

# Secondary School Teachers' Perceptions of Student Teaching in Japanese EFL Classrooms

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## ABSTRACT

This is a preliminary study to investigate the current student teaching practicum at Japanese junior and senior high schools. The practicum is one of the starting points of the "life-long learning" as a teaching professional, encompassing the preservice and inservice stages of teacher education. A small-scale survey was conducted to find the Japanese EFL teachers' perceptions of the practicum and the questionnaire used includes eight questions that are summarized into four areas; (1) who learns from the experience, (2) what knowledge/skills student teachers learn from the experience and what knowledge/skills they should have before they join the program, (3) the duration and timing of the practicum, and (4) general suggestions to improve the current practicum system. The results show that the majority of the participating teachers agree that under the current system: (1) student teachers learn a lot from their practicum experience; (2) what they learn is "How to teach" and "Junior/senior high school students", and before starting the practicum, they should have more knowledge/skills of "English language" and "How to teach"; (3) the current 3-week duration is enough and the timing of the practicum should be May-July, and (4) the quality of the student teachers should be improved.

## KEYWORDS:

Teacher Education, Preservice, Student Teaching, Practicum, English Language Education, EFL, Japan

## I. Introduction

*"There is no such thing as good teaching. There are only good teachers." In other words, teaching is realized only in teachers; it has no independent existence. Teacher education is hence less involved with transmitting models of effective practice and more concerned with providing experiences that facilitate the development of cognitive and interpretative skills, which are used uniquely by every teacher. (Richards, 1998, p. 81)*

This is a preliminary study to investigate the current student teaching practicum at Japanese junior and senior high schools. Practicum is one of the main features of the university's teacher education course. Legally and practically, nobody can become a teaching professional without undergoing this field experience. However, little is known about what happens during the practicum and what student teachers

learn; “the practicum remains an undertheorized and underresearched area.” (Crookes, 2003, p.2)

A small-scale survey was conducted to fill this gap and find the Japanese EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers’ perceptions of the practicum, which they themselves had gone through and are currently supervising. The questionnaire includes eight questions that are summarized into four areas; (1) who learns from the experience, (2) what knowledge/skills student teachers learn from the experience and what knowledge/skills they should have before they join the program, (3) the duration and timing of the practicum, and (4) general suggestions to improve the current practicum system.

The survey was conducted in the summer of 2010 and 23 practicing Japanese teachers of English voluntarily responded to the questionnaire. They are all currently practicing EFL teachers at a junior and/or senior high school in Japan. Their answers were then tallied and analyzed.

A short literature review covering language teaching education follows this introduction, which is then followed by the survey results and a discussion thereof.

## **II. Literature Review**

It is quite unfortunate that there is a paucity of literature on EFL practicum and student teaching. Due to this lack of literature, this section should cover language teacher education in general, EFL teacher education, some examples of research concerned with student teaching practicum, and a recent suggestion for professional development guidelines for Japanese teachers of English.

Crandall (2000), in his review of the literature on teacher education, argues that language teacher education programs have been designed and conducted following the disciplines of applied linguistics, education, languages, and literature. In addition, until recently, according to Crandall, applied linguistics “formed the core of language teacher education”. Yet in the 1990s:

... general educational theory and practice have exerted a much more powerful influence on the direction of the education of both pre-service and in-service language teacher education ... (p. 34)

Writing for the United States Department of Education, Darling-Hammond and Baratz-Snowden (2010) state central principles in regards to teacher education today:

Since teacher education cannot impart a body of knowledge that comprises everything a teacher will ever need to know, it must lay a foundation for life-long learning. Given the relatively short time available for preparing teachers in both traditional and alternative programs and the fact that

not everything can be taught, teacher preparation should be designed to help teachers learn from their practice and from the insights of others when they assume their initial teaching responsibility. (p.115)

- What should student teachers learn?

Reviewing the teacher education literature in general education and comparing new and experienced teachers' professional knowledge, Roberts (1998) lists 10 deficits in novice teachers' knowledge as follows:

1. Novice teachers' perceptions of classroom events are relatively indiscriminating and simpler than those of experienced teachers;
2. they are less able to select which information is salient when planning a lesson;
3. they lack 'typificatory knowledge' (Calderhead, 1987a: 7) i.e. what to expect of pupils, what challenges to set, and what difficulties to anticipate;
4. they tend to work from the textbook rather than in terms of pupil attainment levels (p. 62);
5. they lack practical classroom management routines to keep pupils on task;
6. their concern with control makes it difficult for them to focus on pupil learning;
7. they lack an established teacher's 'pedagogic content knowledge';
8. they lack the practical experience from which to construct personal meanings for theoretical or specialised terms;
9. they lack a coherent system of concepts with which to think about teaching; and
10. they lack a specialised vocabulary with which to analyse and discuss teaching. (pp. 67-68)

