

Training Prospective Secondary School English Teachers in Japan

AILA Madison '05

Background

What kinds of qualities are required of prospective English teachers for employment? Unfortunately, no teacher-quality standards for employment have been officially announced by any local board of education. Besides, there have been few, if any, surveys conducted on the perspectives of pre-service teacher screening for employment. If standards or perspectives of screening for hiring new teachers of English were available, universities and colleges could provide their students with more effective and hands-on training.

In the previous years, the SIG on English Education of the Japan Association of College English Teachers (JACET) carried out a couple of investigations with the local boards of education and university professors of English teaching pedagogy. With the results of these investigations as well as the prior surveys conducted by the Teacher Education Research Group (TERG), the SIG has worked out 30 items which are considered as the criteria for screening for employment, and classified them into six categories: 1. personality traits, 2. aptitude for being a teacher, 3. competence for classroom teaching, 4. knowledge of English teaching pedagogy, 5. knowledge about education for international understanding, and 6. English language ability. What the SIG should do next is to find out how these categories with their 30 items will be weighed by the teacher-trainers who are in charge of employment at the local boards of education.

Purpose

To clarify the qualities of pre-service English teachers suitable for employment and make some suggestions for improvement of English teacher training at universities and colleges.

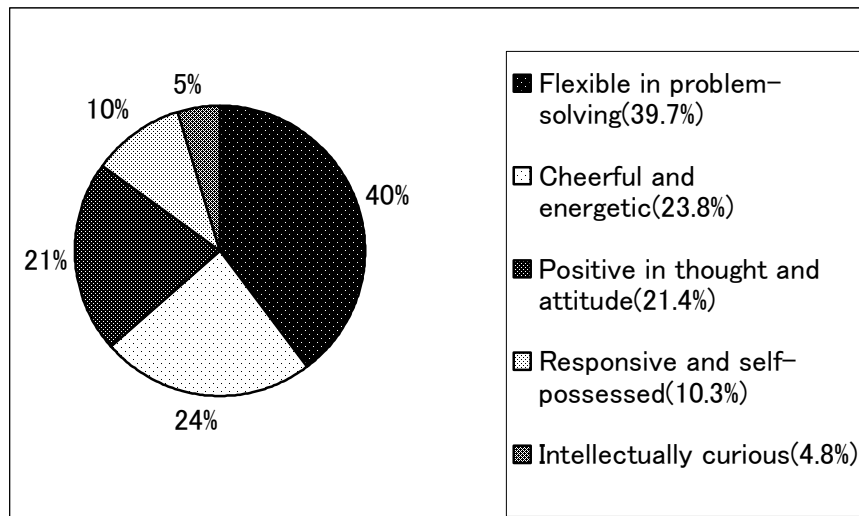
Methods

A questionnaire was sent to 62 teacher trainers in charge of employment at the local boards of education in April 2004. The teacher trainers were asked to choose three out of five items from each category and rank them first to third. Then, they were asked to rank the six categories. Finally, they were requested to write what should be emphasized in the pre-service English teacher training programs at universities and colleges.

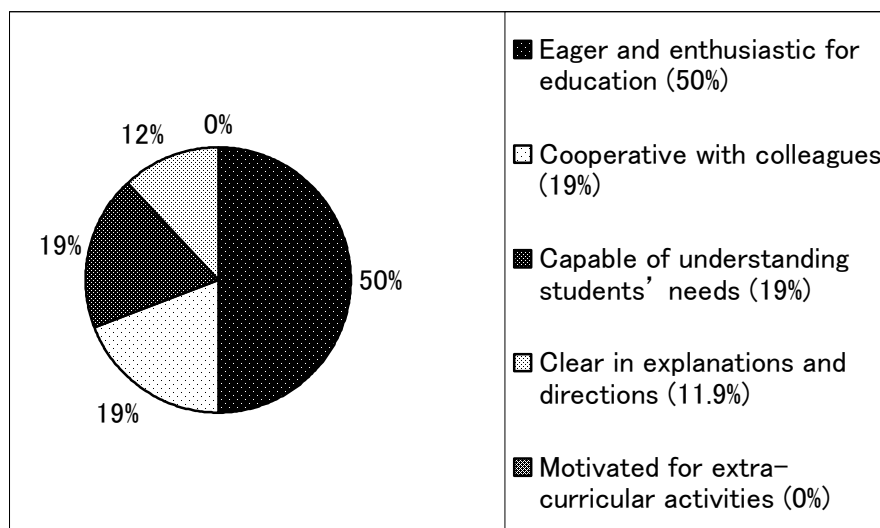
Results (N=21)

