

# Towards the Virtuous Cycle: Improving English Ability Through a Focused Understanding and Enhancement of Teacher Training, Motivation and Self-Efficacy

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## Abstract

This paper discusses the shifting attitudes towards best practices in (English) language learning policy in Japan and what, (if any), are the effects of those ideals on Non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs) and their ability to implement said changes to the Course of Study (CoS). Looking through the lens of teacher identity, that is, how teachers view their ideal L2 self (Dörnyei 2010), teachers' ability to achieve pedagogical reform and realize self-transformation will be discussed. Given that a significant gap has (and still does) exist between the CoS as a plan and as a lived experience in the classroom (Aoki 2004; Connelly & Clandinin 1988), it is in the collective best interest of Japanese Ministry officials to more fully understand not only the needs of the learners but also the needs of the language teachers tasked with implementing the reforms. Taking a look at the demands placed on NNESTs, this paper will investigate the effects on, and importance of teacher motivation, and self-efficacy in curriculum implementation and on work-life balance. Moreover, this paper will explore educational practicum considerations, in-service training procedures, as well as the JET Programme and suggest how they can be improved in order to enhance NNEST self-confidence in the classroom and increase the efficacy of recent educational reforms.

**Keywords :** Teachers, Education, English, Motivation, Self-efficacy, Training

**Abbreviations :** NNEST (Non-native English speaking teacher), ALT

(Assistant Language Teacher), JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme), MEXT (Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology), JTE (Japanese Teacher of English), CoS (Course of Study),

## Introduction

After much consideration in the years leading to the implementation of the new course of study and because of the perceived need for *Japanese with English Abilities*, in the most recent version of the national curriculum, *foreign language activities* was introduced by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (hereto referred to as MEXT), in 2008. These new changes, although not starting officially until 2011, stipulated that, despite the somewhat ambiguous terminology of “foreign language activities”, elementary schools should instruct students in English. The uptake was rapid and according to a 2009 MEXT report 98.7% of primary schools in Japan had already begun instruction despite the fact that those in charge of teaching the new ‘English’ curriculum, had little in the way of training to do so. Armed only with MEXTs support resource (Hi! Friends and *Eigo Note*) and their own English language learning experiences in junior and senior high school, many teachers expressed anxiety about their ability to instruct a subject for which they had no formal training (Aoki 2010; Butler 2004; Kusumoto 2008; Nunan 2003).

In response to this, MEXT cooperated with the British Council to create the LEEP (Leaders of English Education Project), to help bridge the gap. Now in its final year of a five-year mandate, the cascade training project has the ambitious goal of helping practitioners make the shift from traditional grammar-translation based teaching to a more skills-based focus by “training 500 teachers from every prefecture across Japan, who then circulate their expertise to teachers in their home prefecture, initially reaching 10,000 teachers, then later, hopefully reaching every teacher of

English in the country” (British Council 2017). Albeit well intentioned, due to the large number (253,832) of elementary school teachers (MEXT 2015) in the country, the program has been slow to reach those who are in desperate need of assistance and based on conversations with language teachers at primary and secondary schools, anxiety levels continue to be high (White 2018, pers. comm., 20 July).

Presently, various government organizations: The Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIC), The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), as well as The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) increasingly use the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme (JET Programme) to bolster the confidence of NNESTs through team-teaching and to promote communicative competence in students. Originally however, the JET Program was created in response to trade friction with the United States and had as its primary aim, “internationalization in Japan’s local communities” (JET Programme 2018).

The JET Programme is a contentious one with fans and foes in equal numbers. Devotees to the program advocate its successes in helping to internationalize Japan both at home and abroad, while opponents point to its failure to improve students’ communicative ability and see it as a colossal waste of money and resources. Undeniably it has become difficult to regulate the use of ALTs in Japanese schools and despite an approximate ¥40 billion annual budget, many schools have turned to direct hire ALTs through loosely regulated private dispatch and outsourcing firms. Roughly 75% of all ALTs currently in Japan come from these companies (Japan Times 2017).

Japan’s use of both JET and private ALTs is seen as having mixed results especially among the NNESTs with whom they are supposed to work in tandem. Some teachers see visits by ALTs as motivational welcome assistance, while other “overworked teachers often don’t have the time required to properly co-plan a team teaching lesson-especially when

dealing with an inexperienced ALT fresh off the plane” (Ibid., 2017). Opponents also argue that the money used for the JET Programme could be much more efficiently employed in sending NNESTs abroad for training. This however, has been criticized by bureaucrats as being too costly in the current economic climate (Ibid).

Considering all the changes taking place with regard to curriculum, team teaching, and ALTs, it is only natural that the self-confidence, motivation and feelings of self-efficacy of NNESTs also receive some attention. While much of the focus in education is/has been naturally learner-centered, we are only beginning to understand the affect that demotivated teachers have on their charges. Money is allocated in budgets toward improving conditions for students, but it is often the teachers that are left with the responsibility of making the best use of those funds in the classroom. If reserves are to be used efficiently to meet curricular goals, the complex relationship between teachers, their work, and their students must be investigated. Exploring how these factors interact with one another can help us to develop a more complete picture of the educational puzzle. A greater understanding of teacher motivation, self-confidence and self-efficacy can be of immense use in making more efficient use of funds, preventing redundancy, and achieving long-term goals.

