

Who is Teaching What? Insights from Educational Professionals within the JET Programme

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Abstract

This study investigates three groups of professionals directly involved with the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme (JET) in Oita Prefecture, assistant language teachers (ALTs), Japanese teachers of English (JTEs) and school administrators. The aim of this research is to conduct an exploratory study for a language Programme evaluation into the formative issues of the JET Programme's ALT (assistant language teacher) situation in Oita prefecture. In particular, the study draws from Macedo (2002) seeking evidence for possible trends in the type of team teaching predominately being used. Included in this research is insight into the three groups' different perspectives of the role of the ALT concerning classroom leadership, curriculum design, curriculum implementation and the limitations of the position. This study contributes to the field of language Programme evaluation and offers insight into one of the world's largest international teacher exchange Programmes.

Key terms: language Programme evaluation, team teaching, JET Programme, curriculum

1. Introduction

English education is a global industry, and has been flourishing in non-English speaking countries for decades. From the demand for English education derives the need for English educators, and many non-English speaking countries have turned to importing native speakers to fill the roles of English teachers in their countries. Japan is one such country currently importing thousands of native speakers of English to work within their public, and private school systems. The JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching) Programme is Japan's largest recruitment Programme for international English teachers.

The JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching) Programme currently employs, and imports 5,676 university graduates, from forty-one foreign countries as assistant language teachers (ALTs) to team-teach in the Japanese Public School systems with Japanese Teachers of English (JTEs) (C.L.A.I.R. 2006). Despite the amount of Japanese, and international press attention that has been allocated to the Programme's merits and its problems, no published evaluations of the JET Programme's English language education practices are available.

The aim of this research is to conduct an exploratory study for a language Programme evaluation into the formative issues of the JET Programme's ALT situation in Oita prefecture. It is intended to possibly reveal details concerning team teaching practices being used and the perceptions are of the roles of the educational professionals involved in the Programme.

2. Review of the Literature

2.1 LPE Defined

In language Programme evaluation, or LPE, evaluation refers to the process of forming a judgment of

something, attempting to establish its value, through processes that provide evidence of that value. Pawson & Tilley (1997) describe LPE as an objectives-driven undertaking. Evaluation provides vital information to stakeholders of any Programme. Examples of stakeholders include Programme administrators, teachers, researchers, parents of students and students themselves. The importance of evaluation to stakeholders is that it provides evidence of the value of the Programme and addresses developmental and contractual accountability (Lewy, 1990).

There are two main types of evaluations conducted in LPE, summative and formative. Summative evaluations are concerned primarily with outcomes from instruction (Scriven, 1967), and generally follow the experimental model and are considered positivist in orientation (Guba, 1990a). In Cronbach et al. (1980), summative evaluations are described as “an inescapable obligation of the project director, an obvious requirement of the sponsoring agency and a desideratum for schools”(p 27). Formative evaluations take into consideration details of a Programme like classroom procedures, Programme practices, teacher, student and stakeholder opinions, and the like (Hilton, 1969; Long, 1984; Beretta, 1986). Formative studies use research instruments like journals, dairies, classroom observations, interviews, and questionnaires (Marottoli, 1973; Schotta, 1973; Guthrie, 1982; Lynch, 1992.), and can be naturalistic approaches (Guba, 1990). Outcomes from formative evaluations can reveal issues and concerns from the different stakeholders, and aid in the development and modernization of Programmes.

2.2 The JET Programme

The JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching) Programme began in 1987, when the Japanese government invited 848 university graduates from several English-speaking countries, “for the purpose of improving foreign language education as well as promoting international exchange at the community level” (C.L.A.I.R., 2000). The Programme was, and continues to be, administered jointly by three ministries – Jichishō, the Ministry of Home Affairs, with overall control of the Programme, Monkashō, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, which provides guidance for the administering of the team teaching portion of the Programme, and Gaimushō, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, that recruits the participants through its overseas consulates. Jichishō, the ministry of home affairs, also formed an administrative agency, the Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (C.L.A.I.R.), to oversee administration of the Programme (McConnell, 2000).

