

Recent Challenges for Foreign English Teachers in Japan

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Abstract—Japanese students are suffering from English learning. Data show that Japanese students fail to demonstrate desirable English proficiency despite decades-long efforts and promotion from the Japanese government. Foreign (native) teachers have helped with the development of English teaching in Japan in many respects, serving not only as teachers conveying language knowledge to students but also as representatives of foreign cultures helping students to appreciate incentives to learn about intercultural communication. The main emphasis of this study is to identify the problems with foreign English teachers in Japan to see whether there are any commonalities in the opinions of foreign EFL teachers related to cross-cultural challenges, labor concerns, workloads/working conditions, psychological and emotional well-being, which may have a negative impact on English education. The findings of surveys and semi-conducted interviews revealed that teachers' perceptions of their teaching approaches were generally acceptable and unproblematic, and they seem to have received fair evaluation and support from their colleagues. The stress and demands on teachers were often excessive with increased administration, which consumed the energy of English teachers while not contributing to the improvement of teaching effectiveness. Although foreign teachers generally have positive outlooks on their own experience, their advice tends not to be taken seriously or given credit for their innovations or accomplishments. Cultural conflicts sometimes cause trouble for them. Foreign teachers should learn about Japanese culture and try to change their perspective in thinking to achieve a better understanding of intercultural communication.

Keywords—foreign teacher, English teaching, intercultural communication, labor issue in Japan

I. INTRODUCTION

English language instruction in Japan has long been a contentious topic. How to assist students in improving their general English proficiency has baffled and intrigued both teachers and the Japanese government for decades of years. To enhance English education, all primary schools are required to carry out activities to help students familiarize themselves with English at the 3rd and 4th year level across the nation. Furthermore, it has become a compulsory subject for students of the 5th and 6th grades [1]. “Japan ... has one of the longest traditions of employing English instructors” [2]. The educational industry has hired foreign teachers with native English proficiency and assigned these Assistant Language Teachers (ALT) to nearby primary schools and middle schools since 1987. The initial goal was to recruit 3,000 foreign teachers to fulfill the purpose and the goal was achieved in 1992. According to the official data, 5,723 foreign teachers were employed in 2022 for this national scheme [3]. These foreign teachers are expected to aid the students in deepening their knowledge of English and cross-cultural communication. Additionally, a large number

of foreign experts also coach students in spoken English proficiency at higher education institutions [4]. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) and many universities have begun to contemplate adjustments as a result of the consistently poor quality of English language instruction and practical application in Japan over the years. The Japanese government has made efforts to enhance students' spoken and cross-cultural English competence; however, the result has not been as desirable as expected. Despite the government's support and efforts, the situation has worsened and discussions about the problem have not been useful or productive. International investigation reports have shown that Japanese students' overall English competence hasn't improved all that much. Japanese English learners are classified as having “low proficiency” according to the study results from the Swiss international education corporation EF Education in 2022, which ranks Japan 80th out of 112 non-English speaking nations and regions. Japan ranks 14th out of 24 Asian nations on the English Proficiency Index (EPI), which has a global average score of 502 [5]. As seen in Fig. 1, despite recent increases in government funding for English language instruction, the average level of English proficiency among Japanese students has fallen substantially.

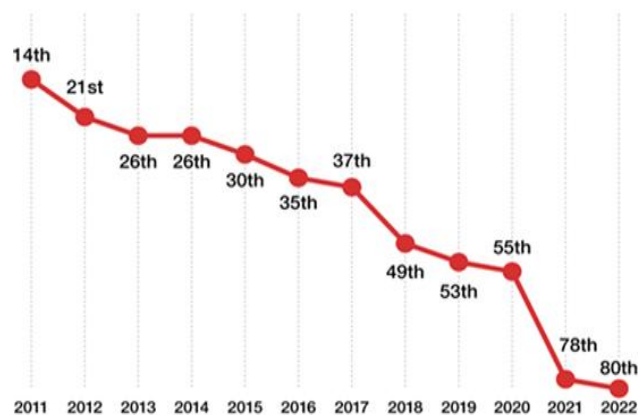


Fig. 1. Japan's EFL English proficiency index ranking (created by Nippon.com).

