



English-speaking Coordinators in Schools

Produced by the AJET National Council

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Opinion Exchange Meeting

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MIC ♦ MOFA ♦ MEXT ♦ CLAIR ♦ AJET



English-speaking Coordinators in Schools

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report addresses JET Programme participants' views on the usefulness of an English-speaking coordinator in their schools. While the overall feeling was split, around half of all respondents in favour of creating such a role, this report will show that there is a marked difference in receptiveness and services desired depending on a participant's year on the JET Programme. The data presented here suggest that a coordinator would be most useful to participants in their first or second year on the Programme, and in situations where a similar role is not already carried out by a supervisor or Japanese Teacher of English.



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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 the Ministry of Internal Communications (MIC) is currently in the process of considering a funding model that would enable the positioning of a Japanese coordinator-type person in communities who could support communication between Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) and the other teachers at the school, and between JET participants and other Japanese staff in general.

In addition, both MIC and CLAIR were interested to know what kinds of specific information would be beneficial to JET participants, to better connect them with their communities, whether it be through a dedicated coordinator, or via pre-departure information.

With this in mind, AJET developed several survey questions to ask current JET participants how they would feel about having a coordinator at their schools and what kinds of information they would be interested to receive. 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 English-speaking coordinators in schools, 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:

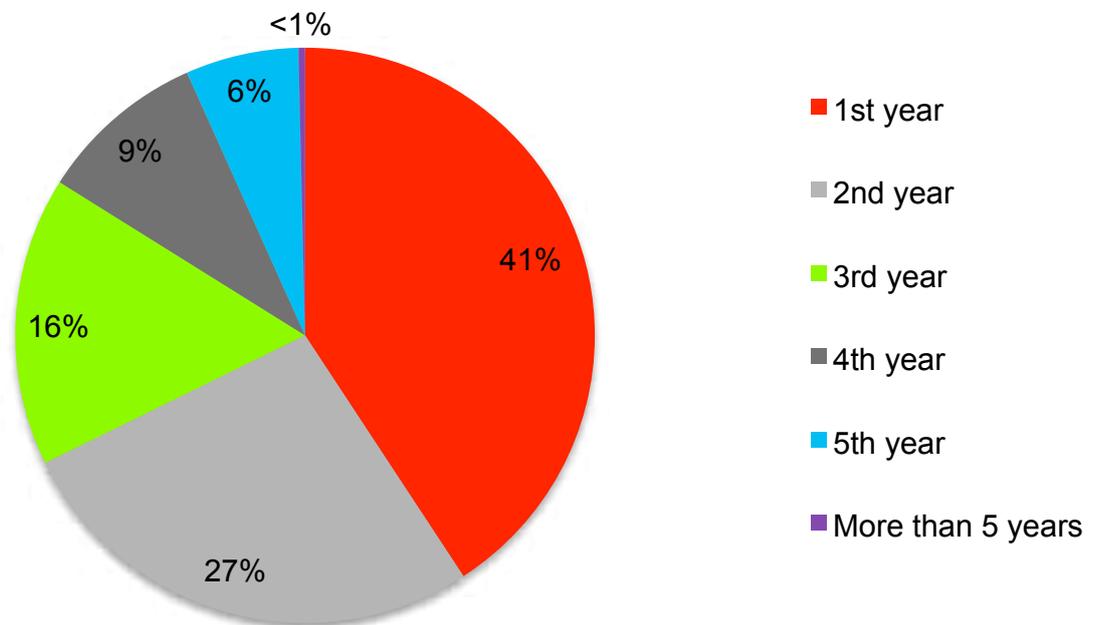
- ALT: Assistant Language Teacher
- CIR: Coordinator for International Relations
- SEA: Sports Exchange Advisor
- JET: Japan Exchange and Teaching (Programme)
- AJET: The Association for Japan Exchange and Teaching

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 large portion indicated that they did not teach at junior high or senior high schools, so their data has been excluded from the analysis presented in this report, leaving a sample size of 554 respondents, or 13% of the JET population. All of these 554 respondents currently works as an ALT on the JET Programme.

In terms of how long the 554 respondents have been on the JET Programme, the largest proportion identified themselves as being in their first year (41%), with second- and third-year participants the next most populous groups (27% and 16%, respectively). The graph below shows the complete breakdown of respondents by year on the JET Programme.

