



Constructing Effective Teacher-Training Workshops for Japanese Pre-Service English Teachers

Tony Cripps^{1*}, Takao Imai¹, Sean H. Toland²

¹ Ph.D., Nanzan University, Japan

² Ph.D., The International University of Kagoshima, Japan

Abstract

This paper elucidates a research project that aims to understand and support the practical needs of pre-service English teachers who intend to teach at junior and senior high schools in Japan. Each day, novice English teachers who work in the Japanese public school system are facing challenges for which their pre-service training has failed to prepare them. Regrettably, the support structure for English teachers in the public system is sadly lacking. As part of this research project pre-service teachers of English (n=20) were asked through an online questionnaire to identify what topics they would like to be included in teacher-training workshops designed to address their needs. A series of one-day workshops were then developed based on these perceived needs. This paper explores the efficacy of the first two workshops based on the participants' (n=28) informal and written feedback. The authors map out the design of future workshops and argue that practical support is essential considering the current teacher-training structure in Japan. This research project aims to provide realistic solutions to many of the common problems that Japanese teachers of English encounter in their professional practice. It is hoped that fellow educators will find this paper useful when considering making changes to their own educational contexts.

Keywords: pre-service, support, teacher training, workshops

1. Introduction

Pre-service training programmes for English teachers vary in terms of length and quality throughout the world. This short paper will look at a Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) funded research project which aims to furnish meaningful support for Japanese pre-service English teachers. After providing some background on teacher training in Japan and a brief overview of a past research project designed to support in-service English teachers, this paper will focus on two pre-service workshops which were held in June and November 2022 respectively. The authors offer insights into how the workshops were constructed, provide examples of feedback from the participants, and consider the efficacy of the workshops. The final section discusses ideas for future workshops and maps out forthcoming developments.

2. Background

In many educational circles, teacher training is considered to be an essential field that has garnered increased domestic and international attention and fuelled significant research. On an international level, teacher training is at the forefront of research and pedagogical innovation. Teacher-training programmes are being developed in parallel with new educational policies throughout the world. The move towards the establishment of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) in the U.K., as well as coordinated pre-service and in-service professional development programmes in Canada and the U.S., demonstrate the importance of teacher education. On the domestic front, teacher training in Japan is even more crucial due to the changes implemented in 2020 by the Ministry of Education, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) to the university entrance examination system. There have also been additional changes to the New Course of Study curricular guidelines which means that adequate support for pre-service English teachers is essential if the policies are to succeed. Several researchers (e.g., Fukushima, 2018; Steele & Zhang, 2016; Tahira, 2012) agree that the lack of qualified English teachers in Japan is undesirable and that enhancing training programmes can provide one solution to this problem. Insufficient teacher training at the national level has created a problematic divide between educational policies in Japan and the reality of teaching (Kikuchi & Browne, 2009). Therefore, it is imperative that Japanese pre-service English teachers receive adequate training before they start teaching (Kurosawa, 2011; Ueno, 2013).

For many years, countries in Asia have recognized the importance of learning English. In South Korea, English became a mandatory subject in elementary school in 1997 followed by China in 2001. Although the Japanese government has invested a tremendous amount of resources into English language education, the levels of fluency are quite low compared to other Asian countries such as South Korea and Malaysia (Seargeant, 2019). It is clear that the English education system in Japan is trailing its Asian neighbours (Ikeda et al., 2019). MEXT is slowly trying to improve how English is taught in Japan, yet most pre-service English teachers feel ill-equipped for the challenges they will face when they start teaching full-time.

2.1 Providing Support for Japanese In-Service English Teachers

In 2015 Professor Cripps was awarded a ‘Kaken B’ research grant (No. 15H03481) by JSPS. This four-year research project sought to provide meaningful and practical support for Japanese in-service teachers of English. The motivation for applying for the grant was Professor Cripps’ frustration at seeing many of his students struggle when they first started teaching English after graduating from university. As part of the above Kaken B project,

four workshops were held that focused on the needs of in-service English teachers. The workshop topics were: (a) ‘teacher and learner motivation’, (b) ‘teaching English in Japanese high schools’, (c) ‘intercultural communication’, and (d) ‘creativity in the classroom’. The final workshop, which was entitled ‘transitioning from a learner to a teacher’, was given by Professor Doi from the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa and targeted the specific needs of pre-service English teachers (see Cripps & Doi, 2020). By the end of the research project, it was clear that pre-service English teachers required more support, and that a practical focus was essential to equip them with the skills required for the various classroom and professional challenges ahead. The success of the five workshops mentioned above provided the impetus for a further ‘Kaken B’ research grant application which focusses on providing support for pre-service teachers (see section 2.2. below).

