Secondary School English Teacher Training in Japan

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I   Introduction

1. New directions of English education in Japan

The Course of Study has provided overall objectives, curriculum and syllabus of all subjects in school education and it has been revised every ten years. In 2002, a new course of study was introduced. Regarding English subjects for secondary education, the emphasis was put upon the enhancement of the practical ability to communicate in English. Also, in 2003, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) announced the action plan to cultivate "Japanese with English abilities." One of the main objectives of this plan was that classroom English teaching in secondary schools should be conducted mainly in English.

Unfortunately, however, the realities of classroom English teaching turned out far from being satisfactory. In July last year, *the Yomiuri* reported that only 4% of junior high school teachers taught English mainly in English, whereas in senior high a little more than 1% except the subject of Oral Communication (25.1%).

The action plan also stipulates the benchmark of the English ability of secondary school teachers of English: that is, Pre-1st Grade of STEP (Society of Testing English Proficiency), TOEFL PBT550, TOEIC 730 or above. Actually, junior high school teachers who cleared this benchmark were around 10% and senior high school teachers less than 20% according to the survey conducted by the MEXT (*the Yomiuri* 2005).

2. English teacher training system

Japan has an "open system" of teacher education: that is, any accredited university, public or private, is able to issue teaching certification to qualified students as long as they have taken the teacher training courses stipulated by law. As a result, a great number of students who have obtained a teaching diploma do not go into the teaching profession.

One of the big problems is the duration of teaching practicum. It is two weeks for prospective senior high school teachers and three to four weeks for prospective junior

high school teachers.

Another problem lies in the screening process of the students who apply for the teacher training course. According to our 2003 survey, no more than 20 % of universities set a particular standard for English proficiency to be enrolled in the training course.

3. Surveys conducted by the JACET SIG

In the academic years 2004-2005, the JACET SIG on English Education conducted several surveys and investigations. In this paper, we are going to report the results of the two surveys: one was carried out among the local boards of education and the other among local schools which accepted the teacher trainees, focusing on 1) the qualities of pre-service English teachers suitable for employment, and 2) the awareness of the teacher trainers in the local schools concerning the teacher education programs, particularly the details of teaching practicum and the possibility of the extension of its length.

From these two surveys, we will indicate what qualities are appropriate for the prospective teachers and how to educate such teachers.

II   A survey on qualities of pre-service English teachers suitable for employment

1. Background

In Japan, the local boards of education of forty-seven prefectures and fifteen ordinance-designated cities are authorized to employ public school teachers on their own. The process and methods of screening for hiring new teachers are different from area to area. Usually, there are three stages of screening: a paper screening, written examinations and interviews. Quite recently, more and more local boards of education have required their applicants to do microteaching or simulated teaching. The applicants are screened out stage by stage.

The dates and types of examinations are announced in official bulletins and websites. However, the information on the criteria or perspectives for screening for employment has never been disclosed.

2. Purpose

To find out the qualities of pre-service English teachers suitable for employment.

3. Questionnaire

A survey was carried out in April 2004 among the sixty-two local boards of education. The questionnaire was composed of six categories with five items within each

category which were narrowed down to the possible perspectives for screening for employment based upon the previous surveys and investigations. The six categories were: 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.

The supervisors in charge of employment at the local boards of education were asked to choose three out of five items from each category and rank them from first to third. After that, they were asked to rank the six categories.

4. Results

(1) Number of responses

Twenty-one boards of education made a response. Although this number seemed small, the results of the survey were thought to be very significant because they could help provide teacher-production institutes with useful suggestions for improvement of English teacher training.

