



# The English Language Program in Osaka's Public Elementary and Junior High Schools- A study of CNETs/ALTs' Perspectives

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**Abstract:** This case study wanted to look at how the Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) in Osaka City called City Native English Teachers (CNETS) perceive the English program that they were hired in, what they think are the difficulties and strengths of the program. The participants of this case study are the CNETs/ALTs working in Osaka, and a survey was done along with interviews for its methodology. Results validated the dilemma of teaching English in Japan such as lack of Communicative Language Teaching activities and more on traditional teacher-centered, grammar-translation method type of teaching. Other aspects such as student personalities, quality of textbooks, kind of teachers (JTE and ALT), access to teaching materials and other issues were tackled as difficulties/weaknesses of the English program in Osaka from the perspectives of the CNETS. Suggestions were also given after the various weaknesses were presented.

**Keywords:** ALT, CNET, English language program, Osaka, communicative language teaching, grammar-translation method, English teaching, team teaching, challenges

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## INTRODUCTION

This case study is done mainly to be able to get a clear picture of the MEXT's (Ministry of Education Culture, Sports, Science and Technology-Japan) English language program in the elementary and junior high schools in Osaka, Japan - the challenges and strengths of its implementation and sensible recommendations from the perspective of CNETs or ALTs who were hired to teach English in Osaka. The researcher of this mini-case study is also a CNET/ALT who is working in 3 elementary schools and two junior high schools in Osaka. At present, Japan has the lowest Japanese TOEFL score in Asia despite all the efforts to provide English education through the current English programs in public schools (Yokogawa, 2017). Japanese English education started way back in the Meiji period (1800s) when Japan opened its doors to foreign countries after 250 years of isolation. Most information during those times was available through books and documents thus it lead to the start of the method of direct translation as a means of learning the English language. This heavy reliance on grammar and translation led to a system of learning focused heavily on grammar and reading which still has traces up to these present times. The wave of pro-English and anti-English sentiments as time goes by also influenced the English education policies and systems in Japan. A special component of Japan's English program now is to hire native/non-native foreign teachers from other parts of the world to work as "assistants" or ALTs to Japanese Teachers of Language (JTL) working in the public schools. There are various ways for this process. First is through the JET Program; second is direct hiring with the local Board of Education and lastly, through dispatch companies (Boonyarattanasoontorn, 2017). The JET Program is a government-initiated teacher exchange program. Native speakers, mostly from the UK, America, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and other

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countries are hired to work full time as ALTs in public elementary, junior high schools and senior high schools all over Japan. Hiring is done mostly from their home countries, and they are flown into Japan. Being hired directly by the Board of Education is also possible. Each prefecture (like a region or province) has their own local Board of Education and may opt not to use the JET Program for their area and do the hiring of ALTs. CNET is such a program that is aimed at Osaka City only. And lastly, the prefecture or Board of Education may aim to use the services of an intermediary dispatch company. The prefecture may choose one company to work out a contract with. The company does the hiring and support for the ALTs and the contract is between the ALT and the dispatch company. Japan started to hire ALTs for the JET program in 1987. The foreigners are hired to be assistants to the Japanese teachers of English in junior high schools and high schools. The hiring of ALTs for the elementary schools only started around 2011. At present, almost all elementary and junior high schools have an ALT in their schools in Japan (Taher, Shrestha, Rahman, & Khalid, 2016; Unnanantn, 2017).

According to the ALT Handbook (MEXT, 2013), the ALT's primary role is to assist the JTL in the preparation and delivery of lessons. As indicated in the handbook, the ALT is expected to be working, and team is teaching with the JTL in the classroom and is not expected to teach a lesson on their own. The ALT is also expected to help plan lessons with the JTL and expect the ALT's knowledge of English and their culture as a resource for English lessons. The ALT is also expected to be open-minded and flexible about the different approaches, which may not be commonly used in their own countries. The Course Guide indicates that the Japanese teacher should be the main teacher, to make and plan lessons with the assistance of the ALT. We will see in the study the reality of the situation. As the course guide says: "homeroom teachers or teachers in charge of the foreign language activities should make teaching programs and conduct lessons. Effort should be made to get more people involved in lessons by inviting native speakers of the foreign language or by seeking cooperation from local people who are proficient in that language..." This study wanted to look at how the ALTs or CNETs perceive the English program that they were hired in, what they think are the difficulties and strengths of the program. This case study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the program's weaknesses/difficulties from the perspective of the CNETs who are working in various public elementary and junior high schools in Osaka?
2. What are the program's strengths from the perspective of the CNETs who are working in various public elementary and junior high schools in Osaka?

