

Teacher Certification Renewal System: An Analysis Based on a Nation-wide Survey of Japanese Teachers of English

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Background

In October 2007, three education bills, including the Revised Teacher's License Law were approved by the Central Education Council in February and submitted to the Diet. The purpose of the Revised Teacher's License Law was "to ensure teachers systematically acquire up-to-date knowledge and skills to maintain the professional competencies necessary for today's educators, teach with confidence and pride, and gain respect and trust from the public." Until this revision in the Teacher's License Law, teachers in Japan were granted a permanent license after completing their induction training. However, due to this revision, teachers' licenses are now issued for ten years. In addition, in order to renew the license, teachers are required to take license renewal courses totaling over thirty hours of instruction over a two year period prior to the date of license expiry¹.

The three education bills leave a number of issues unresolved once they are put into effect. It is possible to attribute the reasons to the following two points. First, not enough time has been devoted in the planning of these bills to considering their implications. As the Mainichi Newspaper (June 20, 2007) reports the three education bills "were approved in a speed-before-quality situation although Prime Minister Abe had the initiative." Secondly, these bills only set frameworks and do not present clear, concrete guidelines. Beginning in 2008, accredited universities started to provide pilot training programs. However, the government still has not presented a concrete standard necessary for the teacher license renewal process, such as standards on "qualities and capabilities of teachers," concrete contents of a license renewal course and the standards of completion and approval, and so on. The Teacher Certification Renewal System (TCRS) was scheduled to take effect in April 2009.

In response to this policy development, we conducted a survey of secondary school teachers of English to determine their attitudes and opinions toward the new system. The basic stance of the research project is that it is imperative to

make the TCRS implementation process inclusive. If the renewal system was not perceived by the classroom educators as beneficial to them, it would not be successful in the long run. Therefore, the research took a bottom-up perspective to ensure that the views of teachers were adequately represented. By reflecting on the opinions of in-service teachers, we hoped to make some useful suggestions on the necessary actions to be taken prior to the implementation of the TCRS and to make recommendations for the restructuring of the teacher education system in Japan.

Finally, in order to make concrete and constructive recommendations, we believed that the survey research should be conducted in our specialist field of English education. The results of meaningful research in one field can, we feel, be generalized to all teachers. From this starting point, we decided to conduct a nation-wide project to survey English teachers.

Objectives

The objective of this research was to examine the opinions of English teachers in secondary schools regarding the TCRS and teacher education to

- (1) identify the preconditions for the successful implementation of the TCRS, and
- (2) establish what concepts and designs of the license renewal training curricula would be accepted. As a result, we wish to
- (3) suggest the necessary actions prior to the implementation of the TCRS and make recommendations for the restructuring of the teacher education system in Japan.

Procedure

Questionnaire Design

Questionnaire items were designed based on the results of two surveys. One was the survey taken in the previous year on the related revised education law. The other was a pilot survey of the present study conducted for the participants

in the Kanto Koshin-etsu English Education Conference in August, 2007.

The questionnaire included eight items concerning improvement of the conditions of the TCRS, and sixteen items concerning plans for the TCRS. Respondents had a choice of five options for each item. Option “Other” permitted respondents to contribute additional comments, if desired. For the complete version of the questionnaire, see the appendix.

Timeframe of the Project

This survey was conducted from October to December, 2007. Of 9,458 sets of the questionnaire that were sent to secondary schools around Japan, 2,897 (30.6 percent) were returned.

Respondents’ Personal Data

Levels of schools

With respect to the levels of schools studied, 50.3 percent of the respondents were from junior high schools, 34.4 percent from senior high schools, and 11.1 percent from 7–12 high schools. One of the reasons why more than half the respondents were from junior high schools seems to be that we sent more questionnaires to teachers in junior high schools.

School types

Regarding the type of schools, 80.6 percent of the respondents were from public schools, 18.3 percent from private schools, and 0.6 percent from national schools. One of the reasons why more than 80 percent of the responses were from public schools could be that more questionnaires were sent to public schools than to private schools.