(2) Percentage distribution of weight of the five items from each category

Table 1　Personality traits

Flexible in problem solving	39.7%
Cheerful and energetic	23.8%
Positive in thought and attitude	21.4%
Responsive and self-possessed	10.3%
Intellectually curious	4.8%

Table 2　Aptitude for being a teacher

Eager and enthusiastic for education	50%
Cooperative with colleagues	19%
Capable of understanding students' needs	19%
Clear in explanations and directions	12%
Motivated for extra-curricular activities	0%

Table 3　Competence for classroom teaching

To keep classroom teaching easy to understand	39.7%
To provide various types of communication activities	31%
To keep the class interactive	16.7%
To attract students through interesting topics or special talents	10.3%
To speak with an appropriate volume	2.4%

Table 4   Knowledge of English teaching pedagogy

Linguistic knowledge of the English language	34.1%
Knowledge of major English teaching methodologies and theories	24.6%
Knowledge of the "Course of Study"	17.5%
Knowledge of the linguistic and cultural differences between Japanese and English	13.5%
Knowledge of testing and evaluation	10.3%

Table 5   Knowledge about education for international understanding

Knowledge of cross-cultural communication	37.3%
Knowledge of current international affairs	20.6%
Recognition of the role of English as an international language	18.3%
Knowledge of cultural backgrounds of English-speaking countries	18.3%
Overseas experience: studying, living, and/or traveling abroad	4%

Table 6   English language ability

To teach English in English	41.3%
To communicate in English with *ALTs	33.3%
To obtain Pre-1st Grade of STEP, TOEFL 550, and/or TOEIC 730 or above	12.7%
To speak and read English with near-native pronunciation	9.5%
To give correct answers to the English examinations set by the National Center Test For University Entrance Examinations	3.2%

Note: *ALTs stands for assistant language teachers who are native speakers of English.

(3) Percentage distribution of weight of the six categories

Table 7   Percentile rank of the six categories

Personality traits	43.7%
Aptitude for being a teacher	29.4%
Competence necessary for classroom teaching	20.6%
English language ability	4.8%
Knowledge of English teaching pedagogy	1.6%
Knowledge about education for international understanding	0%

5. Analysis

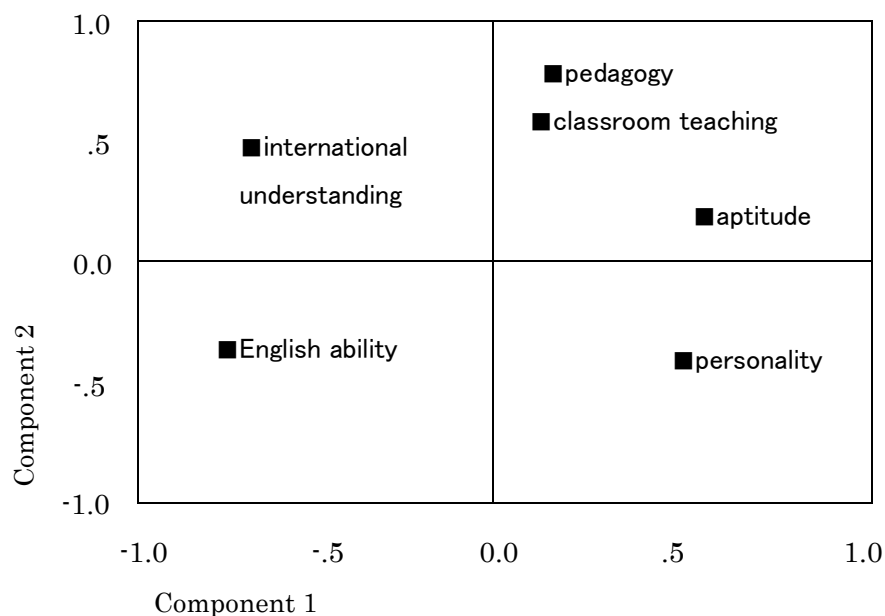(1) Principal component analysis by SPSS 11.0J

Figure 1 Component plot of the six categories

> **Note:** Abbreviations－ personality: personality traits / aptitude: aptitude for being a teacher / classroom teaching: competence for classroom teaching / pedagogy: knowledge of English teaching pedagogy / English ability: English language ability / international understanding: knowledge of education for international understanding

Figure 1 indicates how the supervisors 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 are related as one group. However, the other three are distributed among the other dimensions. It means the first dimension group has minus correlations with the categories in the other three dimensions respectively. This result suggests that the supervisors did not necessarily respond to the questionnaire taking into consideration the organic connections among the categories.