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS

### *Review of Related Literature*

Yokogawa (2017) said that English in Japan has alternated between the pro-English and the anti-English since the Meiji Restoration Period. Kenji (2010) stated that the aims of the courses of study from 1947-1969 are "Americanization", from 1969-1989 is for "international understanding" and 1989-present is for "global communication". The first junior high school course of study was released in 1947 with 4-6 class hours per week. The hiring of foreign native speakers for the English program in Japan began with the government initiated JET Program in 1987, with the purpose "to deepen mutual understanding and helping English teaching English to the general public". Since then, a lot of ALTs began to be introduced into the English teaching program/system in Japan. With the hiring of native speakers also came with it the shift of the English program curriculum to more focus on oral communication rather than grammar and translation only. However, the truth is that the "juken-eigo and grammar translation methods still prevail in Japanese classrooms today" (Løfsgaard, 2015). There has been a long and standing debate about whether English should be introduced in the elementary schools. Support for the English program in elementary says that first- it raises active attitude toward communication; second-they can build up the basics of Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) through English activities. On the other hand, opposition groups maintain that students should develop how to communicate, read, write, think logically first in Japanese before learning English and also they might get the wrong knowledge if taught by teachers with insufficient English training (Nishida, 2006). Finally, in 2011, "foreign language activities" started in elementary schools from grades 5 and 6 with the aim not to acquire the language but to enhance and improve communicative abilities (Kasuya & Kuno, 2010). It is not aimed at teaching English skills, but a is a way to introduce "international awareness" into the children. The English classes will be once a week with about 35 lessons in total in a year (Ikegashira, Matsumoto, & Morita, 2009). The English language program in the public junior high schools in Japan is based on the guidelines in the Course Studies released by the MEXT, the department responsible for the education system and management of Japan. The New Course Studies for junior high school strongly encourages

the application of Communicative Language Teaching as implied in statements such as: “to enable students to talk about their thoughts using English, to enable students to understand the speaker’s intentions when listening to English” MEXT (2017, p. 1), “language activities should be conducted in such a way as grammar is effectively utilized for communication, based on the idea that grammar underpins communication” MEXT (2017, p. 6). Communicative Language Teaching focuses on the function of the language rather than the form. CLT also makes use of real life situations that uses communication. The teacher sets up a situation that students are likely to meet in real life (Savignon & Wang, 2003). Teachers talk less and listen more, giving students more chance to speak and communicate. The setting is student-centered and a more active classroom scene where students are not glued to their seats in accomplishing a task. Students then may gain more self-confidence in using English because there is an increased responsibility to participate (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). However, there is a discrepancy between the classroom reality as opposed to the ideology of the MEXT’s Course Studies especially related to Communicative Language Teaching policies. Otani’s study revealed that there is a mismatch between the goals of MEXT and what is going on in actual schools. It is revealed that many English teachers are not aware of CLT or if they do, most of them do not utilize it because of the lack of preparation time and materials (Otani, 2017).

Abe (2013) conducted a study about the current and future practices of Communicative Language Teaching in a junior and senior high school in Japan and found out that indeed there is a lack of practice of speaking and listening and also few chances to communicate with native English teachers in the classroom. Ikegashira et al. (2009) stated that the biggest problem in the educational system of Japan lies in the entrance examinations. Many students think that English is not relevant and necessary for their lives and they just study English starting in Junior high school for the purpose of taking entrance examinations. Also in junior high schools, the level of students coming from different elementary schools varies considerably which puts a strain in the classes itself. In elementary, one of the problems is that English letters are not officially ruled or ruled out in the English program. Thus, it is stressful for the teachers and students if the classes are not introduced with English letters. Ikegashira et al. (2009) further proposed the teaching of the English alphabet as soon as possible in the first grade. Uchibori (2014) analyzed the guidelines for teaching English in Junior High School in the English program of Japan, which have evolved through the years. The first period (1947, 1951 and 1958) focused on learning English as learning about the English-speaking people because language is connected to culture. The second period (1969, 1977) paved the way for the changes from being teacher-centered to student-centered and focus expanded to include all the people of the world and not just the English speakers. The third period (1989, 1998, 2003 and 2012) emphasized developing communicative competence as the goals of the four skills to be developed. However as Uchibori (2014) concluded in her studies, the goals are far from realities as only a few people can communicate in English without difficulty after graduating from university. She further recommended that there should be more activities in the classroom for acquiring practical skills. The problem does not lie on the guidelines of the English program but on how these guidelines were implemented inside the classrooms. Moreover, the use of textbooks in junior high schools has been studied by Shioda and Hosaka (2013) to find out their quality from the point of view of communication. The study found out that the “ratios of two-way tasks and required interaction tasks, which are important for developing basic communication abilities are lower than the one-ways tasks and optional interaction in the new versions of the textbooks”. Thus, it is important to introduce communicative activities into their classrooms to develop communication abilities. Crump (2007) did a study on the consequences of hiring native English speakers to teach English in Japan and their attitudes towards models of English teaching and the global spread of English. It was found out in the study that ALTs lack awareness of many issues of the global spread of English and English teaching in general. It was also concluded that the ALTs wanted training and specific job descriptions so that they know exactly what their roles are. Recommendations include pre-service and in-service training, seminars and designing and preparation of teaching materials. (Otomo, 2018) proposed one effective recommendation to the dilemma of the English teaching in Japan, which is the use of more communicative approaches in their English lessons and also emphasize “internalization”. She strongly suggested that there is a need for curriculum change in order to meet the needs of the government’s goal for 2020.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This case study used a variety of means to gather data including a survey conducted distributed to 61 ALTs/CNETs working in Osaka public elementary and junior high schools. Because of the limitation of time and ways of meeting other ALTs/CNETs in Osaka, the survey was done online. The researcher used google doc forms as a format and floated the questionnaire in the CNETs/ALTs official facebook account where only currently hired ALTs/CNETs are members, and they can only use their official Facebook accounts to join as members. The unstructured interview was also conducted to select ALTs/CNETs to gather more in-depth information about their answers and related information about the study. Interviews were done after the official weekly meetings of CNETs/ALTs in Osaka. Once a week, all CNETs/ALTs of Osaka City will gather together for a weekly meeting/seminar. Thus, the chance for the researcher to meet and schedule unstructured interviews with some selected participants. Other participants sent in their answers through e-mails. The researcher, being an ALT for three years with a dispatch company teaching in elementary schools and a CNET with Osaka City Board of Education for almost two years in Japan, has gathered related information for this study through direct observation and participant-observation results. Results are summarized in two tables below:

Table 1 *Survey Result “Weaknesses/Difficulties of the English Program in public Elementary and JHS Osaka from the perspective of CNETs/ALTs.”*

Rank	No. of respondents	Percentage	Answer
1	35	57.4%	Japanese teachers explaining and speaking too much using Japanese in class Lack of training and confidence of Japanese elementary teachers to teach English
2	30	49.2%	insufficient time for lesson plan meeting between the ALT and the JTL no professional career development for ALTs
3	29	47.5%	students are not motivated and quiet in class
4	27	44.3%	the use of too much grammar-translation method in junior high school unstable duration of work and lesser benefits of ALTs as compared to Japanese teachers
5	26	42.6%	English is introduced late in Elementary School at Grade 5-6
6	25	41%	Team teaching with Japanese teachers
7	24	39.3%	having different levels of learners
8	23	37.7%	Japanese teachers focus too much on the goal of the students to pass entrance examinations ALTs are used as “game machines.” lack of confidence of Japanese JHS teachers in their abilities to speak English in front of the students
	9	22	36.1% Inadequate textbook for elementary schools language barriers some ALTs dont have the experience and background to teach English to non-native speakers
10.	21	34.4%	Noisy and undisciplined students
11.	19	31.1%	students sleeping in class limited access to the internet
12.	17	27.9%	limited access to computers and printers
13.	14	23%	Unsuitable textbook for junior high school classes
14.	12	19.7%	cultural barriers ALTs are not given enough time to prepare for lessons

Table 2 *Continuee..*

Rank	No. of re-spondents	Percent-age	Answer
15.	8	13.1%	Insufficient teaching materials
16.	7	11.5%	the difficulty of working with other people from different cultures
17.	1	1.6%	OTHERS (training is either non-existent, not practical or abstract, writing isn't taught until far too late, phonics isn't taught, personality differences, vastly different workloads for ALTs in a week and Japanese teachers lacking faith in their students' abilities

Table 2 *Survey Result "Strengths of the English Program in Public Elementary and JHS Osaka from the Perspective of CNETs/ALTs."*

Rank	No. of respondents	Percentage	Answer
1	43	71.7%	hiring foreign native and non-native speakers to teach English
2	42	70%	students have the chance to be exposed to different teaching strategies from various teachers with various teaching and cultural background
3	31	51.7%	Providing cultural, linguistic and professional experiences for foreigners who want to work and live in Japan
4	29	48.3%	shorter working hours for ALTs
5	24	40%	lesser responsibilities and work loads for ALTs as compared to Japanese teachers
6	21	35%	better salary conditions as compared to the work they can find in their home countries
7	18	30%	Japanese JHS teachers are equipped to teach the grammar and structure of English
8	1	1.7%	OTHERS: ( working in another country with a different culture And interacting with the ALT gives students the incentive to learn

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question 1: What are the English programs weaknesses/difficulties from the perspective of the CNETs who are working in various public elementary and junior high schools in Osaka?

The top 1 answer of most CNETs/ALTs include:

1	35	57.4%	Japanese teachers explaining and speaking too much using Japanese in class Lack of training and confidence of Japanese elementary teachers to teach English
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Most ALTs/CNETs think that JTL's abilities are not applicable to the English program at hand. In JHS, most teachers speak a lot of Japanese in explaining and talking to the students. For a language program to be successful, the use of that language should be consistent. Thus, it is good if the students listen to English spoken by their teachers. If the teachers are using too much Japanese, then the students will only rely on listening to the Japanese translations and not use their critical thinking abilities to discern and discover the use of English. The use of Japanese in the classroom is important but should not be too much to the point wherein the students will just be waiting for the Japanese translation.

It is even worse in elementary schools because the teachers are not trained to teach English at all. The homeroom teachers are trained to teach all subjects except English. Thus, many elementary teachers are very shy and insecure about their English abilities. This will lead to homeroom teachers handing all the class to the ALTs, and they will just stay behind the class and not do anything at all. They are embarrassed that they cannot even speak minimal English and for them not to be “exposed” they just chose not to say or do anything.

The second top answer includes:

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2	30	49.2%	insufficient time for lesson plan meeting between the ALT and the JTL no professional career development for ALTs
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Ideally, the lesson planning should be done by the ALT/CNET together with the JTL. However, this rarely happens because of the differences in schedule. The Japanese teachers have a full schedule everyday. Please refer to Appendix for the sample schedules of both JTEs and ALTs in elementary schools and junior high schools. As we can see both from Table 1 (elementary) and Table 2 (Junior High School), JTLs have a very full schedule. The ALTs, on the other hand, are expected to stay in school from 8:30-4:15 as stated in their contract. ALTs have a lot of free time depending on the schedule that the schools will give them. However, the JTLs dont have much time. By the time the JTLs have some down time, the ALTs would have left the school (4:15). So, there is a difficulty in adjusting for the time to sit down and talk together about lesson planning.