Teaching experience

As for the periods of teaching experience, the distribution is balanced. Six hundred and thirty-one respondents (21.8 percent) were teachers whose teaching experience is less than five years. This is the largest group. Groups ranging from five to ten years and from twenty to twenty-five years of experience accounted for about 15 percent each. After that, the number of respondents with more than 25 years experience decreased.

Age of Respondents

In terms of age of the respondents, the largest number, nine hundred and seventy-seven (33.7 percent), were in their forties. The next largest number, nine hundred and two (31.1 percent), were in their thirties.

The Follow-up Survey Design

The number of responses reached two thousand on November 14, 2007, at which point the data was analyzed. Then on December 17, 2007, we sent one hundred and thirty-eight sets of the new questionnaires to the teachers who had written their names and addresses on the return envelopes.

First, we asked the new respondents to make comments on items in which ceiling effects were observed. These three items were “To clarify the standards for English teachers’ abilities,” “To evaluate teachers synthetically by several factors such as English proficiency, holistic educational competence, training records, and teaching records,” and “To let the teachers take course subjects freely.”-

A second questionnaire was designed to ask the reasons for one item in which floor effects were observed. This item was “Attending the teachers’ license renewal course should be for about one year.” As a result of this follow-up survey, forty-eight teachers submitted their comments. In addition, ten secondary school English teachers from two prefectures were invited to make comments on the results of the first phase. A total of fifty-eight items were carefully analyzed.

Results

Preconditions for the implementation of the Teacher Certification Renewal System

Of the eight items prepared for this category, five were supported by more than 65 percent of the respondents, who judged them as “somewhat important” and “important.” These five items could be considered as the items that were considered to be most important by a majority of the in-service teachers as preconditions of the implementation of the TCRS (See Table 1).

Concerning the free comments, two hundred and sixty-one teachers (9 percent) contributed personal comments. Although the rate of response was low, the comments were revealing in offering an understanding of teachers’ concerns related to the TCRS. The comments can be broadly divided into three areas: (1) concerns about the needs for appropriate standards for Teacher performance assessment including assessor’s standards, (2) needs for the adjustment to workload, and (3) needs for appropriate standards including teachers’ pedagogical competence, English proficiency, and graduating teacher standards in the induction period.

TABLE 1. Preconditions considered important by a majority of respondents

Items	Percentage of the sum
h. The deliberations of the license renewal evaluation committee should be made public.	81.5%
g. Standards of approval and assessment for license renewal should be based upon consultations with in-service teachers and should be publicly accessible.	80.8%
b. Appraisals of teachers of English should be based on diverse criteria, including English ability, pedagogical competence, past record of professional development, and classroom and job performance.	78.7%
a. Professional competencies or standards for teachers should be concrete.	77.9%
c. Adjustment to the workload should be implemented for those requiring license renewal-related training and have other professional development needs.	65.9%

Summary of the Follow-up Survey

A follow-up survey was conducted on the following two items:

- (a) Professional competencies or standards for teachers should be concrete, and
- (b) Appraisals of English teachers should be based on diverse criteria, including English ability, pedagogical competence, past record of professional development, and classroom performance.

Regarding item (a), in 2004 the Japan Association of College English Teachers' Special Interest Group (hereafter JACET SIG) on English Education (2005) identified fifteen items as necessary qualities for teachers of English based on survey data gathered by twenty-one supervisors in charge of employment at local boards of education (Table 2). In the present research, we asked the respondents to determine if they agreed with the list of qualities described by the JACET SIG that prospective English teachers should possess and with their rankings. Respondents were also asked to list additional qualities, if any.

The survey found these fifteen items acceptable and agreed with the rankings. Additional qualities were not

collected. However, one respondent commented that if teachers of other subjects were involved in the study the set of qualities might be significantly different from the one in the table. Others suggested that the ability to communicate effectively with parents and community members, the ability to set goals and demonstrate leadership, and the ability to show professionalism in various teaching environments were important qualities.

Regarding item (b), a research project conducted by Teacher Education Research Group (2004) identified the qualities of "pedagogical competence" of junior and senior high school teachers (Table 3). In this follow-up research project, respondents were asked if they agreed with the benchmarks. In addition, respondents were asked to describe possible perspectives on "training records" and "job performance".