(2) Structural equation-modeling by AMOS 5.0

'English ability' seems to be taken lightly in the percentile rank of the six categories (see Table 7). However, Figure 2 shows that it is the most influential factor (.39) upon the important perspective of screening for employment. Apparently, there is a great

contradiction between these two results. A close look at the responses to the items of this category would help identify this cause.
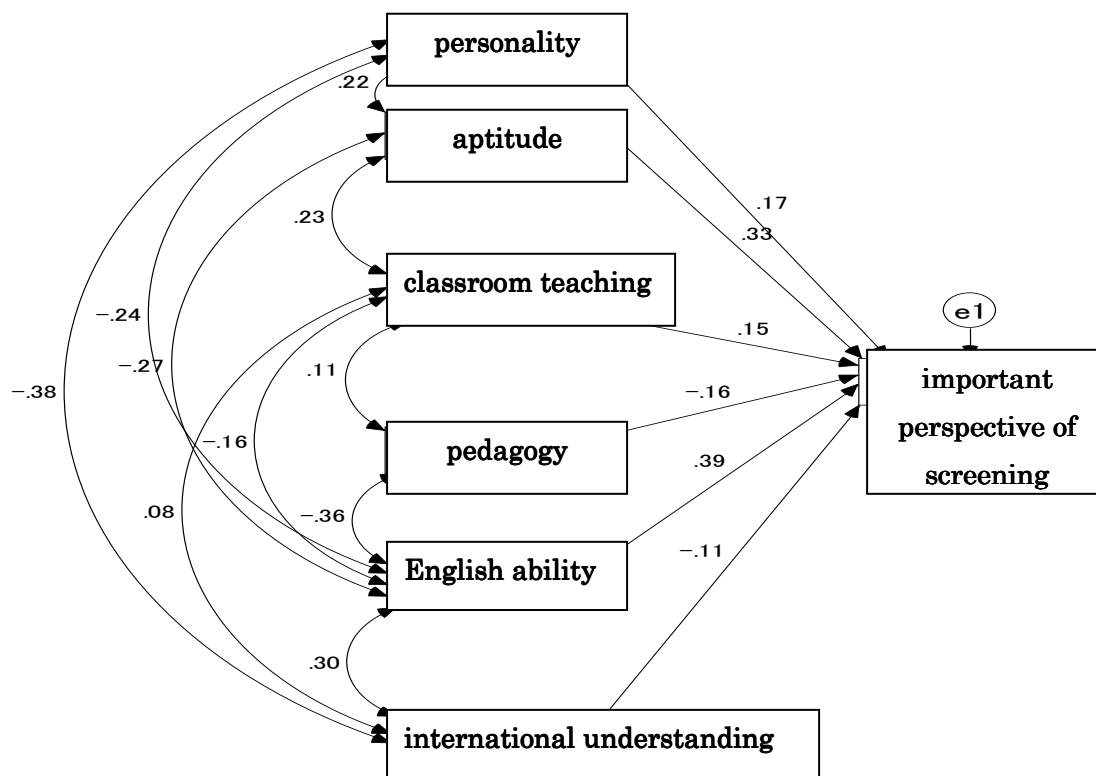

Figure 2   Structural equation-modeling of the six categories

Most of the 21 respondents ranked two out of five items either first or second in weight as is shown in Table 8.