2.2 Providing Support for Japanese Pre-Service English Teachers

Pre-service English teachers in Japan must overcome several significant obstacles. Three of the main challenges are: (a) responding to the demands of a new curriculum, (b) inadequate pre-service teacher training, and (c) a poor support structure once they enter the teaching profession (Mouri, 2020; Tahira, 2012). Deficient pre-service teacher training, especially in terms of the lack of practical on-site experience, is arguably one of the main contributing factors to why many pre-service teachers and novice English teachers in Japan feel ill-prepared when they enter the teaching profession.

University students who are taking the teaching license programme only have three weeks teaching practice at their former junior high school if they want to receive a junior high school teaching license. Remarkably, the training period to obtain a high school teaching license is only two weeks. During this on-site teaching practice, pre-service teachers are assigned a teaching mentor who gives them advice on how to plan and teach classes. However, in reality, pre-service English teachers are given little instruction and the actual number of classes that they teach during their on-site teaching practice can be as low as four lessons.

The aforementioned problematic situation prompted the research team to apply for a Kaken B research grant to support Japanese pre-service teachers of English. The grant was awarded by JSPS in 2021 (No. 21H00551). During the five-year duration of the project, the researchers will design and spearhead a series of practical workshops (in addition to other types of pedagogical and technical support) which will give pre-service English teachers the essential skills that they will need when entering the teaching profession.

3. Methodology

The pre-service workshops discussed in this paper were held at Nanzan University in June and November 2022. Nanzan University is a private Catholic university based in Nagoya city, Japan. Its Department of British and American Studies (known as ‘*Eibei*’ in Japanese) has an excellent reputation for producing graduates who have a high level of English. Many of these graduates become English teachers. The two key research questions which underlie this research project are:

1. What are the pedagogical needs of pre-service English teachers in Japan?
2. What support structure is needed to help these pre-service teachers?

Before designing the workshops, it was imperative to ascertain the needs of pre-service teachers. Twenty pre-service teachers of English studying at *Eibei* were asked through an online questionnaire what topics they would like to be included in teacher-training workshops designed to address their needs (Cripps, 2021; Cripps et al., 2023). Their responses were analysed along with data from in-service teachers that emerged during previous research projects (Cripps et al., 2017, 2018). This information was factored into the construction of the workshops in conjunction with informal feedback from Professor Cripps' seminar students. After each workshop, the participants' oral and written feedback were obtained via reflective circles and feedback forms. Several researchers (e.g., Gardner et al., 2022) have utilized reflective circles to provide teachers with mutual support and an awareness of different perspectives and strategies.

In total, 28 students attended the first two workshops. The data from the participants were analysed for emerging themes using a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2014; Saldaña, 2013). These initial themes were broken down into primary and secondary themes, which allowed the researchers to gain a more detailed understanding of the participants' needs. Before each of the workshops, Professor Cripps discussed the purpose of the teacher- development study and obtained the participants' informed consent. Pseudonyms have been used throughout this paper to protect the participants' privacy.

4. Discussion

4.1 Workshop No. 1

The first workshop held as part of this research project took place at Nanzan University on Saturday June 25, 2022. Two expert teachers, Professor Toland from the International University of Kagoshima, and Professor Uchida from Akita International University were invited to give workshop sessions (see Table 1 for the schedule). The design and themes of each session were shaped by responses from pre-service English teachers who were asked to identify what topics they would like to be included in teacher-training workshops that are aimed at addressing their specific needs. Two one-day workshops were held in 2022 based on these perceived needs with a series of workshops being planned over the next four years.

