



# WORKPLACE INTEGRATION

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# WORKPLACE INTEGRATION

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report examines, analyses, and addresses workplace communication and integration of current JET Programme participants by compiling data from a survey on training received regarding cultural differences between Japan and participants' home countries, difficulties related to communication in the workplace, socialisation opportunities in and outside the workplace involving co-workers, workplace communication issues specific to Assistant Language Teachers, and Assistant Language Teachers' involvement in their schools' English clubs. For the purposes of this survey, a JET Programme participant's workplace includes all locations in which they regularly work.

The survey for this report was open to responses from the entire current JET Programme community from March 30, 2017 to April 23, 2017. Approximately 18% of the current JET population responded.

A majority of JET Programme participants receive training in cultural differences between Japan and their home countries both before and after arrival. Such training is rated as beneficial overall; however, a sizeable minority do not receive such training.

Communication within the workplace can be challenging due to language differences but nearly all JET Programme participants possess some Japanese language skills and utilise various methods to communicate with co-workers who don't speak their native language. A majority of JET Programme participants report no significant problems communicating with their supervisors, but language is the primary concern for those who do encounter such difficulties.

Nearly all participants are invited to attend officially organised workplace social events, and nearly all do so when invited. Most are invited to attend unofficial events by their co-workers, and nearly all who are invited do so; however, a fair number are not invited to such events by co-workers.

Participants who work as Assistant Language Teachers report that the primary language of communication they use is English; however, Japanese is used more frequently when working with lower grades. Coordinating schedules with Japanese Teachers of English and Homeroom Teachers is the primary difficulty they encounter.

Participants who work as Assistant Language Teachers have a high rate of participation in their school's English clubs, when such a club exists at their school. Participants schools are less likely to have such clubs when the participant works at multiple schools, or when the schools are not senior high schools. Participants are less likely to participate when working at multiple schools as well.

Overall, the survey suggests that JET Programme participants are active participants within the workplace. Cultural and language differences lead to some difficulties, but not to an extraordinary amount. Modifications to expected behaviour and training for both participants and their COs could help reduce the amount of difficulty encountered and result in improved communication and integration within the workplace.

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## INTRODUCTION

JET Programme participants spend a significant amount of their time at work so effective communication and integration within the workplace is important to create a positive outcome for participants, their co-workers, and their COs. Differences in language and culture provide opportunities for cultural exchange, but can present various challenges as well. Understanding and resolving those challenges is beneficial to all parties involved.

The goal of the Spring 2017 Survey was to identify difficulties encountered by JET Programme participants within their work environments, offer clarification of expectations between participants and their contracting organisations, and discover areas for improved communication and integration between participants and their co-workers. In doing so, the AJET National Council hopes to remove barriers and increase engagement between participants and their co-workers, foster greater cultural exchange, resolve misunderstandings between participants and their contracting organisations, and create an improved experience for all parties involved in the JET Programme.

## 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 25 days, from March 30, 2017 to April 23, 2017. The survey was distributed to current JET Programme participants using an online survey development tool. The survey consisted of 53 questions that were written in English. 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, workplace demographics for respondents, and questions relating to JET Programme participant integration within their workplace. 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 912 JET Programme participants, equivalent to approximately 18% of the total current JET Programme population in Japan. This represents a 27% increase in responses compared to the fall survey. Of these respondents, 849 (93%) identified themselves as JET Programme Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) and 63 (7%) as JET Programme Coordinators for International Relations (CIRs). There were no responses from any of the six SEAs. These results are congruent with the overall breakdown of JET Programme participants: 91.6% are ALTs, 8.3% are CIRs, and less than 0.1% are SEAs.

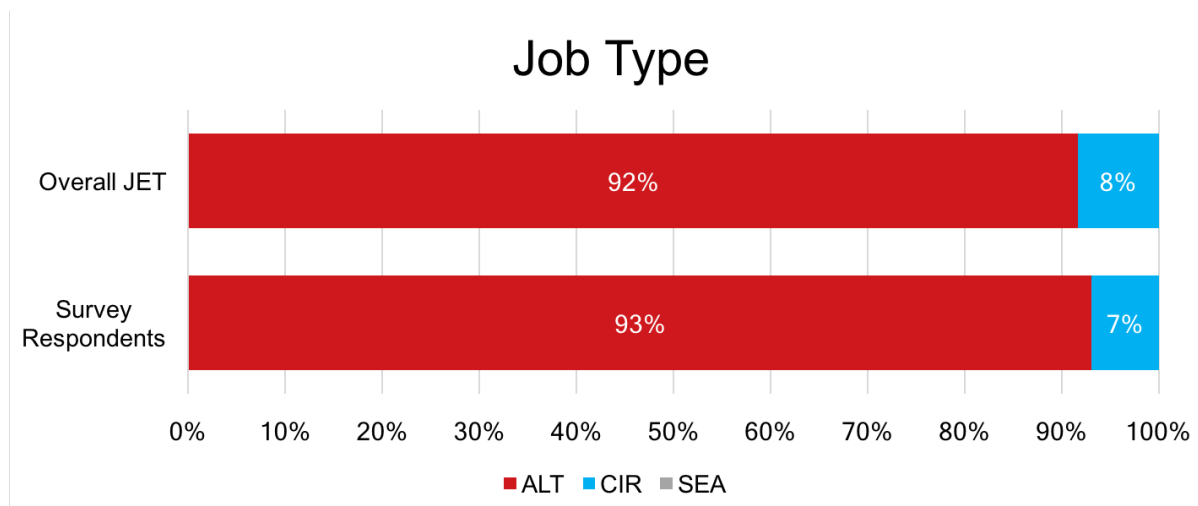


Chart 1

The largest proportion of respondents indicated that they are in their first year on the JET Programme (42%), with second and third year participants the next most populous groups (31% and 16% respectively). Compared to overall JET Programme participants by year, first year respondent numbers are slightly higher than expected, but overall the results are comparable to that of the entire JET Programme participant population.

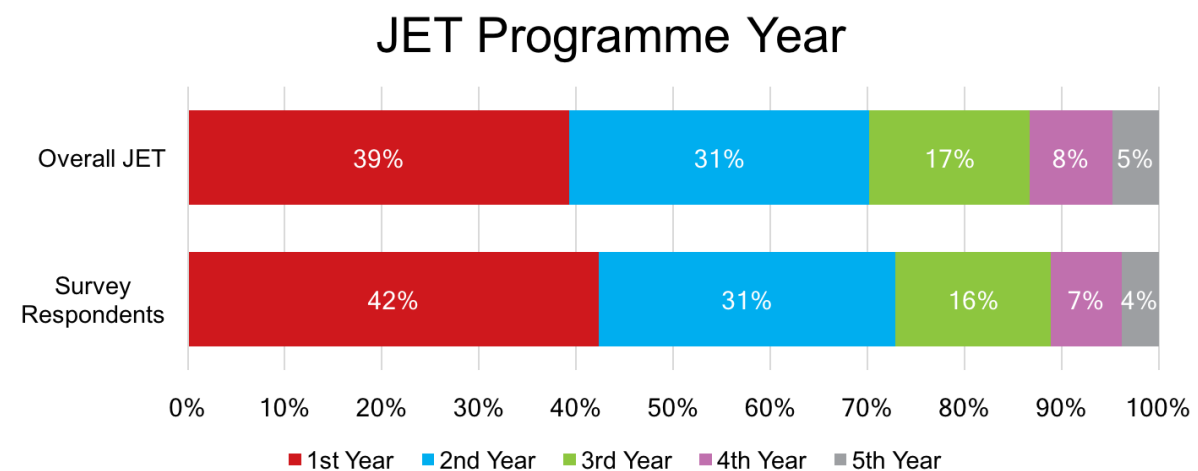


Chart 2

# RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

## CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

JET Programme participants come from many different countries, all with differing cultures. Living and working in Japan involves adjusting to new cultural expectations and behaviours. In this section, training received for dealing with cultural differences and difficulties encountered related to cultural differences will be explored.

## CULTURAL TRAINING

JET Programme participants typically receive training before and after arrival in Japan. Survey respondents were asked if they had received training on cultural differences between Japan and their home country. A majority of survey respondents indicated they had received such training both before (58%) and after (54%) arriving in Japan.

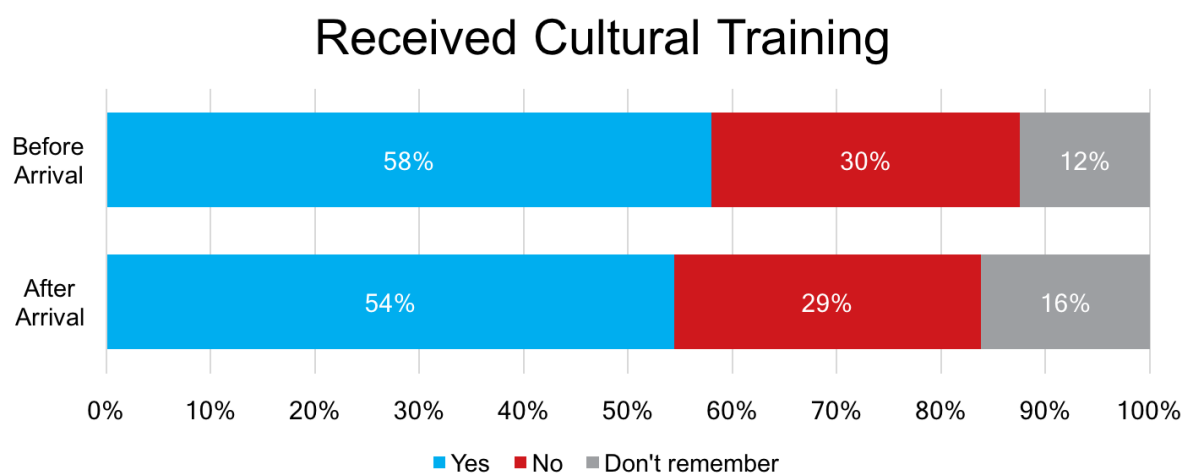


Chart 3

When examining only those participants who recalled having received such training or not, current first-year participants were noticeably more likely to have received such training before and after arrival. There is also a sizeable difference between fifth-year JET Programme participants and all others regarding training received before arrival.