Table 8 Top two items in 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 ALTs	6	28.6%	11	52.4%	17	81.0%

This category converges at the above two items. There are no other categories which converge among their items like this one. Therefore, 'English ability' shows the strongest influence in spite of the fact that it is placed fourth in the percentile rank. From this result, we can posit that these two abilities are recognized nationwide as the

most salient qualities of English teachers.

'Aptitude' (.33), 'personality' (.17) and 'classroom teaching' (.15) follow 'English ability.' Among these three categories, 'aptitude' and 'personality' are considered the qualities of not only teachers of English but also teachers of any subject. On the other hand, 'classroom teaching' has two items which can be integral to English teaching: they are "to provide various types of communication activities" and "to keep the class interactive." Furthermore, it is closely related to 'pedagogy' as is shown in Figure 1.

6. Findings

(1) The six categories with 30 items worked out by the researchers are important attributes of teachers of English because there was no objection from the respondents.

(2) Among the six categories, personality traits and aptitude for being a teacher are the top two categories weighed by the supervisors. This result seems to be quite reasonable since they can be regarded as the qualities essential for teachers of any subject.

(3) As far as teachers of English are concerned, English language ability and competence for classroom teaching are the major qualities suitable for employment.

(4) Among the items of English language ability, to teach English in English and to communicate in English with ALTs are considered as integral attributes of English teachers.

(5) Competence for classroom teaching is correlated to knowledge of English teaching pedagogy. This suggests that teacher-production institutes should provide hands-on training backed up by the theories of English teaching pedagogy.

Ⅲ　A survey on the practicum for pre-service English teacher training

1. Purpose

To find out: 1) the realities of the current English teaching practicum, 2) the problems of the practicum carried out at secondary schools, and 3) some clues to improvement for the practicum and the overall system.

2. Questionnaire

The survey was conducted from June through August in 2005. The questionnaire was sent to English teachers of 1,800 secondary schools throughout Japan. It consisted of 13 categories with several items or choices within each category. The 9 categories

discussed in this paper took the form of questions as follows (# indicates question number):

#5 "What do you consider an appropriate attitude for a student teacher?"

#6 "What kind of instruction do you assume universities have given the student teachers while at university?"

#7 "What kind of specific preparation do you have student teachers make before classroom teaching?"

#8 "What level of English ability do you require student teachers to have?"

#9-10 "To what degree do you have student teachers use Japanese and/or English in classroom teaching?" (#9 for junior high schools and #10 for senior high schools)

#11 "How many hours in total do you think are appropriate for student teachers to do classroom teaching?"

#12 "What kind of instruction do you think universities should give student teachers, especially when you would extend the current practicum of less than one month to one-term period of, say, three months?"

#13 "What kind of support do you think universities should give student teachers while they are taking the practicum at secondary schools, especially when you would extend the current practicum of less than one month to one-term period of, say, three months?"

3. Data processing

Method: The Likert Scale of five grades is used for #5,6,7,8,12 & 13

Point allotment: Five points are allotted to the utmost positive response, vs. one point to the utmost negative one. Average points are indicated for each item of # 5, 6, 7, 8, 12 & 13.

Percentage indication: Percentages are shown for each choice in # 9, 10 & 11.

4. Results

(1) Number of responses: Out of 1,800, 332 schools (18.4%) made a response.

(2) Average points of items or percentage distribution of choices from each category

Table 9   The appropriate attitude for student teachers (#5)

Assigns a high priority to becoming an English teacher	4.5 pts
Has eagerness and enthusiasm to teach	4.8 pts
Is open to gaining a better understanding of learners	4.8 pts
Has adequate common sense and social etiquette & manners	4.6 pts
Is flexible enough to cope with changing situations in school	4.0 pts
Knowledge of English teaching methodologies and techniques	3.2 pts

Table 10   Instruction presumed to have been given already at universities (#6)

Teaching material utilization	3.7 pts	TMU
The writing of teaching plans	3.6 pts	WTP
Training in English ability	3.8 pts	TEA
Classroom teaching confidence through simulated teaching	3.2 pts	ST
Educational equipment utilization	2.9 pts	EEU
Knowledge of English teaching methodologies and techniques	3.3 pts	TMT