I Percentage distribution of weight of the five items from each category

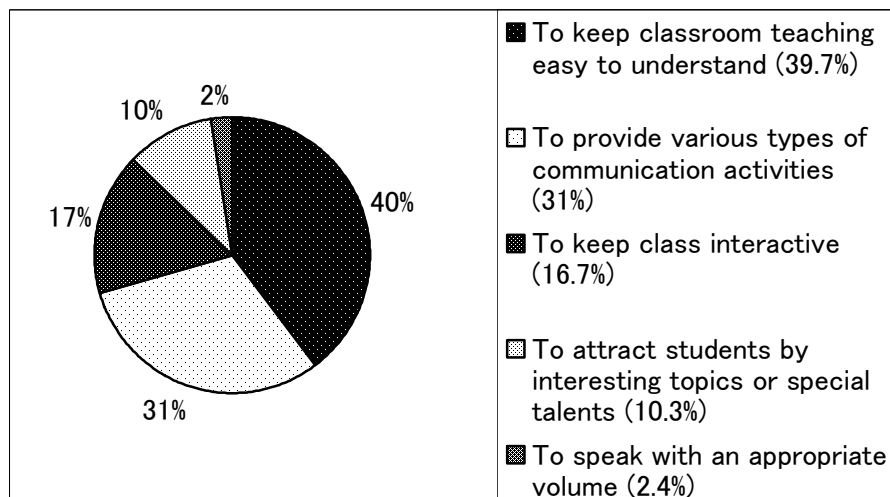
1. Personality traits



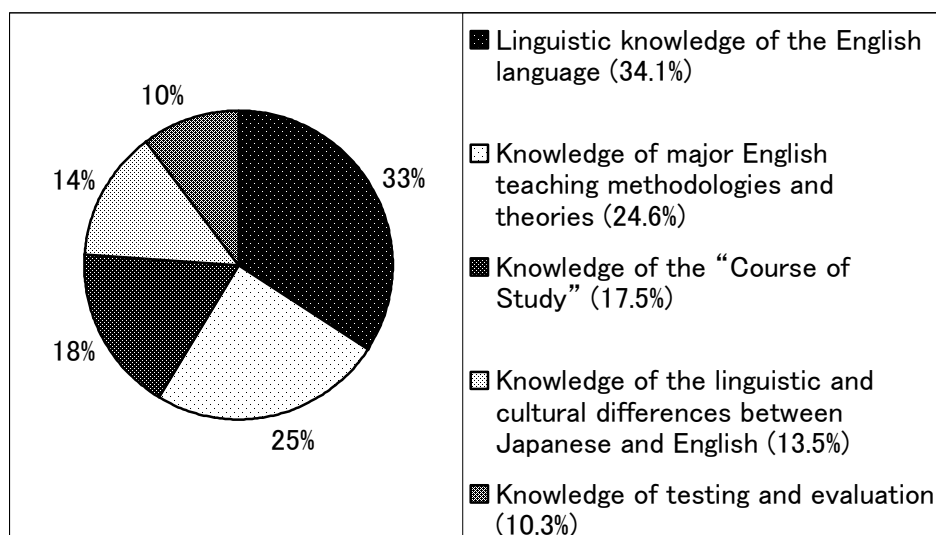