Another top 2 in the result of the survey include “no professional career development for ALT”. This is because the ALTs are not the main teachers in class and some foreign teachers feel that this is constricting their abilities to grow professionally as a teacher.

Top 3 Answer in the survey include:

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3	29	47.5%	students are not motivated and quiet in class Lack of training and confidence of Japanese elementary teachers to teach English
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It is a fact that most Japanese students are quieter in class as compared to other countries in Asia, which have English programs as well. This is probably because of cultural considerations. Japanese culture value the group as opposed to being individualistic. The adage saying, “The nail that sticks out will be hammered down” still applies in this society. In the English class (or any other subjects for the matter), it is almost impossible to see a student voluntarily raising their hands to answer or to ask questions. Before they answer, they mostly ask for confirmation from their classmates before saying anything. When the researcher observed in the Japanese teachers class in JHS, the students are very quiet. The teacher employs lecture method and the students mostly listen and write what their teachers are saying. The teacher calls on the students to answer, and nobody volunteers information. Some students are even sleeping in class. The focus of most of the English classes is on grammar and translation. Thus, it is no wonder that students feel that English is difficult and boring- which leads to students who are not motivated to learn.

Top 4 answer in the survey include:

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4	27	44.3%	the use of too much grammar-translation method in junior high school unstable duration of work and lesser benefits of ALTs as compared to Japanese teachers
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In reality Junior high school teachers focus on too much grammar-translation method even though that the MEXT’s policy in the course guide specifically states that “...language activities should be conducted in such a way as grammar is effectively utilized for communicatio...consideration should be given so that instruction does not center on issues like explaining grammatical terms or differentiating between usage, but on actual use of grammatical items” MEXT (2017, p. 6).

JHS teachers mainly use the method of translation (teacher asking students to translate Japanese phrases/sentences to English and vice versa) or called “yakudoku” in Japanese (meaning translational reading). A Japanese teacher said, this method is a good practice for the entrance tests because the test involves a lot of “yakudoku” items. Although learning grammar is important for the English program, too much focus on it for the sake of the structure only and not used in the context of communication may lead to students who are too focused on grammar and not on communication. Many Japanese (even adults) fear to commit grammatical mistakes when talking. Thus, they sometimes opt not to speak for fear of making mistakes.

Another answer in rank 4 is that ALTs feel that their work is unstable because they work with a limited number of years in their contracts. The JET program runs for five years, CNETs for three years, and most dispatch companies renew contracts after a year. There are also different benefits but JTL’s benefits are way much better than ALTs. For example, JTLs have 20 days of paid leave in a year while the CNETs have 12 days. The JTLs have five days summer leave while the CNETS have three days. Salaries of JTLs are also much higher than ALTs and there are benefits that JTL’s have that CNETs or ALTs don’t have such as maternity benefits, sick leave, etc.)

Top 5 answer include:

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5 26 42.6% English is introduced late in Elementary School at Grade 5-6

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It is only recently that English is introduced in the elementary education system. However, the researcher thinks that introducing English in Grades 5-6 is way too late. Lennerberg’s critical period hypothesis states that first language acquisition has a critical period for it to be acquired and when it passes that age, then it would be difficult to attain it. Many theorists believe that this hypothesis also extends to second language learners.

Top 6 answer include:

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6 25 41% Team teaching with Japanese teachers

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Team teaching with Japanese learners is the main central role for ALTs/CNETs in the English program. This is the strength of the program- to be able to have two teachers with different backgrounds and specialties bringing all of these in the classroom to benefit the students’ learning. Understandably, it will also create lots of misunderstandings and difficulties when certain situations arise. In elementary, many homeroom teachers because of their lack of experience and expertise, the tendency of team teaching is almost non-existent or rare. The HRT usually gives the whole class to the ALT, and sometimes the HRT is only responsible in the discipline. Some ALTs complain that sometimes HRTs even bring their work in the class and just sit at the back doing their work, letting the ALT do the job. In Junior high school, the ALTs complain that “team teaching” is using the ALT to read certain passages and letting the students repeat it - the “human tape recorder” phenomena. In the researcher’s case, the JLTs give her the whole 50 mins of the class and help with the giving of directions and translating what the researcher (ALT) wants the class to do. Thus, in reality, it seems that “team teaching” includes the JLT doing the lesson planning and the lesson per se and just asking the ALT to do parts of it (like reading and pronunciation) or the JLT/HRT completely giving the whole lesson to the ALT.

Top 7 answer include:

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7 24 39.3% having different levels of learners

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Students have various levels because they are exposed to English in various ways. Some students attend “Eikawas” (private language schools geared for communicative aspects of English) or “jukus” (language cram schools geared for English grammar and structure). Other students have lived abroad and spoke English at home or school. Most of the students have their English exposure only in school. Thus, there are students with extreme levels - some are with high-intermediate levels and others have basic-low levels. For example in Grade 5, for most students, it is their first regular weekly class in English and it their first time to be taught in English by a native speaker (with the HRT). For others, who had attended after-school private language lessons, the English topics and the book used (Hi Friends) are



already very easy for them as they had English lessons for many years already. Teaching a class of 40 students with extreme English levels indeed is a great challenge for any teacher.