Roberts adds three (3) "discipline-specific deficits" of novice language teachers:

1. Their performance levels in the target language (TL), as matched against the level required for accreditation;
2. analytic knowledge of TL systems;
3. [and] assumptions about the nature of language and about the TL as a school subject (perceptions which could be skewed towards function, form, or content). (p. 68)

These deficits of novice teachers, particularly of novice EFL teachers, could be summarized into five broad categories: (1) knowledge of the English language (TL), (2) how to teach the TL (knowledge and skills), (3) communicative competence in English (TL), (4) context of teaching (school system), and (5) students (junior and senior high school students in current Japanese educational contexts). These categories will be used as one of the frames of the present study as shown in the next section.

Referring to student teaching in general, Darling-Hammond and Baratz-Snowden (2010) mention the following list of characteristics of successful student teaching experience:

1. Clarity of goals, including the use of standards guiding the performances and practices to be developed;
2. modeling of good practices by more-expert teachers in which teachers make their thinking visible;
3. frequent opportunities for practice with continuous formative feedback and coaching;
4. multiple opportunities to relate classroom work to university course work;
5. graduated responsibility for all aspects of classroom teaching; and
6. structured opportunities to reflect on practice with an eye toward improving it. (p. 124)

As pointed out by Darling-Hammond and Baratz-Snowden (2010), some authors argue that pre-service teacher education and in-service professional development should be a continuous process that leads to “lifelong learning” (Igawa, 2008). Freeman and Johnson (1998) maintain that the core of teachers’ knowledge base must be the activity of teaching itself: “It should center on the teacher who does it, the contexts in which it is done, and the pedagogy by which it is done” (p. 393).

There are a number of studies investigating the practicum of Master of Arts (MA) Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) students. Although they are not directly relevant to this study, they might afford some perspective on the topic of the current study, which is student teaching by undergraduate students.

Johnson (1996), for example, studies the concepts of who teachers are, what teaching is, and how teachers learn to teach. Johnson argues the following:

- (1) KNOWLEDGE: What teachers know about teaching is not simply an extended body of facts and theories but is instead largely experiential and socially constructed out of the experiences and classrooms from which teachers have come.
- (2) TEACHING: Teaching [is]...a socially constructed activity that requires the interpretation and negotiation of meanings embedded within the classrooms and schools where teachers teach.
- (3) LEARNING TO TEACH: Learning to teach is a complex developmental process that is acquired by participating in the social practices associated with teaching and learning. (pp. 766-767)

Johnson further maintains, “Theory can inform classroom practice only to the extent to which teachers themselves make sense of that theory.” And, therefore, second language teacher education programs must focus their attention on “this sense-making process” (p. 767).

Nemtchinova (2005) studies how MA TESOL students and host teachers perceive the strengths of non-native-English-speaking teacher trainees based on their practicum experience. Nemtchinova found the

following to be their strengths: (1) their teaching ability, (2) their professional skills, (3) their grammar and idiomatic English, (4) the multilingual and multicultural resources that they bring, (5) their understanding of the students' learning problems and concerns, and (6) the fact that they are role models for ESL students.

Investigating five (5) Japanese English teachers pursuing a master's degree in TESOL at a U.S. university, McKay (2000) notes some complications the Japanese student teachers might experience due to the fact that "language and teaching methods are socially and culturally bound":

... because of the contrasts the teacher trainees experienced between a largely teacher-centered Japanese English classroom and more student centered U.S. classrooms, the teacher trainees are forced to consider the advantages and disadvantages of each and their appropriateness for different contexts. (p. 66)

Furthermore,

Perhaps the most difficult challenge confronting these five teacher trainees is the one they may face as they return to Japan and their English teaching careers. The expertise they have gained in their graduate program in terms of linguistic knowledge and teaching methods may be not valued and perhaps may even be viewed by some as a threat. (pp. 66-67)

As to MA TESOL practicum, see also Govardhan, Nayar, and Sheorey (1999); Johnson (1996); Polio, and Wilson-Duffy (1998).

Recently, a special interest group of the JACET (Japan Association of College English Teachers) has proposed an integrative array of professional development guidelines, JACET (2010), based on the results of their multiple studies encompassing the areas of pre-service training, professional development, teacher evaluation, and certification systems of Japanese teachers of English.

While introducing a European model of language teachers' professional development standards, the EPOSTL (European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages: A reflection tool for language teacher education), the JACET group advocates, among other things, that English teachers should be able to conduct classes in the target language, English, and their English competence be proficient enough to perform such tasks. And they mention STEP 2<sup>nd</sup> to Pre-1<sup>st</sup> levels; English proficiency test by the Society for Testing English Proficiency, Inc. (Tokyo, Japan)<sup>1)</sup>. See also Jimbo, et al. (2005), and Yamazaki

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1) <http://stepeiken.org/>

(2006).