Year on the JET Programme

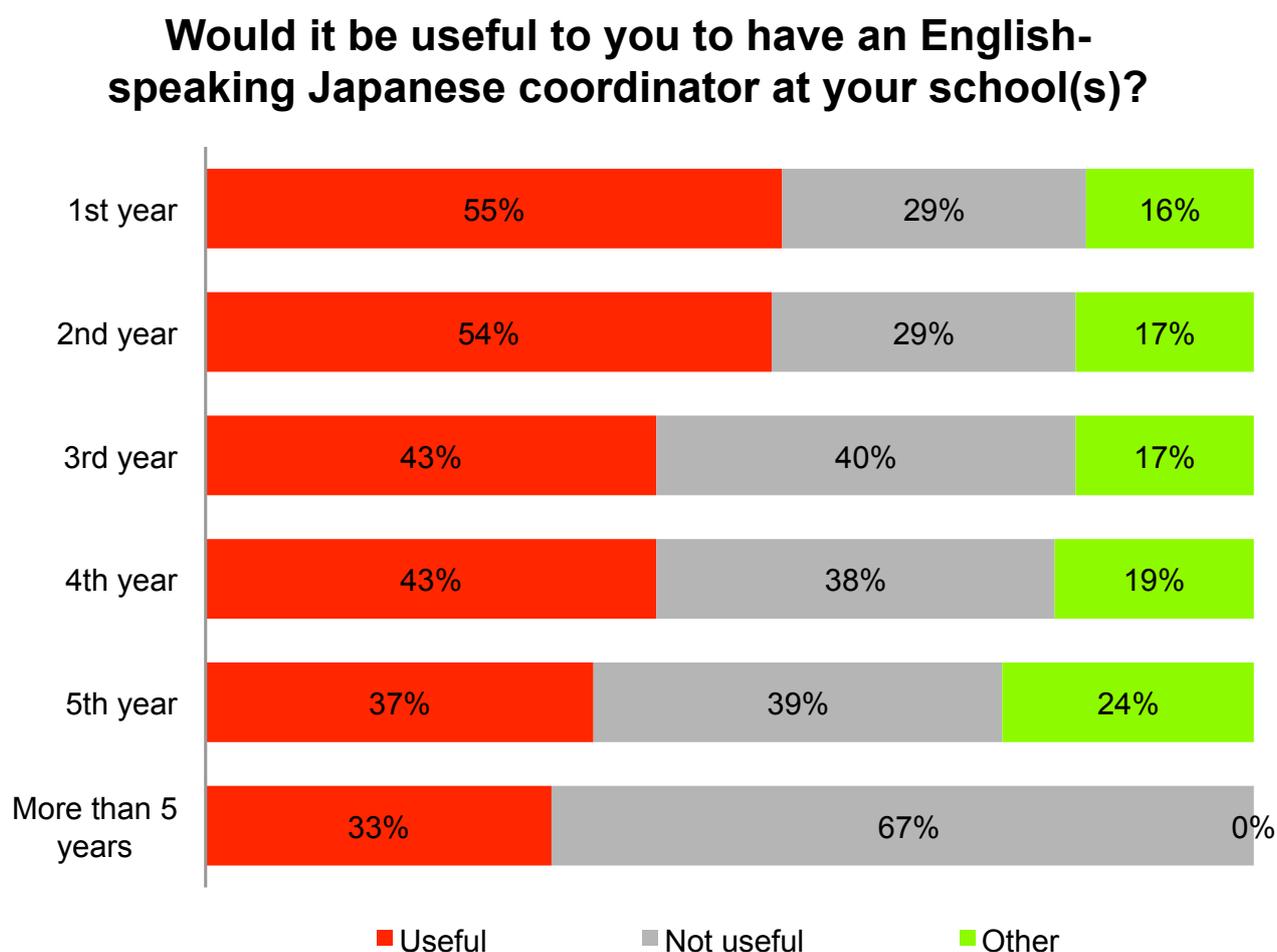


Note: Although the maximum JET Programme tenure is 5 years, 'More than 5 years' is used to denote JET participants who have a combined total of more than 5 years over 2 or more separate appointments. With such a small sample size for these participants, their results have been left out of most graphs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

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Support for an English-speaking Coordinator