Why is ELT in Japan so ineffective? What difficulties do teachers encounter? What areas and priorities should EFL teachers concentrate on to make things better? Do teachers have an overall positive or negative view of the current EFL industry? As teachers with decades of years of teaching experience in Japan, we realized that what needs further investigation is how experienced EFL teachers in Japan view recent challenges for foreign English teachers, how their teaching has been supported and evaluated by the administration as well as how intercultural and social issues have affected them. This is a very core issue that may have

serious impact on the productivity of EFL teaching throughout the country.

Thus, in this paper, we surveyed 21 participants and semi-conducted interviews with 5 foreign/native English teachers. The purpose is to discover those factors which have prevented the development of ELT in Japan and those factors that prevented teachers from offering more effective instruction.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Many researchers have addressed the topic related to foreign labors in Japan, and the most commonly discussed issue in the past 30 years has been the Technical Intern and Training Program (TIIP). It has been criticized as sort of human trafficking [6–8]. Japan used the system as a backdoor to help with the solution of the domestic labor shortage issue but didn't offer proper benefits and salaries to the foreign trainees. In fact, the Japanese government has started to improve the situation of foreign labors by terminating the old system [9] and to create a new evaluation standard to supervise the organizations and companies involved in the process of foreign labor recruitment [10]. According to Japan International Trainee & Skilled Worker Cooperation Organization (JITCO), the new Technical Intern Training Program "introduced a new system for licensing supervising organizations, a system of accreditation for technical intern training plans, and expanded the program for excellent supervising organizations and implementing organizations by increasing training periods and quotas for technical intern trainees". However, there have been very few studies on issues related to foreign (native) EFL teachers. We might need to think about this issue from another perspective by listening to the actual comments and opinions from foreign teachers who have the experience of teaching English in Japan. This would then allow for other researchers to make comparisons with the foreign language teaching in other countries. There are many kinds of labor issues that EFL teachers are now facing. One of them is the fix-term contracts being much more widespread. According to the Mainichi Newspaper [11], Luc Loosveldt, a former teacher at Nagasaki University, had asked the university to recognize him as an assistant professor of English, claiming that his termination was unfair because it occurred shortly before he would have been qualified to convert his fixed-term employment agreement into an unfixed one after five years of service. The university's answer, according to the Nagasaki District Court, was "not reasonable within socially accepted norms", and the court also ordered the university to refund Loosveldt's back salary since the termination of his employment. Employees have the option to apply for an unfixed term contract if their fixed term contracts signed after April 2013 total more than five years, according to a rule issued by the central government under the amended Labor Contracts Act that went into effect in April 2013. The Nagasaki District Court's decision may have an impact on related lawsuits, as there have been issues at universities and other institutions around the nation where employees have been fired before obtaining such a privilege [12]. Reynolds [13] reported on foreign/native teachers in Japan not knowing their rights and obligations, working circumstances, and the law regarding the disputes before schools and teachers were not common.

People who have spent years teaching in Japan frequently have a hazy understanding of their rights and what remedy they have if those rights are abused. Even the language schools themselves, particularly the smaller ones, are ignorant of the laws [13]. Reynolds discusses how he recently had a conflict with his workplace about Paid Annual Leave (PAL), during which he was mistreated, ignored, fired, and then reinstated. A second issue has been that of bureaucracy; for example, during the pandemic, in 2020, many teachers, particularly those working on oral English courses, found this to be a huge challenge, as their companies had been analog for so long and this sudden transition created more work and stress for teachers. Also, as one native teacher noted, "Technology, or rather attitudes toward it, was a big challenge. My company was rather ill-equipped to switch to remote lessons, and while we had the resources for remote work, it was bogged down in bureaucracy". Teachers had to wear masks, face shields, often teach reduced class sizes, maintain social distancing in the classroom, provide adequate ventilation, and then disinfect desks and chairs between lessons. Changes came in 2023, with some universities and schools offering mixed online and in-person lessons so the students can choose what's most comfortable for them. A third issue, as pointed out by Steele, Zhang and McCornac [14, 15], is the poor accreditation system for English teachers, i.e., the inadequacy of the English Teacher Certificate System. Many EFL teacher education programs in Japanese universities do not give enough practical teaching experience or enough in-depth instruction in teaching methods [16]. The system for awarding teaching credentials is open to students being registered at colleges and universities. Most of the national, public, or private universities will allow students to obtain a teaching certificate as long as they meet the prerequisite credit requirements [17]. Universities without sufficient full-time faculty of English education are still allowed to grant some students teaching certificates in English language instruction. These institutions take advantage of the teaching credential system and prioritize collecting tuition money above preparing future teachers [14, 15]. Obviously, the existing climate of inadequate English education in Japan is partially caused by a shortage of trained teachers, and researchers contend that strengthening teacher training programs is the key to improving English education in Japan [18]. Lack of pre-service and in-service English teacher training programs has led to a shortage of skilled English instructors and staff to assist the implementation of the MEXT policy [19–21].

