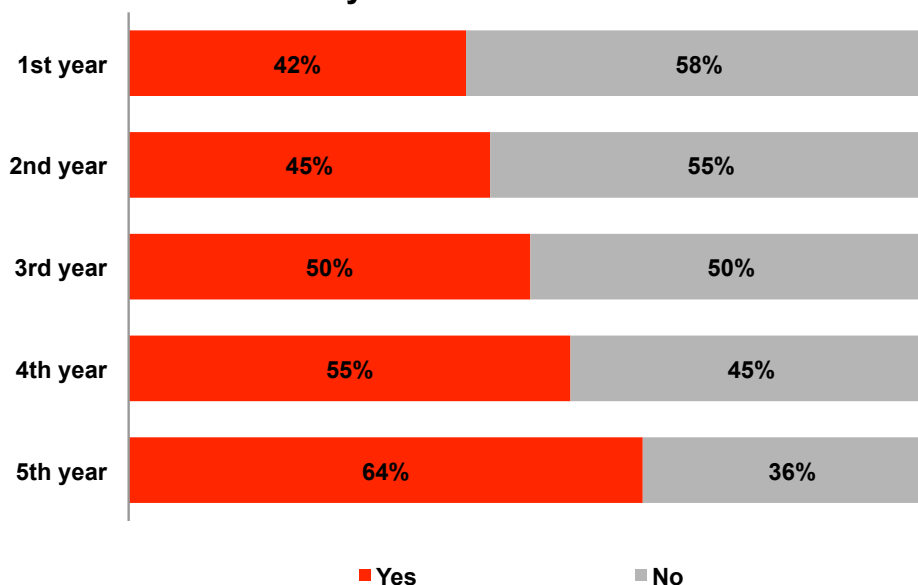
Have you taken, or are currently undertaking, some kind of education qualification/ certification programme whilst on the JET Programme?



The Realities of Solo Teaching amongst ALTs

According to the survey results, almost half (46%) of ALTs teaching at junior and senior high schools currently conduct some, or all, of their English classes alone. Despite not technically being allowed to teach alone within the current system, the reality is that this occurs at least some of the time for many survey respondents, at both junior high and senior high school levels, if only because Japanese Teachers of English (JTEs) are occasionally not present (unexpectedly) or have not planned anything for class. This number is shown to grow with each additional year of experience on JET, starting at 42% for first-year participants and increasing to 64% for those in their fifth year, as shown in the graph on the following page.

Do you plan and execute some or all of your classes alone in your current situation?



This result is not surprising given that the most common reasons given for the ability to plan and execute solo lessons were confidence (69%) and length of time and teaching experience gained on the JET Programme (52%) – again indicating that although ALTs are not supposed to teach on their own, perhaps those with more experience are given more independence by their JTEs. ‘Other’ common reasons provided by respondents that allow them to successfully teach solo included issues around ‘rapport and trust with the students and/or JTE’, or contrastingly, ‘having a JTE that did not prepare for lessons’. As one respondent commented, “I often have JTEs who participate little or not at all, so my ability to conduct a class alone has improved greatly since my start.”