2. Aptitude for being a teacher



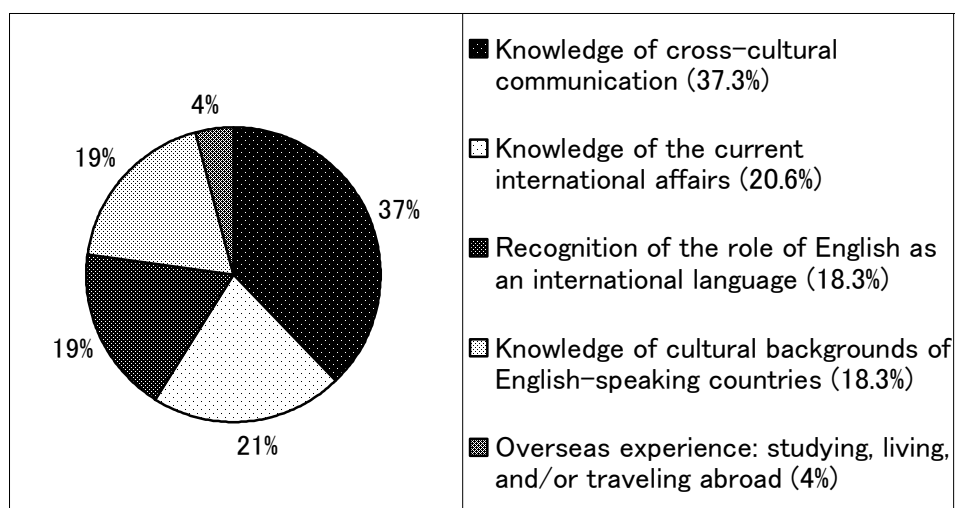
3. Competence necessary for classroom teaching



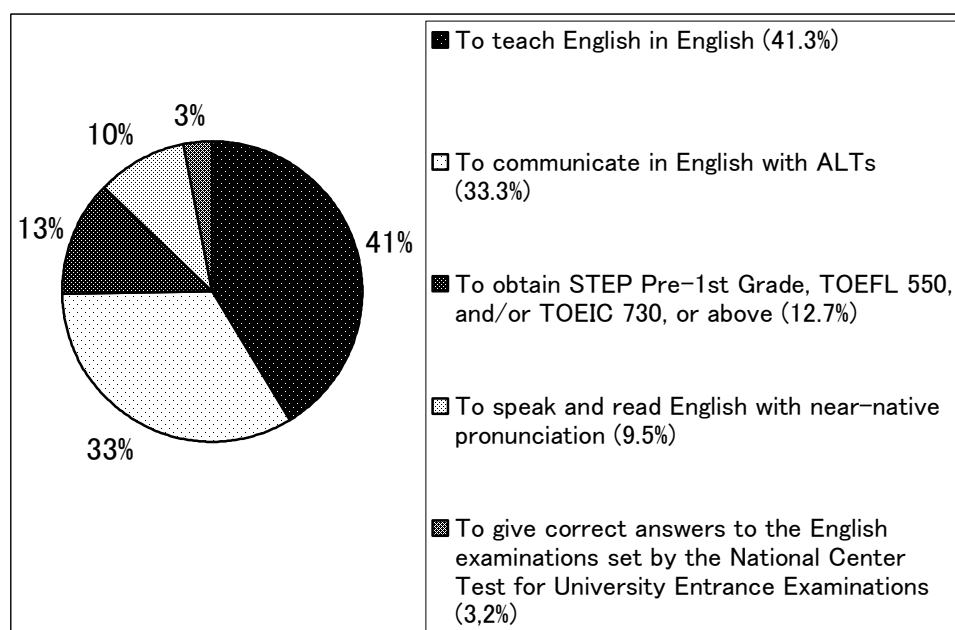
4. Knowledge of English teaching pedagogy



