論文

What Makes a Good Japanese Language Assistant
in Secondary Education in the English Zone?

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This study aims to discover, mainly through an online questionnaires, which behavioral characteristics are associated with good Japanese language assistants from the standpoint of Japanese Language Teachers at secondary schools encompassing more than half of the world's population of learners, in English zone countries where Japanese language teachers have had the experience of being Assistant Language Teachers (ALT) of The Japan Exchange and Teaching Program.

The questionnaire consisting of 37 items modified from past studies was employed netting valid replies from 112 teachers. The data was subjected to the descriptive statistics program SPSS Statistics 22.

Through the analysis, the most important characteristics were enthusiasm for teaching and consideration towards learners along with "intercultural competence" and "professionalism," two attributes which were newly extracted in this study.

These results could contribute to the training of assistants in university courses on Teaching Japanese as a Foreign Language.

Key words: Japanese Language Assistant, Japanese Language Teachers, TJFL, behavioral characteristics, online questionnaire

1. Introduction

According to the Japan Foundation (2013), the number of the overseas learners of Japanese language is almost four hundred million. The number has increased significantly (31.3 times) compared with the data reported in 1979. The number of organizations offering Japanese has proportionately increased fourteen times from 1,145 to 16,046, as well. With them, the percentage of the learners in secondary schools has risen 52.1% (while in tertiary schools the rise is 27.5% and in primary schools it is 5.7%). That means the secondary school has become a very important organization in which to spread Japanese language overseas.

The choice of foreign languages to teach at the secondary level is also under the Department of Education in most foreign countries just as it is under the Ministry of Education in Japan. In fact, the policies of the principals and the administration have a strong decisive power. In other words, if Japanese language is designated as a required subject, e.g., as a university entrance examination subject for higher education, it will contribute to increasing the number of the learners and raising the global position of the Japanese language.

The Japan Foundation (2013) raised as problems for teaching Japanese beginning at the secondary education level "lack of learner zeal", "lack of teaching materials" and "lack of information". For the solution to these problems, the good use of Japanese assistants could be suggested.

Neustupny (1995) proposed a method to release Japanese education from the traditional classroom scene and introduced the idea of the Japanese language assistant who is different from a teacher. Through interaction with the assistant, who plays an important role for learners as they come into contact with the social, verbal and socio-cultural rules, the classroom will be freed from the traditional unilateral teacher-centric model.

Moreover, the Japanese Language assistant (JLA) embodies attractive aspects of Japanese culture, e.g., Japanese youth culture and knowledge of animated cartoons. They themselves are a kind of teaching material that help to motivate learners.

Judging from the experience of the authors who have sent JLA abroad for more than 15 years, lots of remarkable growth has taken place among those who have finished their role as JLA and returned to Japan; and the overseas schools which have accepted our JLA so far also wish strongly for the next assistant to come.

There are a few qualitative studies on behavioral characteristics of Japanese teachers at overseas secondary schools. Based on PAC (Personal Attitude Construct) analysis and semi-structured interviews, Furubeppu (2009) described how the image of a good Japanese teacher held by two JLA dispatched from a university Teaching Japanese as a Foreign Language course to the secondary schools in New Zealand changed in the course of their overseas teaching experience. The post-return data shows strong influences on each assistant by their mentoring Japanese language teacher. After returning from abroad the JLAs' common image of a good Japanese teacher included class management ability and a cheerful personality. Furubeppu (2010) further noted that there is a different process of development between the three-week teaching practice and the more than six-month JLA experience in the secondary schools in New Zealand through a case study of one informant based on PAC. Through a case study of one informant using PAC, Furubeppu (2011) verifies that basic citizenship skills for an overseas JLA in a university TJFL (Teaching Japanese as a Foreign Language) Course improve through the period of the JLA experience. However, there is no quantitative study referring to the behavioral characteristics of overseas JLA.

Furthermore, the findings have not been introduced formally into in the training of JLA in the university TJFL Courses. However the Japan Foundation and JICA, at present, promote Japanese Intern programs or dispatch Japanese volunteers, which tells us that JLA are much needed. Thus the quantitative survey referring to JLA is not only complementary with the qualitative survey mentioned above, but also may contribute in a practical way to the global society.

2. A quantitative study of the image of good Japanese language assistants

This study aims to find out through an online questionnaire which behavioral characteristics are associated with good JLA from the standpoint of Japanese Language Teachers at secondary schools in the English zone. There are two reasons we conducted the research in the English zone. The first reason is that Australia, Canada, UK, New Zealand and USA, where the first language is English, are among the 20 countries with the highest the number of Japanese language learners in the world. The other reason is that there are to some extent Japanese language teachers in English zone countries who have the experience of being Assistant Language Teachers (ALT) of The Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program according to the advisors of the Japan Foundation. That is, they know the concept of the teaching assistant as different from the teacher.