### Received Cultural Training Before Arrival

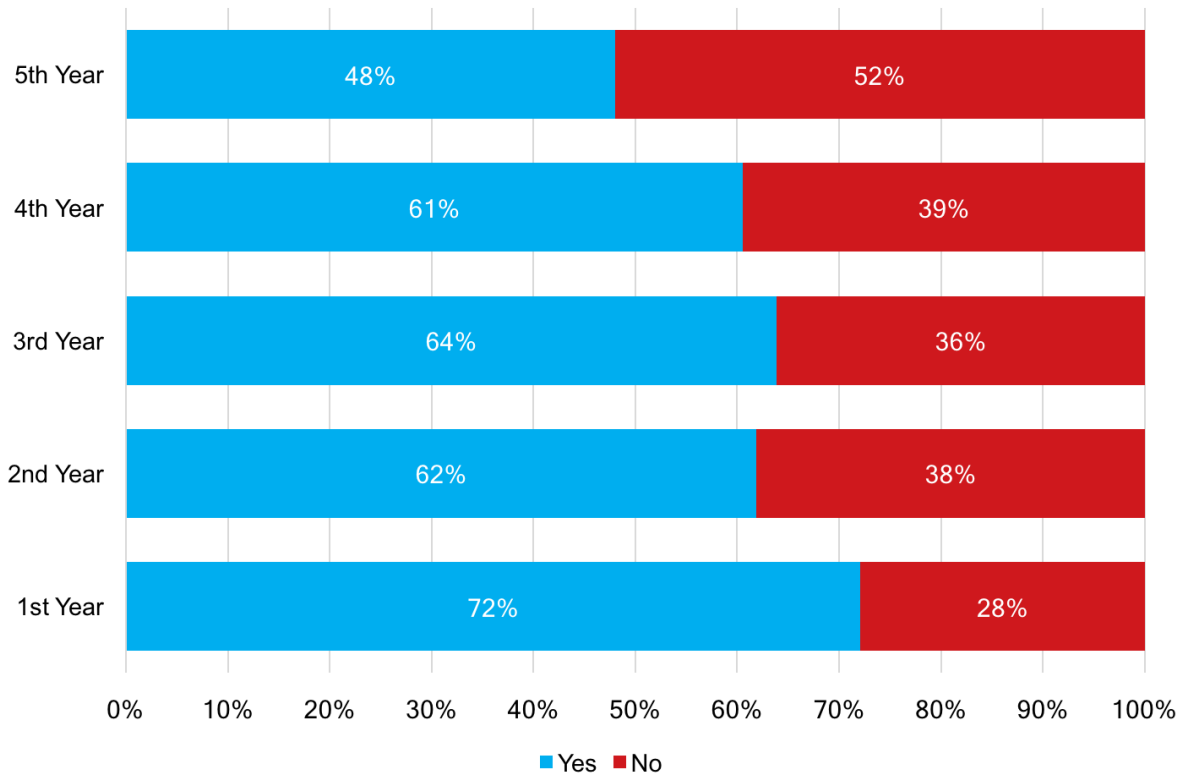


Chart 4

### Received Cultural Training After Arrival

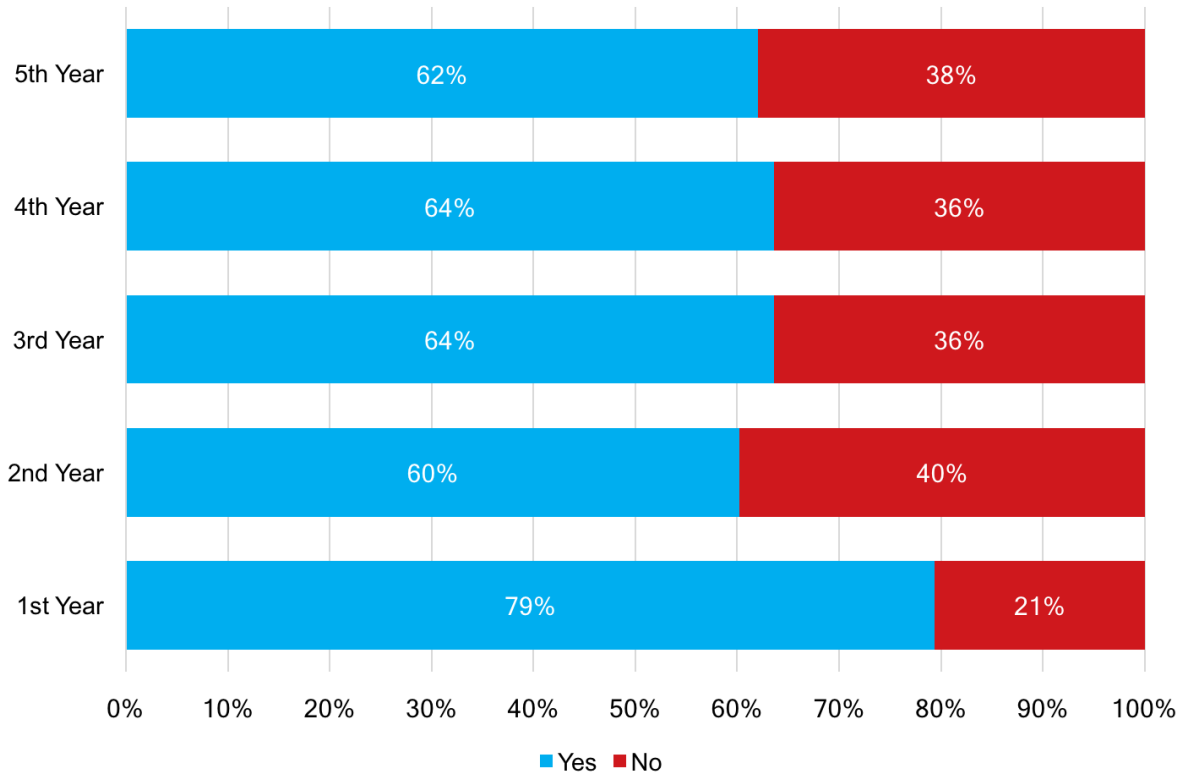


Chart 5

Survey participants were also asked to rate their perceived effectiveness of the training they received on the topic of cultural differences, both before and after arrival, on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being very unhelpful and 5 being very helpful. A sizeable majority of participants indicated that such training was at least somewhat helpful (66% before, 57% after) compared to those who found it unhelpful (15% before, 20% after).

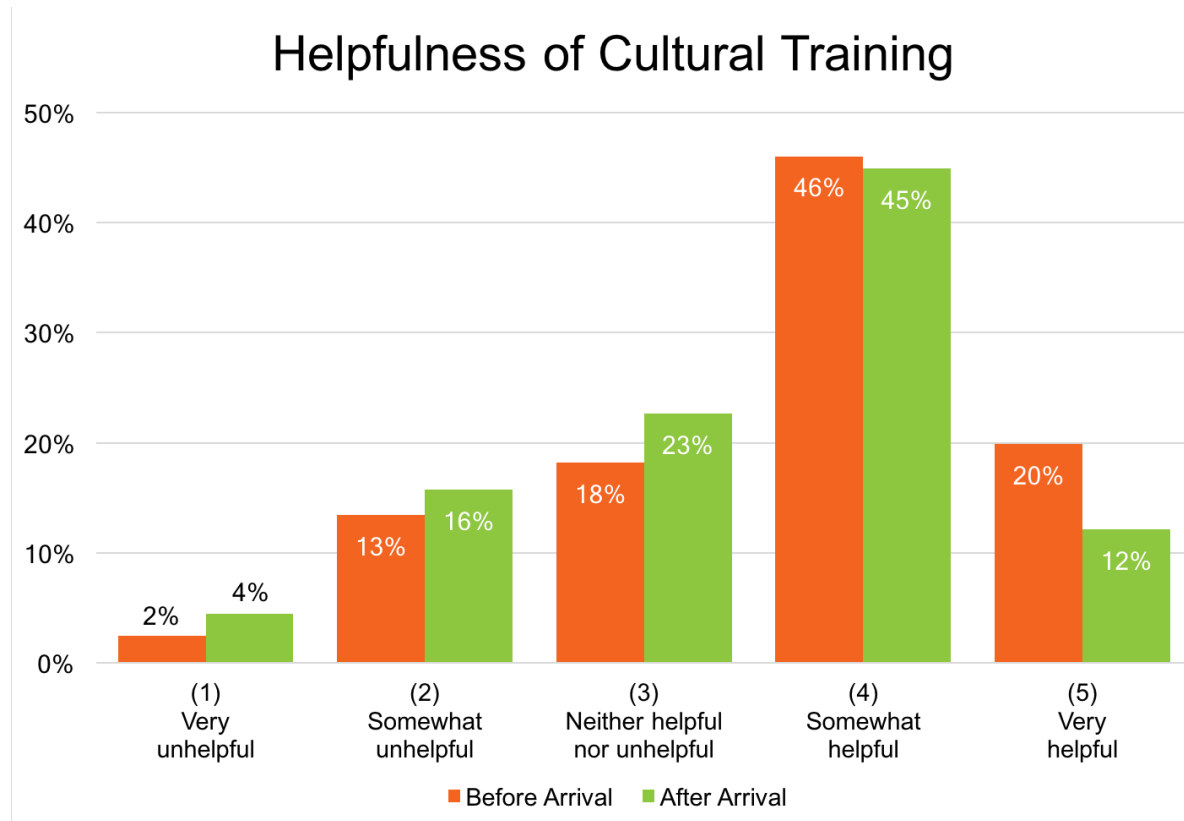


Chart 6

## DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED

While a majority of survey participants indicated that they have not encountered any significant difficulties related to cultural differences (57%), a sizeable minority indicated that they have encountered such problems (43%).