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Primary Data

Preliminary data comes from a paper published in 1999 by Long [22], which investigated the career development of retiring teachers and their insights into the "industry". The aim of this study was to describe teachers' responses as they relate to evaluating their experiences in regard to intercultural and labor issues, teaching methods, support and cooperation, and stress at work. Five participants were selected with the interviews analyzed from the six themes about their career entry, stabilization phase, experimentation and diversification, reassessment, serenity and relational distance,

and disengagement. Teachers did discuss, regarding career entry, the issue of politics and how foreign teachers were often challenged to adjust to Japanese norms and practices. Criticism of school policies proved challenging, and teachers commented how important it was to quickly adapt and to work out a system for oneself. In short, being flexible is a key to making oneself successful at Japanese schools. In regard to the stabilization phase, two observations were made: (1) be creative and make learning English meaningful for the students; (2) learn Japanese and become more familiar with Japanese culture. In regard to the experimentation phase, teachers recognized the importance of having stages in your lesson format so students do not get bored with your instruction, and try to change your style and role. As for the stage of reassessment, two issues surfaced: (1) it was important to take some time out each month and to assess your career and life; (2) think about what you have learned and mastered, and always establish new goals for yourself. As for the stage of serenity and relational distance, teachers pointed out the need to improve relationships with colleagues, and to try to become closer to students and be more confident about teaching. As for the last stage of disengagement, teachers felt it was important to ask whether one was becoming more or less active in their career and why, and what would prompt them to leave EFL? The data collected from this study pointed out the importance of reflection for valuing the insights of more experienced teachers in the field, and how they see the profession in the coming years, and what challenges remain ahead for newer teachers.

B. Rational

As described above, it is of importance to understand how various social and cultural issues are affecting EFL teachers' educational opportunities in Japan. Current research on the career development of foreign (native) EFL education in Japan is lacking. Depopulation is impacting how education is perceived and valued, and Japan is endeavoring to achieve the goal of getting involved in globalization. Therefore, it is important to reexamine the issues relating to the career development and cycles of foreign (native) English teachers, and what they have to say about their adapting to the roles at the institutions and even to the Japanese culture and the society.

C. Questionnaire and Interview

This time, we created a questionnaire focusing on five issues that impact EFL teaching: (a) intercultural communication issues and their impact on your teaching; (b) fair treatment and evaluation of your colleagues; (c) support and cooperation; (d) teaching methods; and (e) stress and demands. Twenty open-ended questions were included in the survey, aiming at eliciting additional information, examples, explanations, or comparisons, and how participants felt about the issues. Furthermore, we also conducted semi-structured interviews with five foreign (native) English teachers in person to further confirm the information we obtained from the questionnaire. There were 32 people who were contacted and 21 responded with valid responses. Data collection proceeded from mid-March to early June 2023. In addition to the questionnaire, we also conducted interviews with 5 native teachers with profound teaching experience in Japan.

IV. RESULTS

A. Intercultural Communication Issues and Their Impact on Your Teaching

This section concentrated on difficulties connected to communication among coworkers and participation at meetings about educational activities/curriculum that is the official route for them to express their ideas and opinions. Furthermore, we were interested whether foreign (native) English teachers could communicate a sense of values with people around them, and whether or not their comments were taken into account and accepted regarding issues in improving teaching efficiency. In response to the first question, 15 participants stated that they could communicate easily but emphasized the need for repetition and rephrasing in practically every circumstance. In brief, there were recurring themes in the responses, demonstrating the insufficiency of effective communication skills and the necessity of following up when something is not entirely understood. Only two participants responded negatively to the second question about being given the opportunity to attend meetings related to teaching activities. The majority of respondents cited committee work related to curricula, rules, and exams. However, two comments did draw our attention to a specific unresolved problem:

We have meetings regarding curriculum creation and administration, but there is essentially no discussion about teaching activities or approaches. There are sometimes FD sessions, but I've never really found them to be helpful.

