

# An Investigation of the Identity and Teaching Practices of Japanese Teachers of English in Japanese Higher Education

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## Abstract

This study reports the qualitative results obtained from a questionnaire survey that was distributed by email to 420 Japanese teachers of English in various types of universities throughout Japan. The three questions discussed in this paper are 1) Do you think of yourself as an English language teacher? 2) How did you learn to teach English? and 3) How do you teach a typical class? Although the response rate to the questionnaire was low (7.3%), the analysis showed that a relationship does exist between the participants' self-identity as an English language teacher and their teaching beliefs and practices. In order to better understand English education in Japan, it is suggested that further investigation of Japanese university English teachers is warranted.

*Keywords: Japan, university language teaching, teacher identity, teacher beliefs, teacher practices*

## Introduction

The goals of English language education in Japan shifted from originally being communicative-based in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century to enable students to study *in* English, to being test-based in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in order to demonstrate knowledge *about* English as a means to gain admission to higher education (Butler & Iino, 1998; Smith & Imura, 2004). Over-attention paid to seldom-used grammatical forms and obscure vocabulary that are needed to pass difficult entrance examinations is thus commonly believed to be the reason behind Japanese people's generally poor command of English. Many university graduates are unable to communicate in simple English even after having studied it for at least eight years. This brought forth a great deal of criticism from the business community who needed to invest time and money in improving the communicative skills of newly hired recruits, resulting in the Federation of Economics Organizations in Japan demanding an English education that would result in students attaining better communicative skills (Aspinall, 2006).

In attempts to improve Japanese students' English ability, the Ministry of Education revised its course of study in 1989/1990 and 1998/1999, and again in 2002/2003. Under its new name, the Ministry of Education, Health, Science and Welfare (MEXT) directed an emphasis on spoken

communication and the study of culture (Neustupny & Tanaka, 2004). The last revisions in 2002/2003, known as the “Action Plan”, had concrete goals to improve English language education in Japan. These goals include improving secondary schools’ English classes; improving secondary school teachers’ English communicative and pedagogical skills; increasing student motivation; creating alternative types of university entrance examinations; introducing English language education in elementary schools; and improving students’ Japanese language abilities (MEXT, 2003).

What is notably absent from the Action Plan is attention paid to *university* English classes or *university* English teachers. The only mention of English at the tertiary level concerns the improvement of university entrance exams and the call for more university classes to be taught in English. No mention was made of improving university teachers’ communicative or pedagogical skills or raising the quality of teacher education programs. Failing to bring tertiary English education into the official discourse of reforming English education in Japan may thwart the overall goals of the Action Plan to create a nation of English speakers because such top-down educational initiatives are, for reasons that will be discussed, unlikely to bring results.

Considering that there is generally a four-year gap between secondary school graduation and entrance into the workforce, tertiary English education must take responsibility for the ultimate outcome of students’ English language abilities. However, English language instruction at the tertiary level is said to be limited and students generally learn *about* English-related subjects such as literature or linguistics *in* Japanese (Neustupny & Tanaka, 2004; Aspinall, 2006). Nagasawa’s (2004) survey of Japanese English teachers’ practices in 19 universities (national and private) found that academic English classes, such as literature or linguistics, are taught in Japanese 95% of the time, and that non-academic classes, such as conversation, cross-cultural understanding and teaching methodology are taught in Japanese 65% of the time.

In addition, university English teachers’ pedagogical practices can also influence the teaching practices of secondary school English teachers, as teachers tend to model their own teaching practices on the years spent in what Lortie (1975) calls an “apprenticeship of observation” (p.61). This means that the thousands of hours students spend in classes watching their teachers, plays a role in influencing future teachers’ teaching practices.

Moreover, university English teachers also teach required courses for obtaining teaching licenses. Many of these professors do not have teaching licenses themselves, and because each university is able to determine their own course content, these teachers are often left to their own devices as to how to go about teaching them (Nagasawa, 2004). Kizuka (1999) argues that a major problem with teacher education is that many university teachers have “little actual interest in teacher preparation” (cited in Gorsuch, 2001, para 12). Furthermore, as Neustupny and Tanaka (2004) point out, teacher education has “ignored and continues to ignore the results of applied linguistics research over the last 30 years, including research about social issues in language acquisition” (p.24). They argue that with little interest in acquiring knowledge about

language pedagogy, and an outdated understanding of how people actually learn languages, it is likely that university teachers continue to draw upon their own language learning experiences, and perpetuate the *yakudoku* system where attention is given to grammar and translation at the expense of teaching real communication skills (see also Hino, 1988).

