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**Between Diplomacy and the Classroom: A Contextual and Thematic
Examination of Japan's JET Programme**

Doctorate of Education (EdD)

School of Education

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May 2025

Between Diplomacy and the Classroom: A Contextual and Thematic Examination of Japan's JET Programme

Abstract

The Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme is one of the most significant government initiatives. It was initially envisioned to improve English education in Japan and foster cultural understanding. Despite almost 40 years of praise and criticism, questions remain regarding alignment between its policy objectives and real-world implementation.

This study evaluated the JET Programme's policy and operational frameworks, stakeholder perceptions its cultural, diplomatic and educational impacts. Focussing on the experiences of JET participants and Japanese Teachers of English (JTEs), the research contextualises the JET Programme within Japan's wider purpose to internationalise education.

Hyatt (2013), Rizvi, and Lingard (2010) informed the policy contextualisation research methodology, while Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach was applied to questionnaire responses from respondents. This mixed strategy allowed for an integrated synthesis of top-down policy frameworks and JET participant on-the-ground experiences.

The study's outcomes reveal partial misalignment between policy intentions and lived experiences: while cultural exchange and soft power objectives are successfully perceived, continuing and long-standing challenges with English proficiency improvements, rigid exam-oriented classrooms, and limited pedagogical independence frustrate many JET Programme participants and JTEs. In spite of these deficiencies, the JET Programme continues to expand intercultural awareness and global outlooks in local communities in Japan.

Recommendations emerging from this research study include closer policy alignment, increasing professional support for JTEs and Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs), and improved role clarification to ease tensions in the JTE-ALT working relationship. More systematic evaluations of policy and practice and continued refinement of programme logistics are recommended to sustain relevance in a rapidly evolving society.

By integrating policy contextualisation with thematic analysis, this thesis contributes original insights into large-scale educational initiatives, highlighting the complexities between official policy aims and stakeholder realities. It informs future reforms in international exchange programmes and underlines the importance of balancing national policy goals with pedagogical requirements.

Acknowledgements

I want to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisors, Dr Mark Payne and Professor David Hyatt, for their invaluable guidance, encouragement, and patience throughout this doctoral journey. I am also grateful to my examiners, Dr Aneesh Barai and Professor Dylan Yamada-Rice, for their constructive feedback and support. This thesis would not have been possible without the generous contributions of the JET alumni and Japanese Teachers of English, who shared their time and experiences, and I owe them my sincere thanks.

I would also like to acknowledge my colleagues and friends at Sugiyama Jogakuen University for their encouragement and advice, and especially Dr Mick Cochrane for his unwavering support, thoughtful feedback, and guidance, and for picking me up whenever I needed it.

Most importantly, I wish to thank my wife, Mikako, and my daughter, Nina, for their love, patience, and belief in me. Their support has been my greatest source of strength. Finally, I would like to thank my family in Wales, particularly my father, Peter, my brother Hywel, and my nephew Noah. This one is for you, Mam. *Gyda'm holl gariad, nawr ac am byth.*

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Acronyms

AJET:	Association for Japan Exchange & Teaching
ALT:	Assistant Language Teacher
BoE:	Board of Education
CIR:	Coordinator for International Relations
CLAIR:	Council of Local Authorities for International Relations
CO:	Contracting organisation
ESID:	Every situation is different
(a) JET:	JET Programme participant (including ALTs, CIRs, and SEAs)
JETAA:	The JET Programme Alumni Association
JET Programme:	Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme
JTE:	Japanese teacher of English
MEXT:	Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology
MIC:	Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications
MOFA:	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
PA:	Prefectural Advisor
SEA:	Sports Exchange Advisor

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

1.1 Introduction

This study aims to explore the governance, trajectory and participant experience of the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme, Japan's exchange teacher initiative that employs predominantly, native English-speaking teaching assistants (ALTs) in state schools across the country. It is particularly relevant in the current climate, given that almost four decades have passed since the JET Programme's inception, and recent educational reforms and budgetary considerations have prompted renewed scrutiny of large-scale government initiatives. This study also fills a notable gap in the research by critically analysing how policy intent and key stakeholder¹ perceptions align with the JET Programme's design and implementation, an avenue often overlooked in studies that focus solely on classroom teaching practices. This importance is explored in greater detail in Section 1.3. In this chapter, I will briefly outline the key elements of this introductory chapter, while also providing a brief synopsis of the chapters that follow. The study will focus on discrete elements of the JET Programme, analysing policy intentions, programme trajectory and participants' personal experiences from its inception in 1987 up to the end of the academic year, 2024. It will seek to explore findings emerging from the analysis of one of the world's most substantial and enduring government teaching exchange programmes (Nagatomo, 2016), and to contextualise those findings within the broader socio-economic and educational space in which it is manifest.

1.2 Introduction to the Study and Contextual Background

The JET Programme is widely regarded as one of the world's most significant international exchange initiatives (Borg, 2020; Hiratsuka, 2022; McConnell, 2000; Metzgar, 2017). Hiratsuka (2017) states that the JET Programme has 'become an essential part of the English education landscape in Japan' (p.4). High-profile endorsements further reflect this standing; in 2011, the then Secretary of State of the USA, Hillary Clinton, while attending the US-Japan Council annual conference, lauded the JET Programme as an example of cooperation and exchange between the two countries (Metzgar, 2017). In addition, in 2016, the Imperial Highnesses of Japan attended the 30th-anniversary celebrations of the JET Programme, where the chairperson of the Council for Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR), Tamotsu Okamoto, praised JET Programme participants for their work in creating strong bonds with people all over Japan and playing a pivotal role in advancing the country's internationalisation initiatives. (CLAIR, 2020).

Despite these prestigious accolades, however, other commentators (Borg, 2018; Hiratsuka, 2017; 2022; McCrostie, 2017) have also questioned the legitimacy of such claims. As a former JET Programme participant working at Japanese universities since 2013, I believed that these acclaims had been made without systematic investigation. This personal and professional curiosity prompted me to embark upon a doctoral-level critical analysis of the JET Programme.

This research study will present the findings of that analysis through a thorough, critical and reflexive literature review and analysis, followed by a discussion and a conclusion. Initially, however, it is worthwhile to provide some background on the study's context. Broadly speaking, the two main

¹ The term "stakeholder" has been critically examined in recent academic literature for its ambiguity and potential exclusionary implications (Plys et al., 2025; Reed et al., 2024). Acknowledging these concerns, I use the term in this thesis only to refer specifically to former JET Programme participants and Japanese Teachers of English (JTEs).

goals of the JET Programme are to improve English language education in Japan, and to promote cross-cultural understanding between the Japanese school population and overseas ALTs. The findings emerging from this research study suggest that this is not as straightforward as it seems. The JET Programme was initially conceived as a diplomatic gesture to improve Japan's international relations, especially with the United States, amid growing trade tensions in the 1980s (McConnell, 2000). In his influential book, McConnell (2000) explains that the JET Programme was a gift from the Japanese government to the American delegation at the Ron-Yasu summit of 1986. Since then, the JET Programme has expanded significantly and developed over time to become both an English language teaching initiative and to promote the wider Japanese government goals around internationalisation and cultural diplomacy.

The JET Programme initially began to facilitate these dual objectives by bringing predominantly young university graduates into Japan. At its inception, the age limit for JET Programme participants was 30, which was later revised to 40 and is now no longer in effect (JET Programme, n.d.-i). The Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) is the most common of the three available positions, with around 90% of the annual intake being ALTs (JET Programme, n.d.-h). The ALTs' job is to work with Japanese Teachers of English (JTEs) at elementary, junior, and senior high schools to assist in teaching languages. English was the only language available for instruction during the early years of the JET Programme. Hence, the acronym was initially AET, standing for Assistant English Teacher. However, as the JET Programme expanded to include other countries and more languages became available, the term changed to ALT (Assistant Language Teacher). In this thesis, I will consistently use ALT when referring to Assistant Language Teachers. This study uses numerous other acronyms; a dedicated list of them is provided on page 8.

Hiratsuka (2022) confirms that fewer than 5% of ALTs teach languages other than English. Therefore, the term ALT is often considered an English teaching role. Due to the predominance of ALTs within the JET Programme demographic, they are often the individuals people refer to when discussing the JET programme. The programme also employs CIRs (Counsellors for International Relations), who typically work in local government offices. There are also a small number of SEAs (Sports Exchange Advisors) on the JET Programme, but ALTs hugely outnumber these. As a result, when discussing the primary aims of the JET Programme, which include improving the English language skills of Japanese students, promoting cultural exchange at the grassroots level, and fostering positive international perceptions of Japan, the responsibility usually falls on ALTs. As of August 2024, the total number of JET Programme participants is 5,861, comprising 5,373 ALTs, 479 CIRs, and nine SEAs (JET Programme, 2024).

Historical and Cultural Context of Language Education in Japan

The JET Programme is set against the backdrop of a complex historical, cultural and English educational backdrop within the evolving nation-state of Japan. Although the country recognises the importance of English instruction, having been taught as a foreign language since 1868 (Noda & O'Regan, 2020), it has historically preferred to import these elements within the confines of its own borders rather than experience them firsthand by going overseas (McConnell, 2000). Furthermore, Japan has sought to integrate foreign cultural ideas into a relatively rigid educational structure that prioritises tradition and established methods (Reesor, 2002).

Persistent challenges have long marked this broader context of language education in Japan. Despite decades of investment and educational reforms, English proficiency remains relatively low, with fewer than 10 per cent of the population reportedly using English regularly in the workplace (Sugita, 2004; Terasawa, 2013). In addition, Japan persistently scores poorly on various English proficiency assessments, such as EF (2024), IELTS (2024), TOEIC Listening and Reading (2023), TOEIC Writing and Speaking (2023) and TOEFL iBT (2023), often ranking below nations with far fewer economic resources. These shortcomings are frequently attributed to the *yakudoku* tradition (literally ‘translate and read’), a grammar-translation style of teaching which has been established in Japan since the Meiji era (McConnell, 2000), which roughly overlaps the later Victorian era. The *yakudoku* method of language learning can be traced back over a thousand years to when Japanese scholars first began translating Chinese texts. Hino (1988) cites critics of this method dating back over a century, while more recently, Thompson and Yanagita (2017) and Noda and O’Regan (2020) also discuss the movement to shift away from this still highly persistent method within the language teaching stratosphere in Japan.

The JET Programme introduced native English ²speakers into classrooms to promote authentic language use and more communicative approaches to language learning. However, the complexities of the Japanese education system are further compounded by the importance of entrance exams, which are paramount when entering junior high schools, followed by senior high schools and, finally, university (Hiratsuka, 2022; McConnell, 2000; Metzgar, 2017). These exams can often overshadow oral proficiency goals by focusing on classroom activities dedicated to test preparation (Borg, 2020; Gorsuch, 2002; Inoi et al., 2001), something I can attest to from my 16 years working in the education sector in Japan. Although the JET Programme aims to encourage more exposure to spoken English, it must navigate a long-standing pedagogical culture in which grammar translation continues to dominate. Harasawa (1974) succinctly explains that ‘Of all the countries in the world where English has been taught on a nationwide scale, Japan seems to me about the least successful... On balance, our English teaching has become a disastrous failure’ (p.72).

The efficacy of the JET Programme in achieving its educational goals has been debated since some of the earliest research conducted on the programme (Cominos, 1991; Sturman, 1989; Uchida, 1990). Critics claim that the programme has had limited effects on English language proficiency, citing continued low rankings in international English proficiency assessments for Japan (Borg, 2018; McCrostie, 2017). Others argue that the programme's broader internationalisation and cultural exchange objectives have succeeded more effectively in building Japan's soft power and global image (Crump, 2007; McConnell, 2000; Metzgar, 2017). This dichotomy between the programme's intended outcomes and its perceived impact underscores the need for a comprehensive analysis of its policy intentions, operational realities, and stakeholder perceptions. While many authors have researched the ALT and JTE relationship in the context of team teaching, this study aims to investigate deeper by analysing policy frameworks and stakeholder perceptions together.

² The term *native speaker* is widely contested in language education for perpetuating an artificial dichotomy and privileging particular varieties of English (Holliday, 2017; Llorca & Calvet-Terre, 2022). Although I recognise the ideological issues associated with the use of the term *native speakers*, I use this term as it frequently occurs in the JET Programme’s related literature and broader discourse in Japan.

1.3 Significance of the Study

This study is particularly relevant as it seeks to reconcile policy intentions with the lived experiences of those directly involved with the JET Programme. Focusing on examining the policy environment and micro-level experiences of JET participants and JTEs provides a holistic picture of the programme's impact. This dual focus is crucial since educational policies are often successful only if they are carefully designed, implemented, and accepted by the relevant stakeholders (Fullan, 2007).

Understanding the JET Programme's policy intentions is crucial for three main reasons. It first gives an insight into the Japanese government's broader educational and diplomatic strategies, namely, to internationalise its education system and to increase its global standing. Secondly, it highlights the problems of large-scale educational reform in a context where established teaching practices and cultural expectations clash with the introduction of new pedagogical approaches. Finally, this work contributes to the discourse on the professional development of language teachers in contexts where foreign language education constitutes a key policy issue.

The relevance of this research goes beyond the JET Programme. As Japan faces the impact of globalisation, demographic decline and economic challenges, effective internationalisation strategies are necessary. This study's findings can potentially guide future educational policies and initiatives for language education and cross-cultural understanding in Japan. In addition, the questionnaire responses from ex-JET participants and current JTEs provide insights into the professional development needs of language teachers and the factors influencing their classroom performance.

Hiratsuka (2022) shows that the usual public discourse surrounding the JET Programme is unanimously positive and uncritical, with government offices such as the Ministry of Education (MEXT), CLAIR and local Board of Education (BoEs) offering an uncritical and wholly successful picture of the JET Programme. With this in mind, I feel a more in-depth scrutiny of the JET Programme's intentions and perceptions of its key stakeholders is vital for a balanced view of the initiative.

1.4 Research Gap and Scope of this Study

Despite the JET Programme generating substantial scholarly interest, critical gaps in the discourse still exist, particularly concerning the alignment of policy intentions and operational realities. Much of the existing research has focused on team-teaching practices and the experiences of JET Programme participants in this pedagogical sphere. Few studies rigorously examine the policy frameworks underlying the JET Programme or explore how key stakeholders implement these plans. Stakeholders' perceptions of its overall efficacy form a central part of this research study, and this is currently unique in the JET Programme corpus.

The existing literature has generally treated the JET Programme's educational and cultural objectives as distinct, separate entities rather than considering how they intersect and influence one another. This current research study aims to fill that gap by exploring how these objectives are experienced and perceived by JET participants and JTEs. In this way, the research aims to offer a more comprehensive overview of the JET Programme's impacts and factors mediating its success.

A final aspect that will be explored in this study is a critical engagement with the role of the JET Programme within a broader context of Japan's internationalisation efforts. While the JET Programme is often praised for contributing to cultural exchange (Metzgar, 2017), it has not been evaluated for contributing to more profound internationalisation efforts such as intercultural competence and global citizenship. This study fills this gap by examining the programme's wider cultural, diplomatic, and educational impacts, contributing to current scholarly discussions on the role of international education exchange in a globalised world.

Scope of this Study

This research study could address a range of corresponding avenues related to the JET Programme, but practical constraints require limiting its scope. First, private hire ALT companies such as Interac, RCS Corporation and Borderlink will not be examined, as this study is focused on government policy intentions and how they relate to the main actors of the JET Programme. Second, since the JET Programme's inception, other countries have started similar programmes, including – but not limited to – 'Brazil, China, Hong Kong, South Korea, Slovenia, Taiwan and Thailand' (Hiratsuka, 2022, p.3). However, this research remains anchored in the Japanese context and thus will not investigate these foreign initiatives in detail. Third, there is no primary data on Japanese student outcomes or perceptions, partly due to logistical and ethical considerations with research involving children under the age of 18. Finally, although aspects of ALT-JTE relationships and team teaching will be covered due to its proximity to the JET Programme, a comprehensive examination of these dynamics lies outside the scope of this thesis. Instead, such elements are referenced briefly to contextualise the JET Programme into the broader discourse on English education in Japan.

Positionality

As my own trajectory is closely tied to the JET Programme, it is essential to situate my positionality as a researcher. Doing so helps clarify how my personal and professional experiences have shaped the questions I ask and the interpretations I make. My personal and professional trajectory has strongly shaped my interest in this research. My first encounter with the JET Programme was indirect: in August 1999, I visited a friend working as a JET on the island of Shikoku. That experience left a lasting impression and sparked my determination to one day take part in the programme myself. In my mid-twenties, I spent several years travelling widely, with the intention of eventually settling in Japan. However, lacking the necessary qualifications at that stage, I worked in Australia before deciding to return to university as a mature student. I undertook a degree in linguistics and TEFL with the explicit aim of joining the JET Programme, applying in the third year of my course and successfully taking up a post in Ogaki, Gifu Prefecture, in 2008.

My experiences on the JET Programme, and subsequently working in higher education in Japan, have provided me with both an insider's understanding of the programme and the benefit of a longer-term perspective. Living in Japan for over 15 years has given me close familiarity with Japanese society and culture, alongside the opportunity to develop working knowledge of the Japanese language. At the same time, my academic background in language learning and education has provided the theoretical grounding that frames this study. These experiences, before, during, and after JET, position me as both insider and outsider: personally connected to the programme, yet critically distanced as a researcher. I recognise that this dual standpoint inevitably shapes the questions I ask and the interpretations I make, and I discuss this positionality further in Chapter 3.

1.5 Research Questions and Objectives

The three primary research questions guiding this study are:

- 1. How do the initial policy objectives align with the operational realities and perceived outcomes of the JET Programme?**

This question asks whether the original policy goals of the JET Programme have been translated into practice. It examines whether these goals align with the everyday experiences of JET participants and JTEs and examines outcomes regarding language education and cultural exchange.

- 2. What are the perceptions of key stakeholders, particularly JET participants and JTEs, regarding the effectiveness of the JET Programme in enhancing English education and cultural exchange in Japan?**

This question aims to extrapolate how people actually feel about the JET Programme. It captures the views of JET participants and JTEs on the programme's effectiveness, highlighting successes, challenges, and room for improvement.

- 3. What are the broader cultural, diplomatic, and educational impacts of the JET Programme, and how do they contribute to internationalisation goals in Japan?**

This question explores the JET Programme's wider impact beyond the confines of the classroom. This study examines how the programme contributes to Japan's internationalisation efforts, cultural diplomacy, and global image and its long-term effects on participants when they return to their home countries.

Research Objectives

The study's research objectives are:

- 1. Evaluating the JET Programme's policy and operational frameworks.**

This objective involves critically analysing the policy frameworks underlying the JET Programme, their coherence, alignment with educational goals and effectiveness in achieving desired outcomes. It identifies areas where policy intentions diverge from operational realities and makes recommendations for improving policy coherence and execution. This objective aligns with Research Question 1, which examines how initial policy objectives align with the day-to-day realities and perceived outcomes of the JET Programme.

- 2. Understanding stakeholder perceptions and experiences.**

This objective aims to highlight the lived experiences and perceptions of JET participants and JTEs regarding the programme's effectiveness. It examines their challenges and the factors influencing their experiences. This understanding is critical for identifying alignments and misalignments between policy intentions and stakeholder experiences. This objective reflects the goal of Research Question 2, which investigates key stakeholder perceptions and experiences of the JET Programme's effectiveness in advancing English education and cross-cultural exchange in Japan.

- 3. Exploring the broader impacts and implications of the JET Programme.**

This objective explores the wider impacts of the JET Programme on cultural diplomacy, internationalisation, and global citizenship. It investigates how the programme influences participants' perceptions of Japan, their professional development, and their engagement with Japanese culture in the long term. This ties into Research Question 3, which explores the broader cultural, diplomatic and educational implications of the JET Programme and its contribution to Japan's internationalisation goals.

With these research questions and objectives to inform the research, this study will provide a comprehensive analysis of the JET Programme, it will reveal the perceptions of key stakeholders in the initiative, and it will suggest future policy development as well as contributing to the continuing discourse on international educational exchange and language education in Japan.

1.6 Theoretical Framework

Policy Contextualisation

This study employs a policy contextualisation approach informed by the discourse analytic perspective of Hyatt (2013) to analyse the policy intentions underlying the JET programme. A contextual discourse perspective (Hyatt, 2013) permits a critical analysis for examining the sociopolitical contexts within which policies are developed, the discourses shaping those policies, and the power dynamics underlying implementation. This approach is suited to the JET Programme given its complex origins and continued expansion as a convoluted government initiative with many stakeholders involved in its conception and execution.

The study also draws on the policy contextualisation paradigms from Rizvi and Lingard (2010). Rizvi and Lingard (2010) prescribe a fluid approach to examining the policy environment, selecting the methodological choice depending on the policy under scrutiny. This is particularly pertinent for the JET Programme, given its multifaceted nature.

Thematic Analysis Framework

This research uses Braun and Clarke's (2006) reflexive thematic analysis (TA) framework to analyse the qualitative questionnaire data of JET participants and JTEs. This approach is appropriate because it allows a detailed exploration of stakeholders' experiences and perceptions, capturing their nuanced reflections and opinions.

Thematic analysis involves several stages, including familiarisation with data, initial code generation, theme searching, theme reviewing, theme definition and naming, and producing the final report. This systematic approach ensures rigorous and transparent analysis and allows the identification of themes reflecting stakeholder concerns and experiences. The methodology chapter will explore this in greater detail.

Linking Theory to Research

The combination of a policy contextualisation approach drawing on models from Hyatt (2013) and Rizvi and Lingard (2010) with Braun and Clarke's (2006) reflexive thematic analysis provides a robust research framework for addressing this study's objectives and research questions. Hyatt's (2013) and Rizvi and Lingard's (2010) models offer a lens through which to examine the convoluted and bureaucratic policy context of the JET Programme. Braun and Clarke's (2006)

reflexive thematic analysis of qualitative data collected from stakeholders provides a valuable tool for analysing the responses collected from the JET Programme participants and JTEs involved in the JET Programme. Together, this framework allows a holistic analysis of macro-level policy intentions and the micro-level experiences of key stakeholders involved in the JET Programme.

By linking theory with research, this study contributes to the broader literature concerning policy contextualisation and thematic analysis by demonstrating how such frameworks can be extended to study international educational exchange programmes. This combination of approaches facilitates a comprehensive analysis of the JET Programme and allows the contradictions and complexity inherent in its implementation and outcomes to emerge during examination.

1.7 Thesis Structure and Chapter Summaries

The thesis is structured into six main chapters, all contributing to addressing the above research questions and objectives.

Chapter 1: Introduction – This chapter introduces the general setting, previous research in this field, the context for this study, and aims and objectives, including a rationale for this research, research questions, the scope of what will and will not be covered and the sequence for this study.

Chapter 2: Literature review—This chapter presents a literature review of the JET Programme, paying particular attention to recurrent and important themes, gaps, and debates that inform this study. The review can serve as the basis for ensuing analysis and discussion.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework and Methodology—This chapter describes the theoretical frameworks used in the study, including policy contextualisation and thematic analysis, and provides a detailed account of the research design, data collection, and analysis processes.

Chapter 4: Analysis and findings—This chapter reports findings from analysing policy documents and qualitative data from JET participants and JTEs while combining data from personal communications with CLAIR. It addresses each research question and objective and details the study's results.

Chapter 5: Discussion—This chapter reports on key findings relative to the research questions and objectives of the study and discusses their implications for educational policy, internationalisation, and professional development for language teachers.

Chapter 6: Conclusion—This chapter summarises the findings and original contribution to knowledge, discusses practical implications for policymakers and educators, and recommends future research.

1.8 Potential Impact of the Study on the Fields of Language Education and Cross-Cultural Relations

This study includes proposals designed to influence Japan's educational policy around language teaching, which will be elaborated upon further in the Conclusion chapter. It first analyses the JET programme through a policy contextualisation window and then through stakeholder perception perspectives. The study examines how policy intentions align with operational realities and thus contributes to ongoing discourse on the difficulties of implementing large-scale educational initiatives.

The study also provides new insights into the perceptions and experiences of JTEs. This population represents key personnel in the JET Programme who have previously been underrepresented. By capturing their views on the JET programme and examining them within both

cultural and educational contexts, this study aims to provide a balanced account of the programme's impact and effectiveness on Japanese people and society, while also highlighting areas for improvement and support.

Finally, this study examines the JET Programme's broader cultural, diplomatic, and educational impacts to understand its role in Japan's internationalisation efforts. It analyses the programme's long-term effects on participants to gain insight into the sustainability and importance of international educational exchange programmes.

Practical Implications

The findings of this research have practical implications for policymakers, educators, and future JET participants and their JTE teaching partners. For policymakers, the study calls for greater coherence between the policy objectives and operational realities of the JET Programme. Additionally, it describes how the programme must be continuously evaluated and refined to meet the needs of changing Japanese students, educators, and society. The world is very different now compared to how it was 38 years ago when the JET Programme was initiated.

Finally, the study offers insight into life working in the Japanese education system, including challenges and opportunities that future participants may face. Understanding the broader context of the JET programme and its impacts enables participants to make more informed decisions about their roles and contributions, thereby improving their experience and enhancing the programme's effectiveness.

This introduction chapter prepares the groundwork for critically analysing the JET Programme, laying the groundwork for the ensuing analysis and discussion. The study's focus on policy context, stakeholder perceptions and broader impacts ensures that it contributes to educational policy and language teaching in Japan with theoretically informed but practically relevant insights.

This introduction chapter establishes the study's rationale, scope, and theoretical foundations, foregrounding the policy environment and stakeholder experiences that shape the JET Programme. In the following Literature Review chapter, I present a detailed review of the existing literature, identifying key themes, gaps, and theoretical perspectives that inform this research. The subsequent chapter provides a foundation for the ensuing analysis and discussion by situating the JET Programme within a broader scholarly discussion.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter articulates a comprehensive and critical examination of the extant scholarly discourse on the JET Programme, encompassing associated research domains. Turner (2018) underscores that a literature review typically encompasses multiple focal areas. Considering the multifaceted and intricate evolution of the JET Programme across its 38-year history and its interplay with various facets of daily life in Japan, excursions into tangentially related research domains are occasionally warranted. While some of these tangential aspects, such as socio-cultural integration and local government structures, may appear peripheral, they help illuminate how the JET Programme interacts with Japan's educational policy environment. More directly, they inform Research Question One, which examines how differing objectives shape programme operations, and Research Question Three, which explores the wider cultural and diplomatic impacts beyond the classroom setting.

This literature review focuses on textual analysis of English-language sources. While official JET-related webpages and materials often include images and other multimodal resources, this thesis analyses only the written texts, since images fall outside its scope. Likewise, I have prioritised English-language academic and policy sources, rather than relying on translated interpretations of Japanese texts. This decision reflects both the parameters of the project and the need for transparency in interpretation. Nonetheless, I acknowledge that these boundaries represent limitations of the study, and future research could extend the analysis to Japanese-language sources and visual materials.

This literature review serves several pivotal functions in the context of an EdD thesis. Firstly, it lays the foundation for the study by delineating the current understanding of the JET Programme, pinpointing gaps or contentious aspects within existing scholarship, thereby underpinning the formulation of the research study's inquiries. Additionally, it involves defining critical terminologies and examining diverse methodological approaches employed in previous studies related to the JET Programme, as elaborated by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018).

Secondly, the review demonstrates the researcher's foundational understanding of the JET Programme, showcasing familiarity with key theories, methodologies, debates, and pivotal issues surrounding the subject matter. This is essential for establishing the researcher's expertise in the field.

Thirdly, establishing the rationale is crucial, as Cooper (2003) explains that a literature review substantiates the significance of the research problems and questions. It delineates the scope of prior studies and their methodologies. It identifies existing gaps in the literature, thereby constructing a compelling justification for the necessity of this research and its contribution to extending current scholarly understanding.

Fourthly, the review guides the methodology. Cooper (2003) noted that it offers insights into how preceding studies have addressed similar challenges. Evaluating the strengths and weaknesses

of these methodologies informs the design of this study, ensuring a robust methodological approach.

Furthermore, this review enables positioning within the field, allowing the audience to discern where this research project is situated within the broader academic discourse. It distinguishes between known information and the study's novel contributions, thereby avoiding redundancy.

Another critical function is knowledge synthesis. Beyond mere summarisation, a comprehensive literature review synthesises existing data to generate new insights, as elucidated by Turner (2018). This process involves identifying patterns, drawing conclusions, or spotlighting inconsistencies across different studies. Torraco (2016) views this synthesis as a creative process employing critical thinking to amalgamate existing ideas with emerging concepts.

Additionally, the development of a theoretical framework is crucial. Identifying theoretical frameworks employed in previous research enables the adoption or adaptation of a framework that best aligns with this study, thereby guiding its overall trajectory.

Finally, a rigorous literature review significantly builds credibility. The thoroughness of the review establishes the credibility of this study, enhancing its relevance. Engaging with contemporary and seminal works spanning over three decades demonstrates a comprehensive understanding of the field, solidifying the study's academic worth.

This thesis spans multiple areas of study. Firstly, it is widely regarded that the JET programme is an exchange programme designed to help foster Japan's international appeal in mainly English-speaking countries; the predominant research on ALTs has been transient and has primarily focused on team teaching lessons (Sakamoto, 2022). Secondly, the JET Programme is considered a bastion of soft power (McConnell, 2008; Metzgar, 2017), which will be explored in this research study, starting with this literature review.

Language education is a dynamic domain within pedagogical studies, characterised by continuous evolution and development. This progression is closely associated with introducing innovative teaching methodologies and governmental education policies, which both influence and adapt to the emerging challenges and complexities of language instruction. The JET Programme exemplifies these evolutionary processes within language education. Hiratsuka (2017; 2022) notes that the JET Programme's immense popularity, scale, funding, and legitimacy have profoundly impacted numerous Japanese teachers, school personnel, students, and local communities, establishing it as a key element of English language education in Japan. This emphasis on the role of ALTs in Japan's English education landscape directly informs the design of this study's Research Question Two, which explores how JET Programme participants and JTEs perceive and experience these evolving roles. Moreover, the JET Programme has been a model for other assistant language teaching programmes, such as the English Programme in Korea (EPIK), the Native English Teacher (NET) Scheme in Hong Kong, and the Auxiliares de Conversación in Spain.

Tracing its genesis back to 1987, the JET Programme has undergone significant transformation over its 38-year trajectory, evolving from its initial, modest inception into a globally acknowledged and, arguably, uniquely influential cultural exchange and language teaching initiative. This progression has been accompanied by a corresponding development in the issues and challenges it encounters, reflecting broader trends in the field of language education. These contemporary issues, mirroring the programme's expansion and global recognition, offer a rich tapestry for analysis within the broader discourse of language education and cultural exchange.

The scholarly discourse surrounding the integration of ALTs in foreign language education within Japan is extensive and multifaceted, encompassing a broad spectrum of themes and investigations. Research in this domain typically explores the operational dynamics of specific educational initiatives (Sakamoto, 2012), the role of ALTs as exemplars of native speakers, the interplay between ALTs and Japanese foreign language educators, and student perceptions of collaborative teaching methodologies (Johannes, 2012).

Significant attention has been directed towards evaluating the efficacy and impact of ALTs on language learning outcomes. Studies such as those by Chindemi (2021) explore the contributions of ALTs to the language learning process, while Galloway (2009) focuses on the positive cultural ramifications of ALT involvement. Conversely, Marchesseau (2015) provides insights into potential adverse effects associated with ALT-led instruction. The expectations and experiences of both Japanese and international language educators regarding the JET Programme are scrutinised in works like Hasegawa (2008), offering a comparative perspective on teaching practices and pedagogical objectives.

Furthermore, the existing literature provides critical reflections on the professional identity and pedagogical values of ALTs, as illustrated by Turnbull (2018), and explores the correlation between ALT participation and improvements in student academic performance (Chindemi, 2021; Tajino & Walker, 1998). The introduction of mandatory foreign language education in Japanese elementary schools in 2011 has prompted further academic investigation. For instance, Butler (2007) examined the increasing diversification and associated issues in foreign language education at the elementary level prior to the implementation of this policy. Additionally, Machida and Walsh (2014) and Ng (2016) investigate the curriculum's challenges and implications, especially regarding ALT involvement and the broader foreign language education policies in Japan.

This body of literature collectively underscores the complex and dynamic role of ALTs within Japan's foreign language education landscape, highlighting the diverse perspectives and outcomes associated with their integration into the educational system.

Topic-Specific Analysis

This literature review chapter critically examines the scholarly corpus related to the JET Programme, a government-sponsored initiative of considerable magnitude. Given its scale and impact, such a programme inevitably attracts a spectrum of viewpoints, ranging from staunch advocacy to critical opposition. These perspectives have been articulated and disseminated through various media outlets and academic forums. This review endeavours to methodically analyse the issues and debates that have surfaced in the literature over the history of the JET Programme. It

aims to delineate the evolution of these discussions, thereby providing a nuanced understanding of the programme's multifaceted impact.

Concurrently, this chapter will appraise the research methodologies employed in existing studies, with a specific focus on identifying and elucidating gaps within the current academic discourse. By highlighting these gaps, this review seeks to underscore potential avenues for future research, thereby contributing to the ongoing scholarly debate surrounding this significant educational initiative.

Imel (2011) posits that literature reviews play a pivotal role in illuminating new perspectives and elucidating unresolved issues, primarily by pinpointing gaps and inconsistencies in the current literature. Such reviews, as Turner (2018) contends, often necessitate a multifocal approach, a notion particularly salient in the context of the JET Programme. Given the Programme's extensive and intricate history spanning 38 years, the corpus of literature pertaining to it is both extensive and variegated. This necessitates a meticulous recognition of the diverse perspectives and methodological approaches that have been applied in research on the JET Programme, ensuring alignment with the evolving contexts within which the Programme operates.

In evaluating the various outcomes and impacts of the JET Programme, a comprehensive and critical examination of all its dimensions is imperative. Such an analysis must account for the JET Programme's complex origins, structural evolution, and the myriad factors influencing its operation, thereby facilitating a balanced and thorough assessment of its successes and shortcomings.

This literature review endeavours to critically appraise a select corpus of seminal literature related to the JET Programme, supplemented by analysing various news sources to gauge public perceptions of the initiative. It also aims to distil and clarify key insights from official governmental publications. As Turner (2018) and Boote and Beile (2005) assert, the essence of conducting a literature review as a component of a broader research project, like a postgraduate thesis or as an independent endeavour, transcends mere summarisation of extant literature. It necessitates a nuanced exploration that extends beyond a superficial overview. Given the discourse surrounding the JET Programme, this chapter does not aim to exhaustively catalogue all the existing literature. Instead, it seeks to provide a historical contextualisation, underscore prevalent themes, and delineate the methodologies prevalent in the scholarly discourse.

Consistent with Turner's (2018) stipulation, this review seeks to synthesise the collected body of work, generating new insights and knowledge about the JET Programme. The ultimate objective of this chapter is to develop a robust research framework for the subsequent doctoral thesis and to identify gaps within the current scholarly discourse. This will inform the trajectory of my research and contribute to situating it within the broader academic investigation into the JET Programme.

In articulating a methodology for synthesising literature within this review, the seven-step framework proposed by Cooper (2010) serves as a guiding structure. These steps encompass (1) Formulating the research problem, (2) Conducting a comprehensive search of the literature, (3) Collating information from the identified studies, (4) Critically evaluating the quality of these studies,

(5) Analysing and integrating the outcomes derived from the studies, (6) Interpreting the collated evidence, and (7) Effectively presenting the synthesised results (Cooper, 2010, p.12).

Furthermore, this literature review endeavours to clarify a particular observation concerning the peripheral literature on the JET Programme. Notably, the discourse predominantly oscillates between extolling the Programme's successes and delineating its shortcomings, with scant reference to its ambiguous policy framework. In this context, the works of Borg (2008, 2018), Hiratsuka (2013, 2022), McConnell (2000) and Metzgar (2017) emerge as notable exceptions, meriting in-depth analysis.

Metzgar's (2017) exploration of the JET Programme through a soft power lens is particularly insightful. Her focus primarily lies on the tenuous relationship between US-based alumni and the Programme's administrative bodies. Metzgar (2017) astutely highlights the Japanese government's nebulous policy guidance towards prefectural offices and educational boards across Japan. According to Metzgar (2017), this partially reveals the 'absence of national coordination' (p.150), especially in maintaining connections with alumni post-repatriation.

2.2 JET Programme Overview

The following graphic (Figure 1) from the JET Programme website illustrates the relationship between the different organisations responsible for running the JET Programme.

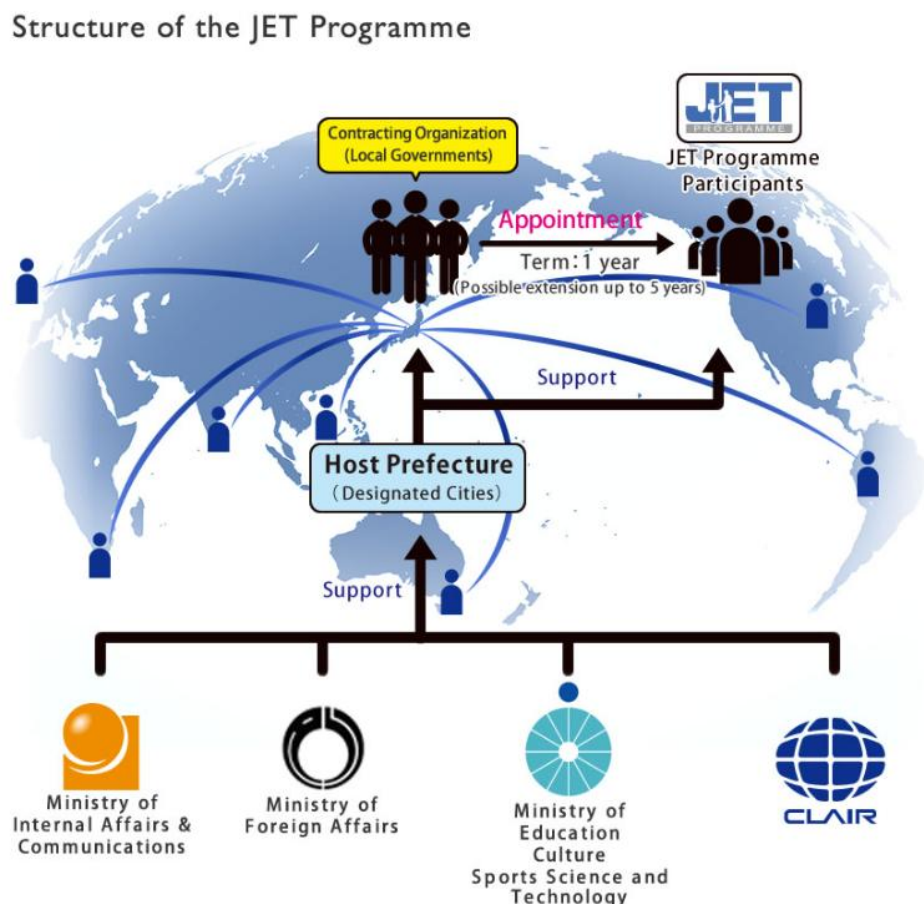


Figure 1. Connection Between the JET Programme and the Associated Government Ministries
Source: JET Programme, (n.d.-g)

Government offices and organisations:

Given the JET Programme's status as a government-run initiative, with connections to various official offices and organisations, it is crucial to clearly define some of the key individuals and government offices involved. Throughout its history, the acronyms associated with these entities have evolved. In this literature review and later chapters, I use the most current terminology and, where changes have occurred, I note the previous terms, as some older literature may refer to these earlier acronyms.

