

# A TESOL Graduate Program in Japan: The Potential for Developing Global Competency

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**Key words:** 英語教授法、グローバルコンペテンシー、教員養成、大学院教育  
TESOL, global competency, teacher education, graduate program

## Abstract

The aim of the present paper is to introduce and examine the potential of a new graduate program called TESOL-J at the College of Intercultural Communication, Rikkyo University. Based on survey results, verbal input, and materials obtained from attending multiple overseas conferences, the potential of the program is ascertained and challenges are addressed for the further enhancement of the program.

## 1. Introduction

The aim of the present paper is to introduce and examine the potential of a TESOL graduate program to be conducted under the Graduate School of Intercultural Communication that will begin from the 2016 academic year at Rikkyo University in Japan. The TESOL program will combine elements from the Japanese education system and an understanding of the challenges Japanese learners of English face; thus, the program is called the TESOL-J Graduate Program. Completion of the program leads to a Master's in Intercultural Communication. Students of any nationality are eligible to apply to the program, and the program aims to attract non-Japanese graduate school students. This paper will primarily focus on the aspects of the program that are related to non-Japanese students.

First, the recent rise in the need for developing global competence in people will be illustrated. This demand is a discussion occurring at the national level, which has led to discussions in the field of education affecting the content and practice of teacher education programs. Second, a new graduate program in TESOL with a concentration on the context of the Japanese English language education will be described. Third, the potential and the challenges of the program are examined based on the results of a survey, verbal feedback, and materials obtained from interaction with TESOL professionals in the United States. Lastly, the paper addresses the challenges to be overcome for the further enhancement of the program.

## 2. Global Competency in Education and in Teacher Preparation Programs

With the intensification of globalization in today's world, the need for developing global competence of future generations has become an important topic at governmental level, within the education world, and the private sector.

At the national level, for instance, in 2012, the U.S. Department of Education developed "its first, fully-articulated international agenda with two strategic goals," with one of them being "to advance [the] nation's international priorities" (U.S. Department of Education, 2012, p. 3). At the 2012 International Education Summit held as part of the G8 meeting in Washington, D.C., U.S. Under Secretary of Education Kanter described the department's agenda as follows:

In today's hyper-connected world, no nation can launch a fully effective domestic education agenda, without also addressing global needs and trends, and

nurturing a globally competent citizenry....A main goal of our plan is to increase the global competencies of all U.S. students, including those from traditionally disadvantaged groups (U.S. Department of Education, 2012, p. 3).

In Japan, globalization and its impact on education has also been discussed at the national level. For example, in order to bring about internationalization at the primary and secondary levels the debate has focused on how to develop attitudes of cooperation with people of different cultures, and how to enhance students' communication abilities in foreign languages (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology [MEXT], 2011). At the tertiary level, the government has emphasized communication abilities in foreign languages, strengthening international competitiveness, developing a society of people who will play more active role internationally, and improving mobility amongst students and faculty members (MEXT, 2011). With an aim to promote global competency among students, the launch of Go Global Japan (GGC) in 2012, a report entitled "Strategies to Accept Foreign Students to Incorporate World Growth" (the author's translation) in 2013, and the start of the Top Global University Project in 2014 show the Japanese government's clear desire to address internationalization at the university level and to promote greater interactions with incoming foreign students (Working Group for the Internationalization of Universities, 2014).

The Top Global University Project is a government-funded project that "aims to enhance the international compatibility and competitiveness of higher education in Japan" (MEXT, 2014). Through this project, 37 universities were selected, and thus have been recognized as "world-class and innovative universities that lead the internationalization of Japanese universities" (MEXT, 2014). The selected universities will be provided with prioritized governmental support; Rikkyo University is one of these universities.

The term global competence is often used as a prerequisite for success in our ever more globalizing world. Quoting Shari Becker Albright, chair of the Department of Education at Trinity University and former executive director of the International Studies Schools Network of the Asia Society, West (2012) stated that global competence:

requires knowledge of other world regions, cultures, and international issues; skills in communicating in languages other than English while working in global or cross-cultural environments; the ability to use information from different sources around the world; and modeling the values and perspectives of respect and concern for other cultures, peoples, and global realities (p. 2).