Most respondents agreed with the list of pedagogical competencies. They also made some suggestions for items to be added such as "ability to develop students' reading comprehension, summarizing, and rapid reading," "ability to create a lesson according to the lesson plan," "ability to enhance interest in other cultures," "effective use of teaching materials including education technology," "ability to promote autonomous learning," and "ability to prepare the students for the entrance exam."

TABLE 2. Qualities of prospective English teachers necessary for employment (JACET SIG on English Education, 2005)

1. enthusiasm for the profession
2. ability to present material clearly in an accessible manner
3. ability to create effective communicative activities
4. teamwork
5. ability to understand students' needs
6. ability to provide clear instructions
7. ability to sustain interaction in class
8. ability to identify and develop topics of interest to students
9. possess linguistic knowledge of the English language
10. clear and loud voice
11. possess knowledge of major English teaching methodologies and theories
12. possess knowledge of the "Course of Study"
13. possess knowledge of the linguistic and cultural differences between Japanese and English
14. familiarity with testing and evaluation formats
15. willing and active participation in extra-curricular activities

TABLE 3. Possible benchmarks of pedagogical competencies for secondary school teachers

Possible benchmarks of pedagogical competencies for junior-high school teachers
❖ Use English effectively for giving instructions and directions on activities.
❖ Use English and interact with students on greetings and familiar topics.
❖ Engage students in communicative activities using taught grammar and vocabulary.
❖ Utilize visual aids to introduce new material.
❖ Teach reading by using English effectively.
❖ Teach reading through memorizations.
❖ Activate students' self-expression by developing read aloud skills.
Possible benchmarks of pedagogical competencies for senior-high school teachers
❖ Enhance students' communicative skills.
❖ Activate students' background knowledge on topical content in the introduction of new material by mainly using English.
❖ Use both English and Japanese according to the teaching content.
❖ Encourage students' read aloud activities (or voice-reading activities).
❖ Activate students' self-expression by using newly acquired grammar, and vocabulary.

TABLE 4. System design supported by the majority of in-service teachers

Items	Percentage of the sum
d. Successful completion of the Course should be contingent on the participant's regular attendance.	65.2%
g. The course should focus on practical teaching knowledge and skills useful in everyday classroom context.	83.3%
k. Participants should be able to choose from a variety of courses.	78.4%

Design of the license renewal course

Of the sixteen items in this category in the questionnaire, the following three items were supported by more than 65 percent of the respondents, who chose to either “agree” or “to some extent agree” (Table 4).

Of the 2,897 respondents, two hundred and eighty-two (9.7 percent) added personal comments. These responses can be divided into two main categories of concerns:

- (1) concerns about increased workloads, and
- (2) ‘wish list’ items.

These can be further subdivided into the following five categories:

- (1a) the need for workload adjustments for those undergoing license renewal training coursework, which would include a review of the current leave system,
- (1b) the need for system flexibility which suits each teacher's needs,
- (2a) the need for curriculum flexibility,
- (2b) the need for license renewal training staff from a range of professionals, and
- (2c) the need for fair standards.

Summary of the results of the follow-up research

The follow-up research focused on the following two items:

- (b) The course should be conducted over an extended period of time, e.g. one year, and
- (k) Participants should be able to choose from a variety of courses.

Regarding item (b), almost 60 percent of the teachers disagreed with item (b). This rate was unexpectedly high. Thus, in the follow-up survey, respondents were asked why they thought so many people disagreed. Respondents indi-

cated that they were mainly concerned about the increase in the workload and about being away from the work place for a long period of time. This was consistent with the results observed in the nation-wide survey. Teachers were not opposed to the training *per se* but were concerned about the reality of pursuing training and performing other duties at the same time.

Seventy-seven percent of the teachers agreed with item (k). So, the follow-up research asked the in-service teachers what areas they would find most useful among the following subject areas listed in Table 5.

The responses showed that over 50 percent of the teachers showed interest in EFL courses as ways to develop their own English language skills, in learning new teaching methods that develop students' four skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) in English classes, and in multi-media courses (Table 5). The comments in the open-ended section indicated that the teachers would also be interested in courses on team-teaching with Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs).