## **Motivation**

What does one mean when one says that another lacks motivation? Can we so easily chalk up our failings in second language learning to an absence of this concept? Motivation includes a myriad of variables in the social-cultural dimension and represents a complex relationship between the learner, the teacher, the subject matter, the conditions under which the learning takes place and the surrounding environment. Therefore, perhaps it is precisely because of its incredibly complex nature, that we refer to motivation in broad terms and simply state that one is in possession of *it* or not. However, if we are to offer an educational intervention, one which

is aimed at edifying the current approach to second language learning and teacher education in Japan, it is incumbent upon researchers, educators and policy makers to have a far more comprehensive understanding of concept.

Motivation, as a factor in second language acquisition (SLA) research, has been theorized for many years. Schumann (1976, 1978) argued that differences in the social context between language learners and those in the target language group accounted for what he referred to as *social distance*. When this social distance was minimized, acculturation of the second language (L2) group into the target language (TL) group was sped up and language learning itself was optimized. Likewise, when the social distance between these two groups was increased, effective language learning could not occur. Therefore, viewing motivation as a static concept, only those who were highly motivated and attempted to close the social distance gap, could be successful language learners.

Krashen (1981, 1982) hypothesized that in order to successfully learn a second language, one must have a low *affective filter* whilst constantly being bombarded by *comprehensible input*. Krashen believed that although we may not understand all the structures in the language that we as second language learners hear, it was nevertheless essential to give L2 learners the opportunity to increase their exposure to these structures in order to learn. Additionally, it was one's affective filter, which included variables such as motivation (again in a static sense), anxiety and self-confidence, that governed whether, in the presence of comprehensible input, successful L2 learning could take place. In this view, one may appear to be unmotivated, if one's affective filter were too high.

Looking at motivation through the lens of self-confidence, Gardner (1985) believed that through continued positive exposure in a second language learning context, one's self-confidence would increase, which would in turn motivate one to learn a second language. This view supposes that one's motivation is a subset of one's self-confidence, or lack thereof.

Thus, should L2 learners have many positive experiences in L2 learning, they would be far more likely to continue to be ‘motivated’ to continue learning a second language.

Other motivation-related concepts, namely *investment*, and one’s *social identity*, have been put forward by Pierce. According to Pierce (1995) these concepts arise from the perception of L2 learners’ perceived inequitable relationship with members of the TL group. If a second language learner is heavily invested in their own learning, One’s linguistic competence can be epitomized by their growing awareness of their ‘right to speak’, and in claiming this right they legitimize their positions as speakers of English. Investment, as Pierce sees it,

...presupposes that when language learners speak, they are not only exchanging information with target language speakers but they are constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. Thus an investment in the target language is also an investment in a learner’s own social identity, an identity which is constantly changing across time and space (Ibid., pg.18).

Despite the fact that many second language learners, including Japanese teachers of English [JTEs], are highly motivated to speak and learn English, there are certain conditions under which they remain silent. JTE’s fluctuating view of themselves in their shifting roles as teacher, learner and classroom manager sometimes come into conflict with each other and cause them to question their legitimacy as English language speakers. This questioning can, in turn, lead to feelings of inadequacy and a gradual distancing from the target language both inside and outside the classroom.

In a recent interview on December 5, 2017, Akiko<sup>1)</sup>, an elementary

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1) An anonym has been used at the interviewee’s request

school teacher currently instructing in Oita Prefecture, stated that during the course of her teaching, she frequently felt uneasy with her English teaching duties and was unsure of how to instruct students in a foreign language. Expressing her frustration, she stated “I never had training enough [sic] during my university days and other than the book they [MEXT] give me, I really don’t know how to teach English. I feel bad for students because if I was a better teacher and [English] speaker, they might like English more.” Akiko’s words echo the feelings of inadequacy and frustration that many elementary school teachers feel as they have never received any formal post-secondary teacher training in foreign languages, and the in-service training they have received on the job has been sporadic at best. She added that “I feel so relaxed when the ALT<sup>2)</sup> comes. I know he is [sic] assistant but I usually ask him to teach the class.” This comes as no surprise as according to Kiyotaka, approximately 34% of ALTs in elementary schools surveyed stated that they taught without the help of their JTE hosts and more than 56% said that they were the only ones responsible for lesson planning (2015).

In Japan, learners are naturally limited in their access to the target language community. Therefore, it is essential that optimistic attitudes, positive models, and constructive experiences encourage them to abandon the preconception that they are incapable of linguistic growth and competence. Only then will they come to realize their idyllic potential and claim their own right to speak.

Although one’s desire to become part of a second language community can account for increased motivation to learn the L2 and can be more easily achieved in environments where learners have natural access to speakers of the TL; in foreign language learning contexts such as Japan, this proves more difficult. In Gardner’s (1985, 2001) theory of motivation the concept of *integrativeness*, in other words, “a genuine

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2) Assistant Language Teacher (a non-Japanese English speaking teaching assistant)

interest in learning the second language in order to come closer to the other language community” (2001, pg.5) is not easily applied in Japan due to the homogeneousness of its population.