In order to instill global competency in future students, the issue of teacher education

becomes central. In the field of teacher education, Gay (2002) suggested that student teachers need “explicit knowledge about cultural diversity...imperative to meeting the educational needs of ethnically diverse students” (p. 107). Furthermore, understanding cultures of various groups and people make up an important part of this knowledge:

Culture encompasses many things, some of which are more important for teachers to know than others because they have direct implications for teaching and learning. Among these are ethnic groups’ cultural values, traditions, communication, learning styles, contributions, and relational patterns (Gay, 2002, p. 107).

There are different ways to raise cultural awareness in teacher education courses and practices and expand understanding of various cultures by utilizing resources on campus or in local areas, such as interacting with people from diverse backgrounds at college, in the community, and at local schools (West, 2012). However, West (2012, p. 6) quoted David M. Moss, associate professor at the University of Connecticut Neag School of Education and one of facilitators at the NAFSA 2012 colloquium, who said that having an international experience is a very critical and effective way:

[H]aving an international experience is one of the most important ways teacher candidates...can develop global competence. To be truly transformative, an ‘international experience’ must include elements such as intensive immersion, being a cultural outsider, and opportunities for cultural reflection (p. 6).

It is true that incorporating a course with an overseas teaching component is not straightforward. Although they are still few in number, gradually studies focusing on student teachers’ experiences of teaching overseas are being published. For example, Salmona, Partlo, Kaczynski, and Leonard (2015) reported on the experiences of 10 American pre-service teachers who conducted a five-week practicum in K-12 classrooms in Australia. Tomaš, Farrelly, and Haslam (2011) presented their program that sent U.S. TESOL graduate students to a small town in the Czech Republic for three weeks. Through a community-immersion approach, the participants lived with Czech host families free of charge, in exchange for communicating with them in English. The main focus of the program was to develop intercultural communication skills in the student teachers, and the goals to develop teaching skills were deemed of only secondary importance. Another study reported on perceptions of a small group of Canadian pre-service English language teachers after experiencing their overseas field experience in Hong Kong (Yang, 2011). This

field experience program lasted for eight weeks, and the participants taught in either a primary or a secondary school, while sharing accommodations in an apartment near their placement school. Marx and Moss (2011) analyzed the experiences of one candidate majoring TESOL at an American university who participated in a one semester teacher education program in London that placed her in an urban secondary school with a large immigrant population.

The main focus of international student teaching experiences, the length of such programs, and the target students of the teaching experience vary across programs. However, studies have shown that program participants were highly positive about their experiences due to the opportunities to gain from rich cross-cultural exchanges and to foster a deeper understanding of teaching in a different culture (Marx & Moss, 2011; Tomas et al., 2011; Yang, 2011).

In the following section, I introduce a teacher education program designed to meet the need to develop global competency in student teachers. The College of Intercultural Communication at Rikkyo University will start a graduate school program in TESOL from the 2016 academic year to provide aspiring language teachers with a culturally responsive education.

### **3. TESOL-J Graduate Program at the College of Intercultural Communication, Rikkyo University**

As an initiative in line with Rikkyo University's goals as a Top Global University Project member, the College of Intercultural Communication is developing a TESOL graduate program to be conducted under the Graduate School of Intercultural Communication. The TESOL program will combine elements from the Japanese education system and an understanding of the challenges Japanese learners of English face; thus, the program is called the TESOL-J Graduate Program. Completion of the program leads to a Master's in Intercultural Communication, and in the following sections I introduce the program aims and focus on the advantages for non-Japanese graduate school students.

#### **3. 1. Aim of the Program**

The TESOL-J Graduate Program is designed for students who are interested in pursuing the study of TESOL and in the Japanese English language education context. Students enrolled in the program will learn about the relationship between cultural factors and the teaching of the English language in Japan, becoming better equipped to support Japanese students' language learning efforts. Furthermore, because the program is conducted in Japan, non-Japanese students will gain global and cultural competencies

through their educational and personal experiences.

### **3. 2. Program Components**

The TESOL-J Graduate Program focuses on three different student populations. The program accommodates new graduate school students who wish to matriculate into a two-year Master's program, current graduate school students who are able to enter the program through a ratified student exchange agreement, and students who have completed a Master's in TESOL or a related field and wish to obtain paid in-class teaching experience while earning a second degree.

Like traditional graduate school programs, the TESOL-J Graduate Program is open to students who have completed an undergraduate degree and are interested in pursuing the study of TESOL in the Japanese education context. Completion of this component of the program will take two years, and it includes a teaching practicum in a regular Japanese classroom and some courses have outside-of-class tutoring assignments. Completion of the two-year component requires students to write a Master's thesis.