For instance, CLAIR, the Council of Local Authorities for International Relations, was previously referred to as the Japan Local Government Centre. Similarly, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIC) was formerly known as the Ministry of Home Affairs. The term ALT was previously referred to as AET, Assistant English Teacher. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) have retained their acronyms, though their specific roles and structures may have shifted slightly over time.

Understanding these changes and the roles of these entities is essential for comprehending the broader administrative and policy context within which the JET Programme operates. This awareness ensures that discussions and analyses of the JET Programme are accurate and that references to these bodies are correctly interpreted, particularly when engaging with older literature.

CLAIR—The Council of Local Authorities for International Relations plays a central role in the administration and management of the JET Programme, operating in collaboration with the three key ministries detailed below. Established in July 1988 as a coalition of prefectural and municipal governments, CLAIR's inception was driven by the growing demand for grassroots internationalisation within Japan.

CLAIR's involvement in the JET Programme is multifaceted. It primarily focuses on recruiting and placing ALTs, CIRs, and SEAs from overseas. These individuals are strategically assigned to local public bodies across Japan, aiming to enhance mutual cultural understanding and provide participants with immersive experiences in Japanese culture and society.

A critical aim of CLAIR is to ensure the efficient and successful operation of the JET Programme, benefiting the local contracting organisations and the individual participants. To facilitate this, CLAIR offers guidance to host prefectures, designated cities, and contracting organisations, as well as to the participants themselves. This includes the publication of essential resources such as the Contracting Organisation Manual and the Questions & Answers Manual, designed to provide comprehensive information and support to the contracting organisations.

In addition to these resources, CLAIR organises various training sessions and seminars for contracting organisations, Prefectural Advisors (PA), and other officials. These sessions focus on addressing issues related to the JET Programme and navigating cross-cultural interactions.

CLAIR also coordinates numerous conferences for JET Programme participants, contributing to their professional development and cultural acclimatisation. The organisation further supports participants through a range of publications, offering insights and guidance for their time in Japan.

CLAIR's Department of JET Programme Management employs 13 Programme Coordinators (PCs), the majority of whom are former JET participants. These PCs are instrumental in providing additional support and answering queries from current participants regarding life and work in Japan.

The primary responsibilities of CLAIR's Department of JET Programme Management are disseminated across a variety of critical tasks:

1. Managing communications with the ministries involved in recruiting and selecting new JET participants.
2. Allocating JET Programme participants to contracting organisations and following notifications of successful applicants from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
3. Undertaking promotional activities to raise awareness and support for the JET Programme.
4. Offering assistance and advice to contracting organisations.
5. Facilitating the reappointment process between participants and contracting organisations.
6. Organising and conducting orientation sessions and conferences, such as the Post-Arrival Orientation, Coordinator for International Relations (CIR) and Sports Exchange Advisors (SEA) Mid-Year Seminars and facilitating the After JET Conference.
7. Supporting local ALT Skill Development Conferences.
8. Developing and distributing training materials, including Japanese language course study CDs and textbooks, and implementing Japanese language training for participants.

Through these efforts, CLAIR plays an indispensable role in the successful implementation and ongoing development of the JET Programme, ensuring it remains a beneficial and enriching experience for all involved. CLAIR describes its relationship with government ministries thus: 'CLAIR does not take instructions from other government agencies regarding the JET Programme but works with them to implement the programme' (CLAIR, personal communication, 27 March, 2023).

In essence, CLAIR can be regarded as the link between the JET Programme and various government offices. CLAIR functions as a pivotal administrative entity closely affiliated with the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication (MIC). The hierarchical structure of CLAIR underscores the significant influence of the MIC, with key positions such as the Secretary-General, the Deputy Secretary-General, and the Chief of the General Affairs Section typically being occupied by individuals from MIC (McConnell, 2000). This alignment highlights the integral role of CLAIR within the broader governmental framework, particularly in its operational linkage with the MIC.

CLAIR's responsibilities include extensive negotiations and collaborations within a complex and multifaceted administrative landscape. These interactions span a diverse range of stakeholders, including various national ministries and agencies, local government bodies across Japan, and the extensive network of JET Programme participants. Despite its limited involvement in overarching policy formulation, CLAIR wields considerable influence in the practical aspects of the JET Programme (McConnell, 2000).

The Japanese staff members and programme coordinators within CLAIR possess substantial discretion in tailoring the content and operational details of the programme. This ability to shape the programme's execution and day-to-day activities underscores the significant, albeit nuanced, role that CLAIR plays in the administration and success of the JET Programme, navigating the delicate balance between adherence to national policy directives and the pragmatic needs of local implementation (McConnell, 2000).

MEXT – As stated on the official JET Programme website (JET Programme, n.d.-g), Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology serves as the central governing entity for all educational affairs. Within its broad spectrum of responsibilities in the education sector, MEXT's interactions with participants of the JET Programme are predominantly observed in areas such as orientation programmes, seminars, and the provision of pedagogical guidance.

MEXT typically adopts an engaged and supportive stance towards ALTs participating in the JET Programme. This is demonstrated through the organisation and delivery of seminars and workshops, which are integral components of the JET Programme's various conferences. These educational sessions are designed to enhance the professional development of ALTs, equipping them with essential skills and knowledge for their roles in educational settings.

Additionally, MEXT plays a crucial role in developing and refining Japan's educational curriculum. This involves formulating and implementing various educational policies and establishing standards for educational materials and texts. The impact of these policies and standards is directly felt in the classrooms where ALTs are engaged, influencing the teaching and learning environment.

ALTs are also afforded a unique opportunity to engage in a biennial dialogue with MEXT alongside other ministries and CLAIR. This event, known as the ALT Opinion Exchange, provides a platform for ALTs to share their perspectives and experiences directly with policymakers, contributing to the ongoing evolution of educational strategies and practices within the JET Programme.

MIC – Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, formerly referred to as the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA). As one of the main administrative bodies of the Japanese government, MIC is responsible for the 'fundamental framework of Japan, such as the various organisations relating to the economic and social activities of the nation and supports the basis of the nation' (MIC, n.d.).

However, regarding the management of the JET Programme, the website (JET Programme, n.d.-g) states that MIC plays a pivotal role primarily in the administrative sphere. This involvement includes the critical task of financial management, encompassing the estimation of fiscal resources necessary for the programme's operation. Additionally, MIC is instrumental in formulating the criteria for candidate selection from various participating nations.

This collaborative process involves strategic consultations with key governmental bodies: MOFA, MEXT, and CLAIR. Post-consultation, MIC is responsible for establishing specific selection guidelines for each country participating in the JET Programme, including determining the quotas for participant acceptance.

MIC's role extends to the fiscal aspect of the JET Programme, particularly in the allocation of local government revenues. These funds are allocated to subsidise a significant portion of the programme's expenditures. This financial support encompasses various elements of the programme, such as the compensation provided to the participants and the coverage of their travel costs. This financial involvement underscores MIC's commitment to facilitating the successful implementation and ongoing sustainability of the JET Programme.

MOFA—The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is the primary point of initial engagement for individuals aspiring to join the JET Programme. MOFA's role is pivotal in JET Programme participants' recruitment and selection process, adhering to the established acceptance guidelines specific to each country. This recruitment process is primarily conducted through Japan's extensive network of embassies and consulates around the world.

MOFA's overseas missions execute several key functions to facilitate the selection process. These include hosting informational sessions for potential applicants, processing application submissions, conducting interviews, and ultimately communicating the selection decisions to the successful candidates. Also, MOFA is critical in preparing new JET Programme participants for their transition to Japan. This preparation involves organising pre-departure orientations and interactive question-and-answer sessions to alleviate apprehensions and equip participants with essential information to commence their experience on the JET Programme confidently.

The involvement of MOFA extends beyond the initial recruitment and orientation stages. When JET Programme participants return to their home countries, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) often hosts 'welcome back' receptions, typically organised in partnership with the local JET Alumni Association (JETAA). The objective is to foster and maintain the bonds and friendships forged in Japan, ensuring that these connections endure and continue to thrive.

In addition to these functions, MOFA collaborates closely with other ministries and CLAIR as part of the overarching JET Programme initiative. This collaboration aims to enhance Japan's global social and cultural awareness, promoting a deeper understanding and appreciation of Japanese culture and society. This concerted effort by MOFA and its partners underscores the Programme's commitment to fostering international relations and cultural exchange (JET Programme, n.d.-g).

JET Alumni JET AA—Established in 1989, the JET Programme Alumni Association (JETAA) is an independent organisation aimed at sustaining and enhancing the friendships formed among JET Programme participants. Through various activities, its mission is to foster a greater understanding between Japan and the countries involved in the JET Programme. Presently, JETAA comprises 56 regional chapters across 21 countries and regions, with around 21,000 members (JET Programme, n.d.-e). Metzgar (2017), in particular, focuses her analysis of JETAA's role in promoting deeper intercultural understanding and connections between Japan and the JET Programme's participating countries.

Individuals:

The term Assistant Language Teacher (ALT), coined by the JET Programme, is occasionally referred to as Assistant English Teacher (AET) in earlier literature pertaining to the Programme.

Initially, English was the only language being taught by AETs/ALTs. However, as the JET Programme started expanding, receiving JETs from not just the traditional inner-circle countries, such as Australia, the USA and the UK, other foreign languages were added as target languages by MEXT.

At first, German and French were included, but this was expanded in 1998 to include Chinese and Korean (JET Programme, n.d.-d). The total number of languages currently possible for an ALT to teach is seven: English, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, and Korean. As more languages were offered, the term AET changed to ALT to become more encompassing. Even though there are opportunities to teach more than just English, this language is by far the most common second language taught on the JET Programme, with ALTs teaching foreign languages other than English accounting for less than 5% (Hiratsuka, 2022). ALTs also comprise 90% of the JET Programme population (JET Programme, n.d.-d). As of the 1st of August 2024, there were a total of 5,373 ALTs out of 5,861 total JET Programme participants (JET Programme 2024).

The inclusion of these languages within the JET Programme demonstrates a significant diversification in language instruction and may reflect the Japanese government's recognition of the increasing diversity among its foreign residents. The foreign population in Japan has surged from 867,237 in 1986 to 3,223,858 in 2023 (Immigration Services Agency, 2024), with Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Filipino, and Brazilian residents being the most prevalent groups. The incorporation of Chinese, Korean, and Portuguese languages in the JET Programme not only serves to strengthen diplomatic relations with these nations but also supports students from these linguistic backgrounds.

CIR (Coordinator of International Relations) is a JET member employed at a municipal or prefectural office and reports directly to MIC. As of August 1, 2024, there were a total of 479 CIRs out of 5,861 participants in the JET Programme (JET Programme, 2024). One of the main differences between an ALT and a CIR is that no Japanese language is required for an ALT position. However, in order to become a CIR, an applicant must 'have a functional command of the Japanese language (Japanese Language Proficiency Test N1 or N2 is desirable)' (JET Programme, n.d.-b). This broadly translates to a CEFR level of B2/C1 (CEFR, n.d.; JLTP, 2023), which enables the use of the Japanese language in everyday work settings and the performance of translation and interpreting duties.

This is reflected in the CIR's typical responsibilities and duties, which include translation/interpretation for government officials, teaching community or school English classes, and international exchange event planning and implementation while they are also expected to receive guests from abroad, edit and produce pamphlets in English or Japanese, advise and plan international exchange programmes and teach English (or other languages) to government employees and local residents (JET Programme, n.d.-h).

SEA (Sports Exchange Advisors) represents the fewest number of JETs. SEAs work for local governments in Japan and aim to promote internationalisation through the coaching and training of their particular sport. As of August 1, 2024, there were 9 SEAs out of 5,861 total JET Programme participants (JET Programme, 2024).

Japanese Teachers of English (JTEs), occasionally referred to in earlier literature as Japanese Teachers of Language (JTLs), frequently collaborate with ALTs in elementary, junior high, and senior

high schools across Japan. At elementary schools, one teacher will be responsible for teaching multiple subjects, and therefore, their English ability can vary dramatically from basic understanding to proficient user. The ALTs assigned to elementary schools are based at the local Board of Education (BoE) and visit multiple schools within a one-month period. Often, these ALTs will only visit the same elementary school once or twice in the space of one month. As a result, it can be difficult to build relationships with the teacher(s) and students. Furthermore, elementary school ALTs will have their supervisor situated at the BoE rather than at the school.

The significance of the one-shot (McConnell, 2000) ALT approach lies in the limited interaction between ALTs and JTEs at elementary schools, which poses challenges in establishing the natural rapport often associated with the benefits of team teaching. This rapport, frequently observed at the junior high and senior high school levels, is crucial for effective collaboration and teaching. For example, the primary JTE I worked with during my first high school assignment remains a close contact, and this experience is echoed by numerous other ALTs and JTEs who maintain ongoing relationships.

ALTs based at junior high and senior high schools will work with designated English teachers; although these JTEs' English ability is more proficient, there can still be a disparity in the overall levels. The ALTs at junior and senior high schools will have a designated supervisor based at that school with whom they will often work closely. However, it is not unusual for an ALT to teach with several different JTEs at one school.

Borg (2020) brings our attention to the acronym ESID (Every Situation Is Different); his article discusses the disparities in the working and living conditions of ALTs on the JET Programme. The term ESID reflects the highly variable conditions experienced by ALTs due to the decentralisation of their management to local Contracting Organisations (COs). This policy results in significant inconsistencies, including job duties, workload, and holiday time differences. While some ALTs report positive experiences, others face challenges like 'desk warming being idle due to lack of assigned tasks' (Borg, 2020, p.48) and being used merely as 'human tape recorders, limited to repetitive speaking tasks' (Borg, 2020, p. 49). The article critiques the lack of standardisation and reform in the JET Programme, suggesting that while CLAIR and MEXT acknowledge these issues, there has been little effort to address them. The article concludes that the JET Programme prioritises Japan's soft power and international image over substantive improvements in the working conditions of ALTs.

This principle that 'Every Situation is Different' (ESID) holds true across the board for the schools engaged with the JET Programme, reflecting the diverse conditions encountered by participants (Jacobs, 2023). While the three previously discussed schools share commonalities, the working and teaching environments can vary significantly. Factors such as geographical location—whether rural or urban—the size of the school, student population, and numerous other variables contribute to these differences. Consequently, participants' experiences, in terms of teaching and general working conditions, are subject to the specific context of their placement.

2.3 Origins of the JET Programme

In contextualising this study within the broader literature review, it is essential to first present an overview of the JET Programme, tracing its development from inception to the present. According to the official JET Programme website:

As a government-sponsored programme, the JET Programme is not a business or language school. The goal of the JET Programme is to promote internationalisation in Japan's local communities by helping to improve foreign language education and fostering international exchange at the community level.

(The Jet Programme, n.d.-c)

This strategic objective, prominently featured in the 'History' and 'Frequently Asked Questions' sections of the JET Programme's website, highlights the emphasis on local-level internationalisation. The programme's historical inception in 1986 was a convergence of various objectives: adhering to the pedagogical directives of MEXT, aligning with the diplomatic ambitions of MOFA, and fulfilling the localised objectives set by MIC.

The two suggested methods of achieving these wide-ranging goals are: 'by helping to improve foreign language education and fostering international exchange at the community level'. This seems a clear enough statement of objectives, but it hides some significant foundational contributing factors. The programme's origins were influenced by the diplomatic interests of external stakeholders, including the United States government (McConnell, 2000). This intricate melding of educational and diplomatic objectives resulted in an initial mission statement of the JET Programme that was markedly expansive:

The Japan Exchange and Teaching Program seeks to promote mutual understanding between Japan and other countries including the U.S., the U.K., Australia, and N.Z. and foster international perspectives in Japan by promoting international exchange at local levels as well as intensifying foreign language education in Japan.

(McConnell, 2000, p.47)

As Borg (2018) aptly observes, the inherently broad nature of the JET Programme's official statements enabled operational flexibility, a feature particularly critical during the Programme's formative years. However, the resultant lack of clarity poses a challenge when defining the scope of the JET Programme and assessing its successes or failures. There remains a lack of established metrics for assessing the degree of internationalisation within Japanese communities or for gauging mutual understanding between Japan and other nations (Borg, 2018). Despite these limitations, efforts have been made to assess the programme's effectiveness.

One tangible metric, although limited in scope, is Japan's performance in English language proficiency tests, where it consistently ranks poorly compared to other nations (IELTS, 2024; Margolis, 2024; TOEIC, 2023a; 2023b). This particular aspect has led to perceptions that the JET Programme is ineffective in fulfilling its mandate for English language education. Metzgar (2017) suggests that such evaluations mainly focus on outcomes due to difficulties in quantifying the programme's objectives. Additionally, this narrow linguistic perspective overlooks the cultural and socio-political dimensions of the JET Programme.

While the intentions of the JET Programme are commendable, there is also some ambiguity surrounding its overarching objectives. This ambiguity primarily arises from the differing priorities of the three ministries involved in its development and implementation. According to McConnell (2000) and his interactions with senior officials from MEXT, MOFA, and MIC, the programme's main objectives are as follows.

- 1) To promote 'local-level international exchange'.
- 2) To improve foreign language education standards.
- 3) To foster an 'understanding of Japan' among people in foreign countries.

However, according to McConnell (2000) and Borg (2018), these objectives reflect the respective government ministries' relative interests in creating and operating the JET Programme. The absence of a policy or directive to align these objectives has allowed each ministry to pursue its agenda independently, often neglecting the opportunity to create a cohesive implementation of the programme. This fragmentation in policy inevitably affects the ALTs in classrooms and the CIRs in prefectural offices, creating uncertainty about their specific roles within the programme. This fragmentation and its effects are a key focus of this research study and are addressed at length in later sections of this thesis. These historical tensions provide context for Research Question One, which investigates how conflicting governmental objectives shape the implementation and lived experiences of the JET Programme today.

As an ALT myself for four years, it was only through research for my thesis that I became aware of the underlying dynamics influencing the JET Programme. This realisation underscores a need for communication and alignment of objectives within the programme as it directly impacts both its execution on the ground and how participants perceive it. My personal experience succinctly reflects the lack of communication and misalignment of objectives evident in the literature of the often-competing Japanese government agencies involved with the programme. To me, the lived experience of the JET Programme articulates the uncertainty of clear directional goals and the confusion that can arise when multiple agencies pursue their own policy agenda without full knowledge, understanding or interest in the agendas of other contributing agencies. This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5, Section 5.2: Policy Contextualisation.

McConnell (2000) and Borg (2018, 2020) have raised questions about the JET Programme and its endorsement by MEXT. It is worth noting that, thus far, MEXT has not officially incorporated the JET Programme into any updates to the English teaching curriculum. McConnell (2000) also points out concerns within MEXT about resistance from JTEs who see the programme as a threat to their professional standing. This internal disagreement within the education system has led to criticism of the JET Programme.

Jeon (2019) provides an insightful summary of feedback from both JTEs and ALTs regarding the inadequate time allocated for lesson planning. A notable disparity emerges: ALTs reported feeling unproductive and idle throughout the day, while JTEs felt overwhelmed by their other, more urgent responsibilities. Additionally, a significant grievance highlighted by a JTE in Jeon's (2019) study was the lack of support and explicit guidelines from the Japanese government on how to implement team teaching effectively. JTEs are merely informed of the ALT's arrival time and date, without receiving any written instructions on teaching methods or lesson content.

2.4 JET Programme Public Perception

As alluded to in the previous section, the majority of journalistic discussions surrounding the JET Programme primarily focus on its English language education aspect. As a result, it is often viewed as unsuccessful. A common criticism is the underutilisation of ALTs or their limited role as mere 'human tape recorders' (Borg, 2020; Jeon, 2019; McConnell, 2000), which may inadvertently contribute to Japan's poor performance in English proficiency assessments. However, these evaluations often overlook the programme's multifaceted objectives. Other criticisms stem from the assignment process resembling a 'lottery' (Borg, 2020, p.6) system, where ALTs are sometimes assigned the exact opposite of what they requested on their JET Programme application form. This can lead to discontent with the ALTs from day one and harbour ill feelings and resentment towards the schools and areas where they are placed, thereby affecting their day-to-day performance.

While some scholars, such as Borg (2008, 2020), McConnell (1996, 2000) and Metzgar (2012, 2017), acknowledge that there are more contributing factors to consider within the JET Programme than simply language education, they occasionally overlook or superficially address the absence of a cohesive policy directive from the Japanese government.

This research study aims to investigate the dynamics of the JET Programme, focusing on how the lack of a unified policy across MEXT, MOFA and MIC creates a disjointed administrative structure. As these different ministries pursue their own priorities, no single, top-down directive ensures consistent implementation at the local level. Consequently, evaluating the JET Programme solely based on its English teaching merit neglects the broader aspects such as cultural exchange, local government involvement and soft power objectives that collectively shape its overall influence. Addressing these wider dimensions is central to this study's aim to evaluate the JET Programme beyond its English language outcomes.

Persistent Criticisms: English Proficiency Gaps and Resource Allocation

A primary criticism of the JET Programme pertains to Japan's persistently low English language proficiency scores. This critique gains credence when examining data from international proficiency tests. For example, in 2023–2024, Japanese test-takers achieved an average overall score of 5.9 on the IELTS Academic exam, ranking 34th among the 39 countries that participated, ranking above only Bangladesh and Arabic speakers (IELTS, 2024). Similarly, Japan's overall TOEIC scores placed it 40th out of 48 participating countries (TOEIC, 2023a; 2023b). Furthermore, Education First's English Proficiency Index (EF-EPI) ranks Japan 92 out of 116 countries in 2024 (EF, 2024). Although the EF-EPI is not entirely indicative of Japan's English proficiency, it is notable that Japan has consistently fallen in rank every year since its inception in 2011, as more countries participate in the ranking (Nippon.com, 2023).

Reflecting upon this, scholars including Aspinall (2012), Brown (2013), Browne and Wada (1998), Hagerman (2009), Mondejar et al. (2012) and Seargeant (2008) have woven two main narratives through their critical analyses:

1. The paradox of Japan's economic prosperity and high educational standards juxtaposed against its consistently low rankings in English proficiency tests.
2. The tangible impact, if any, of the JET Programme on enhancing English education in Japan.

Although it is not necessary to analyse the complete historical background of Japan's perceived failings in its English education system, there are several points worth noting. Seargeant (2005) articulates a nuanced perspective regarding Japan's engagement with foreign educational concepts. He notes a dichotomy where there is an eagerness to adopt modern foreign educational methods coupled with a reluctance to embrace the cultural changes these methods might ignite. This dynamic is reflected in Japan's education system, especially in English language education, which is designed to allow access to foreign culture and technology while carefully controlling their influence.

Hagerman (2009) scrutinises the historical complexities of this issue. He traces the challenges in English language education back to its inception in the Japanese curriculum in 1871. Since then, university entrance examinations have predominantly focused on comprehension and translation skills, shaping the teaching methodology in schools.

Despite over a century of educational evolution, the core structure of university and high school entrance exams remains essentially unchanged. Drawing from my experience on entrance examination boards at Japanese universities and in my current academic role, I can verify the emphasis on comprehension and translation in these exams. Consequently, teachers across Japan orient their English teaching towards equipping students to succeed in these entrance examinations, often at the expense of communicative aspects of language learning.

This approach has unintentionally placed ALTs, whose primary role is to improve students' speaking abilities, in a difficult position. As a result, they are often partially held responsible for Japan's low English proficiency levels and criticised as a poor allocation of resources (McCrostie, 2017). McConnell (2000) encapsulates the broader educational mandate, observing, 'The most important functions of Japanese secondary schools are to prepare for high school and college entrance examinations and to maintain social order' (p.7).

2.5 The Availability of Literature on the JET Programme

When conducting literature research for this thesis, it is important to consider the questions within the scope of the JET Programme's objectives. One major challenge I encountered was the accessibility of documents from the Japanese government, which, if available, could be significant for this investigation. The work of Borg (2008; 2018; 2020) provides insights into this element of the discourse, particularly as Borg's (2008) doctoral research includes both English and Japanese sources.

McConnell's (1996, 2000) and Browne and Wada's (1998) contributions are also essential in understanding the intricacies of the JET Programme. Notably, Browne and Wada's (1998) article has significant importance. Charles Browne, who served as National Chairman of the JET Programme during its pivotal years (1987-1988), along with Minoru Wada, who played a role in its development as a Senior Curriculum Specialist at MEXT, offer a unique perspective. Despite their involvement in shaping the programme, they do not hesitate to provide critical evaluations when necessary.

Additionally, McConnell's (1996, 2000) interviews and correspondence with important personnel shed light on the JET Programme's early years and proved invaluable resources.

Furthermore, McConnell (2000) details the difficulties he first encountered when trying to conduct research on the JET Programme, something which I encountered myself. McConnell (2000) states, 'I found negotiating access to Ministry of Education and CLAIR officials and gaining permission to observe national-level conferences quite difficult; a general ministry policy forbids any outside research on the JET Program' (p.27).

Reflecting on my personal experiences, I had hoped to observe the annual JET Programme induction at the Keio Plaza Hotel as part of my doctoral research. Although I had previously participated in this event twice as a newly arrived ALT in my first year and later as a Teaching Orientation Assistant (TOA) delivering teaching seminars in my fourth year, CLAIR denied my request for researcher access. I also requested a face-to-face meeting rather than email correspondence, to which CLAIR replied, 'Unfortunately, because of the nature of our organisation, it is imperative that our responses are well vetted before release and as such an in-person interview is not possible. Thank you for your understanding in this matter' (CLAIR, personal communication, 21 August, 2022). This refusal highlights how my prior roles as a participant and TOA did not confer special access as a researcher, and obtaining direct observational data or interviews through CLAIR channels was not feasible. Such restrictions demonstrate external researchers' broader difficulties when examining policy and practice in a government-sponsored programme like JET.

Fortunately for McConnell (2000), his mentor, Tetsuya Kobayashi, was a personal friend of Minoru Wada, one of the key officials responsible for the JET Programme. As a result, McConnell was allowed unparalleled access to CLAIR, which was previously and has not been demonstrated since. Over the course of thirteen years, McConnell (2000) conducted ten visits to the CLAIR office, interviewing 'twelve ranking officials of CLAIR's managerial staff and fifteen of the "program coordinators"' (McConnell, 2000, p.27) who were responsible for creating and implementing the programme policy for the JET Programme.

In addition, McConnell (2000) outlines how, initially, he was only given basic, standard answers intended for the public. However, over the course of his thirteen-year research period, he would develop and nurture the various relationships he had by attending work parties and other non-work-related events. This, coupled with the fact that many of the people who had initially held key roles in implementing the JET Programme were now in new, different roles and were able to discuss the JET Programme more freely, allowed McConnell (2000) to obtain far more detailed answers than would otherwise have been granted.

The article by Browne and Wada (1998) is notably impactful within the corpus of literature on the JET Programme. Charles Browne served as the inaugural National Chairman of the JET Programme from 1987 to 1988, while Minoru Wada, as Senior Curriculum Specialist for English education in secondary schools at MEXT, played a central role in the design and implementation of the JET Programme, lend their work considerable authority, especially with regard to the formative years. Despite their intimate association with the programme during its developmental years, Browne and Wada (1998) exhibit a balanced perspective, providing critical analyses when necessary.

In a similar vein, McConnell (1996, 2000) offers enlightening perspectives on the early stages and establishment of the JET Programme. His interviews and exchanges with several principal figures

associated with the programme are particularly valuable, shedding light on its foundational dynamics. Borg (2008) further enriches this discourse by drawing astute comparisons between the official Japanese websites and their English counterparts. His analysis illuminates notable discrepancies in the emphasis and presentation of information across these platforms.

The terms 'Exchange' and 'Teaching' in the JET Programme name suggest the incorporation of these two components. Borg (2008) explains that 'Exchange' in this context is conceptualised as an 'exchange of ideas and experiences' (p.107) within the Japanese education system, diverging from the conventional notion of personnel exchange. Intriguingly, the programme's official Japanese title, 'Gogaku Shido nado wo Okonau Gaikoku Seinen Shotai Jigyo'—loosely translated as 'programme to invite overseas youth for language instruction, etc.'—differs markedly from its English counterpart, with 'JET Programme' appearing only in brackets (Borg, 2008, p. 107). This linguistic divergence is noteworthy, as the Japanese title omits any reference to 'exchange' or 'international exchange', potentially leading to the perception among the Japanese general public that the JET Programme is predominantly a language teaching initiative.

This discrepancy in terminology has the potential to create confusion within local Japanese communities, especially with the increasing presence of foreign ALTs and CIRs. Additionally, it highlights a divergence in the perceived objectives of the programme: English-speaking participants may interpret the programme differently from their Japanese counterparts due to linguistic differences in the programme's title. These linguistic subtleties emphasise the challenges in aligning and communicating the goals of the JET Programme across varied cultural and linguistic contexts, as well as the language used for the programme. Mackin (1989) points out several related issues in translating between Japanese and English, noting problems at both the microstructural and macrostructural levels. Mackin (1989) further contends that one of the primary challenges stems from the linguistic background and instruction in the Japanese language, where translators with a grammar-translation and dictation-focused learning background are not adequately equipped for the 'communication requirements' (p.349) necessary for accurate translation.

The questionnaire responses from former JET members and JTEs reveal variations in language and differences in the intended meaning of the JET Programme's goals. Subsequent analysis and discussion chapters will explore these discrepancies in greater detail. This analysis will provide a more in-depth understanding of how linguistic nuances and cultural contexts influence the perception and implementation of the JET Programme's objectives.

2.6 The Official Standpoint of JET

As alluded to previously, the JET Programme is under the stewardship of three principal government ministries: MOFA, MEXT, and MIC. Additionally, CLAIR plays a pivotal role in the daily operational aspects of the JET Programme, which was established a year after the inaugural intake of JET participants. A critical issue that has emerged in the context of the JET Programme is the often discordant objectives of each ministry. This misalignment poses significant challenges to the coherent implementation of the programme's goals. The following evaluation provides an overview of the roles and complex, sometimes strained relationships between these authorities in the context of the JET Programme. This overview is derived from an array of sources, including official government handbooks, ministerial websites, and the official JET Programme website.

CLAIR, established as a joint government entity, is crucial in supporting and fostering internationalisation at the grassroots level in Japan. The primary function of CLAIR, as described on the JET Programme's official site, is 'to ensure that the JET Programme runs as smoothly as possible' (JET Programme, n.d.-g). CLAIR primarily serves as a liaison between the three government offices and the public interface of the JET Programme. It is also tasked with coordinating training sessions and promotional initiatives for JET participants. Understanding CLAIR's coordination role is crucial to Research Question One, as it reveals how no single government office exerts complete control, mirroring the fragmentation that underlies the JET Programme's policy challenges. In parallel, MOFA engages in the JET Programme through its global network of Japanese embassies. MOFA often represents the initial and concluding point of contact for JET participants. This ministry is instrumental in conducting information seminars for prospective participants, overseeing the application review and processing, and organising placement interviews. Furthermore, according to the JET Programme's website, MOFA plays a significant role post-programme by often sponsoring 'welcome back' receptions. They also work in close partnership with the local JET Alumni Association (JETAA) to preserve and reinforce the relationships and connections established during participants' time in Japan (JET Programme, n.d.-g).

Based on my personal experience during my four years on the JET Programme, I observed a notable absence of a reintegration process for returning participants, a sentiment echoed by Metzgar (2017), who notes the frequent inadequacy of support for JET alumni. This shortfall is particularly striking given MOFA's stated objective of fostering a positive image of Japan amongst JET participants post-return. McConnell (2000) cites a MOFA minister emphasising their primary aim for the JET Programme as enhancing participants' understanding of Japanese society, yet the gap in reintegration efforts persists.

MEXT is often perceived as the primary administrator of the JET Programme due to the emphasis on language education. Responsible for the educational curriculum, policy implementation, and organisation of seminars, workshops, and teacher training, MEXT faces significant scrutiny. ALTs, who constitute 90% of JET participants (JET Programme, n.d.-h), are frequently at the forefront of criticism regarding the state of English education in Japan.

Some primary critics of the JET Programme in the public domain come from publications such as *Japan Today*, *The Japan Times*, and *GaijinPot*. These sources are significant due to their substantial reach and influence.

Japan Today is a prominent English-language news website in Japan that caters to expatriates and English-speaking Japanese. While precise readership statistics are elusive, the site maintains a robust online presence through targeted content and interactive community features. As one of the pioneering online news platforms featuring comment and forum functions, Japan Today aims to provide news and facilitate discussion on domestic and international issues (Japan Today, n.d.). Its impact is considerable within the expatriate community, which relies on it for local and international news.

The Japan Times, established in 1897, is Japan's oldest and most widely read English-language newspaper. Recent statistics indicate a daily circulation of approximately 44,000 copies (The Japan Times, 2022). Although this figure pertains to its print readership, the newspaper's digital reach is extensive, bolstered by a comprehensive online archive and active social media presence. According to The Japan Times Media Information (2022), its readership spans over 200 countries, with about eight million monthly page views.

GaijinPot is a vital resource for foreigners residing in Japan. It offers various services, including job listings, real estate options, language schools, and community forums. As of 2020, the website had more than six million users worldwide (GaijinPot, n.d.). It is particularly popular among expatriates seeking employment and accommodation in Japan and those looking to connect with the broader foreign community.

These publications play a crucial role in shaping public opinion and discourse about the JET Programme, providing platforms for both support and criticism.

Perspectives on the effectiveness of ALTs vary, with Gay (2010) questioning the necessity of the JET Programme, McCrostie (2017) arguing for a reallocation of funds towards Japanese English teacher training, and Winovich (2016) expressing doubts about ALT's impact in classrooms. Despite these critiques, MEXT's goals for the JET Programme extend beyond improving student English proficiency; they aim to enhance the professional experience of mainstream educators, Board of Education (BoE) personnel, and local government officials through ongoing engagement with JET participants (McConnell, 2000).

Meanwhile, MIC manages the JET Programme's fiscal responsibilities, overseeing each prefecture's tax allocations and financial resources. Besides these fiscal responsibilities, MIC is instrumental in setting guidelines for participating countries, determining position availability across Japan's 47 prefectures, and handling administrative tasks in collaboration with CLAIR. McConnell (2000) notes a MIC official's statement that English education was never a MIC priority; their focus was on integrating young, foreign workers into smaller towns and cities.

Metzgar (2017) aptly encapsulates the complexity of the JET Programme, describing it succinctly as: 'sponsored by three Japanese government ministries and implemented by a fourth pseudo-governmental entity, the JET Programme is a complicated bureaucratic beast' (p. 157). This intricate bureaucratic structure underscores the necessity for a unified, top-down policy to harmonise the disparate objectives of these various entities.

The preceding paragraphs highlight criticisms and questions regarding the JET Programme's viability and resource allocation, reflecting a range of opinions. These divergent views, some advocating the programme's educational benefits and others emphasising cost-effectiveness concerns, relate directly to Research Question Two (stakeholder perceptions) and Research Question Three (broader cultural and diplomatic dimensions). The lack of a unified viewpoint underscores the need for ongoing inquiry into how these multiple perspectives influence the JET Programme's impact and align with Japan's stated internationalisation aims.

2.7 Early Years of JET and Persistent Problems

The inaugural cohort of the JET Programme, comprising 848 participants, arrived in Tokyo in the summer of 1987 (JET Programme, n.d.-d). This nascent government initiative, unprecedented in scale, did not see significant scholarly attention until the early to mid-1990s. McConnell (1996, p. 446) describes the JET Programme as the 'largest initiative since World War II in the field of human and cultural exchange'. The uniqueness of the programme, given its unprecedented scale and scope, presents inherent challenges in appraising its effectiveness due to the lack of comparable initiatives. Pioneering research from Browne and Wada (1998), Cominos (1991), McConnell (1996, 2000), and Scholefield (1996) remains relevant, echoing concerns that persist decades later.

Cominos (1991), in one of the very first peer-reviewed articles regarding the JET Programme, scrutinises the state of English education in Japan during its early years. He identifies the inadequate English communication skills of Japanese school and university graduates and the urgent need for educational reform in this area—a concern that remains relevant, as evidenced by the works of Winovich (2016) and McCrostie (2017).

A notable yet less frequently discussed aspect in Cominos's (1991) work is the exploration of the merits of the traditional, grammar-focused, and teacher-centred approach to language learning in Japan. He cites an interview with Professor Watanabe of Sophia University, a former government advisory board member who highlights the significant role of rote learning, stating that it 'contributed greatly to the intellectual training of the Japanese people since the Meiji period' (Cominos, 1991, p.115). Having not previously considered the merits of this educational approach, as it is often considered outdated in modern, Western language teaching circles, I found it intriguing to consider this teaching style from an alternative perspective. This viewpoint, rarely explored in existing JET Programme literature, may also illuminate some of the systemic tensions inherent in the Japanese education system.

This issue is particularly relevant given the contrasting teaching styles often observed within the JET Programme. Predominantly young Western ALTs, often with little or no formal teaching training, advocate for communicative language teaching approaches. In contrast, JTEs, having been educated within the Japanese system, are more accustomed to and comfortable with grammar translation and rote learning methods. This divergence in pedagogical preferences can lead to frustration on both sides, with JTEs feeling undermined by inexperienced ALTs and ALTs feeling stifled by the traditional methods employed by their Japanese counterparts. Such points of contention underscore the need for a balanced approach that respects and integrates both perspectives to enhance the effectiveness of language education in Japan.