Gorsuch (2001) notes the impact that tertiary teachers have on secondary school teachers' pedagogical practices, and attributes the difficulty of diffusing MEXT's goals of communicative language teaching into secondary schools to the pre-service teacher education system which "is inadequate to the task of supporting the development of fundamental changes in instruction implied by policies" (para 20). Since English language and English education classes at the tertiary level are said to be concerned with talking *about* English *in* Japanese (Nagasawa, 2004), it is not surprising that many secondary school teachers feel unprepared for English language teaching after graduating from university (Browne & Wada, 1998; Lamie, 1998, 2000, 2002), and indeed unprepared to implement MEXT's new goals (Butler & Iino 2005; Nishino 2008).

Perhaps most importantly, the English component of university entrance examinations, constructed by university English teachers, is recognized to be of utmost importance in shaping secondary school teaching practices in Japan (Gorsuch, 2001; Browne & Wada, 1998; Guest, 2000; Sakui, 2004, Smith & Imura, 2004; Nishino, 2006). Brown and Yamashita (1995) argue that many university teachers have no specialized knowledge in language testing. Kimura and Visgatis (1996) assert that questions on these exams have been found to be more difficult than MEXT's officially approved English language textbooks, and suggest that university teachers are not aware of, or perhaps are not paying enough attention to, the official curriculum guidelines for secondary schools. As a result, pressure is placed upon secondary school teachers, who need to "second guess" what may be asked of their students on these important examinations.

Success in high-stakes university entrance exams is one of the most important concerns of students, parents and teachers (Smith & Imura, 2004) because of the profound impact of the outcome on students' lives (Beauchamp, 1987; Ishida, 1993; Ono, 2001). In secondary schools, therefore, even classes that are identified as communication-based classes focus mainly on "teacher-fronted grammatical explanations, chorus reading, and vocabulary presentations" (Sakui 2004, p.157), because accumulating such knowledge to pass an entrance examination is a more important and immediate goal than developing communicative competence in English.

In sum, the English goals of MEXT may not be in harmony with the realities of English language education in Japan, and there is a clear need to include the teaching practices and beliefs of tertiary English teachers in the discourse of discussing English language education and its reform in Japan. This is necessary to create reforms that can take root from the bottom up—which may result in greater success in diffusing curricular change in Japan—than from top down directives that are "perceived to be inappropriate at a grass-roots level (Smith & Imura, 2004, p.38).

To date, few studies have examined the teaching practices and beliefs of English teachers in Japanese higher education, and those that did focus on this powerful group of teachers examined

their teaching practices and beliefs in conjunction with non-Japanese teachers as well (e.g. Duff & Uchida, 1997; Simon-Maeda, 2004; Stewart, 2005, 2006). The current study therefore focuses only on Japanese teachers to better understand English education at the tertiary level in Japan. This study focuses on whether or not Japanese teachers of English in Japanese higher education identify as English language teachers, how these teachers developed their language teaching skills, and how they teach a typical language class.

## METHODOLOGY

### Questionnaire

A questionnaire instrument, designed to elicit information concerning biographical details, current teaching situation, beliefs toward teaching and language learning, and actual teaching practices, was constructed, piloted and distributed to 460 college and university English teachers in two waves, one month apart, in March, 2008. Most of the questionnaire recipients were found on a website of 420 Japanese universities with English department homepages (Matsuoka, 1999). The initial survey distribution yielded only 19 returned surveys, with nine respondents agreeing to answer further questions by email. Eight of the nineteen respondents were sourced from the direct mailing of the questionnaire, but eleven were personally known to me, or were introduced to me by their colleagues. Over the next twenty months, I distributed a small number of questionnaires to teachers that I met at language teaching conferences. By January 2009, 31 completed questionnaires had been received.