Note: The symbols in the right column indicate the abbreviation of each item (see Table #18)

Table 11   Specific preparation for student teachers to make before classroom teaching (#7)

Write a sketchy teaching plan (one-sheet long)	4.4 pts
Write a full teaching plan with details	3.6 pts
Practice writing on a blackboard	3.6 pts
Practice utilizing educational equipment	3.0 pts
Prepare teaching aids	4.2 pts
Practice pronunciation and reading aloud	3.9 pts

Table 12   English language ability required of student teachers (#8)

Pre-1st Grade of STEP, TOEFL 500, TOEIC 730 or above	3.1 pts	PT
To be able to communicate in English with ALTs	3.8 pts	ALT
To teach English in English	3.9 pts	TEE
To read textbooks aloud with appropriate pronunciation	4.6 pts	AP
To give correct answers to the questions from the English examinations made by National Center Test for University Entrance Examinations	3.1 pts	GAE
To be able to explain school grammar systematically	3.8 pts	ESG

Note: The abbreviations in the right column are used in Figure 3.

Table 13   Degree of Japanese and English which student teachers are instructed to use while classroom teaching ①: Junior high school   (#9)

All in English	1.8 %	All in Japanese	0.6 %
Mainly in English	39.8 %	*Up to ST	10.4 %
Mainly in Japanese	48.2 %		

Note: *Up to ST: Student teachers are allowed to decide on the language with which they do classroom teaching.

Table 14 Ditto ②: Senior high school (#10)

	English I	English II	Oral Communication
All in English	0%	0%	12.5%
Mainly in English	18.1%	18.4%	50.5%
Mainly in Japanese	51.7%	47.6%	21.1%
All in Japanese	6.0%	5.4%	2.3%
Up to ST	24.2%	28.6%	14.1%

Table 15 Number of hours considered necessary for classroom teaching practice (#11)

0~ 5 hours	6~ 10	11~15	16~20	21~30	30 or more
3.1%	34.2%	31.1%	18.9%	9.6%	3.1%

Table 16 Instruction preferably to be given by universities necessary for extending the current practicum period (#12)

To have student teachers do simulated teaching at universities before they are allowed to take the practicum	4.3 pts	ST
To instruct how to utilize a textbook	4.3 pts	TEXT
To instruct how to write a teaching plan for a textbook	4.1 pts	TP
To improve communicative English ability	4.3 pts	CEA
To instruct English teaching methodologies and techniques useful for classroom teaching	4.1 pts	CT
To instruct teachers' various duties and functions at high schools	3.3 pts	TD
To instruct the importance for a better understanding of learners	4.0 pts	US

Note: The abbreviations in the right column are used in Table #18

Table 17 Support for student teachers preferably to be given by universities necessary for extending the current practicum period (#13)

Visiting high schools regularly by mentor professors	3.0 pts	RV
Having closer cooperation between mentor professors and high school teachers	3.2 pts	CC
Giving advice to student teachers by observing their classroom teaching practice regularly	3.1 pts	RO
Establishing a caring system for student teachers' mental health	3.4 pts	ECS
Taking responsibility for those student teachers who are judged incompetent by high schools	4.1 pts	TR

Note: The abbreviations in the right column are used in Table #18

5 Analysis

(1) Cross tabulation by SPSS 11.0J

Every category was cross-tabulated from different viewpoints, such as school types, ages, sexes, and correlation among the items in each category. Among many significant results obtained, those from the two categories (#6 and #8) related to the purpose of this paper are described.

 1) Cross tabulation among the items in category #6 in correlation

Look at Table 10. It shows that the six items stay between points 2.9 and 3.8. This means most of the teachers in junior and senior high schools do not judge that these instructions are adequately taught while in colleges. This indicates that teaching contents taught at universities do not fit the necessities at junior and senior high schools. However, because of the limitation of the class hours, not all these items on the table can be instructed at universities. To discover the most influential item to the respondents, correlation among the items was calculated.

