

Teacher License Changes and High Schools in Japan

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Abstract—The number of non-native speakers of Japanese obtaining a license to teach in the Japanese school system has steadily increased over the past ten years with the introduction of a new national curriculum and the associated license regulations. This study examines the reactions to these changes by both native speakers of English and native speakers of Japanese. How do teachers feel after reaching this level? Do they feel more qualified in their positions? Do potential Japanese teachers have a desire to work with licensed Japanese teachers or feel its only necessary for their native peers?

Index Terms—education, high school, Japanese teaching license, teachers

I. INTRODUCTION

Acquiring a teaching license is an important condition for native Japanese speakers with aspirations of working in the Japanese school system both public and private. While the foreigners teaching in Japan have often worked as A.L.T. or assistant language teachers. The Japan Times [1] reported more than 8500 A.L.T.'s in 2012 with half originating from the United States. These vary between individuals with extensive education backgrounds to those with non-education based majors working for financial remuneration. However some foreign teachers have more lofty aspirations for teaching in Japan. Foreign teachers obtaining a Japanese teacher's license have the opportunity for permanent full time employment or tenure with their respected schools. They're salaries also can reach the equivalent of their Japanese counterparts based on both their age and experience. The average salary for someone in the education field is over 5,000,000 yen per year according to the Japanese Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications [2].

What kind of effect do foreign teachers feel it has on their overall performance? Is it just a procedural requirement or do they feel more competent as licensed instructors? Do they feel more accepted by their Japanese co-workers?

The Japanese government is implement changes requiring English education to be a larger part of a student's education by 2020 in correlation with the Tokyo Olympics. This will require more English teachers over the next 4 years. Do prospective Japanese teachers feel a teacher's license will have an effect on their working relationship with foreign teachers?

II. BACKGROUND

The competition for Japanese teaching positions has improved as the level of remuneration has. The salary for a licensed teacher in the Japanese school is competitive with similar positions in the private sector [3]. A study described 200,000 Japanese applicants competing for 38,000 vacancies [3]. The license itself is not clear-cut. There are different levels of certification in Japanese schools depending on the level of school from preschool to upper secondary school. The level of education varies from 2 years for primary school to a Masters for upper secondary [4]. The procedure for obtaining a license has two parts. An applicant must attend a series of classes both in general education and specific to their major and a second consisting of interviews. While in training a teacher must be evaluated by an experienced teacher and a principal. The requirements are determined by national law but also can vary due to area or local law.

Foreigner language teachers working in Japan, like the government sponsored J.E.T. program, are required to simply have a 4 year Bachelor's degree. They are classified by their school's as A.L.T. or assistant language teachers. But since they are not licensed, are required by law to have a licensed teacher with them in the classroom. Teachers in the J.E.T. program are assisted in many aspects of everyday life from their flight to Japan to their accommodations. They are also paid twelve months a year. Other participating in non-J.E.T. programs may only be paid an hourly or class wage with little assistance in other factors of Japanese life.

However, the teachers participating in our survey were not A.L.T.s but employed full-time at two private schools in the Kansai area. Two teachers participating in the survey are from a co-ed school located in West Kobe. Both teachers have been employed there over five years. The school promotes itself as having a more thorough English curriculum with 7 full-time Japanese and 3 full-time native English teachers. Overall, it has more than 1200 students with many doing long and short-term home stays from North America and Europe. High School students may attend an affiliated university if they fulfill certain requirements and reach a pre-determined level on a standardized test.

Two other teachers surveyed are employed at an all boy's junior and senior high school in Kobe. One had been employed there over five years. The other was a recent addition to the school but had received his Japanese teaching license previously. The school has over 600 students from all over Japan and its students often go to the most prestigious universities in Japan and abroad including: Tokyo University and Kyoto University.

III. RESEARCH

Our research involved two surveys. First, we created an online survey for non-Japanese teachers that have successfully received a Japanese teacher's license. The survey asked sixteen questions varying from the participants having a license in their own country to how they felt a Japanese license affected their relationships with their peers, students, and students' parents. The final question asked the participants their overall opinion about a Japanese teacher's license. The second survey was a written survey completed by a group of 30 fourth year university education majors attending a women's university in Western Japan. The students are planning, and are in training, to become a primary or elementary school teacher. The university has an enrollment of over 3000 students.

The students answered ten questions about their past experience having an English native speaker as a foreign language teacher and their future concerns of working with a licensed or non-licensed foreign teacher. The students were allowed the freedom of answering in English or Japanese allowing the most thorough and detailed answers.

The first six questions asked the students about their past educational experiences with foreign teachers. The questions included: did the student have a foreign teacher, the frequency of classes, the foreign teacher's position and responsibilities, and pragmatics in addressing the teacher.

The last four questions gauged the student's desires of working with a licensed or unlicensed teacher including: the advantages and disadvantages of working with a licensed or unlicensed teacher.

Some of the questions on the survey included the following:

- 1) *Once you become a licensed teacher would you rather work with foreigners who are ALTs or licensed teachers?*
- 2) *What would be possible good points of working with foreigners who hold a Japanese teaching license?*
- 3) *What would be possible difficult points of working with foreigners who hold a Japanese teaching license?*

The second survey was conducted online using the surveymonkey website. Answers were collected anonymously from four native speakers of English who currently hold teachers licenses in Japan. The sixteen question survey asked questions about the difficulty of the process to receive a teaching license in Japan. The survey also asked about changes in the teachers' feelings of self-efficacy due to the license and also changes in the relationships with co-workers, students, and parents. Some of the questions on the survey included the following:

- 1) *How difficult was it for you to prepare to receive the teaching license?*
- 2) *How difficult was the interview to receive the license?*
- 3) *What language was used for the interview?*
- 4) *Has your teacher changed since receiving the license?*
- 5) *Has your relationship with co-workers changed since receiving the license?*

IV. RESULTS

The survey of native speakers of Japanese indicated concerns in two areas. There are culture and communication. A number of respondents were concerned with a non-native speaker of Japanese becoming a licensed teacher because that teacher may lack the cultural understanding to work together and take responsibility beyond simple classroom instruction. The communicative aspect included concerns about being able to communicate effectively with someone who does not share the same native language. Some were worried about their own lack of English ability. Other respondents indicated a concern about communication difficulties within the working environment. In addition some results indicated a worry that the non-native speaker of Japanese would be ineffective at teacher without the support of a native Japanese speaker.

Native speakers of English completed the second survey. Seventy-five percent of respondents indicated that it was slightly difficult to prepare for and receive the teaching license. Most also responded that the license changed their relationship with co-workers, students, and parents very little. However, several respondents indicated that they felt the license was important for their employer and felt more secure in their position due to the teaching license.

V. CONCLUSION

The results from the two different surveys show completely different concerns by the two groups regarding the licensing of non-native speakers of Japanese with the Japanese education system. Native speakers of Japanese were concerned about communication difficulties between teachers as well as between students and teachers. They also indicated a concern about cultural misunderstandings. In contrast the native speaker of English group showed concerns in the process leading up to the receiving the license, but little concern after. This could be due to the background of all of the respondents having taught within the Japanese system for a number of years before becoming licensed.

These results indicate that the Japanese education system should provide support for new teachers who are non-native speakers of Japanese during the process of obtaining a license and also training in language and culture to ease the transition into becoming a member of the school community.

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