Conducting a small-scale survey on student teaching, Akutsu (2008) summarizes how practicing teachers who coached student teachers perceive the students' lack of necessary qualities and skills as EFL teachers in Japan. Akutsu (2008) categorizes the qualities and skills into three areas according to the length of time supposed to take to acquire them:

1. Qualities and skills that could be acquired in a comparatively short period of time,
2. Qualities and skills that requires a significant length of time to acquire, and
3. Qualities and skills that requires quite a long period of time to acquire or ones that people are born with.

The qualities and skills in the first category include such attitudinal factors as "Determination to become an English teacher", and "willingness to understand learners". The second category contains practical skills; "making teaching plans" and "preparing teaching materials and aids". The third area contains competencies "to produce proper pronunciation", "to communicate adequately in English with native-speaking ALTs (Assistant Language Teachers), and "to conduct lessons in English", the competencies related to target language proficiency and even many of the practicing non-native-speaking teachers might feel uncomfortable claiming that they possess.

These areas of qualities and skills, as well as the suggestions by JACET (2010), are items covered in this study and they certainly need more discussion and specification.

### III. The Study

[Teacher] *learning is seen to emerge through social interaction within a community of practice.*  
(Richards, 2008, p. 165)

#### A. Participants of the Study

The participants of this study were 23 Japanese teachers of English, all of whom are practicing in secondary schools in Japan. The participating teachers are either members of "ACROSS<sup>2)</sup>," an English teachers' organization to promote professional development, or colleagues of ACROSS members who voluntarily responded to the questionnaire prepared for and sent by the author of this study.

The majority of the participants, 73.9%, were female while male teachers accounted for only 26.1%

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2) Association of English Teachers for Cross-Cultural Communication. <http://www.aglance.org/across/>

of all participants. As for the age of the teachers, many of them were in their 40s and 50s, which proportionally is 39% and 35% respectively. Teachers in this age range constitute more than 70% of the entire group. (Refer to Table 1.)

**Table 1 Participants of the Study**

	20s		30s		40s		50s		60s+		TOTAL			
	m	f	m	f	m	f	m	f	m	f	m	f	Total	%
JHS		1		2		3		2				8	8	34.8%
SHS			1	1		5	4	2	1		6	8	14	60.9%
Both						1						1	1	4.3%
Subtotal	0	1	1	3	0	9	4	4	1		6	17	-	-
TOTAL	1		4		9		8		1		26.1%	73.9%	23	100%
%	4.3%		17.4%		39.1%		34.8%		4.3%		100%			

NOTE: JHS=Junior High School, SHS=Senior High School, Both=teaching at both JHS and SHS.

While eight of the 23 participants (34.8%) teach at junior high schools, which in Japan account for grades 7 through 9, 14 teachers (60.9%) teach at senior high schools, which in Japan accounts for grades 10 through 12. Only one of the teachers (4.3%) teaches at both junior high school and senior high school. In regards to years of service, the average length of time stands at 22.8 years. The participants could be described as a group of seasoned Japanese teachers of English teaching at a junior and/or senior high school in Japan. In addition, all of the teachers have an experience supervising student teachers' practicum.

## B. Questionnaire

The questionnaire used in this study includes the following seven questions, each one accompanied by a space to provide an explanation in English for the response and one open-ended question asking for ideas on how to improve the current teaching practicum system:

### Questions

- (1) Student teachers learn a lot from the current teaching practicum. (Tick one)

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	don't know	Other (Please Identify)

- (2) What do student teachers learn from the teaching practicum? (Please rank No.1 – No. 5/6)

1. English Language	2. How to Teach	3. Communication Skills in English	4. School System	5. J/SHS Students	6. Other (Please Identify)

(3) You as a practicing teacher learn a lot from the current teaching practicum. (Tick one)

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	don't know	Other (Please Identify)

(4) Your JHS/SHS students learn a lot from the current teaching practicum. (Tick one)

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	don't know	Other (Please Identify)

(5) The current 3-week teaching practicum is too short. (Tick one)

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	don't know	Other (Please Identify)

(6) What month do you think is the best time for the teaching practicum? (Tick one)

Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.

(7) What knowledge/skills should university students have before they start the teaching practicum?  
(Please rank No.1 – No. 5/6)

1. English Language	2. How to Teach	3. Communication Skills in English	4. School System	5. J/SHS Students	6. Other (Please Identify)

(8) What do you think is necessary to make the current teaching practicum better?

### C. Results of the Study and Discussion

1. Who learns from the practicum?: Questions 1, 3, & 4

The first question asks the participants to respond to the statement, "Student teachers learn a lot from the current teaching practicum." The overwhelming majority (more than 90%) agreed, with about 70% saying "agree" and 22% saying "strongly agree." See Table 2.

