

# English teacher education at Japanese universities

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文部科学省の最近の調査によると、ほとんどの公立中学・高等学校の英語教員は文科省が指定した英語力と指導力のレベルに達していないことが判明した。この調査結果は、日本の教員養成のあり方を疑問視する声を高めている。本稿では、日本の中学・高等学校の英語教員養成について検証する。始めに、教員免許取得プロセスの概略を述べ、次に実例としてある英語教員養成課程の実体について触れる。最後に、「JALT2005教員養成ディスカッション」の参加者(40数名)からの意見と提案をいくつか提示する。

In its five-year Action Plan to cultivate Japanese with English abilities, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) included plans to improve the teaching ability of English teachers. MEXT called upon teachers to teach lessons principally in English, to conduct classes that foster communication abilities in students, and to attain a minimum English language proficiency level – 550 on the TOEFL, 730 on the TOEIC, or the pre-first level on the STEP (MEXT, 2003).

However, according to a 2005 MEXT survey of 14,000 secondary schools, very few teachers appear to have reached these goals (Daily Yomiuri, 2005a). Only a very small percentage of the surveyed English classes were conducted for the most part in English, and less than twenty percent of the teachers had passed the pre-first level of the STEP.

Clearly, the Ministry and other public organs which are responsible for the planning and implementation of pre-service and in-service teacher education programs, must take further steps to reach the stated MEXT

goals and improve the present teacher training system. In addition, we, as teacher educators, and others who work in the teacher education field, need to become better informed about the system and more involved in the process (Sato, Takaki, Okada, Takahashi, Yamashita, & Serikawa, 2005). We hoped to both share and broaden our knowledge by opening lines of communication and creating networks at our discussion session on English teacher education at JALT2005.

This paper includes the information on teacher certification and pre-service teacher education for prospective junior high and senior high school teachers that we presented at JALT2005. The first presenter provides an overview of the teacher certification process and the second presenter describes her teacher education program at Bunka Women's University. This description serves as an example of how one university has interpreted the curriculum guidelines set forth by MEXT for the English teaching methodology course and teaching practicum. We end with a summary of comments and suggestions received from our participants.

### **An overview of the English teacher certification process**

#### ***Types of certificates and academic requirements for certification***

More than half of all Japanese universities, colleges of education and junior colleges offer teacher certification programs each of which must be approved by MEXT (MEXT, n.d.a). Under the Education Personnel Certificate Law enacted in 1949, MEXT prescribes the minimum

number of required credits and types of courses needed to complete a certification program (Ota, 2000).

There are three kinds of teacher certificates awarded by Japan's prefectural and designated municipal boards of education (See Table 1). The regular certificate includes three categories, advanced, first class, and second class. The special certificate is given to individuals deemed to have expert knowledge, experience and skills and who successfully pass a recruitment examination offered by a board of education; the temporary certificate is awarded only under special circumstances (MEXT, n.d.b; Ota, 2000). Public sector teachers are treated as civil servants hired by these boards.

**Table 1. Types of teacher certificates**

Type	Validity	Category	Basic Qualification
Regular	Valid throughout Japan	Advanced (Senshuu ) First class (Isshu ) Second class (Nishu )	Master's degree Bachelor's degree Junior College degree
Special	Valid only in the district conferring the license		
Temporary	Valid only in the district conferring the license Term of validity 3 or 6 years		

The academic requirements for certification vary according to school type. The prospective teacher must complete courses related to the subject area (*kyoka ni kansuru kamoku*) and courses related to school teaching (*kyoshoku ni kansuru kamoku*). Table 2 shows the number of credits required for junior high school and senior high school teacher certification. A one-credit course should consist of 15 sixty-minute lecture- or seminar-type classes. Students are expected to spend at least ninety minutes in preparation for each of the 15 classes (Ota, 2000). Those students wishing to obtain a first-class junior or senior high school teaching certificate must complete a minimum of 59 credits in addition to 124 credits, the average requirement for a bachelor's degree. Although some credits may be counted twice, students in teacher certification programs, especially those who are non-English majors, carry a heavy schedule of courses.

