

A trajectory policy analysis of the JET Programme thirty-three years since its introduction:

evaluating the policy's aims, implementation, amendments and relative success
of the world's largest exchange teaching programme

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Abstract

This article examines the substantial and convoluted history of the world's largest and longest running teacher exchange programme. Throughout the 33-year history of the JET Programme there have been both detractors and advocates for this immense government policy that involves three different government ministries and a pseudo-government agency responsible for the day to day running of the programme. This article examines the policies and government offices responsible for the creation of the JET Programme and how it has evolved over the course of three decades. From its modest beginnings with 848 participants from four countries in 1987 to almost 6,000 participants in 2019 from 57 countries, the JET Programme is now a global phenomenon.

Introduction

This article will analyse the policy trajectory of the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme (JET Programme), an initiative that was enacted by the government of Japan to help facilitate English language education in Japanese schools. The policy was implemented during trade war tensions between Japan and the United States, and was initially unveiled to a US delegation attending the 'Ron-Yasu' summit of 1986 between Yasuhiro Nakasone, the Prime Minister of Japan, and Ronald Reagan, the United States President (McConnell, 2000).

Less than one year after its unveiling, the first participants of the JET Programme arrived in Tokyo on the 1st of August 1987. Among these were 848 recent university graduates from Australia, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and the United States (McConnell, 2000). Since that first year, the JET Programme has grown into one of the world's largest exchange teaching programmes, with 5,761 participants from 57 countries for the 2019 academic year (JET Programme, about, n.d.). In its 33-year history there have been more than 70,000 people from 75 countries (JET Programme, about, n.d.) which have participated on the JET Programme with an estimated annual budget exceeding £300 million (McConnell, 2000). At its peak attendance in 2002 there were 6,273 participants (JET Programme, history, n.d.) before dropping to a recent low in 2010 of just over

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4000.

However, there has been a gradual increase since 2013; when Prime Minister Abe took office in late 2012, he pledged to increase JET Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) to more than 6,400 by 2019 (Metzgar, 2017). The rapid implementation of the JET Programme from Prime Minister Nakasone's 1986 announcement to ALTs arriving in Japan generated a considerable reaction from the media and from within the political realm. The policy has had its share of controversies and divided opinion, from the start to the modern day, with both staunch detractors and advocates within Japan and internationally. Given the size, far-reaching scope and substantial investment of time and resources by the Japanese government, and as a former JET participant, it seemed pertinent to investigate the mechanisms and ramifications of this policy for my current research.

One of the main issues facing any analysis of this policy enactment is the divergent nature of its inception and implementation. There have been three different agencies involved in running the JET Programme and, as a result, there is some key terminology used by Japanese ministries and the surrounding literature that need to be defined. The following are all frequently used within the JET Programme by different government affiliations and the personnel involved. Other general acronyms used to refer to the JET Programme and associated organisations have been included in the following outline.

Government offices and organisations:

The JET programme is run via a combination of the following government authorities:

CLAIR – Council of Local Authorities for International Relations: the JET administrative office under the auspices of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

MEXT – Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology: it fell on MEXT to provide the schools and boards of education with guidelines and materials pertaining to one of the most significant and controversial sections of the JET Programme, team-teaching.

MIC – Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, formerly referred to as the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA): gained overall control over the JET Programme and was responsible for creating CLAIR to oversee the implementation and the day to day running of the JET Programme.

MOFA – Ministry of Foreign Affairs: through the overseas consulates, the MOFA is responsible for JET Programme recruitment.

Individuals:

The JET Programme has the following three positions:

ALT – Assistant Language Teacher: a term created by the JET Programme. It is noteworthy that throughout the literature pertaining to the JET programme there are several acronyms used, and even within JET programme official documentation, Assistant English Teacher (AET) was initially the term used. However, this was later revised to ALT. For ease of clarity during this article I will be using ALT. These are overwhelmingly the majority of the positions on the JET Programme with

a total of 5234 participants in 2019; this includes first, second, third, fourth and fifth year participants (JET Programme, countries, n.d.).

CIR – Coordinator of International Relations: a JET member who is employed at a municipal or prefectural office and reports directly to MIC. As of 2019, there are 514 participants across all years (JET Programme, countries, n.d.).