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8	23	37.7%	Japanese teachers focus too much on the goal of the students to pass entrance examinations ALTs are used as “game machines” lack of confidence of Japanese JHS teachers in their abilities to speak English in front of the students
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Passing the high school entrance test is very important for Japanese junior high school students. The free and compulsory education in Japan is 6 years elementary and 3 years junior high school only. High school is not compulsory and parents have to pay for the fees. The kind of high school, a student, goes to will affect the choice of future university and the choice of future kinds of employment. They think that it affects their future. Many students even start preparing even as early as 9th grade for entrance test and choosing the high school they will want to go to. A Japanese JTL said most 3<sup>rd</sup> year JHS students are so busy leading up to the tests days that most of them go to cram schools after regular schools and go home at around 10-11:00 pm. This is called entrance exam hell week “juken Jigoku”. They even give up their after school club activities so that they have more time to study. And they take care not to get sick as the public high school tests are usually given in one day. Thus the students can only take a one time chance to take the test for one particular school. If they do not pass, then they have to take tests for private high schools with more expensive fees.

ALTs being used as “game machines” is also an issue because the CNETs/ALTs feel that they can contribute more to the English program instead of just creating games and activities. Usually, the JLT teaches the grammar points then asks the ALT to read a passage or do a “game” with the students depending on their lesson. Sometimes, it may be related to the lesson but most of the times they just do it to use up the time. ALTs/CNETs feel that they can help more than just being that if given the opportunity and flexibility of the pedagogical system.

As explained earlier, JTLs use too much Japanese in class (Rank 1). JTLs in JHS speak more Japanese in class than HRT in elementary schools. This is because they have more classes in English classes and they have to explain lots of grammar rules and do lots of translations for the students. Although they are well versed in grammar and structure of the English language, they are not so confident with their speaking abilities especially speaking in front of the students. In the researchers own English JHS class, she tries to engage the JLT in English conversation in front of the students, and many students are amazed to find out that the JLT can actually “speak English”. One JTL said that as students, they feel that they didn't have enough time and chance to practice their English speaking abilities.

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9	22	36.1%	inadequate textbook for elementary schools language barriers some ALTs don't have the experience and background to teach English to non-native speakers
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One big dilemma for first-year ALTs/CNETs is how to teach the Hi Friends book (please see attachment for a copy). The instructions for the activities are written in Japanese and the teacher's book is also written all in Japanese. This book was designed in for the HRTs as the main teachers, but in reality, the ALTs/CNETs are given the book to teach. If the ALT/CNET cannot read Japanese, then it is difficult to manage the various activities because there are no English instructions available. Also, the book looks too “simple”, and it takes a teacher's skill and creativity to provide various lessons for each unit. For instance, in Lesson 4 in Hi Friends 1 (pp. 14-17) the main topic is “I like — / Do you like —?”. The ALTs and HRTs must prepare additional activities based on that lesson alone for a total of 4 lessons in a month, 45 minutes each with a maximum of 40 students in a class. If the ALT is a professional teacher or has a background in TESOL or further training, then it would not be that difficult. However, there are many ALTs who were hired without teaching experience but were hired just because they are “native speakers” and can speak the language. Most of them would be the difficulty in teaching strategies, especially to non-native English speaking students. They would have a difficulty because what they think is “simple” such as phonics or alphabets may be considered “difficult” for students who are learning English as a foreign language.



Also, a main barrier in the English program is language. Some ALTs/CNETs study the Japanese language before coming to Japan. Most of them have no Japanese abilities initially when they arrive in Japan. The researcher was hired with just a basic knowledge of Japanese and was faced with major difficulties especially in the elementary schools because most teachers in the schools cannot speak English. An ALT/CNET is usually assigned to a different school for a different day in a week (usually a ratio of 4-6 schools for one CNET in Osaka). If the ALT cannot speak Japanese, and the HRT cannot speak English then lesson plannings and meetings would be difficult. It is easier in junior high schools because the English teachers are expected to speak and comprehend English because they are English majors. Most of the other teachers could not speak English so expect only the English teachers are talking to the ALT.

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10.	21	34.4%	Noisy and undisciplined students
11.	19	31.1%	students sleeping in class

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As expected of compulsory education, there are different kinds of learners. Most of the students tend to be quiet in English class, and some are extremely noisy and undisciplined. Especially in the Osaka area, the researcher has encountered more “difficult” students as compared to working in the countryside of Japan where it is more rural. Osaka is a very big city and there are different kinds of people living in a very small area. One ALT said that there were some students in his class where they even jump on top of the desks, slam the doors/windows and run around during English class. There were three teachers in the room including the ALT, the HRT and the vice principal but still they could not contain the students. It is stated in the ALTs contract that it is “NOT” their duty to discipline students but leave it to the JTLs. If not noisy students then some students are sleeping in class. There is a higher tendency for junior high school students to sleep in class probably because JHS they have more activities to juggle- including school work, club activities, cram schools, and entrance tests. That leaves them little to no time to rest. Even in other classes, it is common to find students “dozing off”.

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11.	19	31.1%	Limited access to the internet
12.	17	27.9%	Limited access to computers and printers

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All teachers in elementary and JHS are provided with their desks and computers in the common teacher’s room (shokuin shitsu). These computers can be opened with the teacher’s passwords only and are connected to the internet and to the printers as well. ALTs/CNETs, on the other hand, are not given a computer but can use the common computer. However, (especially in Osaka) strict measure for school privacy is imposed thus some schools allow the ALT/CNET access to computers and printers, some schools don’t allow, and some schools allow only limited access. Some schools also have strict policies using personal handy drives and emails are blocked in the computers. With these restrictions, the ALTs/CNETs have limitations in preparing for their lessons especially supplement lessons to the textbooks.