Partial amendments in the Education Personnel Certificate Law were made in 1998 and took effect in 2000. The amendments, which included the introduction of a new class of elective courses called courses related to the subject area and to school teaching (*kyoka mata wa kyoshoku ni kansuru kamoku*) allowed institutions to actively revise and provide for more flexibility in their teacher education curricula. Although the total number of credits for each type of school certification remained the same, the number of credits for courses related to school teaching was increased while the number of credits for subject area courses was markedly decreased. In Table 2, the numbers in parentheses indicate the number of required credits prior to the 1998 amendments.

**Table 2. Credits required for junior and senior high school teaching certificates**

Type of Certificate	Subject Area Credits	School Teaching Credits	Subject Area and/or School Teaching Credits	Total Number of Required Credits
Junior High School				
Advanced	20 (40)	31 (19)	32 (24)	83 (83)
First-class	20 (40)	31 (19)	8	59 (59)
Second-class	10 (20)	21 (15)	4	35 (35)
Senior High School				
Advanced	20 (40)	23 (19)	40 (24)	83 (83)
First-class	20 (40)	23 (19)	16	59 (59)

The amendments included reform not only in structure, but in content as well. MEXT, calling for improvement in school-teaching courses, suggested that more emphasis be given to instruction in new teaching methods and establishing meaningful contact with children (See Table 3 for MEXT curriculum guidelines). The Ministry initiated an integrated course on teaching covering topics such as the problems facing humankind (MEXT, n.d.c). However, control of the content of teacher education courses belongs entirely to the university or college and there is no inspection or audit performed by MEXT (Ota, 2000).

In addition to the courses mentioned above, students in teacher certification programs have been required by the Education Personnel Certification Law, to study the constitution of Japan and physical education (Ota, 2000). The 1998 amendments added two more required classes, foreign language and information technology, to the program (See Table 3).

**Table 3. MEXT curriculum guidelines for teacher certification programs**

Guidelines for Required Courses	Junior High Required No. of Credits	Senior High Required No. of Credits
Courses required by the Education Personnel Certification Law		
The Constitution of Japan	2	2
Physical Education	2	2
Foreign Language	2	2
Information Technology	2	2
Courses related to the subject area and/or school teaching		
Subject Area Courses or School Teaching Courses	8	16
Courses related to the subject area		
English Language, English Literature, English Communication, Cross-Cultural Communication	20	20
Courses related to school teaching		
Courses Related to Teaching as a Profession • Philosophy of Teaching & the Role of the Teacher • Duties & Work of the Teacher as a Professional • School & Career Counseling	2	2
Courses Related to Basic Theories of Education • Philosophy & History of Education • Child Psychology & Development • Education & Society	6 or more	6 or more
Courses Related to Teaching Practice • Teaching Methods in the Subject Area • Moral Education • Teaching Methods in Extra-curricular Education • Educational Teaching Materials & Information Technology	12	8
Courses Related to Student Counseling & Student Career Guidance • Theories & Methods in Student Counseling • Theories & Methods in School Counseling	4 or more	4 or more
Integrated Course on Teaching	2	2
Teaching Practicum (includes 1 credit for pre/post practicum training)	5	3

Besides completing coursework, prospective kindergarten, elementary and junior high school teachers are required to carry out four weeks of practice teaching. Although four weeks may be a short period compared to programs in, for example, the U.S., it should be noted that before the 1998 amendments, the teaching practicum was limited to just two weeks. However, many universities face difficulties in finding schools that will accept students for four weeks (Ota, 2000) and must request the cooperation of neighboring schools or the schools from which their students graduated. Student teachers are supervised by both university professors and secondary school teachers (Hawley & Hawley, 1997).