**TABLE 2 [Question 1] How do you respond to the statement, “Student teachers learn a lot from the current teaching practicum?”**

RESPONSE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	DON'T KNOW	OTHER	TOTAL
Number	0	0	16	5	2	0	23
%	0.0%	0.0%	69.6%	21.7%	8.7%	0.0%	100%

The comments appended to the responses to the first question are by and large positive, including:

*Teaching practicum has student teachers face, experience, and learn the reality of schools and students. Of course, student teachers have already known the reality of them, but they were from their standpoint of the as students. So, teaching practicum shows reality from a different angle, as teachers. It is very new to them. So I think it is one of the important experiences through teaching practicum. [sic] (No. 008: Female JHS teacher in her 20s)*

*Although it is impossible to fully learn what teachers' jobs are in such a short time, student teachers can feel (sense) if they will like the job or not. (No. 005: Female JHS teacher in her 40s)*

There are participants, however, who point out a limitation of the current system, although they too generally agree that student teachers learn a lot from the current practicum:

*As far as I see, the student teachers learn a lot about the school system, the students, and the homeroom teacher's job, however, they don't learn how to teach the subject (English) enough. (No. 14: Female JHS teacher in her 50s)*

*It depends on how motivated student teachers are. All of them will not take exams to be a teacher. Some have an only want to have a good time to be with the students. (No. 011: Female SHS teacher in her 40s)*

The third question asked the participants about their own professional development as prompted by the student teachers' practicum: “You as a practicing teacher learn a lot from the current teaching practicum.” The responses seem clearly divided into two distinct groups. About 70% of the participants agree with the statement while 30% disagree. See Table 3.

**TABLE 3 [Question 3] How do you respond to the statement, “You as a practicing teacher learn a lot from the current teaching practicum?”**

RESPONSE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	DON'T KNOW	OTHER	TOTAL
Number	0	7	16	0	0	0	23
%	0.0%	30.4%	69.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100%

The remarks by the teachers who agree with the statement emphasize the reciprocal aspect of the teaching practicum. The responses include:

*Having a student teacher gives me time to think about the way I teach. He/She and I think about a better way to teach. This is good not only for the student but for me.* (No. 001: Female JHS teacher in her 50s)

*I have to show think about my own classes and give advices to the student teachers. I recognize what are important things for teaching.* [sic] (No. 005: Female JHS teacher in her 40s)

*As a practicing teacher, I tend to suggest that the student teachers adopt my own way to teaching. So through watching their teaching in class, I found my weak points for teaching that I haven't noticed before because their teaching reflects my way of teaching at some points.* (No. 007: Female JHS teacher in her 40s)

On the other hand, the teachers who disagree with the statement tend to underscore the adverse conditions of the current system and their comments seem to indicate that they are not learning from this system because they are not living in a perfect world:

*These days, student teachers are not good. They don't have the skills to teach English or communicate with students.* (No. 002: Female JHS teacher in her 30s)

*We are too busy to take good care of the student teachers.* (No. 011: Female SHS teacher in her 40s)

The next question was to do with the JHS/SHS students and it asked the participating teachers if they agree with the following statement: “Your JHS/SHS students learn a lot from the current teaching practicum.”

Again, the participating teachers seem to be divided into two groups. 56.5% of the teachers agree with

the statement while 30.4% disagree. See Table 4.

**TABLE 4 [Question 4] How do you respond to the statement, “Your JHS/SHS students learn a lot from the current teaching practicum?”**

RESPONSE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	DON'T KNOW	OTHER	TOTAL
Number	0	7	13	1	2	0	23
%	0.0%	30.4%	56.5%	4.3%	8.7%	0.0%	100%

The comments by those who agree with the statement seem to stress the role model function of the student teachers:

*They learn a lot from the student teacher's seriousness. Sometimes student teachers teach wrong things, but their young energy is what (old) teachers have lost. As a role model of what the students could be in the near future, their existence is meaningful.* (No. 005: Female JHS teacher in her 40s)

*In many cases, student teachers graduated from the junior/senior high school where they student teach. I'm sure my junior/senior high school students saw their student teachers as kind of learning models (e.g. They learned how their student teachers had spent their high school days and how their student teacher had learned English in their high school/college days.) As a result, they were motivated to learn English even though their student teachers' way of teaching was not so good at sometimes.* (No. 009: Female SHS teacher in her 50s)

The teachers who disagree with the statement point out the realistic aspect of the current system:

*It is true that SHS students are encouraged to learn English by a young and zealous student teacher, but from the viewpoint of English acquisition, I am afraid they are not learning effectively.* (No. 019: Male SHS teacher in his 60s)

*The student teachers are not trained through real experience, so they cannot teach a lot like I was so. [sic]* (No. 023: Male SHS teacher in his 50s)

## 2. Content issues of the practicum: Questions 2 & 7

The second question asked the practicing teachers what they think student teachers learn from the teaching practicum experience. The practicing teachers were asked to rank five items: (1) “English Language”; (2) “How to Teach”; (3) “Communication Skills in English”; (4) “School System”; and (5)

“JHS/SHS Students.” They were also given the option to choose (6) “Other” and identify what they had in mind.