Japanese colleagues seldom show disagreement to a proposal, especially when it is made by someone in power. So there is no real discussion. The meeting is just a process to pretend that the decision is made by all the members of the department.

Only four individuals mentioned the third topic—values—as not being important to them or their pupils, citing time and curriculum constraints. Others talked on how they might live up to the principles taught in the textbook. A second participant noted:

I teach intercultural communication, so that is part of the course material. Where appropriate, I would feel free to discuss it with students in other classrooms as well, but I would also like to emphasize its diversity.

One participant talked about how he was allowed and even encouraged to teach about morals in his seminars because one of the goals of the program is to introduce students to different cultures. Another participant emphasized how there were many students from the Chinese mainland, so it is important to give extra consideration to how you will teach about Taiwan and Canada's sense of values compare to those of China. Only one person responded negatively to the fourth question, which included advice and opinions, but others claimed that there were no opportunities for this issue. The responses ranged from how they essentially have complete control over what they teach in their seminars to the fact that they only needed to use a common textbook.

B. Fair Treatment and Evaluation of Your Colleagues

This section focused on how one is treated and judged by peers, especially with regard to compensation, workload, perks, and support. These responses had a lot in common,

with the salaries for Japanese coworkers and foreigners being the same. However, there were more negative responses (7) about the question about workload, with participants claiming that their Japanese coworkers had a heavier workload because “other foreigners could mostly not function in Japanese, and they did not do much extra beyond materials development, so I think the native speakers of Japanese (including Koreans) generally had more duties (and would not resist like foreigners occasionally did)”.

One teacher explained about the process of promotion in her school:

There is no real fair evaluation system in my school. The bonus you received is determined by your boss, and it does not reflect the quantity and quality of your work and academic achievement. I have a doctoral degree and a lot of publications, much more than the other two Japanese guys. But I was rejected for promotion five times. The other two Japanese teachers hold a master's degree only and seldom had any publications. But they were promoted to professor because they helped supervise the student baseball team.

There were six affirmative responses to question 7 and nine negative ones, with others mentioning the difficulty of their circumstances. Hardly anything was discussed, including rights, obligations (apart from those in contracts), or even one's tasks, according to the participants. They simply assumed that foreign (native) teachers will behave in accordance with their expectations and remain silent until they step on one of the unseen land mines. Even a human rights-focused college demonstrates a tendency toward authoritarianism in society. Others noted how unclear things were at their university for everyone. In other words, it demonstrated that this particular issue varied significantly among institutions. Regarding question eight, which asked participants if they could bring up instances where they felt treated unfairly, the majority cited how they relied on their dean, president, or union.

C. Support and Cooperation

When asked if they could get help when needed from their coworkers and staff, two respondents gave negative responses. However, teachers' opinions on whether they are encouraged to offer suggestions for improving teaching and administration in their school were more divided. Eight people offered affirmative responses, three responded with qualifications that their opinions were significant in administration but not in teaching, and others mentioned that they were permitted to express their opinions but were not encouraged to do so. Key responses include such remarks:

Certain foreigners who are in with the cult are welcome. My input was ignored except when they needed my help for bilingual faculty training in new educational technologies like learning management systems. I was on the IT committees. They did take my advice in one big issue. Energy and time-wasting attendance cards were filled out by students at the beginning of every class, a pet idea of the all-powerful President. I convinced them to install an automated attendance management system, which has saved a huge amount of quality class time and money. But it's not as if they acknowledged it was my idea and so the staff remember.

Yes, I feel free to recommend changes and to speak my

mind. I also feel that I am listened to when I do have something to say. Initially, I was hesitant to speak up because I didn't know how my input would be received, but after a year or two, I came to realize that the administrators and my colleagues were open to my input and accepted it.

When pandemic started, all classes went online. I had to learn how to use the different systems in 6 universities because I am part-time. All of the systems had English indication only, and no manuals in English version were available. I didn't know [with] whom I should talk to about this.