### **Other requirements**

In addition to these academic requirements, the 1998 amendments mandated that those who wish to obtain elementary or junior high school teaching certificates must complete seven days or more of service learning at social welfare institutions and schools for special education, giving assistance to or interacting with senior citizens and the disabled. The Ministry deemed it important for teacher trainees, who are to be engaged in the compulsory education system, to have opportunities to develop a deep appreciation and understanding for the concepts of social responsibility and the dignity of the individual (MEXT, n.d.a).

### **Recruitment examination**

Students who complete the certification program and graduate from college cannot automatically become public school teachers. In order to be eligible to teach, students

must pass highly competitive, once-a-year recruitment examinations held by boards of education. Successful candidates are listed in order of their exam scores and are hired in turn as teaching positions open up. Since the list is valid for only one year, those who are not recruited must take the examination again the following year (Ota, 2000).

In its 2003 Action Plan, MEXT called for improvements in the hiring of teachers (MEXT, 2003). Boards of education were asked to confirm that teachers have the required levels of English ability by including tests for listening skills and English conversation in their recruitment procedures. In 2004, the Ministry announced its intention to establish a fixed-term period for teaching certificates and a system to evaluate the suitability and professionalism of teachers upon renewal of the certificates (MEXT, 2004).

Recently, a working group in the Central Council for Education compiled a reform program that would assess college students' ability to teach (Daily Yomiuri, 2005b). All universities that offer teacher certification programs would be required to establish committees that would assess students by judging students' abilities through interviews, essays and their performances in mock classes. The committees would also be asked to test students on their motivation to teach, feelings of responsibility, social skills, understanding of children's needs, academic knowledge and leadership skills.

It should be noted, however, that only a small percentage of those who obtain teaching certificates actually enter the teaching profession. According to the Ministry (MEXT, n.d.a), only 18.3% of all elementary school teaching certificate holders, 3.2% of all junior high school holders,

and 2.5% of all senior high school holders become teachers. In the next section, the second presenter describes what students must do to complete the teacher certification program at her university.

## The English teacher education program at Bunka Women's University

### *Requirements and components of the program*

The English teacher education (ETE) program at Bunka Women's University (BWU) started about thirteen years ago. Students in the program include mainly English majors and some Intercultural Studies majors. The ETE program emphasizes not only professional development but also personal development, which is vital for these young women to work effectively as teachers. In the program, students are encouraged to develop into caring and responsible teachers through practice teaching, and various interactions with their peers, high school students, teacher mentors, and teacher educators. As a teacher researcher, I have been investigating personal and professional growth in individual students since the program started (See Sakamoto, 1996; Sakamoto, 2004).

Students who wish to take the ETE program must meet several conditions in addition to the required academic coursework. By the end of their second year, students must have passed the second level on the STEP, not have any incomplete grades, and have maintained a *B* grade point average. In addition to these requirements, a letter of recommendation from their homeroom teacher is considered essential.

BWU has a special teacher education committee which evaluates each student's ability to participate in the teaching practicum. The committee confirms whether individual students have met all the program requirements needed at the beginning of their third year. Any student who has failed to finish any of the prerequisites is put on probation and will not be able to take the teaching practicum until she completes them. In the following sections, I describe and discuss what students in the ETE program are expected to do in each year of the program.

### *The first year*

All first-year students are introduced to the ETE program. I tell them what will be expected of them if they decide to take the program, that is, becoming a teacher involves assuming a great deal of responsibility for the secondary school students they may someday be teaching. Teacher certification courses related to school teaching start in the first year and continue until the end of the third year.

### *The second year*

The second year is a crucial year for the students because there are several important requirements to complete, and there are always some who are unable to complete everything successfully. Some students are unable to pass the STEP requirement, but may still wish to continue taking the program. BWU gives these students a chance by administering an in-house English proficiency test at the end of the second year. Although our in-house test is easier than the second level STEP, some students cannot pass it and

there are usually several students who still want to continue the program. I interview them in order to determine how seriously they wish to stay in the program. I emphasize the importance of improving their English ability and ask them to review their English textbooks during the upcoming one-month spring break and report on their progress at the beginning of the third year. They are also reminded that they are going to be on probation until they have passed the STEP. The word, probation, which has a very serious connotation in Japanese, appears to spur some of the students on in their studies.