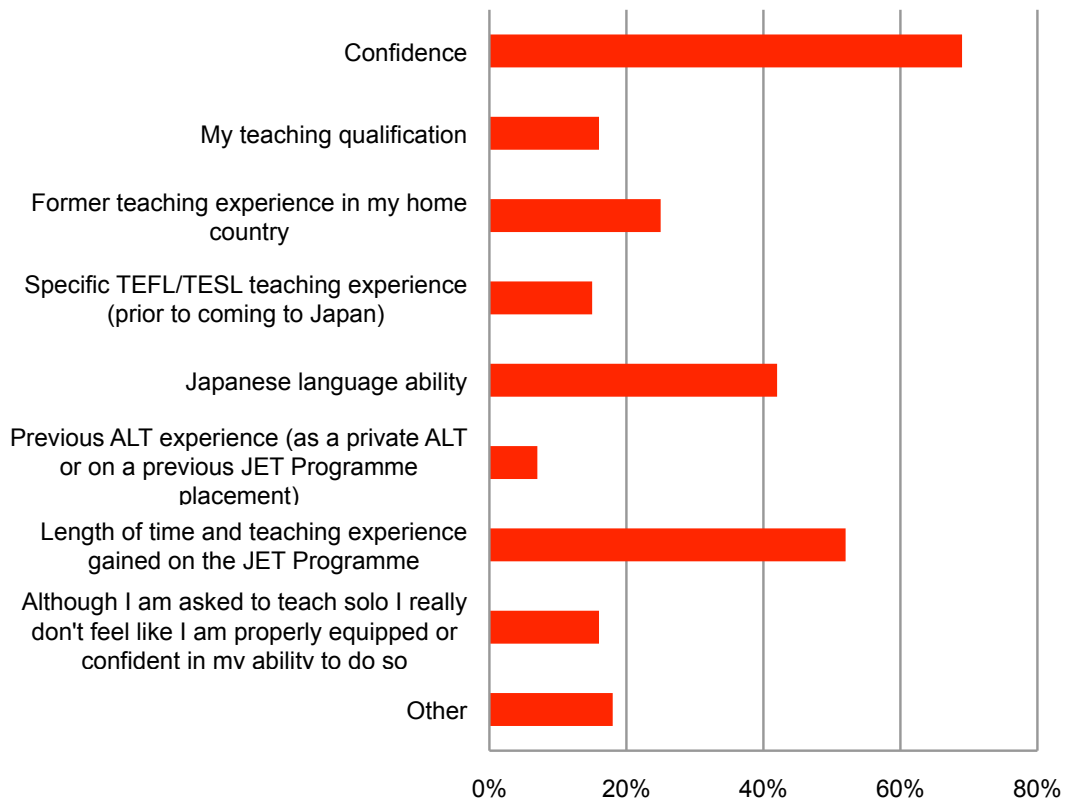
It is also worth noting, as reflected in the above graph, that a reasonable proportion of respondents (16%) are actually expected to teach solo but do not necessarily feel confident in doing so. This was also reinforced in the ‘Other’ comments of a number of respondents:

“I would’ve liked to have had more training. I basically had to figure out how to do my job on my own, after quite a rocky start.”

“I don’t know why it’s been so “hands off” even after specifically asking my JTE/supervisor to give me some help. This is my first time teaching and it’s had a tremendously negative impact on my first year as an ALT.”

“My predecessor planned and taught his classes solo and therefore I was expected to do the same. Although I had obtained a TESOL qualification before coming to Japan, I had no “real” teaching experience so planning and teaching 15+ lessons a week was extremely stressful as I did not feel qualified or competent. Now, after 2.5 years I feel confident in my teaching abilities though I wish I had more input from my JTEs when it comes to lesson planning.”

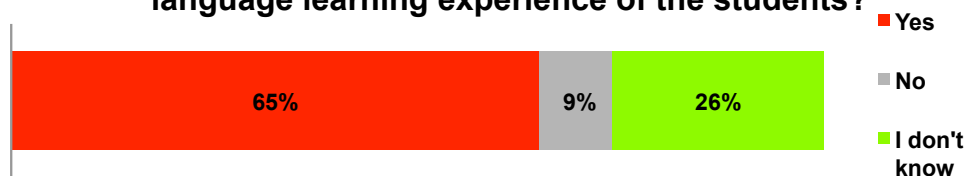
What do you think are the main factors that allow you to teach solo?



Perceptions of Solo-taught Classes

It is interesting to note that 65% of respondents believe that solo-taught ALT classes could enhance the language learning experience for students, as shown in the graph below.

Do you think solo ALT-led classes could enhance the language learning experience of the students?



Compared to the proportion of ALTs that actually teach some or all solo classes in their current situation (46%), this suggests that many ALTs believe it to be a positive idea in theory. However, as would be expected, there are many different views from the JET community regarding allowing ALTs to teach solo, with many stating caveats on which their response was based. In line with the graph shown earlier about the factors that enable current ALTs to teach solo, common viewpoints expressed in the free responses are that ALTs would need to have teaching experience from their home country, or gain enough experience as an ALT on the JET Programme first, before undertaking their own solo lessons. The following responses illustrate these concerns:

"If the JET is a certified teacher, this is the best possible way to teach a language. Receiving instruction from someone who doesn't know what they're doing clearly doesn't work. The Japanese teacher needs to take a backseat position, supporting the English speaker, not the other way around. For this to work, however, the JET needs to be an actual teacher, not just a native speaker."

"Of course, there are JETs that are qualified to teach, and some who don't have a teacher's license but have obtained the necessary skills from a previous qualification that is transferable [sic] to the job. But to be able to teach alone, these JETs will still need the cooperation and support of a Japanese speaking teacher who can help phase with other staff members and students. I also think that having two teachers in a class working together is advantageous because it really reinforces the fact that English can be more than a subject - it is a set of life skills. And then it can be fun!"