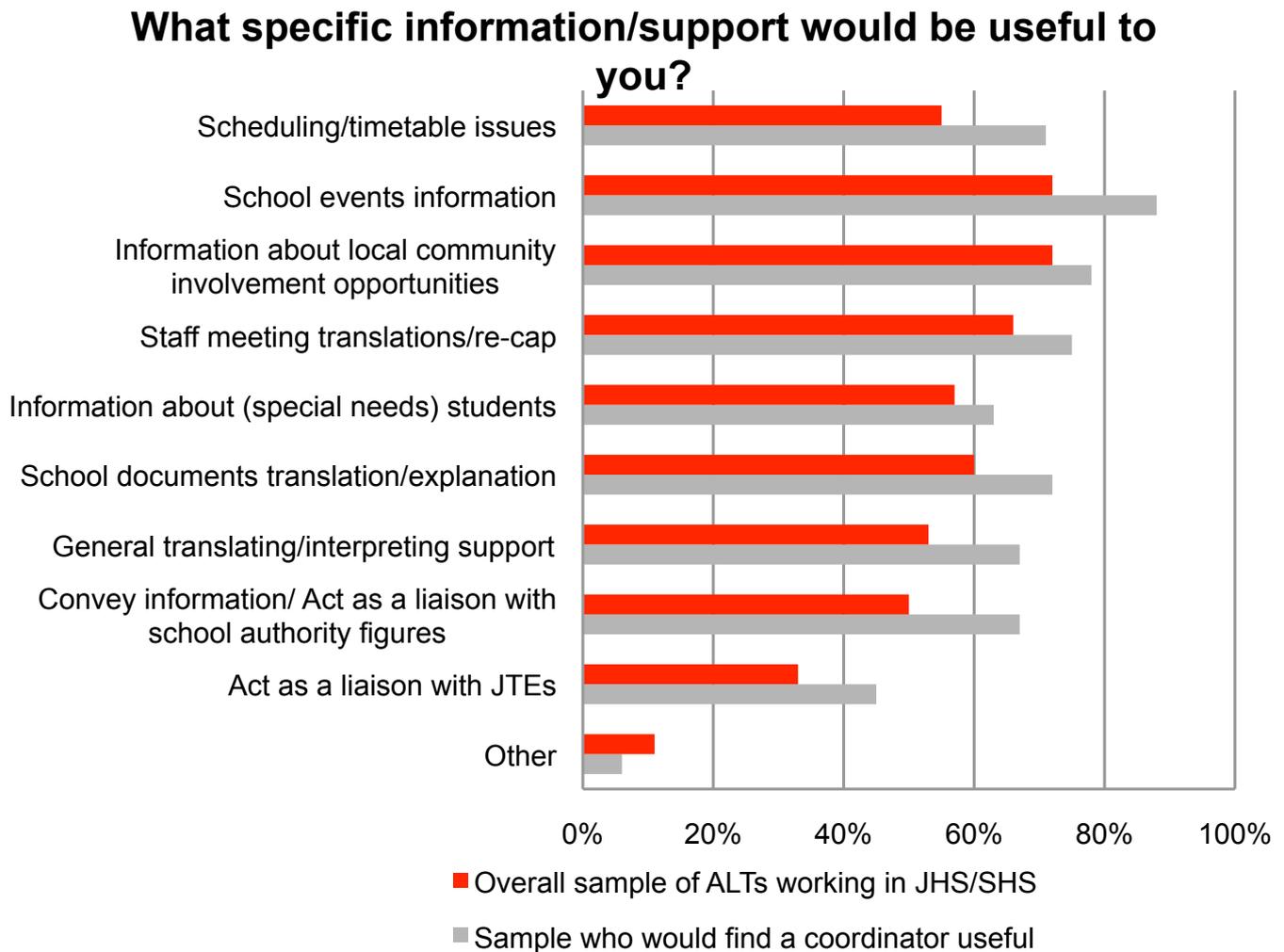
There is a general split among respondents as to whether a coordinator would be useful to them or not, with 50% of respondents overall indicating that they were in favour of the position and 33% indicating that they were not in favour. Within these responses, there is a consistent trend depending on the participant's year on the JET Programme. Specifically, first and second year participants are more likely to indicate that they would find a coordinator useful, while third, fourth and fifth year participants are more likely to indicate the opposite, as shown in the graph below.