### *The third year*

In their third year, the students take two courses, English Teaching Methodology and Practice Teaching English Workshop. I teach both of these courses meeting the students twice a week and getting to know them quite well, which I feel has been helpful in instructing them.

In the methodology course, I use a reflective learning approach believing that it is important for the students to reflect on their learning, especially their own language learning, when they learn how to teach English. This approach encourages students to begin thinking about the level of English proficiency necessary to teach secondary school English. Many appear to realize that they need to improve their English skills. I also have them visit their alma maters to see the type of secondary students they may have to teach during the practicum.

In order to help the students grasp teaching theories and methods, I have them analyze their own English language

learning experiences, share and discuss them in class. Without fail, the students mention having had good or bad English teachers when they were in junior or senior high school. Taking advantage of this concept of a good or bad instructor, I ask them what they mean by a good or a bad teacher. Usually the students come up with several qualities of good or bad English teachers for secondary school students.

The methodology course also serves to build up the students' awareness of current issues in education. I believe this will become a basic foundation from which they may draw on when they start practice teaching. The students are asked to bring in TV news reports or newspaper and magazine articles on current issues in Japan's educational system and English education system. They are also encouraged to observe English classes at their alma maters. I have found that most of the students need to first practice speaking Japanese in front of people. So, after demonstrating how to conduct lessons, I have the students take the teacher's role. The students take turns being the teacher and leading class discussions.

In the Practice Teaching English Workshop, the students take part in focused learning activities which help to prepare them for the upcoming teaching practicum. The students believe that having good English pronunciation is important since they sense that secondary school students tend to judge student teachers' English ability by their English pronunciation. Therefore, I give the students a year-long pronunciation assignment. They are instructed to read and record an English passage at the beginning of the first term. In class, several English pronunciation activities are



demonstrated, and students are encouraged to record their English and to listen to their pronunciation as much as possible. At the end of the academic year, they are required to read and record the same English passage they read in the first term and analyze their pronunciation. Most of the students usually find that they have improved, but they are able to recognize their weaknesses as well.

The students familiarize themselves with secondary school English by studying and examining school textbooks. Based on the knowledge gained from this analysis of the textbooks, they learn how to write lesson plans and conduct two mock lessons in front of their classmates. They team-teach for the first mock lesson and conduct a lesson alone for the second.

At the end of the third year, there is a two-day intensive program, which is preparation for the teaching practicum scheduled in the fourth year. We invite junior and senior high school principals and vice-principals to speak to the students, explain their school systems and talk about today's secondary school students in order for the ETE students to get a better sense of secondary school life and practices. Their reflective reports on the intensive program usually show that they have made some discoveries regarding the culture of secondary schools.

Also held at the end of the third year is the Integrated Course on Teaching, the main aim of which is to help the students broaden their horizons. In order to accomplish this goal, the students are encouraged to enhance their global awareness by discussing cross-cultural issues, visiting the United Nations House, and doing a small-scale research project. The students also visit UNICEF House to help deepen their knowledge of children's rights and education.

### *The fourth year*

In the fourth year, the students take a final preparation course for the teaching practicum. In this class they do mock lessons with third-year ETE students acting as their students. The mock lessons appear to be successful for both third- and fourth-year students because the fourth-year students try to do their best in front of the younger students, who are usually impressed by the seniors' teaching skills. In addition to the mock lessons, there is a *Do's and Don'ts* orientation for the teaching practicum. In the orientation, I emphasize, among many other things, the importance of being on time; they should be 10 to 15 minutes earlier than the designated time for any meeting and activity.

Finally, most of the fourth-year students start the teaching practicum in the middle of the first term. All students are encouraged to do the practicum for four weeks in order to qualify for both junior and senior high school teaching certificates. During the teaching practicum, the students contact me by e-mail or phone if they have any problems. At the end of the practicum, the students report on their experiences to the third-year students. They are also required to keep a portfolio which includes a teaching practicum report, lesson plans, pictures, and thank-you notes. These portfolios are shared with the third-year ETE students and displayed at our school festivals. Based on an analysis of the students' reflective reports, and interviews I hold with each student, I have learned that most of the students are forced to explore their potential while practice teaching. The teaching practicum is a crucial experience and an opportunity for the students to cultivate this potential and to gain confidence.