Many respondents also indicated the importance of a JTE being present for classroom management even if they do not actively participate in the lesson, as in the following comments:

"I think some JET participants would be alright, but many people do not come from professional educational backgrounds. I learned on the job how to be [self-]sufficient in the classroom, and sometimes feel confident teaching solo under emergency circumstances, but in general I don't enjoy teaching alone, mainly because class management becomes problematic. I also don't have good enough Japanese language skills to adequately explain technical grammar points."

"It is better to have a JTE in the classroom in the case of a breakdown in classroom management or other emergency situations such as an accident or disaster, the JTE should know what to do."

Respondents were also asked to consider the impact on the classroom learning environment more generally in the absence of team-teaching. Many different points were raised as to what would be lost in a solo-educator environment (regardless of whether the teacher was a JTE or ALT). Responses could be broadly classified according to five main categories:

- student engagement – having some students either bored or left out due to a lack of personal attention
- discipline – the inability of a single teacher to remain focused on teaching a class while disciplining students
- two-person models – the ability to demonstrate normal English conversation
- efficiency – the challenge for a single teacher in maintaining class attention throughout all aspects of the class, including handing out paperwork or writing on the board
- misunderstanding – challenges in communication between the students and teacher

Of these, by far the largest concern, described by over half (55%) of respondents to this question, was a lack of two-person models, as in the following quotes:

"Sample conversations and two-person demonstrations can really be an effective way of showing students what it looks like to use English to communicate with others. As a solo teacher that's obviously much more difficult to accomplish."

"The students seem to forget that their Japanese teachers can speak English, and it is good for them to see their role models use English to communicate, it shows them it is possible and they will try to emulate [it]."

"When team teaching, the two teachers can work together to demonstrate or carry out listening activities. Also, when the ALT is the main teacher, or solo teacher, the Japanese students lose sight of the very capable Japanese speaker of English. Seeing Japanese speakers of English in and outside of the classroom can boost moral[e], and the students' own belief in their ability to learn English."

The next most commonly identified concern was in regard to issues of misunderstanding (identified by 27% of respondents). As one respondent noted:

"I think without a native Japanese speaker in the classroom the children would be scared to ask questions because they wouldn't be sure the alt [sic] would fully understand them."

These responses indicate that a large number of current JET Programme ALTs see team teaching as an effective way of delivering examples of natural English communication, and on a more practical level, as a means of demonstrating activities. In addition, the presence of a Japanese person who has learned English and is able to interact with a native speaker forms an excellent role model for students to emulate. Issues relating to student engagement, discipline and efficiency, though mentioned less often, represent other valid concerns about a solo-educator model compared to a team-teaching environment.

Overall, the results suggest that although a large portion of ALTs (65%) believe that solo-taught ALT classes could enhance the language learning experience for students, the prevailing viewpoint is that team-teaching is still the best approach for the majority of classes, as evidenced in the following comments:

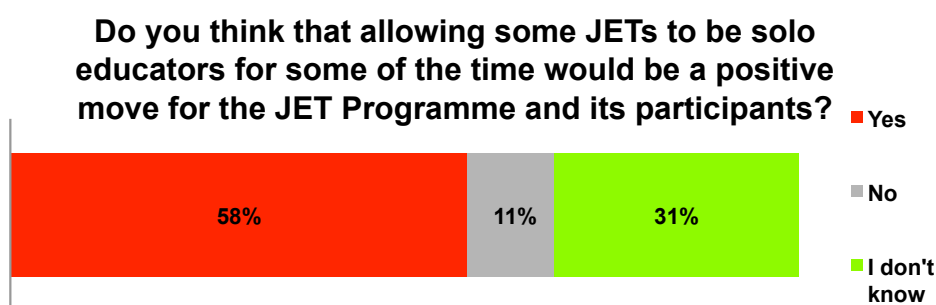
“Team teaching is a great experience for the JTE as well as the students, and I feel that the skills and traits that both parties bring to the table cannot be competently accomplished by a single individual.”

“I’m not sure I’m convinced that JETs acting as solo educators is a good idea. I think there is a fundamental [sic] disconnect between JETs and their students due to language and cultural barriers. JTEs help bridge that gap because not only do they understand the culture, but they understand the school system and it’s [sic] expectations. Solo classes are definitely a possibility [sic] that can be explored, but I think team teaching with a JTE should remain as the default approach to English teaching.”