Graduate students who are enrolled at a university (or in a department) with which the College of Intercultural Communication holds a ratified student exchange agreement are eligible to participate in the TESOL-J Graduate Program. Exchange students can enroll in courses for one or two semesters, and they are eligible to take the teacher practicum course.

Students who already have acquired a Master's degree in TESOL or in a related field from a graduate program that has an alliance agreement with the TESOL-J Graduate Program can earn a Master's in Intercultural Communication in one year and are offered a paid teaching opportunity over the program duration to teach English regular for-credit language courses at Rikkyo University. This study and work component is unique and aims to provide students a context-rich education, ideally suited to those who are interested in teaching in Japan. Completion of the one-year component requires students to finish a Master's Capstone for which they may apply for a project grant up to 50,000 yen.

In sum, the TESOL-J Graduate Program serves three student populations, and Table 1 summarizes the key facets of each TESOL-J Graduate Program component. All students are eligible to receive Japanese language support. Matriculated students are required to take a Japanese language course, and exchange students are eligible for Japanese language courses or at the very least are offered to be paired with a Japanese university student volunteer. All students are eligible for student housing and will have full access to university facilities. New graduate students will complete the program in two-years, have a shared office, and will do a teaching practicum. Exchange students are eligible for a teaching practicum if they come for the fall semester. Students who aim to earn a second

Master's will be offered a paid teaching opportunity and able to apply for a Capstone project grant.

**Table 1 Summary of the Key Facets of TESOL-J Graduate Program Components**

	Two-year	Exchange	One-year
Japanese language support	✓	✓ *	✓
Student housing	✓	✓	✓
Facilities access	✓	✓	✓
Shared office	✓		✓
Practicum	✓	(✓)	
Paid teaching			✓
Project grant			✓

✓ Eligible, (✓) Depends upon enrollment period

\* All exchange students are offered to be paired with a Japanese university student volunteer who helps with language and cultural issues.

(Based on the TESOL-J Graduate Program pamphlet, Rikkyo University<sup>1)</sup>)

## 4. Data Collection

The author attended and presented at multiple conferences in order to introduce the aims and content of the program to TESOL professionals to obtain feedback for the further enhancement of the program. Data was gathered from (a) results of a written survey, (b) verbal input gained through conversations at the conferences, and (c) conference programs and other materials. Below, I report on the conferences attended, and then I present the survey used for the data collection.

### 4. 1. Conferences Attended

Table 2 shows the summary of the conferences attended by the author<sup>2)</sup>. The decision on which conferences to attend was based on conferences that focused on (a) teacher education of language teachers, and (b) the practice of teaching English to students of other languages. Attending regional conferences allowed for intimate discussions and encounters as well as the opportunity to speak with professionals who may not be able to attend national or international conferences. The Graduate School of Intercultural Communication is not looking to enroll a large number of students into the TESOL-J Graduate Program; rather, the program seeks to partner with overseas TESOL programs to offer a unique educational experience to their students and alumni as well as prospective students who are interested in teaching in Japan .

**Table 2 Summary of the Conferences Attended**

Name of Conference	Theme	Place	Date	Data Collected
Ninth International Conference on Language Teacher Education	Changes and Challenges in Language Teacher Education	The Commons Hotel (University of Minnesota), Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA	May 14-16, 2015	Verbal input
2015 Tri-TESOL Conference	Transcending Boundaries and Interweaving Perspectives	Highline College, Kent, Washington, USA	October 3-4, 2015	Survey; Verbal input
MIDTESOL 2015	Future is Now: Building New Traditions in TESOL	The University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, USA	October 23-24, 2015	Survey; Verbal input

## 4. 2. Survey

A survey (see Appendix) was handed out to the participants who attended my presentations at two conferences (see Table 2). The survey was returned anonymously, with an agreement to use the content for a report or a paper, such as the present one. Five written surveys were collected. Although five completed surveys are few in number, the answers received were rich and detailed. In addition, one of the participants sent additional feedback via email to offer further thoughts toward the program. Information gathered through interaction and from conference materials will be mentioned below wherever appropriate.

## 5. Findings

### 5. 1. Reasons of Interest in the TESOL-J Graduate Program

The attractiveness of the TESOL-J Graduate Program can be categorized into three groups: (a) practicum/teaching opportunities overseas; (b) Japanese language support; and (c) Japan as the target country.