In addition, this topic solicited a large number of free responses (169), as reflected in the 'Other' category in the above graph. The most common theme amongst these was that the participant's current supervisor or Japanese Teacher of English (JTE) already serves in this type of coordinator role, making a separate/additional position unnecessary. This suggests that although an English-speaking coordinator *role* is useful to many Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs), they already have someone who fills this type of position, which is a positive result. In fact, a number of respondents specifically commented that they thought this is or *should be* the role of supervisors (or JTEs in some cases), and that adding another person in this capacity would be a waste of money and resources. Another common theme among respondents was a concern that such a position could potentially alienate participants from their Japanese colleagues. As one respondent wrote: "...I feel having a liaison would further remove me from the faculty community; everyone would just rely on the coordinator instead of talking to me."

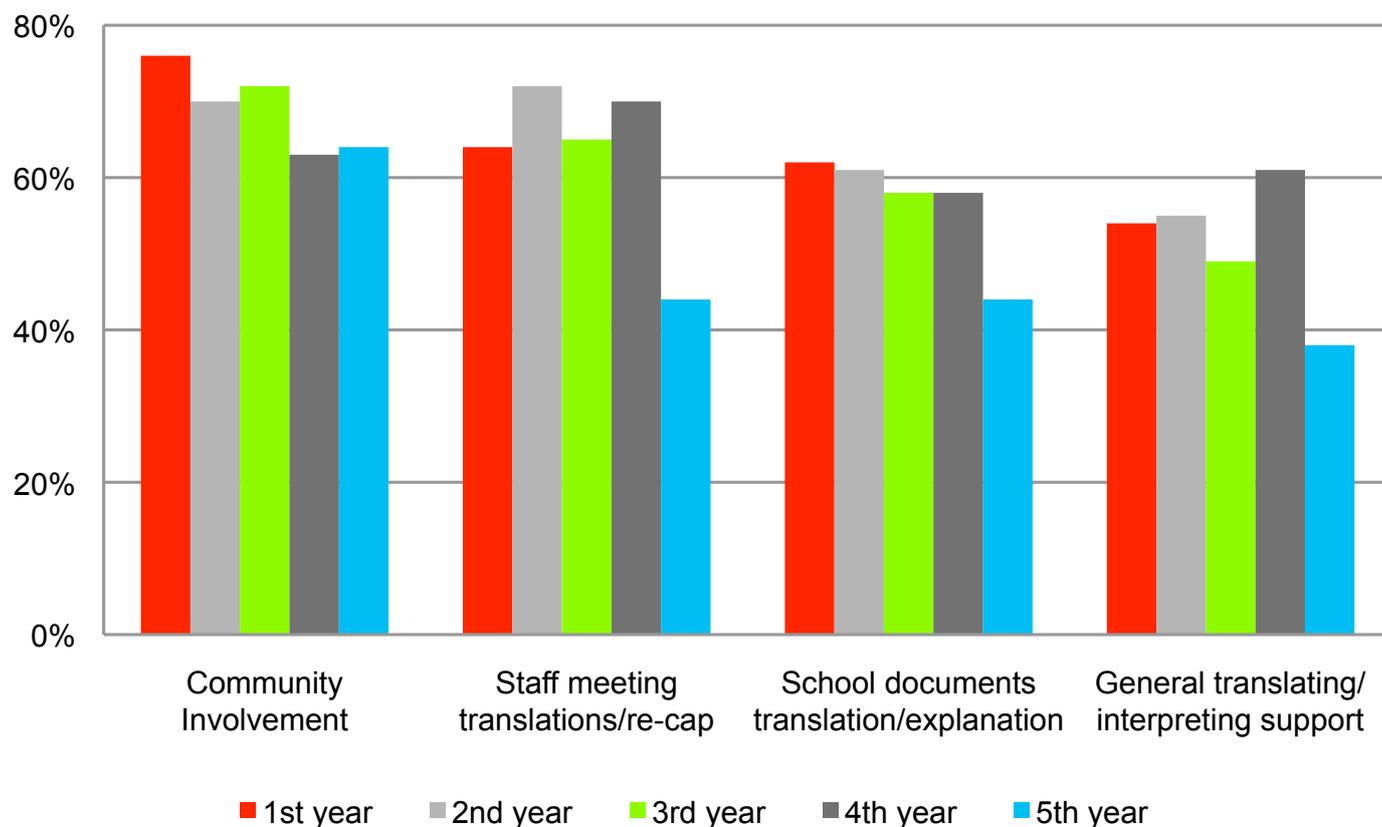
Information Desired by ALTs

The survey also asked participants what kind of information they would like to receive from a coordinator if one were to exist. The types of information most commonly desired by ALTs, regardless of whether they felt an additional coordinator would be useful in their school or not, relate to information on school events and community involvement opportunities. More specifically, among the respondents who supported a coordinator position, 88% expressed that they would like this person to provide them with information on school events and 78% would like information on community involvement. 'Staff meeting translations/re-cap' (selected by 75% of those supporting a coordinator), 'School documents translation/explanation' (72%) and 'Scheduling/timetable issues' (71%) were other popular choices. A full breakdown of results is shown in the graph below.