The participants’ responses were summarized by counting how many participants indicated each item as No.1, No.2, or No.3 and the percentage of the participants who indicated the item as No.1, No.2, or No.3.

The results show that all of the participants (100%) think (2) “How to Teach” is the item student teachers learn from the practicum, followed by (5) “JHS/SHS Students” (91.3%), and (4) “School System” (56.5%). See Table 5.

**TABLE 5 [Question 2] What do student teachers learn from the teaching practicum?  
(Please rank No.1 – No. 5/6)**

#	1	2	3	4	5	6
ITEM	ENGLISH LANGUAGE	HOW TO TEACH	COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN ENGLISH	SCHOOL SYSTEM	J/SHS STUDENTS	OTHER (PLEASE IDENTIFY)
Number	8	23	5	13	21	2
%	34.8%	100.0%	21.7%	56.5%	91.3%	8.7%

The explanations for choosing item (2) contained the following responses:

*Of course, before the teaching practicum, student teachers haven't known the real situation of the schools and JHS students. When they start teaching as student teachers, they notice the difference between their knowledge in their minds and the real situation. They can understand the importance of what is easy for the JHS students to understand and what is not for JHS students through teaching. [sic] (No. 007: Female JHS teacher in her 40s)*

*Our student teachers this year spent a lot of time preparing for class, practicing teaching with each other, giving comments and advice to each other, and asking teachers a lot of questions. (No. 017: Female SHS teacher in her 40s)*

The remarks related to items (4) and (5) include:

*Teaching experience provides the readiness and awareness of communicating with other people, especially students. (No. 18: Male SHS teacher in his 50s)*

*It must be a very precious experience for them. They can learn, especially about the communication and interaction between the teacher and students, besides teaching skills. (No. 003: Female SHS teacher in her 50s)*

The item (6) "Other" included the following entries and that stress the importance of university students becoming more mature through this experience:

*Communication with other teachers: Flexibility and diligence are the most important things for them to learn. (No. 11: Female SHS teacher in her 40s)*

*How to behave as a responsible adult (No. 22: Male SHS teacher in his 50s)*

These "Other" remarks seem somewhat related to the professional identity of the EFL teachers. Cattley (2007), for example, reports on a study of student teachers' establishing their professional identity through reflective writing. Also see Farrell (2001) and Pennington (2002).

Question 7 asked the practicing teachers about what they think the student teachers should learn before the teaching practicum experience. The practicing teachers were to rank in order the following five items: (1) "English Language"; (2) "How to Teach"; (3) "Communication Skills in English"; (4) "School System"; and (5) "JHS/SHS Students". They were also given the option to choose (6) "Other" and identify what they had in mind.

The participants' responses were summarized by how many participants indicated each item as No.1, No.2, or No.3 and the percentage of the participants who indicated the item as No.1, No.2, or No.3.

The majority of the participants (95.7%) think that both (1) "English Language" and (2) "How to Teach" are the items student teachers should learn before they participate in the practicum program, followed by (3) "Communication Skills in English" at 78.3%. See Table 6.

**TABLE 6 [Question 7] What knowledge/skills should university students have before they start the teaching practicum? (Please rank No.1 – No. 5/6)**

#	1	2	3	4	5	6
ITEM	ENGLISH LANGUAGE	HOW TO TEACH	COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN ENGLISH	SCHOOL SYSTEM	J/SHS STUDENTS	OTHER (PLEASE IDENTIFY)
Number	22	22	18	1	4	2
%	95.7%	95.7%	78.3%	4.3%	17.4%	8.7%

The comments used to explain their choices usually contained references to more than one item. In some cases, all three of the top items were included. For example:

[Items 1, 2, & 3] *Knowledge of English is essential. It is desirable that how to teaching and communication skills should are be acquired before the practicum by practicing teaching practice in their university class. [sic] (No. 003: Female SHS teacher in her 50s)*

[Items 1 & 2] *University students can learn no.4 and no.5 during their teaching practicum. Also, they learn them when they become teachers. So I think they should learn knowledge of English language and teaching English. Before the teaching practicum, they should think about how to teach and teaching procedure. (No. 007: Female JHS teacher in her 40s)*

[Items 1 & 3] *The two most important knowledge/skills university students should have are English language skills and communication skills, both in English and in their L1. They will learn other things while working as student teachers if the teaching practicum is long enough. (No. 022: Male SHS teacher in his 50s)*