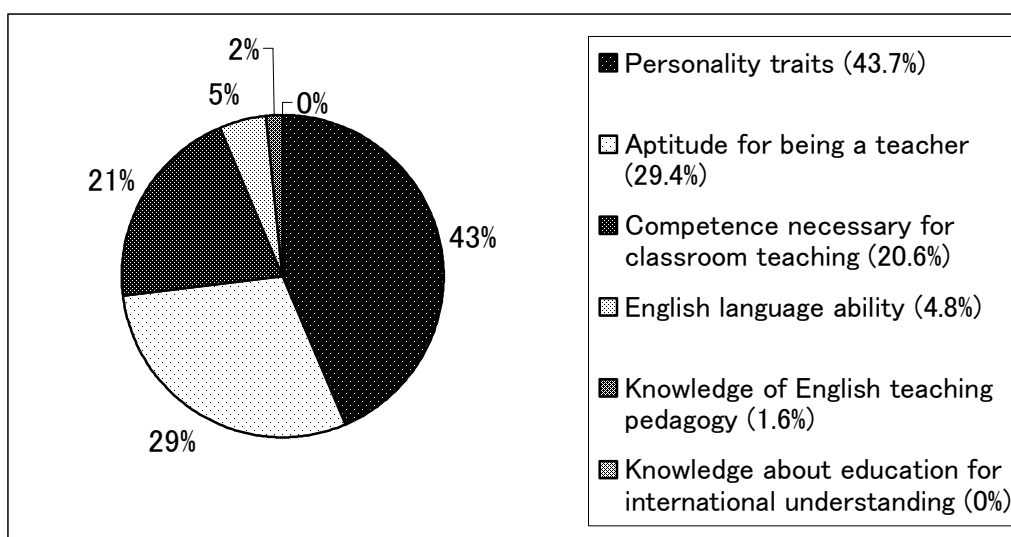
5. Knowledge about education for international understanding