Dörnyei purports an “L2 Motivational Self System-that builds upon the foundations laid by Gardner (1985) but which at the same time broadens the scope of the theory to make it applicable in diverse language learning environments in our globalized world” (2010, pg. 75). Dörnyei attempted to measure the motivations of L2 learners and found that integrativeness “turned out to be the principal motivation factor in an environment where integrating was not very meaningful (since there was nothing really to integrate into) and, furthermore, integrativeness was closely associated with two very different variables: faceless pragmatic incentives and personal attitudes towards members of the L2 community” (Ibid., pg.78). In other words, language learners in EFL environments seem to be motivated by practical considerations (such as being part of a globalized world) although they often cannot immediately see how those considerations affect them directly. JTEs also often sight their primary reason for studying English as ‘globalism’, but other than being a trendy catchphrase, they themselves often remark that it is difficult to see how this concept is realized in their daily life.

Even though they were tasked with educating L2 pupils themselves, Kusumoto’s (2008) research showed that a clear majority of JTEs (especially at the elementary level) “have no confidence in their English ability at all and feel pressure to teach English... [and] they would rather not teach English” (pg.16). In most cases teachers preferred instead to leave language teaching up to professionals. Although it is not clear who the word *professionals* refers to in this case, one surmises that it denotes junior and senior high school English teachers as well as native-speaker ALTs who often assist with the teaching of English classes. In Kusumoto’s study approximately half, (123 of 256 teachers) or (48%), reported feeling a lack of confidence when conducting English classes (Ibid). This



overwhelming number clearly illustrates that teachers are struggling with their own motivational issues.

Based on pioneering research by Markus and Nurius (1986), and Higgins (1987, 1998), Dörnyei has further postulated that there exists in language learners of every level an “L2 Motivational Self System” (Dörnyei 2010). This system hypothesizes that one’s ability to stay motivated and continue to successfully learn an L2 depends on one’s image of one’s ideal L2 self. In other words, a learner’s motivation can depend on either: the interaction of their *Ideal L2 Self* with a *promotion* focus, that is, what one envisions oneself becoming either personally or professionally; interaction with one’s *Ought-to L2 Self* with a *prevention* focus, that is, one’s avoidance of states that cause anxiety; or finally interaction with one’s *L2 Learning Experience*, in short, the impact of the learning environment on the learner (Ibid., pg.79-80).

It is clear that in the Japanese educational context many teachers feel there is a gap between what they envisioned their responsibilities to be and the reality of the situation in the classroom. The harsh realities of a lack of L2 teacher-training, form-focused language curriculums despite the rhetoric of a shift towards more communicative task-based activities in the classroom; and a general lack of an integrated teacher network in which a community of teachers can freely share ideas and get assistance, has caused imbalance between the teachers’ Ideal L2 Self and their Ought-to L2 Self. Put simply, they are engaging in English study not because they want to, but because they feel they should or are obligated to do so. Due to this disproportion, teachers’ L2 motivation suffers and many feel helpless, anxious and de-motivated when it comes to English instruction. If teachers feel this way, it is only natural that students, in turn, will not have a positive balanced view of themselves and their abilities in the language classroom.

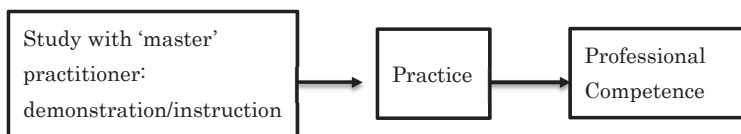
Dörnyei’s model provides an easy way to see how the current teacher training and development system in Japan causes stress, confusion and

high levels of prevention-based instrumental motivation. Teachers themselves have few good role models upon which to envision their ideal L2 self resulting in a low promotion focus in their instrumental motivation. Additionally, the L2 learning experience is inconsistent due to the non-standardization of the curriculum, time/content constraints as well as other professional limitations. Teachers often feel that they experience neither personal, nor professional success because of a lack of time to which they can dedicate themselves to appropriate teacher training and development. Moreover, high levels of prevention-focused instrumental motivation are predictable due to teachers' desire to improve their performance in order to avoid possible negative outcomes such as classroom breakdown, or embarrassment in front of other staff or students.

### **In-service training**

Very little has changed over the last 30 years in Japan with respect to communicative language teaching until relatively recently, despite much rhetoric to the contrary. Guidelines set in place by policy makers have not frequently been implemented by teachers in the classrooms. There are various arguments as to the causes for this lack of progress but, suffice it to say, insufficient or antiquated methods in in-service training can be seen as one of the roots.