Team teaching in the JET Programme, or Japan in general, can be defined as a collaboration between a Japanese teacher of English (JTE) and an assistant language teacher (ALT) in an English classroom in which all parties, ALT, JTE, and students, ideally are engaged in communicative activities (Brumby and Wada, 1990). The practice is intended to be “an effective means of nurturing English communicative competence in Japanese students” (Shimaoka and Yashiro, 1990. p 126.).

The dynamics associated with team teaching can be problematic. ALTs have a much lower status than JTEs, but often the ALT will perform a more leading role in the classroom. This style of team teaching, where the assistant is the leader of the class, is referred to as reverse team teaching (RTT) (Shimaoka and Yashiro, 1990). To overcome possible problems, it was recommended that each teacher should perform a specific role (Tajino and Tajino, 2000). Wada (1994) recommends that the ALT should actively engage in communication with Japanese students, and the JTE should explain the English language, specific concerns and facts, and answer learners’ questions (Wada, 1994). Common problems that occur when the collaboration fails are ALTs feeling like human replacements for tape recorders (Kobayashi, 2001), or JTEs abdicating their roles to simply function as translators (Brumby and Wada, 1990).

2.3 Team teaching in EFL in Japan; Macedo, 2002

In Macedo (2002), research was conducted to explore team-teaching practices to contribute to the field of education. The aims of the study were to discover which style of team-teaching, was more prevalent in the Japanese private and public junior and senior high schools at that time. The quantitative data revealed that reverse team-teaching is the prevalent style of team-teaching in private and public junior and senior high schools throughout Japan. However, qualitative data revealed that “concrete reasons why it was chosen over traditional JTE-led team-teaching, were found to be somewhat inconclusive”, and although reverse team-teaching proved to be the dominant style it did not always prove to be the most desired.

2.4 Research Questions

1. What style of team teaching is predominantly being used, traditional team teaching, or reverse team teaching?
2. Who is predominately determining the content of the lessons and curriculum for team teaching?

3. Methodologies

3.1 Participants

ALTs

Thirty-seven Assistant Language Teachers, ALTs, participated in this project - 20 males, 16 females, and 1 that chose not to disclose their gender. The ALTs participating in this project are all non-Japanese citizens from a variety of English speaking countries recently employed in the JET Programme. The ALTs participating were between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-five years old, worked for either the prefectural board of education (Kencho), the local board of education in their posted town or village, or for private schools in Oita prefecture. The Participants worked in Elementary schools, Junior High Schools, and Senior High Schools.

JTEs

Nine Japanese Teachers of English, JTEs, participated in the study - 3 male, 6 female between the age of 21 and 59. Three of the nine participants studied abroad in an English-speaking country, and all of the JTEs participating in the study were employed in Senior High schools.

Administrators

Ten administrators participated in this study, all between the ages of 46-55 years old and worked in Senior High Schools. There was no data collected concerning gender from this population due to the fact that there is currently only one female administrator working in the targeted prefecture’s senior high schools, and it was felt that requesting gender could compromise the anonymity of this administrator if she were to choose to volunteer.

The three groups were intended to represent the different ranges of schools, being elementary schools, junior high schools and senior high schools, and the researcher predicted that the elementary school situation would be underrepresented by any or all of the three targeted groups due to the fact that ALTs have only been formally introduced into elementary schools since 2002 (C.L.A.I.R. 2002). This prediction was confirmed when all JTEs and administrators that volunteered to participate in this study came from only Senior High Schools. This potential problem will be discussed later in this paper.

3.2 Research Instruments

To conduct this research, three web-based questionnaires were developed and posted on the University of Melbourne web server (url no longer available). Since two of the three groups were Japanese nationals, both the JTEs’ and administrators’ questionnaires were offered in Japanese as well as in English. A Japanese research assistant was recruited for the translating of the English versions into Japanese, as well as for the translating of the results answered in Japanese.