### Participants

Table 1 provides the biographical information of the 31 participants

Table 1 Participants' biographical data

#	Gender	Age	Region	Position	University	Area of study	Degrees
1	M	47	Kansai	Professor	Private	English Education Applied Linguistics	BA, MA
2	F	37	Kansai	Associate professor	Public	Literature	BA, MA
3	F	40	Kanto	Assistant professor	National	Linguistics	BA, MA PhD
4	M	32	Kansai	Assistant professor	Private	Linguistics	BA, MA PhD
5	M	55	Kyushu	Professor	Private	English Education Teacher Education	BA, MA PhD
6	M	52	Kanto	Professor	Private	Linguistics, English Applied linguistics Intercultural communication, economics	BA, MA, PhD
7	F	53	Kanto	Part-time	Private	English Education	BA, MA, PhD (unfinished)

8	F	42	Kanto	Part-time	Private	Literature	BA, MA
9	F	50	Chubu Tokai	Professor	Private Jr. college	Literature	BA, MA
10	F	42	Kanto	Assistant Professor	Private	Literature Women's studies English Education	BA, BA MA, MA PhD (unfinished)
11	F	29	Chubu Tokai	Assistant Professor	Private	Linguistics	BA, MA PhD
12	F	34	Kansai	Assistant Professor	Private	Literature	BA, MA
13	M	52	Kansai	Professor	National	Linguistics	BA, MA
14	M	32	Kansai	Assistant Professor	Private	Literature	BA, MA, MA PhD**
15	M	35	Kyushu	Part-time lecturer	Private	English Education Communication	BA, MA PhD (unfinished)
16	M	50	Kanto	Professor	Private	English Education Linguistics	BA, MA, MA PhD
17	M	40	Kyushu	Associate Professor	National	Linguistics English Education	BA, MA PhD
18	M	50s	Kansai	Associate Professor	Private	Literature Linguistics English Education	BA, MA PhD (unfinished)
19	M	51	Kanto	Professor	Private	Linguistics	BA, MA PhD (unfinished)
20	M	33	Kanto	Assistant Professor	Private	Adult and community education	BA, MA PhD (unfinished)
21	M	43	Kanto	Associate Professor	Private	Italian Literature/ Impact of study abroad	BA, MA PhD (unfinished)
22	F	35	Kanto	Assistant Professor	National	American Literature	BA, MA, PhD
23	M	67	Kanto	Part-time lecturer	Private	English linguistics, Applied Chemistry Business Communication	BA, BA, MA
24	F	32	Kyushu	Part-time Lecturer	National Private	American Literature	BA, MA
25	F	60	Kyushu	Part-time Lecturer	Private, National, Prefectural	English linguistics English Education	BA, MA
26	F	51	Kyushu	Part-time lecturer	Private	English translation	BA
27	F	45	Kyushu	Associate Professor	Prefectural	American studies and folklore	BA, MA, PhD
28	F	35	Kanto	Associate Professor	Private Jr. College	American Literature	BA, MA
29	M	53	Kansai	Professor	National	Linguistics, Applied Linguistics	BA, MA, PhD
30	F	63	Miyagi	Part-time	Private	Literature	BA, MA
31	M	50s	Miyagi	Professor	Private	Sociolinguistics	BA, MA, MA

As the table shows, the participants represent a wide spectrum of university English teachers in Japan. They range in age from their late twenties to their mid-sixties; they range from being part-time teachers to full-time assistant, associate and full professors at 28 different universities; they live and work from the southern tip of Japan up to the north; they teach at academically low-level private universities to highly prestigious national universities. They conduct research in literature, linguistics, English education, and other fields. All but one participant has at least a Master's degree; three participants have two Master's degrees in different fields. Of the nine participants who hold PhDs, three were obtained from Japanese universities and six were obtained from foreign universities.