### Experienced Difficulties Related to Cultural Differences

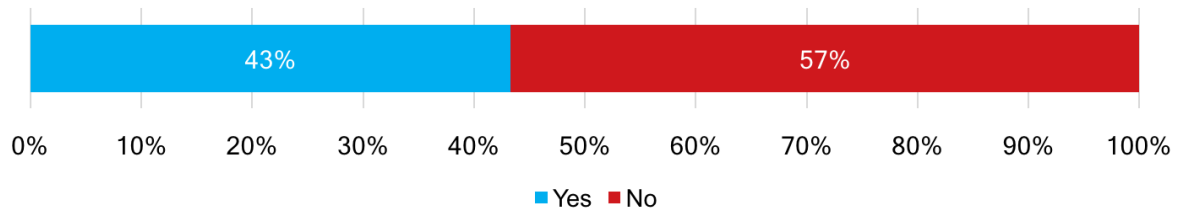


Chart 7

Respondents were asked in a free-response question to describe any difficulties they have encountered, and what steps they have taken (if any) to address these difficulties. Comments were received from 306 out of 852 survey respondents, or about 36%. Issues raised included: indirect vs. direct communication, acceptable classroom behaviour and discipline, lack of classroom participation, sexual harassment, and expected attire at various functions. Direct discussion (38%) was the most common method used by respondents to address such difficulties. Adjusting one’s own behaviour based on observation (18%) and seeking help from outside parties (17%) were the next most common methods used.

### Steps Taken to Address Difficulties

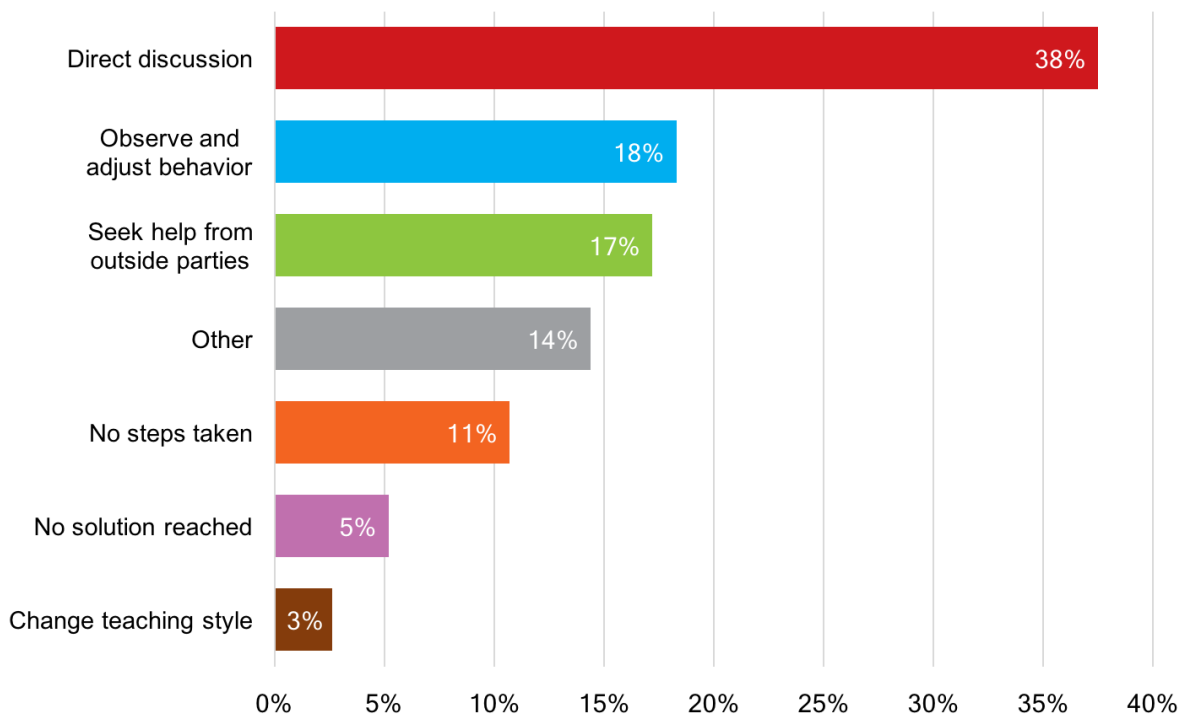


Chart 8

## WORKPLACE COMMUNICATION

Communication within the workplace is an essential function of any job. JET Programme participants, their supervisors, and their co-workers are presented with opportunities and challenges because of the difference in language. On the positive side, participants have a chance to practice their Japanese while their co-workers can practice other languages (primarily English). On the negative side, it can contribute to miscommunication and present hurdles to integration. In this section, workplace communication and related difficulties will be explored.

### LANGUAGE

Japanese language skills are not a requirement of the JET Programme, though many participants enter the program with some level of skill. Additionally, JET Programme participants are expected to make an effort to learn Japanese while participating in the programme. Survey participants were asked to rate their level of Japanese proficiency. Nearly all respondents (98.9%) said that they possess at least some knowledge of Japanese, with most (64.8%) reporting moderate or better skill.

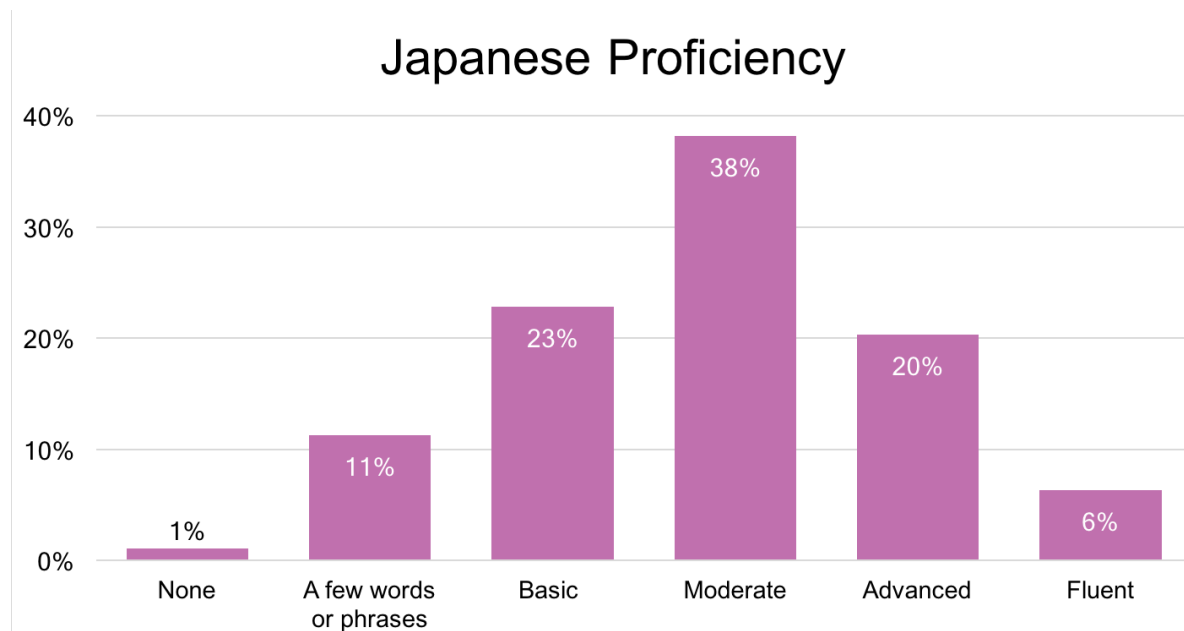


Chart 9

Many JET Programme participants' co-workers will have limited or no language skills in the participant's native language (typically English). Survey respondents were asked what methods of communication they use when interacting with a co-worker who does not speak their native language. The two most common alternative communication methods reported by respondents were use of basic Japanese (69.2%) or use of gestures (66.0%). Translation, either using online tools (45.7%) or with the help of a co-worker (39.7%), was also a common method reported by respondents. A fair number of respondents (39.7%) reported using advanced Japanese for communication. Finally, about one quarter (25.3%) reported using pictures and drawings.