Table 18   Correlation among the items in category #6

	TMU	WTP	TEA	ST	EEU	TMT
TMU		0.65	0.44	0.51	—	0.49
WTP	0.65		—		—	0.45
TEA	0.44	—		0.47	—	0.45
ST	0.51	0.45	0,47		0.47	0.50
EEU	—	—	—	0.47		—
TMT	0.49	0.45	0.45	0.59	—	

In Table 18, the figures indicate Pierson's correlation coefficient. When the figure becomes under 0.4, the cell is marked minus because its correlation is weak. This table also shows that only the item "ST" has comparatively strong correlation with all the other items. This suggests the item influenced the judgment of the respondents to category #6 the most.

 2) Cross tabulation of category #8 in school types (see Table 12)

Figure 3 shows that the item "AP" was considered the most important without any significant difference between junior and senior high school teachers. "ALT" and "TEE" were also thought to be considerably important, but they were more highly taken of by junior high school teachers than by senior high school teachers. On the other hand, senior high school teachers put far more emphasis on "ESG" and "GAE" which could seem less important to junior high school teachers.
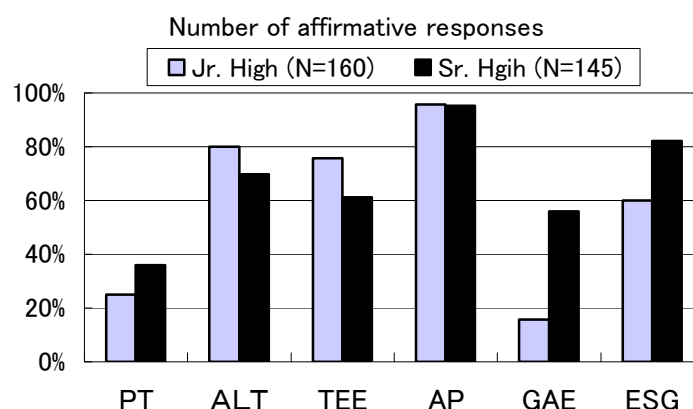
Figure 3　Cross Tabulation of category #8 in school types

(2) Factor Analysis by SPSS 11.0J on:

 1) Items which show a ceiling effect

Factor analysis was conducted to find out the hidden ideas of secondary school teachers about teaching practice. First, all items of each category were checked to see whether they had a ceiling effect or a floor effect. As a result, the following items turned out to have a ceiling effect: in category # 5 (see Table 9) -- the attitudes to "assign a high priority to becoming an English teacher", to "have eagerness and enthusiasm to teach", to "be open to gaining a better understanding of learners", and to "have adequate common sense and social etiquette & manners" ; in category #7 (see Table 11) -- "write a sketchy teaching plan (one-sheet long)", "prepare teaching aids"; in category #8 (see Table 12) -- "to read textbooks aloud with appropriate pronunciation (AP)" ; in category #12 (see Table 16) -- "To have student teachers do simulated teaching at universities before they are allowed to take the practicum (ST)."

The items with a ceiling effect are the ones to which most of the respondents give positive answers. They are not suitable for factor analysis. Therefore, categories # 5 and #7, which have most or some of items with a ceiling effect, were not considered to be significant in factor analysis. On the other hand, categories # 8, #12 and # 13 might be worth factor-analyzing.

 2) Factor analysis among the items in category #8

The item "AP" had a ceiling effect and it was excluded. Table 19 shows that category # 8 has two factors. Factor I includes "GAE" and "ESG."　Taking the characteristics of the two items into consideration, Factor I can be labeled as "the ability

Table 19　Factor analysis of category #8

	Factor I	Factor II	Commonness
PT	0.47	0.48	0.46
ALT	0.15	**0.77**	0.61
TEE	0.06	**0.62**	0.39
GAE	**0.93**	0.12	0.87
ESG	**0.53**	0.90	0.29

to give correct answers to written tests."