Table 1: Workshop One Schedule

Time	Details
12:50 – 13:00	Welcoming address
13:00 – 13:45	Professor Toland <i>Cultivating English language learners' creativity</i>
13:45 – 14:00	Break
14:00 – 15:00	Professor Uchida <i>Why can't they write?</i>
15:00 – 15:10	Closing remarks and feedback

Twelve Japanese pre-service teachers of English from *Eibei* participated in the first workshop in addition to the two session leaders and two professors from Nanzan

University. Professor Toland's session explored how to cultivate English learners' creativity and Professor Uchida's session focussed on Japanese students and their writing skills.



Figure 1: Professor Toland and Professor Uchida giving their sessions

4.1.1 Feedback and Efficacy

Professor Toland's session received a lot of positive feedback. For example, Kyoko wrote: *"I was pleased to know how to give students creative activities."* Risa, who was one of the students that Professor Toland had previously taught at Nanzan University, made the following comment: *"A lot of his activities and advice he gave were actually used in his classes, so they were easy to imagine in an actual classroom. It was nice looking into detail at what we were doing."* The participants also appeared to enjoy and acquire a lot of new knowledge from Professor Uchida's session. Takako wrote that: *"The interaction was fun, and his explanations were exactly what I wanted to know when I couldn't figure out how to get my students to think some more."* Moe noted that: *"It was a really fun presentation, and it was also an interesting topic for me."* In terms of judging the overall efficacy of the first workshop, from the feedback received, it is fair to say that it achieved its short-term goals. The participants had positive feelings about the workshop and reported that they had gleaned a lot of useful information from both sessions. However, in terms of long-term efficacy, further research is needed through follow-up studies which will track the participants once they enter the teaching profession.

4.2 Workshop No. 2

The second workshop of this research project took place at Nanzan University on Saturday November 19, 2022, and four expert teachers gave individual sessions. Professor Toland from the International University of Kagoshima and Professor Uchida from Akita International University were invited again to give sessions. In addition, Professor Matsumoto from Bond University in Australia and Professor Cripps from Nanzan University gave sessions (see Table 2 for the schedule).

Table 2: Workshop Two Schedule

Time	Details
10:25 – 10:30	Welcoming address
10:30 – 11:30	Professor Uchida <i>Ask Plus Answer Plus: a way to help false beginners speak/write. Ask Plus Answer Plus:</i> 一言添えて広がる英会話・英作文
11:30 – 11:45	Break
11:45 – 12:15	Professor Toland <i>Strategies to support Japanese English language learners' 21st century skills</i>
12:15 – 13:05	Lunch
13:05 – 14:05	Professor Matsumoto <i>How to reverse the trend: Japanese could speak English better</i>
14:05 – 14:15	Break
14:15 – 14:45	Professor Cripps <i>Tips for getting your students to speak English</i>
14:45 – 15:00	Closing remarks and feedback

Sixteen Japanese pre-service English teachers took part, along with the four session leaders and a professor from a private university in Nagoya. The design of the second workshop was based on the oral and written feedback received after the first workshop. Most of the participants of the first workshop expressed a need for learning about how to improve learners' spoken English. Professor Uchida gave a session on how to help false beginners speak and write. Professor Toland focussed on teaching strategies which support learners' 21st century skills. In the afternoon, Professor Matsumoto's session was on how Japanese English language learners can improve their spoken English and Professor Cripps facilitated the final session on how to encourage students to speak more English in class.



Figure 2: Professors Uchida, Toland, Matsumoto, and Cripps giving their sessions

4.2.1 Feedback and Efficacy

The written and oral feedback for the second workshop provided by the participants mirrored that of the feedback for the first workshop in that it was overwhelmingly positive. Professor Uchida's session concentrated on the idea of making classes interesting and encouraging students to focus on the meaning of sentences rather than translating each sentence word for word. In addition, the session stressed the importance of providing students with a sense of achievement which also resonated with the pre-service English teachers as Jun commented: *"I strongly agree with your opinion that teachers should provide students with a sense of achievement in their classes."*

The feedback on Professor Toland's session was extremely favourable and the participants noted that he provided good examples of useful activities and teaching materials – as Haruki wrote: *"It was fun actually doing them in class and they were good references for teaching practice."* Professor Toland's session also delved into the issue of information and communication technology (ICT) use. Many of the participants, being digital natives, wanted to know how to integrate ICT into their classes. Professor Toland introduced an activity which encourages students to make their own 'marketing videos' and this resonated with many of the participants. Takako noted: *"It is an interesting way to have students communicate and collaborate with each other."*