### Methods used to communicate with non-native language speaking coworkers.

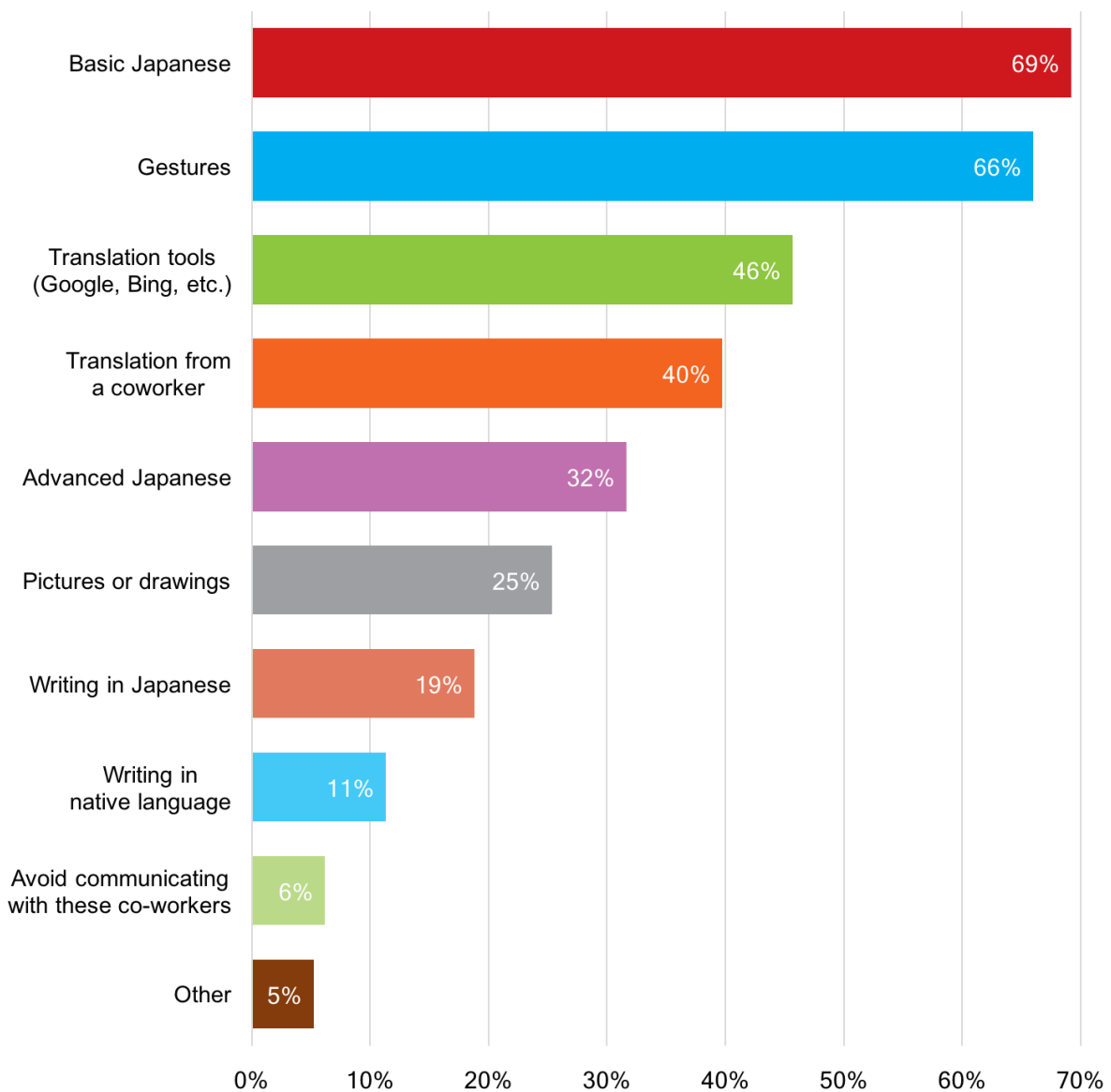


Chart 10

## SUPERVISOR COMMUNICATION

Communicating with supervisors is an important aspect of a JET Programme participant's job. Survey participants were asked whether they have encountered any notable problems communicating with their supervisor. While a majority (72.3%) responded that they have not encountered such problems, a fair minority (27.7%) have encountered at least some problems communicating with their supervisor.

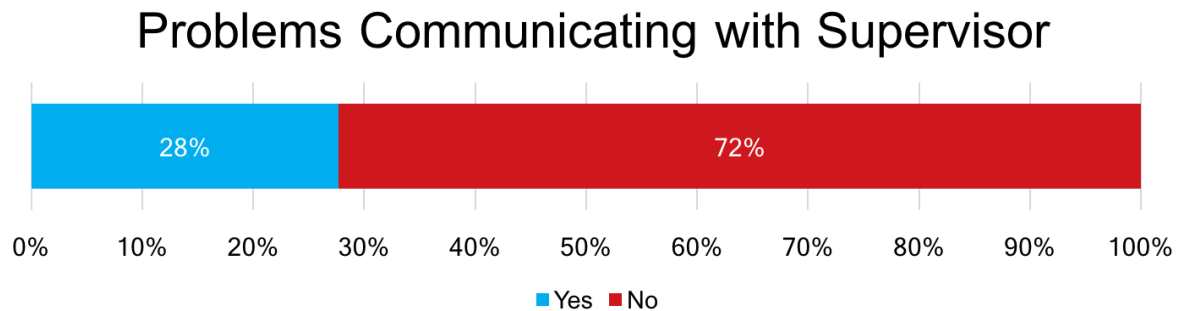


Chart 11

Survey respondents who answered yes to the previous question were given the opportunity to provide details about the difficulties they encountered. A total of 233 respondents submitted answers. Difficulty communicating due to a supervisor speaking little or no English was the most frequent issue listed (48%). Information not being provided, particularly surrounding school events, was another issue raised by many respondents (13%). Other issues of concern included supervisors being too busy to meet with respondents, supervisors being unwilling to assist or communicate with respondents, and in some cases respondents being unaware of who their supervisor is.



## WORKPLACE SOCIALISATION

JET Programme participants spend a large amount of time at their workplaces. Socialising with co-workers in both official and unofficial settings is a valuable way for participants to experience Japanese culture, practice Japanese language skills, share their own culture, and better integrate into the workplace and their community. In this section, workplace socialisation will be explored.

### OFFICIAL EVENTS

Official social events might include seasonal and holiday office parties, enkais, and other gatherings that are coordinated by one's workplace. Survey participants were asked whether or not they are invited to participate in official workplace events. An overwhelming majority (94.0%) indicated that they are invited to such events, with much smaller minorities indicating that they are not invited (3.8%), or that their workplace does not organise official social events (2.1%).

#### Invited to Official Social Events

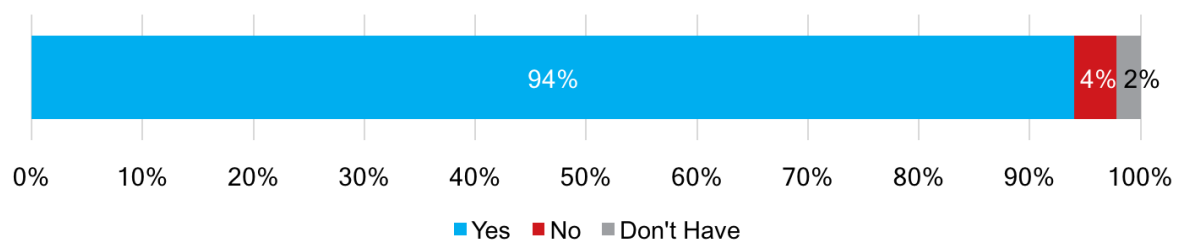


Chart 12

Survey participants who said that they were invited to official workplace social events were also asked if they attend them. Nearly all of those invited (95.3%) indicated that they do.

#### Participates in Official Social Events

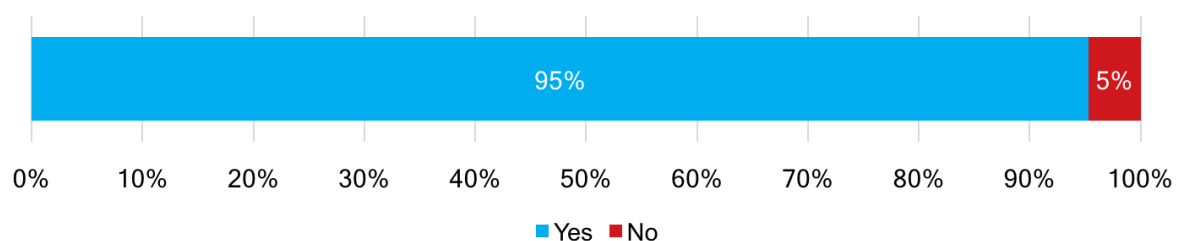


Chart 13

Respondents who said that they do not attend were also asked what reason or reasons they might have for not attending, with 60 answers provided. Common reasons for not attending included: dietary restrictions, financial concerns, personal discomfort based on a co-worker's past behaviour, receiving short notice for events, and feeling a lack of meaningful connection with co-workers due to working in multiple locations.

## UNOFFICIAL EVENTS

Unofficial social events, such as karaoke parties, local sightseeing, attending festivals, etc., are another way in which JET Programme participants interact with their co-workers. When survey participants were asked whether or not they are invited to unofficial social events, a sizeable majority (63.5%) indicated that they are invited, compared to those not invited (36.5%).

### Invited to Unofficial Social Events

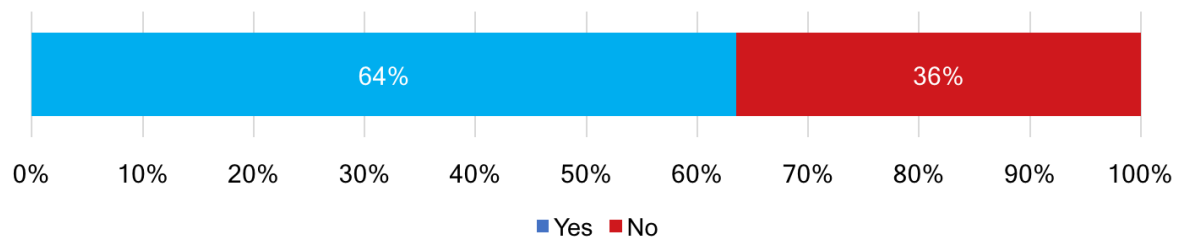


Chart 14

Survey participants who said that they were invited to unofficial workplace social events were also asked if they attend them. Similar to official social activities, nearly all of those invited (94.4%) indicated that they do.