Regarding question 11, which was about the school's budget and salaries, only four responses were in favor, with the majority claiming that salary had stagnated and that new workers had less favorable contracts. Five participants responded negatively to the following question regarding opportunities for making presentations and receiving on-the-job training, whereas the majority of participants said yes. However, one teacher said he had received almost no training at all.

D. Teaching Methods

In particular, the use and emphasis on standardized testing, e-learning, class sizes, and how their institutions dealt with disinterested students were crucial topics to focus on from the perspective of the professors at the institutions. Seven participants responded negatively to question 13 about the usage and emphasis on standardized testing, and the remaining participants mentioned greater reliance on the TOEIC and other examinations. One teacher noted as follows:

There seems to be an ongoing obsession with TOEIC as the only criterion that matters. I think this has much to do with the personal preference of the department head – and thus tends to swing like a pendulum. Currently, we are at an “extreme obsession” end of that swing.

There were four unfavorable responses regarding the usage of e-learning and whether or not this technology was thought to be helpful to students' actual proficiency. It was noted:

I haven't seen any noticeable effect on their proficiency. I think that it is easier for students to be passive in e-learning than in personal-contact learning.

Well, the pandemic forced us to start using Google Classroom, Zoom, etc., more. But I feel that it was forced on many professors, rather than being something they wanted to do. I think the benefits may not have really been there for students as the tools haven't been utilized well and students have generally tried to attend online classes with cameras off (doing whatever we cannot see). We have no real way of knowing the effectiveness.

Since very young, Japanese students have been trained to follow every instruction from the teacher. They are not encouraged to do their work with their own decision. In class, if I do not ask them to write down the points on the whiteboard, they will just sit there still and wait for my instructions. Japanese style of teaching does not encourage students to ask questions that much. So they just keep silence in class and never volunteer to ask my questions, either.

As to whether class sizes were proper for language teaching, seven replies were negative with teachers feeling that classes were simply too large. Some opined that “I think

the best class size would be 6 to 10 students. That is unrealistic, of course. The problem is that in a class of 30 students”, only 5 or 6 could be considered “language learners” while another pointed out that classes now often have between 35 and 45 pupils due to a gradual rise in enrollment. Individual teachers now have a heavier workload because of this. More than 70 students could be in one teacher’s class. Six people responded negatively to question 16 about providing support at your school for pupils who exhibit apathy or behavioral issues, but others mentioned that counselors were on hand. One noted, “Yes, fastidious student support partly justifies the relatively high tuition. They have a belief system, though, that each student has a salvageable soul, so they try not to reject students with various mental problems”, while another questioned how effective these support systems were.

E. Stress and Demands

Four participants reported feeling no stress in relation to the final issue that affects EFL educators – stress and demands, but others noted concerns related to scheduling, committees, and other issues. One said “once in a while”. Another person talked about how administration can be demanding, particularly when it comes to the quantity of meetings and difficulties with Japanese paperwork. They suggested that they might be trying to grasp new committee duties and how to occasionally connect with more senior professors.

A culture of heavy emphasis on pedagogy and student support makes teachers dedicated, so there is more potential for trouble outside of teaching. It's not always the fault of administrators, but if someone pecks at them, they peck at teachers. One false accusation can destroy a teacher, while others get away with marrying a former student or whatever if they are insiders. I was a professor at a religious institution, stressed at feeling that inculcation of faith does not belong in education.

Thirteen people responded negatively to question 18 about power or sexual harassment that occurs for reasons unrelated to teaching, but others provided examples of how such harassment is subtly perpetrated, such as by enforcing a “Japanese only” policy in meetings, engaging in minor verbal harassment, or obstructing someone’s research efforts with apparent malice. Teachers believed that it was frequently simpler to put up with the abuse than to go through the arduous and time-consuming procedure of pursuing a claim that would only result in a light or nonexistent punishment for the offender. One female teacher said about the drinking party:

I was invited to attend the drinking party more frequently than I expected. The dean loved parties. All of other teachers were male and loved drinking. I went to most of them because I realized it is a place for exchanging ideas and discussing. I was afraid of power harassment in one way or another if I refused. They sometimes talked about sex while drinking, and I just pretended that I didn't understand their Japanese. I felt extremely uncomfortable though I knew it is part of the Japanese party culture.