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13.	14	23%	Unsuitable textbook for junior high school classes
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Junior high schools have the option of choosing which textbook to use (New Horizon, New Crown, Sunshine). These books are mandated by the MEXT to be chosen as English textbooks, and they have one for each grade (Grades 1-3). Some ALTs/CNETs feel that these textbooks are not suitable for the learners. ALTs interviewed said that the topics are designed in such a haphazard way that it is difficult for the students to understand. For example the textbook used for Grade 1 should consider the fact that it is the first exposure to English as an official subject in school. Thus, priorities should be given to the basics such as phonics and basic grammar structures. However, many students still cannot read but the book has portions where students are required to read and memorize lots of vocabularies. Even in other textbooks, the introduction and presentation of grammar structures are not that organized. For instance, in one unit, there are various grammar structures that were introduced which may or may not be related to each other. Thus, the students tend just to memorize instead of understanding the connections and use of the grammar structures.

Living and working in another country not your own will naturally lead to cultural and language barriers. If the ALT/CNET is culturally sensitive or aware of certain Japanese cultural nuances, then life would be easier. For instance,

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14.	12	19.7%	cultural barriers ALTs are not given enough time to prepare for lessons
15.	8	13.1%	insufficient teaching materials
16.	7	11.5%	difficulty of working with other people from different cultures

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Japanese people value the virtues of modesty, uniformity and group conformity. Thus, group activities would be a good option instead of individual activities where the student is asked one by one to stand up and answer a question. They don't want the attention to be focused on them as an individual but as a group. If the ALT is aware of this, then it would save some embarrassing moments for the students in the class. And also because of the cultural differences, sometimes difficulties will arise among ALTs working with the JTLs or other teachers. For example, Japanese people's concept of saving face is very important. One ALT said that she corrected the JTL's English in class and that led to trouble between them. The JTL felt that she was put on the spot in front of the students and her position as a teacher was compromised. The ALT, on the other hand, felt that she should give immediate correction for the sake of the students who are learning about English.

Other ALTs/CNETs feel that the materials provided were insufficient. Especially in elementary, the teachers need a lot of printed or digital visual aids/ flashcards to help in their lessons considering that it is the students' first exposure to the English language. Thus materials are indeed helpful. Four years ago, the EIGONOTE the elementary textbook was well provided with printed flashcards (big and small cards) with DVDs/CDs for all the topics discussed in the book. The present book, *Hi Friends*, do not have the flashcards, and the teacher must take the initiative to print and laminate the cards by themselves should they wish to have printed materials. On top of having insufficient materials, some ALTs are not given enough time to prepare for their lessons. Some schools give the schedules to their ALTs ahead of time. Sometimes, they just tell the ALT on that day or a few minutes before. Thus, the ALT doesn't have enough time to prepare for the lesson. And with any teacher, an unprepared lesson is not so efficient especially if you have unmotivated students.

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17.	1	1.6%	OTHERS (training is either non-existent, not practical or abstract, writing isn't taught until far too late, phonics isn't taught, personality differences, vastly different workloads for ALTs in a week and Japanese teachers lacking faith in their students' abilities)
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Other difficulties include: lack of training, writing taught very late, phonics not being taught, personality differences, lack of faith of Japanese teachers in their students' abilities, and different workloads of ALTs in a week.

Research Question 2: What are the strengths of the English Program in public Elementary and JHS Osaka from the perspective of CNETs/ALTs?

The top answers in the survey include the following:

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1	43	71.7%	hiring foreign native and non-native speakers to teach English
2	42	70%	students have the chance to be exposed to different teaching strategies from various teachers with various teaching and cultural background
3	31	51.7%	Providing cultural, linguistic and professional experiences for foreigners who want to work and live in Japan

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the hiring of foreign native/non-native English speakers to teach alongside the Japanese teachers is considered a very big strength of the English program. By hiring foreign teachers, students are exposed to two different types of teachers (ALT and JLT) with various teaching strategies and cultural background. The students have the best of both worlds - the JLT teaches the finer grammar points and structures of the English language and explains the grammar points in Japanese for the students to understand fully, the ALT could help with the communication, pronunciation practice, oral and listening practice, cultural aspects of the language and others details of the English language that could not be found in their textbook. On the other hand, it is also beneficial for the ALT because it provides cultural,

linguistic and professional experiences for them while living and working in Japan.

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4	29	48.3%	shorter working hours for ALTs
5	24	40%	lesser responsibilities and work loads for ALTs as compared to Japanese teachers
6	21	35%	better salary conditions as compared to the work they can find in their home countries

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Another strength of the program from the ALT/CNET's perspective is the nature of the job itself. Most of the ALTs interviewed said that this type of job is attractive for them because of its perks. First, they have shorter working hours as compared to the JLTs. As discussed earlier, the CNETs' working hours are from 8:30-4:15. Other ALTs in Japan have almost the same number of working hours- a total of 8 hours a day. However, not all the hours are spent teaching. Depending on the schedule given by the school, the ALT might have 1-5 classes in a day. Sometimes, with certain special activities, the ALT doesn't have any class at all, but the ALT must still report to the school. Aside from that, the ALT does not have the same responsibilities that JTLs have such as acting both as teachers and guidance counselors, disciplining, talking to parents, home visiting, practicing students for Sports Day/Music Festivals/speech contest and giving grades to students. Also, some ALTs said that the compensation that they get being ALTs are much better than what compensation they can get from working in their home country. For instance, for Filipino teachers working as CNETs, their salary as permanent public school teachers back in the Philippines could be 4-7 times more what they can get here working as ALTs. Of course, lifestyle is more expensive here in Japan and bills have to be paid but still, the salary is much better off.