[Items 1 & 3] *You can improve your way of teaching during the teaching practicum, but you cannot improve your English dramatically for in such a short time. (No. 017: Female SHS teacher in her 40s)*

Naturally, there are also comments referring to only one item:

[Item 1] *Even though the two student teachers [at my senior high school worked very hard, unfortunately, they made some mistakes in teaching ... even the pronunciations of the target words. What teachers must not do in class is teaching something wrong. (No. 009: Female SHS teacher in her 50s)*

[Item 2] *They should learn to speak clearly and loudly enough for students to hear. They should practice writing letters on the blackboard. By listening to CDs, they should practice reading English sentences aloud so that his/her reading can be "model reading." (No. 020: Female SHS teacher in her 30s)*

[Item 3] *They should try to acquire proficiency in the English language before they teach JHS/SHS students. (No. 015: Male SHS teacher in his 30s)*

There were two participants who chose "Other" and explained their selection as "Communication skills

in Japanese” and “Common Sense” respectively.

(3) Duration and Timing of the Practicum: Questions 5 & 6

Question 5 refers to the duration of the practicum program. Japan’s Ministry of Education currently requires two to four weeks of teaching practicum for the teaching credential for secondary school teachers. The amount of times more student teachers spend generally averages out to about three weeks. The question asked the practicing teachers to respond to the statement: “The current 3-week teaching practicum is too short.”

Internationally speaking, this seems quite short. For example, in the United States, student teaching or “fieldwork experience” needed for initial certification ranges “from five to 20 weeks, with many states requiring 10 to 12 weeks of student teaching experience” (U.S. Department of Education, 2009, pp. 40-41). Maandag et al. (2007) report on the student teaching requirement in the U.K.: “The minimum amount of training time spent in the school has been established by law and ranges from about 18 to 32 weeks, depending on the type of teacher education” (p. 157).

The responses from the participating teachers again seem split. Approximately 60% of them choose “Strongly Disagree” or “Disagree”, with 4.3% and 56.5% of all teachers choosing these responses respectively. Meanwhile, some 30% replied, “Strongly agree” or “Agree,” with 17.4% and 13% of the participants choosing these responses respectively. See Table 7.

**TABLE 7 [Question 5] How do you respond to the statement; “The current 3-week teaching practicum is too short?”**

RESPONSE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	DON'T KNOW	OTHER	TOTAL
Number	1	13	3	4	2	0	23
%	4.3%	56.5%	13.0%	17.4%	8.7%	0.0%	100%

The teacher who chose “Strongly Disagree” mentions, “Two weeks is enough. If they intend only to get a license, not to be a teacher, even a few days is enough” (No. 020: Female SHS teacher in her 30s). Examples of the participating teachers who selected “Disagree” are as follows:

*It’s difficult to accept student teachers for a longer period. Anyway, there are lots of things they have to learn after they come to get the job.* (No. 003: Female SHS teacher in her 50s)

*School teachers can’t spend much time for the student teachers. Nowadays, students need to be*

*taken care of more than before.* (No. 004: Female J&SHS teacher in her 40s)

In contrast, one of the teachers who picked “Strongly Agree” says:

*I let them spend the 3-weeks, like this. The 1st-week ; observing the classes as much as possible, the 2nd-week ; is used to practice teaching ‘the basic lesson’ mainly using the textbooks, 3rd-week; is used to practice teaching ‘the communicative lesson’ preparing for the open-class. But it is too short for us.* (No. 010: Female JHS teacher in her 30s)

Similarly, an example of the comments for “Agree” reads:

*I think that the current 3-week teaching practicum is not long enough for student teachers to learn the basic way of teaching English. When they come to know a bit about teaching, they have to return to their college/university.* (No. 009: Female SHS teacher in her 50s)

The next question asked the participants for the timing of the practicum: “What month do you think is the best time for the teaching practicum?” Currently, most of the teaching practicum is conducted in May-July.

The majority of the teachers say May-July (70%), with June being by far the best month (57%), while fall, September-December (21%), seems to be the second most popular period. See Table 8.

**TABLE 8 [Question 6] What month do you think is the best time for the teaching practicum?**

MO	APR.	MAY	JUN.	JULY	AUG.	SEPT.	OCT.	NOV.	DEC.	JAN.	FEB.	MAR.	NA*	TOTAL
#	0	2	13	1	0	1	2	1	1	1	0	0	3	25
%	0%	9%	57%	4%	0%	4%	9%	4%	4%	4%	0%	0%	13%	109%

NOTE: Some participants chose more than a month; so the total exceeds the number of participants.