In his book on language teacher training Wallace (1991, pgs.6-17) illustrates three main models of teacher training. In the first, professional training can be seen as a craft :

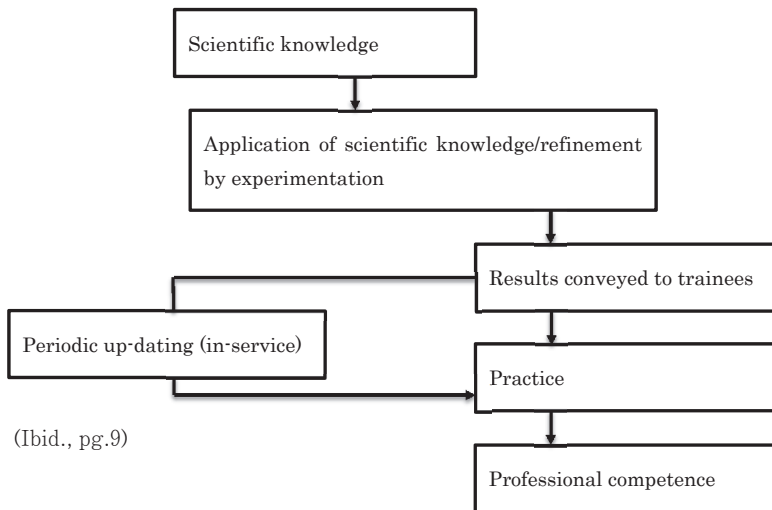


(Ibid., pg.6)

However, this view of professional education is refuted as not being sufficient as ‘master’ practitioners, although very proficient in the methods they have practiced for years, can not keep pace with the ever-changing demands of new curriculum and policy. As techniques are continuously being changed and updated, the static craft model cannot keep pace and does not present a realistic option for teacher education. He goes on to propound that,

good teaching is an undeniably complex activity, and there is no guarantee that it will ever be fully predictable in a logical way... teaching as primarily a craft...does not allow for the explosion of scientific knowledge...to say nothing of the tremendous developments in the subject areas which teachers teach (Ibid., pg.7).

The second model described by Wallace is the applied science model.



In this model, it can be clearly seen that knowledge flows from the top, down. Through continuous experimentation, techniques are refined and

the results are passed down to the trainees (teachers) who then practice these methods through in-service training and classroom trial and error, thereby resulting in professional competence. This model, however, presupposes that changes can only be conveyed by 'experts', in other words, not by teachers in the classrooms. Wallace points out that,

It is possible...for some of the practitioners to become 'experts', but they usually do this by leaving their...classrooms and becoming academics in universities or other institutions...this tendency for the experts to be well removed from the day-to-day working scene is more pronounced in teaching than in some other professions (Ibid., pg.9-10).

This implied distance between so called 'experts' and classroom teachers can be argued to be responsible for much of the slow or inadequate progress in communicative language teaching techniques in Japan over the last few decades. Wallace goes on to say that,

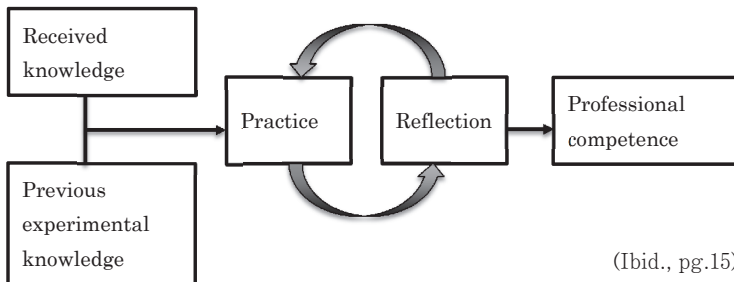
Many practicing teachers might not be able to understand the more technical research articles, even if they bothered to read them (which few of them do). However, the frustrations, survival techniques and infrequent rewards of teaching in today's classrooms can only be understood by many educational researchers in an abstract way. Indeed, the gulf is sometimes wider than ignorance or status: it can even be one of mutual contempt and antipathy. Researchers can be contemptuous of teachers because 'they never read'. Teachers can be antipathetic to researchers because the latter are seen as 'refugees from the classroom' (Ibid., pg.11).

Indeed, the 'antipathy' that Wallace describes is a real problem as overburdened JTEs, however well-intentioned, simply do not have the time

to implement the changes nor possess the background training on how to do so.

In saddling teachers with the responsibility for curriculum change and implementation as well as their own development, training, club supervision and regular teaching tasks, ministry of education officials have perhaps, inadvertently, overburdened teachers. This has, in turn, resulted in a less effective implementation process than expected. In the rush to improve students' test scores in English, government officials have essentially ignored their most important resource: teachers. Top-down implementation of policy is rarely successful and there is evidence to suggest (Speck & Knipe 2001) that teachers feel the same way about professional development opportunities that are offered without first consulting them about their actual needs.

The reflective model, the last model introduced by Wallace, integrates both knowledge based on scientific principles (received knowledge) as well as experiential knowledge gained from practice and patient experimentation in the classroom in order to achieve a better compromise.



Where the craft model did not allow for rapid expansions of knowledge and/or innovation on a grand scale precisely as it was “imitative in nature” (Ibid, pg.15), the reflective model allows teachers to make use of research, experience and other professional developments more adequately.

As it is not based on imitation but careful reflection and adaptation of effective practice, it is a more practical model for teacher training. Conversely, the applied science model has lead to a gap between research based knowledge and knowledge based on classroom practice. Wallace rightly points out that, “There has also been a tendency to downgrade the value of the classroom teacher’s expertise derived from experience” (Ibid., pg.16). Using the reflective model, however, the classroom teacher’s input is an integral part of the reflective process and one that is imperative if one wishes research to be more grounded and applicable to the real classroom. Should MEXT wish its new reforms to be more smoothly implemented by teachers, a more ‘reflective model’ should be considered; one that allows for greater teacher input and values classroom experience equally to that of research by experts in the field. Should this system be employed, classroom teachers would feel that frequent reforms were being fashioned, to some degree, from the bottom up rather than top down, and this would likely enhance their induction.