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7	18	30%	Japanese JHS teachers are equipped to teach the grammar and structure of English
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Another strength of the English program has JLTs who know the ins and outs of the English grammar and structure. Most Japanese have studied the English language in detail and most of the time, JTLs can explain difficult grammar points more than the ALTs. The JTLs are majors in the English language thus they have studied the English language per se. Most ALTs are not English majors, and most of them are not teachers in profession.

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8	1	1.7%	OTHERS: (working in another country with a different culture and interacting with the ALT gives students the incentive to learn)
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Having foreign ALTs/CNETs give the students the incentive to learn. In an interview, most of the CNETs/ALTs said that they have felt like "superstars" of some sort when they have worked as ALTs in Japan, which they have not experienced in their home countries. Most ALTs said that their class is full of fun and include lots of singing, dancing and games for elementary students. Imagine Japanese students who are usually shy and reserve singing, dancing and playing games in a loud voice. The presence of the ALT gives energy and fun to the class and that is a strong incentive for them to want to learn and study English.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter would like to present its summary of the survey and the researchers conclusions and recommendations. This study presented various factors that the ALTs/CNETs think that give its English program its strengths and difficulties. Main difficulties lie within the program participants (ALTs/CNETs, JTLs/HRTs, students), students, nature of work, teaching materials, educational policies, and other aspects as well.

The hiring of CNETs/ALTs is seen as one of the major strengths of the English program. It is good for the students and Japanese teachers as well as good for the ALTs/CNETs themselves. The abilities and knowledge of the Japanese JHS teachers in grammar and English language structure is also the main strength of the program. However, this system also brings about difficulties.

Many ALTs/CNETs feel that the Japanese teachers are not that confident in teaching English especially teachers in the elementary. Sometimes, they (most JHS teachers) focus more on grammar and translation methods ("yakudoku") than on actual communicative ways of using the grammar structure. They often direct their lessons to focus on grammar

to help the students prepare for the high school entrance tests, which are a big part of a Japanese student's life. Often, they use too much Japanese in class to talk to the students. They are often too busy to sit down for a meeting with the ALT/CNET to do lesson planning. And most of them do not know how to maximize the presence of ALTs in their class except by using them as "human tape recorders" or "game machines". And most of them do not know the concept of "team teaching".

On the other hand, many ALTs/CNETs said that some ALTs have certain difficulties in class because they lack the expertise, training and experience to teach students who are non-native speakers of English with very low English levels. Some ALTs/CNETs also said that sometimes, the schedule given to them gives them too little time for preparation leading to unsuccessful classes.

The survey also pointed out to the students, as extremes- most of them are quiet and unmotivated, some even sleeping in class and some of them are noisy and undisciplined. Also, the difference between English levels and English exposure seem to be apparent.

The kinds of textbooks used in the English program is also seen by the ALTs/CNETs as a detriment and not a tool. The Hi Friends book in elementary is too "simple" and needs more content and the Junior high school textbooks more organization. This survey is only seen from the perspectives of the ALTs/CNETs thus naturally, most of the difficulties pointed out to the weakness of the Japanese teachers in the classroom.

### **Recommendations**

The recommendations presented are the researchers own as affected by her own experience as a CNET/ALT participant of the English program and partly affected by unstructured interviews conducted to selected ALTs/CNETs and other Japanese teachers.

**Related seminars and training are recommended both for ALTs/CNETs and JTLs/HRTs:** On the side of the JTLs in the junior high schools, seminars and trainings that aim to introduce more communicative language teaching approaches would help balance out the focus on too much grammar and translation based teaching practices. For the HRTs in the elementary schools, training and seminars on how to teach Hi Friends and other basic English lessons would help them gain more confidence in teaching English. For the ALTs/CNETs, training and seminars on effective and practical teaching strategies, such as TESOL based strategies and methodologies that would fit Japanese learners would be a great help especially for those with minimal teaching experiences. TESOL-based training with certificates given could give the ALTs/CNETs a certain degree of professional growth and development in their teaching career as well as help them with the actual classes.

**Team teaching training for ALTs/CNETS and JTLs/HRTs:** wherein the focus would be to practice better team teaching strategies. Open discussion (topics such as roles of teachers in the classroom discussion, etc.) and actual demonstration of team teaching should be a part of it.

**Japanese language classes for ALTs/CNETs:** The Board of Education should provide extra Japanese lessons for the ALTs/CNETs such as partnering with local community centers that provide volunteers who teach Japanese language lessons to foreigners. Another option is to allow the ALTs/CNETs to join Grade 1 elementary Japanese lessons so they could learn the basics of the Japanese language. It greatly helps if the ALT/CNET knows the language especially in the working environment where very little English is spoken.

**Consider Textbook revisions or change:** The MEXT or the Board of Education should consider the change of elementary textbooks and the revision of the Junior high school textbooks. If not, then teachers should consider using the textbook only as a base and may use supplemental materials/activities that are still related to the topics presented in the textbook.