Several authors (Browne & Wada, 1998; Cominos, 1991; McConnell, 1996, 2000) have documented various challenges around the JET Programme's formative years, many of which might be expected, given the unique nature of such a sizeable government initiative. However, the issues identified in these early critical analyses seem to have persisted throughout the ongoing span of the JET Programme and have been further examined by other authors (Carless, 2006; Hiratsuka, 2013, 2017, 2022; Galloway, 2009; Metzgar, 2012, 2017; Sutherland, 2012). One of the most commonly recurring issues is the mismanagement and under-utilisation of ALTs.

McConnell (1996) illustrates this issue with an anecdote of two ALTs who surreptitiously swapped schools for a day, unnoticed, to demonstrate their perceived interchangeability and undervaluation. This anecdote poignantly illustrates the enduring frustrations of ALTs regarding their roles and contributions. Over two decades later, Metzgar (2017) acknowledges that the relationship between ALTs and JTEs continues to be fraught with tension, with the potential contributions of ALTs 'often not fully exploited' (p. 89).

These findings are corroborated by the results of my questionnaire administered to the ex-JET community. Responses from participants covering the entire duration of the JET Programme reveal recurring criticisms that have persisted throughout the programme's history. Such consistent feedback underscores ongoing challenges and areas for improvement within the JET Programme, highlighting the ongoing need to examine its policy intentions and implementation. These operational inconsistencies, documented across decades, also directly inform the thematic analysis conducted in Chapter Four of this thesis.

Jeon's (2019) article comparing language teaching programmes in East Asia also highlights some of the JET Programme ALTs' complaints of misuse. The JET Programme does not differentiate in compensation for participants based on their possession of teaching credentials or prior teaching experience. The overarching aim is to broaden the international exchange by engaging a diverse group of JET participants rather than prolonging the tenure of existing participants. The modus operandi is that the more people you can get through the door and sent back to their home countries, the greater the level of exposure the programme will receive. As a result, it is not in the JET Programme's interest to keep its participants for an extended period of time.

This is operationalised through a policy that limits the tenure of JET participants to a maximum of five years, with only marginal salary progression during that time. Jeon's (2019) feedback from numerous participants highlights concerns regarding underutilisation in their roles. Common grievances include feelings of redundancy, excessive idle periods leading to frustration, perceptions of unfulfilled potential, and roles that are limited to repetitive tasks, akin to functioning as 'human tape recorders' (Jeon, 2019, p.8), without meaningful engagement or impact. One participant, with a background in teaching in their home country, reflected that 'As a teacher in my home country, I discovered once I got into my school that I had actually taken a step down professionally. I was given few responsibilities and did not feel as though my teaching was taken seriously' (Jeon, 2019, p.8).

As the most common complaints often come from the ALTs on the JET Programme, it is helpful to highlight an excerpt from Jeon's (2019) article from a JTE respondent. This provides an insight into the teacher's perspective of the issues maligning the JET Programme's scattershot approach to allocating ALTs to numerous schools in their designated area. The JTE in question replied, 'The board of Education said the ALT (JET participants) will come to your school this day, this day, this day. There are no written guidelines when it comes to teaching methods. They just tell you when they are coming and how many days' (Jeon, 2019, p.10).

This approach has been a persistent issue within the JET Programme, as McConnell (2000) identifies it as the 'one-shot system' (p. 125) introduced in 1987. In this system, ALTs are allocated a

desk at their local BoE and visit schools irregularly, which hinders the development of rapport with teachers and students. Even when ALTs return to the same school, they often work with different teachers and different sets of students each time. McConnell (2000) further reports that ALTs might be required to visit a school within a five-minute walk of the BoE or take a two-hour boat ride. This inconsistent and fragmented approach has left both ALTs and JTEs feeling dissatisfied and unhappy with team teaching and their individual roles.

Ongoing Issues

The persistent complexities surrounding ALTs and the team-teaching model in the JET Programme, despite being one of its foundational principles, are not entirely unexpected. The introduction of this pedagogical approach coincided with the inception of the JET Programme, yet it was implemented without preliminary research into its efficacy within language education (Metzgar, 2012). MEXT posited that integrating language and culture is essential for second language acquisition, thereby advocating for a team-teaching model with JTEs and ALTs collaborating. This approach was envisioned to fulfil the educational objectives set by the ministry (Cominos, 1991; Hughson, 2017). Nevertheless, it does not appear to have been driven by clear pedagogy.

Browne and Evans (1994) and Browne and Wada (1998) explore the prospective advantages of having two educators in the classroom concurrently. They hypothesise that, by leveraging the ALT as a cultural informant and through cooperative efforts between the two teachers, there is substantial potential for what Browne and Wada (1998) term the 'largest programme of its kind in the world' (p. 110).

Addressing the current challenges in team-teaching requires a reconciliation of teaching methodologies. Presently, a dichotomy exists between the traditional, grammar-focused, teacher-centred pedagogy prevalent in Japanese classrooms and the communicative language teaching approach typically advocated by ALTs. CLAIR provides guidance in the ALT handbook, administered to all new JETs on arrival, suggesting an eclectic approach that amalgamates various pedagogical methods. A more definitive and harmonised teaching style may be a viable solution for enhancing the effectiveness of the team-teaching system.

The suggested approach is a multifaceted approach incorporating ideas from the Communicative and Natural Approach to Language Teaching, the Lexical Approach, Task-based Language Teaching, Social Constructivist Theory and Multiple Intelligences Theory.
(CLAIR ALT Handbook, 2013, p.81)

In a recent scholarly contribution, Brown (2023) proposes an innovative teaching philosophy to address the challenges encountered in team teaching settings. The crux of Brown's (2023) research is encapsulated in the notion of 'imagined communities of target language (TL)' (Brown, 2023, p. 66), a concept that is meticulously explored within the article. The empirical basis of this study is substantial, with a collection of 5079 instructional resources gathered from JET Programme educators throughout Japan. Employing a content analysis methodology, the study scrutinised these materials to assess the extent of social group engagement and the application of the target language within them.

Brown's (2023) findings reveal significant 'missed opportunities' (Brown, 2023, p. 78) for fostering connections between language instruction and the potential social contexts in which the target language might be employed. The article highlights a notable gap in the JET Programme and analogous international teaching initiatives, which predominantly recruit young individuals to teach abroad. This gap pertains to a mismatch between the taught language and the 'imagined social group participation' (Brown, 2023, p. 79), highlighting a discord between the instructional content and the conceivable real-world applications of the language.

Advocating for a pedagogical paradigm shift, Brown (2023) suggests that ALTs in any country should integrate language learning with envisaged social group interactions. This could be operationalised through innovative teaching strategies such as role-playing activities that aim to elevate students' awareness of the congruence between language usage and social contexts. According to Brown (2023), such an approach would inspire learners by aligning with their aspirational social identities and infuse a sociolinguistic layer into the teaching process. Consequently, this would ensure that the language proficiency acquired by students transcends mere grammatical accuracy and embraces the pragmatic and social nuances of language use.

While I cannot provide a comprehensive review of language pedagogies in Japan, studies of communicative language teaching (Gorsuch, 1998; Butler & Iino, 2005) and the persistence of exam-driven practices (Taguchi, 2005) offer useful context for understanding why JET's educational impact has been limited. Taguchi (2005), for example, highlights how teachers often perceive the communicative approach positively in theory, yet in practice revert to grammar-translation and exam-oriented methods. Together, these studies underline the structural and cultural constraints within which JET participants have worked, helping to explain why the programme's ambitions for classroom innovation have often been challenging to realise.

A comprehensive analysis of nationalism and soft power is beyond the scope of this thesis, but it is important to note that the JET Programme has consistently been framed not only as an educational policy but also as a tool of cultural diplomacy. Nye (2004) offers a valuable lens for understanding how governments utilise cultural exchange to project their influence internationally. McConnell (2000) situates JET within Japan's wider efforts to manage its global image, while Burgess (2014) highlights how nationalist politics and identity discourses continue to shape debates about internationalisation in Japan. Although these themes cannot be fully explored here, they highlight the significance of the JET Programme as more than an educational initiative, linking it to larger sociopolitical projects of image-building and nationhood.

2.8 Future-Proofing ALTs: Team Teaching and Economic Strategies

The incorporation of ALTs and the adoption of team teaching within the JET Programme have been acknowledged for their numerous benefits (Hiratsuka, 2013). Team teaching, a collaborative approach where a JTE and an ALT jointly plan and execute language lessons, is lauded for its effectiveness in facilitating communicative activities (Brumby & Wada, 1990; CLAIR, 2013; Sutherland, 2012). This pedagogical method is particularly advantageous in modelling question-and-answer role-plays and presenting more authentic dialogues, as noted by researchers including Tajino and Tajino (2000), Carless (2006), and Sutherland (2012).

Metzgar (2017) highlights the JET Programme's significant contribution to local communities in Japan. The Programme is seen as a catalyst for developing enduring international connections at the local level. These connections are not just cultural or educational but also extend to economic ties. Metzgar (2017) further emphasises the Programme's relevance within the broader economic strategy of the Japanese government. She notes, 'the national government's economic revitalization plans have stressed the importance of the JET Program in this context' (Metzgar, 2017, p.66). This assertion underscores the Programme's alignment with national objectives aimed at economic rejuvenation, where the cultural and educational exchanges facilitated by the JET Programme play a crucial role.

Holding Back the System – Entrance Exams

Seargeant (2005) articulates a complex dynamic within Japan's engagement with global ideas, wherein there exists a dual inclination towards the adoption of contemporary foreign concepts while concurrently striving to mitigate their assimilative impact. This ambivalence is manifest within the Japanese educational sphere, particularly in the approach to English language education. The pedagogical strategies employed aim to equip learners with English proficiency, thereby enabling access to global culture and technological advancements. However, these strategies appear to evolve in such a way as to curtail the potential cultural and ideological influences that accompany English language acquisition.

Hagerman (2009) examines the historical nuances of this educational paradigm, providing a comprehensive analysis of its evolution. A pivotal moment identified by Hagerman (2009) is the incorporation of English into the Japanese language curriculum in 1871, a move that set a precedent for the subsequent focus on comprehension and translation skills in university entrance examinations. This emphasis has been a significant factor in shaping the trajectory of English language education in Japan, presenting a considerable obstacle to the holistic development of English language competencies, particularly in terms of communicative proficiency.

The enduring influence of entrance examinations for universities and high schools in Japan, which has persisted for over a century, plays a crucial role in shaping the educational and future career trajectories of Japanese students. Drawing on personal experience as a member of examination boards at various Japanese universities and in my current professional role, I can confirm that these entrance assessments primarily focus on English comprehension and translation aspects. Consequently, the pedagogical approach adopted by educators across Japan is heavily geared towards preparing students to succeed in these examinations, often at the expense of communicative language teaching.

Hiratsuka (2022), drawing on his extensive experience as a JTE who has collaborated with numerous ALTs and served in supervisory capacities, offers a critical examination of the ALT's role within the Japanese educational system in his detailed work on narrative inquiries. He recounts a telling episode where he was told that an ALT would be excluded from participating in English classes, the rationale being the paramount importance of preparing students for university entrance examinations. Hiratsuka (2022) paraphrases this prevailing sentiment, noting that 'essentially the only goal was to go to a good university by passing an entrance exam' (Hiratsuka, 2022, p. 107).

This incident prompts Hiratsuka (2022) to further research the actual function of ALTs within the educational landscape and the justification for their recruitment to Japan. The narrative underscores a systemic issue within the educational framework, where the intensive focus on examination success potentially marginalises the contributions of ALTs, whose primary mandate is to enhance communicative competencies in English. This dissonance between the intended purpose of ALTs and the operational realities of the Japanese education system raises fundamental questions about the alignment of educational practices with the broader objectives of language learning and international exchange.

The structure of entrance exams, which lack a communicative component, directly impacts the teaching methodology in schools, where emphasis on spoken English is minimal. This situation places ALTs in a challenging position, as their primary responsibility is to enhance speaking skills among students. The discrepancy between the goals of the JET Programme and the educational priorities dictated by entrance examinations has led to criticism of ALTs, with some alleging that they contribute little to improving students' English proficiency levels and are thus an inefficient use of educational and financial resources (McCrostie, 2017).

McConnell (2000, p. 7) encapsulates this predicament by noting that the principal objectives of Japanese secondary education serve two purposes: equipping students for demanding entrance examinations and maintaining societal discipline. This dual focus underscores the complex interplay between educational objectives and societal expectations, highlighting the challenges faced by initiatives like the JET Programme in effecting substantive changes in English language teaching practices within the Japanese educational system.

The issue of Japanese entrance examinations, which primarily do not assess communicative competence, significantly influences the teaching objectives of JTEs. Their primary mandate is to ensure students' success in pivotal entrance examinations that determine progression from junior high to senior high school and ultimately to university. A potential strategy for resolving the dichotomy in teaching approaches within the JET Programme would be to establish a consensus on pedagogical methods between MEXT and the programme itself. Instituting an official policy that delineates teaching methodologies for both JTEs and ALTs could pave the way for a more cohesive and integrated team-teaching framework.

Alternative Perspectives

Galloway's 2009 scholarly work, entitled 'A Critical Analysis of the JET Programme', thoroughly examines the challenges and accomplishments within the JET Programme. Galloway (2009) commences the analysis by highlighting that 'Many people have remarked upon the benefits of having native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) in a country such as Japan, and the Japan Teaching and Exchange Programme (JET) has been continually praised' (Galloway, 2009, p.169). Galloway (2009) further references the research of Koike and Tanaka (1995) and McConnell (2000), who support the notion that ALTs positively influence classroom dynamics by offering students enriching interactions with foreign nationals. Additionally, Galloway draws attention to Taguchi's (2002) study, which evidences a marked increase in the usage of English during classes conducted with the participation of an ALT, citing an increase from 40% to between 80% and 100% in Oral Communication (OC) classes with an ALT.

Other advocates for the team-teaching approach, such as Brumby and Wada (1990) observed numerous advantages arising from team teaching. Among these benefits were enhanced opportunities for genuine interaction in English, frequent instances of exemplary dialogues demonstrated by ALTs and JTEs, and the facilitation of intercultural understanding within the educational environment.

Tajino and Tajino (2000) proposed that the enhancement of students' linguistic and interactive skills is contingent upon a clear understanding of both the concept and application of team teaching, as well as the roles within the team comprising both teachers and students. Further advantages of team teaching also particularly apply to JTEs. Collaborative teaching frameworks offer a platform for cultural exchange between ALTs and JTEs, enriching both parties. Notably, JTEs stand to benefit in terms of advancing their English communication skills through regular interactions with ALTs, as evidenced in the research by McConnell (2000) and Browne and Wada (1998). It is something I also considered during my time on JET, that JTEs were the clear beneficiaries from my presence at the school.

While numerous scholars have lauded the JET Programme, a significant body of critical literature addresses its limitations. Browne and Wada (1998), instrumental in the JET Programme's early development, identify several deficiencies attributed to MEXT. These include a lack of substantive support and questions regarding the effectiveness of ALTs. Similarly, McConnell (1996, 2000), despite generally advocating for the JET Programme, acknowledges certain detriments related to the inclusion of ALTs in educational settings.

A particularly poignant critique, which resonates with my own experiences in the programme, concerns the perception of team-taught classes. McConnell (1996) conveys insights from JTEs at junior and senior high schools, noting that while classes involving ALTs were often considered exciting and engaging for students, they frequently lacked substantial educational outcomes. This is evidenced by the absence of formal examinations, regular homework, and clearly defined syllabi or learning objectives established by either the JTE or the ALT. Elementary ALTs might only visit the same school once or twice a term, and high school ALTs often teach isolated lessons with no continuity from one class to the next. This was certainly the case at the four different high schools where I taught. The disconnect between the perceived enjoyment of the classes and the actual academic learning achieved highlights a significant challenge within the JET Programme's team-teaching approach.

McConnell's (1996) interviews with JTEs reveal a notable dichotomy in their approach to team-teaching with ALTs. A frequently uttered phrase, 'now it's time to get down to studying' (McConnell, 1996, p.452), was used to transition from activities led by ALTs to traditional textbook-based learning. This routine suggests a perception among JTEs that the time with ALTs, while perhaps engaging, was not equated with serious academic study. Furthermore, JTEs expressed the necessity to exert additional effort in classes without ALTs, compensating for what they perceived as 'lost time'. One of the most common complaints from ALTs is the often lauded I was nothing more 'than a human tape recorder' (McConnell, 2000, p.190). Adachi et al. (1998) and Hasegawa (2008) also lament the disparity between the aims of classes with ALTs and the need to study for entrance exams.

A salient point brought up by Iwamoto (in Miyazato, 2009), but also experienced by myself, is the passive nature of many JTEs during the actual classroom time. Some JTEs see the team-taught classes as a break and allow the ALT to teach the majority of the class while the JTE acts as an interpreter when needed.

Contrasting this perspective, my personal experience as an ALT responsible for teaching 14 weekly classes highlights another facet of this issue. At the end of the school year, the task of grading students revealed a disconcerting reality: Despite significant efforts from both the students and myself, the grades I assigned constituted a mere 0.5% of the overall student evaluation. Speaking with other ALTs in my network revealed this was common in many Oral Communication (OC) classes. This low weighting of ALT's OC classes demonstrates how perceptions of assessment influence student and teacher priorities (Boud, 2000). In many school contexts in Japan, high-stakes examinations dominate, potentially undermining ALTs' attempts to enhance communicative competence (McConnell, 2000). This marginalisation of the ALT's contributions not only diminished the perceived value of my efforts but also sent a message to students and other teachers that the educational components associated with ALTs were deemed of lesser importance.

This perspective is echoed by Metzgar (2017), who, despite generally being an advocate of the JET Programme, remarks that 'Although often hailed in passing as a large and successful international exchange program, JET has rarely been considered as such in a formal academic context' (p. 145). This observation is particularly significant when juxtaposed with the scrutiny of the Japanese media. Various news outlets frequently cast the JET Programme in a negative light, focusing on what they perceive as a misallocation of resources and the inefficiency in the utilisation of ALTs. Such media critique, coupled with the scarcity of formal academic recognition, as noted by Metzgar (2012, 2017), contributes to a rather pessimistic overall assessment of the JET Programme.

Publications such as *Japan Today*, *GaijinPot*, and *The Japan Times* have shed light on various concerns regarding the JET Programme. In a notable article, Debito Arudou (Arudou, 2010) identifies two contrasting viewpoints towards the programme's ALTs. Firstly, there is an appreciation for their role in augmenting Japan's soft power abroad. Conversely, Arudou (2010) points out criticisms that label the programme as 'wasteful, bringing over generally untrained and sometimes unprofessional kids, and offers no measurable benefit (see Japan's bottom-feeding TOEFL test scores in Asia)' (Arudou, 2010). Such mixed perceptions from the media and public are understandable, considering the substantial resources invested in the JET Programme and the seemingly modest tangible outcomes.

However, this narrative is not unanimously endorsed. Several authors, including Hughson (2017), McConnell (1996, 2000), and Metzgar (2012, 2017), acknowledge the less visible but significant benefits of soft power from the JET Programme. Furthermore, ALTs serve as an invaluable asset to motivated JTEs, facilitating regular interaction and enhancing their English communicative skills – an opportunity that might be elusive without the ALT system in place.

Additionally, Ohtani (2010) advocates for the enhancement of language skills in both JTEs and ALTs, suggesting that proficiency in both English and Japanese is crucial for effective communication. Furthermore, it is recommended that government-sponsored teacher education

programmes should incorporate courses aimed at fostering intercultural awareness. These courses are also intended to provide JTEs with a solid understanding of the value and rationale behind team teaching, thereby positively influencing their attitudes towards this collaborative approach.

Galloway (2009) astutely points out that responsibility for any shortcomings in Japan's English education system should not be attributed solely to the young, often inexperienced foreign teachers. She suggests that JTEs also share responsibility for challenges. Reflecting on my time in the JET Programme, I observed a wide variance in team-teaching effectiveness. While some JTEs demonstrated remarkable openness and enthusiasm towards the contributions of ALTs, others exhibited reluctance to engage in English within the classroom, at times entirely withdrawing from team-teaching sessions.

Hiratsuka (2022) highlights instances where JTEs adopt a passive role or leave the classroom entirely, despite the legal implications, as ALTs are not certified teachers in Japan. This issue is also evident in the questionnaire responses from ex-JET participants and JTEs, as discussed in the analysis and discussion chapters. Research by Adachi et al. (1998), Hasegawa (2008), and McConnell (2000) highlights the persistent challenges within the JET Programme, particularly the disconnect between the objectives of team-taught lessons and the demands of high-stakes examinations.

From my own experience, I encountered similar issues, often being left to teach oral communication classes alone, which undermines the team-teaching model central to the JET Programme. Despite lacking formal certification within the Japanese teaching system, this practice was overlooked within my school, although it would likely have been frowned upon by the board of education if discovered. From a student perspective, the lessons were well-received, and I faced no disciplinary issues. Discussions with other ALTs suggested maintaining discretion regarding this situation, and other JTEs in my school generally ignored the practice. My personal experience along with other ALTs I spoke with reflects Carless's (2006) viewpoint that inconsistent team-teaching practices undermine communicative class teaching goals.

Such behaviour runs counter to the guidelines provided by CLAIR, as outlined in their General Information Handbook (GIH): 'Please bear in mind that the ALT is an assistant to the Japanese teacher in the classroom. The ALT should not, therefore, be expected to conduct classes alone nor be the 'main' teacher' (CLAIR, 2024, p.95). The ethos of team-teaching, inherently implied by its name, necessitates mutual cooperation between the ALT and the JTE. Galloway (2009) acknowledges this, noting that reluctance from JTEs to use English, both in and out of the classroom, can lead to frustration among ALTs. This, in turn, negatively impacts students' learning experiences and linguistic development.

One notable instance that stands out from my experience occurred at a particular high school where I was assigned to teach. One teacher introduced himself in English during my initial meeting with the various English teachers I would collaborate with for the year. Immediately afterwards, this teacher stated that from that point onward, we would only communicate in Japanese and reserve English for the classroom. This teacher was also my direct supervisor, responsible for assisting me with matters outside of school. Fortunately, I had enough experience by

that stage to require minimal assistance. However, the reluctance of an English teacher to use English in professional communication still perplexes me. This experience highlights a recurring issue within the JET Programme, where English teachers' expected English use is not consistently upheld, which can impede the intended cultural and linguistic exchange. I imagine this would have been particularly problematic for a first-year ALT with no experience living in Japan.

This stance reflects observations by Carless (2006) and Sato and Kleinsasser (2004), who found that despite MEXT's proposals for JTEs to instruct in English and to adopt more communicative teaching methods, these were rarely taken up by JTEs. Sato and Kleinsasser (2004) in particular found that despite positive intentions from JTEs the pressure on them to keep up with other teachers and ensure that textbooks were fully covered, in order to prepare students for entrance exams, meant that JTEs invariably fell back to grammar translation methods and stifled any pedagogical innovation.

2.9 Positives and Negatives of the JET Programme

While the JET Programme, particularly the role of ALTs, has faced its share of criticism, substantial evidence suggests that the programme has yielded positive outcomes. McConnell (2000) acknowledges this duality, stating 'In spite of the complaints of some JET participants that one-shot visits to either a school or a classroom are meaningless, JTLs (JTEs) and students really do believe that seeing and interacting with one foreigner can make a difference' (McConnell, 2000, p.274). This insight suggests a significant impact of the JET Programme on the attitudes of both JTEs and students towards foreign language education and cultural exchange. This overall positive inclination towards the JET Programme is also reflected in the questionnaire data explored in the analysis and discussion chapters.

The evolution of the JET Programme is encapsulated by an official from Shiga Prefecture's International Affairs Division, who describes it as having passed through three distinct phases: 'the era of astonishment, the era of acclimation, and the era of understanding' (McConnell, 2000, p.274). This trajectory indicates an initial surprise, gradual adaptation, and eventual appreciation for the programme within local communities. The same official observed that towns and schools which were initially hesitant about participating in the JET Programme eventually expressed eagerness to be involved, with requests for JETs spreading throughout the prefecture.

Complementing this perspective, Cominos (1991) notes, 'despite opposition from some teachers and outside commentators, local governments are continuing to pressure the national government to provide more JET assistants each year' (p.119). This demand from local authorities for an increased number of ALTs underscores the perceived value and success of the programme at the grassroots level, despite the critiques it may have attracted from certain quarters.

The introduction of foreigners into rural communities through the JET Programme, a strategy often criticised, has nonetheless sparked significant interest, as noted by McConnell (2000). This approach led to an increased desire for participation in the programme among surrounding towns. Cominos (1991) captures this growing enthusiasm, stating, 'now in its fourth year, the Programme has expanded rapidly from 848 participants in 1987 to 2,223 in August 1990, a very clear indication of its popularity among students, teachers and local educational authorities' (p.118). Such

expansion is indicative of the programme's positive reception and perceived effectiveness in fostering internationalisation at the local level.

Conversely, an official from MEXT voiced concerns about cultural identity within the context of globalisation. Highlighting a cautious stance within the Japanese government, this official expressed apprehension about the potential erosion of national identity amidst the drive for internationalisation. McConnell (2000, p.278) quotes the official questioning the implications of such changes: 'If we lose our identity, who are we?' This statement reflects a nuanced tension between the desire to adapt to an increasingly interconnected world and the preservation of a distinct cultural identity.

Looking at it broadly, it seems that the JET Programme's implementation has been characterised by inconsistencies, partly due to the absence of a cohesive central policy guiding the recruitment of ALTs to Japan. Borg (2008) identifies a critical issue in this regard, noting the programme's limited integration 'within the overall language education policy framework in Japan' (Borg, 2008, p.119). This lack of alignment raises questions about the selection criteria for languages and the specific varieties of English included in the programme. Additionally, there is ambiguity surrounding the allocation of time within the Japanese education curriculum for team-teaching classes, a decision that significantly impacts the efficacy of the programme (Borg, 2008). These oversights by JET policymakers underscore the need for a more structured and coherent approach to embedding the programme within Japan's wider educational strategies.

These questions about language choice and curricular integration cannot be understood in isolation from Japan's longer political and historical trajectories. A complete historical account is beyond the remit of this thesis, but it is important to acknowledge the broader contexts in which the JET Programme was conceived. Works such as Dower's *Embracing Defeat* (1999) highlight how post-war US-Japan relations shaped educational and cultural policy, helping to explain why American English became central to JET's design. More generally, Japan's engagement with international exchange can be traced back to the arrival of Commodore Perry's black ships in 1853, which ended centuries of isolationist policies and initiated a long-standing negotiation with globalisation (Howell, 2009). Accounts on Japan's nation-building and internationalisation (Gluck, 1985; McConnell, 2000) further situate the JET Programme within more holistic efforts to use education and cultural policy to balance domestic identity with global pressures. While a comprehensive exploration of these themes lies beyond the scope of this study, they offer valuable insights for connecting JET to wider historical and political narratives.

2.10 Gaps in the Literature and Scope for Updated Research

Reflecting on my initial visit to a rural area in Japan in 1999, I vividly recall being escorted to various public places by a JET-ALT colleague's supervisor. The supervisor's eagerness to be seen with two foreigners in his small agricultural community signified, in my view, the JET Programme's success in fostering intercultural understanding. This perception aligns with McConnell's (2000) positive assessment of the programme at that time. However, in the past two decades, significant shifts in Japan's socio-cultural and political landscape have necessitated a contemporary re-evaluation of the JET Programme.

The landscape in which the JET Programme operates has evolved markedly, particularly with advancements in international travel and digital communication technologies. These developments may have significantly altered public attitudes and expectations regarding cultural exchange and internationalisation. Furthermore, after 38 years of implementation, it is conceivable that the JET Programme has realised one of its objectives of enhancing internationalisation in rural Japan. A comprehensive research study could be instrumental in assessing the programme's impact on local communities, focusing beyond the sphere of English language education.

As Metzgar (2017) observes, one of the JET Programme's primary objectives, often eclipsed in many studies, is promoting a favourable perception of Japan through the work of ALTs in rural regions. Metzgar (2017) notes that this aspect is equally important as the English education component, underscoring a critical dimension of the programme's intent and achievements. Building on this perspective, the present study examines how participants' perceptions reflect the JET Programme's broader soft power ambitions, particularly at the grassroots level.

While these narratives illustrate the JET Programme's success in rural areas, the literature does not entirely address how such localised intercultural gains interact with persistent policy fragmentation at the national level, thereby forming a gap. Research Question Three advances this discussion by exploring if such positive local intercultural outcomes can be scaled or maintained amid Japan's evolving sociopolitical context.

Prevalence of American English

Kobayashi (2023) critically examines the linguistic preferences within the JET Programme employing Kachru's (1985) three circles, inner, outer and expanding, framework. While Pennycook (2007) argues for a more fluid and flexible paradigm, the usage of inner and outer circles in Kobayashi's (2023) study helps illustrate the JET Programme's heavy reliance on ALTs from the traditional inner circle countries, predominantly favouring American English, despite the programme's purported aim to embrace global Englishes. Kobayashi (2023) provides statistical evidence to underscore this preference, noting that an overwhelming 90% of ALTs in the JET Programme originate from inner-circle countries, which are predominantly native English-speaking nations, as opposed to a mere 10% from outer-circle countries, where English functions as a second language or an official language alongside other languages.

Kobayashi (2023) further illuminates a significant shift in Japan's educational policy regarding teaching English pronunciation. The policy evolved from a focus on 'contemporary British or American standard pronunciation' to a broader 'contemporary standard pronunciation' in 1977, indicating an attempt to diversify the accepted norms of English pronunciation within the educational system (Kobayashi, 2023). Despite this policy shift, there remains a substantial bias towards American English, as evidenced by the latest participation data from the JET Programme for the academic year 2024. According to this data, a substantial portion of JET participants - 3,002 - originated from the United States, dwarfing the figures from other contributing countries. The United Kingdom and Canada follow with 741 and 548 participants, respectively, whereas the Philippines represented the most significant source of non-standard traditional English speakers, with 339 participants (JET Programme, 2024).

This desire for American English should come as no surprise given the origins of the JET Programme as being a 'gift' to the then-American president, Ronald Reagan. An account from McConnell (2000) perfectly sums this up: 'One Ministry of Home Affairs official told me bluntly: "The first thing you should know about the background of the JET Program is that Japan likes the United States."' (McConnell, 2000, p.50). This is further highlighted by McConnell (2000) and Kobayashi (2023), who reference non-American ALTs who were asked to teach or read to the students in an 'American accent'. During my four years as an ALT, I was also asked numerous times to do this. Being uncomfortable with doing so, I politely refused and attempted to maintain a neutral accent, which is a similar approach to the ALTs mentioned in McConnell (2000) and Kobayashi (2023). Overall, the public documents from the MEXT and CLAIR, and their non-existent statements on the dominance of Inner Circle JET ALTs and, in particular, American ALTs, suggest their tacit assumption that such disproportion is, as a matter of course, not a matter of concern.

The absence of official commentary or policy statements from the MEXT or CLAIR regarding the dominance of American ALTs, and more broadly, ALTs from inner-circle countries, implies a tacit acceptance of this imbalance. This lack of acknowledgement suggests that the skewed representation of English varieties within the JET Programme is not perceived as a pressing issue by the governing bodies, thereby perpetuating the existing linguistic hierarchy and potentially overlooking the Programme's stated objective of fostering a global perspective on English language education (Kobayashi, 2023).

More Recent Publications on the JET Programme

A more recent, comprehensive, and well-researched publication is by Hiratsuka (2022). His book offers a comprehensive introduction and overview of the JET Programme. Hiratsuka (2022) notes that most research regarding the JET Programme focuses on ALTs and team-teaching; as such, there 'still exist gaps in the literature' (p.31). Furthermore, the focus of Hiratsuka's (2022) work, like many other publications, has the ALTs as its primary concern. However, the main focus is on creating a comprehensive image of 'who ALTs are and what their experiences in Japan are like.' (p.31).

One particular aspect that Hiratsuka (2022) highlights, which is lacking in many previous works, is his insights into the contemporary conditions of ALTs. This is useful in many respects, none more so than the majority of research conducted on ALTs, which is understandably based on their working conditions. However, considering that for many young, first-time JET workers, this is their first experience living overseas, it is only natural that their living conditions and what they do outside of working hours will have a considerable impact on their lives as a whole.

Taking into account the JET mantra of ESID—Every situation is different—it is difficult and somewhat precarious to speculate before moving to Japan on the JET Programme about a participant's living conditions, because one ALT's experience will be different from another's.

Hiratsuka (2022) offers a holistic overview of JET ALTs' lives to create multifaceted identities that are relevant and sometimes unique to JET ALTs. Overall, it is too early to say how influential Hiratsuka's (2022) book will be, as it is still relatively new in the world of academia. Hiratsuka (2022) does raise some valid points when discussing the history and trajectory of the JET Programme.

However, for my line of research, although interesting, the all-inclusive identities of ALTs are not so relevant.

Although the JET Programme may have been driven by a foreign policy consideration at its inception, at the time of writing, 'Japan is starkly different from what it was more than three decades ago when the program started – demographically, culturally, politically, and economically' (Hiratsuka, 2022, p. 49). In light of this distinct historical backdrop, it is imperative that the JET Programme undergoes meticulous examination, modification, and enhancement to align it with the requirements of the present era.

One new perspective that Hiratsuka (2022) puts forward is that having the four separate offices used effectively could have been a benefit to the JET Programme. It has, in actuality, been seen as a negative in many respects, particularly in the impact it has had on the lives of the ALTs, arguably the core group of the JET Programme. Hiratsuka (2022) elucidates that the two main goals of the JET Programme —enhancing the internationalisation of Japan and improving English education —are not being met due to the lack of qualifications and experience among the ALTs. This is a novel approach worth considering, that due to the different goals of each ministry, this has led to an ambiguous situation for the ALTs, perpetuated by the mantra ESID, and that none of the goals are being achieved. In addition, it is posited that the promoted soft power success may be limiting the success of the English language goal.

Hiratsuka (2022) does raise, as he terms it, a 'brave' question, which few others are willing to ask when he writes 'are ALTs worth it?' (Hiratsuka, 2022, p.55). The intended answer is to be examined throughout the book and assessed by evaluating both the professional and personal lives of ALTs. However, a contentious issue is raised between the disparity of qualifications and experience to become a JTE. Yet, the similarity in financial remuneration between the two is a focal point for friction. What I would argue is, that is the whole point of them being a JET ALT, and why Wada, during his discussions with McConnell (2000) argued for the terminology of the position being an *assistant language teacher* with CLAIR (2020) clearly outlining the role and responsibilities of the position to (a) conduct team-teaching English classes alongside JTEs, (b) support the development of teaching materials, and (c) engage in extracurricular activities with students, such as English clubs and sports activities. Additionally, as non-licensed teachers in Japan, they are not responsible for student discipline and should never take a class by themselves.

Furthermore, Takeda (2023) explores the complexities faced by Shannon, a Canadian-Taiwanese JET-ALT, who encountered challenges in the classroom due to her Asian appearance despite being a native English speaker. The article highlights the potential for discursive transformation by leveraging the dilemmatic positions of individuals like Shannon. Such individuals can challenge and disrupt prevailing stereotypes and social norms through their unique experiences and perspectives. The JET Programme's recent expansion to include more countries can be seen as a positive step towards dismantling stereotypes related to race, gender, and language ideologies, thereby influencing the professional and personal experiences of non-White native English speakers in Japan.

Hasegawa and Sakamoto (2023) investigate the internal cognitive processes of ALTs during the preparation stage of the JET Programme through narrative research. Their study underscores the significance of understanding these cognitive processes to equip ALTs for their roles in Japan better, thereby enhancing their teaching efficacy and cultural engagement. The research reveals instances of cognitive dissonance among ALTs, who reported feeling anxious and uncomfortable about their new teaching environment. Specific concerns included anxiety over lesson planning, student behaviour, and collaboration with Japanese teachers. These issues are also reflected in my own questionnaire results, which highlight the lack of fundamental training and preparation as a significant concern among both the ALT and JTE communities. Addressing these concerns is crucial for ALTs' successful integration and effectiveness within the Japanese educational system.

2.11 Synthesis of Key Debates and Research Gaps

In 2014, the objectives set by the late Prime Minister Abe for the JET Programme included a significant expansion, aiming to increase the number of JET ALTs, specifically, to 6,400 by the year 2019 (MIC, n.d.). This expansion plan was aligned with major international events hosted by Japan, namely the Rugby World Cup in 2019 and the then-upcoming 2020 Olympics. Prior to the unforeseen disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, there had been a consistent yearly increase in the number of JET Programme participants since 2009 (JET Programme, n.d.-d). The Japanese government during this period was notably more stable compared to the preceding years, which saw a rapid succession of six Prime Ministers in as many years. Former Prime Minister Abe's tenure from 2012 to 2020 marked a period of relative political stability, and his tenure was characterised by a discernible preference for the JET Programme over privately hired ALTs (Metzgar, 2017). In light of these developments and considering the governmental support for the programme, coupled with the renewed increase in JET participants (JET Programme, n.d.-d) the current period presents an opportune moment to re-evaluate the JET Programme's role and effectiveness in the context of Japan's educational and cultural landscape.

Over the years, the evolution of the JET Programme has been incremental and predominantly reactive. McConnell (2008) observes that any policy modifications that have occurred within the programme often stem from the continuous advocacy and demands of JET participants rather than proactive policy development by the responsible government ministries or the administrative bodies of the JET Programme itself.

This literature review chapter aims to provide foundational insights into the positioning of the JET Programme as a policy initiative, as described by Borg (2008). Reviewing it in this context, describing the JET Programme as a policy intent might be more accurate. While MOFA, MIC, and MEXT each have distinct objectives, there appears to be no consolidated government policy that aligns these disparate goals towards a singular, coherent purpose.

To illustrate, Hughson (2017) references a compelling perspective from an interview with a prefectural advisor (PA) at CLAIR. The PA asserts that 'there must be a very definite policy behind the programme' (p.30), yet, as it stands, such a policy is not evident. A former CLAIR employee further elaborates upon this lack of clear policy direction. The employee notes that despite the official discourse not explicitly mentioning 'soft power' or 'diplomacy', the underlying directive communicated to CLAIR is to mould JET participants into individuals with a deep connection to

Japan. Consequently, upon returning home, these participants are expected to act as informal ambassadors, sharing their positive experiences and promoting Japan's cultural and societal merits (Hughson, 2017).

