



Title of Project:

The Impact of TESOL Teacher Education on Job Satisfaction for Native English Speakers Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages in Japan

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Project Summary

Motivation for the Research

There has been a growing critique over the hiring practices of so-called “native speaker” teachers relative to teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) based on their demographic backgrounds (Holiday, 2006; Houghton & Rivers, 2013). However, empirical evidence suggests that specific types of academic qualifications that should be prioritized during hiring practices overseas, and these priorities seem to be missing in many contexts. Very few studies have explored the potential effect of teachers having completed a TESOL teacher education program upon teacher effectiveness (e.g., Farrell, 2009; Kurihara & Samimy, 2007; Peacock, 2001). The studies to date have not only yielded inconsistent results, but they have also centered on the influence of a single program on teaching practices. This approach to research may underestimate the potential that can be found in the variety of teacher training/education that ‘native English speakers’ may possess in their workplaces overseas, as well as the potential influence they may have over broader aspects of their professional lives (e.g., relationship with colleagues, salary, and subjective well-being as foreign workers).

Research Design and Methodology

To fill these gaps in the literature, the current study aimed to clarify types of academic qualifications that were present within a specific group of “native English speaker” teachers in Japan (Assistant Language Teachers or ALTs, $N = 232$). The study then examined associations between teacher qualifications and educational backgrounds and their professional lives through the lens of job satisfaction. The study adopted a two-phase sequential explanatory design as a mixed methods approach (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). In the first phase, the online questionnaire collected information broadly on demographic, linguistic, educational backgrounds, and job experiences. The descriptive data here in part provided a clear clarification of “TESOL qualifications” that existed within this group of teachers in Japan.

The variations in ALT backgrounds were then numerically coded and used as predictor variables in the regression analysis to examine their potential influence on ALT job satisfaction. Job satisfaction is defined as “a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job or job experiences” (Locke, 1976, p. 1300), and the data were collected in the questionnaire using an existing teacher satisfaction scale (McKenzie, Rowley, Weldon &



Murphy, 2011). Job satisfaction was adopted as a useful indicator of a perceived match between the skills and knowledge that workers possessed and those required for the work (e.g., Green & Zhu, 2010; Locke, 1976). Exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis identified three latent variables: (1) satisfaction with team-teaching with local teachers, (2) satisfaction with students' progress, and (3) satisfaction with resources. These factors were used as dependent variables in the regression analysis in the first phase.

In the second phase of the study, 13 one-on-one interviews were conducted via Skype, and responses were collected by email from 24 additional participants. The interview data were analysed using a deductive thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2008) in search of plausible explanations for both the significant and non-significant associations discovered through the subsequent regression analysis.

Major Findings

The educational backgrounds of ALTs. The study found a high level of diversity among the academic qualifications and educational backgrounds of participating “native speaker” Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs, $N = 232$) in Japan. The study then clarified types of qualifications in which they had self-reportedly acquired their perceived skills and knowledge of TESOL.

- Overall, these 232 ALTs had completed a total of 359 academic qualifications in a variety of discipline areas such as Humanities and Arts ($n = 154$, 43% out of 359 qualifications); Social Science, Business and Law ($n = 71$, 20%); Education ($n = 66$, 18%); Science ($n = 30$, 8%); Health and Welfare ($n = 12$, 3%) and Engineering, Manufacturing, and Construction ($n = 6$, 1%).
- A little over 35% of participants ($n = 87$, 37.5%) self-reported that they had learned some skills or knowledge in TESOL (hereafter called TESOL skills/knowledge) while completing academic qualifications they possessed ($n = 110$, defined as TESOL related qualifications). Over 85% of these qualifications were either in Education ($n = 50$, 45.5% of these 110 qualifications), or Humanities and Arts ($n = 45$, 41%).
- A close examination of names/titles of these TESOL related qualifications revealed that ALTs have learned their perceived TESOL skills/knowledge not only with qualifications that have been developed specifically for TESOL teacher education purpose (e.g., CELTA, Bachelor of Arts in TESOL, Master of TESOL), but also in much broader types of studies such as: teacher education in other fields (e.g., Bachelor of Education), the study of languages (English, Japanese, or in linguistics in general), and other miscellaneous disciplines (e.g., drama, journalism, law, multicultural counselling, psychology, and sociology).
- Despite this diversity, individual subjects that ALTs had completed in these studies were very similar to those frequently reported as core elements of existing TESOL programs (e.g., Christopher, 2005; Govardhan et al. 1999).
- Of the 110 TESOL related qualifications, 45 % ($n = 49$) included some kind of teaching practicum. Teacher practicum experience appeared to differ from program to program (e.g., duration, required hours of teaching, student proficiency levels, class sizes).

ALT educational backgrounds and job satisfaction. Overall, these data show that there were very few strong associations between ALT's educational backgrounds and their job



satisfaction scores. In most cases, ALT job satisfaction had little to do with what they had studied in their home countries.