2.1 Subjects

The questionnaire aimed at the Japanese teachers of secondary schools in six countries in the English zone (Australia, Canada, the U.K., Ireland, New Zealand, and the United States) was administered as follows:

Through the website of the Association of the Japanese Language Teachers the writer asked members in those countries to answer an online questionnaire uploaded to a website that respondents were directed to. Other teachers were asked to fill out questionnaires directly at conferences on Teaching Japanese as a Foreign Language held in each country.

As a result, among 115 respondents, the replies of 112 were valid. Three questionnaires with deficient entry information were excluded. The breakdown of respondent data is shown in Table 1.

Among 112 subjects, there are 36 native-speaking teachers and 76 non-native teachers. Through this result it can be seen that non-native teachers play a core role in the English zone. Among them, 57 people have had experience with assistants, the number of which is almost half of all subjects.

Table 1

Subjects of survey

Nation		AUS	Canada	UK	Ireland	New Zealand	USA	Total
The number of effective respondents		44	23	10	14	9	12	112
Mother tongue	Japanese	8	15	5	6	1	1	36
	English	31	8	4	8	8	11	70
	Other	5	0	1	0	0	0	6
Years of education	Under ten years	25	8	6	11	2	3	55
	Ten years or more	19	15	4	3	7	9	57
Experience with accepting Japanese teaching assistants	Experienced	27	15	1	4	7	3	57
	No experience (hope to accept)	17	4	4	8	0	8	41
	No experience (do not hope to accept)	0	4	5	2	2	1	14

Note. AUS=Australia

2.2 Questionnaire and Procedure

The questionnaire items were developed as follows:

(1) We based the action characteristics of the superior Japanese teachers at secondary schools on 41 items from the findings of Nuibe, et al (2006). The reason we based the findings on these items is because many of the items expressed attitudes of the classroom teacher that could also apply to assistants. We found that 23 items remained after deleting the items that only applied to the teacher (e.g., long experience in teaching, or ability to make a course design corresponding to the needs of the learner).

(2) By having eight people, six student assistants, and two teachers (one native and one non-native) who have experience with accepting student assistants, each rank the most important five items in their view, a total of 40 items were listed.

(3) By deleting the overlapping items and adding the new items based on (1) and (2), 14 items were extracted.

(4) Finally, the modified questionnaire consisting of 37 items was completed based on (1) and (3). (See Table 2 below.)

The questionnaires were prepared in English and in Japanese. The survey was conducted between April and September 2013. The respondents were asked to rank items on a six-point scale as follows:

   1) Very unimportant　　2) Unimportant　　3) Somewhat unimportant

   4) Somewhat important　5) Important　　6) Very important

Table 2

37 question items concerning behavioral characteristics of good Japanese Language Assistants

1. Being positive about oneself, other people and one's life.
2. Being warm-hearted, considerate and kind.
3. Being obedient.
4. Being diligent.
5. Being enthusiastic about teaching.
6. Being patient.
7. Being tolerant towards different languages and cultures.

8. Being friendly and easy to speak to.
9. Being able to have a good personal relationship with others.
10. Being able to play it by ear.
11. Having a special ability for introducing Japanese culture, e.g. folding paper and singing songs.
12. Having a good knowledge of Japanese culture, history, mannerisms and customs.
13. Understanding well how things go in present Japan.
14. Having a good knowledge of world affairs.
15. Having previous experience of learning a foreign language(s).
16. Being able to analyze the Japanese language objectively.
17. Being able to speak standard Japanese.
18. Being highly proficient in Japanese.
19. Being interested in teaching Japanese as a foreign language.
20. Being a qualified teacher of Japanese as a foreign language, or in process of gaining qualifications.
21. Being aware that as a Japanese native speaker, an assistant is a model for learners.
22. Being aware of the assistant's role of which they are not the teacher-in-charge but have delegated responsibilities.
23. To enjoy being a Japanese language assistant.
24. Professionalism (e.g. being prompt, accurate, punctual) .
25. To take the initiative to find what to do.
26. Enjoying using and making a variety of materials including audio-visual aids, e.g. games and Power Point.
27. Being able to correct mistakes effectively.
28. Being able to guide each learner appropriately.
29. To know how to ask questions to elicit responses from learners.
30. Encouraging students to speak Japanese as often as possible.
31. Being able to explain in the students' native language or in English.
32. To manage to use English without inconvenience inside and outside of the class.
33. Making students well disciplined in the class.
34. Praising and encouraging students.
35. Trying not to perplex or ridicule students when they have made mistakes.
36. To act fairly towards learners.
37. To accept students' feelings.

2.3 Analytical method

Through using the descriptive statistics program SPSS Statistics 22, we examined the data.