The pre-service English teachers found Professor Matsumoto's afternoon session on how to improve students' spoken English thought-provoking. Takako commented that: *"I always thought that pronunciation is an important factor for English, but after the lesson my mind changed."* Many English teachers in Japan tend to over-emphasise the

importance of pronunciation and Professor Matsumoto's session challenged this pedagogical fixation. He also advocated the view that students do not have to be concerned with "speaking English like a native speaker" and instead they should concentrate on improving their fluency. Kyoko wholeheartedly agreed with this point of view and considered what she would say to her students: *"If I become a teacher, I would like to tell them they do not have to speak like native speakers. Instead, I would like to have the students engaged in speaking focussing on fluency more."*

Professor Cripps' session was more practical in nature and encouraged the participants to think about how to create effective speaking activities. He incorporated collaborative group work into his session which Kaori, amongst others, found very useful: *"I was able to learn the characteristics of a successful activity. I would like to implement these traits to create successful activities and help students enjoy English."* Professor Cripps also stressed the importance of creating a fun atmosphere in class. All the participants agreed with this point as the following comment from Saori illustrates: *"It is important to give students some enjoyable and fun moments in class."* Likewise, Hanae stated: *"I thought that it's important for teachers to make a good atmosphere for students."*

4.3 Extending the Support

As shown above, the reaction to both workshops was overwhelmingly positive. The research team has already taken the next step regarding providing further workshops specifically tailored to the needs of pre-service teachers. Since many workshop participants will do their on-site teaching practicums during the 2023 academic year, two mini-workshops were also designed for both before and after their teaching practicums. The first one was held on May 14, 2023, and covered concerns which the pre-service English teachers had with their up-coming teaching practicums. The second mini-workshop took place on June 21, 2023, and was in essence a 'debriefing' session which went over their teaching practice experiences in which the participants analysed their teaching practice experiences in reflective circles. These two training sessions will be explored in detail in a future publication.

In addition to the pre- and post-teaching practicum workshops, two more workshops are being planned for the current academic year (2023-2024). The first one will be held on the 'Zoom' videoconferencing platform. In-service English teachers will be asked to share their teaching expertise with pre-service English teachers from a teaching seminar at Nanzan University. A further face-to-face workshop based on suggestions from both pre- and in- service teachers is currently being designed and will cover such topics as:

- Teaching grammar
- Creating interesting activities
- Using ICT effectively
- How to keep students motivated
- Teachers' motivation and beliefs
- How to conduct efficient collaborative group work
- Creating interesting classes and lesson plans
- Content and language integrated learning (CLIL)

The research team will continue to try and meet the demands of pre-service teachers by analysing the data that were generated during the workshops and working closely with in-service English teachers. The fluidity of this situation is such that the content and scope of the workshops is always evolving.

5. Conclusion

Previous studies (e.g., Ikeda et al., 2019; Seargeant, 2019) have shown that the English education system in Japan is falling behind other Asian nations. Ultimately this is not that surprising as both pre- and in-service Japanese English teachers failed to receive adequate training on how they can integrate communicative language teaching into their classrooms (Okumura, 2017). Furthermore, the practicum period for pre-service educators is woefully inadequate, especially when one considers that potential teachers might only teach a total of four lessons before entering the profession. The researchers were cognizant of this unfortunate reality and thus created a series of workshops to support Japanese pre-service English teachers. Creating and conducting an effective teacher-training workshop is something that is much easier said than done. First and foremost, workshop design and implementation should address the specific needs of the participants. The two workshops outlined in this paper sought to meet the demands of pre-service English teachers at a private Japanese university who have little or no teaching experience. Both workshops were designed after consultation with pre-service English teachers and are based on previous research on in-service teachers' needs. The participants' informal and written feedback was analysed and used to construct subsequent workshops. Reaction to these training sessions was overwhelmingly positive. Future workshops are currently being constructed based on the expressed needs of pre-service English teachers, while also taking into consideration suggestions from several in-service English teachers. It is expected that the scope of future workshops will widen to take into account the disparate needs of pre-service English teachers. It is also likely that more interaction between pre- and in-service teachers will be woven into the design of future workshops so that professional contacts can be established and both groups can share their experiences and knowledge.