## Comments and suggestions from participants

We asked our participants to discuss three general areas, the pre-service teacher education system, the teaching methodology course, and the teaching practicum. They were asked to answer specific questions regarding the three areas:

1. Can the Japanese pre-service teacher education system be improved?
2. What should an English teaching methodology course cover?
3. Should student teachers be required to have a certain level of English proficiency? What level? How can communication between teacher educators and junior and senior high school teacher supervisors be improved?

### *The pre-service teacher education system*

There were several suggestions on how to improve the pre-service teacher education curriculum. Courses in class management and communication skills should be emphasized. Students should learn how to control different classroom situations, how to bring energy levels up or down as needed. Students need to learn how to communicate not just in cross-cultural situations, but also with each other. The comment was made that the younger generation seems to have trouble communicating their thoughts and feelings. Participants felt that more courses on the mechanics of teaching, phonology, syntax, and grammar were needed instead of classes in American or British literature. It was also suggested that students might be required to write a

graduation thesis to help them delve into areas of individual interest. And, in order to help improve students' English proficiency, an overseas home-stay experience might be made a requirement. Finally, it was suggested that university teacher educators themselves should go through the teacher certification process.

### *English teaching methodology courses*

Participants felt that taking an eclectic approach would be more helpful for student teachers, that is, the teaching methodology course should try to cover a variety of methods such as the Direct Method and Total Physical Response. The course should include instruction in how to teach grammar and the four skills, classroom management training, and practice teaching lessons. Students might be shown videos of expert teachers to learn how they teach in their classrooms. There should also be some guidance in how to interact with Assistant Language Teachers. The comment was made that the course could be partially taught in Japanese to allow students and teachers to go more deeply into discussions on theory and methods.

### *The teaching practicum*

Participants said that the teaching practicum was too short and started too late. An eight-week teaching practicum, two weeks for preparation, four weeks for the teaching practicum, and two weeks for a follow-up, was suggested. Students in their first and second year should be exposed to secondary school culture to help them decide if they want to become teachers or not. Participants felt there

were too many people who had teacher licenses, but who do not teach. Participants wanted to know who the teacher supervisors were, if they were actually willing to mentor student teachers, and if they were suitably qualified to train pre-service teachers. A critical comment was that although there were guidelines, there were no regulations. MEXT and the boards of education do not have requirements regarding student teacher English proficiency. Some participants felt being able to speak English was important, “If you can’t speak English, you can’t teach it.”

### Concluding remarks

There are many problems in the teacher certification and pre-service teacher education system. How can we better help student teachers develop both their teaching ability and English language proficiency? How can teacher educators improve the teaching practicum experience for student teachers? At the recent MEXT 2006 Forum held to discuss the Ministry’s Action Plan, teacher educators called for an increase in the required number of courses related to English (*kyoka ni kansuru kamoku*) and an extended practice teaching period. Although students in teacher education programs already shoulder a heavy load of required courses, we agree that prospective teachers need more time and training to develop their abilities. And, teacher educators need to be more aware of the content of the courses related to teaching (*kyoshoku ni kansuru kamoku*). Are students being exposed to important teacher skills and knowledge such as conflict resolution and cooperative learning strategies, communicative language teaching methods, and the notions of communicative and pragmatic competencies?

Our participants, who included teacher educators, university instructors, and secondary school teachers, shared our concerns regarding Japanese pre-service teacher education. More communication is needed among all those involved in the teacher education process. Our discussion session was a small step in this direction and we are very happy to report the creation of a teacher education study group which includes several of the session participants. We appreciate the comments and suggestions we received at JALT2005. Perhaps some of them may be utilized for a better teacher education system in Japan.

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