SEA – Sports Exchange Advisor: a newer position created for the JET programme in 1993 to bring sports professionals and athletes to Japan. The recruitment of SEAs differs in that a country's National Olympic Committee or similar governmental organisation must directly recommend an individual for this position. In 2019, there were a total of 13 SEAs from first to fifth years (JET Programme countries, n.d.).

Additional useful acronyms

JTE – Japanese Teacher of English: JTEs are predominantly Japanese nationals but this is not always the case; they are responsible for teaching English to Japanese students and work closely with the ALTs. Depending on the size, level or focus of the school there can be between one and ten JTEs at a single school. At elementary schools, and occasionally at junior high schools, the teacher responsible for teaching English and working with the ALT will not be a designated English teacher. They will often be the homeroom teacher and usually teach multiple subjects. At senior high schools there are multiple English teachers depending on the size and focus of the school. For example, if the high school is an academic school and has an international department there may be ten or more JTEs. However, at technical high schools there may only be three or four JTEs.

There are various categories of high schools within Japan and ALTs can be sent to any of these, although they are placed predominantly in rural areas as opposed to urban (JET Programme, about, n.d.). At senior high schools one JTE will be designated as the ALT's supervisor; there is no choice in this role from either side and the role can be assigned for the duration of the ALT's stay or it can be rotated on an annual basis. At elementary and junior high schools, due to the itinerant nature of the position, with ALTs often visiting a different school each day, the ALT will be given a supervisor at the BoE and will have a designated contact or team teacher at each school (JET Programme, positions).

Selection of Policy Analysis

As with any kind of analysis, there are often several methods available, and policy analysis is no different, with four separate models to choose from. The correct choice of policy analysis is particularly relevant as any policy text is far more than the summation of its words. Rizvi and Lingard (2010) advocate that the most suitable option will depend on the kind of policy that is being analysed and that 'there is no recipe for carrying out policy analysis in education' (p. 45, 2010). Policies are multifaceted and can be influenced by financial, social, political and even international contexts. The JET Programme is an atypical example of a government policy. It is

heavily embedded in education interests while also interacting with several other ministries, but it is also now a global phenomenon, as it has expanded from initially taking participants from four countries in 1987, to 57 countries in 2019 (information correct as of August 2019 intake, JET programme history, n.d.).

Given that the JET Programme is a government policy run by three different government authorities whilst also interacting with 75 different countries to date (JET Programme, about JET, n.d.), there are many dimensions to consider and, as with any policy, there are both intended and unintended consequences. In consideration of this article's outline, and in order to fully answer the question, there are four analyses options: elite studies, policy text analysis, implementation studies and trajectory analysis.

Elite studies is a focus on the important figures involved in developing a policy while analysing the policy's inner workings, including the conflicts, debates and compromises that take place at policy formation stage. Policy text analysis is, as the title suggests, examining the use of the language selected to outline the policy. This is an important factor in policy analysis as the language used will often convey the beliefs and values of the policy makers which is rarely value-free. By analysing the language of a policy, it is possible to outline the way in which language is used to create problems, solutions and relations of power.

The third option for analysing policy is implementation studies. This kind of analysis examines if a policy's values, aims and intentions have been realised and how the policy's texts have been translated into practice. Implementation studies also explores the intended and unintended consequences of the policy while focusing on practitioners functioning within the area of policy implementation.

Finally, trajectory studies assesses the policy as a whole and examines the timeline from policy formation to inception and implementation, while also analysing alterations over time. Clearly the four options available offer a distinct focus on various aspects of a policy and these can vary depending on the context, the problem addressed by the creation of the policy, and the dissemination and implementation of the policy (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010).

All four options could provide a means of analysis for this research. However, given the longevity of the JET Programme and, as its continuing development shows no signs of abating, I will be utilising a trajectory studies approach while also examining implementation concerns. Although over the course of 33 years there are multiple issues which have arisen, I will aim to keep to those which are deemed most pertinent to this article. I will also endeavour to provide a balanced outlook, looking at both the positive and negative features of the policy as well as its intended and unintended consequences.