Acknowledgment

The research team would like to thank the professors who delivered each of the workshop sessions and all the participants.

Ethics

This research project was given ethical clearance by Nanzan University's Committee for Research Screening in 2021.

Funding

This research project is being generously funded by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) Kaken B No. 21H00551.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

- Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Sage.
- Cripps, A. C. (2021). What skills do pre-service teachers think they need? *HICE 2021 Proceedings*, pp. 518-531.
- Cripps, A. C., & Doi, S. (2020). Addressing the needs of pre-service English teachers through a one-day workshop. *Academia* (108), pp. 69-84.
- Cripps, A. C., Imai, T., & Toland, S. H. (2023). Designing teaching workshops for pre-service teachers of English in Japan. *The 18th Education and Development Conference (EDC 2023) Proceedings*, pp. 81-100.
- Cripps, A. C., Imai, T., Toland, S. H., & Uchida, H. (2023). “That was a masterpiece!”: Crafting effective workshops for Japanese pre-service teachers of English. *The IAFOR International Conference on Arts & Humanities in Hawaii (IICAH2023) Proceedings*, pp. 343-354.
- Cripps, A. C., Miles, R., & O’Connell, S. (2017). Motivating instructors and learners of English: A teacher-training workshop. *Academia* (102), pp.105-124.
- Cripps, A. C., Miles, R., & O’Connell, S. (2018). Integrating content with English language education in Japan: The perspectives of in-service and trainee teachers. *Academia* (103), pp. 259-267.
- Fukushima, M. (2018). English for elementary school teachers in Japan: Ways of enriching teachers’ experience in Learning and using English. 富山国際大学子ども育成学部紀要第9巻第2号, pp. 39-56.
- Gardner, F., Southall, A. E., & Baxter, L. (2022). Effectively supporting teachers: A peer supervision model using reflective circles. *Teachers and Teaching*, 28(3), 369-383. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2022.2062727>
- Ikeda, M., Imai, H., & Takeuchi, O. (2019). An innovative approach to in-service teacher training for teaching English at Japanese public elementary schools. In H. Reinders, S. Ryan, & S. Namamura (Eds.), *Innovation in language teaching and learning: The case of Japan* (pp. 257-282). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kikuchi, K., & Browne, C. (2009). English educational policy for high schools in Japan: Ideals vs. reality. *RELC Journal*, 40(2), pp. 172-191. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688209105865>
- Kurosawa, J. (2011). Syougakou Gaikokugo Katsudou (Eigo Katsudou) ni okeru Mondai to Kyouin Kensyu Kouza no Teian (Issues related to English teaching in primary schools and suggestions on programs for teacher training). *Journal of Naruto University of Education*, 2, pp. 29-38.
- Mouri, T. (2020). 少子化の中の教員養成と教育学: 教員養成系大学・学部の挑戦 [Teacher training, pedagogy, and the declining birth rate: The challenges facing Japan’s teacher training faculties and universities], 教育学研究所 [Educational Research], 87(2), pp. 203-13. https://doi.org/10.11555/kyoiku.87.2_203
- Okumura, S. (2017). Homeroom teachers or specialist teachers?: Considerations for the workforce for teaching English as a subject at elementary schools in Japan. *Asian Journal of Education and Training*, 3(1), 1-5. <https://doi.org/10.20448/journal.522/2017.3.1/522.1.1.5>

- Saldaña, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (2nd ed.). Sage.
- Seargeant, P. (2019). English in Japan in an era of global uncertainty. In H. Reinders, S. Ryan, & S. Namamura (Eds.), *Innovation in language teaching and learning: The case of Japan* (pp. 9-22). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Steele, D., & Zhang, R. (2016). Enhancement of teacher training: Key to improvement of English education in Japan. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 217, pp. 16- 25. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2016.02.007>
- Tahira, M. (2012). Behind MEXT's new course of study guidelines. *The Language Teacher*, 36(3), pp. 3-8.
- Ueno, N. (2013). Developing a teacher training program for English teachers in Japan: Enabling nonnative English speakers to teach solely in the target Language. *Journal of Ibaraki Christian University*, 47, pp. 107-23.