The varied areas of academic specialization among the respondents are worth noting. As English teachers, it is expected that many have specialized in English-related subjects such

as literature, linguistics, or English education, but it is somewhat surprising that others have specialized in areas such as sociology, women’s studies, economics, Italian literature, and even chemistry. It is also interesting to note that academic interests have shifted over time, particularly among the older participants or among those who received part of their education from foreign universities. Participant 6, a 52-year-old professor at a private university, first studied linguistics for his BA, applied linguistics for his MA, and intercultural communication and economics for his PhD. Participant 23, a 67 year-old part-time teacher, has a mixed background in English linguistics, applied chemistry, and business communication.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The participants’ responses to the Likert scale questions were analyzed to obtain the descriptive data, and the responses to the open-ended questions on the questionnaire and the responses obtained from the follow-up email questions were analyzed qualitatively. Due to space limitations, this paper only discusses the responses to the following three questions:

- 1) Do you think of yourself as an English language teacher?
- 2) How did you learn to teach English?
- 3) How do you teach a typical class?

### Do you think of yourself as an English language teacher?

While all respondents said that teaching-related activities consumed much of their time and they all believed that teaching their classes well ranked in the top two activities for furthering their careers, when specifically asked how strongly they agreed with the statement, “I think of myself as an English language teacher,” their responses varied considerably, as shown in Table 2:

**Table 2 I think of myself as an English language teacher**

	Number	%
Strongly disagree	0	-
Mildly disagree	7	22.6
Neither agree nor disagree	8	25.8
Mildly agree	9	29.0
Strongly Agree	7	22.6
Total	31	100.0

It is interesting that only half of the participants identified as English language teachers. One plausible explanation for some teachers holding ambivalent attitudes toward language teaching is the gap between English language teaching and their research in English-related areas. It could be assumed that teachers specializing in English education or applied linguistics should

identify more as English language teachers than those specializing in literature, but this was not necessarily the case among the respondents in this study. It could also be assumed that those who had worked as secondary school English teachers would identify more as English language teachers than those who did not, but again, this was not necessarily the case. Participants with PhDs could be assumed to be more inclined to self-identify as researchers and not as English language teachers, but again, this was not necessarily the case.

Identification as language teachers may have been influenced by the participants' own definitions of language teaching, which presumably guide their classroom teaching. Let us now consider several comments from the open-ended questions and from the follow-up email questions in relation to the responses to the questionnaire questions that dealt with teaching practices and teaching. In order to retain the participants' voices, their comments are written verbatim and may be somewhat ungrammatical.

Participant 3, in answering questions in a follow-up email, defines an English language teacher as "a person who encourages her students to develop and expand the vocabulary and grammar, to understand the organization of a paragraph and an essay, and to deepen the understanding of other different cultures." She attributes her positive identification as a language teacher to her approach to teaching, which she said, includes the following:

[Teach] basic skills to read English essays and listen to English talks and news [to] show differences between English and Japanese in terms of languages and cultures, and [to] devise and practice a scheme for getting my students to read and listen to the large quantities of English materials for pleasure.

For this respondent, there is no gap between her beliefs about language teaching and how she carries out her teaching. She says that she almost never teaches in English. Because she sees teaching as the transmission of information to her students, teaching in Japanese is seen to be an effective use of teaching time. She explains that as "students and teachers are both Japanese, Japanese explanation is easier to understand for my students and for me when I explain difficult English sentences and logic."

Participant 2, on the other hand, mildly disagrees with identifying as an English language teacher. She explains:

I think an English teacher (in higher education) is a person who helps those who want to improve their English skills. But as an English teacher, I would like to teach my students pleasure of reading, communicating in English, and if possible, power of words, beauty of their sounds, through reading poetry.

This comment illustrates a gap in what she perceives to be important to a language teacher

and what she does, or would like to do, as an English teacher. This gap may explain why she cannot identify as an English language teacher, even though she teaches English.

Participant 9, on the other hand, seems to have been able to bridge the gap between teaching English language and her academic specialty, although she is ambivalent about identifying as an English language teacher. She says in a follow-up email that even though she prefers teaching her academic specialty, she still draws satisfaction from teaching English because her students are motivated and hard working. She utilizes a mixture of teaching methods, including traditional (translation, calling on students one-by-one, correcting them when they make a mistakes), and a communicative approach (students work in pairs and groups). Her teaching style may be the result of her 25 years of teaching experience, together with her interaction with many native-English speaking teachers who specialize in TESOL at her university.