Hiratsuka (2022) articulates concerns regarding the structural complexities inherent within the JET Programme, arising from the involvement of three distinct governmental branches, each with its unique set of objectives and responsibilities. While intended to enrich the programme through diverse inputs and oversight, this tripartite administrative framework inadvertently precipitates conflicts and confusion, as highlighted by Hiratsuka (2022). The lack of a unified direction and the overlapping jurisdictions contribute to an environment where coordination challenges become prevalent, impacting the programme's efficacy and coherence.

The use of the term 'exchange' in the JET Programme's title warrants further examination. Contrary to the conventional understanding of an exchange programme, where participants from both countries swap roles, the JET Programme has not facilitated the reciprocal travel of Japanese nationals to work overseas. Bhagan (2024) defines an exchange programme as an arrangement where teachers switch roles with counterparts abroad for a set period. This allows them to immerse themselves in a foreign educational setting, understand diverse pedagogical approaches, and experience day-to-day teaching practices in a different cultural context. She stipulates that such programmes typically target highly proficient, seasoned educators with exemplary records in their current roles (Bhagan, 2024), in contrast to the JET Programme practice of recruiting recent university graduates, often lacking formal teaching experience, to assist in English language education in Japan.

The 'exchange' aspect in the JET Programme context is conceptualised more in terms of the interchange of ideas and experiences, which was set by the Japanese government from day one of the JET Programme. However, as will be seen in later chapters, a small percentage of ex-JET members and a larger percentage of JTEs did not realise this. The goals of the JET Programme, as laid out by the three different government offices, enable the participants to contribute their cultural and linguistic insights to the Japanese educational landscape and, upon returning to their home countries, continue to disseminate their acquired knowledge and experiences of Japanese culture. This reinterpretation of 'exchange' forms a pivotal part of the JET Programme's unique structure and objectives. The JET Programme website states that:

Firstly, each participant in the JET Programme brings their culture to a local community in Japan, helping the country to gain personal contact with peoples of other countries.
Secondly, each JET participant will learn a great deal about Japan, its culture and its people. It is expected that JET participants will share what they learned with their family and friends upon returning home.

(JET Programme, n.d.-f)

As reflected in the above statement, the Japanese government's objective is to foster and promote interactions between Japanese citizens and foreign nationals. This international exchange occurs within Japan, allowing Japanese individuals to engage with and learn from foreign ALTs within their own country's safe and familiar context. Upon completion of this interaction, these ALTs/JETs

are then expected to return to their respective countries and advocate for the merits of Japan and its culture.

A seminal work in the discourse surrounding the JET Programme is McConnell's (2000) 'Importing Diversity: Inside Japan's JET Program', which provides extensive insights into the programme's dynamics. This publication has become a cornerstone for subsequent researchers exploring the JET Programme. Metzgar (2017), in particular, acknowledges the foundational role of McConnell's work in her own research, regarding her book as a continuation 'of where McConnell left off' (Metzgar, 2017, p.1). Despite these valuable contributions, there remains a notable lacuna in the literature concerning the JET Programme, particularly regarding how the fragmented policymaking structures affect the lived experiences of JET participants and JTEs, a gap this study directly addresses. My research aims to fill this void by adopting a critical, analytical lens to evaluate the JET Programme against its stated objectives. While Hiratsuka (2022), McConnell (1996, 2000) and Metzgar (2012, 2017) have touched on the absence of a unified policy and the resultant conflicts among the three government ministries involved, there remains scope for a more comprehensive and systematic analysis. Such an examination can enhance the understanding of the JET Programme in its contemporary guise.

2.12 Conclusion and Methodology Preview

Thus far, the literature reveals unresolved questions pertaining to the JET Programme's policy coherence, stakeholder dynamics, and broader socio-cultural impacts. Few studies directly investigate how the misalignment between MOFA, MIC, and MEXT objectives affects JET Programme participants and JTEs' daily realities. By incorporating these multiple perspectives, this study seeks to offer an original and thorough analysis of the JET Programme's policy environment, surpassing previous research that has more commonly focused on either English teaching or cultural exchange in isolation. In doing so, this thesis addresses Research Question One by examining policy fragmentation, Research Question Two by exploring stakeholder perceptions and Research Question Three by assessing the broader socio-cultural impacts.

To address these research gaps and this study's Research Questions, the forthcoming methodology chapter will explore the researcher's experience and provide a rationale for how policy contextualisation and thematic analysis will elucidate these outstanding issues and extend the existing research foundations.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to describe the methodological choices used to examine how the JET Programme's policy intentions align with its operational realities and to explore key stakeholder perceptions of JET participants and JTEs. The methodology consists of two principal elements: (1) a policy contextualisation approach that draws on elements of critical discourse analysis and policy frameworks from Hyatt (2013) and Rizvi and Lingard (2010) to situate the JET Programme historically and politically, and (2) thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of qualitative data from two online questionnaires.

This section of the thesis, 3.1, begins with an introduction and restatement of the research questions guiding the study; the remainder of the chapter includes an explanation of the research design and rationale 3.2, whilst Section 3.3 positions the study within the policy contextualisation lens. Section 3.4 details the collection and analysis of the key stakeholder data and the ethical guidelines adhered to. Section 3.5 focuses on my researcher reflexivity and trustworthiness. Section 3.6 examines the limitations of this study, while Section 3.7 concludes the chapter and previews the subsequent Analysis chapter.

Research questions are essential to any research design as they allow the researcher to highlight the problems they wish to address and then focus on how they will resolve those issues. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018) point out that research questions need not be divided between qualitative and quantitative research, as the same issues apply to both. The main goal of research questions, as suggested by Alvesson and Sandberg (2013), is to guide the direction of the study and help raise the problems into testable questions. With that in mind, the research questions, as stated in the introduction, guiding this study are:

- 1. How do the initial policy objectives align with the operational realities and perceived outcomes of the JET Programme?**
- 2. What are the perceptions of key stakeholders, particularly JET participants and JTEs, regarding the effectiveness of the JET Programme in enhancing English education and cultural exchange in Japan?**
- 3. What are the broader cultural, diplomatic, and educational impacts of the JET Programme, and how do they contribute to internationalisation goals in Japan?**

3.2 Research Design and Rationale

An integral element of this study's research design and rationale involves an exploration of my researcher positionality. Contrary to Hesse-Biber's (2009) depiction of a paradigm simply as a theory or hypothesis, a paradigm should be considered a foundational scaffold upon which theories are constructed. A paradigm profoundly impacts one's world perception, informing one's standpoint and moulding the comprehension of interrelations within the research context. Embracing a specific worldview influences personal and professional conduct and significantly shapes the stance adopted in relation to any research topic (Aliyu et al., 2015).

The concept of positionality involves the amalgamation of the researcher's accumulated knowledge, prior experiences, values, and beliefs, which inexorably influence the nature of the

research undertaken and the formulation of research questions. I have used etic and emic perspectives in this research project, which offer complementary approaches to understanding the phenomena under investigation.

The etic perspective (Pike, 1967) applies a realist approach, emphasising an external, objective viewpoint. This allows the researcher to analyse data from an isolated perspective, such as examining official policy documents or survey data, where my role is that of an observer, interpreting patterns and meanings. For example, when analysing documents and literature related to the JET Programme, I aimed to adopt an outsider's stance to understand broader policy intentions and framing.

In contrast, the emic perspective (Harris, 1976) focuses on the subjective experiences and meaning constructed by individuals within their cultural and societal contexts, which aligns more with a relativist approach. This perspective was essential during the analysis of online questionnaires, where I immersed myself in the participants' lived experiences and perspectives. For example, the JTE questionnaire responses enabled me to explore participants' unique experiences and perceptions of the JET Programme from their cultural and professional understanding.

Employing these dual perspectives enabled me to connect the objective analysis of a policy contextualisation approach with the subjective insights obtained from participants' narratives. These complementary perspectives allowed me to navigate the complexities of the JET Programme, examining its structural elements and the lived realities of its key stakeholders.

As noted in the preceding discussion of my dual (etic/emic) perspectives, my ontological beliefs and epistemological stance form the foundations of these methodological choices. Consequently, these assumptions about reality and knowledge shape every aspect of the research process, from initial design to data interpretation. More specifically, my view of the nature of reality (ontology) informs my conception of what counts as valid knowledge (epistemology), guiding the methods employed in this study. It is an inescapable reality that our values and beliefs, alongside epistemological, ontological, and political considerations, interject into our methodological decisions. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018) articulate this interconnectedness succinctly:

Ontological assumptions (assumptions about the nature of reality and the nature of things) give rise to epistemological assumptions (ways of researching and enquiring into the nature of reality and the nature of things); these in turn, give rise to methodological considerations; and these; in turn, give rise to issues of instrumentation and data collection. Indeed, added to ontology and epistemology is axiology (the value and beliefs that we hold) (p.35).

As no single prescribed methodology fully encompasses the complexity of this study, I subscribe to an adaptive and pragmatic approach, drawing on multiple ontological stances. More specifically, I use elements of realism and relativism, applying them selectively to different sections of the research to address the multifaceted nature of the JET Programme.

Similarly, my epistemological stance reflects the duality of my ontological approach, employing a synthesis of etic and emic perspectives to address the multifaceted dimensions of this research. Epistemology, the philosophical study of how knowledge is acquired and understood, is

pertinent to shaping the methods through which this study interacts with objective data and subjective experiences.

Building on the earlier outline of my dual epistemological stance, I applied an etic perspective, aligned with realist ontology, to analyse policy documents and other static texts. As these policy documents articulate explicitly stated goals and strategies, an etic lens, treating these goals as externally verifiable, was well suited for uncovering how the JET Programme's policy aims are framed.

Conversely, I employed an emic perspective aligned with a relativist ontology in examining questionnaire data. Here, the emphasis is on how truth is constructed through individual experiences and context, particularly in the interpretation of qualitative data. This helped me explore how JET Programme participants and JTEs socially construct meaning from their lived experiences.

Rather than attempting to combine and conflate these diametrically opposed ontological positions into a singular framework, I adopt a pragmatic pluralism (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Morgan, 2007), accepting that different aspects of the research require different philosophical underpinnings. Pragmatic pluralism is a valid and increasingly accepted approach in qualitative research, acknowledging the complexities of real-world phenomena. Clark et al. (2015) highlight how pragmatic pluralism enables the application of multiple analytical frameworks to facilitate holistic insights and uncover diverse perspectives that are not possible with a single approach. The emic perspective was critical when engaging with the questionnaire responses from both groups, where the lived experiences and contextual insights were at the forefront. The etic position complemented this by framing the analysis with a structured, policy-focussed lens. This adaptive approach allowed me to holistically explore the JET programme's structural and subjective dimensions, ensuring that the methodology was responsive to the study's varied objectives.

A clear and systematic approach is required to ensure that using different ontological perspectives does not introduce inconsistencies or bias during the research process. For example, I delineated the two phases of the study where each perspective was applied. The realist stance (etic perspective) was strictly adhered to during the literature analysis regarding policy formation, where the objective was to extrapolate the explicit intentions, goals and strategies articulated by the JET Programme policymakers. Conversely, the relativist stance (emic perspective) was employed when analysing questionnaire data, ensuring that the subjective experiences and interpretations of JET participants and JTEs were at the forefront. This approach confirmed that each stance had a defined and exclusive domain within the research process, preventing overlap and potential bias.

To ensure consistency during the analytical process, I used tools that aligned with the respective ontological stances. For example, when analysing qualitative data collected from questionnaires, I used Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis process to identify recurring themes grounded in participants' lived experiences. For the policy text analysis, I employed a critical policy discourse framework (Hyatt, 2013; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010), which aligns with a realist perspective of the texts as carriers of fixed institutional meanings. This consistency of

methodological approaches mitigated the risk of biases stemming from oscillating between perspectives.

3.3 Reflexivity to Mitigate Bias

Throughout the analysis process, I engaged in reflexive practices such as maintaining a log of my research journey to document my decision-making processes and critically evaluate how my positionality might influence the interpretation of data. For instance, when switching from analysing policy formation texts to stakeholder qualitative data, I noted shifts in my analytical lens to ensure that insights from the policy contextualisation would not unduly shape the interpretation of my analysis of participant responses.

Maintaining this reflexive journal proved especially beneficial when identifying moments where my previous experience as a JET participant risked overshadowing the perspectives of questionnaire respondents who reported negative or ambivalent experiences. For example, in one early coding session, I found myself being dismissive of certain responses from JET Programme participants who were overly critical of their time on the JET Programme, particularly in reference to the notion of being a human tape recorder or being underutilised in the workplace. Reviewing my log numerous times, I realised my dismissive tendency originated from my own positive experience on the JET Programme and strong working relationships that I had built with JTEs. As a result, I revisited and recoded these critical comments under a new theme related to underutilisation and gave them equal weight in my analysis. This conscious act of re-checking the data allowed me to bracket my personal biases and more thoroughly honour the range of stakeholder voices. Overall, the reflexive journal served as a constant checkpoint, ensuring my dual perspective as a former insider and outside researcher remained balanced, ultimately enhancing my thematic analysis's credibility and depth.

Justification for Dual Ontological Stance

Employing a purely realist stance, which assumes the existence of a singular objective truth, would have been insufficient for capturing the multi-layered, subjective perceptions of JET participants and JTEs in this study. Their wide array of interpretations of the JET Programme's impact and meaning are contextually formulated, reflecting diverse personal, cultural and professional backgrounds. A realist perspective would risk oversimplifying these rich, nuanced perspectives into a singular, reductive narrative. It was, therefore, useful to examine complex data of this type through a relativist lens to honour each respondent's experiences.

A purely relativist stance would weaken the policy contextualisation, which is intended to convey fixed institutional meaning and objectives. While the meaning of policies may differ among JET Programme participants and JTEs, the policy's original intent represents a foundational element of the programme's design that cannot be entirely dismissed as subjective. It is comprised of data through which specific threads of intention run in parallel, and successive policy authors appear to have gone to great lengths in order to sustain policy trends and terminology.

3.4 Comprehensive Overview of Research Methodology

This chapter comprehensively outlines the research methodology employed in this study, addressing the complexity and multifaceted dimensions of the JET Programme. The methodology

outlined combines diverse analytical approaches to systematically investigate the programme's policy's trajectory, implementation, and stakeholder perceptions. The key factors of this methodological framework are reviewed below:

3.4.1 Tracing the JET Programme's Policy Evolution

Rizvi and Lingard (2010, p.59) state that 'Trajectory studies deal with policy across the stages of the policy cycle, which is pertinent for capturing the JET Programme's multifaceted layers. The initiative originated in the mid-1980s as a political gesture to appease trade tensions between Japan and the USA (McConnell, 2000). Gradually, it expanded to include broader objectives of promoting internationalisation at the grassroots level, improving English language proficiency, and cultivating cultural diplomacy. My policy contextualisation approach draws on that notion of a shifting trajectory. It identifies three broad phases: 1 – the JET Programme's genesis, 2 – the initial policy implementation process, and 3 – subsequent reforms or modernisation. As detailed in the following Analysis chapter, these phases underscore the interplay of educational aims, diplomatic imperatives, and local government pressures that continue to shape the JET Programme today.

3.4.2 Challenges of Contextualisation

The scarcity of interviews with founding policymakers made drawing on partial elite studies (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010) more challenging. McConnell's (2000) book remains a seminal resource as it includes extensive discussions with officials from the JET Programme's three sponsoring government offices over a thirteen-year period. McConnell admitted in a private email correspondence with me how fortunate he was to achieve the level of access that he did due to the Fulbright office and a university sponsor at the time who was well connected (McConnell, personal communication, 27 February, 2024). For me, direct access to official documentation was hindered by:

1. Language constraints: Much early documentation is in Japanese, and the prevalence of 'wasei-eigo', or Japanese-made English terms, in JET Programme documentation further exacerbates the risk of mistranslation and misinterpretation, as indicated by Loveday (1996).
2. Fragmented archives: Historical policy statements are either unpublished, dispersed across several agencies, or lost.
3. Limited ministry transparency: My attempts to interview or request documents from MEXT, MIC, MOFA and CLAIR were largely unfruitful, resulting in minimal clarifications via email. As stated in a private correspondence with CLAIR on behalf of the three government offices, 'Unfortunately, because of the nature of our organisation, it is imperative that our responses are well vetted before release' (CLAIR, personal communication 21 August, 2022).

Despite these challenges, a contextual review of available documents, historical accounts, and academic analyses was sufficient to reveal key junctures in the policy formation of the JET Programme. In the subsequent Analysis chapter, I highlight how conflicting ministry agendas shaped the JET Programme's initial aims, what policy amendments followed critiques of the programme's effectiveness, and how the rhetoric of grassroots internationalisation persists despite varying local realities.

In summation, this study presents a focussed and methodologically robust policy contextualisation of the JET Programme, examining its official statements, historical development,

and ongoing evolution. By incorporating aspects of text, elite, implementation, and trajectory analysis, and by examining how policy language, political negotiations and operational adjustments intersect, this contextualisation situates the JET Programme's policy intentions within its evolving socio-political and educational frameworks. This sets the foundations for the thematic analysis of questionnaire data, where stakeholder perceptions and experiences illuminate how these top-down policy objectives are understood, enacted, or contested in practice.

3.4.3 Stakeholder Data: Collection/Generation and Analysis

Data collection included policy-related texts, questionnaires for JET Programme participants and JTEs, and communication with the principal administration office responsible for running the JET Programme, CLAIR. This triangulated approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the JET Programme's policy intentions, implementation, and perceived impact.

The use of questionnaires enabled the efficient gathering of data from JET Programme participants and JTEs across a broad geographic and demographic range, which would have been difficult to achieve through interviews alone. Questionnaires are particularly effective for studies aiming to capture patterns of perception across large, diverse groups (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009). My data collection occurred against the backdrop of COVID-19 restrictions, which were markedly stringent and enduring in Japan. This resulted in inter-prefectural travel being heavily limited, and face-to-face interviews being impractical. While online video interviews were beginning to gain traction, they were not widely adopted or consistently accessible across all participant groups. These practical constraints further supported online questionnaires as the most viable method for reaching a large, dispersed respondent base. Limitations such as reduced response depth and potential data misinterpretation were mitigated through careful question design and triangulation with policy texts.

3.4.4 Data Collection and Generation

The following procedure is how I administered and constructed my questionnaires to JET Programme participants and JTEs:

1. After making the JET participant questionnaire, I searched through my personal contacts. Having been a JET ALT for four years, I already had approximately 30 contacts I knew had been on the JET Programme. I also asked for my questionnaire to be forwarded to other JET Programme participants that I may not know.
2. As there are numerous JET alumni groups on various social media platforms, my next step was to post the questionnaire there with details of my research. Again, I asked that people forward it to others they knew who were possibly not on social media.
3. I have only a few personal contacts for contacting JTEs, so I sent my questionnaire to them and asked them to forward it to their contacts. Unlike the JET Programme alumni groups, there are no such corresponding groups for Japanese English teachers. As a result, I could not replicate my previous step of sending it to multiple groups on various social media platforms.

In retrospect, these recruitment steps involved purposive and snowball sampling aspects. Purposive sampling involves consciously targeting individuals who are knowledgeable about the research topic (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018; Teddlie & Yu, 2007). By relying on my personal contacts from my four years on the JET Programme, I purposefully reached out to ex-JET Programme

participants and JTEs who I expected to have direct, relevant insights. Simultaneously, snowball sampling (Marcus et al., 2017; Noy, 2008) was evident when I asked these initial contacts to forward the questionnaire to other JET Programme alumni and JTEs beyond my immediate network. This chain-referral process provided a far more extensive reach. Consequently, this combined sampling approach gave this research a more diverse yet contextually relevant pool of respondents.

Tables 1 and 2 summarise the most relevant demographic characteristics of the study's participants, comprising former JET Programme participants and JTEs. Data are presented on age range, nationality, years of programme or teaching experience, and, for JTEs, the number of JET participants they had worked with. This provides context for interpreting the subsequent thematic analysis results.

Table 1: Demographic Information of JET Programme Respondents
JET Programme Participants (n = 267)

Category	Group	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Age Range	22–29 years	122	46%
	30–39 years	86	32%
	40–49 years	40	15%
	50+ years	13	5%
	Prefer not to say	5	2%
Nationality	USA	134	50%
	Canada	36	14%
	UK	36	14%
	Australia/New Zealand	35	13%
	Other (e.g., Ireland, Singapore, Philippines)	25	9%
Years on JET Programme	1 year	41	16%
	2 years	67	26%
	3 years	72	27%
Introduced 2007	4 years	22	8%
	5 years	55	21%
Due to COVID-19	5+ years	5	2%
	Prefer not to say	4	1%

Note. Totals may not add precisely to 100% due to rounding.

Table 2: Demographic Information of JTE Respondents
Japanese Teachers of English (JTEs) (n = 30)

Category	Group	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Age Range	22–29 years	3	10%
	30–39 years	8	27%
	40–49 years	10	33%
	50+ years	8	27%
	Prefer not to say	1	3%
Years of Teaching Experience	1–5 years	7	23%
	6–10 years	7	23%
	11–20 years	9	30%
	21–30 years	3	10%
	30+ years	4	13%
Number of JET Participants Worked With	1–5 JETs	8	27%
	6–10 JETs	10	33%
	11–15 JETs	10	33%
	Unknown (No idea)	2	7%
Total number of JETs worked with		Approximately 224	

Note. Totals may not add precisely to 100% due to rounding.

3.4.5 Rationale for the Questionnaire Design and Likert Scale

Two questionnaires were administered online: former JET participants who had completed at least one year on the JET Programme as an ALT, CIR, or SEA answered one questionnaire, and JTEs who had worked with any JET Programme participants, ALTs, CIRs, or SEAs, answered the second. Given the dominant number of ALTs on the JET Programme and the scarcity of SEAs, no respondents had worked as an SEA, and no JTEs had worked with an SEA.

In both sets of questionnaires, I consistently used a 1 – 10 Likert scale to capture more detailed perceptions and attitudes from respondents. This is particularly advantageous when assessing subjective opinions, as is the case when assessing the value of the JET Programme. The rationale for using a 1 – 10 scale Likert response was to provide ordinal data that enabled the user to quantify subjective constructs like attitudes and beliefs. This approach allows researchers to identify valuable insights into variations in respondents' opinions (Likert, 1932; Clason & Dormody, 1994). The range of 1 to 10 allows for granular responses, which can capture subtle shifts in opinions that might not be discernible with a more restrictive scale (Finstad, 2010).

Of course, this level of granularity does not entirely eliminate subjectivity. Adding more scale options can lead to a false impression of higher precision if participants struggle to differentiate between (7) moderately positive and (8) very positive, for example. Dawes (2008) warns that while a 10-point scale can reduce floor or ceiling impacts, it may also introduce uncertainty if respondents are unsure how to calibrate minute distinctions in attitude. To address this concern, I labelled descriptive anchors to each point (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018) on the scale detailed below to give participants more precise guidance about each numeric choice. I remained aware that self-reported Likert data inherently reflects subjective judgments, so I interpreted it cautiously and cross-referenced other data sources wherever possible.

The 1 to 10 Likert scale offers a graduated approach that allows the researcher to discern more subtle variations in opinion. The suggested scale was given on both sets of questionnaires.

- 1 = Extremely negative
- 2 = Very negative
- 3 = Moderately negative
- 4 = Slightly negative
- 5 = Neutral
- 6 = Slightly positive
- 7 = Moderately positive
- 8 = Very positive
- 9 = Nearly extremely positive
- 10 = Extremely positive

A full spectrum from extremely negative to extremely positive allows the questionnaire respondents to fully articulate and express their various degrees of positive or negative impressions. This, in turn, allowed me to build a more complete picture of respondents' experiences. A descriptive Likert scale, such as the one used here, reduces ambiguity and ensures a more refined and accurate self-assessment (Dawes, 2008; Finstad, 2010). The importance of adding descriptors for each scale point enhanced clarity, minimised misinterpretation, and helped to circumvent ambiguity and unreliability (Champagne, 2014).

Intermediary labels, such as slightly negative or moderately positive, allowed respondents to express a more subtle opinion without forcing them to choose an extreme or neutral descriptor (Menold & Bognar, 2016). A Likert scale with a greater selection, such as these ten descriptors, can also help avoid central tendency bias, as respondents are not limited to a basic positive, neutral or negative choice (Friedman & Amoo, 1999). Providing a predetermined, distinct interpretation of each descriptor facilitated a more precise analysis of perceptions and enhanced the interpretability of the data (Allen & Seaman, 2007) emerging from this study.

However, as with any extended Likert scale, a possible limitation is that respondents may still interpret categories differently. What one person views as slightly positive, another may view as moderately positive (Menold & Bognar, 2016; Nemoto & Beglar, 2014). This subjectivity is inherent in self-reporting measures and reflects the interpretive nature of Likert-style data. Nonetheless, labelling and careful scale construction aimed to mitigate this effect as much as possible.

Both questionnaires were created using Google documents to ensure security. In addition, all questions were marked as non-compulsory, which was clearly stated in the instructions. This ensured that all respondents did not feel pressured to answer questions they felt uncomfortable with or unnecessary for whatever reason. There were also no questions which could personally identify the participant. Furthermore, my University of Sheffield email address was included on the Google form. This was in line with the University of Sheffield ethics application approved on 25/03/2022 (Appendix 3) and is explained in greater detail in the Ethics section of this chapter.

Finally, Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018) state that ensuring the comprehensiveness of the data collected to address the research topics and questions is crucial, necessitating that the

information solicited is pertinent, encompassing facts, opinions, behaviours, events, and attitudes. Additionally, Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018) advocate for the benefits of self-administered questionnaires, citing enhanced response rates and the researcher's ability to address uncertainties or issues that may emerge from the questionnaire. However, given the geographical diversity of respondents, encompassing 16 different nationalities across various countries and regions within Japan, it was not feasible to administer the questionnaires in person.

3.4.6 Attempted Interviews with JET Programme Officials

Efforts were made to establish contact with the three government ministries associated with the JET Programme – MEXT, MOFA, and MIC – via the contact details provided on their official websites, which included an array of telephone numbers and email addresses. To mitigate any potential language barriers, correspondence was initiated in both Japanese and English. Regrettably, these attempts elicited no responses, and the provided telephone numbers yielded no fruitful communication.

McConnell (2000) also reflects on his initial frustrations when researching the JET Programme. However, he benefited from unique access facilitated by his mentor's connection to a key official, allowing him to conduct extensive interviews with CLAIR staff over 13 years. Initially facing difficulties similar to mine in accessing information, McConnell (2000) overcame these challenges by building relationships through social events, eventually gaining deeper insights into the programme that were inaccessible to the public. Despite early obstacles and restricted access, his perseverance led to a comprehensive understanding of the JET Programme's development and implementation during his 13 years of research.

Parallel attempts to engage with CLAIR were initially met with similar silence, with no responses to emails. A breakthrough was achieved when a response was received from one of the telephone contacts. Having previously participated in the annual JET induction at the Keio Plaza Hotel as a new JET participant and as a presenter three years later, I was well-acquainted with the event's structure and proceedings. However, during an initial dialogue with a representative from CLAIR, it was unequivocally stated that attendance at the induction, in any capacity, would not be feasible. This, in effect, ended my attempts to conduct face-to-face interactions with anyone from CLAIR or someone from any of the other government offices involved with running the JET Programme.

While this lack of direct access limited opportunities to incorporate institutional perspectives, it reinforced the value of alternative data sources. Official policy texts, along with questionnaire responses from JET Programme participants and JTEs, provided a means of analysing the JET Programme's policy intentions and implementation. This experience also made me aware of external researchers' challenges when attempting to engage with centralised government institutions.

After these initial setbacks, an alternative strategy involved a proposed visit to the CLAIR headquarters in Tokyo, the address for which was available on their official website. However, this approach was also deemed unfeasible, as I was informed that CLAIR seldom engages in interviews.

CLAIR similarly dismissed the prospect of conducting an interview through video conferencing or, if necessary, a traditional phone call.

After considerable negotiation, it was suggested that I submit any inquiries via email, which CLAIR would then direct to the appropriate individual, whether within their own organisation or among the three affiliated ministries. While not ideal, this method emerged as the sole feasible channel for obtaining direct insights from CLAIR or the other relevant ministries. I was advised to formulate my questions bilingually, in both Japanese and English, and to manage my expectations regarding receiving a response. However, CLAIR committed to trying to reply within one to two months.

I hoped that my initial set of inquiries would yield informative responses and pave the way for subsequent questions. Given the uncertainty of this outcome, I opted not to dispatch all my questions in the initial email. Indeed, the responses I received prompted additional questions, allowing me to incorporate both some of my original queries and incorporate new ones that arose from respondents' feedback. This iterative approach aligns with the strategy recommended by Bampton and Cowton (2002), who advocate for a measured distribution of questions across multiple emails. They caution against the overload of a single email with numerous questions, suggesting that a staggered approach fosters a more engaging interaction and garners more substantive responses.

3.5 Documents Selected for Analysis

For the documents selected for this study, I used a multifaceted approach. I wanted to analyse as much literature as possible regarding the JET Programme and its history. However, most research publications regarding the JET Programme focus on team-teaching and ALT working conditions. This is understandable as 92% of JET positions are currently ALTs (JET Programme, 2024), and most of the workload is team teaching. As I was more interested in the mechanics and dynamics of the workings of the JET Programme, I had to be more selective in which literature was more relevant to my study. Throughout my literature review and during my initial inquiries, which were driven by personal and professional curiosity, I found no other study attempting to address this issue. This enabled me to persist in the research, confident that I would be making a meaningful contribution to the field of education.

Accessing official documents pertaining to the JET Programme proved challenging, with the majority being in Japanese and only more contemporary documents readily available. Historical documents remained elusive, with their existence primarily implied from secondary sources. Despite this, various publications on the JET Programme, ranging in academic rigour, offered valuable insights. Media coverage over the years has also contributed to the discourse, with numerous articles published in English by Japanese newspapers. These articles often gravitated towards more sensationalist and critical narratives of the JET Programme, yet they provided alternative perspectives on certain facets of the initiative.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

This study fully adhered to the University of Sheffield's ethical guidance, aligning with the principles outlined by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018) and the University

of Sheffield's ethical guidelines. Prior to data collection, ethical approval for this study was obtained from the University of Sheffield's Ethics Committee on 25 March 2022 (Appendix 3).

Having received ethical approval, I endeavoured to ensure that this research study adheres to the principles of informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, and transparency. This multidimensional methodology reflects the complex intricacies of the JET Programme, which operates at the crossroads of educational, cultural, and diplomatic domains. A singular methodological approach would not be adequate to address the programme's diverse parameters, from its policy intentions and operational difficulties to its impact on individuals. By integrating complementary methods, this study aims to capture the macro-level policy context and the micro-level lived experiences of its stakeholders.

3.6.1 Informed Consent

Regarding online questionnaires, BERA's (2018) ethical guidelines stipulate that written consent from each participant is not needed when conducting an anonymous online questionnaire where no personal details are required: 'It is accepted that, sometimes, gaining consent from all concerned in public spaces (face-to-face or virtual, past or present) will not be feasible' (p.12). However, there are still key points to adhere to, which are detailed below.

Participants were provided with the full details of this research, including the study's purpose, the methods of data collection, and how the data would be stored and used. Participants were informed that their involvement was entirely voluntary, and in order to proceed with the questionnaires, participants had to read the following statement: 'By proceeding to complete this questionnaire, you are signifying that you have read the above information and you are giving your consent to participate in this study'. Participants could not proceed with the questionnaire until they selected 'next'. It was also clearly stated that if a participant wanted an information sheet or to give written consent, they could email me, and I would send the necessary documents via email.

The information section clearly detailed my full contact details, as well as those of my supervisor at the time and the University of Sheffield's Registrar and Secretary, Dr Philip Harvey. These measures ensured that consent was informed, a cornerstone of ethical research (BERA, 2018).

3.6.2 Anonymity and confidentiality

The online questionnaires were collected without any identifiers, ensuring participants' anonymity. A numbering system was applied to quotes from the questionnaires. All data were securely stored on password-protected devices, accessible only to the researcher.

Right to Withdraw

All participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any repercussions. Instructions for withdrawal, including all relevant contact details, were included in the information section of the online questionnaires. Participants could withdraw their data at any given point.

3.7 Transparency in Data Collection and Reporting

This study emphasised transparency by providing participants with clear instructions and contact information for completing the questionnaire. Participants were informed about how their data would be analysed and how the findings would be used and disseminated. All efforts were made to ensure accurate and unbiased data reporting.

Several measures were undertaken to safeguard data accuracy and objectivity. First, the questions in the questionnaires were designed to be clear and non-leading to mitigate any unintentional steering of participant responses (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). Second, to guard against data-entry errors, I exported questionnaire responses directly into Excel and Word, avoiding manual transcription whenever possible. Third, I engaged in iterative coding and multiple cross-checking of themes during data analysis. Any discrepancies were revisited to uphold consistency and reliability (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Finally, I triangulated key findings with existing literature and official data from CLAIR to confirm the participants' accounts and the credibility of results. By using these combined strategies, I endeavoured to uphold the transparency and rigour of the reporting process.

Trustworthiness

This research incorporated Lincoln and Guba's (1985) guidelines for trustworthiness:

Credibility: Through the triangulation of data using participant questionnaire responses, policy documentation, and email exchanges with CLAIR, I approached the design of my questions with respect to respondents' autonomy and perspectives. Rather than simply extracting information, I was driven by authentic curiosity about the range of experiences within the JET Programme. I avoided leading or overly restrictive prompts, opting for open-ended questions and Likert scale responses from 1-10. The open-ended questions allowed respondents to convey their views in their own words (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). The 1-10 Likert scale enabled the researcher to capture subtle shifts in opinions that might not be discernible with a more restrictive scale (Finstad, 2010). By re-examining my coding and emergent themes, I enhanced the likelihood of capturing the diverse realities of JET Programme stakeholders.

Transferability: Detailed contextual information such as participants' background, demographics, roles on the JET Programme and questionnaire procedures allows others to assess the applicability of findings to similar educational or policy contexts.

Dependability: My reflexive journal and audit trail throughout the design and data-analysis phases allowed for a degree of transparency. This documentation includes notes on questionnaire development, rationale for revisions and coding decisions, and a demonstration of how the study evolved. These procedural records help illustrate consistency over the course of this project.

Confirmability: To help mitigate bias and ensure conclusions derived naturally from the data, I preserved my original coding frameworks and excerpts from questionnaire responses with my analytical memos. Presenting participant comments verbatim in the analysis ensured the respondents' voices were at the forefront, allowing the study's interpretations to remain closely tied to the raw data rather than my own preconceived notions.

3.8 Thematic Analysis

Thematic Analysis of Stakeholder Perceptions

Adopting Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis (TA) framework, this study collected and analysed qualitative data from two online questionnaires. This approach identified recurring themes and patterns in participants' perceptions, linking them to the study's overarching research questions.

In order to accurately represent stakeholder perceptions, a TA approach was adopted to scrutinise the collected data; this qualitative research technique facilitates identifying salient themes through the systematic coding and organisation of extensive datasets (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013). Typically, qualitative research eschews rigid, analytical methodologies in favour of more fluid interpretative approaches (Tuckett, 2005). Despite its widespread application across various disciplines, TA has historically been critiqued for its vague methodological delineation and the opaqueness of its analytical processes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Nonetheless, recent scholarly contributions have clarified its methodological soundness and potential pitfalls, providing a phased approach to enhance its analytical rigour and thereby solidifying its conceptual foundation and credibility (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Nowell et al., 2017). It is this, enhanced, phased approach that I have used in this study.

Applicable to both inductive and deductive research paradigms (Javadi & Zarea, 2016), TA seemed most suitable for this section of my research. The initial phases of the experience, encompassing data analysis and coding, employed a deductive strategy to distil themes from participant responses. Following the structured approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2014), this reflective TA commenced with the reading and analysis of respondents' answers, subsequent to which codes were assigned to individual statements. The iterative process of conceptualisation yielded preliminary themes, against which subsequent analysis was benchmarked.

Thematic Analysis of the Questionnaires

The application of TA, as illustrated by Braun and Clarke (2006), is particularly useful in exploring topics that have not been extensively examined. This methodological approach is instrumental in discerning prevalent themes within a dataset, thereby facilitating the interpretation of meaningful patterns. Despite the JET Programme being the subject of scholarly inquiry for a period exceeding three and a half decades, there remains a paucity of literature that specifically addresses the perceptions held by the main stakeholders of the programme, namely the JET Programme participants and the JTEs, regarding the programme's core objectives and operational dynamics.

3.9 The Integral Role of Reflexivity in this Study

In light of the complexities and methodological intricacies associated with TA, Trainor and Bundon (2021) underscore the indispensable role of reflexivity throughout all stages of the research process. Reflexivity transcends mere acknowledgement of the researcher's positionality; it necessitates a conscientious engagement with the researcher's active role in the co-construction of knowledge. This process demands a rigorous interrogation and negotiation of the researcher's multifaceted positionality, a perspective echoed by Hill and Dao (2020), who advocate for a nuanced understanding of the researcher's situatedness within the research environment.

Braun and Clarke (2013) further elaborate on the inherently subjective nature of qualitative research, suggesting that researchers infuse the research process with their personal histories, values, assumptions, perspectives, political orientations, and idiosyncrasies. This subjectivity is not limited to the initial choice of research topic or the selection of a participant group; rather, it permeates the interpretative acts that form the core of the analytical process. Researchers' understandings and interpretations of empirical phenomena are invariably shaped by their underlying assumptions, values, and commitments, influencing the analytical lens through which data is examined and understood.

The acknowledgement of this subjective interplay underscores the importance of reflexivity in qualitative research, particularly within TA. Reflexivity enables researchers to critically engage with their influence on the research process, from formulating research questions to interpreting data. By actively reflecting on and negotiating their positionality, researchers can enhance their work's transparency, rigour, and ethical integrity, thereby contributing to the credibility and depth of the knowledge produced.

The imperative of reflexivity was integral to the conceptualisation and execution of TA within the context of this research, particularly in the analysis of questionnaire responses. This reflexive stance was not merely a methodological consideration but a pivotal aspect of the research ethos, guiding the analytical journey from inception to conclusion. By foregrounding reflexivity in the analytical process, the research aimed to transcend the potential critique of adopting an overly simplistic or 'happy-go-lucky' approach to TA, as cautioned against by Trainor and Bundon (2021).