### Participates in Unofficial Social Events

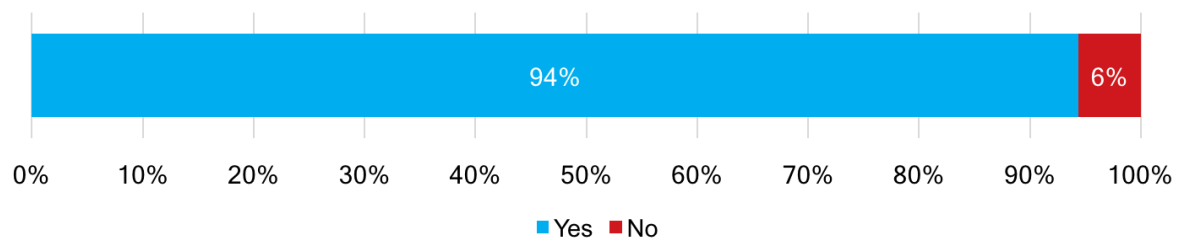


Chart 15

Respondents who said that they do not attend were also asked what reason or reasons they might have for not attending, with 39 answers provided. Common reasons for not attending included: dietary restrictions, financial concerns, difficulty coordinating schedules, and difficulty communicating due to lack of Japanese skills.

## ALT WORK ENVIRONMENT

The large majority of JET Programme participants (91.6%) serve as ALTs. In this section we will examine some of the difficulties ALTs encounter working with the Japanese Teachers of English (JTEs) and Homeroom Teachers (HRTs) at their schools. In addition, we will examine participation in after-school English clubs by ALTs at junior and senior high schools. Questions in this section were only directed at those who indicated that they were ALTs.

### WORKING WITH JTES AND HRTS

One of the primary responsibilities of ALTs is preparing and executing lesson plans in coordination with JTEs and HRTs. English is the primary language of communication, with 77.0% of survey respondents indicating that they use English 50% or more of the time when working with JTEs/HRTs. Respondents who chose “Other” had the option of leaving a comment. Most comments came from respondents who teach at multiple school levels and indicate the use of differing styles at each school, such as using primarily English when at a high school and mostly Japanese when at an elementary school.

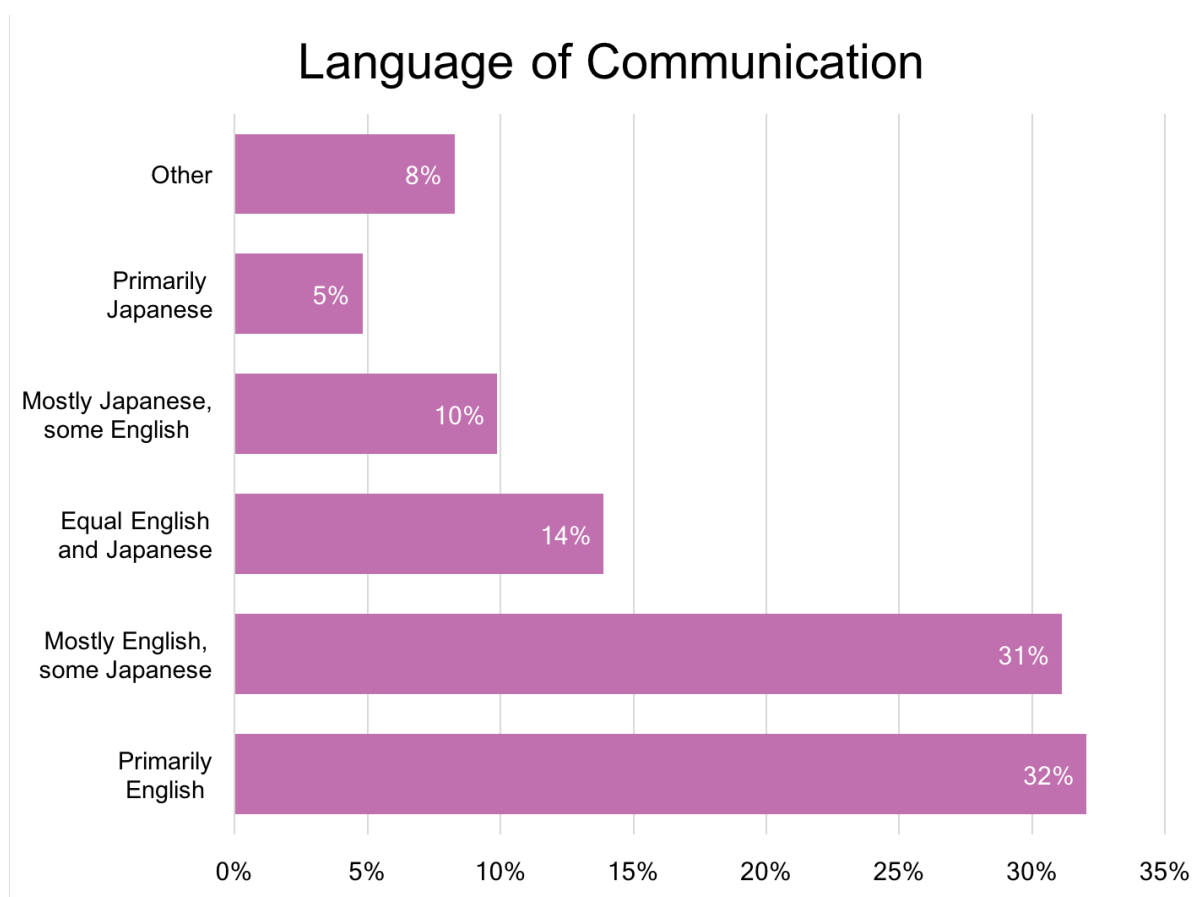


Chart 16

Unsurprisingly, there is greater English usage among those who teach at the junior high school (71.0%) and senior high school (95.2%) levels, where teachers are specifically teaching English, compared to the elementary and preschool level (59.1%), where HRTs are not primarily English teachers.

Language of Communication by School Type

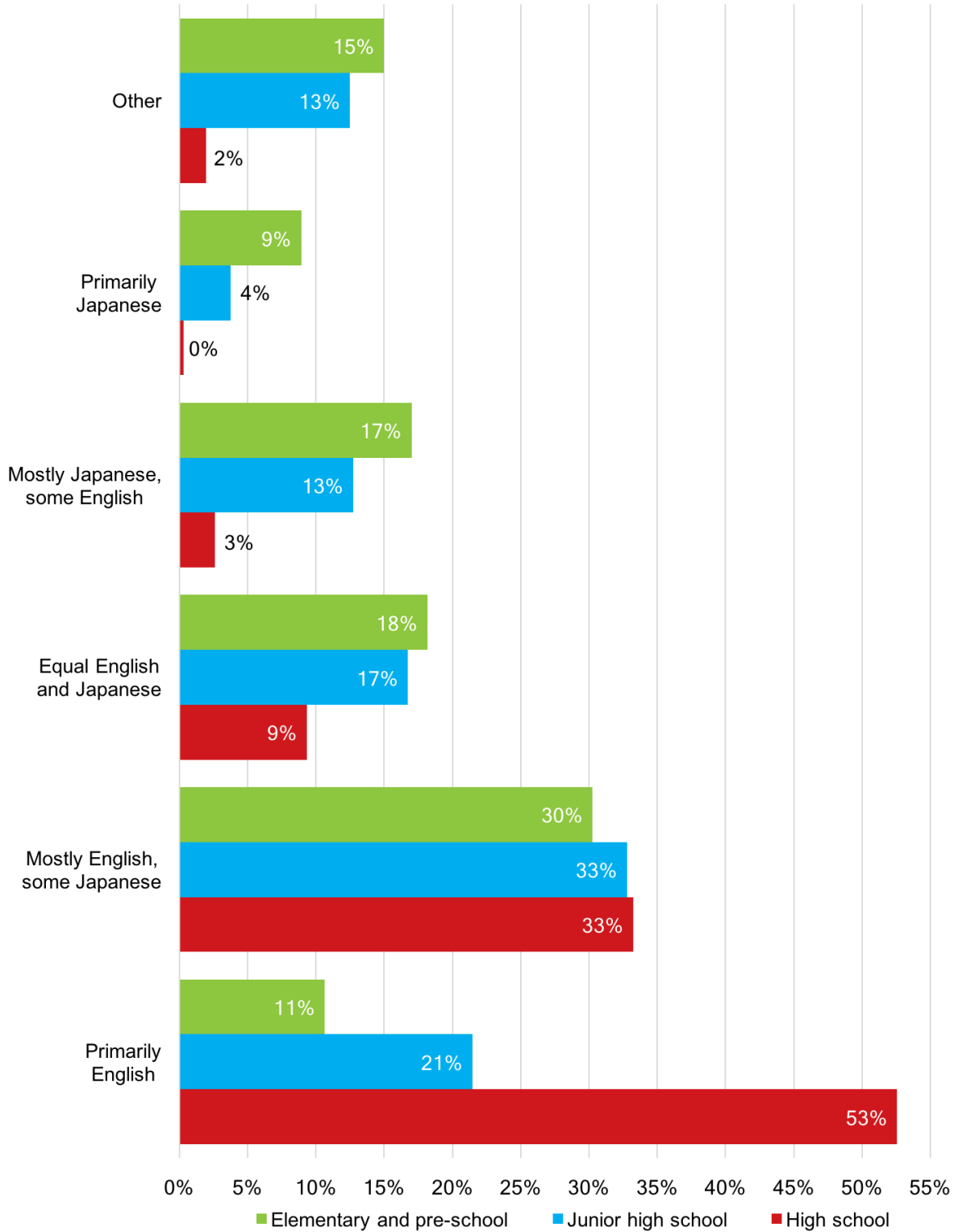


Chart 17

When respondents were asked to describe how they communicate with JTEs and HRTs, unscheduled meetings were the most common response by a large margin, listed by 95.3% of survey respondents. Chat using SMS services (34.2%), scheduled meetings (32.6%), and e-mail (28.6%) were also listed by a sizeable number of respondents.