Learning how to bridge the gap between one's academic specialty and the teaching of English language may be one of the most critical elements for developing professional identity for Japanese university English teachers. Participant 12, for example, feels ambivalent toward identifying as a teacher, although she says she feels confident with her teaching skills. However, she also feels her educational background inadequately prepared her for teaching English. She says:

I was not trained to be an English language teacher but to be a researcher. It is not only I, but all graduate students of ex-imperial universities in Japan who major in literature. We have been encouraged to study, but never to improve teaching skills! I think this doesn't hold true for English language majors and education majors. As a literature major, I have been baffled at the gap between my graduate school days and now.

This teacher attributes her difficulty in adjusting to English teaching to her being a literature major, and this suggests that those who have studied linguistics or education may have been better prepared for teaching. However, this may not necessarily be true, because another participant who is also a literature major from a different ex-imperial university has a different perspective. Participant 14, like Participant 12, neither agreed nor disagreed with identifying as an English language teacher. What is different for him, however, is that he has a teaching license from the education department of his university. Furthermore, he credits his experience in the teacher education program, particularly his student teaching experiences, as an extremely positive influence over his teaching practices. The differences in the preparedness to begin a teaching career between these two participants are likely to be due to a number of other factors as well, for Participant 14 may have a personal inclination toward teaching, which might be why he sought a teaching license as an undergraduate student and Participant 12 did not.

Nevertheless, it is impossible to ignore that Participant 12 felt that her teachers did not



encourage her to “improve teaching skills.” As a graduate student from a prestigious university, however, it should have been evident to them and to her that she was bound for a career as a university teacher, where nearly all academics who specialize in an English related field must ultimately teach the English language. One explanation for her teachers’ attitudes toward English language teaching may be related to its relatively low status, for it is often considered that anyone who is a native speaker, or anyone who is proficient at a language, can teach it (e.g. Duff and Uchida, 1997; Simon-Maeda, 2004). This contributes to an elitism which may result in divided attitudes toward English language teaching, and a situation where English teachers prefer to position themselves as academics in their chosen fields rather than as language teachers, which results in the marginalization of those specializing in language teaching (Stewart, 2006). Such negative attitudes toward language teaching as a profession do not, of course, exist solely in the Japanese context (see Pennington, 1997; Johnston, 1997). University teachers are generally hired for their academic qualifications and research publications, and not because of their teaching skills. This may be true of all university teachers in all areas of specialization, but most university teachers teach in their area of academic expertise. However, English teachers in Japan, with expertise in an English-related field, are still called upon to teach the English language, especially at the onset of their university careers.

Some university teachers of English in Japan understandably may prefer to project an image of themselves as scholars, having taken years of study to achieve their status, and downplay an image of themselves as English language teachers simply teaching English language classes. Participant 12’s literature teachers, for example, may not have been particularly interested in the English language classes they have taught, or are currently teaching, and thus they have encouraged their protégée to focus on literature at the expense of obtaining practical English language teaching knowledge for her future. If this is true, then it is quite possible that university teachers help perpetuate a cycle of negative attitudes toward teaching English in their students who proceed to become university teachers.

### **How did you learn to teach English?**

Having considered the issue of self-identity as a language teacher, now let us consider an equally important question that will have contributed to those self-perceptions as a teacher, namely how these teachers learned to teach English.

The first of the questionnaire’s open-ended questions, asked the respondents to describe in key words how they learned to teach English. The questionnaire supplied the terms, “trial and error,” “observing other teachers” and “attending teaching conferences” as example key words, and these were often cited verbatim by the participants as how they learned their teaching skills. Other categories were created by the participants. Thus, coding responses required combining similar categories. For example, under the category of “books and journals,” the wording of

the responses may have varied, but the core meaning—that they learned language teaching by reading about it—was the same. The most common methods of learning how to teach, followed by the number of times it was mentioned by the participants, are the following:

- Trial and error (19)
- From other teachers—talking with, observation, asking advice (16)
- Books and journals (8)
- Own experiences as a student (8)
- Improving own language skills (8)
- Attend teacher conferences (7)
- Feedback from students (6)

The first five categories above will now be discussed and compared with the participants' perceptions of themselves as language teachers.

#### *Trial and error*

The most commonly cited method of learning how to teach, regardless of whether or not the participants identified as language teachers, was *trial and error*, and it was mentioned by nineteen participants.