There was again a noticeable trend depending on a participant's year on the programme: 76% of first year participants indicated that they would like to receive information on community involvement as compared to 64% of fifth year participants. When asked about general translation support, the trend is similar: 54% of first year participants indicate that this was a desired service while only 38% of fifth year participants indicate this as a critical factor. These trends are likely due to the participant's overall time spent on the Programme. JET Programme participants in their fourth or fifth year are likely to have a better idea of how to become involved in their community and/or potentially have a better understanding of the Japanese language than first-year participants. This indicates that first-year participants are in more need of the third-party support that a coordinator could provide.

What specific information/support would be useful to you?

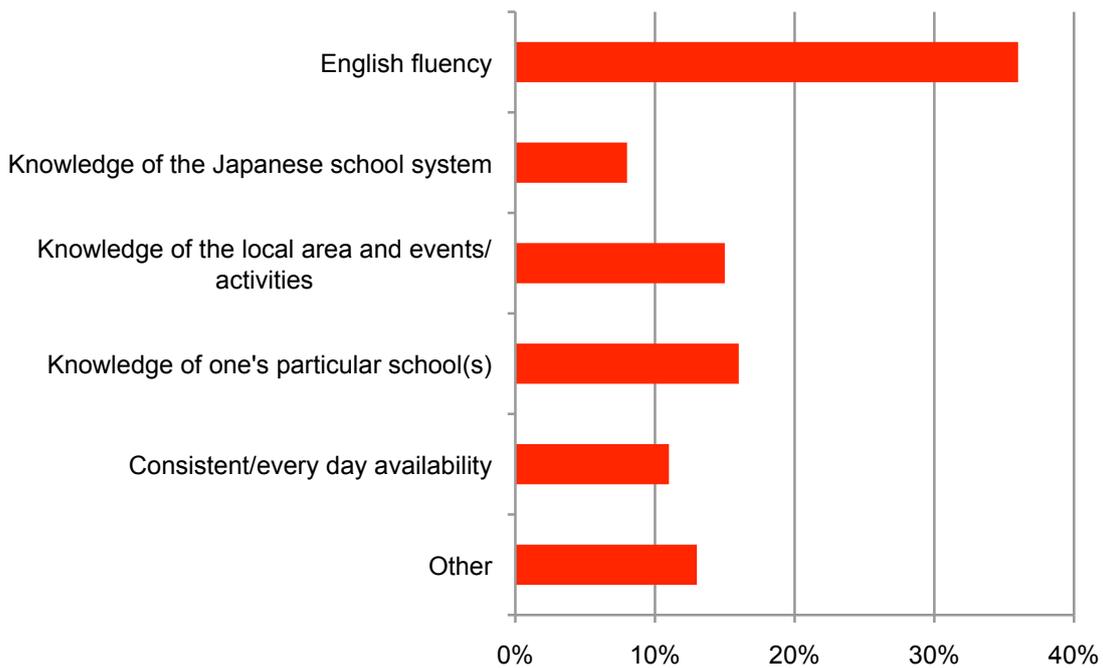


Interestingly, amongst the 33% of survey respondents who indicated that a coordinator would *not* be useful to them in their schools, the most commonly requested information (by 65% of this group), was also information about local community involvement opportunities, whereas information relating to school events, staff meetings and documents were selected by far fewer respondents. In-keeping with many of the extended responses and those shown above in relation to a participant's length of time on the Programme, these results suggest that many ALTs do not feel the need for a coordinator because they are already familiar with their school environment, but nevertheless may still be interested in outside community opportunities.