As to the reason for choosing June as the best time for the practicum, examples of some of the comments include:

*We have gotten used to this system for many years. The rest of months have school events. [sic]* (No. 004: Female J&SHS teacher in her 40s)

*My school usually has it in June. It is the period students get used to new classes and make friends with each other. So, the atmosphere in class is better to teach. It is between mid-term exams and end-term exams, so teachers are not as busy.* (No. 007: Female JHS teacher in her 40s)

Another example is a comment made by a participant who experienced the MA TESOL practicum in the United States. She also mentions that the duration of the current practicum in Japan is too short:

*Usually the teacher employment examinations are held in July and August. Thinking about student teachers' motivation, I guess June and July can be the best. And thinking about the annual events at junior/senior high school, the second/third terms are not the best. However, according to my experience as a student teacher at the M.A. TESOL Program of San Francisco State University (I student teach from January till May—about 5 months), a 3-week practicum is too short. If we can make the practicum longer, June till October could be another possibility. (No. 009: Female SHS teacher in her 50s)*

(4) How to improve the current system: Question 8

The final question asked the participating teachers to give suggestions in regards to improving the current teaching practicum: "What do you think is necessary to make the current teaching practicum better?"

The opinions are categorized into eight (8) groups, including the NC (no comment) group, which was not one of the originally planned groups. This group only became necessary after summarizing the data because not all of the participants answered question 8. Additionally, some of the teachers' comments are rather far-reaching and cover several categories. (Table 9)

**Table 9 [Question 8] Suggestions to Improve the Current Teaching Practicum (by category)**

#	Category	No.	%
1	Student Teachers' Quality	7	30.4%
2	Duration of the Practicum	5	21.7%
3	Division of Labor	2	8.7%
4	Teachers' Work Load	2	8.7%
5	Practical Suggestions for Student Teachers	2	8.7%
6	Suggestion for Supervising University Professors	1	4.3%
7	Other	2	8.7%
8	No Comment	7	30.4%
	TOTAL	28*	121.7%*

NOTE: Some teachers' comments were categorized into not only one category, but rather two or three. Therefore, the total number of comments exceeds the number of participants.

Many teachers, 30.4% or seven participants, mentioned the need to improve the quality of student teachers and the comments in this category usually have to do with the motivation and/or attitudes of student teachers. For example:

*Each student teacher should have a strong desire to be a good teacher and have a positive attitude toward his/her teaching practicum.* (No. 019: Male SHS in his 60s)

*To make student teachers have well-balanced manners!* (No. 011: Female SHS teacher in her 40s)

*Only the student teachers who have a truly strong drive to become teachers should do practice teaching.* (No. 015: Male SHS teacher in his 30s)

The second most popular category is “Duration of the Practicum”; 21.7%, or five participants’ comments fall into this category, which naturally overlaps with Question 7. However, the fact that many participating teachers mentioned this in the final open-ended question might underscore the importance of this issue.

An example of comments from those who are in opposition to an extended duration reads as follows:

*A longer teaching practicum is better for the student teachers. However, it would be a burden for the school teachers.* (No. 022: Male SHS teacher in his 50s)

On the other hand, comments for the extension include:

*Teaching practicum should be longer, if possible, half a year or one year. Student teachers should work as other teachers, and should belong to some parts of the teachers’ work and have responsibilities for their own work. To learn real and actual teachers’ work, they need to spend for 6 months to one year, I think. Honestly speaking, during student teachers’ stay, teachers should have more work and should stay at school until late at night for them. And, a few student teachers don’t want to be teachers. They take the teaching practicum for only for credits for toward their graduation. We, teachers don’t want to spend time for such with this type of student teachers. If the teaching practicum is longer, such students don’t will not want to take the teaching practicum. [sic]*  
(No. 007: Female JHS teacher in her 40s)

This expanded comment also has to do with student teachers’ motivation and practicing teachers’ working conditions. Therefore, it is categorized as “Student Teachers’ Quality” (30.4%) and “Teacher Workload” (8.7%).

Two of the participants’ opinions can be classified as “Division of Labor” (8.7%). The first comment proposes assigning the practicum responsibility only to certain schools. The second comment suggests that the subject teacher and the homeroom teacher at the same school share the work. This second

comment is also categorized into the "Teacher Workload" group

*Teachers should know what and how to teach student teachers. I don't think all of the teachers and schools can give enough training to student teachers. So, the teaching practicum should be done only at some schools. [sic] (No. 013: Female SHS teacher in her 40s)*

*Sometimes, teachers who are in charge of the teaching practicum are too busy to take care of student teachers more attentively. They have many chores. That means, in our high school, that means that teachers who have homeroom classes have the primary responsibility of mainly must taking care of the student teachers. So, it might be a good idea if we (or the board of education, etc.) can separate the functions in some way, that might be a good idea. For example, about English language teaching practicum, teachers who don't have homeroom classes should take care of that and class management phases should be taken care of by the teachers who have homeroom classes. Sometimes we can do it that way, but not that often. Anyway, if we can find a good way to reduce the burden of the practicing teachers who have a lot of daily chores, that will work. [sic] (No. 021: Male SHS teacher in his 50s)*