3.3 Constructing the Questionnaires

The three questionnaires each consisted of between 21 and 23 questions, and were designed to take an average of fifteen minutes to complete. The types of questions were: some closed questions describing specific characteristics of their experiences, some open questions for the participant to describe their experiences or opinions in more detail, some ratings questions using a Likert scale, and some background questions for statistical purposes. The focuses of the questionnaires were based on formative aspects of the Programme. Decisions about the language, and ordering of the individual questions for each questionnaire followed Dörnyei (2003). All questionnaires were piloted with a group of former ALTs and adjustments were made to the JTE and administrator questionnaires; the ALT questionnaire was deemed appropriate as it was.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data collected from the three questionnaires included both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS software. The qualitative data was analyzed in the following way. A list of the major concepts to be examined was made based on the responses from the different open questions. The data was then reduced into codes representing themes to be examined. Each group was examined, and coded separately at first. Codes were recorded representing frequencies within the group per question. The three groups were then compared with each other to examine differences in frequencies of themes shared between groups, and for themes unique from other groups. Unexpected responses that occurred outside of the major themes were labeled as “other”. The data resulting from these “other” categories were then examined separately for any additional themes.

4. Findings

In order to determine what style of team teaching is predominantly being used, traditional team teaching, or reverse team teaching, and how the content for the classes that are team-taught is predominantly determined, data from the three groups were reviewed for frequencies concerning who they perceived as being “in charge” of the classes being team taught (See tables 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5).

Table 4.1 ALT results for who determines content

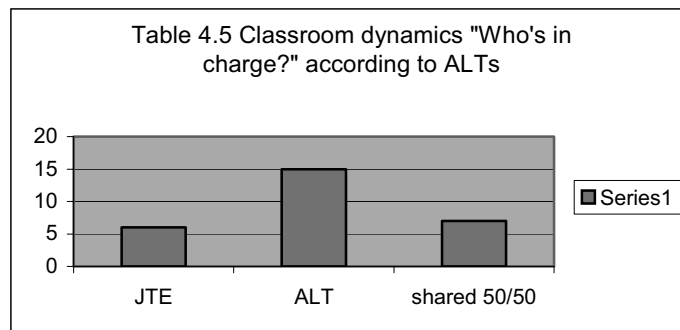
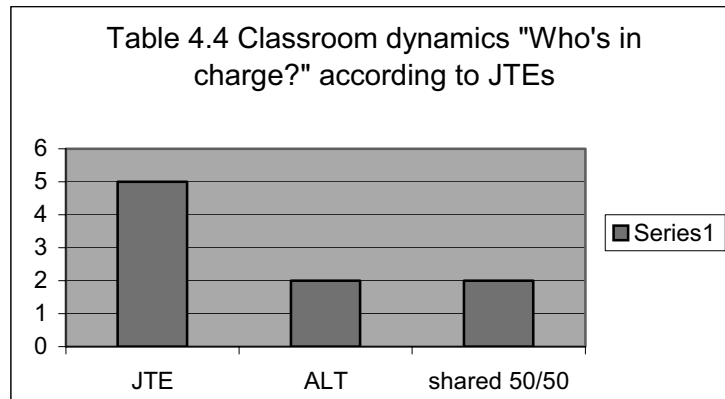
	Frequency	Percent
JTE	10	27.0
ALT	9	24.3
Collaboration	14	37.8
Other	4	10.8
Total	37	100.0

Table 4.2 JTE results for who determines content

	Frequency	Percent
JTE	5	55.6
Collaboration	4	44.4
Total	9	100.0

Table 4.3 Administrators ' results for who determines content

	Frequency	Percent
Collaboration	10	100.0



The resulting data shows that the three groups have different views of who is in charge of the lessons and its content. 55 percent of JTEs believed they controlled content, 44 percent believed it was a collaboration, and no JTEs felt that ALTs determined content. However, 24 percent of ALTs believed they determined the content, with 37 percent feeling it was a collaboration, and 27 percent reported that JTEs determined content. When asked who determines content, the data reflects opposing views from ALTs and JTEs. The majority of ALTs reported that they determined content, and the majority of JTEs reported that they determined the content. According to the administrators, all reported that content was decided collaboratively. The researcher questioned which, if any, other factors might affect how the decision as to who should lead team teaching partnerships is made. It was discovered that the focus of a language Programme has an effect on the determining of the team-teaching dynamic. A Chi-square was performed relating Programme focus, and who determines the content of lessons from the ALT data. It was discovered that there is a significant relationship between the two variables ($\chi^2 = 22.459$, $df = 6$, $p < 0.005$). If the focus of a Programme is grammar, it is more likely that the JTE will determine the content, and if the Programme focus is communicative, the ALT is more likely to be in charge of the content.