First, having an opportunity to do practicum coursework or receive a paid teaching opportunity was viewed very positively. The following are comments on the survey from the participants indicating the advantages of the TESOL-J Graduate Program, if they were an international student considering to enroll in the program:

- *Could obtain practicum experiences overseas*
- *[Could] understand more [about] teaching in an EFL domain versus ESL domain*
- *Definitely the teaching portion would be a major draw*
- *Has [the] internship[-like] or service learning opportunities*

At the conferences, the value of doing a practicum overseas or including an international aspect into a curriculum were expressed by other conference attendees. For instance, there was a poster presentation called “*Estoy Aquí Para Servirles*” *Pre-Service Teachers Abroad*” reporting on the experiences of pre-service teachers teaching abroad and changes observed among the participants. Another poster presentation reported on a project of using technology to pair up American university TESOL Certificate students with middle-school students in China to have authentic exchanges. This project did not require students to go to another country, but showed an attempt to incorporate authentic international experience into the curriculum<sup>3</sup>.

Second, the presence of Japanese language support was viewed as an asset to the program. Comments cited, for example:

- *The promise of developing a functional level of Japanese*
- *Language support (survival Japanese class)*

In one of my presentations, a question was raised whether there were opportunities to learn the Japanese language outside of the program, and where students could access such resources. I replied that many municipalities run volunteer Japanese language courses and in support of Toshima Ward residents there was an activity called the Rikkyo Japanese Language Classroom mainly run by graduate and undergraduate students of the College of Intercultural Communication. Considering prospective students coming to a country where a completely different language is used from their own, whether there is a support system with the Japanese language is not a trivial matter. The survey results and the question raised reveal that both formal and informal language support opportunities are important.

Finally, there was a comment indicating that Japan as an “international and safe environment” was an advantage to the program. Although different in context, there was a session introducing a program sponsored by the American Embassy to send TESOL teachers, often times to developing countries. When a question was raised about the concern related to running the program, the presenter raised “safety” of teachers as the top concern<sup>4</sup>.

## 5. 2. Concerns Regarding the TESOL-J Graduate Program

Concerns related to the TESOL-J Graduate Program can also be categorized into three groups: (a) before, (b) during, and (c) after attending the program.

Concerns regarding before attending the program were with regard to the following:

- *Visas*
- *Pre-arrival communication*
- *First-day, first-week, first-month expectations by the TESOL-J administration*

In other words, adequate information provided not only during a student's stay in Japan, but also prior to attending the program was pointed out as essential.

Concerns of the participants at the session if they were actually to enroll in the TESOL-J Graduate program were:

- *Cost*
- *Scholarship availability*
- *Housing (Living situation, such as housing available on campus, available for couples?)*
- *Work / study opportunities*
- *Support from the school when [facing a] crisis*
- *Living in Tokyo*

Multiple people expressed concerns over cost. This is a concern that both the participants and the university share in common. Participants were directed to the TESOL-J Graduate Program pamphlet and university homepage which detail a reduction in tuition costs for matriculated international students. One concern voiced was that providing a dormitory only for single people would not be adequate in some cases.

Furthermore, the need for an emotional support system was expressed. Multiple people also talked about this point in the author's presentation session. For instance, a participant shared her past experiences facing difficulty as a JET<sup>5</sup> teacher in rural Japan. Since much of her difficulty derived from culture shock, looking back she said even a small amount of support such as letting her know that what she was going through was nothing strange but only culture shock would have relieved her stress greatly. Another participant shared his story of coming to a university in Tokyo to work, but was not given any support outside of work. This included crucial issues such as how to find a place to live and how to open a bank account to manage money and income. Related to having an emotional support system, another participant inquired about the chances to interact with other international students. Such opportunities would make a difference in their campus life, the participant believed, allowing such students to share common experiences that might be shared and understood only amongst international students.

Concerns related to life after completing the study were:

- *Career counseling*
- *Job after graduation*
- *Post-graduate opportunities*

Indeed, it is a student's choice to decide what they would do after completing the program: find a job in Japan, go back to their home country and work, or pursue a further academic path. However, participants expressed that if the TESOL-J Graduate Program was able to provide as much information and support as possible for the

students to make most of the experiences and learning they acquired, that such program component would be of great value. This may require a collaborative effort from other sections within the university such as the career center.