Perhaps all teachers in all subjects develop their teaching skills to a certain extent through trial and error. However, what is interesting to note among these participants is that ten do not have teaching licenses. Teacher education can provide potential teachers with theoretical knowledge in areas that lay outside the specific subject matter, such as educational psychology and classroom management. What is learned in a training program can be applied and/or rejected once in the classroom through trial and error. However, for those without prior pedagogical training, the period of adjustment in the classroom must be more difficult and stressful.

Participant 22 said preparation for her first university teaching job involved being handed the course's textbook and being told to teach everything from it so the students would be able to pass a standardized test at the end of the semester. For new English teachers in Japan, such a 'sink or swim' method may be rather common, as Participant 12's earlier comments illustrated about the gap between her graduate school study and the realities of teaching. Since many of the teachers also report confidence in their teaching and beliefs that they are good at teaching, learning through trial and error may be an effective way to develop teaching skills, even if it may be somewhat nerve-racking as a method.

#### *From other teachers*

Regardless of whether or not they identify as language teachers, sixteen participants report interaction with other teachers to be an important aspect in their learning how to teach. Such interaction included asking senior teachers for advice, discussing teaching with colleagues,

observing what other teachers do, studying together in teacher-training programs or graduate school, and through exchanging emails with teachers from around the world. Although those who self-identify as English language teachers seemed more inclined to seek out opportunities to learn about teaching from colleagues—particularly those outside of the university in which the participants work—this was not always the case.

#### *Books and journals*

There may be a connection between self-identification as a language teacher and seeking information about language teaching through books and journals. Out of the eight teachers who said they learned teaching through reading about it, only one, who is in the process of completing his dissertation in communication at an American university, mildly disagreed with identifying as an English language teacher. It would be interesting to know what came first: identifying as a language teacher and thus studying about language teaching, or studying about language teaching first as a way to come to terms with the demands of the job and as a result, developing an identity as a language teacher. Participant 10 learned to identify as a language teacher after entering a TESOL graduate program for the sole purpose of enhancing her employment prospects. Prior to learning about language learning and language teaching, she said she had looked down upon those who were “just” language teachers.

#### *Experiences as students*

Not surprisingly, eight participants said that they had learned their teaching skills from their own experiences as students. Which teachers they chose to emulate is unclear—did they have a dynamic teacher that inspired them to become English teachers, or are they drawing upon the accumulated years of English classes that they had? Did the teachers make a conscious choice to emulate their teachers, or was this the result of having no other teaching framework to draw upon?

#### *Improving own language skills*

Many teachers also said that they developed their teaching skills through the improvement of their own English skills. As non-native English speakers, many feel the necessity in keeping up their language skills in order to maintain confidence in the content matter (grammatical and lexical aspects of language) of what they teach. Participant 9 reported going to English conversation classes to brush up her speaking ability, and Participant 24, said taking English proficiency examinations enabled her to keep up and improve her English ability.

The responses to this question indicate that there may be a relationship between identification as a language teacher and learning how to teach. What would be interesting to learn would be whether or not teachers would develop a stronger sense of professional identity as an English language teacher if more assistance were provided in helping teachers learn how to teach their

classes.

### How Do You Teach a Typical Class?

Now, let us turn to the second open-ended question, which asked the respondents to describe, using key words, how they teach a typical class. Most participants listed a variety of classroom activities they engage in while teaching. Initially, I listed all responses, but some were set aside because they did not deal with actual language teaching (such as “return students’ reports”) or because it was unclear what the participants meant by their response (such as “to get back self-esteem and respect for themselves and others”). The remaining responses were then inductively categorized by theme, with a resultant twelve categories accounting for 139 different (but often overlapping) classroom procedures mentioned by the 31 participants.