The engagement with reflexivity entailed a thorough and ongoing introspection concerning my role in the interpretative process, acknowledging the influence of personal biases, theoretical predispositions, and contextual factors on the analytical outcomes. This approach was geared towards fostering a more refined, critical, and ethically aware application of TA, one that is attuned to the complexities of the data and the socio-cultural dynamics underpinning the research phenomena.

By embedding reflexivity at the heart of the research methodology, the aim was to cultivate a more focused and methodologically rigorous version of TA that adhered to the highest standards of qualitative research and contributed to a more sophisticated understanding of the research topic. This commitment to reflexivity and methodological rigour is anticipated to enhance the validity and reliability of the research findings, thereby advancing the scholarly discourse on the subject matter at hand.

The data analysis process within this study commenced with the meticulous downloading and collating of survey responses into Microsoft Excel. Subsequently, the consolidated data was transitioned into a Microsoft Word document to facilitate a streamlined coding process. This preparatory phase was instrumental in setting the foundation for an in-depth engagement with the dataset, allowing for a seamless transition to subsequent stages of analysis.

Central to the analytical process was the principle of data immersion, whereby I engaged in an iterative process of reading and re-reading the responses to achieve a greater level of familiarity

with the content. This immersive engagement was pivotal in identifying preliminary points of interest that would later inform the coding framework. Adhering to an inductive, or bottom-up, analytical approach, the study prioritised the emergence of codes directly from the data itself, ensuring that the coding process was responsive to the data's inherent subtleties and complexities rather than being constrained by preconceived categories or concepts.

Acknowledging my influence on the coding process was paramount, with the understanding that pre-existing knowledge and theoretical orientations inevitably shape the interpretative lens through which data is analysed. This reflexivity was integral to the analytical rigour of the study, ensuring a balanced interplay between the data's intrinsic meanings and my interpretive contributions.

The coding process distinguished between semantic codes, which were closely aligned with the participants' explicit language, and latent codes, which sought to unearth the underlying meanings and implications embedded within the responses. This dual coding strategy facilitated a comprehensive analysis that spanned both the manifest content of the data and the more subtle, inferential elements.

The emergent codes served as the building blocks for the initial formulation of candidate themes, with thematic maps employed as a visual and conceptual tool to aid in the organisation and refinement of these themes. This stage involved an iterative theme development process, where preliminary themes were scrutinised for coherence, distinctiveness, and fidelity to the original data. The utilisation of participant quotations played a crucial role in testing the robustness of these themes, ensuring that they encapsulated coherent patterns of meaning and were representative of the dataset.

A rigorous review of the candidate themes ensued, aimed at verifying the uniqueness of each theme and ensuring the absence of overlap, thereby preserving the thematic structure's clarity and integrity. This critical evaluation led to adjustments in the themes' content and structure, culminating in finalising themes that encapsulated the central organising concepts. This meticulous thematic development and refinement process underscored the study's commitment to analytical depth, precision, and reliability of the participants' experiences and perspectives.

3.10 Positionality

A brief account of my biographical and professional trajectory is provided in Chapter 1, Positionality. In this chapter, I focus on the methodological implications of that stance, namely, how my insider/outsider position informed design choices, analytical decisions, and reflexive practice. Given that my personal history and prior involvement with the JET Programme shaped my research approach, it is important to state my position in regards to my suitability to conduct this study. When proposing and conducting this research project, my values and beliefs needed to be considered and evaluated. The JET Programme was one of my primary reasons for moving to Japan. Before participating in the programme, I enjoyed a month-long holiday visiting a friend on the JET Programme in 1999. After becoming enamoured with the country during my trip, I decided to study language teaching at university undergraduate level with the aim of joining the JET Programme, which I successfully did upon my graduation in 2008. After four years as a JET ALT, I decided to

return to the UK for a year to further my studies by completing a master's in teaching English and obtaining a CELTA teaching certificate. After completing both in late 2013, I moved back to central Japan.

Upon moving back to Japan, I started working for the British Council. I began working as a teacher of English in Japanese universities in April 2014. Although I have not been directly engaged with the JET Programme since 2012, my four years as an ALT left a lasting impression. During those years, I made many new friends and connections, not just with other JETs but also with people in my local community, including Japanese teachers and the students I taught, many of whom I am still in contact with today. In addition, I learned a considerable amount about what it means to teach English in a foreign language classroom setting. Being fully immersed in the JET Programme lifestyle, I gave presentations at national events and helped develop and run training sessions for ALTs in my region. All these experiences combined to feed into my desire to research the JET Programme and to contribute to the wider scholarly corpus. Thus, while Chapter 1 situates who I am in relation to the JET Programme, this chapter clarifies how that stance shaped what I did and how I interpreted the data.

3.11 Limitations of the Study

One limitation of my multifaceted approach was the tendency to become intrigued by broader aspects of the JET Programme and issues related to English language education in Japan and the historical, political, and societal ramifications of language education. These broader considerations occasionally diverted my focus from addressing the specific research questions, necessitating constant reference to these questions during the analysis and discussion chapters to avoid such digressions. A second related limitation was that my approach often generated more questions about English language education, the JET Programme and its implementation in Japan than it answered. This complexity, coupled with the numerous tangents and varied interpretations of certain texts and respondents' questionnaire answers, made it challenging to maintain the investigation within the defined scope of the study. These limitations are explored in more detail in the Discussion chapter of this thesis.

3.12 Conclusion to the Chapter

Hyatt's (2013) model proved beneficial for this research study in that it allowed me the flexibility and grounding to use a contextual approach based on Rizvi and Lingard's (2010) frameworks. Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis allowed me to build a research paradigm that gave me a solid research-led foundation and the flexibility to adapt my methodological approach when one paradigm alone was insufficient.

Despite the scarcity of primary official documents from the various government ministries involved in the JET Programme, an amalgamation of pertinent literature, direct communications with the central CLAIR office, contributions from JET participants, JTEs, and a select number of local BoE officials facilitated the construction of a comprehensive overview of the Programme's objectives and ambitions. This foundation was further enriched by my personal experiences and reflections from my tenure within the JET Programme, encompassing epistemological and ontological insights. Consequently, this confluence of sources and personal engagement with the JET experience underpins my confidence in delineating the aims of the JET Programme and its current limitations.

The following Analysis chapter applies the methodology outlined here to the documents selected. It is within the Analysis chapter that the core examination of these documents takes place. The Analysis chapter also serves to facilitate detailed exploration of the questionnaire results. Using the methodology described in this chapter, data emerging from these analyses are detailed and examined.

Chapter 4: Analysis

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is divided into two main sections. The first half contextualises the JET Programme's policy intentions, while the latter half is the primary analysis section, which focuses on the thematic analysis of the data from the two questionnaires. The policy contextualisation provides an overview of the JET Programme's policy origins, its guiding objectives, and how the three government offices have shaped its implementation over the past three decades. Instead of conducting a thorough critical policy analysis, I aim to contextualise the JET Programme within its continually evolving educational and bureaucratic frameworks. To achieve this, I draw selectively on key elements of policy analysis approaches, including text, elite, implementation, and trajectory analyses, which will be outlined briefly in the following section. It outlines the JET Programme's inception, its gradual, continuous expansion, and important modifications in response to social and political pressures. The following section provides the necessary background for understanding the subsequent thematic analysis of stakeholder experiences. As previously noted, I acknowledge the contested nature of the term stakeholder (Plys et al., 2025; Reed et al., 2024) and use it here solely to refer to former JET Programme participants and JTEs.

4.2 Policy Contextualisation

Hyatt (2013, p.42) posits that an essential preliminary step in policy analysis is scrutinising and acknowledging the motivations underpinning the creation of policies. This is related to the expression of the anticipated aims or objectives that a policy seeks to achieve. These expressions can be conveyed through a variety of mediums, such as announcements from government officials, formal policy documents (notably, in the context of the UK, this might include documents such as green and white papers), statements issued via press releases and online channels or formally codified in legislative texts. This presents a challenge in the context of the JET Programme, as there has been an absence of readily accessible official documents for analysis. However, a concise declaration on the JET Programme's website outlines its objectives and goals. Through direct communication with CLAIR in 2023, I have verified that these stated intentions align with the programme's primary objectives and goals.

One of the complexities inherent in analysing the JET Programme arises from its multifaceted organisational and administrative structure. This complexity often results in a shift of focus to peripheral elements, thereby impacting the central policy narrative. Metzgar (2017, p.67) succinctly captures this notion, stating that 'the JET Program is a complicated bureaucratic animal'. The programme's evolution over its 38-year tenure has been marked by various reactive changes, rendering a detailed dissection of its complex policy shifts challenging within the scope of this study. Consequently, utilising a trajectory analysis approach (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010), we can distinguish three distinct yet interrelated phases:

1. The Genesis of Policy—This section will investigate the foundational objectives and conceptual underpinnings of the JET Programme at its inception. It is difficult to pinpoint a specific date for this stage as there were previous iterations of programmes aiming to transform Japan's English education and bring ALTs to Japan, such as the Fulbright Programme in the late 1960s, Monbusho English Fellows Programme in 1977, and the British Council's British English Teaching

Programme in 1978 (Hiratsuka, 2022). However, the first rejected proposal of the JET Programme was in 1985 (McConnell, 2000).

2. Policy Implementation—The focus is on the strategies and methodologies employed in the programme's initial rollout and subsequent operationalisation. McConnell (2000) states there were initial difficulties in getting the three government offices to agree on the JET Programme proposal, as it had to be worded in such a manner to appease all three offices. However, an official press statement was scheduled for the 8th of October 1986, forcing the government offices into an agreement³. This date is regarded as the official start date of the JET Programme, with the first participants arriving in August 1987.

3. Evolution and Modernisation—This section will explore the dynamic adaptations and reforms undertaken to align the JET Programme with contemporary educational and socio-political landscapes. Numerous amendments to the JET Programme have aided its development since 1987; some of the more important changes will be detailed below.

4.2.1 Policy Inception

The inception of the JET Programme was marked by inherently divergent expectations, a factor that complicated its early years and continues to influence policy-related challenges. McConnell (2000) emphasises that from its very beginnings, the programme was entangled in conflicting ministerial goals, which were inextricably woven into its framework. Hiratsuka (2022) also comments more recently on the inherent difficulties during the inception of the JET Programme.

McConnell (2000), understandably keeping the anonymity of his sources, only states that the information came from officials from respective government offices. However, he does state that ‘the process of policy formation and the conflicting ministerial goals became enmeshed in the JET Program. At the national level, political manoeuvring dominates: from the very moment the idea for the JET Program was conceived, its administrative structure and implementation were affected by competing goals’ (McConnell, 2000, p.30). A key admission from a MIC official underscores this dichotomy:

Frankly speaking, the purpose of the JET Program was never focused on the revolution of English education. The main goal was to get local governments to open up their gates to foreigners. It’s basically a grassroots regional development program.

(McConnell, 2000, p.30)

By analysing the three core goals of each government ministry, we can see how the language used elides the agent. The three separate goals and associated government branches are:

MIC: Grassroots regional development

MOFA: Fostering international comprehension of Japanese society

MEXT: Improving English language communicative competence in Japanese teachers and students

³ After much deliberation, an exceedingly broad statement designed to satisfy each of the above constituencies was released: The Japan Exchange and Teaching Program seeks to promote mutual understanding between Japan and other countries including the U.S., the U.K., Australia, and N.Z. and foster international perspectives in Japan by promoting international exchange at local levels as well as intensifying foreign language education in Japan. (McConnell, 2000, p.47)

For example, a MIC official is quoted as saying, 'The main goal was to get local governments to open up their gates to foreigners' (McConnell, 2000, p.30). There is no direct reference to who will oversee or enact this shift, leaving the responsible party unnamed. Likewise, a MOFA official states, 'Our main hope for the JET Program is to increase understanding of Japanese society' (McConnell, 2000, p.30), without explicitly naming who or how the increase in understanding will be achieved. Finally, a MEXT official stated their aims as, 'If Japanese students and teachers improve their communicative competence in English, then they have become more internationalized' (McConnell, 2000, p.30), effectively foregrounding the outcome while masking the mechanism or agent facilitating the improvement. These examples demonstrate Hyatt's (2013) model of lexico-grammatical construction and how policy language can strategically remove explicit reference to who has ultimate responsibility for implementing the policy goals. However, Metzgar (2017) explains that the JET Programme, envisaged as a conduit for realising the separate ambitions of multiple ministries, frequently struggled to fulfil any of their respective objectives satisfactorily, owing to the need to placate diverse administrative bodies.

4.2.2 Historical Context

Both McConnell (2000) and Metzgar (2017) assert that the initial proposition for the JET Programme originated from MIC, a ministry with a primary focus on domestic concerns. During the mid-1980s, although there was an acknowledged need within Japan for a transformation in English language education, MEXT exhibited hesitancy towards implementing substantial changes in the curriculum. McConnell (2000) cites an interview with Nose Kuniyuki, a senior official at MIC (then called the Ministry of Home Affairs - MOHA), who recalled that his 1985 proposal for the JET Programme was initially rejected by his superior, citing it as beyond the ministry's remit.

Nose Kuniyuki's insights further illuminate the JET Programme's embryonic stage challenges. As McConnell (2000) documents, Kuniyuki's discussions with mayors across Japan revealed a general reluctance to welcome foreigners, reflecting the nation's predominant sense of homogeneity. Metzgar (2017) acknowledges that while there has been a subtle shift in this outlook over the past three decades, Japan still largely perceives itself as a homogeneous society. This is further corroborated by a recent *Japan Times* (2024) article citing a Taisho University study from 2023, with 54.5% of Japanese respondents expressing a reluctance to increase the number of foreign residents within their area.

Initially, the prospects for the JET Programme seemed bleak. However, a confluence of circumstances at a critical juncture in international relations provided an unexpected impetus for its revival. In 1985, trade tensions between Japan and the United States intensified, mainly because of Japan's \$50 billion trade surplus. The 1986 summit, which was set to convene leaders from both nations, presented Prime Minister Nakasone with a dual challenge: to alleviate these escalating tensions and concurrently address Japan's socio-economic needs within a rapidly evolving global setting. In this context, as McConnell (2000) details, the JET Programme was reconsidered and ultimately revitalised, aligning with both political and educational objectives.

The JET Programme, notwithstanding its endorsement by the Prime Minister, faced hurdles in obtaining parliamentary approval and securing necessary funding. The programme's financial details have been a focal point in critical discussions within the literature. Carless (2006), McCrostie

(2017) and Seargeant (2008) underscore the significant costs involved. McCrostie (2017), writing in the *Japan Times*, reports that each JET participant costs the government between 5 and 6 million yen per year, equivalent to roughly £25,000 to £31,000. Although I was unable to locate official figures to corroborate this amount, a BoE official responsible for current JET Programme members in their area advised me in a private email that there is a budget of 4.6 million yen (approximately £24,000) allocated to each prefecture for each JET Programme participant. The BoE official advised me that this figure covers everything from their 'salary, commuting allowance, social insurance premiums, travel expenses for training or returning to their home after the JET contract is over, sharing cost (sic) with CLAIR and so on' (BoE official, personal communication, 30 October, 2023).

McCrostie's (2017) article further references a 2015 report by the Japan Association of Corporate Executives, estimating the JET Programme's yearly expenditure at 40 billion yen, about £205 million, exchange rate correct at the time of writing [using XE.com](https://www.xe.com/), is financed by local and national governments, but ultimately burdens Japan's taxpayers. McCrostie (2017) argues that these funds might be more effectively allocated towards training JTEs or facilitating their overseas language immersion.

Implementing government policies typically follows a top-down approach, and the JET Programme was no exception. This approach manifested in limited communication between the ministries responsible for creating policy and those expected to implement it, namely the teachers and local BoEs, tasked with translating policy into practice. Despite the conflicting goals of the various government offices, a unified front had to be presented on the official JET Programme website before its implementation.

McConnell (2000) observes, 'The intersectoral nature of the policy meant that program goals had to be worded so as to please all three sponsoring ministries' (p.46). Consequently, the JET Programme's website articulates its founding objective as 'the purpose of increasing mutual understanding between the people of Japan and the people of other nations' (JET Programme, n.d.-d). The official narrative further states that the programme seeks 'to promote internationalisation in Japan's local communities by helping to improve foreign language education and developing international exchange at the community level' (JET Programme, n.d.-d).

This diplomatic phrasing, however, belies the programme's deeper complexities. Metzgar (2017) incisively points out that 'Despite [its] multifaceted mission, however, today JET is most widely discussed in the context of just one of those purposes: English language education' (p.67).

In employing the Hyatt (2013) frame of critical discourse analysis, I was able to scrutinise facets of the JET Programme's stated aims with increased rigour. An example of this is 'the political warrant' (Hyatt, 2013, p.51), which is defined as the rationale behind a policy, framed in terms of its contribution to the public or national interest, the advancement of the common good, or the conceptualisation of an ideal society. This is often perceived as the JET Programme's most pronounced success (Borg, 2018; Hiratsuka, 2022; McConnell, 2000; Metzgar, 2017). However, the English teaching side of the JET Programme may be disappointing and regarded as one of its 'greatest vulnerabilities' (Metzgar, 2017, p.63). The advancements in goodwill and internationalisation have often been lauded (Borg, 2008; McConnell, 2000; Metzgar, 2017), with Ben

Dooley (2011) writing in the *Japan Times* that 'Although the program has an uneven track record when it comes to improving Japanese students' English, it has quietly and unexpectedly become a powerful tool for achieving another objective: grooming the next generation of American leadership in U.S.-Japan relations.'

Hyatt's (2013) definition of the accountability warrant in education is when a policy initiative is enacted to project an improvement in results or educational standards. This aligns with one of the aims of the JET Programme: to improve (English) language education through team-teaching classes while promoting internationalisation. However, the English language aspect of team teaching has failed to realise its potential, while internationalisation is far more ephemeral and difficult to measure. As mentioned previously, the internationalisation aspect of the JET Programme is regarded as one of its positive outcomes over the past three decades. Although there is some evidence contrary to this, a recent *Japan Times* (*The Japan Times*, 2024) article quoted an online survey conducted by Taisho University, which detailed the limited interaction between Japanese residents living in rural areas and the international community within their locales. This study, carried out from October to November 2023, engaged participants from 59 cities, towns, and villages across Japan where the populace of foreign nationals constitutes 5% or more, explicitly excluding central Tokyo's 23 wards and the 20 designated major cities.

Out of 1,194 valid respondents, a significant 83.8% reported a lack of regular engagement with the foreign nationals in their vicinity. Conversely, among the 16.2% who indicated interactions, 39.7% identified these foreigners as colleagues, 32.5% as neighbours, and 21.6% as friends. When queried about the desirability of increasing the foreign national percentage in their communities, a majority of 54.5% expressed reluctance, voicing apprehensions regarding potential social discord and the degradation of societal norms. This is a concurrent thread that has existed in Japan for many years. McConnell (2000) states that Japan has a history of resisting change, with one government official concerned about Japan losing its uniqueness. Minoru Wada, one of the key personnel in the early years of the JET Programme, openly stated, 'I don't think Japan will change that much. We're not going to become like other countries' (McConnell, 2000, p. 61).

4.2.3 Policy Implementation

Central Role of ALTs and CIRs

In analysing the JET Programme's policy implementation, one of the main focal points to emerge is the pivotal role of team teaching and ALTs. This facet is central to the programme's design, which revolves around recruiting predominantly young, university-educated, non-Japanese individuals to facilitate mostly English language education in Japan. Despite the previously discussed divergent objectives of the ministries involved, the importation of ALTs, alongside CIRs, whose involvement is comparatively minor, is indispensable to the programme's functionality. Historical data indicate that among the nearly 79,000 participants (JET Programme, n.d.-a), ALTs constitute approximately 90% of JET Programme participants, with CIRs representing just under 10% and SEAs accounting for the remaining fraction (JET Programme, n.d.-h). Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of participants from around the world.

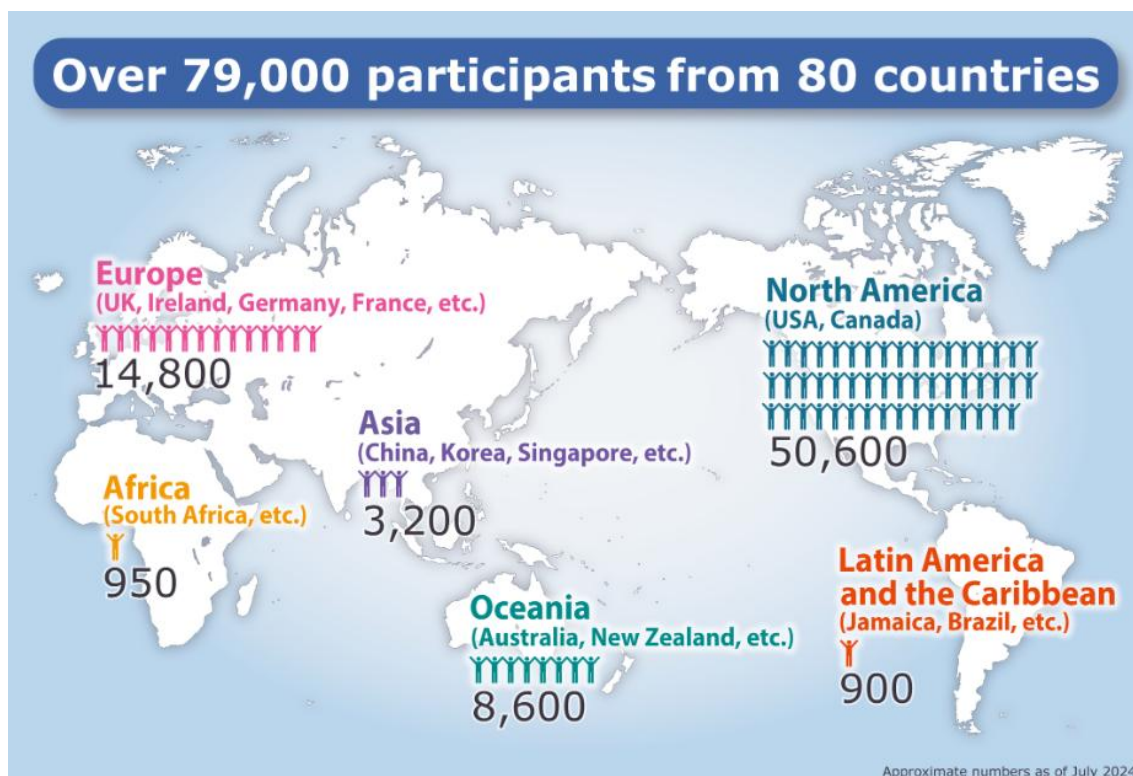


Figure 2. *Worldwide Distribution of JET Programme Participants*

Source: JET Programme (2024)

The designation 'ALT' itself was a topic of considerable debate. Minoru Wada, a senior MEXT official and regarded as 'a principal designer of the JET Programme' (Pearce, 2020, p.133), who played a key role during its launch and implementation, shared with McConnell (2000) the thought process behind this terminology. Initially, MEXT harboured reservations about the JET Programme, fearing a potential loss of educational autonomy due to the involvement of multiple ministries. Nonetheless, MEXT's recognition of the need for English language education reform, coupled with external pressures and the Prime Minister's endorsement, led to their eventual support of the Programme. One critical condition set forth by Wada was that the foreign participants would be designated as 'assistants'; this term was strategically chosen 'so that Japanese teachers would not feel that their own jobs were either legally or symbolically threatened by the influx of native speakers' (McConnell, 2000, p.45).

Wada also disclosed to McConnell (2000) a noteworthy aspect of the internal dynamics within MEXT regarding the JET Programme. He revealed that a majority of MEXT officials were ambivalent towards the Programme. This ambivalence among MEXT officials reflects the underlying uncertainties and reservations within the Ministry regarding the efficacy or strategic value of the JET Programme. However, despite opposition from the teachers' union against introducing JET participants, Japanese teachers frequently reported positive experiences from earlier programmes collaborating with ALTs. These positive experiences reported by JTEs in working with ALTs indicate that the practical implementation may surpass institutional expectations. This contrast points to a disconnect between policy-level scepticism and the favourable outcomes observed at the educational grassroots.

4.2.4 Updating Policy to Reflect Contemporary Educational Contexts

Within a policy framework extending over 38 years, such as that of the JET Programme, modifications are inevitable as needs and objectives evolve in response to the changing societal and educational landscape. While a comprehensive analysis of all amendments is beyond the scope of this thesis, the most notable changes will be succinctly outlined.

1. In 2002 the JET Programme was expanded to include elementary-level education.

One significant adaptation occurred in 2002 when elementary schools were integrated into the JET Programme. Acknowledging the necessity for reform in English education policy and recognising that the programme was not achieving its anticipated outcomes, MEXT implemented several modifications in 2002. These reforms were aimed at aligning the programme with the contemporary needs of Japanese students. A notable change was the creation of the elementary specialist ALT role, expanding the Programme's reach beyond its traditional focus on senior high and junior high schools (JET Programme, n.d.-d). This shift was congruent with MEXT's future nationwide strategy of mandating English instruction in elementary schools. Coincidentally, the year 2002 also marked the peak in JET participant numbers, with a record 6,273 individuals (JET Programme, n.d.-d).

2. Changes to the age limit.

An integral modification within the JET Programme concerned the age limit of applicants. Initially, the programme, as per Nose Kuniyuki's design at its inception, targeted university graduates under 35 years of age. Kuniyuki, in his interview with McConnell (2000), explained his reasons for this age specification. Firstly, he believed that younger individuals living and working in Japan could potentially contribute to alleviating trade tensions with the United States. Secondly, he posited that individuals' adaptability diminishes beyond this age threshold (McConnell, 2000).

However, as the Programme evolved, criticism emerged regarding the maturity levels of younger participants. Detractors, including Crooks (2000), Brown (2013), and Ishihara, Sherrie, Mahler, and Russo (2018), have argued that some young graduates treated the JET Programme as an extended university experience, utilising the Japanese government's funding for a short-term stay before returning home. This criticism led to a policy revision in 2002, raising the age limit to under 40 years (JET Programme, n.d.-d). The aim was to attract a more mature and professional cohort of ALTs. Subsequently, the age restriction was entirely removed in the mid-2000s. There are no official documents pertaining to this adjustment. However, the official JET Programme application materials no longer stipulate the age limit. The removal of any age limit for new applicants further broadened the applicant pool and aligned the programme with its evolving objectives.

3. Change in maximum contract duration: three to five years.

In 2007, a significant policy modification was implemented within the JET Programme, extending the maximum re-contracting period for participants from three to five years (JET Programme, n.d.-d). This change mirrored the earlier adjustment to the age limit, reflecting an

ongoing effort by policymakers to enhance the quality of teaching within the Programme. Under the revised policy, only ALTs evaluated as 'outstanding' by their contracting organisation were eligible to re-contract for a fourth or fifth year (JET Programme, n.d.-d).

Concurrent with extending the re-contract limit, a revised pay structure was introduced. This structure was designed to reflect the duration of an ALT's tenure and their contribution to the Programme. Under the previous system, ALTs received a uniform annual salary of 3.6 million yen (approximately £19,000) before deductions, irrespective of their length of service. However, the new remuneration framework set the first-year salary at 3.36 million yen (approximately £18,000), with a progressive increase to a maximum of 3.96 million yen (approximately £21,000) for those who extend their contract to a fourth or fifth year (JET Programme, n.d.-k).

4. Introduction of educational and career advancement grants by CLAIR.

To elevate teaching standards within the JET Programme, CLAIR has introduced various initiatives, including conferences and seminars, to support participants' career development following their JET Programme tenure. While a significant development has been the provision of grants for ALTs and CIRs actively engaged in the programme, who aspire to obtain a Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) certification (JET Programme, n.d.-f). This initiative marks a departure from earlier practices where JET Programme participants were essentially left to their own devices once placed in their designated positions. Reflecting on my personal experience as an ALT from 2008 to 2012, it is evident that such support for TEFL certification was not universally available at that time. There were no career support or development options other than the twice-a-year JTE and ALT prefectural gatherings. At the request of my BoE and in recognition of my undergraduate degree in applied linguistics and TEFL, I was tasked with conducting a week-long English teaching seminar in collaboration with a JTE. This responsibility was assigned despite my limited practical teaching experience, which was primarily derived from my initial year in the JET Programme. During this period, there were no Japan-wide provisions or alternatives for ALTs seeking professional development or certification in TEFL. These recent additions by CLAIR for more English teaching training and support also hint that the initial goal of the JET programme was never about English education. However, the criticisms (Arudou, 2010; Aspinall, 2012; Goodman et al., 2003; Kubota, 2002; McConnell, 2000; Seargeant, 2005, 2008; Snow, 2016) aimed at English education in Japan and the continued low scoring on English language proficiency tests, JET Programme officials are attempting to offer more support and guidance towards the language teaching aspect.

In a significant educational reform, Japan has updated its curriculum guidelines across primary, junior high, and senior high schools, as directed by MEXT (2021). A notable change within this revision is the mandate of foreign language education in primary schools from the third year onward, effective from 2021. This represents a shift from the previous requirement, which commenced foreign language instruction from the fifth year. According to the revised guidelines, students in the third and fourth years are now exposed to 35 foreign language lessons annually, while those in the fifth and sixth years participate in 70 lessons per annum (MEXT, 2021). Consequently, the updated curriculum introduces an additional 70 lessons of English language education each year for primary school students, augmenting the existing framework.

The reorientation of English language teaching within the Japanese education system, as articulated by MEXT (2021), may herald a pivotal change in the perceived value and utilisation of ALTs. Historical accounts and empirical data, including questionnaire responses examined in subsequent sections of this analysis, recurrently highlight a prevalent concern among ALTs regarding their underutilisation within educational settings. Moreover, JTEs frequently express uncertainty regarding the optimal integration of ALTs into the learning environment (Hiratsuka, 2013; 2022), often attributing their reticence to a predominant focus on preparing students for the rigorous entrance examinations that characterise the transition to subsequent educational phases.

The imperative for reform in Japan's English language education system has been underscored by the nation's lacklustre performance in global assessments of oral communication and fluency, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, with reference to the IELTS and TOEIC proficiency tests. Similarly, the 2019 TOEFL Internet-based test, which evaluates the four macro skills of writing, reading, listening and speaking, positioned Japan at a notably low 147th out of 170 countries, 28th among 30 Asian counterparts, and at the bottom of the 37 OECD nations regarding English proficiency (Educational Testing Service, 2023). These disconcerting standings catalysed MEXT to embark on a substantial overhaul to elevate English language proficiency across Japan (Hasegawa & Sakamoto, 2023).

In a concerted effort to address this challenge, MEXT has revised the curriculum and scrutinised the proficiency levels of JTEs. As reported by Hasegawa and Sakamoto (2023), a survey conducted by MEXT in 2022 revealed a promising uptrend in the qualifications of JTEs in junior high and high schools, with an increasing number achieving a CEFR B2 level or above. Specifically, over the span from 2015 to 2021, there was a 22.2% increase in the number of high school English teachers attaining these proficiency levels, with 74.9% of all teachers now meeting this standard (Hasegawa & Sakamoto, 2023).

Enhancing English teachers' skills is intrinsically linked to improving their students' linguistic competencies. In this evolving educational landscape, the collaborative pedagogical model involving English-speaking ALTs assumes a critical role. Integrating ALTs into the learning process is pivotal in providing students with authentic, practical English language experiences (Hiratsuka, 2013). This approach is central to the overarching strategy of English education reform in Japan, which aims to equip students with the practical English skills necessary for effective communication in a global context.

4.3 Policy Contextualisation Conclusion

The evolving aims, administrative structures and periodic reforms of the JET Programme highlight the dynamic trajectory from inception to the present day. The overview provided here has been necessarily selective, as it underscores the JET Programme's shifting policy objectives, the convoluted interplay between the three government ministries, and the tensions between its cultural and educational aims. As McConnell (2000) states, the JET Programme, as it stands today, 'differs in some important ways from its incarnation' (p.8). Furthermore, Hiratsuka (2022) argues that 'Even though bilateral ties with the United States are still a cornerstone of current foreign diplomacy, Japan is starkly different from what it was more than three decades ago when the program started – demographically, culturally, politically, and economically' (pp. 48-49). Considering

these two statements, it is essential that the JET Programme is analysed and the adaptations that have taken place over its 38-year history are scrutinised.

It has been a significant catalyst for professional growth and cultural exchange for many JET Programme participants, including myself and the Japanese students they serve. The JET experience was formative in recalibrating my worldview, my professional trajectory and my evolution as an educator. It remains, in my opinion, a valuable cultural and educational edifice worthy of continued investment. However, there are still areas of uncertainty regarding its long-term sustainability, evolving policy goals and alignment with Japan's broader educational reforms. The following section shifts from this contextual grounding to a thematic analysis of questionnaire data. This will examine how the JET Programme's policy intentions and structural features intersect with its participants' lived experiences and perceptions.

4.4 Thematic Analysis of the Questionnaires

Introduction to Thematic Analysis

This section builds on the policy contextualisation outlined above and presents the thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of the questionnaire data collected from ex-JET Programme participants and JTEs. Utilising Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach, I identified recurring patterns in the responses, collating them into key themes that reflect the participants' concerns, experiences and insights regarding the JET Programme. Each theme has a brief overview, followed by selected quotations and an interpretation of how they illustrate the JET Programme's practical outcomes and continuing challenges. The aim is to foreground the voices and perceptions of the key stakeholders, highlighting the real-world ramifications of JET's policy context.

The analysis of questionnaire data followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework, which provides a flexible yet rigorous process for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns across qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I adopted a reflexive approach, as elaborated in Braun and Clarke's more recent *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide* (2022), which emphasises the active role of the researcher in generating, not merely discovering, themes. This reflexive orientation aligns with my methodological commitment to transparency and positionality, acknowledging how my own experiences and assumptions shaped interpretive choices.

The analytic process proceeded through several stages. I began by coding responses inductively, working from the data while maintaining sensitivity to concepts from the literature and policy context, thereby incorporating a deductive dimension. Codes were then collated into potential themes, which were reviewed, refined, and re-named in an iterative process. This cycle involved moving back and forth between the dataset, the coded extracts, and the developing thematic map to ensure that themes were coherent internally and distinct from one another. The final themes represent an interpretive synthesis of participants' experiences and perspectives, rather than a simple categorisation, and serve as the basis for the analysis presented in the following sections. This analytic process builds directly on the reflexive stance outlined in Chapter 3, ensuring coherence between the study's methodological foundations and the interpretation of participants' accounts.

JET Participants Demographic Overview

There were 267 replies in total, consisting of 174 (65%) females, 85 (32%) males, and six (2%) non-binary, with one person preferring not to say. The age range of respondents was from 22 to 67, with five people opting not to answer, ensuring perspectives from both recent graduates and long-term professionals. There were 13 nationalities, reflecting the JET Programme's multinational reach.

JET Programme Placement Information

A total of 254 (96%) ALTs and 11 (4%) CIRs replied, with two respondents choosing not to answer. This aligns with official JET Programme data indicating ALTs that 'more than 90% of JET participants are employed as ALTs' (JET Programme, n.d.-h) and 'just under 10% of JET participants are CIRs' (JET Programme, n.d.-h). Given the rarity of SEAs, it was unsurprising that I did not receive

any replies from people who held that position; as a reference, there are currently eight SEAs out of 5,861 JET Programme participants across the five-year cohort currently in Japan (JET Programme, n.d.-h). In Japan, there are 47 geographical areas known as prefectures, and I received at least one questionnaire response from someone who had lived in each prefecture. Starting in 1988, there were responses from someone on every year of the JET Programme up until 2022. Overall, responses were received from personnel who participated in the JET programme between 1988 and 2022, providing a broad historical and geographical sample of the programme's evolution.

JTE Demographic and Teaching Experience Data

Thirty JTEs completed the parallel questionnaire. The respondents presented an array of teaching experience (1-40 years) in both junior and senior high schools. There was an almost even split in gender, and all had worked with at least one JET participant during their careers, with the majority having worked with multiple JET participants, some with as many as ten or more, including ALTs and CIRs. This range presents a depth of professional encounters with the JET Programme, suggesting that although relatively small in number, their collective insights demonstrate a cross-section of Japanese English teaching contexts. Further demographic data is provided in Tables 1 and 2 of the Methodology chapter.

Thematic Analysis

This previous section presents the demographic data of the JET Programme participants and the JTE demographic data, coupled with the teaching experience of JTEs who have worked with JET participants. The following section will thematically analyse the ex-JET questionnaire and JTE questionnaire data. There are seven themes which emerge from the data, these are:

1. Cultural Exchange and Japan's Soft Power Strategy
2. The Perceived Efficacy of English Teaching in the JET Programme and Benefit to Japanese Students
3. Role Ambiguity and Misalignment in the ALT-JTE Relationship
4. Promoting Internationalisation and Global Awareness in Japan
5. JET Participants' Satisfaction and Professional Development
6. Cultural and Professional Integration Challenges
7. Sustainability and Future Directions for the JET Programme

Each theme will be introduced with its title and a short introductory paragraph about its main trends. This will be followed by a summary of the JET participants' perspectives with selected quotes and analysis from the corresponding questionnaire. Each questionnaire quote will be preceded by the respondents' number between 1 and 267, as there are no personal details to identify the respondents. Following this, there will be a short summary of JTE perspectives with quotes and an analysis of the corresponding questionnaire. Again, numbers will be used to identify the respondents, this time between 1 and 30.

There is some unavoidable overlap between certain themes, as it is often impossible to totally isolate a specific aspect or perspective put forward by a questionnaire respondent. For example, Theme two discusses the perceived efficacy of English language teaching within the JET Programme, while Theme five concentrates on JET Participants' Satisfaction and Professional

Development. Many ALTs view their core responsibilities as being in the classroom, whether teaching language or supporting cultural awareness. When they perceive that they are being neglected or underutilised in this respect, it will affect their happiness and their perceptions of the efficacy of their classroom time.

Moreover, although themes are often reflected in responses to particular questions, this is not always the case. Therefore, comments were obtained from different questions throughout the questionnaire to highlight a specific theme. However, where responses to a specific question are highly relevant to a theme, this is made clear. Both questionnaires are reproduced in the appendices one and two.