Only three teachers responded negatively to the following question about job-related pressure and burnout, while the others mentioned difficulties like publish or perish pressure,

mundanity, etc. Five people responded negatively to the final question on whether Japan has been more tolerant of foreigners over the past few decades, although others thought there had been some progress. One stated:

Japan as a whole, I find that hard to answer. But my place has always treated me fairly. I'm not sure, but I would probably say no. It depends what 'accepting' means. I think that life will be the same for a while as a foreigner teaching here. You are certainly not Japanese, but you can slowly fit in more and more over time.

Another pointed out:

I find this question difficult to answer, as there have been ongoing trends in both directions (becoming more accepting and less accepting in different ways). About foreign teachers – I feel the situation has not changed significantly over the three decades I have lived in Japan. This is especially true of universities – which, in my view, tend towards being “bastions of conservatism” in this country. There has always been an undercurrent of discussion in universities where I have worked, regarding how to replace the foreign teachers (both part-time and full-time employees). First it was cassette tapes, then the Internet, and now ChatGTP – that was going to rid Japan of the need for expensive native-speaker foreign language teachers. While the idealized mechanism has changed, the overall intention has not.

V. OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

Thus, to summarize these issues that were in the survey and interviews, the following points should be noted by foreign (native) teachers [6, 7, 14, 15, 23, 24]:

(1) Basically, Japan is a mono-lingual and mono-cultural country, where Japanese language and culture predominate (Fig. 2) [24]. Most of the people do not function well in English including students, and English is not a tool for daily communication. Because Chinese characters are included in the language, it would be impossible for foreigners to master the language without long-term systematic training. If foreign teachers have to rely on the English version of official documents for information, the amount of information they could get access to will be very limited, either at workplace or in their daily life. It is very difficult to find a qualified Japanese staff at schools or governmental sectors who can use English to communicate.

In our survey, some of the participants responded that they were well supported by the staff. However, one thing has to be noted here that the explanation they received are only part of the administrative procedures. The foreign teachers are helped to meet the deadline by completing the complex forms. Actually, many teachers may even not understand why they are supposed to do this because nobody would explain much about the scenario and the logic about the process. Much of the detailed information cannot be conveyed completely through oral interpretations. In Japan, nearly all of the documents are in Japanese only, including those stipulations regarding the benefits and rights of employees at workplaces. Here comes the point: without sufficient competence in reading and speaking Japanese language, most of the information is blocked out from foreign/native teachers.

In sum, the issue of being fluent in Japanese has to be reinforced. It is difficult for foreign (native) teachers to conduct real communication without sufficient reading and

speaking competence. The information available to them is limited.

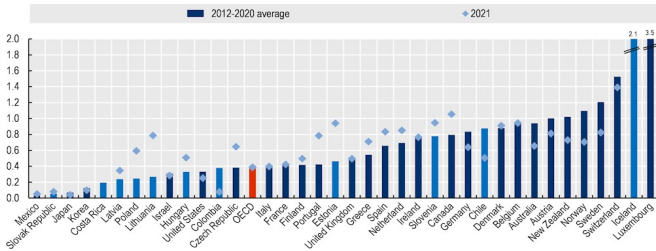


Fig. 2. Permanent-type migration to OECD countries as a percentage of the total population.

(2) One of the significant features in Japanese culture is the difference between “insiders” and “outsiders” [7]. The term insiders refer to those who have been accepted by a social group or a community, while outsiders are people who can stand outside the group or community to watch only what is happening in any given circumstance. Insiders are the people who are really getting involved in the activities of the group or community. Off-record messages and decisions are shared among a small number of insiders only, though the outsiders are affiliated to the organization as well. Since foreign teachers attend fewer meetings and seldom get involved in administrative work due to their incompetence in Japanese language, their points of view are much less reflected during the discussion and decision-making process of the schools.