Domestic teacher training programs in Japan such as the aforementioned Leaders of English Education Project (LEEP), endeavors to aid the process of reflection and practice. Five-hundred teachers are sent abroad to academic institutions to receive the latest instruction from experts in the field as well as other teacher-trainers before coming home to pass on their knowledge to their peers. Unfortunately, the effects of this program are ‘watered down’ as the initial 500 return to their districts to provide five one-day workshops for their colleagues over the course of a year. In an attempt to broaden the audience, an additional 42,000 teacher training DVDs “will be used to help English teachers develop their communicative teaching skills” (Ibid.) through eight 20-minute videos addressing various techniques. Although this program does address the need for L2 training techniques among JTEs from elementary to high school, it does not go far enough in that it does not provide continuous opportunities for feedback and reflection. Additionally, it provides no

attention to teacher work-life balance or to cultivating the individual.

Additionally, thus far, MEXT has failed to draw a distinction between the concepts of *training* and *development*. According to Freeman (1982, pg.21-22), training is about advancing specific skills for teaching such as scaffolding an activity or adapting a text to befit the needs of individual learners, whereas development refers to the teacher as an individual; it focuses on improving a teacher's personal mindset, their sense of accomplishment, goal-setting and fostering their confidence. Training is more related to pressing matters whereas development is involved in the long-term wellbeing of an individual. Certainly there is ample evidence (Tahira, 2012; Laurier et.al. 2011; Sarich, 2014; Steele et.al. 2017) to suggest that despite MEXT's best intentions, in the last 30 years, the difference between the theoretical implementation of CLT techniques and the reality of that implementation in the classroom has been offset due to issues surrounding a profound lack of training as well as innumerable causes of declining teacher motivation. Thus, it is logical that we must first pay careful attention to not only the way in which in-service training is conducted but also to the mindsets of JTEs, before making additional training and teaching demands.

### **Teacher Self-Efficacy**

For the most part, literature on language learning focuses on learners. Socialization of discourse about teachers as altruistic (Nias 1999, pg.226-227) has occurred due to the ongoing learner-centered movement, and the fact that teachers are typically seen in terms of their students, rather than as instruments of change themselves (Leander & Osborne, 2008). However, if “a good teacher is like a candle [in that] it consumes itself to light the way for others” (Ataturk), then ultimately we will be left in the dark with very few competent educators indeed. In fact, according to an article in the Mainichi newspaper, almost 8000 public school teachers took sick leave in 2015 and over 60% of those cases were due

to mental illness alone. MEXT admits that “the busy work environment” is the main cause and cites OECD (2015) evidence that Japanese teachers work an average of 53.9 hours per week which is notably higher than the 38.3 hours per week average across the other 34 nations that were surveyed (Ibid). More worrying is the fact that only 18 of those hours were spent on teaching as reported by Japanese teachers. However, being aware of the problem is only half the battle, and taking measures to ensure the well-being of teachers must surely be the logical next step.

Certainly, in addition to the well-being of students, policy makers and the Ministry of Education need to recognize that “there is a dynamic symbiosis between teacher and student wellbeing. Fostering wellbeing for teachers enables them to support students” (Roffey 2011, pg.198). Focusing on teacher well-being may not lead to immediate increases in students’ English test scores but will likely pay considerable dividends in the long-run. Maslach & Leiter (1999, pg.303) state “The most valuable and costly part of an education system are the people who teach. Maintaining their well-being and their contribution to student education should be a primary objective of educational leaders” . Perhaps, by our continued focus on learners, we are in fact, doing them a disservice. By valuing JTEs, our most precious resource, we will ensure the continuity of quality education by motivated individuals who constantly seek to better themselves rather than simply consume themselves for the sake of others.

There are, however, several challenges to developing teacher self-efficacy. Mercer (2016) made reference to the following factors: perfectionism, changes in roles, expectations and demands of the job, focusing on negative experiences and feedback and being overly-critical of one’s own performance. Because of the ongoing changes to the English education system (MEXT 2014, 2015), JTEs at all levels of education are coping with new reforms. These new expectations are especially taxing on primary school educators who often have never had any formal English teacher training (Machida 2016, p.41). Compounding this problem is



MEXTs continued short-termism. Although they are undeniably attempting to make progress in curriculum development and instructional techniques, they seem to have an extremely precipitous understanding of the value of teachers' emotional and social intelligence.

Simply put, emotional intelligence is the “capacity for recognizing [one’s] own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships” (Goleman 1988 in Gkonou & Mercer 2017, pg.5). According to Goleman, emotional intelligence is made up of several factors which coalesce and help the individual reach a higher level of EI. Chief among these factors is the concept of self-regulation which assists one in controlling one’s behavior with the aim of achieving one’s own goals and aspirations. Motivation, another crucial factor in EI, incorporates one’s passion, hope and optimism (Ibid) and culminates in one’s willingness to participate in an activity for personal betterment. Social Intelligence (SI), although closely related to EI, differs in a few distinct areas. Inasmuch as EI focuses on one’s belief in and about oneself, SI focuses on creating positive interpersonal social interactions and assists those in nurturing positions to assess the desires of those in their care and ultimately guides a teacher’s moral compass.