6. English language ability

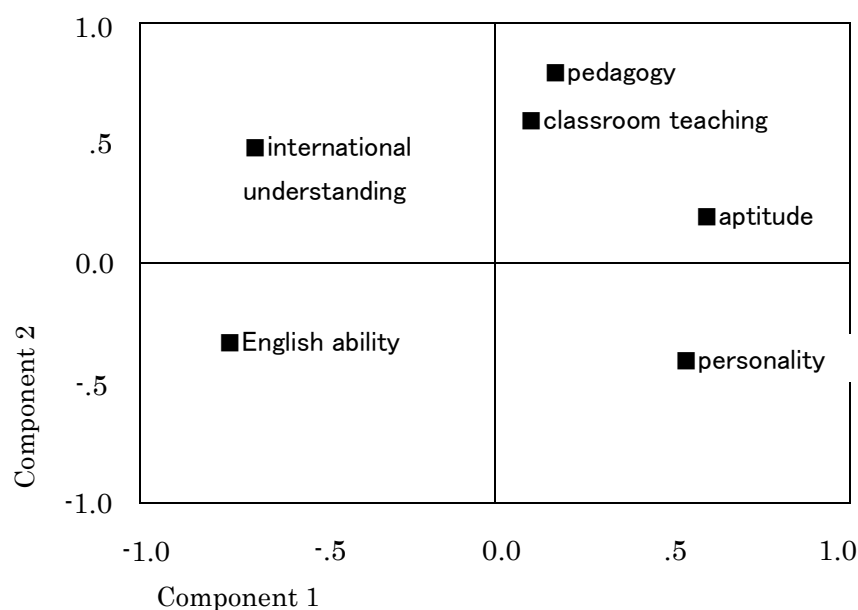


II Percentage distribution of weight of the six categories



Analysis

1. Principal component analysis

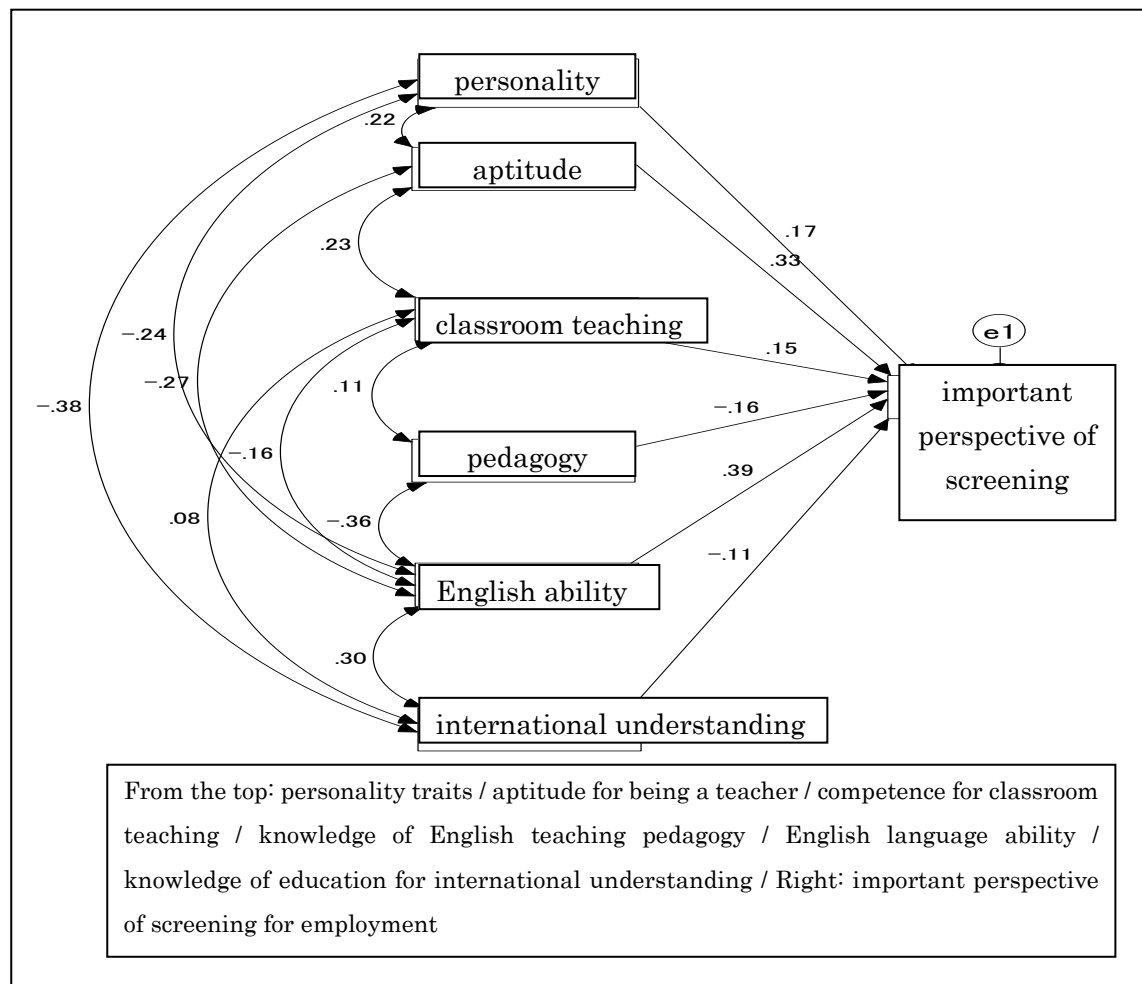


Abbreviations—pedagogy: knowledge of English teaching pedagogy / classroom teaching: competence necessary for classroom teaching / aptitude: aptitude for being a teacher / international understanding: knowledge of education for international understanding / English ability: English language ability

This chart indicates how the teacher trainers grouped the six categories in their minds when responding to the questionnaire. ‘Pedagogy,’ ‘classroom teaching,’ and ‘aptitude’ are placed in the first dimension, which suggests they were related as one group. However, the other three are distributed in the different dimensions. It means the first dimension group

has minus correlations with the categories in the other three dimensions respectively. This result suggests that the teacher trainers did not necessarily respond to the questionnaire taking into consideration the organic connections among the categories.

2. Structural equation modeling by AMOS version 5.0



This chart shows that English language ability is the most influential factor (.39) upon the important perspective of screening for employment. However, it is placed fourth in the percentile rank of the six categories: 4.8% (see Results II). Apparently, there is a great contradiction between these two results. To find out, we must take a close look at the responses to the items of this category.