Many of the foreign (native) teaching staff believe that they keep good relationship with their colleagues because they greet each other whenever they might meet. However, once any trouble arises, these relationships are often tested. Foreign (native) teachers realized that nobody seems to be reliable and would offer them the real help they need. Clearly, the good relationship assumes that foreign teachers follow all the rules and decisions of the school. In most cases, the “trouble” is caused by the proposals made by the foreign (native) teachers about teaching and administration from a different perspective from their Japanese colleagues and the consistency of their motivation to provoke changes. In that case, they would be considered as dissidents and treated as someone who has misbehaved and should receive punishment. Japanese believe that all people should share the same points of view if they are members of the group or organization. They do not accept someone who would challenge them by using a different set of social rules and sense of value. Therefore, the only way for foreigners to be accepted as insiders is to learn about the Japanese logic about life and work and give up their individual ideas. Once compromise is reached in this respect with other Japanese colleagues, he/she would be accepted as a true insider. Certainly, even some Japanese are sometimes exempt from this inside circle as well foreigners who should formulate a new sense of values. Otherwise, the consequence would be to endure a degree of loneliness of being an outsider who is rarely informed about what is going on. Thus, foreign (native) teachers should make choice by themselves, whether to enjoy the freedom of being alone or to follow these conservative Japanese norms.

(3) In Japanese culture, one significant feature is “*tatema*” and “*honne*” [8]. *Tatema* means what people are supposed to say in the public eye, while *honne* refers to people’s true feelings and thoughts that are disclosed to their close

relations only. *Tatema* are usually comments that are considered positive by social standard, such as encouragement, appreciation, challenge spirit, benevolence, sympathy, politeness, and considerateness. *Honne* not only includes the above positive emotions, but also negative feelings and thoughts, such as criticism, selfishness, mercilessness, rudeness, arrogance, demotivation, and dishonesty.

Japanese are trained to build these two communication channels since very young and could use them properly according to the situation around. That is, people are not supposed to be honest all the time and learn to pretend and disguise themselves as “well-educated” in social contexts. As explained above, if you do want to hear someone’s *honne*, you must make efforts to be part of his/her inside circle. Otherwise, what you hear will be just comments that reflect a *tatema* perspective which might not mean anything in essence.

The point here is that it is complex to determine whether the person *tatema* and *honne* to speak; it takes time to learn how to make judgment on this as this is not explicitly taught in Japanese language classes or society. It is not surprising that some foreign staff can hear *tatema* only because they have never been taken as a member of the inside circle in their relationship with other Japanese. Foreign teachers are not really involved in the decision-making process, though they are given the chance to attend the meetings seemingly. Decisions, in Japan, are usually made before meetings among several core members, and the meetings are just ceremonies to show that the decisions are made by all the members. Foreign (native) teachers will get frustrated if they expect real discussions at meetings. There are so many behavioral patterns hidden in the Japanese culture, which may seem to be contradictory from surface.

(4) Bullying is another social issue which should be addressed here. In Japan, it commonly exists at any social group, organization, and workplace. There are many reports about bullying cases throughout the country. According to the statistics of Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, Japan, the number of cases of bullying at elementary schools and middle schools has reached an unprecedented level [25]. Even many Japanese teachers have been reported to be bullied at their workplaces by their administration, and have to quit their jobs [26]. The government offers the explanation for the increasing cases that students must endure more pressure and stress than before. In fact, the essential logic for bullying is that someone should be bullied if he/she is different from other people, and children learn this from the adults around them. The majority of the foreign (native) teachers brought up how their dean, president, or union when they are asked about cases, about which they felt having been treated unfairly. They are different and their insufficiency in Japanese language is taken advantage of.

Diversity is seldom allowed or accepted within any group or organization. An individual is forced to follow the decisions of the majority, which is called peer pressure; thus, the normal pattern for bullying is that one individual will be bullied by several or all the other people around. Deliberate ignorance is the most often used weapon especially when adults want to bully someone at a workplace. This is, indeed,

a very difficult situation for foreigners because they are different in many respects, from looks to behavior, from the language they use to the way they think; foreigners can face very serious problems in this regard because they are different in so many ways.

Furthermore, in Japanese, there is an interesting term “read the air”, which indicates that people should try to discern information or message from the mood and situation around without being told, otherwise, he/she will become the person to be bullied. This has also become a hurdle for foreign staff at their workplace to be treated as equal as other Japanese. Once bullying occurs, foreign staff would not know how to solve the issue. They express their dissatisfaction and protest at meetings for their rights, but this just results in them being labeled as troublemakers because in Japanese culture, obedience and endurance are thought to be important virtues of well-educated people. There are so many behavioral patterns hidden in the Japanese culture, which may seem to be contradictory from surface.