4.5 Theme One: Cultural Exchange and Japan's Soft Power Strategy

This theme discusses the goals of the JET Programme beyond language teaching. It also highlights the cultural exchange aspect and Japan's soft power initiative as core objectives.

4.5.1 JET Participants' Perspectives

The JET participants generally understand the programme's overarching objective of promoting cross-cultural awareness and fostering a positive image of Japan. Many respondents highlight their role as cultural ambassadors by bringing certain aspects of their country into their classrooms and wider communities while learning about Japan's traditions and customs. This is also reflected in the term 'exchange' in the JET Programme's English title, as the term is used to signify exchanging ideas and culture rather than exchanging one person or teacher for another. Finally, respondents have a notable awareness regarding Japan's soft power goals that JET participants will return to their home countries after their stay on the JET Programme as informal advocates for Japanese culture, language and values.

The JET Programme website states that one of the main aims is 'to promote grassroots internationalisation at the local level' (JET Programme, n.d.-a). The JET participants' understanding of this is evident from their overall responses. Typical comments follow a general thread that can be summarised in the following statements:

- #39 - I think the main goal is international understanding and exchange of language and culture.
- #46 - To foster international relationships at a grassroots level
- #70 - As a soft diplomacy program, JET is a roaring success - I still have a deep and abiding affection for Japan, and even here in my new (much-better-job) country I tend to buy and use Japanese-style/brand things and food. More so than when I actually lived in Japan in fact.
- #157 - JET allowed me to develop an attachment to Japan that has lasted years beyond my time there. I still speak to my kids and see their pictures when they graduate.
- #160 - I have recommended the JET program to several relatives or friends in the USA. It absolutely made me as a person and I would love them to have the same transformative experience I did.

Other responses were more cynical and reflected upon the soft power mechanisms at work within the Japanese government while questioning the language teaching aspect of the JET Programme. Typical responses around this topic follow a general thread that can be summarised in the following statements:

- #10 - Officially cultural exchange. Unofficially it's to train and recruit educated foreigners to either work in Japan or go home and proselitize (sic) Japan's merits promoting tourism and to a lesser extent the security alliances.
- #19 - For the Japanese: Provide top-end foreign candidates for direct English-language exposure for students. I believe other goals are to allow foreigners to form

a positive impression of Japan and carry that impression onward with them throughout their lives, spreading the good word. No doubt business contacts will also be fostered by such an exchange.

- #27 - Soft power.
- #76 - Cultural exchange - more explicitly, exposing Japanese students/communities who are in major tourist areas to people with different appearances, experiences, and languages. And if we teach them some English that's a bonus. But in general, teaching English isn't the real goal - Japan's results on most major English tests compared to nearby countries is abysmal and it's clear speaking English just isn't that important in Japanese society.

Although some of these responses appear to carry a critical tone, they nevertheless demonstrate an understanding of the soft power initiative that the JET Programme is trying to implement. Some respondents' comments clearly exhibit a degree of research and reading about the JET Programme, with one reply even quoting McConnell's (2000) book:

- #31 - I think that (sic) main goal is split between the different ministries responsible for the program. I read the book, importing diversity, and it colors my thoughts on the program. If I recall correctly, the Ministry of education school's (sic) was to increase the quality of English education in Japan, in particular for the communicative language teaching movement. It was the Ministry of internal affairs' goal to internationalize Japan, especially the rural areas where many ALTs were being sent. And it was the Ministry of foreign affairs (sic) goal to have those ALTs who participated in the jet program go home and tell everyone they knew how amazing Japan was. A grassroots approach to education, internationalize and soft power.

Question 13 of the JET participant questionnaire was designed to elicit responses that might shed light on perceptions of the programme's organisational structure stemming from its nomenclature. The question reads: The JET Programme stands for the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme. However, this is not an exchange in the usual sense, as you are not 'exchanging' your place with a Japanese national during this time – why do you think this is?

This question provoked diverse responses, underscoring the complexity inherent in defining the essence of exchange within the context of international programmes. The foundational premise for posing this question was to attempt to unravel the substantive elements constituting the exchange process. According to the Collins Dictionary, an exchange programme is defined as 'an arrangement in which people from different countries visit each other's country, perhaps to strengthen links between them or to improve foreign language skills' (Collins Dictionary, n.d.). In that vein, Bhagan (2024) states that a teacher exchange is where you usually swap jobs and even your accommodation at times with your counterpart to experience living and teaching in another country. While providing a broad framework for understanding exchange programmes, this definition may not satisfactorily illustrate such initiatives' multifaceted and multilayered nature.

The conventional parameters of exchange, as delineated by the aforementioned definition, do not fully apply to the JET Programme. With its unique structure and objectives, the JET Programme diverges from the traditional exchange programme model, which predominantly focuses on mutual visits for cultural or linguistic enrichment. The JET Programme embodies a more complex form of exchange, encompassing not only the sharing of language and culture but also the fostering of international relations, educational collaboration, and cross-cultural understanding at a community level.

This deviation from the normative conceptualisation of exchange programmes necessitates a broader interpretation of what constitutes 'exchange'. Within the JET Programme, exchange transcends mere physical mobility or linguistic improvement; it encompasses a deeper, more substantive transfer of knowledge, pedagogical practices, cultural insights, and mutual learning between the participants and the host communities. Such a reconceptualisation of exchange highlights the potential for a diverse range of exchanges beyond the conventional frameworks, underscoring the need for a more expansive and inclusive understanding of what constitutes meaningful exchange in the context of international educational and cultural programmes.

The following diverse responses highlight the ambiguity around the term 'exchange', with respondent #67 praising this uncertainty 'I'm glad its (sic) ambiguized'. This aligns directly with the unclear messaging surrounding the JET Programme's mission as articulated by Borg (2018; 2020), Hiratsuka (2022) and McConnell (2000).

- #16 - I think it is merely a moniker to justify spending so much money on having teachers come over. In my time, the stated expectation, as I recall, was that you would certainly return after JET, and there spread the word about Japan. In this sense, it was supposed to be "exchange".
- #27 - I think these names are usually thought up by bureaucrats without much thought and any sensible suggestions were probably disregarded.
- #67 - Many people always joke about how they keep forgetting it isn't (sic) "japan english teaching" (sic). Personally I'm glad its (sic) ambiguized because just being here for teaching English can seem a bit anglosaxon (sic) imperialist. The exchange part of the name comes from the fact that we are encouraged to talk about our countries in our handouts and our presentations (at least I am). What we get in return is the chance to live in Japan not as tourists. Further, I think there should be more similar opportunities for Japanese people to go abroad. I just don't know how the demand for languages work. I think there's a lot of interest in Japanese cultural education but it's so subcultural it wouldn't fit into a public curriculums (sic) the way a lingua franca does. After all, our salaries are paid for by the government.
- #71 - Japan is not interested in furthering the education of their teachers.

Finally, regarding question 13, a handful of respondents did not know what the acronym JET stood for or had at least never considered its meaning previously. Although this may seem a minor reflection, it underscores how some participants view and engage with the JET Programme's formal identity in a predominantly unreflective way. If JET Programme participants are unclear about the

core terminology 'exchange' or even the acronym, it raises questions about how effectively the programme's goals and mission are being communicated to the people responsible for delivering these aims. This further highlights the broader ambiguity with the JET Programme's stated objectives, aligning with the earlier claim that the programme's identity as an exchange programme is, at times, nebulous for the host institution and the JET Programme participants.

- #31 - it's funny, because someone i (sic) know recently misremembered the jet program having stood for Japan English teaching program. The exchange is actually because it was given as a present to the Reagan administration.
- #191 - Interesting question! Perhaps because we're not actually "taking the place" of a Japanese national, but supplementing the Japanese curriculum in a way that would be very difficult for them to do so themselves. I think it's also harder to convince Japanese adults to travel abroad, and this is a way to bring outside culture to them. I like the idea of providing Japanese adults with more opportunities to work and live abroad, though.
- #194 - Interesting question that I had never considered. You are exchanging part of your life for a brief time in Japan?
- #214 - Hmmm never thought about this.
- #229 - I think it is a meaningless acronym thought up by bureaucrats. Most people think the "E" stands for "English." Even some JETs think it stands for Japan English Teaching programme.
- #239 - No idea. Never thought about it.
- #262 - Not sure but did bring about 35 Japanese students back to the U.S. with me on school breaks where they stayed in homestay and attend a U.S. school for a week.

Despite these responses, it is evident that most participants possess a comprehensive understanding of the programme's objectives and the broader implications of their roles within it. This contemporary perspective among JET participants marks a significant evolution from the observations made by McConnell (2000) over two decades ago. In his seminal work published in 2000, McConnell articulated a discrepancy in the perceptions of internationalisation between JET participants and Japanese officials: 'many of the foreign participants believe that what goes on in JET is not internationalization, while most Japanese officials believe that it is' (McConnell, 2000, p.28).

The variation in participant responses also reflects the complex interplay of individual experiences, expectations, and the broader objectives of the JET Programme. It underscores the importance of maintaining a flexible and responsive approach to programme implementation that can accommodate and address its participants' diverse perspectives and experiences while steadfastly advancing its core mission.

4.5.2 JTEs' Perspectives

Regarding JTE's perspectives, the cultural exchange element is seen as a vehicle for students' exposure to foreign languages and lifestyles. From the JTE's point of view, they tend to focus on the immediate classroom pedagogical benefits of having ALTs in the classroom as a means to diversify students' experiences and improve their cultural knowledge. However, the JTEs showed a distinct lack of awareness regarding the JET Programme's diplomatic and soft power goals.

Questions 9 of the JET questionnaire and 12 of the JTE questionnaire are precisely the same. It reads: What do you believe is the main goal of the JET Programme?

The rationale was to examine the degree to which both parties understood the complex nature of the JET Programme's aims. The vast majority of JTEs focussed solely on the English teaching and classroom interactions with ALTs, with answers such as:

- #7 - To cultivate students' motivation to learn English.
- #21 - This is the opportunity to communicate with each other.
- #1 - It gives us good chances (sic) to communicate with native speakers.
- #16 - We can have opportunities to talk with foreign people.
- #17 - Definitely, Japanese people are required (sic) the experience of communicating with foreigners in their classroom.

Some respondents also reflected upon the benefits of their interactions with JET participants in improving the JTE's proficiency levels in English. Some responses identify the main goal of the programme as follows:

- #30 - To improve students' practical and academic skills of English.
- #28 - To Give Work to the Employee as a Teacher or Teacher Aid.

There were, however, respondents who seemed to understand the cultural exchange ambition of the JET Programme and whose answers included allusions to:

- #10 - cultural interaction
- #13 - The main goal is to cultivate students' global mindsets by expanding their knowledge and viewpoints toward many different topics or issues as well as improving their communication skills. We can also offer our students many opportunities to interact with people and express their thoughts and opinions in English.
- #14 - To promote mutual understanding between Japanese people, especially students, and people from other countries

JET Programme participants and JTEs are two of the main stakeholders involved with the JET Programme and are responsible for actualising the JET Programme's goals on a daily basis. Discovering whether these two groups were cognisant of these goals was a significant aspect of this study. However, only two JTEs could fully articulate the JET Programme's broader implications. Their responses are reproduced here in full:

- #19 - To give students of Japan a chance to learn English and for Japanese local communities to build connections with different countries.
- #22 - Mutual understanding between countries and making friendships.

The discernible contrast in the awareness and articulation of the JET Programme's soft power dimension between JTEs and JET participants underscores a significant aspect of the programme's multifaceted impact. While JET participants frequently reference the notion of soft

power and its implications in fostering cultural diplomacy and international relations, the absence of such discussions among JTE respondents suggests a more pragmatic or operational focus on the programme's objectives within the domestic educational context.

4.5.3 Conclusion to Theme One: Comparison of Perspectives

The divergence in the emphasis on soft power between JTEs and JET participants could be attributed to the differing roles and perspectives inherent in their positions within the programme. For JTEs, the immediate pedagogical objectives and the operational aspects of implementing the programme within their educational institutions might overshadow the broader geopolitical and cultural implications (Carless, 2006). Conversely, for JET participants, the experience of living and working in Japan, coupled with the cultural exchange inherent in their roles, may render the soft power dimensions of the programme more salient (Borg, 2018; Seargeant, 2008).

This distinction in perspectives indicates the JET Programme's complex and layered impact, serving as a vehicle for language education and pedagogical innovation and as an instrument of cultural diplomacy and soft power (McConnell, 2000; Metzgar, 2017). Understanding these divergent viewpoints provides a more refined appreciation of the programme's multifaceted contributions to both the participants and the host communities. It highlights the importance of considering both the micro-level educational interactions and the macro-level cultural and diplomatic exchanges in evaluating the programme's success (McConnell, 2000; Metzgar, 2017).

The main similarity is that both groups recognise the JET Programme's value in improving cultural exchange, although their emphasis differs. Carless (2006) similarly notes that JET participants are often more acutely aware of the broader diplomatic and soft power connotations, likely due to their position as foreigners representing their home cultures in Japan. JTEs, in contrast, focus on the tangible, classroom-level influence and how the immediate educational aspects benefit students (Hiratsuka, 2022). This distinction underscores how each group interacts with the JET Programme's cultural exchange objectives from different perspectives, shaping their respective levels of awareness of its broader strategic implications.

These responses, taken collectively, suggest that JETs may possess a more profound understanding of the programme's objectives than JTEs, despite the latter's potentially extensive tenure working within the programme, which could impact their operational dynamic in the classroom setting. This perceived disparity in understanding between JET participants and JTEs, as highlighted by Hiratsuka (2022) and McConnell (2000), points to a critical issue in implementing the JET Programme at the classroom level, marked by ambiguity and confusion regarding the roles and expectations of both parties.

4.6 Theme Two: The Perceived Efficacy of English Teaching in the JET Programme and the Benefit to Japanese Students

While Theme One focuses on the issue of cultural exchange within the JET Programme, Theme Two highlights JET participants' and JTE's perspectives on the effectiveness of the JET Programme in improving English language education. JET Programme participants and JTEs view this area with optimism and frustration. It discusses the critiques aimed at English language education while emphasising how teaching is somewhat subordinate to the broader cultural intentions of the JET Programme. The dissatisfaction with professional teaching support and teacher training is also a point of contention.

4.6.1 JET Participants' Perspective

JET participants expressed a range of feelings about the effectiveness of advancing students' English language skills. Many ALTs note the limitations, such as the prevalence and continued use of translation teaching methods (referred to previously as *yakudoku*) and restricted teacher autonomy, many of which feel hamper their potential contributions. Responses include feelings of being underutilised and constrained by rigid curriculum structures, particularly when the teaching is focussed on entrance test preparation rather than communicative language classes.

The findings from the analysis of participant responses within the context of the JET Programme reveal a generally robust comprehension of the programme's overarching objectives among its participants, notwithstanding the explicit articulation of these goals. Notably, a subset of responses tended to concentrate exclusively on the English language instruction component of the JET Programme. This focus points to the salient role that language teaching plays within the programme's framework and its perceived prominence in the participants' experiences. However, within this subset, some reflections critiqued the efficacy of language instruction, with some participants alluding to what they regard as a substandard level of English language pedagogy within the programme.

Although occasionally sarcastic, the following responses illustrate some ALTs' perspectives of the JET Programme's objectives and its role within the Japanese education system.

- #75 - Supplementing a severe lack of English ability in JTEs/lack of exposure to foreigners in the general population
- #95 - To add some seasoning to the bland, salt-seasoned chicken breast that is the MEXT English education standards of Japan.
- #74 - To provide a native English speaker to help with teaching English to school students and to provide students with a native speaker to practice teaching English.
- #71 - To have a foreign presence in the school

From these comments, we can observe that #75 and #95 see their role as some sort of support and fill-in for the JTEs' inadequacies, while #74 and #71 view their role as a linguistic assistant or cultural ambassador. This echoes McConnell's (2000) assertion that the efficacy of the JET Programme depends on whether we judge it by linguistic improvements or some foreign exposure role.

The questioning of the JET Programme's efficacy, as framed by the discourse surrounding its objectives and outcomes, touches upon the heart of the debate regarding its value and impact. McConnell (2000) aptly addresses this dichotomy by posing, 'Does the JET Program work? Obviously, the answer depends on one's perspective. Judged by different criteria, the JET Program can look either wonderfully impressive or horribly bad' (p. 28). When assessed in this way, from divergent perspectives, the programme's effectiveness is likely to yield equally divergent opinions, oscillating between commendation and criticism, with some critics questioning the true nature of the JET Programme (Borg, 2018; *Japan Today*, 2012, 2013; Hiratsuka, 2022) as the following comments illustrate.

- #5 - Not teaching English. 😊 I see it as a way Japan tries to influence soft power.
- #49 - Honestly... advanced tourism. You get to live and work in Japan, get paid better than (sic) licensed teachers, have more vacation days to travel, less responsibility so you can 'see' more of Japan, go back to your home country, tell non-Japanese people about it and have them come, or go together, etc. On paper it's to help Japanese students, but without teaching experience and most JET's (sic) having no affiliated degree in education and short tenures... that's debatable.
- #104 - The biggest frustration I had was that teachers wouldn't listen to JETs about how to improve teaching practices.
- #163 - It would be better if ALTs all had more input on what happens in the classroom, rather than the "human tape recorder" approach that often happened.
- #170 - For support with high school students applying to college it is invaluable. However this really comes down to how JETs are used. The impact of true team teacher Vs being the human tape recorder.

Respondents #5 and #49 perceptions show that some ALTs regard the JET Programme as more of a soft power vehicle or opportunity for JETs to pursue travel opportunities than solid language pedagogy. In contrast, respondents #104, #163 and #170 highlight the frustrations of being undervalued as JETs were unwilling to listen to their ideas or simply being used as a tape recorder. These comments point to the disconnect between the stated objective of the JET Programme of enhancing English teaching and the actual classroom role many ALTs feel that they occupy. This is also a contentious issue that Hiratsuka (2022) comments on.

This study has previously outlined certain limitations within the JET Programme, particularly regarding its objectives surrounding English language pedagogy. However, it is imperative to juxtapose these findings with the programme's broader, perhaps more abstract, ambitions—namely, facilitating cultural exchange and fostering international goodwill. When the JET Programme is appraised against these objectives, a different narrative emerges, highlighting its accomplishments in cultivating a positive international image of Japan amongst its participants.

- #24 - Internationalize rural areas in Japan, Foster relationships between Japan and my home country.

- #26 - It should be about improving English learning opportunities for kids, but tbh it's a bloated government project by people who care more about international relations than actual education.
- #217 - Good time, great memories, but I wonder if it is the best way to improve English language skills. It has been a success on the internationalization.

These findings suggest that, while critiques of the JET Programme's effectiveness in language education are valid and warrant consideration, they do not encapsulate the entirety of the programme's objectives or achievements. The data indicating a high level of participant satisfaction and positive perception of Japan's post-programme participation points towards the success of the JET Programme in achieving its broader goals of cultural exchange and the promotion of international goodwill. Respondents #26 and #217 acknowledge the possible deficiency in English language terms but praise the JET Programme's internationalisation virtues, which resonate with Metzgar's (2017) statement that JET's soft power contributions outweigh the programme's pedagogical inadequacies.

While the programme is designed to serve multiple purposes, including cultural exchange, internationalisation efforts at the grassroots level, and the enhancement of foreign language education, the emphasis placed on each of these objectives can vary significantly among participants. The critique regarding the level of language teaching underscores the need for ongoing evaluation and adaptation of the programme's educational methodologies to ensure they meet the diverse needs and expectations of both the participants and the host communities.

4.6.2 JTEs' Perspectives

Overall, most JETs tend to value having ALTs as a form of support in the classroom, but also to support them outside of the classroom and in occasional extra-curricular activities. However, they often view the ALT as supplementary rather than central to achieving language proficiency. This perspective could result from several factors, including not having ALTs available for every English class and instances where one ALT serves a multitude of schools in their area and, therefore, only visits every few weeks. Although JTEs express satisfaction in their collaborations with ALTs, the lack of formal training, teaching experience and limited Japanese proficiency can impact this collaboration. This is often more pronounced when preparing students for entrance exams.

The data gathered from the questionnaire distributed among JTEs involved in the JET Programme, albeit with a smaller respondent pool compared to the JET questionnaire, yields significant insights into the collaborative teaching dynamics and shared experiences between JTEs and JET Programme participants. The demographic and experiential profile of the JTE respondents provides a multifaceted perspective on the interface between JTEs and their JET counterparts, enriching the understanding of the programme's impact from the perspective of host country educators.

- #27 - I think, this JET PROGRAM is a type of work about Teaching. And I think, that kind of work is for me to work with JET PROGRAM COMPANY.
- #1 - To improve and expand students' ability

- #18 - To develop students' and teachers' proficiency in English for international communication
- #21 - work together and inspire students' motivations to (sic) foreign language
- #15 - To teach students English with Japanese English teachers and help teachers in classes by giving teachers some advices (sic).
- #20 - Sometimes i (sic) feel teachers from the JET program tend to be lazy too much (sic). They do not understand what is working in Japan like (sic). They must know our culture, and be fluent at speaking Japanese so that JTE would not need to taka (sic) care of their private problems.
- #12 - It is worthwhile but as I wrote above, the supervisor's job is burdensome and for some ALTs it is very hard to take care of them.

Respondents #1 and #18 extol the benefits of ALT native speakers in making their English lessons more authentic and improving students' and teachers' language ability. On the contrary, #20 and #12 comment on the logistical and cultural difficulties sometimes faced by JTEs, citing Japanese language deficiencies and the inexperience of some ALTs. These contrasting perceptions illustrate how JTEs appreciate the ALT as a positive resource yet remain critical of their practical implementation, echoing Browne and Wada's (1998) findings that insufficient training undermines the perceived efficacy of ALTs.

In terms of collaboration with JET Programme participants, all the JTEs reported working exclusively with ALTs, highlighting the ALT role's centrality within the programme's educational objectives. A smaller subset of respondents, four out of 30, indicated experience working with CIRs. The distribution of JTEs' experience working with varying numbers of JET participants further illustrates the range of exposure and interaction within the programme, with a notable proportion of JTEs having worked with ten or more JET participants, thereby suggesting a significant level of integration and collaboration within their teaching environments.

The JTEs' responses, which predominantly reflect a practical understanding of the JET Programme's goals, resonate with the official programme materials disseminated by CLAIR. According to CLAIR (2013), the ALT-JTE collaborative teaching model emphasises maintaining a student-centred approach, reiterating the pedagogical objective of enhancing language education through active learner engagement. This directive aligns with the broader pedagogical shift towards communicative language teaching methods, which are posited to be more aligned with Western educational paradigms and potentially more effective in fostering language acquisition (Jeon, 2019; McConnell, 2000; Nakao et al., 2019).

4.6.3 Conclusion to Theme Two: Comparison of Perspectives

Both JET participants and JTEs show an awareness of the limitations of the JET Programme's impact on English teaching, although their reasons differ. Browne & Wada (1998) were authoritative voices showing an awareness of the underutilisation and challenges faced by both ALTs and JTEs. JET participants tend to focus on structural constraints and insufficient autonomy, which aligns with Borg's (2020) findings on ALTs and their human tape recorder roles. Conversely, JTEs are more mindful of practical concerns such as language difficulties and the JET Programme's suitability within

the test-oriented educational system. Hagerman (2009), Metzgar (2017) and Seargeant (2005) are some of the authors who discuss the majority of JTEs who view preparing their students for the entrance examinations as their teaching priorities. This thematic overlap suggests an aligned awareness of the challenges to effective English teaching, though both groups reflect uniquely on their own instructional roles and challenges.

CLAIR's General Information Handbook publication (GIH) (CLAIR, 2024) highlights the importance of English teaching in the JET Programme and clarifies the roles and duties expected of JET Programme participants. Furthermore, this publication clarifies the JET Programme's dual objectives, highlighting the aim of improving foreign language education and stimulating international exchange at the community level. This dual mandate encapsulates the programme's broader educational and cultural exchange aspirations, integrating the enhancement of language pedagogy with the promotion of cross-cultural understanding and international relations at the grassroots level (McConnell, 2000; Metzgar, 2017).

The assessment of the JET Programme's efficacy for Japanese students, as perceived by JTEs and JET participants, yields insightful distinctions in viewpoints, with JTEs exhibiting a more favourable assessment. This resonates with Galloway (2009), who notes that although there are logistical and pedagogical difficulties with incorporating ALTs into the classroom, JTEs often view the presence of native speakers as beneficial to them and their students. The average scores from question 19 of the JET participant questionnaire and question 15 of the JTE questionnaire, 'Do you think the JET Programme is worthwhile for Japanese students?' suggest a general consensus on the programme's positive impact on students. JTEs rated this impact more highly, with an average score of 8.32, compared to JETs, who scored an average of 7.63.

The notable difference in the proportion of 10/10 ratings—43% from JTEs as opposed to 22% from JETs—further highlights the variance in perception, with JTEs displaying a stronger conviction in the programme's utility for Japanese students. This difference could be attributed to JTEs' closer integration within the Japanese educational system and potentially a more direct and sustained interaction with students, which might offer them a clearer perspective on the programme's positive changes or benefits (Hiratsuka, 2022).

Conversely, the fact that 13% of JET participants rated the programme's effectiveness for students at 5 or below, slightly higher than the 11% of JTEs, introduces a critical perspective that warrants attention. This critical viewpoint from a segment of JET participants could reflect the challenges or limitations they perceive in translating the programme's objectives into tangible educational outcomes for students. Jeon (2019) reports ALTs 'feeling useless... wasted potential... taking a step down professionally' (p.8). Borg (2022) stipulates instances of the General Information Handbook supplied by CLAIR for all JET Programme participants for information on their job roles as being unclear regarding some aspects of the ALT's duties. Borg (2022) concludes that, effectively, CLAIR is asking ALTs to 'be prepared to do whatever is demanded by the person responsible for managing them' (p.47). Of course, there may be other, less tangible reasons for such responses, including individual mood, specific negative experiences and the impact of culture shock. One of the limitations of this study's structure is that it is impossible to know the respondents' state of mind when completing the questionnaires.

These findings underline the convergence in recognising JET's broader value and divergence in identifying the pedagogical failings. The variation in perceptions between JTEs and JET participants regarding the programme's value to Japanese students highlights the complexity of assessing educational interventions like the JET Programme. While there is broad agreement on its positive aspects, the subtle differences in evaluations suggest areas where the programme might be enhanced to serve its intended beneficiaries better, the Japanese student population. This further echoes McConnell's (2000) assertion that the JET Programme's success is multifaceted and can appear 'wonderfully impressive or horribly bad' (p.28) depending on perspective.

4.7 Theme Three: Role Ambiguity and Misalignment in the ALT-JTE Relationship

This theme accentuates the continued ambiguity regarding the roles and responsibilities of ALTs within the Japanese school system. JET participants and JTEs reflect on the misalignment between policy intentions and classroom realities, with both groups indicating a lack of clear guidelines on how JET participants, and ALTs in particular, should be deployed.

4.7.1 JET Participants' Perspective

Many JET participants, predominantly ALTs, commented on the uncertainty they felt in their positions at their schools. They reported feeling unclear about their specific roles and responsibilities within the classroom. This is often compounded by trying to find a balance between teaching support and their cultural ambassador roles, which can lead to ambiguity about their purpose in the educational structure. This uncertainty is often exacerbated by differences in teaching styles and objectives between ALTs and JTEs, causing friction and misalignment in the team-teaching environment.

The recurrent identification of role ambiguity and collaboration challenges between ALTs and JTEs within the JET Programme, as documented in scholarly literature spanning from the programme's early years to more recent analyses, underscores a persistent issue that has yet to be adequately resolved. This was highlighted in detail in Chapter 2, the Literature Review. This enduring issue suggests a complex interplay of awareness, institutional inertia, and perhaps systemic constraints that have hindered CLAIR and the associated government entities from effectively addressing these challenges. The following questionnaire comments illustrate how ambiguity over expectations manifests in everyday teaching practices.

- #60 - The people brought over, from my experience and from talking to other ALTs across Japan, generally don't actually have a teaching degree or experience, and the vast majority view this job as little more than a working vacation. If more teachers were chosen, or people with actual teaching experience, it would be a far more effective exchange
- #52 - I think there is sometimes confusion about this, but once you arrive at your placement, "JET" has very little to do with you anymore. Any troubles or difficulties you have with your placement are left for you to deal with on your own. I (as I know many of my co-JETs also) had a mixed experience on the program, partially due to problems with our Board of Education (our CO [Contracting Organisation] while on JET). There is no support for airing grievances or what to do when your CO simply doesn't support you. While this is not to say the program overall is bad or that all placements are bad, I think people come to Japan thinking JET is this very prominent, powerful company when it simply is just a title on the resume. You don't report to, work for, or get paid by "The JET Program" after all.
- #126 - I'm not sure what your angle is? Perhaps there is a need for the aims of JET to be more concretely established and communicated - especially to the schools and the staff. I think there is a lot lost in translation (and communication style). JTEs often know Jack about JET - other than "here is a foreigner you have to do team-teaching with (who has no training)". Sometimes too much is expected of ALTs - JTEs

think they should be equivalent to qualified teachers yet the jet aims are more who (sic) do with internationalisation

- #241 - Many times they are very rigid and don't compromise or discuss things with ALTs or share expectations.
- #31 - The question I always think of what this is, relative to what? I would definitely say that the program had more positive impact than neutral or negative. That being said, there is a lot of wasted opportunity in the bureaucracy of the program itself, the lack of qualifications for most teachers, the lack of training, and perhaps, most importantly, the underutilization of and lack of expectations and standards for the teachers.

Collectively, these comments demonstrate a systematic lack of understanding about who is responsible for setting standards (#52, #126) and the perception that ALTs lack any real pedagogical authority (#60, #31). Framing the JET Programme as 'just a title on the resume' (#52) highlights that neither CLAIR nor BoEs provide unified, cohesive guidance. This reinforces the theme of role ambiguity as ALTs are unsure of how to perceive themselves as predominantly teachers, cultural ambassadors or temporary staff. These feelings of dissatisfaction echo Browne and Wada's (1998) and McConnell's (2000) early critiques of the JET Programme, which placed ALTs in schools and BoEs without any fundamental guidelines, leaving the institutions to improvise. Consequently, the confusion between the official rhetoric of team teaching and intercultural exchange with the actual daily practicalities of ALTs drives the continuing role ambiguity within the JET Programme.

Hiratsuka (2022) comments that many ALTs enter the programme with aspirations to make significant contributions to English education in Japan, driven by their enthusiasm and innovative ideas, something which my cohort and I can attest to having been discussed at many social gatherings during my four years on the JET Programme. However, the constraints imposed by the lack of clear role definition and the hesitancy to infringe upon traditional educational practices often lead ALTs to pivot towards cultural exchange as a primary focus of their tenure. While introducing diverse cultures to Japanese students is undoubtedly a valuable aspect of the JET Programme, it raises questions about the optimal utilisation of ALTs' skills and the programme's capacity to effect substantive pedagogical advancements in English language education. The following comments from respondents #5 and #8 demonstrate how these constraints are exhibited in real classroom interactions and proposed solutions.

- #5 - It could be very beneficial with better hiring and more integration so JTEs have PD but the way it's done now just results in frustrations on both sides.
- #8 - Some teachers still wanted to use me as a human tape recorder, but most were willing to try something different. [...] I doubt that the vast majority of team-taught classes are informed by SLA (Second Language Acquisition) research findings. That's the problem. Teachers just don't know or ignore what 50 years of SLA research has told us. And even if they did, the requirements imposed on them e.g. to teach for tests and to cover certain pages in textbooks preclude them from doing anything innovative. For teachers who know little about SLA, I'm sure they can find team-teaching interesting and feel that they are doing

something worthwhile. Now that I have learned about SLA research, however, I could never go back to teaching like that anymore.

Both respondents (#5 and #8) identify a core problem: Without dedicated teacher training or a codified framework for collaboration, ALTs will be utilised as the human tape recorder. These comments reveal a desire for more teaching engagement and a more explicit definition of their responsibilities, starkly contrasting the current, loosely defined approach.

These comments underscore the necessity for a more structured framework that clearly articulates the roles, expectations, and collaborative models for ALTs and JTEs within the JET Programme. Such a framework should aim to harness the full spectrum of ALTs' capabilities, facilitating their active involvement in pedagogical innovation and curriculum development alongside their contributions to cultural exchange. Establishing clear guidelines and fostering open communication between ALTs, JTEs, and educational administrators is paramount to maximising the programme's impact on English language education in Japan and ensuring that the engagement of ALTs extends beyond cultural introductions to encompass meaningful pedagogical contributions. The following response to question 26, 'Have you/would you recommend the JET Programme to someone?' encapsulates this.

- #81 - I think JET is a very exciting opportunity. That being said I think the program needs to examine it's (sic) goals and adjust their programming to match. Without intentional planning, advocacy, and support the amount of meaningful connection and conversation is limited. Thank you!

Respondent #81's comment adds a more encapsulating perspective: While JET is exciting, it lacks intentional planning and clear support channels. This mirrors respondent #126's previous suggestion that the JET Programme goals must be explicitly articulated for ALTs and JTEs. From the ALT's perspective, we can see that they seek clarity in their responsibilities and professional agency in the classroom. Yet the JET Programme's current vague delineation of roles and limited, sporadic training perpetuates the ALT to the sidelines and diminishes their teaching potential.

4.7.2 JTEs' Perspective

JTEs' comments appear to view the ALT as predominantly a supplementary role, providing native English exposure and cultural insights in conjunction with supporting the main lesson plan. However, JTEs experience frustration when they perceive the ALT as unprofessional, unprepared, or unaligned with their idea of pedagogical practices. I once encountered an experienced JTE at an ALT-JTE training seminar who commented that none of this was beneficial as it would not change how he taught his classes by himself or with an ALT. This disparity can lead to misunderstandings regarding lesson roles and teaching goals. This is further exacerbated when JTEs feel that ALTs are not fully integrated into the Japanese school system. In addition to the extra daily responsibilities that most JTEs have, such as after-school club activities, homeroom tasks and preparing students for the entrance tests. All of which often leads to ALTs remaining on the periphery.

The JTE questionnaire data reveal a dichotomy of perspectives: Some respondents express positive experiences, while others note their difficulties or frustrations with role clarity. The following comments highlight these mixed perspectives.

- #14 - It depends on ALTs communication skills. Some ALTs prefer to stay with other ALTs and rarely communicate with local Japanese people. This is also the case when they are in school; some do not show any interests (sic) in communicating with teachers who do not speak English.
- #1 - It sometimes makes teachers feel troublesome.
- #27 - A Program that helps for the Person (sic) who wants to work in Japan.
- #15 - I think JET Programme participants are one of our English teachers.
- #3 - To make English education more practical and authentic with the help of native speakers.

Although respondents #15 and #3 extol the virtues of ALTs for their 'authentic' language exposure, #14 and #1 demonstrate the frustrations that JTEs may feel burdened if ALTs lack initiative or Japanese language ability. This combination of perceptions suggests that while JTEs recognise the potential of ALTs, they can also find it challenging to integrate them into their regular teaching activities without a clear, defined role structure. Borg (2018) and McConnell (2000) argue that this lack of a central, top-down, clear directive creates uncertainty for both JTEs and ALTs regarding the specific role of ALTs.

Some JTEs reflect on the positives and negatives of working with ALTs, while others note that they are unsure how to work with an ALT effectively. Others comment on the difficulties an ALT poses in the classroom and the problems outside the working environment. As previously noted in the Literature Review, a Japanese school teacher has many extracurricular duties, and working with an ALT can often feel like an extra, unwanted burden. More straightforward guidelines from CLAIR on how and why the ALT is placed at a school would help clarify the role and expectations of the ALT. This would also help align the JET programme goals with the day-to-day actualities of the JTE and ALT.

Question 11 states: Just thinking about your time working with JET Programme participants, do you have an overall positive impression of working with them? Below, comments #12 and #14 demonstrate the inherent tensions between valuing ALTs' contributions and resenting the additional supervisory role. Respondent #29 advocates for more dialogue between the two parties, and #6 comments on the issue of underutilisation. Collectively, these comments underscore that without clear, explicit guidelines or consistent, effective training, JTEs remain unclear whether ALTs can be trusted or fully integrated into Japanese classrooms.

- #12 - ALTs are sometimes very helpful for both students and teachers. They play some roles that we JTE cannot do. [...] Also, the supervisor's job is burdensome.
- #29 - We both should try to teach each other positively. The aim of this program should be discussed between JTEs and ALTs more and more.
- #1 - I enjoyed working with them, but sometimes I didn't make use of the opportunities to work with them.

- #14 - Some ALTs are highly motivated to teach their culture as well as languages, and try to learn more about Japan through communicating with Japanese people. However, many of them who I have worked with were not very professional or lack of passion, which often discouraged me.
- #21 - work together and inspire students' motivations to (sic) foreign language
- #6 - Sometimes under utilized (sic).

These perspectives highlight the need for mutual understanding and defined responsibilities to enhance the ALT-JTE collaboration and improve classroom effectiveness. This is a repetitive thread running throughout the history of the JET Programme as discussed by Adachi et al. (1998), Hasegawa (2008), Hiratsuka (2022) and McConnell (1996; 2000).

4.7.3 Conclusion to Theme Three: Comparison of Perspectives

Both groups perceive that role ambiguity and misalignment significantly shape their daily interactions. ALTs often feel frustrated at being underutilised or lacking clear guidance, reflecting Browne and Wada's (1998) observation that there is an enduring absence of standardised ALT job description within the JET Programme. On the other hand, JTEs often view ALTs as valuable additions to their classroom, offering language support. However, JTEs often struggle to integrate ALTs into existing classroom practices without explicit directives (McConnell, 2000). Both ALTs and JTEs converge on the notion that the JET Programme's policy objectives, including team teaching and cultural exchange, are not translated clearly into consistent, school-level guidelines.

Despite this congruence on the problem, a divergence in assigning responsibility arises. Many ALTs agree that neither CLAIR nor BoEs provide sufficient training or adoption of teaching standards. This is exacerbated by the JET Programme mantra of Every Situation is Different (Borg, 2020). In contrast, this lack of clarity contributes to a scenario wherein both ALTs and JTEs navigate their professional engagements cautiously, often underutilising the ALTs' potential contributions to language education. This resonates with Hiratsuka (2022), who believes the absence of explicit, well-defined guidelines delineating the responsibilities and functions of ALTs within the Japanese educational framework is one of the main contributing factors.