“The JET program [sic] was created with team teaching in mind and the whole program [sic] revolves around this approach. If MEXT wants to import true English teachers, it will need completely different qualification requirements, different assessments, and would ideally be recruiting from a different pool of candidates. Therefore, though there would be some positives, overall I think it’d be a mistake to try to halfheartedly [sic] retool the JET program in such a way.”

Perception of ALTs as Solo Educators

The survey also sought to gauge more specifically the perceptions held by current ALTs of the proposal to allow them to work some of the time as solo educators. The overall perception was positive, with 58% of respondents seeing the proposed system as a positive change for the JET programme and its participants.



A number of extended responses identified the potential benefits of solo teaching opportunities in relation to both personal and professional development. As one respondent commented, “As long as the JETs allowed to teach solo are qualified teachers, or have enough teaching experience on JET, it’d be great. More freedom, more responsibility, more variety.” Additionally, as noted above, an even larger proportion of respondents (65%) acknowledged that solo ALT-led classes could also potentially enhance the language learning experience of the students.

Based on the extended responses provided in the survey, the main argument for having solo ALT-led classes at least some of the time is that it would promote communication rather than focusing on reading/writing, and would allow for better English language immersion as there would be no ‘easy way out’ with the JTE translating into Japanese for the students.

According to MEXT's new course of study, English classes in senior high school are already, in principle, to be taught in English. However a large number of comments of this nature from respondents indicate that perhaps this is not necessarily happening with JTEs in the classroom. If MEXT is intending to also extend this policy to junior high schools in future, there is clearly a way to go based on the feedback from current ALTs, and ALT-led classes may in fact be one way for students to participate in a more 'immersive' English learning environment.

It is important to note, however, that 26% of respondents were not sure about whether solo ALT-led classes would be beneficial for students or not, and 31% did not know whether it would necessarily be a positive move for the JET Programme and its participants in general. Combined with the large number of free responses detailing the 'conditions' that respondents believed would need to be in place to ensure the success of such a system, these results suggest that while there is general support for the idea, there is also a sense of uncertainty shared by a significant number of current JET Programme participants.

Only 9% of respondents thought that solo ALT-led classes would not benefit the language learning experience of students. A similarly low proportion (11%) thought it could have a negative impact on the JET Programme itself and its participants. Despite these relatively low numbers, there are still some important concerns in relation to ALTs potentially working as solo educators that should be taken into consideration if/when implementing such a teaching model. Survey responses suggested two main themes in relation to these concerns.

Firstly, respondents stated that the current quality of the JET participants being hired on the Programme may not be of the level required to participate effectively in the proposed solo-educator system, as highlighted by the following comments:

"I find it risky. Some JETs are fresh out of college without any experience or education in teaching. JETs who have proven to be competent could do it, though, and it would be a positive move for them and the Programme."

