



CAMBRIDGE

# Secondary English teacher development programme

Japanese Ministry of  
Education, Culture, Sports,  
Science and Technology  
(MEXT)

From July 2020 to February 2021, Cambridge provided a teacher training programme for MEXT. The programme was designed to help Japanese junior and senior high school teachers of English improve their ability and confidence to teach writing and speaking in order to improve the output skills of their students.

**TRANSFORMING  
SOCIETIES THROUGH  
EDUCATION**



# The challenge

In 2020, MEXT introduced several new policies to improve English language education in Japan. The focus for the Junior High School level was to be on communicative language activities, with classes in principle conducted in English. For the Senior High School level, English classes were to include a focus on five areas: listening, reading, writing, speaking (interaction) and speaking (presentation), so the use of productive skills would become more important.

MEXT outlined the need to improve teachers' English levels as well as their teaching skills. In order to support these new policies, MEXT wanted to provide training for teachers.

Following a trial training programme in 2019/20, Cambridge delivered the training for 2020/21. The participants were 551 teachers from all over Japan with a wide range of teaching experience. All of the training had to be conducted online due to COVID-19.

Teachers completed a pre-training questionnaire to provide information about their teaching situation, confidence with technology, and their attitudes and behaviour when teaching speaking and writing.

## Conclusions from the pre-training questionnaire

Some teachers may have difficulty teaching speaking and writing due to their low language level.

Teachers will benefit from training about teaching speaking.

The majority of teachers should be able to use the online training materials.

Teachers will benefit from training about teaching writing.

Many teachers may struggle to make time for the training.

Teachers should have a positive attitude towards training.

# Our approach

The goal of the training was to allow each participant to focus on developing the skills that they needed for their particular context – because participants had different amounts of experience and faced different challenges.

There were two basic strands to the programme:

1. **Input sessions** (e.g. webinars, online courses) to provide support for challenging areas of teaching. The self-study courses were conducted through the Cambridge Learning Management System.
2. **Action research** to allow participants to focus on a particular problem/challenge they want to address with a specific group of learners.

## The components of the comprehensive training programme:

A five-hour online training event that included five presentations

Four core and two optional webinars

Two tutorials

Portfolio of 16 short written tasks

Two online self-study courses from a choice of six



Conducting the training online “was the best method possible during the current pandemic” and a team of people provided technical support for participants. This team provided information and training on how to use the different websites, and answered questions from participants about the various systems.

This also meant that the teachers had the ability to work at their own pace for the online self-study courses and webinars (due to the catch-up videos). This flexibility was key to helping as many teachers as possible benefit from the training programme.

A buddy system was also set up to encourage teachers to share ideas and continue their development outside of the scheduled training sessions.

“I learned the most from the online self-study, which I was able to do at my own pace.”

Anonymous participant feedback

# The results

The goal of the training programme was to increase participants' skills and confidence in teaching speaking and writing in order to follow the new guidelines from MEXT regarding English education in Japan.

## Analysis of the programme suggests that it was a success

**78%** of the teachers that started the programme completed it

**89%** said they would use the ideas from the programme with their classes

**66%** reported that the programme had made them more confident at teaching English

**95% +** were able to successfully use the different websites and web conferencing software

Before the programme, many teachers were not following good practice for teaching speaking and writing in a communicative way. For example, when teaching speaking, many teachers focused on accuracy and relied on the use of Japanese to set up and run activities, and when teaching writing, many teachers were reluctant to do activities because they worried about not having time to check all of their students' work.

After following the programme, teachers are starting to apply the techniques they learned. They understand the importance of focusing on fluency in speaking tasks and of teaching students functional language to help them work together. They are also starting to ask students to read and comment on each other's written work. These changes in behaviour suggest that teachers are gradually beginning to try out and adopt the ideas from the programme.

The buddy system did not work as hoped. One reason was because teachers felt uncomfortable contacting people they did not know very well. When it did work, it was because the buddies were in the same school or the same area.

Some teachers struggled to find time to complete the programme. In fact, lack of time was the biggest reason that teachers missed key parts of the programme and failed to complete it. Although Cambridge provided several opportunities for participants to attend sessions, future programmes need to find a way to help as many teachers as possible benefit from the training programme, because, as one of the tutors commented, "all teachers should be doing [the programme]".

“[The different methods of feedback] was something I had not used before but learning about it in the training was really meaningful.”

Anonymous participant feedback

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