The ambiguity surrounding the ALT role and the ALT-JTE relationship is a shared challenge, which suggests a need for more transparent communication and defined expectations. Metzgar (2017) suggests that the JET Programme's broader soft power objectives can overshadow the practicalities of shared lesson planning and role definition, leaving the two parties to carry out their tasks in an informal and unstandardised manner. A more harmonious and productive team-teaching relationship would help foster and enhance the pedagogical effectiveness and cultural exchange.

4.8 Theme Four: Promoting Internationalisation and Global Awareness in Japan

Theme four encapsulates the broader, more nebulous aim of the JET Programme to foster internationalisation in Japan, as discussed in Chapter 2 and by authors such as Borg (2008), Metzgar (2017) and McConnell (2000), especially at the grassroots level. JET participants and JTEs both demonstrate an understanding of this key concept of the JET Programme, although it is more pronounced in the JET participant responses. The significance of this theme was highlighted in my direct communications with the CLAIR head office, who stated that 'we believe that the JET Programme impacts not only those directly involved with the Programme but also all of Japan in a ripple-on effect' (CLAIR, personal communication, 27 March, 2023). This 'ripple-on effect' suggests that the programme is envisioned as a catalyst for promoting global awareness and cross-cultural competencies across Japanese society. This aligns with Metzgar's (2017) notion that this grassroots approach was always intended to further Japan's cultural awareness beyond the confines of major urban areas.

4.8.1 JET Participants' Perspective

The responses from this group frequently demonstrate their knowledge of the JET Programme's more comprehensive mission to internationalise Japan, mainly through promoting cross-cultural exchanges in the school environment. Many participants commented on their active role in introducing global perspectives to students and how they see themselves as imperative to broadening their students' awareness of the wider global community, something that would remain alien to many students in the earlier years of the JET Programme and is still the case in the smaller, more rural towns of Japan, McConnell (2000) and Metzgar (2017) remark that this is one of the most successful aspects of the JET Programme. However, there is still a degree of disillusionment regarding what is perceived as strict guidance around ALTs' ability to contribute meaningfully to these goals.

As has already been demonstrated in Theme One, the JET Programme participant community predominantly understands the broader aims of the JET Programme. As shown below, some of their responses also demonstrate the subtler nuances of Japan's importation of internationalisation. However, the expectation is that the JET participant will then return to their home country to spread the goodwill accrued during their limited time in Japan. McConnell (2000) writes that this approach 'provides important insights into how Japanese approach learning from abroad' (p.11). For example, McConnell (2000) cites an 1856 institute created in Japan to learn and use ideas from abroad by importing 'hired foreigners' (p.8). Jones (1980) refers to these hired foreigners, known as oyatoi gaikokujin, being asked to leave the country by the Japanese government once they had fulfilled their obligations of teaching the local populace.

This perspective resonates with the stated objectives of the JET Programme, particularly in relation to its soft power goals. McConnell (2000) and Metzgar (2017) cite the expectation of JET Programme officials for JET participants to return to their home country after completing their time on the JET Programme. Metzgar (2017) emphasises this programme goal, stating that regarding 'attitudes toward Japan among those participants, after they return home, indications are those views are more positive than those of average Americans' (p.158). The following responses accentuate the positive image garnered by JET Programme participants.

- #231 - Participating in the JET Program was a life-changing opportunity for me.
- #236 - The JET Program was responsible for some of the most memorable moments of my life. Sometimes, I wish I could do it again.
- #102 - I believe it is a wish of the program that you learn about the Japanese culture and share what you've learned and experienced with people in your life, wherever you may be from. And at the same time, that Japanese people learn about your and other cultures, and can use this to open their minds to what exists outside of Japan.
- #74 - I believe that the exchange refers to what the ALT brings to the classroom in regards to their home country, to share about the wider world with their students/colleagues.
- #105 - Introduce Japanese children, who live in a monocultural society, to the diverse globalised society
- #126 - Not so much for improving English but in terms of broadening horizons in an increasingly globalised world or (sic) is invaluable
- #45 - Promote international exchange and serve as a bridge between Japan and my country through cultural exchanges
- #98 - There's the "tatemae" goal of internationalizing Japan and bringing in English speakers from around the world to connect with Japanese children and adults in local communities, and the corresponding goal of having exJETs share Japanese culture in their home countries. But I think the "honne" (intentions) goal is something else... which I'm not sure quite how to articulate.... Japan is very happy to have foreign visitors and guests, but it doesn't really want to have foreigners come and stay and become part of the community. The three-year limit (currently five-year) on contract renewals is not the only evidence for that, and it's important to note that jobs for Japanese nationals are increasingly using those limited-term contracts, which are great for employers but suck for workers... The other complicated piece is connected to language -- Japan is ok with having its residents learn English (to a point), but I don't think we would see a similar effort put towards learning an other (sic) East Asian or Southeast Asian language.... Could it be that JET is Japan's hidden effort to increase the number of "desirable" foreigners, since it clearly has an ambivalent relationship with "undesirable" foreigners, in particular because of increasing dependence on foreign workers... So, what is the main goal of JET? Perhaps a very expensive attempt to pay lip service to internationalization without making much true effort to change...

These respondents' comments demonstrate how JET Programme participants interpret their roles as expanding students' horizons (#102, #105) and leaving a lasting impression of Japan upon returning to their home countries (#231, #236). Respondent #98's response in particular, exemplifies a clear understanding of the duality present in the JET Programme's internationalisation efforts: 'tatemae vs honne'. These Japanese terms can be interpreted as the outward appearance you want to show everyone else —tatemae -, and the real intentions of your actions —honne. This duality highlights the perceived superficiality in the JET Programme's approach to genuine cultural integration (McConnell, 2000).

As previously articulated, one of the programme's aspirations is for JET participants to immerse themselves in Japanese culture, garner positive experiences, and disseminate favourable impressions of Japan upon returning to their countries of origin. However, the choice of some participants to remain in Japan after completing their JET tenure, although they may not directly influence their home communities through physical presence, can be construed as a potent endorsement of the programme's success. The decision to extend their stay signifies a profound appreciation and affinity for the Japanese way of life, which, in itself, could be deemed a more potent testament to the positive experiences that the MIC and MOFA sought to cultivate through the programme. Consequently, such outcomes could be viewed as a dual victory for both MIC and MOFA, underlining the programme's efficacy in fostering lasting bonds and affinities with Japan among Jet Programme's participants. The following responses highlight the awareness of the JET Programme's soft power goals.

- #55 - They say it's to promote cross-cultural understanding, but really I think it's soft power for Japan. When JETs return to their home country and talk about the great time they had in Japan to their friends and family, it increases interest in Japan abroad.
- #73 - Because the Japanese government is more interested in promoting Japan to foreign people than it is in cultivating interest in Japanese people living abroad. This is also reflected in the content and structure of the English curriculum. The characters rarely (never?) go abroad, they are helping foreigners in Japan.

This last answer (#73), in particular, highlights a key facet of the JET Programme that is often perceived as the broader perception of Japan's approach to international exchange and immigration. This approach is characterised by a willingness to engage with foreign ideas and individuals for the purpose of study and cultural exchange, juxtaposed with a tendency to maintain a clear distinction between temporary engagement and long-term integration within Japanese society. Minoru Wada, one of the key policymakers of the JET Programme, admitted to McConnell (2000, p.61) that "Since we have proclaimed the high ideals of internationalization, at the very least we must go through the motions of accommodating those ideals. But," he added, "and I'm sure I'll be criticized for saying this, I don't think Japan will change that much. We're not going to become like other countries."

The comments illustrated in Theme Four reinforce Metzgar's (2017) soft-power assertion, demonstrating the significant role ALTs play in shaping foreign perceptions of Japan, even as participants (#98, #126) question whether the current structure allows for true, lasting societal change. This tension underlines how ALTs converge on promoting cultural exchange yet diverge on how authentic or long-lasting that exchange can be with the JET Programme's current structure.

4.8.2 JTEs' Perspective

JTEs see internationalisation as a valuable outcome of the JET Programme, especially in rural areas where students have limited foreign exposure. Many JTEs recognise that while the programme helps broaden students' worldviews, it tends to go hand in hand with what they perceive as the primary goal of English education. Although the JTEs see the significance of internationalisation, they

might feel it is less critical because of the practical limitations and more nebulous concepts within the educational curriculum.

The JTE's comments in response to question 11 generally reflect positively on the role of the ALTs in promoting internationalisation and cultural awareness outside the classroom. They see ALTs as cultural ambassadors who expose their students to English language usage, which they feel, as JTEs, they cannot bring so easily to the classroom.

- #26 - They tell our students cultural and habitual things, which most students are interested in but we cannot tell easily. Plus, I am so motivated by communicating with them. I always feel like discovering something new when talking to them. I personally enjoy getting to know people from abroad.
- #30 - At our school we are making the most of the two ALTs of ours, one full time and the other part-time. They are very busy giving regular team-taught classes, correcting students' compositions and helping with various activities after school (e.g. ESS) and outside school (e.g. speech contests, debate competitions, presentation competitions). We really appreciate their contribution to our English education. They can do what JTEs cannot do.
- #25 - It's irreplaceable to know other countries or regions through a 'raw' person.
- #13 - To cultivate students' global mindsets by expanding their knowledge and viewpoints. Students learn a lot about different lifestyles, cultures, and ways of thinking.
- #9 - Without going abroad, we can communicate with them.
- #6 - They have special power to turn on the switch of motivation of students.
- #16 - Students have time to communicate with Foreigners and that makes them get interested in English.

These comments demonstrate the value that JTEs see in having ALTs at their school, not only for the perceived benefits of bringing real-life culture into their classroom but also through the extracurricular activities that many ALTs take part in highlighted by #30. This is consistent with Galloway's (2009) claim that JTEs often rely on native speakers to bring real-life cultural narratives inaccessible through textbooks into the classroom.

There are, however, some negative and disparaging comments that should be noted. These mainly stem from ALTs who see their time on the JET Programme as a stop-gap measure and do not take their responsibilities as seriously as JTEs would like.

- #3 - One of the current ALTs at my school is passionately learn (sic) teaching skill and Japanese language so that she can enjoy her life here. Meanwhile, the other one is like a migrant worker. Once the value of Yen started to drop, he decided to leave Japan breaking the contract.
- #13 - This program is beneficial for participants who have a passion (sic) to develop their student's language skills and make the most of their experiences they've had in Japan. However, there are some ALTs who prioritize earning money or enjoying their free time rather than dedicating themselves to carrying out their duties.

- #14 - It depends on ALTs teaching skills. Some ALTs, especially who do not have any working/teaching experience before the JET program, are not very professional. I have met some ALTs who said they decided to participate in the JET program just because they could not find a job in their own country.
- #16 - For the past few years, ALTs around me went back to their home country earlier than I had expected. So I wonder whether this programme didn't have a great meaning for them.

Respondents #3, #13 and #14 demonstrate the range of ALTs that are accepted onto the JET Programme, while #16 comments on the unprofessional nature attributed to some ALTs. This conflicting perception was also put forward by Machida and Walsh's (2014) research, which concluded that the JTEs in their study found ALTs useful but an extra burden. Machida and Walsh (2014) also concluded that while JTEs thought the English classes with ALTs were beneficial, they disliked having to prepare with ALTs, especially those who could not communicate in Japanese or were perceived as unprofessional.

Considering that more than 79,000 individuals from over 80 countries have participated in the JET Programme to date (JET Programme, 2024), it is unsurprising that some JETs will be uninterested in promoting the programme's internationalisation goals and see it as a means of personal gratification instead. However, the majority of JTEs view ALTs as assets capable of assisting with classroom activities and extracurricular tasks.

4.8.3 Conclusion to Theme Four: Comparison of Perspectives

The divergent perspectives of JET participants and JTEs regarding the JET Programme's focus on internationalisation underscore a complex interplay between cultural exchange and language education objectives. JETs and JTEs alike recognise the programme's broader role in fostering intercultural understanding, yet each group's emphasis reveals different priorities. While JETs frequently refer to the cultural diplomacy aspect of their roles and the limited positive impact on students' English proficiency (Metzgar, 2017), JTEs tend to prioritise the programme's educational contributions within the classroom, also noted by Browne and Wada (1998), indicating a difference in focus. This contrast suggests that, although the programme's goals are understood at a general level, specific objectives might be interpreted differently by each stakeholder group, affecting their experiences and expectations. Japan's selective approach to internationalisation, as previously outlined by Minoru Wada's comments to McConnell (2000), can be problematic for foreigners living in Japan.

This somewhat ethnocentric approach to internationalisation is illustrated by Japan's response to the economic downturn in 2009, wherein the Japanese government instituted a policy offering financial incentives for Brazilian and Peruvian residents of Japanese descent to return to their country of origin (Matsushita, n.d.; Calazans, 2009). A critical element of this policy was the stipulation that individuals accepting the financial repatriation package and their children or future children would be precluded from reapplying for the 'nikkei' visa—a special category visa designated for foreign workers of Japanese ancestry.

This policy, implemented by former health minister and senior lawmaker of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, Jiro Kawasaki, reflects a broader ideological opposition to the transition of Japan into a multiethnic society. Kawasaki is quoted in the *New York Times* as stating, “We should stop letting unskilled laborers into Japan. We should make sure that even the three-K jobs -kitsui (hard), kitanai (dirty), kiken (dangerous) (translations in parentheses provided by the researcher) are paid well, and that they are filled by Japanese, ... I do not think that Japan should ever become a multiethnic society” (Tabuchi, 2009). Kawasaki's remarks embody a significant viewpoint within Japanese policy circles that advocates for a homogeneous societal fabric, emphasising the preservation of cultural and ethnic uniformity. McConnell (2000) details Japan's historical reluctance to accept and fully integrate foreign workers beyond short-term stays, while Seargeant (2008) also questions the desire of Japan's educational policymakers to embrace and enact fundamental, meaningful changes.

When considered in conjunction with the experiences and perceptions of JET Programme participants, this ideological aspiration highlights the multilayered landscape of cultural exchange, international engagement, and national identity in Japan. It demonstrates the tension between Japan's outward-looking initiatives, such as the JET Programme, aimed at fostering international understanding and cooperation, and inward-facing policies that seek to maintain a certain degree of cultural and societal homogeneity. This duality presents a profound and ongoing challenge for Japan as it navigates its role on the global stage, balancing the benefits of international exchange with the imperatives of national identity and cultural preservation. Liddicoat (2007) provides a thorough analysis of internationalisation in Japan and how it is closely linked to culture and language. Liddicoat (2007) claims that internationalisation in Japan is ‘mono-directional’ (p.38), emphasising the adoption of Western knowledge but ensuring that Japanese values and attitudes remain unchanged by integrating Western systems.

The shift in participants' perceptions towards a more affirmative acknowledgement of the JET Programme's contribution to internationalisation can be attributed to various factors, not least of which may be the influence of critical discourse, including McConnell's (2000) own analysis. The frequent references to McConnell's (2000) work in the questionnaire responses suggest that his critiques and observations have permeated the consciousness of the JET community, fostering a more critical and reflective engagement with the programme's aims and outcomes. This heightened awareness and informed perspective among JET participants could be seen as a direct or indirect consequence of the academic and public discourse surrounding the JET Programme, catalysed partly by McConnell's (2000) contributions. This is also referenced in Hiratsuka's (2022) research, which observes an increase in ALTs' awareness of JET Programme policy-level critiques, suggesting that seminal works like McConnell (2000) have pervaded participants' more significant understanding of the programme's shortcomings.

However, the critical voices, such as those highlighted by McCrostie (2017), who question the allocation of resources to the JET Programme and its cost-effectiveness, represent a significant counter-narrative that challenges the programme's value proposition. Carless (2006) also stresses that the financial burden of hiring foreign ALTs without structured pedagogical outcomes may minimise the potential benefits. The presence of such critiques, coupled with the notable

percentage of lower questionnaire scores from both JETs and JTEs, lends some weight to the debate over the programme's utility and its justification as a public expenditure.

In light of these divergent perspectives, an argument could be made for the programme's administrators and associated government bodies to comprehensively evaluate the JET Programme. This evaluation should aim to address the concerns raised by its critics and the lower-scoring respondents while capitalising on the programme's acknowledged strengths as identified by its proponents. The goal should be to enhance the programme's effectiveness, ensure alignment with its educational and cultural exchange objectives, and maximise its value to the Japanese public and the broader international community. However, many of these issues outlined in this study have been a thread pervading the JET Programme for over three decades. In one of the earliest studies conducted on the JET Programme, Sturman (1989) highlights these same issues, which are then reiterated by Nakatsugawa (2011) and again, more recently, by Hiratsuka (2022).

4.9 Theme Five: JET Participants' Satisfaction and Professional Development

Theme five focuses on how JET participants perceive the programme's personal and professional benefits. An overall high satisfaction level reflects the personal development and cross-cultural experiences gained. However, frustrations again appear due to the perceived inefficiency of teaching practices and the perception that there are mixed messages regarding professional support. Tajino (2002) remarks that there are cases where JTEs consider ALTs as 'guests from abroad, rather than as teaching partners' (p.40). This suggestion that ALTs are not perceived as professionals may increase the frustrations of ALTs and accentuate the feelings of inadequate professional support.

4.9.1 JET Participant Perceptions

JET participants report high levels of satisfaction and recommendation of the JET Programme. This is reflected in the almost unanimous endorsement of 97% (255 out of 267 replies) when asked if they would recommend the JET Programme to someone. Common highlights include the opportunity for cross-cultural engagement and personal growth during their limited tenure. However, some participants expressed concerns about the lack of career advancements and opportunities. Others noted the lack of professional development, the absence of structured pathways to enhance their teaching skills, or the opportunities to pursue longer-term teaching roles within the programme. Some JET participants reflected favourably on the professional growth they experienced while on the JET Programme. This is understandable given the national scale of the programme, the motivations of the JET participants and its mantra of ESID (every Situation is Different). This is accentuated by the first two comments below, in response to question 15: Do you think the JET Programme is a worthwhile venture for the JET participants?

- #77 - While it was not a perfect experience and there were many frustrations both professionally and personally of living in a country and culture different from my own, I have very few regrets about spending five years of my life there. I learned and grew on every level, and it is an undeniably beautiful and fascinating country. Outside of extenuating circumstances (bullying/abuse; completely incompatible placements; isolation...), I believe that the program can be what one makes of it. I think people need to be outside their comfort zone to have some growth in their personal lives. By seeing, living and exchanging cultures, you see the world in (sic) a different angle
- #88 - It entirely depends on if you want to stay in Japan or not. The Program gets you to Japan. There is no ongoing language training, professional training, career support, or anything else in the vein of these. ESID is a lazy crutch that the program uses to avoid any direct action in actually benefitting participants at all. However, if you want an interesting 1 year note on your resume and plan on returning to your home country, then the Program is perfect. I have not encountered a single company here in Japan that cares at all about the JET Program outside of underpaid ALT and Eikawa work. Personally, it is a wonderful experience working with teachers and students. Professionally? If you don't want to be an ESL teacher, then it is a massive waste of your time. Especially if you want to live in Japan long term.

- #133 - I believe that the vast majority of the ALTs I met on JET both made my own experience enjoyable, and also had pretty healthy and enjoyable experiences overall, including the work portion of the program. I personally experienced quite a bit of growth and would have loved to stay longer, had I had the capacity to do so in a healthy way.
- #191 - Job opportunities involving growth don't readily exist for foreigners in Japan. We were at a point in our lives where we had to plant our roots somewhere, and this was a key deciding factor.

Here, we can see examples of how different ALTs view the JET Programme, personally and professionally. #77 and #133 offer insights into how the JET Programme was responsible for their personal and cultural growth. However, respondent #88 laments the absence of serious professional development, while #191 also points out the lack of future job prospects after the JET Programme. This aligns with Borg's (2020) findings, which concluded that there is a lack of institutional support for ALTs looking to advance their career or professional development opportunities beyond basic ALT roles.

- #131 - I don't think we can offer much more academically than what a decent English teacher can. Unless it's one of the small group of jets that are actually trained to teach esl.
- #7 - There are many positives to the programme, and you tend to hear more positives (lasting friendships and relationships, both professional and personal) that have happened as a result. However, as Japan, for the most is slow to, and resistant to, change, there are stories of resentment of the working practices of the JETs (mostly ALTs) and consequently those of the country of origin of said JET and/or resentment of the working policies and procedures within Japan.
- #53 - I completed two years and greatly enjoyed the experience. One of my primary reasons was to really dig-in to the teaching profession. After two years, I was still committed to teaching/education as a career pursuit. However, given my school context as an ALT, there was not much more I could capitalize on as an ALT. I had one school where my role was more for school status (i.e. "parade around the native speaker") versus the other where my role was more intentional. The other factor was knowing only functional Japanese meant there was some element of superficiality to engaging with people meaningfully after two years. Overall, I did not feel my personal/professional growth and development would grow beyond two years. Likewise, I did not see myself contributing much more meaningfully to cross-cultural exchange on-behalf of my country/culture beyond two years.
- #54 - If I had not done JET (twice) I would not be where I am today both professionally and personally. JET is challenging and rewarding - you get out what you put in.

These comments reflect the contradiction prevalent in the JET Programme. Many participants find their time culturally and personally rewarding, but diverge on whether it provides a meaningful professional trajectory. Carless (2006) and Metzgar (2017) reflect these issues,

suggesting that the ALT role can be limiting and stagnating without structured professional development.

The responses to Questions 14 and 15 are particularly pertinent to this theme. Question 14 asks, 'Just thinking about your time on the JET Programme, do you have an overall positive impression of living and working in Japan?'. Question 15 asks, 'Do you think the JET Programme is a worthwhile venture for the JET participants?'.

The responses to Question 14, within the context of this research, offer quantifiable insights into the programme's success in engendering a favourable perception of Japan among its participants. With an overall average score of 7.95 out of 10, the data suggests a predominantly positive reception of the JET Programme experience. This is further substantiated by the distribution of scores, wherein only 13% (equivalent to 33 out of 267 responses) were rated six or below, indicating a lesser degree of satisfaction. Conversely, the most frequent score, representing 34% (88 responses), was an 8, underscoring a substantial proportion of participants who rated their experience highly.

Responses to question 15 offer a highly favourable outlook of the JET Programme's benefits for JET participants. The average score was 8.48 out of 10, with only 12% (29 out of 267 respondents) scoring 6 or less. The most common score was 10 out of 10, with 39% (equivalent to 103 responses) giving this question the highest score possible, signifying a strong endorsement of the programme's impact.

These two metrics, coupled with the 97% recommendation rate for the JET Programme, demonstrate the positivity experienced by many, and perhaps most JET Programme participants. This was essentially the JET Programme's main objective when it was first conceived. The three government ministries responsible for the JET Programme wanted to bring young, foreign graduates to Japan to enjoy themselves and then relate their positive experiences of living in Japan to compatriots when they return to their country of origin.

Thus, when evaluating the JET Programme's overall impact, adopting a holistic perspective that encompasses its educational objectives and wider aims of fostering cross-cultural understanding and positive international relations is crucial. The evidence presented herein suggests that, in promoting international goodwill and enhancing Japan's image abroad, the JET Programme can indeed be deemed a success, countering narratives that paint it as ineffectual or wasteful.

This positive affirmation is echoed in the JET participants' responses, with 200 out of 267 respondents giving a score of 5 or higher to the question, 'Has the JET Programme had any kind of impact on your current employment?'. With only 54 scoring 4 or below. As can be seen, there is an overall positive impression of JET participants' time on the JET Programme despite some of the difficulties faced during their tenure.

The discussion surrounding the JET Programme's effectiveness and its broader implications in the realm of international relations and diplomacy is enriched by the perspectives of various scholars and practitioners, particularly those from the United States who have been directly involved

with the programme. Such individuals' endorsement of the JET Programme emphasises its significance beyond the confines of educational outcomes, highlighting its role in fostering diplomatic ties and mutual understanding between Japan and the United States.

This perspective is further corroborated by Gannon, Auslin, and Cottingham-Streater (2010), all alumni of the JET Programme who subsequently ascended to roles influencing Japan-US policy dynamics. In their commentary for the *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper, they clarify the understated yet profound contribution of the JET Programme to public diplomacy. They argue that the programme's most significant legacy may reside in its success as a vehicle for public diplomacy, subtly facilitating a deeper, more intricate engagement between the two nations. Metzgar (2017) also references how one of the cornerstones of the JET Programme's objectives is to develop positive cross-cultural relationships. These metrics, 7.95 and 8.48 average scores with a 97% recommendation rate, reinforce how effectively it resonates with most participants, supporting Metzgar's (2017) stance that JET alumni often become informal ambassadors when their time on JET concludes.

4.9.2 JTEs' Perceptions

While not quite as positive as the JET participants' score, the JTEs generally view the programme as beneficial for ALTs' professional and cultural development, acknowledging its value in providing ALTs with unique experiences. However, JTEs have raised concerns regarding the long-term professional benefits for ALTs, particularly if participants lack formal teaching qualifications. Concerns about insufficient training or support to fully utilise ALTs in the classroom are also raised.

Question 13 of the JTE questionnaire asks, 'Do you think the JET Programme is worthwhile for the JET participants?'. The average score is slightly less than the JET participants' score at 7.52 compared to 7.95, respectively. The JTEs' most common score is 7 out of 10, with 24% (equivalent to 7 out of 30 respondents) giving this score. Somewhat telling is that no JTE scored below 5 out of 10, signifying that all JTEs who answered consider the JET Programme somewhat beneficial for JET participants. The following responses to question 13 include:

- #9 - They can absorb Japanese customs and culture, living in Japan and touching (sic) the people.
- #11 - In addition to be able to get (sic) salary, they'll be able to learn foreign culture and understand the difference of the education system between Japan and their countries.
- #12 - Their work is rewarding and has less responsibility or burden than JTEs. However, at some schools, ALTs may not find their work as rewarding.
- #22 - Those participants will have great experiences at school and outside school, but I am not sure if it is meaningful for the short-term participants who will have a job unrelated to education in the future.

These comments align with McConnell's (2000) portrayal of JTEs who appreciate ALTs but question whether limited-term contracts foster genuine pedagogical skill-building. Cominos (1991) was critical of this over thirty years ago, stating that JTEs were not working to improve their teaching and were simply ignoring the ALTs placed at their schools. Hiratsuka (2022) explores the relationship between ALT and JTE in more detail, dividing ALTs into multiple identities. In many cases, the ALT identity is dictated by how the JTE perceives and treats the ALT (Hiratsuka, 2022). This is often

predicated by JTEs viewing the ALT as a temporary and unprofessional role. As such, JTEs do not devote time and resources towards helping ALTs, with Hiratsuka (2022) commenting that there are 'some JTEs who acted towards their ALTs as though they were inferior juniors and mere part-timers' (p.196).

The JTEs' perspectives accentuate the strengths and limitations of the JET Programme in terms of professional development for ALTs. Although JTEs acknowledge the programme's role in providing invaluable cultural and experiential learning opportunities, concerns about its ability to produce long-term professional benefits exist. This particularly applies to JET participants who lack formal teaching qualifications or adequate Japanese language proficiency.

4.9.3 Conclusion to Theme Five: Comparison of Perspectives

As perceived by both JET participants and JTEs, the question of the JET Programme being beneficial to JETs reveals a generally positive outlook from both groups, albeit with a slightly more favourable inclination among the JET participants. The average scores provided by JET participants and JTEs—8.48 and 7.52, respectively—indicate a recognition of the programme's value, with JET participants perceiving a marginally higher benefit level. JET participants' responses demonstrate a range of experiences, from being highly valuable for professional and personal growth to feelings of time wasted during their tenure on the JET Programme. Likewise, the JTEs' comments show instances of working with highly motivated ALTs keen to grasp the new opportunities provided by living in a new country, but also instances of extremely unhappy ALTs, which in some extreme cases resulted in ALTs breaking their contract to leave Japan early. This reflects one of the JET Programme's unwritten concepts: Every situation is different (ESID). This ESID concept has been covered in numerous literature (Hiratsuka, 2022; Jardon, 2018; McConnell, 1996; 2000; Nambu, 2015), with Borg (2020) in particular critiquing this principle, stating that it leads to inconsistency in support and training for ALTs, leading to a vast array of satisfaction levels. This shared perspective on the programme's strengths and limitations might provide policymakers with an opportunity for improvements in stability and sustainability that benefit both ALTs and JTEs.

The overwhelmingly positive response from JET Programme participants, with 97% indicating a willingness to recommend the programme to others, emphasises the perceived value and personal impact of their experiences within the programme. This near-universal endorsement, even from participants who commented on the difficulties and frustrations that they experienced, reflects the broad consensus among JET participants regarding the programme's benefits in terms of professional and personal development and fostering cultural understanding and international exchange. McConnell (2000) and Metzgar (2017) are both strong advocates of what they see as one of the main benefits of the JET Programme, in being able to promote a positive image of Japan and fostering enduring goodwill among alumni, corroborated in this study by the 97% recommendation rate.

While JTEs are not directly positioned to recommend participation in the JET Programme, given their role within the Japanese educational system rather than as potential applicants, their unsolicited affirmations of the programme's continuation, expressed in the free comment section of the questionnaire, signal a recognition of its positive contributions. These comments from JTEs can be interpreted as an acknowledgement of the value that the JET Programme adds to the educational

environment, the enhancement of language teaching methodologies, and the promotion of cultural exchange at the grassroots level. The following questionnaire responses exemplify JTEs' positive affirmation:

- #6 - I like English class, especially the time with ALTs.
- #8 - Hope this program will continue for a long time.
- #15 - We are very grateful that excellent JET Programme participants have chances (sic) to teach English in Japan. We are very happy to have many JET Programme participants every year. I do hope this JET Programme will continue longer.
- #25 - For Me, The JET PROGRAM is (sic) Highly Recommended Program.

Respondents #8 and #15 expressed their desire for the continuation of the JET Programme, while #6 mentioned their enjoyment of working with ALTs, and #25 commented on the prestige associated with the JET Programme. In 1996, Scholefield (1996) conducted research on what JTEs wanted from ALTs. The findings indicated that while teaching and helping in the classroom was important, the ALTs' attitude, demeanour, and assistance outside the classroom were viewed as a significant factor in positive ALT-JTE relationships. Carless (2006) also notes positive feedback from JTEs who commented that ALTs were often viewed as catalysts for communicative or culturally enriched lessons, reinforcing that the JET Programme's impact transcends mere classroom assistance.

These findings demonstrate the complex and varied experiences of individuals involved in the JET Programme, reflecting a spectrum of perspectives that range from highly favourable to critically dissatisfied. However, the overall positive tilt in the evaluations suggests that the programme is largely successful in achieving its objectives, as perceived by both JET participants and JTEs. Nonetheless, the existence of divergent experiences, especially the critically low scores from a minority of JET participants, indicates areas where the programme may need to focus on improvement, ensuring that it consistently meets the expectations and needs of all its stakeholders. Browne and Wada (1998) previously noted the mismatch between some ALTs' high expectations and the JET Programme's varied local conditions. They suggested that a more explicit framework could mitigate dissatisfaction among a minority. Hiratsuka (2022) similarly points to ALTs arriving in Japan with lofty ambitions of being able to change English education in Japan for the better and being disheartened when it does not transpire. Hiratsuka (2022) also recommends that ALTs be given more cultural training before moving to Japan, which could help temper their expectations and improve their overall satisfaction.

4.10 Theme Six: Challenges of Cultural and Professional Integration

Theme six addresses the difficulties that JET participants encounter when adjusting to living in a foreign culture and adapting to what many perceive as a rigid Japanese educational system. The main grievances encountered stem from ALTs' feelings of not being listened to, a lack of experience from JET participants and JTEs, and communication barriers. Borg (2020) identifies the ESID principle as one of the main contributing factors to JET Programme participants' feelings of inconsistencies leading to frustrations in cultural and classroom practices.

4.10.1 JET Participants' Perspectives

For many JET participants, adjusting to living and working in Japan provided many challenges. Common issues include navigating cultural and professional norms exacerbated by language barriers and expectations around work conduct. Participants reflected on feeling isolated or underprepared to fully integrate into Japanese society and a totally alien school environment. Hiratsuka (2022) reports that ALTs often arrive with very little preparation, both mentally and logistically. At the same time, Jacobs (2023) reflects on his own time on the JET Programme and suggests various methods to prepare for the JET Programme, such as planning for what to do after JET and ways to integrate into the local culture once you arrive at your placement.

The comments below, collated from multiple questions, reflect the relationship between the JET participants' feelings of being underutilised in the classroom and how it affects them outside their work duties.

- #103 - I would not say it's not worthwhile at all, but I think that applicants need to be really aware of the actual environment in which they will be working. The JET program/CLAIR itself barely offers any support to participants once they have been introduced to their contracting organizations (COs). Almost all communications from CLAIR go through staff at these contracting organizations, but the staff aren't typically trained or familiar with how the JET Program works therefore there is a lot of inefficiency and redundancy. Further, a lot of the COs are not well prepared to properly utilize JET participants' skills causing frustration to their supervisors and the program participants' themselves. Lastly, I feel CLAIR understands and is aware of many of these issues but has zero intention of enacting change because they know there are plenty of uninformed applicants waiting for an opportunity to join the program.
- #104 - I would love to see a version of JET in my country, as I think it will shock Japanese teachers out of their shells. The biggest frustration I had was that teachers wouldn't listen to JETs about how to improve teaching practices. It became a frustrating slog from year to year, especially when new teachers transferred in and you had to start back at the beginning. After over 3 decades in Japan, the quality of education seems like it hasn't changed and that JETs haven't had a measurable impact. Not having the ability to enact change and having to constantly fight with JTLs suggests that JETs aren't being well utilized.

Both #103 and #104 demonstrate participants' frustrations at insufficient structural guidance, echoing Borg's (2020) critique of ESID, where local BoEs and COs can vary significantly in their support of JET hires. #103 also notes that CLAIR may well be aware of many of these issues but

has no intention of addressing them due to the number of 'uninformed applicants' ready to join the JET Programme. This notion of unreadiness reflects the earlier claim by Hiratsuka (2022) and Jacobs (2023).

The following comments from #27 and #61 focus on the issue of feeling underutilised in a rigid education system. Carless (2006) also highlights this perspective, reporting that without clear guidelines and pedagogical frameworks, ALTs often view their roles as superficial.

- #27 - Team teaching is largely useless. Much better to split class sizes in half and have the jet teacher teach alone one week while the JTE teaches the other half and then swap. Having a Japanese teacher in the class almost always kills any chance of decent exposure to English because it's a safety net for students. Also most JETS are terrible teachers.
- #61 - I am a teacher with a passion for education. I mean it when I say that our position is completely useless. I studies (sic) esl for a long time and the teaching methods they use here are abysmal. They hire people who are under qualified to teach and to fill a role that isn't really needed/useful in education. We're not doing much harm, but I also don't think we're that useful. The only use I think we have is for increasing exposure for children to foreigners, but that could be done by increasing immigration or through better means.

Respondent #48 sees bureaucratic problems as some of the main issues limiting the career pathway of JET Programme participants, citing visa restrictions and the fact that ALTs arrive halfway through the Japanese school year in August. Respondent #181 focuses on the lack of training as problematic. These comments align with Browne and Wada (1998) and Hiratsuka (2022), who believe there should be more centralised support for the JET Programme.

- #48 - As a JET, you are given an Education/Instructor visa. This makes your job prospects very narrow since most schools are only hiring in April, but the program ends in July / August. Furthermore, with an Instructor Visa, one is only permitted to work at schools recognized by the Japanese government. Therefore, English schools, cram schools, and tutoring do not fall under that jurisdiction; a Humanities Visa is needed. If you do wish to change fields of work, it's challenging to find an institution that is willing to sponsor your visa. Most employers find it to troublesome to do the two pages of additional paperwork to hire a foreign employee. In most prefectures/BOEs they also do not permit side jobs. If JETs were permitted to work side jobs (so long as it doesn't interfere with their work) before the end of their contract, it would be a great segue for their life in Japan after JET.
- #181 - I think this is where the jet program could majorly improve. As it stands, teachers are just kind of thrown into coteaching with a JET, one who may or may not have teaching experience, and that is challenging. Many don't know how to work and collaborate in class and so many don't ask the ALTs to join class as often, or don't use them to the best of their ability. I think there should be trainings for JTEs from the CLAIR side, even if it's optional. As for BOE members, if they directly work with ALTs/cirs, I

think workshops and professional development opportunities could benefit and improve the experience for everyone involved.

Given the negative nature of many of these comments, it is still pertinent to reflect on the fact that 97% of the respondents to this questionnaire would recommend the JET Programme. Comments like these below highlight the contrast of challenging yourself to do something difficult but ultimately being a worthwhile venture. The comments below display the difficulties involved but also reflect on the positives of working and living in a different country:

- #164 - My time there was challenging but the best thing I have ever done!
- #195 - Life in rural Japan was challenging—loved it, but was ready to go home.
The actual experience was challenging (especially pre-internet), but it ended up having a more profound impact than I ever expected. Not just professionally, but personally. Some of my best friends are JETs from around the world that I met 30 years ago and since returning. I'd do it again (well, maybe not the model reading, lol). Thanks for your research. Good luck.

The overall tone of these comments suggests that while JET Programme participants acknowledge their profound personal growth and cross-cultural experiences during their time on the programme, they also diverge on whether the JET Programme offers genuine professional integration. As McConnell (2000) stresses, the disconnect between official rhetoric and day-to-day realities can create friction points, yet participants still appreciate the personal transformation of living in Japan. They see the main barriers to realising their potential as educators as being underutilised in the classroom, navigating cultural norms, and lacking structured support systems. Many participants feel that more transparent communication, comprehensive preparation and clearer pathways for professional development within the Japanese educational system could enhance their experience. However, despite these difficulties, the overwhelmingly positive endorsement of the JET Programme reflects its transformative impact on participants' personal and professional lives. This duality reflects the need for continuous improvements in the JET Programme's support system to develop its cultural and professional offer.

4.10.2 JTEs' Perspective

JTEs often recognise the cultural adjustment required by JET participants and note the challenges ALTs face, particularly when understanding Japanese work culture and customs. However, some JTEs also note that working with JETs can be burdensome and cause additional workload and stress. JTEs responded that these challenges can hinder effective teamwork, especially if an ALT lacks sufficient Japanese language ability or familiarity with Japanese educational expectations. Ishihara et al. (2018) comment on these issues, highlighting how ALTs who demonstrated Japanese language skills and a willingness to communicate in Japanese with both JTEs and students invariably fitted into the school system and tended to stay longer on the JET Programme than those who did not.