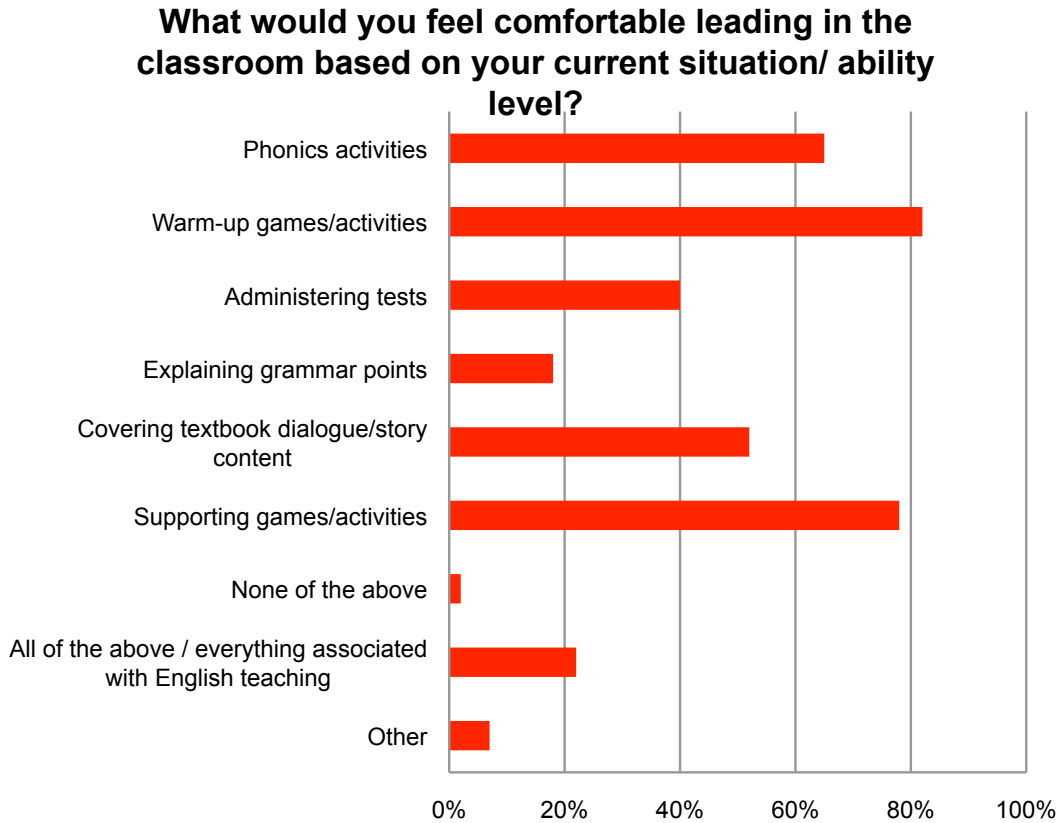
"I really think the JET Program [sic] should increase its standards on who they hire. From what I noticed, some of these ALTs seem highly unqualified and I would really worry about a solo class from some of them, to the point where I feel that it could damage the overall impression of the JET Program [sic]."

Secondly, if ALTs are asked to work in a position of more authority in the classroom as a solo educator, the current terms on which they are treated, whether they be financial, structural or educational, would need to be adjusted. The following response highlights this concern:

"Assistants who take on teaching as the main instructors should be paid and treated as teachers. This changes the job completely and SHOULD [sic] change the requirements for applicants. Hiring native English teachers with no background in education is absurd. It's not native speakers that will change education in Japan, but rather teacher methodology and having a clear curriculum set by MEXT."

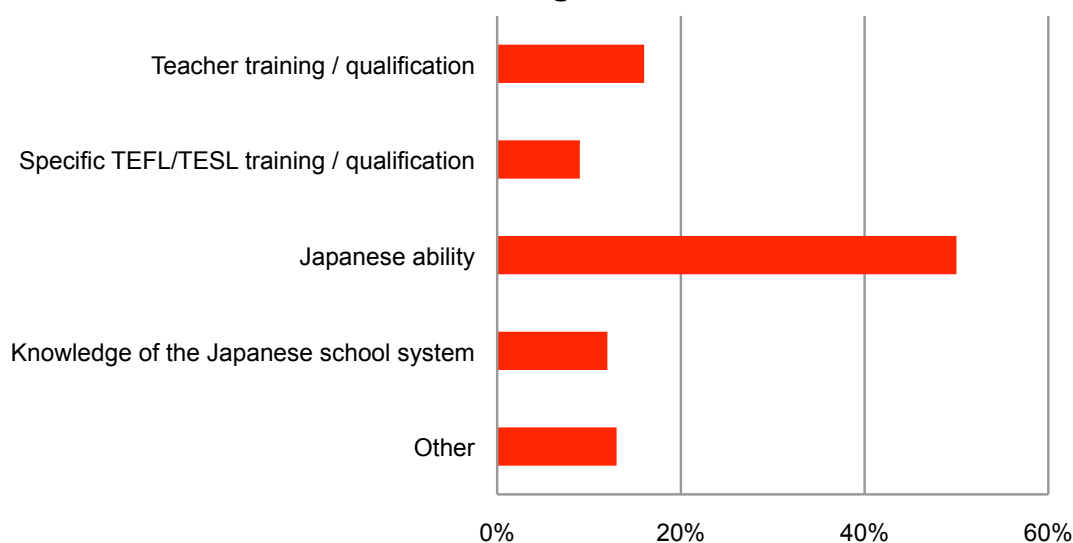
Transitioning ALTs to be Solo Educators

When asked what they would feel comfortable leading in the classroom (without the support of a JTE) based on their current situation/ ability level, many respondents indicated that they are already comfortable leading various warm-up or supporting games/activities (selected by 82% and 78% of respondents respectively) or phonics activities (65%). However only 20% of respondents feel comfortable teaching grammar points, and a similarly small proportion (22%) feel comfortable leading all aspects of English classes, as shown in the graph below.



