



David McMurray

Graduate students and teaching assistants are invited to submit compositions in the form of a speech, appeal, memoir, essay, conference review, or interview on the policy and practice of language education. Master's and doctoral thesis supervisors are also welcome to contribute or encourage their students to join this vibrant debate. Grounded in the author's reading, praxis, or empirical research, contributions are expected to share an impassioned presentation of opinions in 1,000 words or less. Teaching Assistance is not a peer-reviewed column.

Email: jaltpubs.tlt.ta@jalt.org

This issue's column features an essay by a teaching assistant who prepared students during a 15-week program to undertake an internship in Taiwan. The author assessed that the students needed to learn business skills, such as teamwork, as well as to use English and Mandarin Chinese languages, prior to their dispatch on a two-week internship in March.

Preparing University Students in Three Languages for an Internship in Taipei

Ye Lin

Doctoral Program, Graduate School of Economics

I am a teaching assistant (TA) at a private university in Kyushu. I enlisted to teach in an overseas internship program at my university that has been running since 2013. So far, 160 interns have participated in the program. Many of these students reported in debriefing sessions that they had acquired basic business manners and customer service skills after participating in the internship, and it seemed that students who participated in overseas internships developed a sense of self-efficacy. For 15 weeks in 2024, I assisted 14 students to learn a sufficient amount of Mandarin Chinese and practical English to enable them to intern at eight companies in Taipei and Kaohsiung, Taiwan.

Internship Programs in Japan

According to Kamenno (2023), the term internship “was first used in an official government document in the Program for Educational Reform: Toward the Realization of an ‘Educated Nation’ in January 1997” (p. 21). Subsequently, university internship programs were launched in earnest from September, because of their ability to stimulate a desire to learn,

to develop the ability to make independent career choices, and to nurture a high level of professional awareness.

Teaching Language Skills for an Internship in Taiwan

At many Japanese universities, their Chinese language programs usually refer to the Chinese language of the People's Republic of China. However, there is also a certain demand for Taiwanese Chinese, or Taiwan Chinese. Learning the Chinese language spoken in Taiwan is essential for interns from Japan. One of the advantages of internships at Taiwanese corporations is that students can learn English and Taiwanese Chinese at the same time. As for learning the English language, some Taiwanese companies have established their own internship programs in English in order to promote internationalization. Therefore, I felt it was necessary for me, as a TA, to prepare interns to communicate in Japanese, Taiwanese Chinese, and English prior to their dispatch.

The official language of Taiwan is Mandarin Chinese, commonly referred to as “Taiwanese Mandarin.” Even though Mandarin serves as the standard dialect for formal communication and is used in government, education, and media, Chinese language education in Taiwan is different from that learned in China—where I was born. Although the general idea is the same, there are dialect variations and written differences.

I prepared lesson plans following presentation-practice-production (PPP) routines, but blended that teaching strategy with other methods depending on the interns' needs (Tomlinson, 1998). For example, I chose to teach Chinese language vocabulary by asking the interns to repeat key words and phrases that I provided them with via their smart phones, as well as on the whiteboard in the classroom. I adopted this idea from Sato (2010), who claimed that he “could argue that focused activities, which intrinsically require learners to use the target items repeatedly, can still be effectively employed” (p. 197). When Ozment (2020, p. 56) began teaching at a school in Japan, he had hoped to continue to teach the way he had taught

in China. Therefore, he began by being serious, by being strict, and by the constant use of drilling and repetition. This is the way I began my first class: by being incredibly strict, by being serious, and by getting every student to repeat every word from their assignments perfectly. I did not stop until everyone had done it. I also took the opportunity to use the time at the end of my classes to consolidate the vocabulary related to Taiwanese Chinese for the group of students who will be going on internships, and to provide systematic learning guidance to the students during classes.

Ozment (2020) suggested that “the greatest difference between Japanese and Chinese educational systems appears to be the relationships between students and teachers. The expectation of trust allows for Japanese students to progress further and encourages teachers to attempt to find newer and more effective ways to engage with students” (p. 56).

To summarize my language teaching approach, I decided to immediately assign the practice of Chinese word phrases, then the production of spoken answers to my questions in stages as soon as the students entered the classroom, as can be seen in Figure 1. The presentation stage is given as homework and summarized as a quiz at the end of the class on the whiteboard, as seen in Figure 2. By the end of the semester, I was smoothly teaching in a PPP style in the classroom.

Internships and Future Employment Prospects

In the social context of internships and employment, internships abroad have become a major focus for the further development of human resources and the cultivation of human resources in Japan. In terms of learning business skills in an internship environment, however, Taiwan appears to have more professional internship standards and science-related goals. The characteristics of Taiwan’s internship program have become more global. In the semiconductor industry for example, Taiwan has taken its place in the world in terms of its mode of operation and technical level. Therefore, the corporate internship programs at the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) in Taiwan and soon-to-be launched sites in Kumamoto, Kyushu, are in high demand. Consequently, the demand for language instructors by TSMC is high. However, my university does not have an engineering program; my students are enrolled in the humanities and social sciences.