JET Programme in the Japanese education system context

Teaching often requires a time commitment beyond contractual hours. However, in the Japanese education system there are additional responsibilities that not only affect a teacher's professional performance but also infringe upon their personal lives (Bannai, Tamakoshi and Ukawa, 2015). It

is not within the remit of this article to focus on all of these details, but Ono (2018) in his scathing article '*Why do the Japanese work long hours?*' cites one of the main issues affecting the Japanese workforce – including teachers – is the need to work long hours as a cultural expectation. In school settings, this is an expectation extended to many non-Japanese ATLs and other JET programme participants.

Ono (2018) argues that this needs to change, and that change needs to be implemented at the most senior level in order to create a trickle-down effect to newer staff members. Another critical article by Bannai *et al.* (2015) entitled '*Long working hours and psychological distress among school teachers in Japan*', highlights that from 2002 to 2012, there has been a steep increase from 5,303 to 8,341, of school teachers in Japan taking extended leaves of absence due to physical and mental issues. Both Ono (2018) and Bannai *et al.* (2015) cite the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) study of 2013, which 'revealed that school teachers in Japan had the longest working time (53.9 hours per week) of school teachers in the 34 participating countries and regions' (Bannai *et al.*, 2015, p. 20).

According to Ono (2018), Japanese teachers only spend 33% of their working hours actually teaching, which is significantly lower than the 50% OECD average, with Japanese teachers stating that preparing materials, attending meetings and extra-curricular clubs on the weekends and after school are the main causes for the minimum of 15 hours unpaid overtime that teachers do every week. Considering these problematic conditions and then adding the additional stress of a JTE having no choice but to work with an untrained and often much younger foreign ALT, it should be no surprise that, especially in the early years of the policy, significant problems arose, very rapidly. These will be discussed in greater detail below in the analysis of the JET Programme.

The JET Programme analysis

One aspect of the JET Programme analysis that has proven difficult is that, due to the multifaceted nature of its organisation and administration, the focus tends to shift to other facets that affect the main policy. As Metzgar (2017, p. 67) simply states, 'The JET Program is a complicated bureaucratic animal'. Furthermore, with the reactionary changes that have occurred over the 33 years of the programme it is impossible to extrapolate the finer minutiae over the course of the policy to date in the confined nature of this article. Therefore, in line with the trajectory analysis aspect of this current research, this section will be divided into:

1. Policy inception
2. Policy implementation
3. Alterations in policy to modernise the JET Programme

Policy Inception

From the outset, the ideology of the JET Programme had conflicting expectations, and this is one of the main reasons for its problems in the early years, and perhaps for continuing problems with the policy. McConnell (2000) insists that the policy formation surreptitiously had conflicting ministerial goals from the conception which invariably became embroiled in the JET Programme. One MIC official admits that:

Frankly speaking, the purpose of the JET Program was never focused on the revolution of English education. The main goal was to get local governments to open up their gates to foreigners. It's basically a grassroots regional development program.

(McConnell, 2000, p. 30)

However, one of the other agencies responsible for delivering the JET Programme from idea to practice was the MOFA, and an official from their department stated that 'Our main hope for the JET Program is to increase understanding of Japanese society and education among youth in the participating countries' (McConnell, 2000, p. 30).

The third and final government office responsible for the JET Programme's inception, MEXT, reported that 'If Japanese students and teachers improve their communicative competence in English, then they have become more internationalized. This is the goal of the JET Program from the point of view of our ministry' (McConnell, 2000, p. 30). These three excerpts by Japanese government officials, interviewed by McConnell (2000) for his highly influential book on the JET Programme, show the contradictory outlook of the three ministries in charge of developing this policy. In addition, Metzgar (2017) highlights that even though the JET Programme was the vehicle by which the three ministries could achieve their separate goals, by trying to appease these three factions it has often failed to achieve any of the goals in a satisfactory manner.

Both McConnell (2000) and Metzgar (2017) postulate that the initial proposal for the JET Programme was offered by MIC, which, as its name suggests, is primarily concerned with domestic issues. Although by this stage, in the mid-eighties, there was a recognition within Japan that English language education needed transforming, MEXT was reluctant to make any significant changes in the language curriculum. Nose Kunyuki, a high ranking official in MIC (called MOHA at that time), explains in an interview with McConnell (2000) that when he made the initial proposal for the JET Programme to his superior in 1985, it was rejected as being outside the jurisdiction of their ministry.