In addition, the survey collected specific information from ALTs regarding potential barriers to making the transition into the role of solo educator and about what would be necessary to facilitate the process. Not surprisingly, the main barrier ALTs consider in relation to executing solo lessons is (lack of) Japanese language ability (indicated by 46% of respondents), by far overshadowing the next most commonly observed barrier, which was lack of teacher training/qualifications (14%). These results are shown in the graph on the next page.

What do you feel is the main barrier to you feeling more comfortable executing more of these elements?



Together these results indicate that while ALTs are already comfortable with those elements of English lessons that potentially require little or no Japanese language ability, the majority remain limited in their ability to contribute in relation to other aspects of English where Japanese is still considered to be a key teaching tool. This was also reinforced by a number of extended responses, such as these:

"I think this is ok if the solo ALT has enough Japanese experience to help the students along. I understand the main point is to get fully English classes, but sometimes for difficult points students need the extra help of using Japanese."

"If the ALT does not have Japanese language proficiency there could be students who go throughout an entire lesson confused and unable to express it or receive clarification."

As such, (advanced) Japanese language ability is seen by current ALTs to be a key requirement of any ALTs who are to act as solo educators. Alternatively, in transitioning to a solo-educator model, there may be a need to put in place guidelines for which aspects of class ALTs should be responsible for, or provide ALTs with additional training if they are expected to teach all aspects of English education, including those with which they are not currently comfortable.

Aside from limited Japanese language ability, ALTs also specified a number of other potential barriers to solo teaching. The most common of these included a lack of willingness or cooperation from the JTE or school to allow ALTs to teach solo classes, or the ALT not being recognised as a 'real teacher' despite qualifications that the ALT may hold:

"Often the ALTs [sic] input is relegated to irrelevant, 'foreign,' or as they are merely assistants: above their abilities, qualifications (regardless of what they are) or experience in a position viewed as low status, an assistant."

"It's some combination of Japanese language ability, lacking the right support network (I'm still a "guest" - not a "real teacher" - so the students don't always feel like they have to listen to me), and lack of experience."

Furthermore, numerous ALTs noted that a key reason they do not feel comfortable as solo educators in their current situation is the nature of the Japanese education system and structure itself. Aside from feeling restricted in their ability to make a significant contribution in this environment, many ALTs also feel that this negatively impacts students' learning of the English language, as evidenced in the following comments about the barriers that currently exist:

“Knowledge of the goals of the Japanese school system. They say they want students to be able to communicate in English, but in practice that seems not to be true. It seems the goal is more towards tests. I wish I could know the goals better.”

“The Japanese testing system is bizarre and ineffective. It discourages learning and encourages mindless memorisation.”

“Over-reliance on text-book materials by JTEs. An education system that focuses on passing written tests instead of teaching communication skills. Lack of clarity as to the role of an ALT in the classroom and their place in the educational hierarchy.”

It would appear that from first-hand experience, ALTs across Japan are largely in agreement that the apparent goal of English education in Japanese schools at present is not to learn communicative English, but rather to memorise textbook materials and pass exams. This significantly differs from the goals set by MEXT, especially those outlined in the “English Education Reform Plan corresponding to Globalization”¹, which focuses highly on the ability to communicate verbally with English-speaking people.

With these present barriers in mind, the survey also asked respondents to describe what provisions in terms of additional training or resources would be required to enable an ALT to improve the language ability of their students as a solo educator. Amongst the large number of extended responses to this question (653), the largest proportion of respondents (20%) specified Japanese language training as the thing that would be of greatest benefit. This result is clearly related to the finding reported earlier that limited Japanese language ability is currently seen as the most significant barrier by ALTs in terms of their ability to act in a solo educator role. Other training or resources mentioned by respondents included TEFL/TESL certification (8%), knowledge of the curriculum / school policy (7%), classroom management training (5%) and lesson planning courses (4%).

From these results, it is clear that numerous training options and resources are needed to help facilitate the transition from ALTs working in the current team-teaching system to taking on a solo educator role at least some of the time. Alternatively, the JET Programme may need to consider revising its recruitment and selection processes and the types of qualifications or experience it requires of candidates. The following section addresses these issues.