5. Discussion

One goal of this research was to duplicate Macedo's (2002) study of attempting to determine which style of team teaching is predominately being used in Oita prefecture. Determining which type of team teaching predominately being used could provide valuable insights into the roles in which ALTs function.

Unlike Macedo's study, this research did not reveal reverse team teaching to be the dominant style, and actually no one style emerged from the data to be the dominant style. The data revealed that there appears to be different views as to who is actually in charge of the classrooms among the three groups questioned.

I believe that the dynamics of the team teaching situation in Oita is potentially threatened because of this lack of clearly specified roles that Tajino and Tajino (2000) claim are necessary for success in team teaching. This research also sought to take the study of who is in charge, or functioning as the lead teacher in the team teaching dynamic further than Macedo had by including concerns pertaining to who is deciding the daily lesson plans and curriculum.

It was believed that whoever was functioning as the lead teacher in the classrooms would also be functioning as the lead teacher for curriculum decisions. Again the results revealed opposing views, and the issue of who is predominately determining content, or curriculum to be problematic. Of course, the situation could be a result of the sample, and the JTEs, and ALTs participating in this study are in fact in charge of their individual partnerships, but the researcher suspects that it is a failure within the partnerships to clearly define the roles, and that administrators are clearly not aiding JTEs and ALTs in their decisions concerning what their roles should be. All administrators reported that content is decided collaboratively. Not one administrator recommended that the ALT, or JTE is the authority, or lead figure. It is the administrators that oversee the Programmes, and they should provide guidance to the partnerships.

Since Macedo reported that reverse team teaching was the dominant style being used in Japan, the researcher thought it could be interesting to attempt to discover what factors, if any, were contributing to the decision. JTEs have a higher status than the ALT (Tajino and Tajino, 2000), so why would a JTE abdicate authority to the ALT? It was discovered that Programme focus is significant to who is leading the partnership between JTE and ALT for the curriculum and daily lesson planning.

Programmes focused on communicative skills are chiefly being led by the ALT, and Programmes focused on grammar by the JTE. This is interesting because it seems to reflect that there is some tendency towards skill level, or knowledge of subject matter, among the partnerships to select the more experienced individual to function as the lead teacher. Japan's history of English education has revealed that effective communicators of English among the Japanese are rare, so JTEs abdicating their potential rights to function as lead teacher in communicative-based Programmes could be considered an admirable decision. It also seems justifiable that JTEs lead grammar-focused Programmes. JTEs are trained, certified English teachers, and ninety percent of ALTs reported not being certified teachers, and grammar instruction could require more teaching skills and the use of Japanese for explanation.

6. Conclusion

The JET Programme's ALT situation in Oita prefecture cannot be easily described, or reduced to, as any one particular type of situation or experience. This research failed to confirm or disprove Macedo's (2002) findings that reverse team teaching is the dominating style of team teaching, but it did discover that there is disparity between ALTs', JTEs', and administrators' opinions as to which type of team teaching is predominately being practiced in Oita prefecture. The specific roles ALTs are to function in are not being clearly explained, it appears, to all parties. One factor, which seems to aid in how roles are distributed between ALT and JTE is the focus of the language Programme being pursued by the partnerships. Whether a Programme is focused on grammar or communication seems to be significant in the determination of the style of team teaching implemented, and which member of the team teaching pair will ultimately assume the role of lead teacher for

classroom, and curriculum decisions.

As a result of the findings from this study, further evaluation of the JET Programme's ALT position should be conducted. The reasons and limitations concerning why ALTs are experiencing such variation in their appointed positions should be evaluated. ALTs appointed to more rural areas with fewer students than ALTs working in cities could possibly be a reason for the differences, but only an investigation could show that.

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