EI and SI play a vital role in helping teachers to not only better themselves, but also to enact effective educational change. A high SI is “conducive to positive social relationships with colleagues, trust and rapport, exchange of materials and ideas, and personal and professional well-being. Attending to SI is therefore important for ELT training programs given the social and interpersonal nature of language teaching” (Gkonou & Mercer 2017, pg.6). However, most in-service training programs lack this essential training and instead focus primarily on teaching techniques and classroom management. Attending to SI training can assist with managing professional stress and avoiding burnout (Ibid., pg.38). In fact, Gkonou & Mercer state correctly that,

...if the teacher is in a positive frame of mind and motivated, the chances their learners are too is much higher. Given motivated learners are motivational for teachers, it is possible to see how this can trigger a virtuous positive upward cycle, in contrast to the potential for the burnout cascade when a negative spiral takes over (Ibid).

All those involved in the field of education understand that teaching can be a very emotionally exhausting enterprise. Lacking adequate training and overburdened with extra-curricular responsibilities, NNESTs in Japan are especially susceptible to this state. Therefore, it is essential that MEXT promote the development of positive, flexible thinking in their teachers. The ramifications of furthering this lack of confidence could be disastrous. Machida (2016) found that:

teachers' lack of confidence about speaking English was so great that it had nullified any practical benefits that were provided by the district...as a result, it could be expected that students would have reduced opportunities to improve their English ability when studying with unmotivated teachers (pg.57).

In light of this, it seems necessary that in addition to progressive curriculum change and implementation, MEXT should also concern itself with issues associated with teacher well-being in order to prevent record numbers of burnout (Ochiai 2003). Although perhaps not as palpable as high English standardized test scores, we can say for certain that teachers with a fixed mindset do not encourage unmotivated learners.

A fixed mindset is not productive for teachers tasked with implementing the new English CoS. Many teachers, they themselves a product of the educational system they work in, believe that their own language abilities are fixed: that they can do little to overcome their

difficulties and improve their abilities. Simply put, they believe that they are not good at languages. By encouraging and training teachers to develop a growth mindset, we can foster their ability to persevere even in the face of adversity. Through coaching and improvement of their overall EI/SI quotient, we can promote in teachers the feeling that even from failure they have something to learn and that they indeed, can improve their own language abilities. In other words, by supporting a growth mindset we can elevate teachers (and their pupils) to develop grit and discard the feelings of frustration that come with learned helplessness (Mercer 2017).

Gritty, motivated teachers produce the same qualities in their students. Certainly, if we hope to encourage ‘Japanese with English abilities’ (MEXT, 2002) we need to be looking long-term. Perseverance is a learned construct and in the cooperative atmosphere of the language classroom, it is essential that students learn this from their teachers. Gkonou and Mercer affirm that: “we might have the most brilliant materials and resources but without the right kind of interpersonal dynamics, these affordances will never achieve their potential” (2017, pg.42). Despite much effort (OECD 2015, pg.10) and money<sup>3)</sup> spent to the contrary, looking at the lack of English speaking ability in Japan, we can certainly attest to the veracity of this statement. Spending time to improve the EI/SI quotient of our teachers will result in them transmitting their passion for teaching to students who will, in turn, develop a passion for learning. Ultimately, this will do more to foster palpable English test results and promote practical L2 speaking ability than the development of ‘the next best textbook’.

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3) The 2018 budget for “Improvement of qualification ability of teachers responsible for future school education” (MEXT 2018, pg. 6) is 1,468百万円 (approx. 13 million USD)

## **Practicum and pre-service training considerations**

Another glaring problem concerning teacher efficacy in Japan goes to the very heart of teacher training in post-secondary institutions: the length of time that teachers spend in schools honing their skills with actual students varies greatly from other developed countries. In Japan the average practicum length is just 4 weeks (20 days) (OECD, 2014) for those aiming to become elementary school teachers and just 2 weeks for those wishing to become secondary teachers (MEXT, 2017). Institutions such as Hiroshima Educational University, housing one of the country's top faculties of education, have a practicum length slightly longer at five weeks for elementary school and four weeks for secondary teachers (Hiroshima University, 2003) A thorough grounding in not only educational theory and policy but also practice is necessary for the continued success of teachers in the classroom. However, according to the OECD (2014, pg.502) Education at a Glance report, "it is striking that around one in four teachers in Finland, Japan and Mexico does not feel prepared or feel only somewhat prepared to teach the content, pedagogy and practical components of the subjects they teach" . This revealing quote illustrates the anxiety and lack of formal preparation (especially in English teaching techniques) many, especially primary, teachers feel at the commencement of their careers.

Conversely, the University of Victoria in Canada, also with a well-known faculty of education, has a practicum length of 17 weeks (University of Victoria, 2017) in which potential teachers have ample opportunities to not only teach core courses but also to develop interpersonal relationships with their mentors and their students. Another Canadian teacher training university, the University of British Columbia, has a two-year program with a four-week summer vacation between the first and second year. The first year has a four-week practicum in which student-teachers progress from teaching 20% of classes during the first

week, to 40% of classes in the fourth week. During their second year, student teachers experience a longer practicum and progress from 30% teaching load to an 80% load from week three through to the conclusion of the practicum in week eight (Douglas 2016, pg.547). Additionally, in countries such as Germany, teacher education programs can last from 282-604 days (OECD 2014, pg.513) giving new teachers ample practice and confidence heading into their new careers.