Critical Success Factors

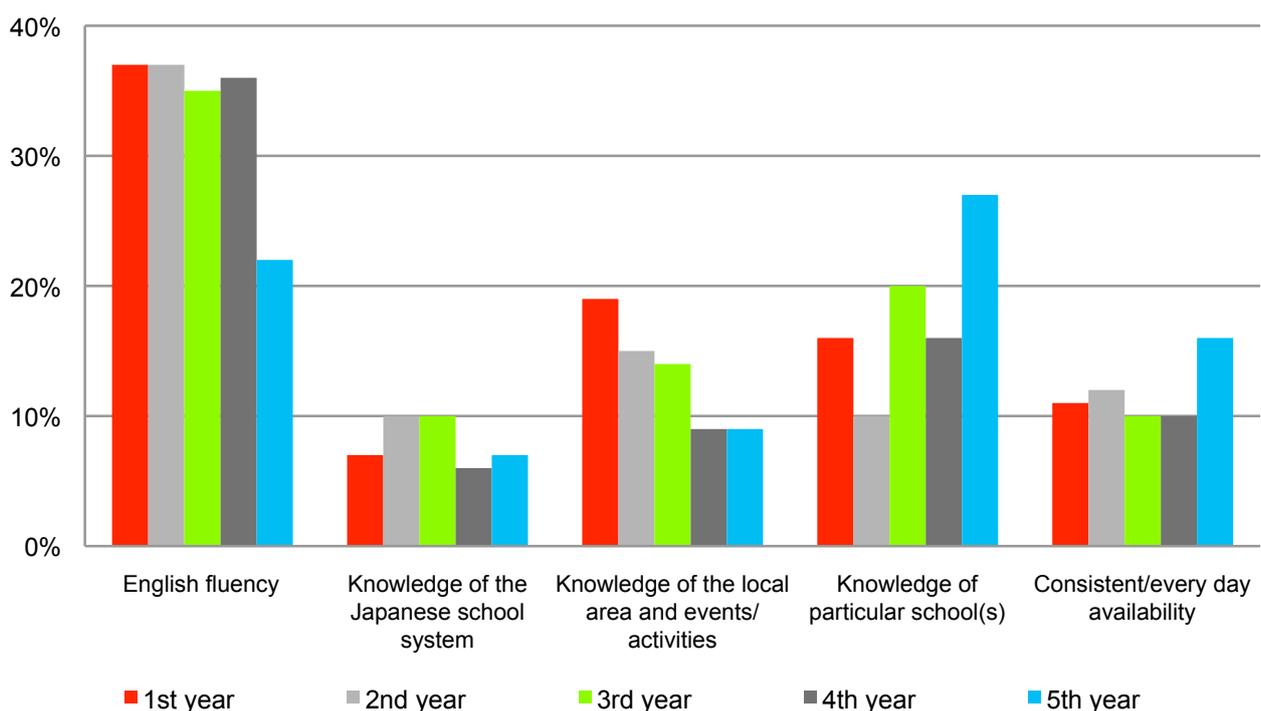
When asked what the most crucial factor for the success/usefulness of a coordinator would be, English fluency was the most common response, being selected by 36% of respondents, with knowledge of the local area and knowledge of particular schools the second most common (16% each). This question also received a large number of extended responses (120). The most common factors identified by JET participants that they would desire from a coordinator are approachability/willingness to help and knowledge of Western culture. Several respondents also noted that overseas experience would be particularly useful for someone in this type of coordinator role.

For a school coordinator to be successful/useful, what is the most critical factor?



Here, again, there is a marked difference among first-year participants and participants of other years, with English fluency clearly being less important to those in their final year on the Programme. In addition, while 19% of first-year participants indicated that they would want a coordinator to be knowledgeable about local events, whereas only 9% of fourth- and fifth-year participants indicated that this would be a critical issue for them. By contrast, the most critical issue in relation to coordinators from the perspective of fifth-year participants was knowledge of the ALT's particular school(s). These differences based on participants' length of time on the Programme are shown in more detail in the graph below.

What specific information/support would be useful to you?



CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, it appears that a coordinator would be most useful for JET Programme participants who are new to the Programme. As a participant spends more time in his/her community, it is natural that they would become acclimated to their community and school environments, accounting for the decreased interest in a coordinator among participants in the fourth and fifth years. Nevertheless, the data show that in many situations a coordinator would be found useful by participants in assisting them in becoming more involved in their schools and communities.

It is recommended that further research be done to ensure that a person with English proficiency and knowledge of the participant's local schools and community is consistently serving in this position. If this is not possible, it is nevertheless recommended that a coordinator be put in place to connect participants with their local schools and communities in order to ensure that the goals of the JET Programme are being met. However, based on feedback from current JET participants in this survey, it will be important to only provide coordinators in situations where they do not already exist; otherwise there is the potential to waste both money and resources in an environment where ALTs are already receiving the information they desire from an English-speaking person.