Nose Kunyuki, further suggests that after numerous meetings with mayors from all over Japan, there were very few cities or towns willing to accept foreigners (McConnell, 2000). Even in modern day Japan there is still an overwhelming sense of it being a largely homogenous society (Metzgar, 2017), though this has altered slightly in the past 30 years. Although the idea of the JET Programme appeared doomed before it had begun, a set of circumstances coalesced which inevitably resurrected the idea.

Tensions between Japan and the USA deteriorated in 1985, in large respects due to the \$50 billion trade surplus. And with the upcoming summit between the US and Japan in 1986, Prime Minister Nakasone needed a mid to long term policy to ease the tensions while also helping improve the social and economic structure of Japan in a shifting international environment. As a result of these political objectives, the JET Programme was revived (McConnell, 2000).

Although the JET Programme now had the backing of the Prime Minister, it still had to pass through the Japanese parliament, and funding was needed to secure its implementation. The significant cost of running the JET Programme has been highlighted in much of the critical literature (Carless, 2006; Seargeant, 2008; McCrostie, 2017). In a recent Japan Times newspaper article, McCrostie (2017) reported that the total approximate cost of employing one JET participant for one year was between 5–6 million yen (approximately £35,000–£42,000). McCrostie (2017) suggested that the money could be better spent on training for JTEs or sending them overseas to enhance their English proficiency. The news article states that a 2015 Japan Association of Corporate Executives report, estimates put the annual cost of the JET Programme at 40 billion yen (approximately £280 million), which is paid for by local and national governments but ultimately comes from the tax payers of Japan (McCrstie, 2017).

However, in his interview with McConnell (2000), Nose Kunyuki explains that although MIC created a national programme, ALTs sign their employment contracts with the local BoEs and municipalities where they are employed. In this way, the programme could be presented to the Ministry of Finance as a local initiative. Moreover, the JET Programme is also a hugely successful public works programme. For example, Japan Airlines has the sole responsibility of flying JET participants to Japan, and along with many other public organisations benefiting from the JET members, it is estimated by McConnell (2000) that approximately 80% of the salary earned by its members actually stays in Japan. Lastly, the issue of trying to pass the JET Programme through parliament proved to be a non-event, as with many ex-MIC members at that time sitting in Parliament and with the official backing of the Prime Minister, the JET Programme passed through with little comment (McConnell, 2000, Metzgar, 2017).

As with many government policies, policy implementation is a top-down process. The formation of the JET programme was no different, with very little communication taking place between the various ministries and the policy enactors, the teachers and local BoEs, which would be responsible for carrying out the policy into practice. Although behind the scenes there were the three contradictory aims of the respective government offices, the actual face of the JET Programme on the official website still had to be agreed prior to implementation.

McConnell (2000, p46) writes that, 'The intersectoral nature of the policy meant that program goals had to be worded so as to please all three sponsoring ministries'. Thus, the final wording on the JET Programme website is that it was started for 'the purpose of increasing mutual understanding between the people of Japan and the people of other nations' (JET Programme, history, n.d.). The official stance is that 'It aims to promote internationalisation in Japan's local communities by helping to improve foreign language education and developing international exchange at the community level' (JET Programme, history, n.d.). Indeed, it is on this last point

that the JET Programme is predominantly scrutinised. Metzgar (2017) summarises it succinctly by stating that ‘Despite [its] multifaceted mission, however, today JET is most widely discussed in the context of just one of those purposes: English language education’ (p67).

Policy implementation

It is impossible to discuss the JET Programme without referring to team teaching and ALTs, as this is the main crux of the policy, bringing young, non-Japanese, university-educated people to Japan in order to interact and help with English education. Regardless of the conflicting goals set out by the ministries mentioned earlier, without importing the ALTs, and to a lesser extent CIRs, the whole idea of the JET Programme would not work. Out of the almost 70,000 people to have participated on JET, ALTs make up approximately 90% of the members, while CIRs make up just under 10%, with SEAs constituting the remainder (JET Programme, history, n.d.).