Factor analysis results

A factor analysis on twenty-four question items was conducted in order to measure variability among the responses. Five factors were identified. Table 6 shows the names, components, loading values of factors, and Cronbach's coefficients of the items of all the five factors. Numbers in the bracket of components section show the question item numbers (see appendix for the question items).

Results of cross tabulation

Cross tabulation was conducted to investigate whether significant differences exist among regional responses, school types, school levels, teaching experience, and age. As for regions, a multiple comparison was conducted to check

TABLE 5. Subject areas

a. Teaching of the four skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening),
b. teaching of pronunciation,
c. Assessment,
d. Ways to motivate students,
e. teaching of vocabulary,
f. Teaching of grammar,
g. SLA theory,
h. Material design,
i. Cross-cultural understanding,
j. Early childhood English teaching theory,
k. EFL course,
l. multimedia resources, and
m. Other

significant differences statistically. However, the results of the survey showed minor regional variation.

As for school types, school levels, teaching experience, and ages, items that showed more than a 10 percent difference were extracted. The results indicated that the following three points should be addressed to policy makers as general tendencies observed as a differences in terms of school levels, school types, teaching experience, and ages:

- (1) Regarding the school level, teachers in junior high and combined lower and upper secondary schools are more willing than senior high school teachers to acquire practical knowledge and skills through demonstration lessons and class observation to improve their teaching techniques.
- (2) In terms of the types of schools, teachers in private, as opposed to public schools, indicated a willingness to engage in renewal training courses, if they were related to their classroom responsibilities.
- (3) Regarding the age of the respondents, younger teachers put more emphasis on the acquisition of hands-on

knowledge and skills, and the improvement of their English ability.

Recommendations for the Implementation of TCRS

Standardize teacher education.

The Revised Local Education Administration Law approved in June 2007 gives the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) the authority to task local boards of education to take corrective action with the Teacher Certification Renewal System, if such is needed. On the other hand, MEXT plans to monitor the standards of approval regarding management of non-performing teachers set by each local education board and present nationwide, comprehensive guidelines. This action was prompted by the belief of policy-makers in the central government that the processes currently in effect vary greatly among local education authorities and a nationwide systematic policy has to be articulated to assure the quality of classroom teachers.

TABLE 6. Factor analysis

Label	Components	Factor Loading	
Standardizing professional competencies and teacher evaluation based on classroom teaching.	1(e)	0.682	0.712
	1(b)	0.657	
	1(a)	0.622	
	1(f)	0.461	
Linking license renewal training with classroom environment.	2(m)	0.649	0.561
	2(p)	0.479	
	2(j)	0.463	
Giving greater visibility to the standards of license renewal	1(h)	0.669	0.647
	1(g)	0.61	
Structuring and implementing a flexible framework of professional development	1(c)	0.451	0.526
	2(l)	0.434	
	2(n)	0.419	
	2(f)	0.369	
	2(o)	0.310	
Enhancing English teaching skills	2(g)	0.610	0.595
	2(h)	0.401	

The above cases indicate a contradiction in MEXT's actions— on one hand, advocating the decentralization of authority and respect for local governments; while, on the other hand, reinforcing its supervisory powers. Local boards of education and schools seem to regard the directives by MEXT to take corrective action and other regulatory guidance, including management of non-performing teachers, as a means by the central government to exercise more rigid control. Comments by teachers in our survey testify to their belief that if the government seeks to “guarantee the quality of the teachers” (the stated purpose of the TCRS), it should give constructive guidance to improve the overall quality of education rather than imposing a regime of corrective action.

Clearly the issues of transparency, concrete standards, fair assessment, and workload adjustment are what most concerns teachers. Research points to the need to establish clear national standards of professional competence for teachers. Standardizing teacher education programs will help to guarantee higher standards in quality of teachers and

will encourage open discussion on these matters with the public. The results of the nation-wide survey indicate that in order to put the teachers' license renewal system into effect in a meaningful way, qualities and capabilities of teachers, professional standards, teacher assessment, pre-service teacher education, teacher training, and duties of teachers must be standardized.

Design and implementation of a flexible system relevant to classroom educators in Japan

Teachers made it clear that the license renewal system would impose additional demands on their time. If this policy is to be effective in assuring the quality of teachers, it will be necessary to create a working environment where teachers can participate in professional training without sacrificing other duties or their personal time.