Professor Mitarai, a University of Oita faculty of education professor specializing in teacher training, confirmed that nationally in Japan there are few requirements related to the percentage of course load taught. Moreover, there are not many stipulations which dictate the degree to which, or framework with which, individual student-teacher candidates are evaluated (2017 pers. comm., 26 December). Oversight and feedback on student-teacher performance is left up to individual universities and/or sponsor teachers and can vary greatly from program to program and host school to host school. If students can manage to finish their practicums without any major problems and in accordance with the guidelines of their faculty, they will in all likelihood, be given credit for the practicum.

Compounding the problem of second language teacher training in Japan, is the fact that student-teachers are not usually required to teach English during their short practicums. In addition to student-teachers, elementary school host teachers themselves have little, if any, experience with English instructional techniques and so cannot, in many cases, provide adequate guidance themselves. This vicious circle is often perpetuated because host teachers and student-teachers alike are a by-product of their own educational system. Because of their own experiences learning English in the Japanese educational system, many of these teachers have limited ideas about how languages should be learned and fall back on using traditional techniques such as the grammar-translation method. Changing these behaviors and practices can be very challenging

“because of all the years teacher candidates have spent observing educational practices in schools as students themselves” (Lortie 1975 cited in Douglas 2016 pg.542), and Pajares’ 1992 study (cited in Douglas 2016, pg.542) found that “teacher candidates’ beliefs are usually well established by the time they arrive in their teacher education programs.” In other words, as no significant changes in the implementation of new pedagogy has taken place in the last 20-30 years, it is unreasonable to expect that teacher candidates’ belief systems will reflect any other pedagogy other than that to which they themselves were exposed as secondary students.

Unfortunately, there are no easy solutions to these problems but in order to ensure long-term success of both curriculum goals and student achievement, several different options should be carefully considered. Currently in Japan, new teachers are mandated by law to complete supplemental in-service training (induction programs) and professional development in the amount of twenty and sixty days respectively (OECD 2014, pg.513) during their first year. Throughout the duration of this year they are mentored and observed by more experienced teachers to ensure the continued development of their teaching skills and classroom discipline (Darling-Hammond 1998). This is an essential training system which is admired and replicated by several countries and which gives beginning teachers more confidence in the classroom. Although indispensable in laying the foundation for good teaching practices, it does little to assist first-year teachers with their ability to instruct in English. As mentor teachers themselves have little experience or training in this area, they too do not necessarily provide adequate models upon which beginning teachers can base their lessons.

One option which could address, on a limited basis, the needs of both experienced and beginning classroom teachers involves repurposing funding from the ALT budget to the promotion of teacher training programs (White 2016, pg.143-144). This would, of course, involve cutting a significant number of ALT positions. However, considering the fact that

there are numerous inconsistencies and mistranslations that exist in the descriptions of ALT/JTE duties, not to mention issues involving inadequate training of ALTs and ambivalent attitudes of JTEs (Ohtani 2010, pg.42-43) perhaps the program should be clarified before it is expanded. Moreover, despite ALTs lack of teaching credentials (Ibid., 2010) and in contravention of Japanese educational law (The ALT Scam, n.d.) ALTs are increasingly finding themselves in charge of teaching English classes rather than as assistants or cultural ambassadors as they were originally intended. Rather than dramatically increasing the number of JETs, the government could make better use of its budget by funding training opportunities for classroom teachers. Presently there are 5,528 ALTs living and working in Japan (JET Programme, 2018). If MEXT were to reduce the current number of JET Programme participants by approximately 1700, they could repurpose approximately fifty million (US) dollars<sup>4)</sup> a year to teacher-training programs. This badly needed money could be allocated to sending teachers on two-week intensive EFL training programs abroad such as the Eiken Teacher Training Project. These programs instruct inexperienced language teachers in communicative task-based teaching techniques, as well as promote cultural understanding, better attitudes toward continuous professional development and enhance knowledge of the target language (Eiken 2016). In 2015, just thirty-six teachers (twelve from elementary, junior high and high school) were selected from within Japan to participate in this program with more than 50 contact hours of training in a foreign country (White 2016, pg.140-141). However, with the aforementioned funding, this number could be boosted to more than ten thousand<sup>5)</sup> per year: a dramatic increase.

Another viable option, albeit difficult if not impossible to implement

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4) 1700 ALT Jobs at an average of \$30,500 per year = \$51,850,000 (US)

5) \$51,850,000 (USD) / \$5000 (average cost of two-week study abroad program)  
=10,370 teachers per year.

without considerable debate on a national level, would be to increase post secondary teacher training degree programs from their current four-year length to a five-year system. Darling-Hammond (1998) asserts that:

the fifth year allows students to focus exclusively on the task of preparing to teach, with yearlong, school-based internships linked to coursework on learning and teaching. Studies have found that graduates of these extended programs are more satisfied with their preparation, and their colleagues, principals, and cooperating teachers view them as better prepared. Extended program graduates are as effective with students as are much more experienced teachers and are much more likely to enter and stay in teaching than their peers prepared in traditional four-year programs (pg.2-3).