3. Results

3.1 The results of the descriptive statistics

Table 3 shows the mean and the standard deviation of the descriptive statistics for the answers to the 37 items regarding behavioral characteristics of good Japanese language assistants by 112 people. The items are in order based on the highest to lowest mean scores.

Table 3

Average and standard deviation for the 37 items on the questionnaire in order of mean value

Item No.	Behavioural characteristics of good JLA	Minimum value	Maximum value	MeanNo	SD
5	Being enthusiastic about teaching.	1	6	5.53	1
35	Trying not to perplex or ridicule students when they have made mistakes.	1	6	5.51	1

7	Being tolerant towards different languages and cultures.	1	6	5.46	0.95
24	Professionalism (e.g. being prompt, accurate, punctual).	1	6	5.41	0.96
8	Being friendly and easy to speak to.	1	6	5.39	1.03
23	To enjoy being a Japanese language assistant.	1	6	5.38	0.96
36	To act fairly towards learners.	1	6	5.34	1.06
6	Being patient.	1	6	5.29	1.02
9	Being able to have a good personal relationship with others.	1	6	5.28	0.97
19	Being interested in teaching Japanese as a foreign language.	1	6	5.21	0.93
4	Being diligent.	1	6	5.21	0.98
2	Being warm-hearted, considerate and kind.	1	6	5.19	0.96
30	Encouraging students to speak Japanese as often as possible.	1	6	5.16	1.09
25	To take the initiative to find what to do.	1	6	5.15	1.05
34	Praising and encouraging students.	1	6	5.14	1.09
1	Being positive about oneself, other people and one's life.	1	6	5.07	1.09
28	Being able to guide each learner appropriately.	1	6	4.96	1
10	Being able to play it by ear.	1	6	4.96	1.01
17	Being able to speak standard Japanese.	1	6	4.96	1.06
37	To accept students' feelings.	1	6	4.95	1.11
29	To know how to ask questions to elicit responses from learners.	1	6	4.94	0.97
26	Enjoying using and making a variety of materials including audio-visual aids, e.g. games and Power Point.	1	6	4.91	1.04
22	Being aware of the assistant's role of not being the teacher-in-charge but having delegated responsibilities.	1	6	4.89	1.07
18	Being highly proficient in Japanese.	1	6	4.88	0.99
27	Being able to correct mistakes effectively.	1	6	4.86	1.09
12	Having a good knowledge of Japanese culture, history, mannerisms and customs.	1	6	4.82	1.07
21	Being aware that as a Japanese native speaker, an assistant is a model for learners.	1	6	4.81	1.12
13	Understanding well how things go in present Japan.	1	6	4.64	1.11
16	Being able to analyse the Japanese language objectively.	1	6	4.56	1.04
15	Having previous experience of learning a foreign language(s).	1	6	4.44	1.16
3	Being obedient.	1	6	4.34	1.13
11	Having a special ability for introducing Japanese culture, e.g. folding paper and singing songs.	1	6	4.31	1.11
31	Being able to explain in the students' native language or in English.	1	6	4.09	1.29
14	Having a good knowledge of world affairs.	1	6	3.99	1.1
32	To manage to use English without inconvenience inside and outside of the class.	1	6	3.97	1.13
20	Being a qualified teacher of Japanese as a foreign language, or in process of gaining qualifications.	1	6	3.79	1.33
33	Making students well disciplined in the class.	1	6	3.78	1.44

Note. Item No. is based on Table2

SD = Standard Deviation

3.2 Analysis

From the results shown in Table 3, we can find three clusters within the12 highest items. The first cluster could be named **"Enthusiasm as a person concerned with teaching, and consideration and patience toward learners"**, since the related items consist of "Being enthusiastic about teaching" (mean = 5.53), "Trying not to perplex or ridicule students when they have made mistakes" (5.51), "To act fairly towards learners" (5.34), "Being patient" (5.29), "Being diligent" (5.21) and "Being warm-hearted, considerate and kind" (5.19). The second cluster could be referred to as **"Intercultural competence"**, consisting of "Being tolerant towards different languages and cultures" (5.46), "Being friendly and easy to speak to" (5.39), and "Being able to have a good personal relationship with others" (5.28). The third cluster could be called **"Professionalism"**, since the mean of Professionalism (e.g. being prompt, accurate, punctual)" was the fourth highest among the 37 items, (5.41).

Secondly, we can find three clusters within middle 13 items. The first cluster could be named **"Bright and cheerful human nature"**, since it consists of "To enjoy being a Japanese language assistant" (5.38), "Praising and encouraging students" (5.14), and "Being positive about oneself, other people and one's life" (5.07). The second cluster can be referred to as **"Practical teaching skills"**, since it consists of "Being able to guide each learner appropriately" (4.96), "Being able to play it by ear" (4.96), "To know how to ask questions to elicit responses from learners" (4.94), "Enjoying using and making a variety of materials including audio-visual aids, e.g. games and Power Point" (4.91), and "Being able to correct mistakes effectively" (4.86). The third cluster could be called **"Japanese language ability"**, consisting of "Being able to speak standard Japanese" (4.96) and "Being highly proficient in Japanese" (4.88).