In the language education literature, classroom activities are often reduced to just two types: those that focus on fluency and those that focus on accuracy (Ur, 1996). For the purposes of this study, a further degree of delicacy was desired for each of these two types. Accordingly, the teaching practices that the survey participants mentioned that *appeared* to focus on communication, where students were asked to be actively involved in the class, were further analyzed and categorized under the category of ‘fluency’. Teaching practices that *appeared* to focus on structure, where teachers transmitted knowledge to the students through their teaching (see Wright, 2005 for a thorough discussion on transmission-based teaching), were further analyzed and categorized under the category of ‘accuracy’. Tables 3 and 4 compare the teachers’ stated activities under these two categories with the degree to which they self-identify as language teachers. This inventory of the teachers mentioned practices, however, does not necessarily reflect their actual classroom practices, because there is no way of knowing from these responses alone what the teachers actually do in the classroom. Indeed, it is possible to conduct a grammar lesson with active student involvement and it is possible for students to be passive during activities that are designed for listening for pleasure. Nevertheless, by dividing the teaching activities into these two categories, we can see that there is a fair balance in classroom activities between fluency and accuracy.

Table 3 Activities that focus on accuracy

Common classroom activities engaged in by the teachers that appear to focus on accuracy and structure	Number of times these activities were mentioned by participants			
	Mildly or strongly agree with being an English language teacher	Mildly or strongly disagree with being an English language teacher	Neither agree nor disagree with being an English language teacher	Total number of times this activity was mentioned by the teachers <sup>1</sup>
1. Grammar, understanding differences between Japanese and English language usage/ explanation /meta-cognitive skills	9	6	4	19
2. Check students' comprehension/ understanding/ give quizzes/ do exercises	12	4	1	17
3. Reading aloud, repetition, shadowing, correcting students' pronunciation, dictation	9	4	3	16
4. Translation	4	3	2	9
5. Understand/develop vocabulary	2	0	3	5

Table 4 Activities that focus on fluency

Common classroom activities engaged in by the teachers that appear to focus on fluency and expression.	Number of times these activities were mentioned by participants			
	Mildly or strongly agree with being an English language teacher	Mildly or strongly disagree with being an English language teacher	Neither agree nor disagree with being an English language teacher	Total number of times this activity was mentioned by the teachers
1. Pair/group discussions/speaking/peer editing	15	4	6	25
2. Listening for pleasure and information, videos, CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning)	9	6	3	18
3. Write sentences, paragraphs, and essays	2	3	5	10
4. Paraphrase, summarize, understand main ideas, research skills, academic writing	6	0	1	7
5. Extensive reading, critical reading, literary reading	4	1	0	5
6. Explain cultural differences, different ways of thinking	1	3	0	4
7. Role play	1	2	0	3
8. Give speeches	0	1	1	2

Many of the classroom activities, such as those focusing on translation and grammar, are often criticized by language educators as ineffective or inefficient, especially if too much attention is paid to them at the expense of those activities focusing on communication. Nevertheless, we can see from the participants' responses that those communicative-based activities, such as group

discussion, pair work, and writing for expression are also employed by the teachers. What is interesting to note is that according to these teachers, there seems to be no real difference in self-identification as a language teacher and the decision to utilize accuracy based or fluency based activities. However, as mentioned earlier, no real conclusion can be drawn from this data because it is not clear *how* the teachers actually conducted their classes. It is also not clear exactly what kind of class the teachers were referring to when they described a typical class. Classes that focus on writing, reading, listening or speaking are bound to require teachers to employ different teaching strategies.

## Conclusion

This exploratory study set out to examine how Japanese teachers of English in Japanese higher education self-identify as English language teachers in order to gain some understanding of English language education at the tertiary level. The response rate for this questionnaire was too low to enable the use of inferential statistics to draw correlations concerning the strength of any relationship between self-identity as an English language teacher and a scholar, and teaching beliefs and practices. Nevertheless, the data analyzed and interpreted through a qualitative approach suggests that such a relationship does exist, and that further investigation of Japanese university English teachers is warranted. The degree to which participants' identify as English language teachers differs and it is connected to various factors, including individual academic backgrounds, personal inclinations toward teaching, teaching experience, and relationships with colleagues. It is complex and dependent upon numerous factors, the greatest of which may be the teachers' own academic specialties.

Because these 31 respondents took the time to answer the questionnaire survey, it is reasonable to assume that they all have a certain amount of interest in language teaching and language education. However, what would be even more interesting to learn, would be what the teaching practices and beliefs are of the 389 university English teachers who did not return the original survey. What they think, do, and believe would reveal much about the state of English language education at the tertiary level in Japan.

## Footnotes

- 1 If a participant mentioned the same activity twice, it was counted twice.

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