Although lengthening pre-service teacher training would significantly increase both time and financial burdens on student teachers, the end result would allow them to learn how to develop motivational English plans in the the classroom and engage students in motivational lessons during prolonged hands-on practicums. Moreover, a fifth year would likely result in far less beginning teacher burnout as teachers would be better prepared not only for classroom discipline and general teaching techniques but for language instruction as well. Long-term solutions such as these “empower teachers with greater understanding of complex situations rather than seeking to control them with simplistic formulas or cookie-cutter routines” (Ibid). If MEXT truly wants its teachers to “stand at the podium with confidence” (Improving the Quality and Ability of Teachers, pg.5) then they must provide the necessary groundwork and opportunities for teachers to both motivate themselves and in turn, their students.



## Conclusions

This paper has endeavored to provide suggestions on how MEXT, together with practicing classroom teachers, can move towards achieving the goal of fostering “Japanese with English Abilities” . In light of the fast-approaching Olympic Games in Tokyo in 2020, the government has indeed embarked upon a propitious plan to bring these aspirations to fruition. However, as we have seen in previous pedagogical reform cycles, implementing reforms without laying careful groundwork can lead to the ultimate collapse of the programs and a prodigious regression to the status quo.

### *Focus on the teacher*

In order to avoid a potentially lamentable situation, we must carefully consider not only our charges, the learners in our classrooms, but also the teachers upon whom the learners entrust their future. Ignoring their needs, is to put the cart before the horse, resulting in confusion, chaos and aversion. Teachers are the foundation upon which educational building blocks must rest. Arduous as it may seem at first, ensuring their well-being and confidence ensures not only the success of learners at every level of education but also the achievement of policies and proposals laid out years beforehand.

### *Pay attention to teacher motivation*

The first step in this process is to attend to teacher motivation. Rather than putting in place policies which promote high levels of prevention-based motivation, in other words, increasing feelings of stress avoidance and antipathy, MEXT, through enhanced emotional training focusing on work-life balance and well-being; could endeavor to elevate the SI of its teachers, thus producing a growth, or ‘can-do’ mindset. In-service training and induction programs should focus not only on *training*, that

is, the advancement of specific instructionally-related skills; but also on *development*. Focusing equally on development, the teacher will improve their mindset which will result in greater levels of self-confidence and motivation which will then be passed on to their students; thus ensuring a virtuous cycle. This accomplished, the 三日坊主 [mikka bōzu] attitude, in other words; the tendency to give up quickly in the face of a demanding task, that has permeated educational reform of past, could be eliminated, or at least assuaged.

### ***Re-evaluate training and in-service protocols***

Concurrently, pre-service teachers should be given more of an opportunity to hone their skills at university before attempting the 教員採用試験 [kyōinsaiyōshiken], or faculty recruitment examination, which must be passed before they are able to secure a job in any given school district. Expanding opportunities for practice could be accomplished in one of two ways: either by altering the duration of practicums, lengthening them so that they are in line with other comprehensive programs in countries such as Canada or Germany, or by adding a fifth year to education degree programs in universities throughout Japan. Admittedly, changing the system could be argued as being an arduous task and a financial burden on the government, post-secondary institutions as well as on the pre-service teachers themselves. However, laying this careful underpinning at the beginning of teachers' careers will in all likelihood do a great deal to prevent the precipitous rates of teacher burnout that have been seen in recent years as well as allow teachers to approach their students with greater confidence in their own abilities. Happy, confident teachers ensure happy, confident students and so the virtuous cycle should continue.

### ***Conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the JET Programme***

Lastly, although the government has called for up to 20,000

additional native speakers (ALTs) and other Japanese fluent in English to be hired in advance of 2020 (Japan Times, 2018), this ‘assistance’ may do more harm than good. Albeit native speakers in the target language, these ALTs and other assistants often possess nothing more than a cursory knowledge of teaching English as a second or foreign language, let alone are in possession of any teaching certification. This paper has shown that while recognizing the cultural significance of the JET Program, its instructional value is somewhat more tenuous. The little money that is allocated to education in Japan would be better spent on enhancing the abilities of its JTEs rather than on an over-reliance on unqualified assistants. By limiting, rather than expanding, the number of assistants in the classrooms, we prioritize JTEs and allow them the essential study abroad training opportunities they so desperately need. While it is true that these short training and development sojourns abroad will not be enough to make JTEs fluent speakers of the target language, they will assist in accomplishing the goal of deepening JTEs international understanding, improving their knowledge of CLT techniques, and motivating them to pursue a greater understanding of the TL upon their return. Motivated, energetic teachers produce the same qualities in their students; thereby further consolidating the virtuous cycle.

If we really are to live up to the Tokyo Olympics 2020 slogan of “Discover Tomorrow”, perhaps we ought to start investing in today. Careful groundwork now will ensure that teachers are better prepared to face the demanding realities of their EFL classrooms, in addition to maintaining their professional and personal well-being. In achieving this, we are also ensuring the success of our learners: a definite win-win situation.

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