The cultural, creative, and tourism field is a part of Taiwan’s humanities industry, and maintains the same standardized operation capability as the world. Therefore, in this internship, the cultural, creative, and tourism industry is the main direction of our program. At internship sites in hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, department stores, language schools, and computer software firms, the interns will have ample opportunity to actively promote their language strengths and act on their own initiative, rather than just waiting for instructions to be given by a TA or teacher. Interns will succeed if they express a positive attitude. Even if they were not confident in the level of their English or Chinese language skills, I encouraged them to actively communicate with their supervisors and coworkers and to continue firm relationships with them after returning to Japan. They can communicate via Google Meet, Zoom, Skype, or other useful modes to maintain their English and Chinese language skills.

I hope that the students whom I assisted for 15 weeks will be able to utilize this language preparation for an internship experience in their post-graduation careers, and realize their social value and value of life. Prior to departure to Taiwan, I suggested to the interns that even if they do not get assigned to the exact job they want, the experience of working abroad will be very useful for their career development back in Japan. Figure 3 shows the interns with a banner emblazoned with their chosen logo of a bridge, signifying their desire to firmly bridge relationships between Japan and Taiwan. Now, the interns are ready to be dispatched.

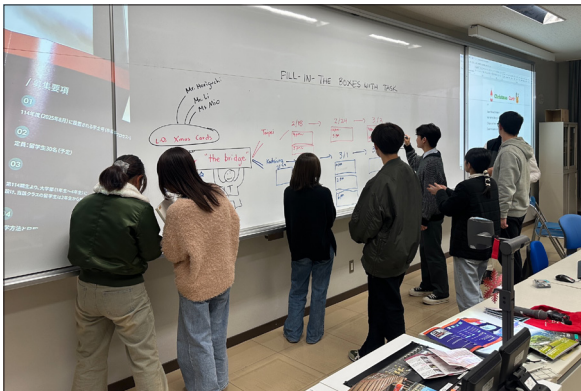
I believe that the 15-week preparatory course for this overseas internship program developed students’ language skills and teamwork abilities. Importantly, motivation levels were raised. As for myself, I was motivated by the story of a former TA who leveraged her previous intern experiences at an English language book publisher and at a Japanese language school in Taipei to get a position as a full-time instructor of Japanese at a university in Taiwan. She was also hired to teach intercultural communications classes in English. Hirata (2022) reported that she contacted staff at the companies where she had previously interned as soon as she started her language teaching career in Taiwan, adding that they soon became her best friends and advisers. I would similarly like to cherish the connections with people whom I will meet in Taiwan during this internship program.

Figure 1

The Author (Standing) Teaching Useful Travel Phrases to Interns

**Figure 2**

Testing Knowledge of the Itinerary at the Whiteboard

**Figure 3**

Interns Ready for Their Dispatch to Taiwan



References

- Hirata, H. (2022). An interview with a graduate student hired to teach in Taiwan. *The Language Teacher*, 46(1), 43–45. <https://doi.org/10.37546/JALTTLT46.1>
- Kameno, J. (2023). Is Japanese internship for the purpose of education or recruitment?: A study of its historical background, and recent changes and future challenges. *Japan Labor Issues*, 7(41), 19–34. <https://www.jil.go.jp/english/jli/documents/2023/041-02.pdf>
- Ozment, A. (2020). Comparing my first English classes in China and Japan. *The Language Teacher*, 44(6), 56–59. <https://doi.org/10.37546/JALTTLT44.6>
- Sato, R. (2010). Reconsidering the effectiveness and suitability of PPP and TBLT in the Japanese EFL classroom. *JALT Journal*, 32(2), 189–200. <https://doi.org/10.37546/JALTJJ32.2>
- Tomlinson, B. (Ed.). (1998). *Materials development in language teaching*. Cambridge University Press.



A Listening SIG / Tokyo Chapter Event

TOKYO CHAPTER

Listening Conference 2025
Theme: *Learning, Teaching, and Researching*

Saturday 28th June, 2025 - 10.00am to 4.00pm
Venue: Heisei Plaza, Tokyo Teleport

Abstract call open until:
Monday 31st March, 2025

Submit a 200-word abstract here:
<https://forms.gle/E6RGxcwadPvbc4h9>

Our call for presenters is now open.
We are looking for 20-minute presentations + 5-minute Q&A sessions on topics related to listening and teaching, pedagogy, assessment, and resources. We are also keen to hear from you if you have another research area in listening you would like to share. To submit a 200-word abstract, use the links above.

Email: listening@jalt.org

<https://jaltlistening.wordpress.com/>
<https://sites.google.com/view/tokyojalt>