However, the term ‘ALT’ was the subject of much discussion. Minoru Wada, a high-ranking official in MEXT during the JET Programme’s creation and implementation, discussed the rationale for the terminology with McConnell (2000). Wada reports that initially, MEXT were against the idea of the JET Programme because they feared MEXT would lose educational control of the policy due to the three different ministries involved. However, senior officials in MEXT at that time knew that reform of the English language policy was needed, and with outside pressure being put on them in conjunction with the official backing of the Prime Minister, MEXT decided to support the JET Programme but with one condition. Wada insisted on the foreign participants being labelled as assistants ‘so that Japanese teachers would not feel that their own jobs were either legally or symbolically threatened by the influx of native speakers’ (McConnell, 2000, p. 45).

Initially, the position was given the title Assistant English Teacher (AET). This was later changed to Assistant Language Teacher when, in 1989, German and French were added alongside English as target languages, and French and German-speaking participants were accepted onto the JET Programme for the first time (JET Programme, history, n.d.). Wada insists in his interview with McConnell (2000, p45 & 46) that the term *assistant* ‘symbolized an important lowering of status from “English fellows”’ (double quotation marks in original) which was a term that had been used by MEXT in a similar but significantly smaller scale project in the early 1980’s. One final noteworthy point made by Wada to McConnell (2000) was that the majority of officials in MEXT were ambivalent towards the JET Programme, and although the teachers’ union was not in favour of bringing JET participants to Japan, Japanese teachers often reported that they enjoyed working with ALTs.

Changes in policy to modernise it for today’s students

Over the course of a policy which has lasted 33 years to date, there will naturally be changes as the needs and goals adapt with the times but also with the people affected by the policy. Although there is insufficient scope in this article to cover all of these amendments, the most significant will

be briefly described.

1. Elementary schools included in the JET Programme in 2002.

Realising that the current English education policy was in need of reform and that the JET Programme was not reaching its expected potential, MEXT introduced a series of changes in 2003 to meet the needs of the modern Japanese student. These included the introduction of an elementary specialist ALT position (JET Programme, history, n.d.). Up until this point there were only senior high or junior high school ALTs, and this adaptation was in line with the future MEXT policy of introducing compulsory English classes at elementary level throughout Japan. Incidentally, 2002 also saw the record number of JET participants at 6,273 (JET Programme, history, n.d.) to date.

2. Changes to the age limit.

In 2002 the age limit for people applying to the JET Programme was raised from 35 years old to younger than 40 (JET Programme, history, n.d.). Initially the age limit was set by Nose Kuniyuki at the policy's inception. In his interview with McConnell (2000), Kuniyuki explains that he set the programme parameters to university graduates under the age of 35 for two reasons. The first was that having younger people in Japan observing how Japanese people live and work might be a solution to the trade conflict with the USA. The second was that people lose flexibility after this age (McConnell, 2000). However, as the JET Programme progressed, many detractors have voiced their concerns over immature university graduates moving to Japan for just the minimum one year or possibly two, and treating the JET Programme as an extension of their university days, taking the Japanese government's money and then returning to their respective countries (Crooks, 2001; Brown, 2013; Ishihara, Carroll, Mahler and Russo, 2018). In response to this criticism, the age limit was raised to 40 and then abolished altogether in order to attract older, more professional ALTs.

3. Re-contract limit changed from three to five years.

A further development in 2007 allowed for JET participants to re-contract from a maximum of three years to five years (JET Programme, history, n.d.). As with the age limit amendment, this was a move by the policy makers to try and improve the standard of teaching on the programme. The terminology implies that in order to re-contract for a fourth or fifth year the 'contracting organisation [must deem the ALT] outstanding' (JET Programme, history, n.d.). In conjunction with this measure, two other important changes were implemented: a pay structure now accompanied the new re-contracting limit. Whereas previously ALTs received a flat rate of 3.6 million yen per year before deductions (approximately £25,000) for each year of their stay, the new system offered 3.36 million yen (approximately £23,500) in the first year and up to 3.96 million yen (approximately £28,000) for ALTs who re-contracted for a fifth year (JET Programme, remuneration, n.d.).