## 6. Discussion: Potential and Challenges

Based on the survey results, interacting with experts, and attending presentations at the conferences, several things can be pointed out related to the TESOL-J Graduate Program.

First, it is acknowledged that there is a certain degree of interest in gaining overseas teaching experience. The survey results point to an interest in the program. An overseas practicum may not be a common fixture in TESOL programs' curricula, but it is gradually developing as a genuine research focus. Perhaps one reason for this is that an overseas practicum is difficult to put into practice.

The potential of the TESOL-J Graduate Program is not fully realized without overcoming the challenges that lie ahead. Then, how can the new program be developed to address the aforementioned issues?

One challenge that the program faces is related to the course content, and the challenges differ depending on the student population component. Most importantly, regarding the practicum opportunity for the two-year and exchange students, the program needs to ensure that the graduate students have a wide choice of education levels from which to choose. Thus, the program must find on campus as well as off campus environments such as public schools and community centers.

For the exchange students, the program needs to work with university exchange partners to offer courses that will be accepted as transferrable credit to the student's home university. Thus, the course syllabi need to be written in English and in a western style (Tsuneyoshi, 2005) for international scrutiny and standardization, and that the courses offered are rigorous enough in order to meet internationally acceptable standards.

The second type of challenge is related to creating a support system for outside of class issues. As it was mentioned earlier, building good communication between the program and the students prior to the commencement of the program is essential in order to, at the very least, let students know what is expected of them prior to coming to Japan and what will occur once they arrive. While enrolled in the program, having access to a community of international students to be able to share experiences and exchange information will be beneficial. Finally, creating a system that would support the students' search for jobs would be an asset. In short, it is necessary to develop a system that would support international students sufficiently by working collaboratively with other offices on

campus, such as the International Office and the Center for Japanese Language Education.

## 7. Conclusion

The globalized world calls for people, and more specifically teachers with global competency. As part of an internationalization strategy to meet the demand of the present world, the present paper introduced a new graduate program called TESOL-J that provides TESOL education under the umbrella of a rich intercultural context and teaching practice opportunities in Japan for international students. This paper then attempted to examine some of the potential and challenges of the program based on survey results, verbal feedback, and materials collected mainly through attending multiple conferences in the U.S. The potential was ascertained, and challenges were organized to further enhance the program.

The new program is to begin from the 2016 academic year. Thus, its true value remains to be seen, and depends on how it will support the students it will attract. With the inclination and presence of interest in globally competent teachers, the type of education the program offers is of central importance. It is also necessary to work to overcome challenges one by one by holding a mid- or long-term perspective and practice, letting more people take part in raising the awareness of globally competent teaching:

For some institutions, this might start with the experience or commitment of a single faculty member to transform the program. Others will begin with the creation of new globally orientated coursework and curriculum. For others, transformation might start by raising the profile of international projects and research, and making faculty aware of what their colleagues in their own school as well as those in other fields are doing to engage internationally (West, 2012, p. 4).

In closing, this report did not discuss the potential of the program with regard to Japanese students or the positive gains Japanese and non-Japanese graduate students may make by taking coursework together. A future examination of this topic would be well worth the effort.

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## Notes

- 1) The pamphlet is available at the office of the College of Intercultural Communication, Rikkyo University.
- 2) Ron Martin, director of the TESOL-J Graduate Program, attended the following conferences to spread the information about the TESOL-J Graduate Program: American Association for Applied Linguistics, Toronto, Canada, March 21-24, 2015; TESOL International Conference, Toronto, Canada, March 25-28, 2015; TEAL, Vancouver, Canada, May 22-23, 2015; NAFSA, Boston, USA, May 24-29, 2015; CATESOL, Anaheim, USA, November 12-15, 2015.
- 3) For both of the poster presentations, see Program Guide of 2015 Tri-TESOL Conference for more information.
- 4) A session "Teach Abroad with the English Language Fellow Program" presented at MIDTESOL 2015.
- 5) The Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme.

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## Appendix

### Survey for Data Collection at the Conference Sessions

#### Conducting Practicum in Japan: Designed for International Students

#### Discussion Questions

1. What sort of intercultural communication related courses did you take in your academic year?
2. Gay (2001) suggested to have 'a cultural diversity knowledge base' for one's teaching to be culturally responsive. What do you think should be included in the base?
3. If you were an international student considering attending the TESOL-J program, what would be your interest in the program?
4. If you were an international student considering attending the TESOL-J program, what would be your concern related to the TESOL-J program?