Some practical suggestions are mentioned both for student teachers and for supervising university professors. These categories include both "Practical Suggestions for Student Teachers" (8.7%) and "Suggestion for Supervising University Professors" (4.3%). The following comments are included in the first category:

*First, each student should provide feedback on his/her own teaching practicum at school; what he/she learned through the observing classes and how to improve the lessons he/she gave. Then the students can discuss what they learned with other students. To have lectures or demonstrating classes from the practicing teachers is another way to learn how to teach and what to teach. (No. 014: Female JHS teacher in her 50s)*

*[Student teachers should] meet people who went to the teaching practicum and listening to what they've done or what they shouldn't have done. (No. 006: Female JHS teacher in her 40s)*

The comment classified as "Suggestion for Supervising University Professors" reads:

*I would like the professors to visit schools during the teaching practicum. That will give them [student teachers] a good dose of pressure and courage. Also, professors can see if the students have the talent for teacherings or not. [sic] (No. 004: Female J&SHS teacher in her 40s)*

#### IV. Summary

In this small-scale study to investigate the perceptions of Japanese secondary school teachers, the results can be summed up as follows:

As to “Who learns from the practicum” in the first group of questions, the overwhelming majority (90%) of the participating teachers think student teachers learn a lot from the practicum experience, although many of them say “it is impossible to fully learn what the teachers' jobs are in such a short amount of time.”

Related to the reciprocal aspect of student teaching, the majority (69.6%) of the participating teachers agree to the view that practicing teachers also learn a lot from the student teachers' experience. However, 30.4 % of them disagree.

As to whether their junior and/or senior high school students learn a lot from this experience, about 60% of the participants agree and mention the “role model” function, while 30% of them said no; “from the viewpoint of English acquisition, I am afraid they are not learning effectively [sic].”

The second group of questions is related to “Content issues of the practicum.” Asking the practicing teachers about what they think student teachers learn from the teaching practicum experience, 100% of the participants choose “How to Teach,” followed by “JHS/SHS Students” (91.3%) and “School System” (56.5%). The response “Other” included items related to teacher identity.

When asked what student teachers should learn before they start the practicum, 95.7% of the participants selected both “English Language” and “How to Teach” as the items to learn, followed by “Communication Skills in English” (78.3%).

The third category of questions is about the duration and timing of the practicum. Although the current 3-week duration mandated by Japan's Ministry of Education looks too short when compared internationally, more than 60% of the participants disagree to the view that the practicum is “too short.” This might be because teachers are not willing to take care of student teachers longer than the present duration since the teachers are too busy already, even though they realize that a longer practicum will result in a better outcome for the student teachers.

As for the timing of the student teaching, the majority (70%) of the participants suggest that the May-July period is the best because in other months of the academic year, there are many school events. Even as it stands now, the regular class schedule is sometimes cancelled or changed and it is difficult for

practicing teachers to take good care of student teachers.

The final section of the questionnaire asked the participants to give suggestions to improve the current teaching practicum. Many (30.4%) of them mentioned that the quality of student teachers should be better, while 21.7% maintained that the duration of practicum should be longer, repeating what they said in Category 3.

Other suggestions include the proper division of labor and/or teachers' workload when taking care of student teachers and practical ways to enhance student teachers' practicum experience.

Obviously, pointing out these aspects of teaching practicum in Japan is not enough and they should be further explored in regards to the practical perspectives suggested by the literature reviewed, particularly the studies based on Japanese EFL situations, i.e., JACET SIG on English Education (2010), as well as Akutsu (2008), Jimbo et al. (2005) so forth.

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## 教育実習に関する日本の中学校・高校英語教員の意識

井川 好二

日本の中学校、高等学校における教育実習の現状を調査するための予備研究である。教育実習は、「生涯教育」とも言われる教員研修のスターティングポイントの一つとして、重要な役割を担っている。本研究では、現職英語教員を対象とする小規模のアンケート調査を実施し、教育実習に関する意識を尋ねる8項目の質問を行った。それらの質問は、以下の4分野に関するものである：(1) 教育実習で学ぶ主体は誰か、(2) 学ぶ内容：教育実習生は実習で何を学ぶのか、また実習前に何を学んでおくべきか、(3) 教育実習の期間と時期、(4) 教育実習の現状を改善するための提案。多くの現職英語教員の回答は、(1) 学ぶ主体は、教育実習生、(2) 学ぶ内容は、「教え方」「生徒の現状」、実習前に学ぶべきは、「英語」「教え方」、(3) 現行の実習期間（3週間）で充分であり、時期は5月～7月、(4) 改善提案としては、教育実習生の質を向上させること、など。

キーワード：教育実習、英語教育、教員養成、日本