4. Educational and career grants now available from CLAIR

One further step taken in order to improve teaching standards is offering various seminars and conferences on career support for life after JET. However, more pertinent are the grants that have been made available for both ALTs and CIRs who are currently working on JET and who wish to obtain a TEFL certificate (JET Programme, tefl, n.d.). This is a relatively new development, as previously – when I was an ALT between 2008 and 2012 – there was no Japan-wide support for TEFL certification. My BoE asked me to run a weeklong English teaching seminar with my JTE, as they knew that I had an undergraduate degree in applied linguistics and TEFL. Even though I had very little practical experience other than what I had gained during my first year on JET, there were no other alternatives available to ALTs.

One of the main criticisms aimed at the JET Programme is ALT's lack of knowledge and training as teachers. As recently as 2017, Ishihara *et al.*, (2018) found that new ALTs were being presented as experts in their own language but also experts in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Ishihara *et al.*'s 2018 article told of ALTs who had only just arrived in Japan and within one week, with little to no training, their contracting organisations were asking the ALTs to 'present a CLT lesson to seasoned JTEs, which they felt was insulting to these colleagues' (Ishihara *et al.*, 2018, p. 85). As no formal teacher training is required to join the JET Programme, this has led to ALT issues which MEXT and CLAIR are only recently attempting to counter by offering more team-teaching training seminars.

From policy concept to implementation, the JET Programme struggled from the agendas of conflicting government departments followed by wide ranging resistance and gradual acceptance. However, it has managed to adapt over the years and become a model of intercultural exchange and English language education (Metzgar, 2017). McConnell (2000), McCrostie (2017) and Metzgar (2017) agree that the JET Programme has become a vital political tool with thousands of foreign participants returning to their respective countries knowledgeable and sympathetic towards Japan. Furthermore, with the current backing of Shinzo Abe, the current Prime Minister of Japan, the JET Programme is set to continue expanding. In 2013, after the announcement of the Tokyo Olympics, there was a pledge to increase high school ALTs in the Tokyo Metropolitan area from 200 to 400, while in 2014 Prime Minister Abe set a goal of placing an ALT in every elementary school in Japan by 2019 (McCrostie, 2017, Metzgar, 2017). This apparent revival is encouraging, but greater visibility has led to renewed criticism, the most pertinent of which will be described below.

Limitations and benefits of the JET Programme

One of the principal criticisms levelled at the JET Programme is the consistently low attainment scores recorded in English language proficiency tests nationwide. On the surface, this would appear to be a sound argument, with data from both the TOEIC and IELTS proficiency tests revealing that Japan consistently places near the bottom of the participating countries. In 2018, Japanese speakers had an average score of 5.79 on the IELTS test, with only Uzbek speakers at 5.73 and Arabic speakers with an average score of 5.58 coming lower out of the 40 participating

countries (IELTS test taker performance, 2018). On the TOEIC test, Japan was ranked 45th out of 50 countries in 2018 with only Macao, Mongolia, Thailand, Albania and Indonesia below them respectively (TOEIC test report, 2018).

Two distinct threads run through the analyses of critical commentators including Browne and Wada (1998), Sergeant (2008), Hagerman (2009), Mondejar, Laurier, Valdivia, Mboutsiadis and Sanchez (2012), Aspinall (2013) and Brown (2013):

1. Why, as such an economically prosperous and well-educated nation, does Japan continuously rank so low on English proficiency tests?
2. Has the JET Programme had any positive influence on English education in Japan?

Although with the limited nature of this article I cannot delve into the full history and intricacies of these two questions, in essence the main problem is a historical and self-perpetuating one.

Sergeant (2005) reasons that although within Japan there is a desire to use modern foreign concepts, there is also a desire to avoid the effects that these foreign ideas bring with them. This is demonstrated in the Japanese education system where English language skills are developed in such a way to facilitate access to foreign culture and technology, but also limit the influence this inevitably brings. Hagerman (2009) describes the historical intricacies in great detail, but in summation, a significant hurdle holding back the development of English language education stems from the 1871 introduction of English into the language curriculum, and the university entrance exams testing comprehension and translation skills hence forth.