**Consider lesser strict policies for the use of computers, internet and printers:** Teaching materials are very important especially in teaching English to Japanese learners who consider English as a foreign language. However, with certain privacy and confidentiality issues, the ALT/CNET has limited access to these devices. If possible, the CNETs/ALTs should be allowed a certain access to these devices such as having their passwords or being able to use the general computer in the teacher's room should be beneficial for the ALTs/CNETs in preparing materials for their classes.

**Consider introducing English earlier than the 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grade in elementary:** The MEXT's Course of Study is changed every ten years, and the next one will be in 2020 which aims to introduce the Foreign Language Activities starting from Grades 3 and 4 in the elementary. Hopefully this plan will push through. However, many issues are

still unresolved as to how it would be implemented. Does it mean that the English program will need to hire more ALTs/CNETs to fill the gap or will they impose the English classes to the already very busy homeroom teachers who are still not confident to teach and speak English?

**The flexibility of schedules for lesson planning meetings:** Japanese teachers should consider allotting a certain amount of time for lesson planning with the ALTs/CNETs. Even if it is only 5-10 minutes, as long as there is a sort of communication between them. The ALTs/CNETs should also understand the JLTs predicament and be prepared with their concise explanation of their lesson plans. They could utilize other ways such as having a written simple lesson plan to be given to the JLTs or in extreme cases, just leave it on their desks if they have no other time to meet together.

**Cultural awareness and flexibility for ALTs/CNETs:** Ultimately, the CNETs/ALTs are working and teaching in Japan, and not the other way around. Japan is a developed nation but has learned to do things on their own for a long time already. Change is not overnight, and it takes a degree of flexibility and cultural awareness and sensitivity for the foreigners living and working in Japan to be able to work successfully. Being able to understand the Japanese culture would be a big help to reduce tensions and misunderstandings in the workplace. Foreign and Japanese teachers working together successfully is the key to a good and lasting English program.

With all these recommendations, hopefully, it would produce students who are motivated and eager to learn English with teachers (both foreign and Japanese) who are able to guide the students in attaining their maximum potentials as learners and participants in the English program. It is the researchers hope that this mini-case study will be helpful in future in-depth studies that will help the success of the present and future English program in the elementary and junior high schools not just in Osaka but the whole Japan.

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**APPENDIX****Table A Sample Time Schedule of ALTs and JLTs in a Junior High School**

Time	Task	JTL's Duties	ALT's Duties
8:00-8:20	Arrive at school		
8:20-8:30	Greet students in front of the school		
8:30			Arrive in school
8:30-8:40	Morning meeting	Meeting with all teachers in the teacher's room	
8:50-9:35	1 <sup>st</sup> period class	Teach a class (Science)	Grade 6-1 English class
9:45-10:30	2 <sup>nd</sup> period class	Teach a class (English) together with the ALT	Grade 6-2 English class
10:30-10:50	Break time	play with students in the school playground	
10:50-11:35	3 <sup>rd</sup> period class	Teach a class (Math)	
11:45-12:30	4 <sup>th</sup> period class	Teach a class (Music)	Grade 5-1 English class
12:30-1:15	Lunchtime	Help students get food from the kitchen where food is cooked, prepare and distribute lunch to students	Eat with students
1:15-1:45	Cleaning time	Clean with the students	
1:50-2:35	5 <sup>th</sup> period class	Teach a class (P.E.)	Grade 5-2 English Class
2:45-3:30	6 <sup>th</sup> period class	Teach a class (Social Studies)	
3:30-4:00		Prepare students before going home	Give homework, etc.
4:15			Leave school
4:00-5:00		Meetings in the teacher room. If not, do other special activities such as meeting with parents, checking students' homework, workbook, etc.	
5:00-onwards	Overtime work	Teachers stay late until 7-8:00 pm to do work that they cannot do on normal days because of their full teaching loads.	



Table A Sample Time Schedule of ALTs and HRTs in an Elementary School

Time	Task	JTL's Duties	ALT's Duties
8:00-8:20	Arrive at school		
8:20-8:30	Greet students in front of the school		
8:30			Arrive in school
8:30-8:40	Morning meeting	Meeting with all teachers in the teacher's room	
8:50-9:35	1 <sup>st</sup> period class	Teach a class (Science)	Grade 6-1 English class together with the ALT
9:45-10:30	2 <sup>nd</sup> period class	Teach a class (English)	Grade 6-2 English class
10:30-10:50	Break time	play with students in the school playground	
10:50-11:35	3 <sup>rd</sup> period class	Teach a class (Math)	
11:45-12:30	4 <sup>th</sup> period class	Teach a class (Music)	Grade 5-1 English class
12:30-1:15	Lunchtime	Help students get food from the kitchen where food is cooked, prepare and distribute lunch to students	Eat with students
1:15-1:45	Cleaning time	Clean with the students	
1:50-2:35	5 <sup>th</sup> period class	Teach a class (P.E.)	Grade 5-2 English Class
2:45-3:30	6 <sup>th</sup> period class	Teach a class (Social Studies)	
3:30-4:00		Prepare students before going home. Give homework, etc.	
4:15			Leave school
4:00-5:00		Meetings in the teacher room. If not, do other special activities such as meeting with parents, checking students homework, workbook, etc.	
5:00-onwards	Overtime work	Teachers stay late until 7-8:00 pm to do work that they cannot do on normal days because of their full teaching loads.	