### Methods of Communication

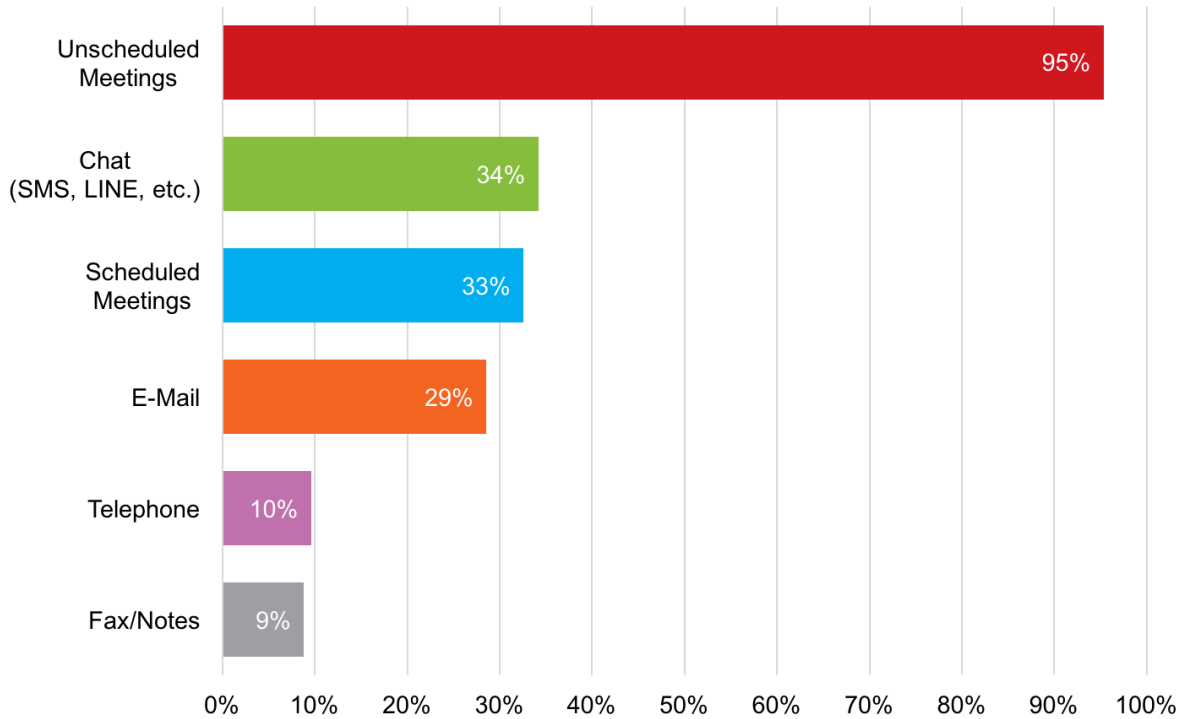


Chart 18

When asked to choose their primary method of communication, unscheduled meetings were listed by 87.0% of respondents. This is almost 11 times greater than the next closest option, scheduled meetings, listed by 8.0%. All other methods combined totalled only 4.9%.

### Primary Method of Communication

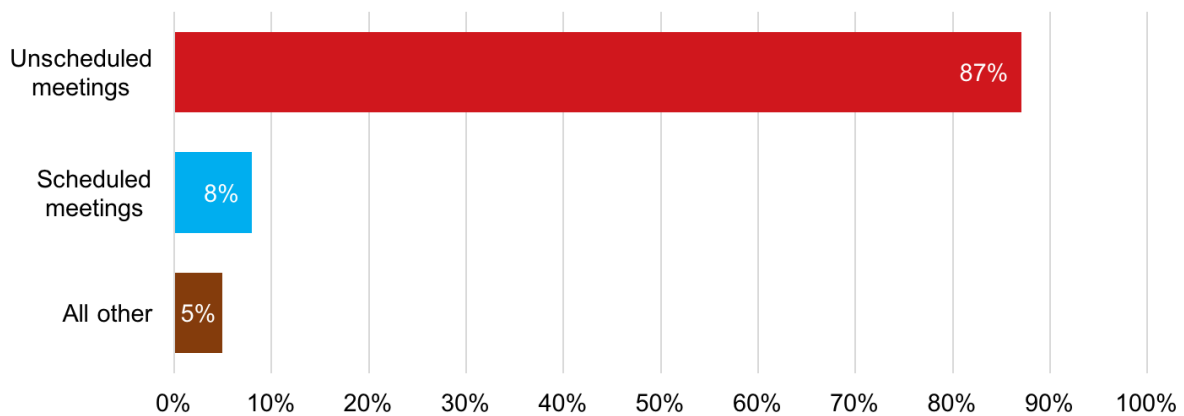


Chart 19

Survey respondents were asked to rate the difficulty of planning lessons with their JTEs/HRTs on a scale of 1-5, with 1 indicating very difficult and 5 indicating very easy. The weighted average value was 3.18, which indicates that lesson planning is only slightly more easy than difficult overall. While lesson planning could be more difficult, there is still much room for improvement.

### Planning Classes with JTE/HRT

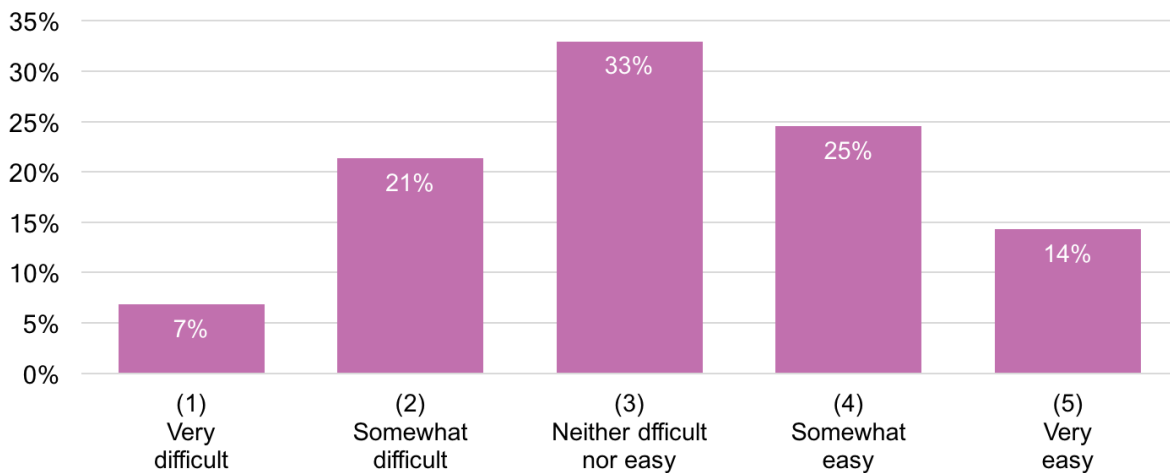


Chart 20

When asked what kinds of difficulties they encounter when planning lessons with their JTEs/HRTs, the most common response, indicated by 70% of respondents, is difficulty finding time to meet with JTEs/HRTs because of the JTEs’/HRTs’ busy schedule. It is likely that this leads to the degree with which unscheduled meetings are used as the primary means of communication between ALTs and JTEs/HRTs.

The next most frequent response, indicated by 41% of respondents, is the JTE/HRT not providing the ALT with topics of instruction for the lesson being planned. As a result, the ALT has to choose a lesson topic which is more likely to be out of step with the students’ current topic of study, either repeating a previously studied topic or introducing a new topic ahead of the class schedule.

More than a third of survey respondents indicated that they are not involved in lesson planning (38%), or that their participation in class is limited (36%). Examples of the later include being used only to pronounce words or read dialogue.

Finally, not having enough time to plan lessons (26%) and not having access to the internet at work (23%) were also noted by a sizeable number of respondents as impediments to effective planning.