In over 100 years, very little has changed; university entrance exams and high school entrance exams which can exert a massive influence on a Japanese students' life cannot be underestimated. Having been on two different exam boards at Japanese universities and currently serving on one at my current job, I can attest to the comprehension and translation nature of the entrance exams. Therefore, teachers at Japanese schools nationwide teach English in order for their students to pass these entrance exams. There is no communicative element to the entrance test, so it is not taught rigorously. Unfortunately, the main task of an ALT is to teach speaking skills. As a result, ALTs are, in-part, being blamed for the low proficiency level of Japanese students and are often labelled as a waste of resources (McCrostie, 2017). McConnell (2000, p. 7) succinctly summarises the role of JTEs by stating, 'The most important functions of Japanese secondary schools are to prepare for high school and college entrance examinations and to maintain social order'.

Benefits of ALTs

There are also many perceived benefits that the JET Programme has brought to Japan through the use of ALTs and team-teaching. Team-teaching is a method of teaching in which a JTE and ALT collaborate to plan a language lesson together and deliver a series of communicative activities to students (Sutherland 2012, CLAIR, guidebook to team-teaching, 2013). This form of language teaching has often been deemed beneficial in that it provides an opportunity to model question and

answer role-plays while also being able to demonstrate more natural dialogues (Tajino and Tajino, 2000, Careless, 2006; Sutherland, 2012).

The official CLAIR (2013) guide to team-teaching claims that this method offers numerous benefits to teachers and students including more one-on-one time for students, more opportunities for students to use meaningful English, the development of teaching skills of JTEs and ALTs through mutual co-operation, and the provision of long-lasting cultural exchanges between ALTs, JTEs and students. On a personal level, I always felt that JTEs benefited more from the ALTs than the students, as they were far more willing to communicate and ask questions about the English language and foreign cultures. This has also been observed by Gorusch (2002) and Carless (2006) who remark that JTEs and ALTs often complement one another, leading to both personal and professional development by JTEs who participated in team-teaching.

Finally, Metzgar (2017) claims that the JET Programme benefits the local communities that host JET participants by developing long-lasting international connections. Metzgar (2017) also stresses the value of the JET Programme when ‘the national government’s economic revitalization plans have stressed the importance of the JET Program in this context’ (Metzgar, 2017, p. 66).

Conclusion

The trajectorial nature of this study has allowed me to view this policy holistically, selecting its primary components and further highlighting key elements from the policy’s formation, production, implementation and its amendments over its current life cycle. However, in a policy of this size and magnitude, it is beyond the scope of this article to do little more than scratch the surface. From my attempts to analyse the JET Programme, I have aimed to have shown that ‘the program today differs in some important ways from its incarnation’ (McConnell, 2000, p. 8).

Although I classify this as a trajectory policy analysis, I have, at times, had to touch upon the three other analytical methods detailed in the introduction to this article. Any of these three other modes of analysis could provide a rich ground for in-depth study into the policy of the JET Programme, and using one as my primary tool has sometimes been restrictive. Other limitations of this study include the range of materials available; these include a vast array of official and unofficial documents, research articles and books that I have been unable to include. I have also been unable to refer to the other exchange teaching programmes around the world, such as the Ameson Programme in China, the Primary NET scheme in Hong Kong (PNET) and the English Programme in Korea (EPIK) – any or all of which could be used as comparisons with the JET Programme.

As a final point, although I have examined some of the negative and positive aspects of the JET Programme, in the interests of neutrality I have refrained from offering an opinion on whether I believe the JET Programme is beneficial or not. Given the cost and the national and international range of the JET Programme, there will always be advocates and critics of this policy. Cynics will undoubtedly point to poor scores on standardised English tests, while exponents will claim that cultural advantages are more important – if more ephemeral – than test scores. Either way, the JET

Programme is now very different from its inception and, just as in the 1980s when it had the patronage of Prime Minister Nakasone, today it has the backing of Prime Minister Abe. And, as JET participants look set to surpass their peak of 6,273 in 2002, barring any unforeseen circumstances, the JET Programme should still be here for years to come and to continue to be as divisive as ever.

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