The category of 'English language ability' is constituted of five components. Most of the 21 respondents ranked two components either first or second in weight as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 English Language ability

	1st		2nd		Total	
To teach English in English	13	61.9%	6	28.6%	19	90.5%
To communicate in English with an ALT	6	28.6%	11	52.4%	17	81.0%

The English language ability the teacher trainers thought of as important for teaching converges at the above two items. There are no other categories which converge among their items like this. Therefore, this category shows the strongest influence in spite of the fact that it is ranked fourth. From this result, we can posit that these two abilities are recognized nationwide as the most important factors of English language ability of English teachers, and that they were necessary conditions for the teacher trainers when weighing the six categories. In other words, the teacher trainers might unconsciously regard these two abilities of English as an integral attribute of English teachers. However, it can still be pointed out that the teacher trainers' perspectives of screening for employment are inconsistent in terms of the organic connections between English language ability and the other three categories which form a group in the first dimension.

Discussion

This survey reveals there is a widely accepted belief that teaching English in English comes first in English teaching pedagogy. In actuality, however, here are the results from two surveys conducted by the TERG (2003) which contradict this belief.

A number of class observations at junior and senior high schools suggest that there are few cases, if any, where teachers use only English in class. Also, many of those teachers who participated in the in-service teacher training held under the auspices of the local boards of education complained that they were not able to teach English in English in their classrooms even after they had been provided with the know-how of communicative language teaching (CLT).

These two facts indicate:

- 1) their belief contradicts the realities of English teaching classrooms at secondary schools.
- 2) CLT provided at the teacher training does not necessarily fit in the actual educational settings.

These can be a reason why English language ability has a minus correlation with the group of three categories. Although CLT has so far been advocated in the in-service and pre-service English teacher education, the method of teaching English in English has not fully taken root in Japanese secondary schools. CLT is not likely to take root until it is developed based upon the actual classroom teaching conducted by the ordinary Japanese teachers of English.

Conclusion

The six categories the SIG worked out are considered to be important attributes of English teachers. However, the results of this survey show that there are no unified teacher-quality standards for employment nationwide because the teacher trainers failed to be consistent in weighing items as well as categories. Only three categories form a correlated group. The ranking of the 15 items in this group may be worth showing:

1. Eager and enthusiastic for education
2. To keep classroom teaching easy to understand
3. To provide various types of communication activities
4. Cooperative with colleagues
5. Capable of understanding students' needs
6. Clear in explanations and directions
7. To keep class interactive
8. To attract students by interesting topics or special talents
9. Linguistic knowledge of the English language
10. To speak with an appropriate volume
11. Knowledge of major English teaching methodologies and theories
12. Knowledge of the 'Course of Study'
13. Knowledge of the linguistic and cultural differences between Japanese and English
14. Knowledge of testing and evaluation
15. Motivated for extra-curricular activities

Further Development of English Teacher Education in Japan

1. Providing comprehensive knowledge and hands-on training of English teaching pedagogy
 Most current pre-service teacher-training curricula in universities and colleges do not meet the realities of English teaching classrooms at secondary schools. Consequently, many teachers who are lacking in knowledge and skills of practical teaching pedagogy have been produced. Some measures should be taken in each university and college to enhance the fitness of the teacher-training curricula to actual classroom teaching.
2. Improving prospective teachers' English proficiency
 Many universities and colleges have failed to produce capable teachers who can teach English in English. Minimum criteria for would-be teachers' English proficiency should be set. Their language communication ability including native tongue and knowledge about cross-cultural communication and world varieties of English should also be improved.
3. Developing prospective teachers' aptitude for being a teacher
 Highly motivated and enthusiastic teachers are wanted in secondary schools. Good teachers are considered to be collaborative with their colleagues, reliable to their students and parents, and flexible in problem-solving. The teacher-production institutes should help their students develop these attributes of good teachers.
4. Encouraging prospective teachers to study abroad
 Cross-cultural and international understanding as well as language ability is required of prospective teachers of English. In order to broaden their horizons, would-be teachers should be encouraged to have overseas experience.
5. Increasing the length of the teaching practicum
 The length of the teaching practicum for junior high school teachers is 3-4 weeks, whereas that for senior high school is only 2 weeks. This is definitely too short, compared with that of other advanced countries. The teacher-production institutes and secondary

schools should work together to create an environment where student-teachers will be able to conduct their teaching practice for at least twice or three times as long as the present periods.