## Difficulties working with JTE/HRT

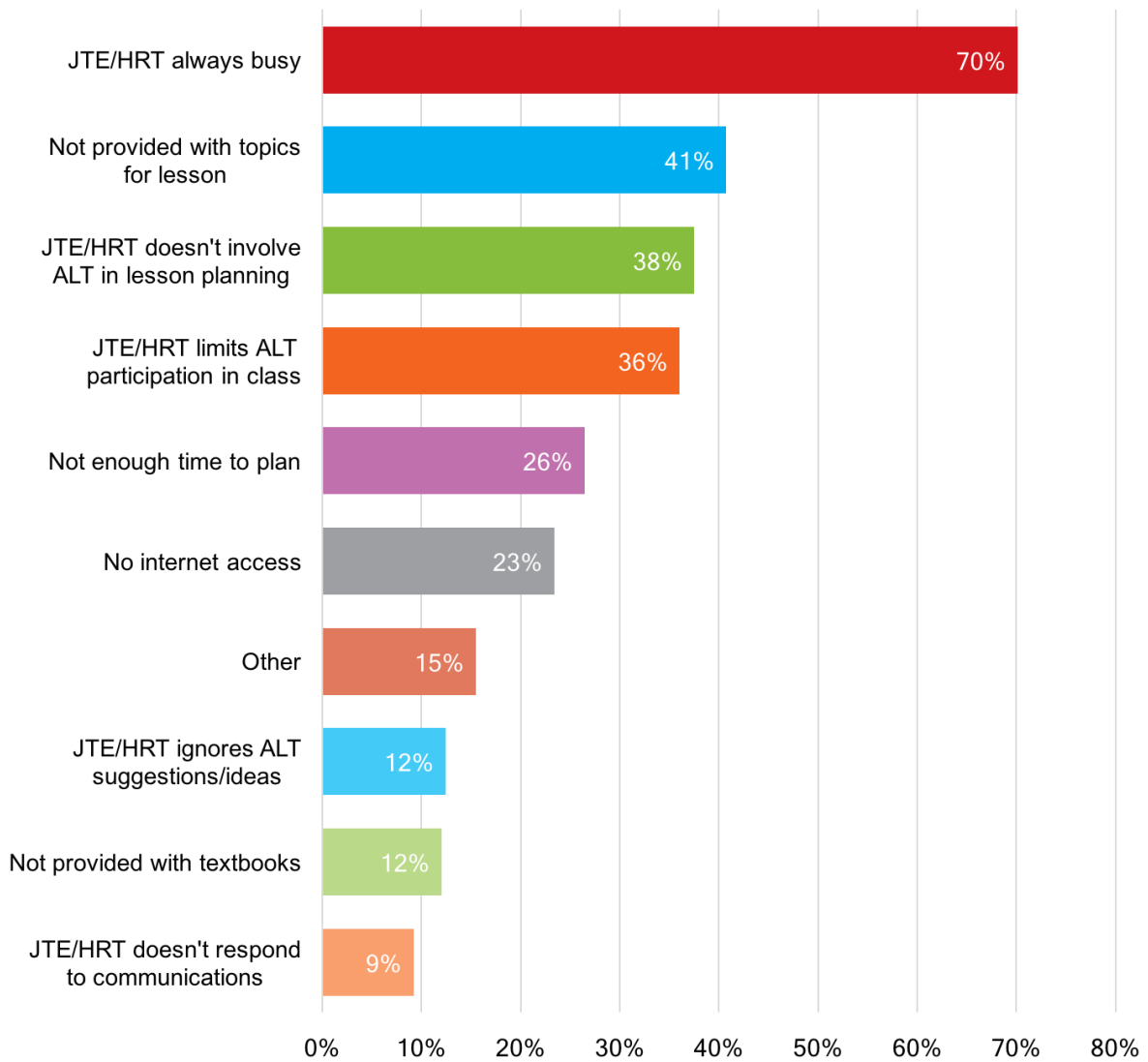


Chart 21

## ENGLISH CLUB PARTICIPATION

*NOTE: Data in this section is limited to survey respondents who indicated that they worked at least in part at the junior or senior high school level, as elementary schools and preschools do not have after-school clubs.*

Survey respondents were asked about their participation in after-school English clubs at their schools. Overall, only 34.7% of respondents indicated that at least one of their schools has an English club, while 65.3% indicated that their schools do not. ALTs who teach at a single school are more likely to have an English club (57.0%) than those who teach at multiple schools (24.7%). In addition, ALTs who teach at one or more senior high schools are far more likely to have an English club at their schools (67.7%) than those who do not teach at senior high schools (7.5%).

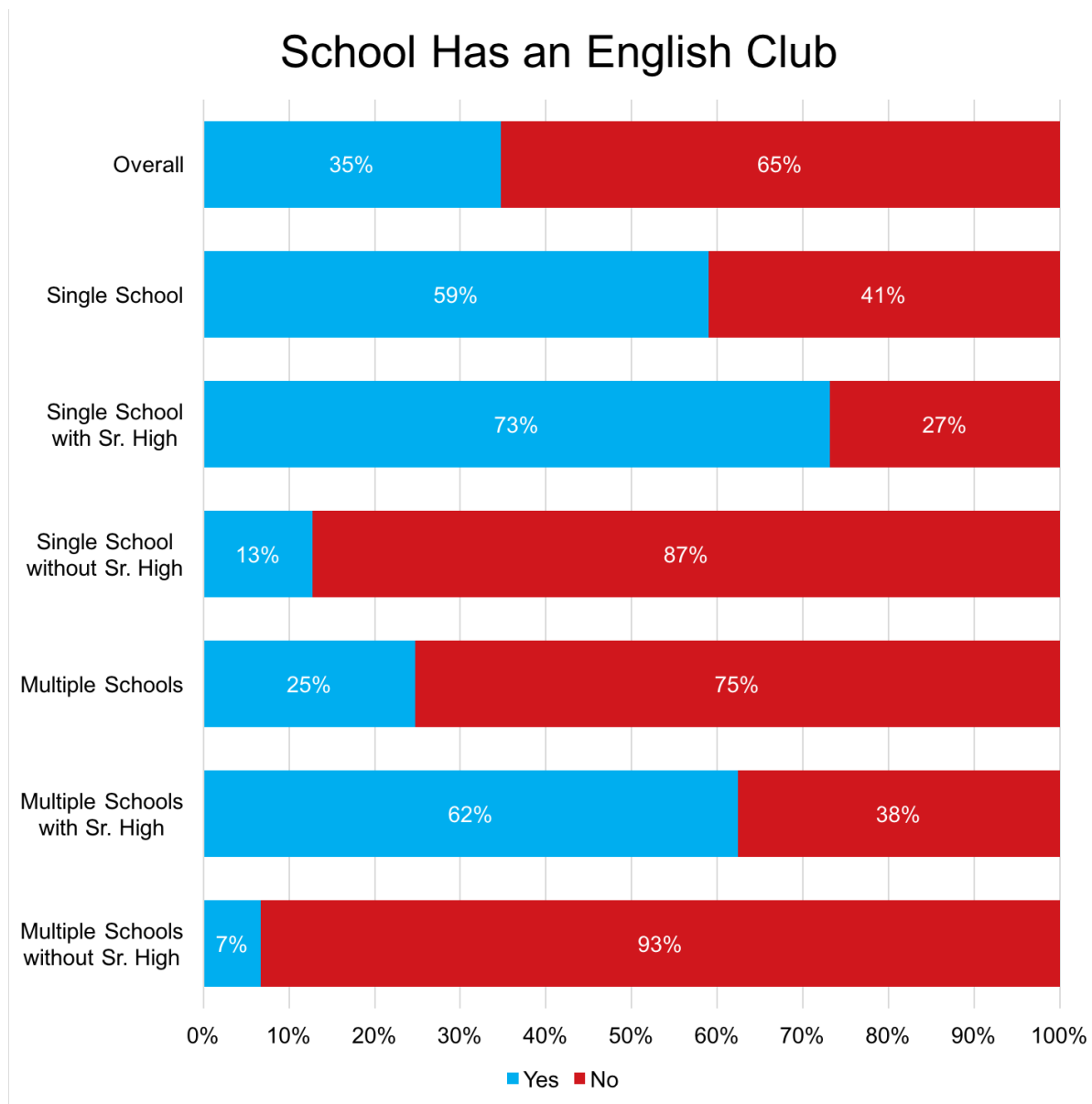


Chart 22



Participation by ALTs in English clubs at schools which have them is high. Overall, 89.5% of ALTs at schools with an English club participate in their school’s club. Participation is highest (92.9%) for ALTs who teach at a single school which is a senior high school or a combined school with senior high school and other grade levels. Participation is lowest (63.6%) for ALTs who teach at multiple schools where none is a senior high school.