The other factor mainly includes two items: "ALT" and "TEE." This factor can be labeled as "oral communication competence in English."

3) Factor analysis among the items in categories #12 and 13

Table 20　Factor analysis of categories #12 and 13

	Factor I	Factor II	Factor III	Commonness
ST	0.11	**0.80**	0.09	0.66
TEXT	0.02	**0.56**	0.32	0.32
TP	0.16	0.27	0.13	0.11
CEA	0.16	**0.46**	0.36	0.36
CT	0.06	0.17	**0.78**	0.65
TD	0.11	0.07	**0.62**	0.40
RV	**0.88**	0.14	0.08	0.79
CC	**0.76**	0.16	0.11	0.61
RO	**0.81**	0.16	0.11	0.69
ECS	0.49	0.02	0.22	0.28
TR	0.17	0.16	0.33	0.16

As is shown in Table 20, three factors were discovered. Factor I may be labeled as "regular support during the practicum", Factor Ⅱ "the ability to properly teach textbooks" and Factor Ⅲ "the awareness of teacher's duties and responsibilities.

6　Pedagogical Implications

(1) From the results of cross tabulation

1) An important instruction to be given in universities

As is shown in Table 18, the most important instruction which should be given at teacher-production institutes turned out to be "classroom teaching confidence through simulated teaching." This was also justified in factor analysis of category #12 since "ST (simulated teaching)" had a ceiling effect. Therefore, universities should improve their instructions before teaching practicum focusing on simulated teaching.

2) Differences in English ability required between junior and senior high schools

Figure 3 indicates that junior high school teachers have a tendency to think more highly of oral communication competence in English. On the other hand, senior high school teachers are most likely to put more emphasis upon the ability to give correct answers to written tests. However, this does not mean that either of the abilities can be taken lightly. Especially, among oral communication competence, the abilities "to communicate in English with ALTs" and "to teach English in English" are highly appreciated by both.

(2) From the results of factor analysis

1) Instruction desired to be given in universities

The items with a ceiling effect indicate that most high school teachers desire universities to give instruction to their students.

① Students' attitude (see Table 9):
   ・"Assigns a high priority to becoming an English teacher"
   ・"Has eagerness and enthusiasm to teach"
   ・"Is open to gaining a better understanding of learners"
   ・"Has adequate common sense and social etiquette & manners"

② Skills that should be taught before teaching practicum (see Table 11)
   "Write a sketchy teaching plan"
   "Teaching material utilization"

③ An English ability that should be taught before teaching practicum (see Table 16)
   "To read textbooks aloud with appropriate pronunciation"

2) Suggestions for lengthening the duration of the practicum

Factor analysis among the items in categories #12 and 13 proved that the respondents thought highly of these three factors: "regular support during the practicum," "the ability to properly teach textbooks" and "the awareness of teachers' duties and responsibilities." Consequently, in order to extend the length of practicum, teacher-production institutes should improve their teaching curriculum and training system taking these three factors into consideration.

VI Conclusion

From our empirical research, we have reached the following conclusions:

1. In training prospective English teachers, the focus should be on "oral communication competence," – that is the ability to teach English in English and the ability to

communicate with ALTs.

2. In teaching practice, competence for classroom teaching should be fostered through "simulated teaching" based on the methodological knowledge and skills.

3. In order to improve the qualities of teachers, the length of the teaching practicum should be at least twice or three times as long as the present periods.

4. Assessment of student teacher performance should be adequate. Its evaluation standards should be clarified

5. Above all, the curriculum of pre-service English teacher training should be professionally integrated and challenging.

We sincerely hope that the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology will take our suggestions seriously and provide better guidelines for pre-service English teacher training.

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