- No difference was made by ALTs' Japanese language learning experience (measured in length of study) nor by their TESOL related qualification status (i.e., whether they had self-reportedly learned their perceived TESOL skills/knowledge or not).
- Next, ALT qualifications in TESOL were re-defined using qualification names, so that they include only qualifications that have been designed specifically for TESOL teacher education purpose (hereafter TESOL certifications) (e.g., CELTA, Master of TESOL, Bachelor of Arts in Applied Linguistics, $n = 56$).
- When compared dichotomously (i.e., those who had it vs those who did not), *TESOL certification* status did not make any significant and/or substantial difference to any of their job satisfaction scores.
- However, when internal variations within TESOL certifications (e.g., academic levels, number of individual subjects studied, teaching practicum length, class size) were entered in the models, some significant and substantial influences were identified.
- ALTs who had completed a TESOL certification that included more than 20 individual subjects were significantly more satisfied with their team-teaching work than those who had a TESOL certification with less than 20 subjects ($b = 1.132$, $SE B = 0.529$, $\beta = 0.369$, $t = 2.140$, $\rho = 0.039$, $d = 0.611$).
- Also, ALTs were significantly and substantially more satisfied with their students' progress when they had completed a TESOL certification that included a teaching practicum experience in a class with more than 20 students, when compared to those who completed a practicum in smaller class or who did not complete any practicum ($b = 1.536$, $SE B = 0.677$, $\beta = 0.376$, $t = 2.269$, $\rho = 0.029$, $d = 0.648$).

Interview Data Analyses. By contrast, the analysis of interview data revealed that ALTs perceived their qualifications, in particular the skills and knowledge they had acquired through their TESOL certification, both positively and negatively. Such a mixture of perceptions may have affected the relative lack of significant statistical associations between job satisfaction and educational backgrounds.

- Most participants who had completed a TESOL certification felt that the skills and knowledge that they had developed from their teacher education programs enhanced their ability to work as ALTs, particularly while they were teaching classes as main teacher and independently from other teachers who formed the local teaching team.
- At the same time, however, they felt their existing skills were often not fully utilised in the Japanese context, especially under the constraints of team-teaching with local teachers who adopted more traditional approaches to language teaching and were less skilled in working with “native speaker” assistants.
- Also, many interviewees provided verbal accounts that demonstrated their appreciation of the Japanese language and culture, not only when communicating with Japanese students in and out of class, but also when communicating with local colleagues and supervisors who were not necessarily proficient in English. Such accounts were provided both by ALTs who were proficient in Japanese and by those who had limited understanding of Japanese language (“I wish I knew more of the Japanese language”). They both felt that



such skills helped them (or would have helped them) to communicate more effectively as foreign workers in Japan and feel accepted as part of the local school workplace.

- At the same time, ALTs who were proficient in Japanese commented on the fact that their use of the Japanese language in class often de-motivated students from using the target language (English) to communicate with them. Such a side effect was perceived very negatively both by ALTs themselves and local teachers who believed that the main role of so-called “native speaker” ALTs was to provide Japanese students with opportunities to engage in English conversation with ‘native speaker’ human resources.

Implications

Overall, the findings from this study suggest that the skills and knowledge that are emphasized during TESOL teacher education should match those required in the target context for graduating teachers. If, for instance, graduates are likely to be teaching in a relatively large class, then they need to be exposed to a class of a similar size during their practicum courses so that they can acquire the teaching skills and knowledge bases that are unique to teaching large classes. Class size matters in a teaching practicum in TESOL.

Pedagogically, no single approach to language teaching should be treated as “the best and only” approach that can be applied to a specific context, and teachers need to raise their awareness of alternative approaches during their teacher training/education. Such an awareness is particularly important for those who have completed a relatively short (i.e., fewer subjects) TESOL teacher training courses.

Also, there needs to be more attention paid to the team-teaching job of ESOL teachers during teacher training/education. While team-teaching between so-called native and non-native speaker teachers is increasing in other contexts (e.g., Wu & Ke, 2009), none of the existing qualifications/programs in the study appears to have provided teacher candidates with the opportunity to study the theoretical backgrounds of team-teaching (i.e., advantages and limitations) and the practical strategies and techniques for effective team-teaching.

The analysis of interview data suggests a strong effect for proficiency in the local language. English speaking teacher candidates should familiarize themselves with local language and culture as part of their teacher training experience because such skills and knowledge may help them communicate with local students and colleagues more effectively when working in a foreign environment. At the same time, given that the negative side effects of “native speaker” teachers’ ability in the local language have also been revealed through the analysis, future programs could also provide pre-service teachers with the opportunity to explore how (not) to use the learners’ first language in class.

Collectively, the implications highlight the unique and significant challenges for providers of TESOL teacher education. Unlike teacher education programs in other contexts, TESOL programs must serve their students (i.e., future teachers) who will likely be working in different contexts or who may not even know their future context. With this continuing reality in the industry, TESOL teacher education should allow students to develop an understanding of sociocultural, pedagogical, and educational norm(s) in the individual workplaces where they could possibly be working and explore the pedagogical roles they may perform in those contexts. Such understandings may direct future teachers to select appropriate workplace(s) where the teaching skills and knowledge bases that they have acquired as teacher candidates provide the best matches based on what may be expected in the workplace.



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