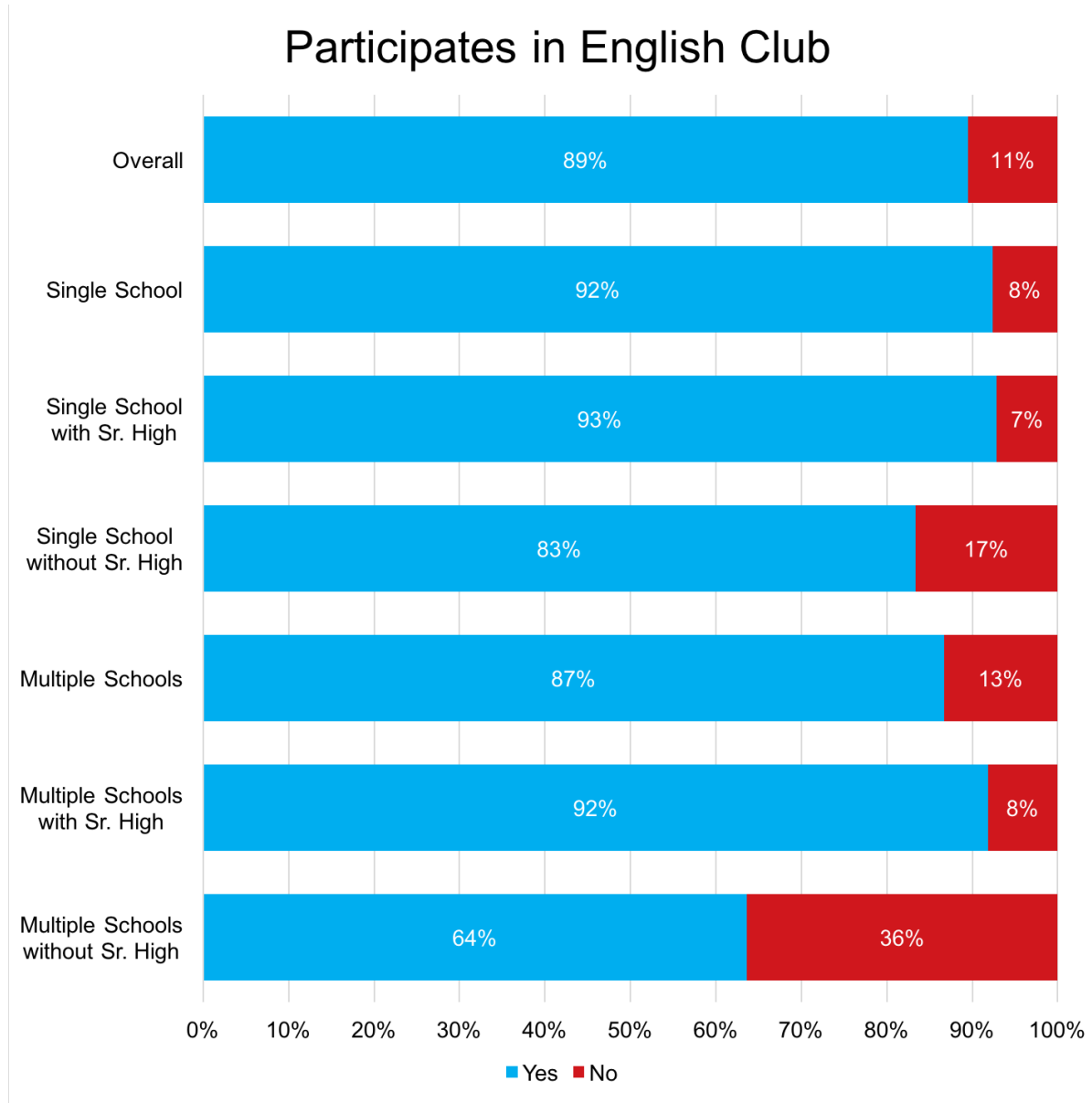


Chart 23

## **OBSERVATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS**

Overall, JET Programme participants are active and involved members of the workplace, but cultural and language differences result in difficulties. While not all such difficulties can be eliminated, there are opportunities to improve which would benefit for participants, their co-workers, and their COs.

### **OBSERVATIONS**

#### **CULTURAL DIFFERENCES**

While a majority of JET Programme participants received some training regarding cultural differences, there remains a sizeable number who did not. Notably, however, current first-year participants are more likely to have received such training, an encouraging trend. In addition, those who received training in cultural differences found it to be helpful.

Particularly problematic areas included the difference in direct vs. indirect communication, cultural norms related to acceptable classroom behaviour by students, and differences in classroom participation style.

#### **WORKPLACE COMMUNICATION**

Nearly all JET Programme participants possess at least some level of Japanese language skill, with nearly two thirds reporting moderate, advanced, or fluent levels of Japanese. When communicating with co-workers who do not speak their native language, they primarily rely on basic Japanese, gestures, translation assistance using online tools, or translation from other co-workers. While most participants do not experience notable communication problems with their supervisors, those who do note that supervisors' lack of knowledge of their native language is the primary source of difficulty. Other concerns raised include; a lack of information being provided, difficulty meeting with supervisors due to their busy schedule, and supervisors who are reluctant to provide assistance when requested.

#### **WORKPLACE SOCIALISATION**

JET Programme participant's attendance at both formal and informal social events is exceptionally high and indicates a strong desire and willingness to integrate in to the workplace environment. COs, meanwhile, appear to be doing an exceptional job overall of including participants in official social functions. A majority of participants are also invited by co-workers to participate in unofficial social events; a sizeable minority, however, are not. Given participants' overall willingness to take part in such events, this suggests that there are opportunities to improve informal workplace socialisation and promote the goal of international cultural exchange among participants and their co-workers. However, it is important to remember that many factors, such as family obligations, age difference, language difference, transportation, or personality mismatch, can contribute to a lack of socialisation opportunities among co-workers. Many factors such as these are beyond the ability of CLAIR or COs to change.

## **WORKING WITH JTES AND HRTS**

When communicating with teachers at senior high schools, English is used significantly more than at lower levels. This is again true when communicating with teachers at junior high schools, compared to lower levels.

JET Programme participants are expected to make an effort to learn Japanese, and CLAIR provides tools such as the online learning course to this end. However, ALTs are often expected to use English extensively or even exclusively while at work. This limits the opportunities to practice Japanese in a setting where other parties, in this case JTEs and HRTs, possess English skills which can help them explain mistakes and grammar points to the ALT.

Communicating with JTEs/HRTs for lesson planning through meetings or other methods was noted as the most common difficulty for most ALTs. While JTEs/HRTs are understandably busy and have important responsibilities beyond working with ALTs, taking the time to better communicate with ALTs will result in a better utilisation of ALTs and can lead to reduced burden on JTEs/HRTs.

## **ENGLISH CLUB PARTICIPATION**

After-school English clubs offer a unique opportunity to further encourage students' interest in English, as well as providing a way for ALTs to have more direct and meaningful interaction with students who have expressed such interest already. There appears to be a large opportunity to increase the number of English clubs at schools across Japan. However, numerous factors may be involved which limit the ability of schools to have an English club, including student interest in participating in an English club, the availability of teachers to serve as supervisors, the availability of ALTs to participate, the allocation of space and resources, etc.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **CULTURAL DIFFERENCES**

The AJET National Council recommends encouraging embassies, consulates, and prefectural organisations to include training related to cultural differences during pre-departure and post-arrival orientation sessions with a particular focus on differences in communication styles and classroom behaviour.

The AJET National Council also recommends including awareness of these differences in training offered to JTEs and HRTs. Emphasis should be placed on direct vs. indirect communication, as many social cues obvious to native Japanese are unfamiliar to and often go unnoticed by foreign ALTs.

### **WORKPLACE COMMUNICATION**

The AJET National Council recommends that COs be encouraged to provide and promote Japanese language learning opportunities for JET Programme participants in their area, including but not limited to: free Japanese language classes provided by prefectural, municipal and other groups, paid Japanese language classes or tutoring, and other language learning resources such as books or online training. COs might also consider partial or complete subsidisation for paid lessons.

The AJET National Council recommends that COs be encouraged to consider foreign language ability when assigning supervisors for JET Programme participants. In cases where this is not possible, COs should be encouraged to ensure that important information is provided through an intermediary such as a JTE who can translate, and that such an arrangement be made clear to all persons involved.

The AJET National Council recommends that CLAIR consider funding grants for JLPT testing at the N1, N2, N4 and N5 levels in addition to the N3 level, which is currently offered.

### **WORKPLACE SOCIALISATION**

The AJET National Council recommends reminding COs that JET Programme participants are willing and active participants in the workplace, and that it is important to include them in socialisation opportunities. Notifications about events are frequently given in Japanese and may go unnoticed by participants, so we further recommend reminding COs that it is helpful for participants to be informed in English as well when possible.

The AJET National Council recommends encouraging the co-workers of JET Programme participants, either directly during training or indirectly through COs, to consider including participants in unofficial social gatherings and events. This could include alerting them of the overall willingness of participants to join in social activities when invited, and reminding them that, as foreigners residing outside their familiar environment, it may be more difficult for participants to actively seek out opportunities for socialisation.

## **WORKING WITH JTES AND HRTS**

The AJET National Council recommends that CLAIR and COs consider increasing the degree to which a participant's level of Japanese language skill is weighted when placing ALTs. Placing ALTs with few to no Japanese language skills in schools that require considerable ability may hamper communication and lead to greater difficulty in many areas. However, we recognise that placement is a complicated process, and that such situations may be unavoidable.

The AJET National Council recommends that COs be reminded that it is important to allow JTEs/HRTs time to meet with ALTs, and that this should be considered in addition to their other responsibilities. In addition, we recommend encouraging JTEs/HRTs to be open to alternative methods of communication such as SMS, e-mail, or use of physical notes, which allow for each person to respond when they have free time, rather than relying strictly on in-person meetings which require both parties to be free at the same time and in the same physical location.

The AJET National Council recommends that training for JTEs/HRTs include information about the benefits of greater utilisation of ALTs in the lesson planning and execution process. Such training could include case studies submitted by JTEs/HRTs from across Japan that demonstrate effective and beneficial team teaching examples.

The AJET National Council recommends that COs be encouraged or required to provide ALTs with copies of textbooks used in schools, with teacher's editions of those textbooks preferred. We further recommend considering adding recommendations or requirements related to providing internet access at work to further help them with lesson planning.

## **ENGLISH CLUB PARTICIPATION**

The AJET National Council recommends including further questions about English club participation in a future survey. In addition, they recommend working together with MIC, MOFA, MEXT and CLAIR to create a set of resources and information to provide to ALTs who are interested in participating in or starting an English club at one or more of their schools. Also, they encourage COs to consider English club participation when placing and scheduling ALTs.

# QUESTIONS

## QUESTION 1:

Has CLAIR ever considered expanding the JET program by creating a new position for university graduates with teaching degrees/experience? An "English Co-Teacher (ECT)" position, for example. An ECT would work more collaboratively with schools and JTEs and take a leadership role (educationally) for ALTs new to Japan and teaching. The role would also create some sort of positions where the JET program is able to retain some of its most experienced ALTs. Is this something that CLAIR would ever consider in the future?

## QUESTION 2:

If viewed necessary by a contracting organisation, is it possible for CLAIR to provide a grant to JETs for levels higher than JLPT N3?

## QUESTION 3:

What should people who are in need of more mental health services do? (Ex. there is only one English counselor in all of Tohoku). With taking days being difficult in schools, it is hard to get to a 9-5 counselor.

What are the barriers to offering more than 5 sessions through the JET online counselling service, and is there anything AJET can do that might facilitate expansion of those resources?

## QUESTION 4:

Has CLAIR looked more into possibly providing a stipend for certain AJET activities in the future for financial support?

## QUESTION 5:

Will AJET be able to have a volunteer support role with the Tokyo 2020 Olympics coming up? What role can JETs play with the upcoming events whether it be the Rugby championship, Olympics, Kokutai in Kagoshima, etc.?