VI. SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

It is indeed a challenging job to teach English in Japan. Here are some suggestions for foreign/native teachers:

(1) Learn Japanese language as much as you can. Give up the idea that you could receive all the information in English. You are settling in the country rather than traveling, so you need much more information in detail. Keep on trying and improve your Japanese language, which will help you know better about society and your work.

(2) Follow the Japanese way of doing things. Try to interact with Japanese people as much as you can and learn about the culture. When you feel uneasy with the Japanese culture, give up the idea that you are right. The common knowledge elsewhere may not be acceptable in Japan. Remember it takes a long time for people to accept you as an insider.

(3) Do not argue with people around. Learn to admit that their sense of value is true. When seeing things are different, change your mind if you want to solve a problem smoothly, because potentially, people around you will not change.

Foreign/native teachers should make efforts to accommodate themselves better to Japan and its culture. However, it must be noted that raising the level of English education is not the sole task of English teachers. English learning activities are closely related to the attitude and sense of value of the whole society [27]. If English is a foreign language that is being taught and used only within the classroom, then one could expect that the outcome of the learning activities may not bear fruit. Perhaps the time has come for Japan to consider how to make a connection between the English language and its practical use in daily life [28]. Moreover, in recent years, Japan has decided to accept more foreign laborers to compensate for its population loss. Thus, it would be of crucial significance to provide migrant workers with more service in English. This is the requirement and responsibility to burden as a hosting country. If foreign cultures can be seen in a more positive light, evaluated, and accepted for what they are without making a comparison to Japanese culture, then Japanese society may be more able to develop a positive attitude towards other parts of the world. Just as one of the participants commented,

Japan still has a long way to go in truly accepting foreigners.

APPENDIX

Instrument

Dear participant, we would like to thank you for taking the time to respond to these questions as best as you can; the information will be compiled and will provide some direction and guidance to new EFL teachers coming into the field once this article is published. Thank you for your cooperation, and do let us know if you are available for a follow-up interview.

Affiliation: 1. Primary School []
2. Middle School []
3. High School []
4. College and University []

Current Status: 1. Full Time []
2. Part Time []

Choose a number that reflects your own experience. Please write one or two sentences about your own experience, if this applies to you.

Part 1. Intercultural Communication Issues and their impact on your teaching

Please write one or two sentences about your own experience, if this applies to you.

1. Are you sure that you can communicate smoothly with your colleagues either in Japanese or English?
2. Are you given chances to attend meetings regarding teaching activities, such as curriculum administration and teaching methods?
3. Do you feel free to teach students sense of values in foreign countries in your class?
4. Do they accept your advice and opinions, which could improve teaching effectiveness?

Part 2. Fair Treatment and Evaluation of your colleagues

5. Are you receiving the same remuneration for teaching as your Japanese colleagues?
6. Do you think your workload is the same as your Japanese colleagues?
7. Have your benefits and rights at your workplace ever been explained to you clearly?
8. Do you have someone to talk to when you are not treated fairly?

Part 3. Support and cooperation

9. Can you get support from staff at your workplace when you have trouble with Japanese documents?
10. Are you encouraged to make proposals regarding teaching and administration in your school?
11. Has the budget (and wages) for English courses and teachers remained stable at your institution?
12. Are you given chances to make presentations at conferences or receive on-the-job training?

Part 4. Teaching Methods

13. Has the use and focus on standardized testing become more important and prevalent?

14. Has the use of e-learning increased at your institution? If so, do you see this tool as beneficial to students' actual proficiency?
15. Is the class size in your school proper for language teaching?
16. Is there any support in your school for students with apathy or behavioral problems?

Part 5. Stress and Demands

17. Do you feel stress at your workplace which is caused by factors irrelevant to teaching?
18. Has power or sexual harassment been a factor at your workplace?
19. Have you experienced any job-related pressure and/or burnout?
20. Has Japan become more accepting over the past few decades of foreign teachers and of foreigners?

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Robert Long designed the survey and both he and Rong Zhang collected data. Both of the two authors did analysis, wrote the paper, and conducted proofreading and revision. All authors had approved the final version.

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