Finally, we can also find two clusters within the lower 12 items. The first cluster could be named **"Knowledge about Japanese culture and world affairs"**. It consists of "Having good knowledge of Japanese culture, history, mannerisms and customs" (4.82), "Understanding well how things go in present Japan" (4.64), "Being able to analyze the Japanese language objectively" (4.56), "Having a special ability for introducing Japanese culture, e.g. folding paper and singing songs" (4.31), and "Having a good knowledge of world affairs" (3.99). The second cluster could be called **"Foreign language ability"**, since it consists of "Having previous experience of learning a foreign language(s)" (4.44), "Being able to explain in the students' native language or in English" (4.09), and "To manage to use English without inconvenience inside and outside of the class" (3.97).

The above results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Variables grouped and organized in descending order.

cluster	variable
Enthusiasm as a person concerned with teaching, and consideration and patience toward learners	•Being enthusiastic about teaching (5.53) •Trying not to perplex or ridicule students when they have made mistakes (5.51) •To act fairly towards learners (5.34) •Being patient (5.29) •Being diligent (5.21) •Being warm-hearted, considerate and kind (5.19).
Intercultural competence	•Being tolerant towards different languages and cultures(5.46) •Being friendly and easy to speak to (5.39) •Being able to have a good personal relationship with others(5.28)
Professionalism	·Professionalism(e.g. being prompt, accurate, punctual) (5.41).
Bright and cheerful human nature	•To enjoy being a Japanese language assistant (5.38) •Praising and encouraging students (5.14) •Being positive about oneself, other people and one's life(5.07)

cluster	variable
Practical teaching skills	•Being able to guide each learner appropriately (4.96)
	•Being able to play it by ear (4.96)
	•To know how to ask questions to elicit responses from learners (4.94)
	•Enjoying using and making a variety of materials including audio-visual aids, e.g. games and Power Point (4.91)
	•Being able to correct mistakes effectively(4.86)
Japanese language ability	•Being able to speak standard Japanese (4.96)
	•Being highly proficient in Japanese (4.88).
Knowledge about Japanese culture and world affairs	•Having good knowledge of Japanese culture, history, mannerisms and customs (4.82)
	•Understanding well how things go in present Japan (4.64)
	•Being able to analyze the Japanese language objectively (4.56)
	•Having a special ability for introducing Japanese culture, e.g. folding paper and singing songs (4.31)
	•Having a good knowledge of world affairs (3.99)
Foreign language ability	•Having previous experience of learning a foreign language(s) (4.44)
	•Being able to explain in the students' native language or in English (4.09)
	•To manage to use English without inconvenience inside and outside of the class (3.97)

Note. High rank group indicates □, middle rank group indicates □, lower group indicates □

The number of ( ) is mean

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Through these analyses, it can be concluded that the Japanese Language Teachers in the English zone think the most important behavioral characteristics of good Japanese Language Assistants in secondary schools are enthusiasm for teaching and consideration towards learners along with intercultural competence and professionalism rather than knowledge and English ability.

Neustupny (1995) states that the Japanese Language Assistants do not have to know grammar or linguistics of Japanese, nor be proficient in the mother tongue of the learner, and that their declarative knowledge would rather be inappropriate. Those statements accord with the results of our research.

The findings of Nuibe (2009) show that Japanese Language Teachers in secondary schools in Australia and New Zealand think it very important to be teachers with the following characteristics: first, **"Bright and cheerful human nature"**; second, **"Practical teaching skills"**; third, **"Considerate attitude"**; and fourth, **"Knowledge about Japanese culture and world affairs"**.

Comparing the results of this study with Nuibe, et al (2009), the common findings are that attitude and the human nature are the most important characteristics and **"Knowledge about Japanese culture and world affairs"** is the least important. Furthermore, **"Intercultural competence"** and **"Professionalism"** are newly extracted in this study as important characteristics of JLA. Specifically, curiosity towards different languages and cultures, inclination for enjoying talking with people, and role recognition as the assistant could be included as characteristics required specifically of the JLA.

In conclusion, through the present study we have identified characteristics of JLA that Japanese Language Teachers in secondary education in English Zone think are important. These results could contribute to the training of assistants in university courses on Teaching Japanese as a Foreign Language. However, the result does not show a significant

relationship among clusters in Table 4. For example, the boundary between "Enthusiasm as a person concerned with teaching, and consideration and patience toward learners" and "Practical teaching skills " is not defined statistically. As for future issues, it will be necessary to further examine the correlation between the clusters through factor analysis such as exploratory factor analysis or confirmatory factor analysis.

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