When government policies such as those regarding performance assessment are mandated from the top without prior consultations with teachers, proposed reforms are seldom effective in being put into practice (see the

allegations made by the All Japan Teachers and Staff Union in 2002, *Asahi Shimbun*, May 28, 2007). The introduction of the TCRS has also been done in a top-down fashion. Teachers' views have not been given due regard in the policy formulation process. This further underscores the need for a more inclusive approach to education reform. Inclusive reform approaches that involve teacher participation already exist in the United States. Our recommendation is that in-service teachers should participate in committees responsible for designing the TCRS training curriculum.

Training courses designed so that teachers gain practical knowledge and classroom skills should reflect the interests and input of teachers. The courses should combine theory and practice, incorporate demonstration lessons and class observations, and offer a range of content options so that they are meaningful for teachers in various professional settings.

As presently contemplated, most of the training program are to be administered by universities who will also release evaluations of participants to MEXT in a prescribed format. Our study indicates that the wishes of in-service teachers should be considered fully not only during the course design but also when the evaluation methods are discussed.

Finally, the license renewal courses should not be a one-off, formal exercise. MEXT should maintain and nurture working environments where teachers continue their professional training on a daily basis. Prior training should count towards the course completion requirements and class demonstrations should be encouraged to stimulate professional interactions and the sharing of expertise.

Appendix: The Questionnaire

1 Question items on preconditions for the implementation of TCRS

- (a) Professional competencies or standards for teachers should be specific.
 - (b) Appraisals of teachers of English should be based on diverse criteria, including English ability, pedagogical competence, record of professional development, and job performance.
 - (c) Adjustment to the workload should be implemented for those requiring license renewal-related training and with other professional development needs.
 - (d) The license renewal training (10th year training) should be provided to all license holders.
 - (e) English proficiency, pedagogical competence, past training record, service record, etc. of teachers who are to participate in the license renewal course should be quantified, and used as the basis for the determination of their specific recertification requirements.
 - (f) A provision enabling teachers with a high level of English proficiency, pedagogical competence, etc. to train and assess other teachers should be put in place.
 - (g) Standards of approval and assessment for license renewal should be based upon consultations with in-service teachers and should be publicly accessible.
 - (h) The deliberations of the license renewal evaluation committee should be made public.
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Appendix: The Questionnaire

2 Question Items on System Design of the License Renewal Training Program

- (a) The license renewal course (hereafter the Course) should be offered during a long vacation for six hours a day for a five-day period, totaling 30-hours.
 - (b) The Course should be conducted over an extended period of time, e.g. one year.
 - (c) Successful completion of the Course should be decided on the basis of the result of a written examination.
 - (d) Successful completion of the Course should be contingent on the participants' regular attendance.
 - (e) The dominant element of the Course should be lectures offered at a specific physical location.
 - (f) Provisions should be made for the participants to be able to take the Course via distance learning.
 - (g) The Course should focus on practical teaching knowledge and skills useful in the everyday classroom context.
 - (h) For teachers of English the Course should focus on maintaining and enhancing the English proficiency of the participants.
 - (i) The Course should focus on up-to-date EFL teaching theory and teaching skills.
 - (j) Demonstration lessons or class observations should be included in the syllabus.
 - (k) Participants should be able to choose from a variety of courses.
 - (l) A preliminary review system should be set up. If warranted by the results of the preliminary review, a participant should be allowed to be exempted from taking the entire course or part of the course related to his or her subject area.
 - (m) Sessions focusing on practical aspects of teaching should be taught by experienced teachers.
 - (n) The renewal application process and participation in the Course should be permitted two years before license expiration.
 - (o) The training record (e.g. conference presentation/participation, graduate level study) should be evaluated and, if appropriate, should count towards the completion of the Course.
 - (p) Many in-service teachers should participate in designing the curriculum of the Course.
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ENDNOTES

- ¹ Contents of the course can be divided into roughly two strands: (1) of courses on current educational issues (more than 12 hours) and (2) on subject teaching, student counseling and guidance, or issues related to enhance teaching (more than 18 hours).