Evaluation of ALTs’ Suitability as Solo Educators

There is a clear indication in the survey results that current ALTs believe a robust and methodical system would need to be put in place for evaluating an ALT’s suitability for acting in a solo-educator role if such a system were to be implemented.

When asked to elaborate on how an ALT could be evaluated pre-departure to be deemed capable and comfortable enough to lead a class as a solo educator, there were two main threads of response. A large proportion of respondents (43%) believed that prior teaching experience was a key determinant of ALT suitability. This suggests that, while at present there is no formal requirement for prospective JET Programme ALT applicants to have any prior teaching experience or qualification, this is something which may need to change if ALTs will be asked to act as solo educators in the future. In addition, a significant number of respondents (36%) believe that prospective JET Programme ALT applicants should be given the chance to demonstrate the required capability and confidence for a solo-educator role through giving a mock lesson at the interview stage of the application/selection process. A number of respondents also noted that it would be very difficult to accurately evaluate an ALT’s capability and comfort teaching a class alone prior to beginning the Programme.

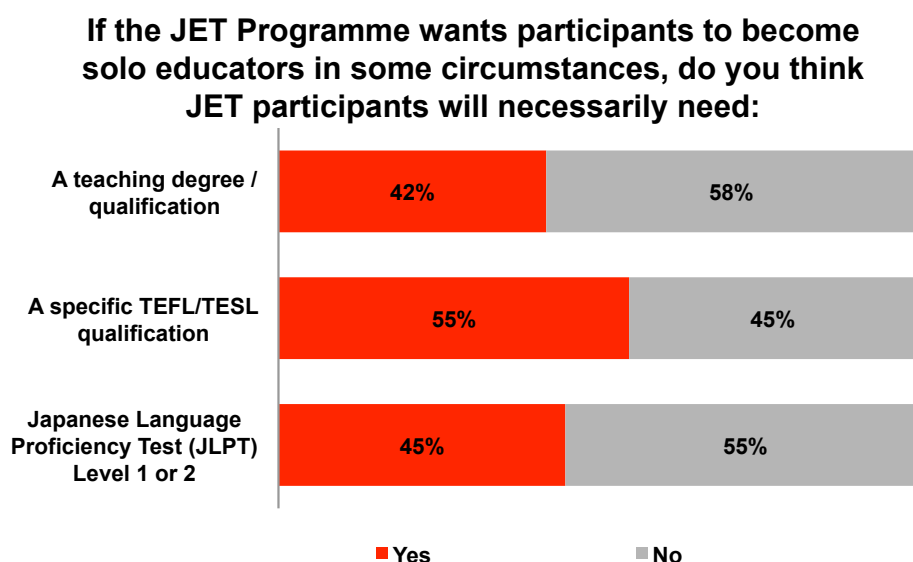
In terms of potential evaluation methods that could be used post-arrival to determine whether ALTs are able to teach classes on their own, there is a clear shift in respondents’ focus from prior teaching experience (mentioned by 20% of respondents) to specific demonstration of ability through delivering a lesson with class observations from relevant staff including both JTEs and supervisors (57%). If a solo-educator system is introduced in the future, this result strongly indicates the need for class observations to be conducted on a much more consistent basis amongst all ALTs as a means

1 http://www.mext.go.jp/english/topics/___icsFiles/afieldfile/2014/01/23/1343591_1.pdf

of evaluating an ALT's aptness for a solo educator role. Several respondents also specifically recommended that evaluation be given only after an initial period of adjustment that gives an ALT the chance to view JTE-only lessons and team-taught lessons. One respondent's view summed up these sentiments as follows:

"I think confidence and assimilation are the most important things. In my case, I don't have a problem with either, but a lot of people are under the stress of living in a new country and despite [any] teaching certificates or N1 language ability they might have; they might be overwhelmed with everything. The team-teaching setup certainly would help in that scenario to delegate some of the stress. I think you would have to ask them a few months after being here if they would want to solo teach."

Interestingly, despite Japanese language ability being cited previously as a potentially key element in ALTs' ability to lead classes confidently on their own, very few respondents mentioned Japanese ability in their suggestions for evaluation methods (both pre-departure and post-arrival), and in fact less than half of respondents (45%) believe that to be successful solo educators ALTs will necessarily need a Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) Level 1 or 2 qualification, as shown in the graph below.

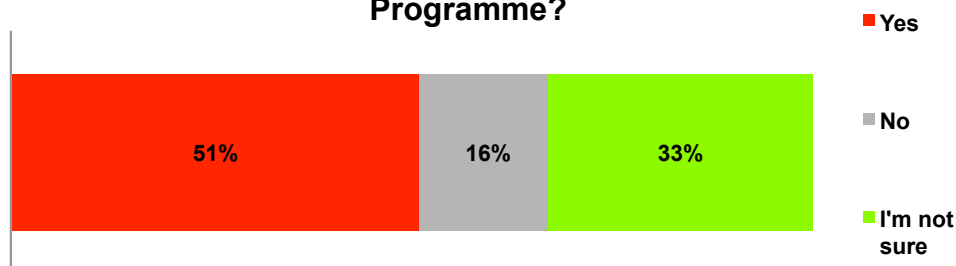


This suggests that although Japanese language ability is an important aspect of ALTs' personal feeling of confidence in leading classes on their own, a related qualification on paper is perhaps not seen as an adequate representation of being able to successfully act as a solo educator. Indeed, only around half of the respondents indicated that a teaching degree/qualification or specific TEFL/TESL qualification would necessarily be required by ALTs working as solo educators (55% and 42% respectively). Together, these results suggest that by far the most important issue in evaluating whether ALTs are competent in leading classes by themselves is to actually see them in action, via some kind of mock lesson or actual teaching demonstration.

Nevertheless, some respondents noted that they would appreciate the chance to more fully utilise their existing qualifications and experience in a solo teaching environment, without being constrained in their role as an 'assistant'. An interesting suggestion from one respondent was that "If teachers have a teaching credential in their home country, there should be some sort of reciprocity program like we have in the U.S. to allow teachers to be able to teach (with those credentials) here. A Japanese language proficiency test in coordination with home country teaching credentials would be appropriate."

A final consideration, when determining whether ALTs are suitable for teaching as solo educators, is whether they *want* to act in this kind of role. Only around half of survey respondents (51%) indicated that with the appropriate training, support and evaluation they would actually want to be solo educators, with the remaining respondents either not sure (33%) or not wanting to be involved in this type of teaching (16%), as shown on the following page.

**If you were able to receive the additional training/
support mentioned above, would you WANT to be a
solo educator in the classroom while on the JET
Programme?**



In addition, throughout the survey there were numerous responses describing situations in which ALTs are forced to teach on a solo basis when they first arrive in Japan, regardless of their Japanese level, teaching qualifications, experience or confidence/ ability to do so, and in many cases these respondents indicated that this had been a negative experience for them. Indeed, many recommended that if ALTs will be expected to act as solo educators at any time, whether now or in the future, that they be better prepared for that scenario, and at the very least given some time to adjust when they first arrive – observing other classes, working in a team-teaching environment and gaining experience – before being expected to act in this capacity.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report has found that whilst there is generally strong support for the proposed system of having ALTs teach as solo educators at least some of the time, that this is tempered with some serious caveats and concerns. Indeed, there are numerous differing viewpoints from the JET community regarding the system and it is recommended that the current requirements for JET Programme participants may need to be revised. For example, prospective ALTs wanting to work as solo educators may need to be qualified teachers, or have at least one year experience on the JET Programme, and a large number would need an increased Japanese language ability to feel confident in this role.

In fact, a significant proportion of the JET community believes that team-teaching should remain a key feature of the JET Programme and of an ALT's teaching schedule, potentially with supplemental/additional solo classes from the ALT. The presence of a JTE for classroom management, teaching grammar points and more importantly for demonstrating natural English communication (only possible with two teachers) is clearly a critical element of the English educational environment for many survey respondents.

Nevertheless, if ALTs are to act as solo educators at least some of the time, there are currently numerous (perceived) barriers to effectively taking on this role. The main barrier is a perceived lack of Japanese ability, though many ALTs also observed that their JTE/school does not see them as a 'real teacher' and that there may need to be a revision to the term 'Assistant Language Teacher' to help facilitate a redefinition of their role in the Japanese classroom. It is also clear that should the system be adopted, a robust system of evaluating an ALT's suitability and desire for taking on a solo educator role is needed. The results indicate that this would be best determined through actually demonstrating one's teaching ability, either at interview or post-arrival.

AJET feels that while a lot of positivity towards this idea exists within the current JET community, there are some clear uncertainties with regards to how it would be implemented. AJET thus recommends that should this proposed system be pursued, significant changes to the JET Programme in terms of clear definition of an ALT's role, title, remuneration, prospective applicant requirements and regular performance evaluations be considered.