The following JTE questionnaire comments focus on the cultural and professional challenges that they have perceived. Respondents #20, #12 and #16 mention the difficulties and extra burden it

can take on their own lives when they have to take care of ALTs, which is often exacerbated when they lack the Japanese language ability to perform daily tasks themselves.

- #20 - Sometimes i (sic) feel teachers from the JET program tend to be lazy too much. They do not understand what is working in Japan like. They must know our culture, and be fluent at speaking Japanese so that JTE would not need to take (sic) care of their private problems.
- #12 - We cannot expect them to work as well as Japanese teachers. [...] it is very hard to take care of them [ALTs].
- #16 - ALTs have trouble in their daily life, and JTEs need to help them, which makes us tired

JTE respondents #3 and #14 illustrate the dichotomy in working with ALTs. #3 questions the motivation of ALTs on the JET Programme, while #14 praises their motivation. Meanwhile, #1 and #11 comment on the troublesome nature of working with ALTs, with #11 in particular noting that when working with ALTs, they feel obliged to create some specific tasks or roles for the ALT to do. In this light, Hiratsuka (2022) also draws our attention to JTEs who feel they must shoulder extra administrative tasks for ALTs.

- #3 - It depends on their motivation to participate in this programme
- #1 - [they] sometimes makes (sic) teachers feel troublesome.
- #11 - it is basically very helpful. Various activities can be done with ALT teachers. However, I sometimes feel that discussing the arrangement and preparing for classes are troublesome. If the class is just done by myself, I can make a plan by myself. However, when I go to the class with ALT, I think I should give ALT some important jobs.
- #14 - Some ALTs are highly motivated to teach their culture as well as languages, and try to learn more about Japan through communicating with Japanese people. However, many of them who I have worked with were not very professional or lack of passion, which often discouraged me.

The issues raised by JTEs are important as they highlight the problems faced by one-half of the team involved in delivering the goals of the JET Programme. The JTEs could be considered as integral to the JET Programme as ALTs or CIRs in some respects, as JET Programme participants only have a maximum five-year contract. In contrast, JTEs may work with multiple ALTs during their careers. This assumption is borne out by the JTE questionnaire results; the 30 JTEs that responded worked with more than 200 JET participants, spanning the 38 years of the JET Programme. Therefore, the issues raised by the JTEs here can be considered endemic problems that have persisted for years rather than one-off comments. This is illustrated by Brown (2013), Browne and Wada (1998), McConnell (2000), and Hiratsuka (2022), who have given examples of JTE complaints suggesting long-standing structural failings, reinforcing that issues like extra workload or unclear roles are systemic, not isolated problems.

4.10.3 Conclusion to Theme Six: Comparison of Perspectives

Although both parties have raised issues, it is significant and a testament to the JET Programme that they both overwhelmingly wish for its continuation and consider it beneficial. The

overall endorsement sentiment supports McConnell (2000), who observed that JTEs, despite systemic challenges, consistently advocate for the continuation of the JET Programme. Meanwhile, Metzgar (2017) also indicates that both ALTs and JTEs see intangible educational and cultural benefits as worth maintaining. The following JTE comments support this notion:

- #17 - We really appreciate this programme and hope to last it (sic).
- #19 - I think any exchange with people of different cultures is beneficial. The teachers need more training and support to work with ALTs effectively. I think teachers should be given more of a choice if they want to work with ALTs or not; sometimes being forced to work together causes friction.

This last comment (#19) acutely addresses the core difficulties associated with the JET Programme's partnership model. The team-teaching experience is valuable, but JTEs feel they and their Japanese colleagues need more training and continued support. Having a choice over whether to work with JET participants could also lead to fewer difficulties and smoother collaboration. Carless (2006) also concluded that JTEs had 'little or no flexibility as to whether to participate in team teaching or in choosing partners' (p.349), often leading to ineffective team-teaching practices.

ALTs focus predominantly on the personal and professional adaptation required when moving to a new country. They observe that having a good awareness of the difficulties they are likely to encounter would help integrate new JET participants. A more straightforward pathway to continuing their teaching careers in Japan is also an issue that has been raised about which ALTs could benefit from advice. This sentiment is echoed by Hiratsuka (2022), who found that ALTs struggle with professional identity in Japan's rigid educational system.

This mutual recognition of JET participants' cultural and professional challenges is consistent with Hiratsuka's (2022) emphasis on the dual burdens ALTs and JTEs face. It highlights the need for improved cultural orientation and support procedures to assist in a more efficient transition. Addressing these issues would benefit both parties and strengthen the JET Programme's educational effectiveness, potentially leading to a more productive relationship between cross-cultural colleagues, as Metzgar (2017) points out.

4.11 Theme Seven. Programme Sustainability and Areas for Improvement

Theme seven examines the comments from both questionnaires on the need for structural improvements in the JET Programme. It suggests more precise policy direction, improved teacher training for JTEs and ALTs, and more focus on the programme's educational objectives. It also suggests that the government ministries responsible for the JET Programme need more integrated collaboration. Browne and Wada (1998), who were both instrumental in early research conducted on the JET Programme, had many of these same criticisms and suggestions for improvements, indicating that they are still relevant today and point to persistent structural problems.

4.11.1 JET Participants' Perspective

JET Programme respondents comment on the societal issues experienced by foreigners living in Japan for the first time, financial aspects such as the long-term sustainability of the programme, and JET participants' salaries. There are also dissenting comments about the lack of professionalism shown by JETs towards other JETs, with some pointing to the participant selection process as unsuitable. Finally, the programme's role in the changing educational and technological landscape is also called into question, highlighting how Japan and the rest of the world differ from 38 years ago when the JET programme started. Some ALTs suggested improvements include clearer professional pathways, creating a new role for dedicated, qualified ALTs, and expanding training opportunities. A more focused alignment with Japan's educational objectives would also ensure the programme's adaptability and ongoing relevance.

The JET participants' comments below are a selection reflecting the sustainability, recommendations and possible future directions of the JET Programme.

- #112 - The program definitely needs to look at social isolation issues for those in remote locations.
- #129 - After the pandemic, Japanese society has not been as polite to foreigners. Tokyo in general has a very cold atmosphere in general. I didn't make many friends outside of the JET Programme, and Tokyo social groups are very closed.
- #53 - I think there's a real lack of alum support on behalf of JET to help sustain and continue to foster meaningful relationships and connections with Japan. Yes, the personal connections/relationships you've formed are meaningful, and I won't discredit their impact. However, there's a sense of once you leave, you're "out". It's actually been quite hard to maintain and tend-to/reactivate those relationships with people from when I was there. I think more post-JET infrastructure is critically needed to continue the programme's overall intended impact and goals beyond peoples' initial commitments. This shouldn't fall on JETAA or formal channels. I think the actual programme needs substantial development in this area.

Respondents #112 and #129 comment on the stress from isolation issues in both rural and urban areas, while #53 criticises the lack of support post-JET. McConnell (2000) also critiques the lack of participant networks beyond their initial contracts. Metzgar (2017) similarly writes that there is 'limited tracking' (p.123) of JET Programme alumni, making it challenging to study and gather reliable information from the ex-JET population.

The following comments offer insights into how ex-JET Programme participants viewed their time on the programme and offer realistic, viable suggestions for improvement. Suggestions such as improved training have been long-standing issues mentioned in Browne and Wada (1998), Carless (2006), Jeon (2019), and McConnell (1998; 2000). While recommendations for a stricter selection process have not been cited as widely in the available literature, the JET Programme has made changes since its original intake in 1986. The age limit has been changed twice, re-contracting options have been extended from three to five years for what they deem 'exceptional ALTs' (JET Programme, n.d.-c) and the inclusion of 80 countries, including non-native English-speaking countries such as Singapore and The Philippines, offering a more diverse pool of applicants (JET Programme, n.d.-d). Calls for a more advanced or senior ALT role were also suggested over 25 years ago by Bowne and Wada (1998). Similar accounts of the JET Programme being a financial burden have also been previously articulated (McConnell, 2000; McCrostie, 2017).

- #4 - The most positive thing was working with my Japanese colleagues. The biggest negative was immature Western staff employed on JET. I believe there needs to be a more rigorous performance appraisal criteria in place. Some JET I came into contact with lacked basic work based skill. An issue when the vast majority are young graduates with limited life or work experience.
- #79 - It gives people a good chance to live in Japan as teachers and give them some career skills and a decent paycheck. It would be better if JET offered real teacher training and a chance to become permanent employees. JET is good for what it does as a language exchange, but without better teacher training and without long term career prospects it will never be anything more than a temporary system. And in some ways the imprinting on the minds of Japanese educators that ALTs are only there temporarily is a detriment for education in Japan as non-Japanese teachers have less chance of ever becoming real parts of the system if the system itself and JTEs always operate under the assumption that non-Japanese teachers are temporary, usually not fully trained or qualified, and are also only working as assistants.
- #49 - I'll never regret it and will always be thankful. However, this program is deeply flawed and really... a waste of taxpayer money. If I was a Japanese national and knew my taxes were going to barely qualified fresh college graduates instead of actually reforming English education - I'd be pissed.
- #123 - I'd LOVE to see a level higher than ALT for people with higher levels of experience. I have an MA in English and courses in teaching so it would have been cool to have a bit more say. Or even a proper job for accredited teachers.
- #88 - I came into the Program with the assumption that it had this kind of "prestige" in the US and in Japan specifically. I stayed in the Program because I liked my coworkers who each asked me to stay and I enjoyed the pay. That naivety (sic) on my part has cost me a lot of time. I was kind of aimlessly moving forward with self study in Japanese and never quite making enough money in Tokyo to live and pay off student debt, nor even be able to afford continuing education or professional development programs. If JET had a grant for Japanese classes beyond the paltry refund you get for passing N3 and higher, then that would take the whole of the Program miles ahead from what it is now. I would also like to see JET institute more career development training and assistance

throughout the duration (sic) of applicant contracts rather than a single Career Fair meant only for people who aren't recontracting.

- #105 - I think JET on paper, 30 years ago, was an incredible cultural and international exchange programme. However, as it is right now, with the wildly varying experiences for participants and schools alike even in the same municipality, it feels dated and exploitative. If JET wants to keep its current idealistic goals of cultural and international exchange, 1) understanding that it is *Japanese children* who need this exposure to daily English and information about other cultures, and that Japan doesn't really need to be promoted by JET participants, 2) better screening of participants, 3) increase support and training for professional growth and career advancement instead of assuming all JETs return home, may help the programme. I think Japan are losing some valuable people every year when participants go home — if more can be done to train and support participants, JET can serve as a very valuable source of working immigrants, which may be helpful in slowly globalising Japan and helping to ease the labour shortage.

Respondent #49 identifies the financial burden on the Japanese public as a primary concern, an issue also raised by McCrostie (2017) in a *Japan Times* article, where it is suggested that the funds might be more effectively utilised on enhanced training for JTEs or providing them with opportunities for overseas study. Whereas respondent #105, while stating many previously mentioned issues regarding the JET Programme, also advocates a point mirrored by Hiratsuka (2022) that Japan is very different now from what it was in 1986, concluding that more research and reforms are needed for the JET Programme to stay relevant.

JET Programme participants generally express gratitude for their personal and professional transformative experiences while also raising concerns over the programme's sustainability and relevance in a rapidly evolving global landscape. They emphasise the need for more developed career opportunities after their tenure and better integration with Japan's educational objectives. JET participants comment on the importance of addressing inconsistent placements, outdated JET Programme structures, and insufficient support systems, hindering the programme's future development and broader impact. Despite these issues, the enduring appreciation underscores the potential for the JET Programme to evolve and continue making meaningful contributions to cross-cultural exchange and educational collaboration.

4.11.2 JTEs' Perspective

Like the JET participants, JTEs also share concerns regarding the sustainability and financial burden of the JET Programme, with some questioning the perceived return on investment. While JTEs appreciate the cultural benefits, there are doubts regarding the long-term educational impact of the JET Programme. The suggestions for improvements from JTEs include structural changes with improved role clarity and more support for ALTs, based on the assumption that these could improve the programme's effectiveness.

Although JTEs are not in a position to recommend the JET Programme to prospective JET participants, their thoughts on its continuation and sustainability are worthy of note. While the JTEs'

comments tilt favourability towards the JET Programme as a whole, they still voice their concerns about having to supervise ALTs at times or highlight the programme's financial burden. The comments below reflect responses from an array of questions on the JTE questionnaire:

- #12 - The work of ALTs is important, especially in my school, where most students are very motivated to speak English. However, sometimes I feel that their work is not worth the cost and effort we Japanese teachers (and taxpayer) pay for.
- #29 - This system itself is good, however, with the burden of finance, we cannot judge this issue easily
- #12 - It is worthwhile but as I wrote above, the supervisor's job is burdensome and for some ALTs it is very hard to take care of them.

JTE #12 and #29 mention the 'burden of finance,' echoing the earlier ALT sentiment about the cost of hiring JET Programme participants, a concern also brought up by McCrostie (2017). However, in counterpoint to this, McConnell (2000) suggests that most JET Programme salaries actually end up staying in Japan and are, therefore, a stimulus to the Japanese economy. JTE #12, while praising certain aspects of working with ALTs, also laments the extra burden of having to take care of them, raising the point previously discussed by Carless (2006) regarding forced team-teaching.

The following JTE comments reflect on the positive affirmation of working with ALTs and note their desire for the continuation of the JET Programme.

- #8 - ALTs give JTE a lot of supports (sic) in making materials. Students can learn not only English but cultures and many things. Our friendship lasts for a long time after ALTs go back to their country. I hope this JET Programme will continue.
- #28 - For Me, The JET PROGRAM is (sic) Highly Recommended Program.

Overall, these JTE comments display a positive attitude towards the JET Programme, which could be made even more productive in the eyes of JTEs with some refinements. Spreading the burden of supervising ALTs across more than one JTE or, as previously mentioned, allowing the JTE to decide if they want to work with and supervise ALTs could help ease some of these tensions.

4.11.3 Conclusion to Theme Seven: Comparison of Perspectives

Both groups recognise the need for improvements regarding the JET Programme's sustainability and overall effectiveness. JET participants focus on personal and professional development, while JTEs emphasise systemic changes and role clarity. Both groups also recognise that financial issues are problematic. The alignment in recognising key areas for reform reflects Browne and Wada's (1998) early calls for a more transparent operational framework. Both groups view sustainability as dependent on the JET Programme's responsiveness to the evolving educational and cultural landscape, emphasising critical areas for future development.

The JET Programme has already survived the possibility of being cut altogether. Metzgar (2017) highlighted a critical juncture in the history of the JET Programme, specifically in 2011, when

it faced potential budget cuts and the threat of termination. Despite challenges related to one of its objectives of enhancing English language proficiency among Japanese students, the programme received robust support from influential advocates. A 2011 article in the Japan Times (Dooley, 2011) encapsulates this sentiment through the commentary of Michael Auslin, then the director of Japan Studies at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) and a former participant of the JET Programme. Auslin's reflections articulate a considered appreciation of the programme, suggesting that while its impact on language education may be variable, it has become a pivotal instrument in nurturing future leaders in US-Japan relations. This is also speculated by McConnell (2000), who reports that political backing often outweighs pedagogical critique when budget cuts loomed.

4.12 Conclusion of Thematic Analysis

The JET Programme continues its overarching objectives of fostering internationalisation, promoting grassroots cultural exchange, and facilitating English language education. While the JET Programme enjoys broad support, as evidenced by the overwhelmingly positive feedback, recommendations from JET participants, and supportive comments from JTEs, it is imperative to acknowledge and examine the dissenting views and words of warning expressed by some respondents on both sides. These critical perspectives are invaluable for providing a balanced view of the programme and identifying areas for improvement. These include role ambiguity, inadequate training, systematic inefficiencies and the evolving demands of a globalised and technologically advanced landscape.

From the JET participants' perspective, the JET Programme encapsulates valuable personal and professional growth opportunities, but its long-term relevance depends on addressing issues detailed in the previous paragraph. Despite the difficulties presented here, the overwhelming endorsement rate among former JET participants points to a programme that remains a transformative experience for many.

Similarly, JTEs acknowledge the JET Programme's contributions to cultural and educational exchange but frequently refer to the requirement for more clarity in the ALT role, more effective collaboration mechanisms, and structural amendments to reduce administrative burdens. Both groups express concern about the JET Programme's financial sustainability and capacity to adapt to the evolving societal and educational landscape.

This orientation of perspectives highlights the shared commitment to the JET Programme's success and mutual recognition for expansion. Addressing the identified issues through specific reforms could enhance the programme's overall efficacy and ensure its relevance and sustainability for the future. As this analysis chapter transitions to its final section, these insights provide a basis for discussing the wider implications of the findings and their contributions to the existing scholarly discourse of international exchange programmes.

The intervening years between McConnell's (2000) publication and this study have witnessed significant global and local shifts in educational paradigms, cultural exchanges, and international relations, all of which may have contributed to a more conducive environment for realising the JET Programme's internationalisation goals. The evolution of the programme's structure and advancements in communication and information dissemination have likely enhanced participants' understanding and engagement with the programme's objectives.

The analysis performed in this study reveals a JET participant population that is more informed and engaged with the programme's aims than ever before, challenging previous assertions of a disconnect between participant perceptions and the programme's internationalisation objectives. This transformation underscores the dynamic nature of cultural exchange programmes like JET, which are subject to continuous evolution influenced by both internal criticism and the changing contours of global interconnectivity and cultural diplomacy.

Collectively, the narrative arc of responses to the JTE questionnaire provides added value to the JET Programme discourse, contributing valuable perspectives to the broader analysis of the JET Programme, offering insights into the collaborative teaching experiences, professional dynamics, and cross-cultural interactions that define the programme's educational and cultural exchange objectives.

4.13 Conclusion to the Chapter

This chapter consists of a detailed examination of various dimensions of the JET Programme, dimensions that remain relatively unexplored within the prevailing academic discourse. Echoing the sentiments articulated by Hiratsuka (2022), there exists an imperative need for a rigorous evaluation, recalibration, and enhancement of the programme to align it with the contemporary milieu of Japan, which has undergone profound demographic, cultural, political, and economic change since the programme's inception over three decades ago.

The primary objective of this analytical endeavour has been to illuminate the intricate genesis of the JET Programme as a governmental initiative and to trace its evolutionary trajectory since its establishment in 1986. Moreover, by leveraging questionnaire responses from former JET Programme participants and JTEs who have collaborated with JET participants, this analysis aimed to capture and convey the perceptions and experiences of these key stakeholders, thereby providing a nuanced understanding of the programme's implementation and its impact on the main beneficiaries of the initiative: students within the Japanese educational system.

At the heart of this discourse lies the JET Programme, initially conceived as a diplomatic gesture towards the United States to mitigate trade disputes, which has subsequently burgeoned into one of the most expansive teaching initiatives globally. Notwithstanding its ostensibly pragmatic underpinnings, its genesis belies the programme's complex and, at times, contentious reception within Japan and amongst its international cohort of participants. With a governmental allocation running into several hundred million pounds and engaging individuals from 80 nations (JET Programme, 2024), the sheer scale of the JET Programme commands attention and warrants ongoing scholarly enquiry and methodical refinement.

The empirical data garnered from 267 former JET participants and 30 JTEs for the purposes of this study, albeit representing a relatively modest subset, offers valuable insights into the multifaceted perceptions surrounding the programme. However, this constitutes merely a preliminary foray into the expansive narrative of the approximately 79,000 (JET Programme, 2024) individuals who have engaged with the JET Programme since its inception. This exploratory analysis draws attention to the need for continuous, in-depth investigation to comprehend and fully enhance the programme's impact and efficacy. A more comprehensive exploration of these future research directions is provided in Chapter 6, Section 6.7.

A recurrent theme discernible within the findings of this investigation pertains to an enduring sentiment among both JET Programme participants and JTEs regarding the perception of their voices remaining unheeded in relation to the persistent challenges intrinsic to the JET Programme. These issues of role ambiguity, underutilisation, and participant frustration are covered

extensively in the following Discussion chapter. They are further evaluated in the Conclusion chapter, where recommendations for stronger policy-stakeholder communication are proposed.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is structured to facilitate a comprehensive discussion of the JET Programme, focusing on policy intentions, academic scrutiny, stakeholder perceptions, and the broader research context. Specifically, Section 5.2 investigates the JET Programme's contextual underpinnings and developmental trajectory, elucidating this initiative's foundational goals and envisioned outcomes.

Subsequently, Section 5.3 situates the findings of this study within the broader scholarly discourse surrounding the JET Programme. This section addresses how the strengths and limitations highlighted by previous research compare with the perceptions captured through the questionnaires. By exploring how researchers have received and critiqued the programme, this section provides context and helps situate the JET Programme's policy intentions in relation to the perceptions from the questionnaires. Doing so gives a more complete picture of how policy frameworks, academic analyses and direct stakeholder experiences converge to shape the JET Programme's overall understanding.

In Section 5.4, the analysis is further expanded by quantifying the perceptions of key stakeholders integral to the JET Programme's execution. This was achieved by applying Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis methodology, which systematically categorises and interprets the wide variety of perspectives of these pivotal figures of the JET Programme participants and JTEs.

Section 5.5 extends the discussion by situating the present study within the wider corpus of research pertaining to the JET Programme's public image, its potential ramifications, and prospective trajectories for future development. This section aims to contextualise the findings within the larger academic dialogue, thereby highlighting their relevance and implications for the JET Programme.

Finally, Section 5.6 provides a synthesis and concluding remarks on the discussions presented throughout the chapter, offering a cohesive recapitulation of the key insights and findings.

By utilising this structured approach, the chapter aims to contribute a scholarly and carefully considered analytical discussion of the JET Programme, grounded in policy contextualisation and thematic examination and enriched by the perspectives of the key personnel directly engaged with its implementation.

5.2 Policy Contextualisation

The inception of the JET Programme can be traced back to the collaborative efforts of three governmental entities, each with distinct objectives and visions. This tripartite foundation has since influenced the trajectory of the programme, which, as observed, appears to navigate a complex and, at times, ambiguous path without a clear, linear direction. This observation aligns with the critical insights provided by Borg (2018), Hiratsuka (2017; 2022), McConnell (2000), and Metzgar (2017), who collectively illustrate the inherent challenges posed by the divergent missions of the various governmental offices involved. This feature of the JET Programme was meticulously examined in the literature review section of this thesis, underscoring the intricate interplay between the programme's multifaceted origins and its operational dynamics.

Regrettably, this complexity and the absence of a unified direction have rendered the JET Programme susceptible to public scrutiny (*Japan Today*, 2012; 2013; McCrostie, 2017; Montgomery, 2013; *The Mainichi*, 2016), particularly concerning the overarching goal of enhancing English proficiency among the Japanese populace. This is understandable as more than 90% of JET participants are ALTs (JET Programme, n.d.-h) and are involved directly with Japanese English education. Japan's low scoring on multiple different English proficiency indicators, coupled with the extensive annual budget allocated to the JET Programme, both of which were discussed previously (Chapter 1, Section 1.2 for proficiency indicators; Chapter 4, Conclusion of Theme 7 for budget deliberations), are easy targets. As a result, the public discourse often gravitates towards this critical appraisal, critiquing the programme for its perceived inability to effectuate substantial improvements in English language skills among Japanese individuals. This criticism, while focusing on one singular outcome of the programme, reflects broader concerns regarding the efficacy and impact of the JET Programme, given its ambitious and multi-dimensional objectives set against the backdrop of its convoluted institutional genesis.

Throughout its thirty-eight-year tenure, the JET Programme has predominantly been depicted as an initiative aimed at enhancing the English linguistic competencies of Japanese students, with a particular emphasis on oral and aural skills. However, this portrayal has been accompanied by a palpable sense of disillusionment among JET Programme participants, namely ALTs, regarding their limited pedagogical independence within the educational setting (Rutson-Griffiths, 2012; Sponseller, 2017). Moreover, the persistently lacklustre performance of Japanese students in global assessments of English proficiency has further fuelled a narrative, especially within domestic circles, questioning the programme's efficacy and value for money (Hiratsuka, 2022; McCrostie, 2017). This sceptical perspective constructs the JET Programme as a considerable financial misadventure.

The culmination of such sentiments was conspicuously evident during the 2010 government fiscal deliberations, which were disseminated nationwide (Metzgar, 2017). During these proceedings, the discourse surrounding the potential discontinuation of the JET Programme highlighted the contentious debate regarding its outcomes. It brought to the fore the critical scrutiny it faced regarding policy effectiveness and financial justification. This pivotal moment underscored the programme's broader challenges and criticisms, encapsulating the ongoing discourse about its role and impact in Japan's broader educational and linguistic landscape. Metzgar (2017) states that the response from the United States to Japan about the possibility of downsizing or completely cutting the JET Programme was immediate and direct, with academics, experts in the Japan-US bilateral relationship and government officials proclaiming the benefits of the JET Programme to the US-Japan relationship.

As discussed previously (Chapter 1, Section 1.2), the performance indicators relevant to the objectives set forth by MEXT in relation to the JET Programme have yielded discouraging outcomes. While disheartening in the context of specific programme goals, such findings should not serve as the sole basis for a wholesale discrediting of the JET Programme in its entirety. McCrostie (2017) also suggests that it is unfair for Japan's low English proficiency test scores to be solely blamed on JET ALTs, given their limited classroom time with Japanese students. It is imperative to recognise the

multifaceted nature of the programme and the broad spectrum of objectives it endeavours to achieve beyond the narrow confines of linguistic proficiency.

The challenge, rather, lies in the endeavour to quantify the more intangible outcomes of the programme, particularly in the realm of 'internationalisation'—a core pillar of the JET Programme's mission. The concept of internationalisation defies simplistic measurement and evaluation with its intricate web of cultural exchange, mutual understanding, and global awareness (Borg, 2008; Metzgar, 2017). It is a nebulous quality that poses a significant challenge for policymakers and key personnel in ascertaining the full extent of the programme's impact. The pursuit of methodologies and frameworks capable of capturing the nuanced and often subtle effects of internationalisation remains a pivotal area of inquiry, necessitating a sophisticated and balanced approach to evaluation that transcends conventional metrics and embraces the complexity of cross-cultural engagement.

In quantitative terms, the JET Programme has achieved a notable milestone by facilitating the dispatch of an extensive cohort of predominantly young, foreign-born, native English-speaking university graduates from a growing number of countries to various regions across Japan. The most recent figures showing more than 79,000 people from over 80 countries have participated in the JET Programme since its inception (JET Programme, n.d.-a). This initiative has provided these individuals with a unique opportunity to immerse themselves in Japanese culture and engage directly with the local populace, thereby fostering a profound cultural exchange.

Upon examining the post-participation perceptions of these individuals, as evidenced by the responses gathered from questionnaires administered to both JET participants and JTEs, a compelling narrative of positive attitudes towards Japan emerges. These responses illuminate a generally favourable shift in perceptions among the participants, likely attributed to their immersive experiences and interactions within the Japanese sociocultural environment.

Such positive attitudinal shifts among former JET participants reinforce the programme's success in fostering cultural appreciation and understanding, and suggest the potential for lasting interpersonal and intercultural bridges between Japan and the participants' home countries. While perhaps intangible, these outcomes are invaluable in their contribution to the broader goals of internationalisation and mutual understanding, reflecting the profound impact of the JET Programme beyond mere linguistic exchange (Borg, 2008, 2018; McConnell, 2000, 2008; Hiratsuka, 2022).

Ultimately, the genesis of the JET Programme is marked by a constellation of motives that extend beyond the realms of education and cultural exchange, intricately linked with broader geopolitical and economic considerations. This multifaceted inception, involving efforts to assuage trade and economic tensions with the United States amidst Japan's economic ascendancy, has been identified as a foundational element of the programme (Hiratsuka, 2022; McConnell, 2000; Reesor, 2002). Over time, the coexistence of these diverse objectives has engendered a degree of ambiguity and uncertainty that has both impacted the experiences of JTEs and JETs and contributed to the evolving broader public perception of the programme.

The triad of interrelated concerns, namely pedagogical aspirations, internationalisation goals and diplomatic-economic strategies, originating from the programme's establishment continues to resonate throughout its operational lifespan, influencing its perception, implementation, and the roles ascribed to JETs. The intertwining of pedagogical aspirations, internationalisation goals, and diplomatic-economic strategies has imbued the JET Programme with a complex identity, sometimes leading to conflicting expectations and outcomes (Hiratsuka, 2022).

This historical and contextual backdrop has played a pivotal role in shaping the JET Programme's trajectory, impacting the status and experiences of those engaged with it, and contributing to ongoing debates about its purpose, effectiveness, and future direction. Acknowledging and addressing these foundational complexities is essential for the continued evolution and optimisation of the JET Programme, ensuring it remains responsive to the educational, cultural, and international relations objectives that it strives to serve.

5.3 Locating the JET Programme within the Scholarly Literature

The discussion herein is constrained to an examination of scholarly contributions that have been articulated in the English language. This included a rigorous analysis of academic material published in peer-reviewed journals, doctoral dissertations, and an array of other scholarly publications that collectively constitute the epistemic community engaged in studying English language education within the Japanese context. This community is dedicated to advancing knowledge and understanding in the field, and its work forms the backbone of scholarly discourse on English language education, team-teaching, and the policy and implementation dynamics of the JET Programme in Japan.

This body of scholarship places particular emphasis on exploring the JET Programme and its role within the broader framework of international education in Japan. This focus facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the JET Programme's objectives, methodologies, outcomes, and overall contribution to the landscape of English language education in Japan.

The corpus of academic research pertaining to the JET Programme predominantly scrutinises the function and experiences of programme participants within the Japanese educational milieu, with a pronounced focus on ALTs (Borg, 2018; Galloway, 2009; Hiratsuka, 2015; 2022; McConnell, 2000; Metzgar, 2017; Turnbull, 2018). These inquiries examine the myriad challenges encountered by ALTs as they navigate the complexities of the Japanese public education system. Furthermore, this scholarly work recurrently revisits and interrogates the broader implications of the JET Programme on English language education in Japan, particularly emphasising the enhancement of spoken English proficiency among Japanese students.

The narrative thread consistently observed within this body of literature, extending back to its inception in the mid-1990s, is noteworthy (Metzgar, 2017). The principal themes relate to the cultural difficulties JET Programme participants face, which are inexorably intertwined with their lack of experience. As many ALTs are new university graduates with little or no working experience, they face a steep learning curve with their first job being in a foreign country (Galloway, 2009; McConnell, 2000). Furthermore, ALTs' potential contributions in the classroom being underutilised is a consistent theme often attributed to the complex dynamic between ALT and JTE. However, one of

the most critical themes persisting throughout the duration of the JET Programme has been the lack of demonstrable improvements in students' English proficiency since ALTs entered Japanese classrooms more than thirty years ago (Metzgar, 2017).

The persistence of these issues not only emphasises the enduring relevance of the identified challenges and questions but also reflects the sustained academic interest in evaluating the effectiveness and impact of the JET Programme in achieving its pedagogical and cultural exchange objectives. Hiratsuka (2017) observes that the JET Programme has played a pivotal role in broadening the international outlook of JET participants and local Japanese communities, while also establishing itself as a key component of English language education in Japan.

The cyclical exploration of these debates suggests a profound engagement with the intricacies of implementing a large-scale, international educational exchange programme within Japan's unique educational and cultural context. Such consistency in scholarly inquiry highlights the field's critical areas of interest and concern, underscoring the necessity for ongoing research and dialogue to address these enduring questions (Hiratsuka, 2022). This body of work aims to contribute to the understanding of the JET Programme's role in Japanese education and the broader field of international educational exchange, bolstering and possibly enhancing the extant corpus.

In addition to the predominant focus on the JET programme's linguistic and educational dimensions, a number of scholars have ventured beyond this traditional boundary to explore alternative metrics that shed light on the programme's broader implications. These investigations have unveiled aspects of the JET Programme that transcend its immediate educational objectives, thereby contributing to a more holistic understanding of its value.

Borg (2008; 2018; 2020), Hiratsuka (2013; 2015; 2017; 2022), McConnell (1996; 2000; 2008), and Metzgar (2012; 2017) have been instrumental in broadening the discourse surrounding the JET Programme, urging a reconsideration of its worth beyond the confines of English language education. Their work has highlighted the necessity of employing alternative metrics to gauge the programme's broader socio-cultural and policy-driven impacts. Some of these alternative metrics are detailed below.

Borg's (2008) research investigated the elusive concept of internationalisation, a core tenet of the JET Programme's mission yet challenging to quantify. This exploration provides critical insights into the programme's effectiveness in fostering global awareness and cross-cultural understanding among JET participants and the local populace alike. This emphasis aligns with the findings from my study, which also demonstrates how JET participants and JTEs perceive the programme's role in promoting internationalisation. Borg's (2008) study highlights the societal impacts of cross-cultural engagement. In contrast, my research takes a more holistic view of internationalisation at the grassroots level by extending the discourse surrounding the perspectives of JET participants and JTEs.

In a subsequent study, Borg (2018) embarked upon an inquiry into the relevance of the JET Programme, scrutinising the official narratives and policies that underpin its operation. This critical examination contributes to the dialogue on the programme's alignment with contemporary

educational and diplomatic objectives, thereby offering a reflective perspective on its ongoing utility and adaptability. Furthering Borg's (2018) study, my research complements the critical narrative put forward by directly engaging with the two main stakeholders of the JET Programme to assess the alignment of its stated goals and expectations of the participants and collaborators. The findings from my study echo the stance of Borg (2018), who draws attention to the importance of coherence between policy intentions and operational realities.

Hasegawa and Sakamoto's (2023) research shifts focus towards the pre-departure cognitions of ALTs, offering a unique lens through which to understand the motivations, expectations, and apprehensions of participants prior to their engagement with the JET Programme. This introspective approach provides valuable context for interpreting the experiences and contributions of ALTs within the programme. The questionnaire responses from my study extend the discussion of Hasegawa and Sakamoto (2023) by analysing how the initial expectations evolve into lived experiences and how JET participants and JTEs perceive the efficacy and alignment of the broader goals of the JET programme. My study builds on Hasegawa and Sakamoto's (2023) work by providing a longitudinal perspective on the JET experience by bridging pre-departure perceptions with on-the-ground realities offered through the JET Programme participants' responses.

Lastly, Hiratsuka (2022) concentrates on the construction and evolution of language teacher identity among ALTs, shedding light on their professional development and self-perception as educators within the Japanese educational ecosystem. This focus on teacher identity enriches the discourse on the professional dimensions of participation in the JET Programme and its impact on individual ALTs' pedagogical philosophies and practices. My study parallels Hiratsuka's (2022) work by offering insights into the dynamics of ALT-JTE collaboration and role ambiguity, which is a source of contention for both groups' professional identities. Hiratsuka's (2022) focus is on ALTs, whereas my research offers the addition of JTEs' perspectives, providing a more comprehensive picture of how professional identities and roles intersect with the JET Programme framework.

My study builds on and extends the discourse surrounding these studies by synthesising their core themes of internationalisation, policy alignment, participant expectations and professional identity into a cohesive analysis of the JET Programme. Through integrating perceptions from JET participants and JTEs, my study uniquely positions itself to address the relationship between the contextual lens from Chapter 4 and operational realities. In addition, the thematic analysis provided in the previous chapter illuminates the JET Programme's multilayered impact on key stakeholders. It provides actionable insights for more closely aligning contemporary educational and cultural objectives. The findings of this study contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the JET Programme's evolving role in promoting cross-cultural understanding and pedagogical innovation.

In the following section (5.4), I build on the seven key themes identified in Chapter 4 using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process for thematic analysis. Through this systematic coding, seven key themes emerged, ranging from cultural exchange to role ambiguity, offering a comprehensive window at how JET Programme participants and JTEs perceive the programme.

5.4 JET and JTE's Perceptions of the JET Programme

This section will refer to the seven themes from the previous chapter's thematic analysis. The following is a brief reminder of the themes:

- **Theme One: Cultural Exchange and Soft Power**
- **Theme Two: Efficacy of English Teaching**
- **Theme Three: Role Ambiguity / ALT-JTE Misalignment**
- **Theme Four: Promoting Internationalisation**
- **Theme Five: JET Participant Satisfaction / Professional Development**
- **Theme Six: Cultural & Professional Integration Challenges**
- **Theme Seven: Sustainability & Future Directions**

In attempting to synthesise the various threads of the JET Programme experience, it is crucial to examine responses to the questionnaires used in this study alongside the existing academic corpus, media perceptions and personal communications. The picture that emerges from such an integration is that these pivotal stakeholders exhibit a predominantly favourable disposition towards the JET Programme. This is epitomised in Theme Five (JET Participants' Satisfaction and Professional Development) by the 97% recommendation rate articulated by JET participants in the questionnaire findings. Furthermore, narrative contributions from JTEs underscore their desire for the continuance of the JET Programme, thereby affirming its perceived value within the Japanese education community.

The allure of the JET Programme also remains undiminished, as evidenced by the consistent influx of applicants each year. While comprehensive statistics on overall applicant numbers remain undisclosed, data from the United States' JET Programme portal (JET Programme, n.d.-l) reveals a substantial annual application volume from all countries, exceeding the availability of participant places by many thousands for each intake year. Most applications are from the USA, accounting for approximately 4,000 to 5,000 applicants, of whom around 1,000 are successfully accepted (JET, n.d.-k), indicating an average acceptance rate of 25% for United States applicants. This figure represents approximately half of the total new participant intake annually; the total number of first-year JETs in August 2024 was 1,954, with 1,011 coming from the USA (JET Programme, 2024), highlighting the notable preference for U.S. English speakers evident in the Japanese government's approach to ALT recruitment. As Galloway (2009) claims, 'the ideal speaking partner in Japan appears to be 'white middle-class Americans' (p.173). For context, the country with the second most first-year participants was the UK, with 251, followed by Canada, with 169. There is little else to elaborate on the nature of applicants; the official line is simply that the application process is highly competitive and that they 'receive a very high volume of applications each year, and only a limited number will make it through to the final shortlist' (JET Programme, n.d.-j). I have previously discussed the diplomatic context of the formulation of the JET Programme, and these current statistics are consistent with that original intention.

The convergence of high stakeholder satisfaction, as reflected in the recommendation rates and positive feedback from JTEs, coupled with the robust interest and competitive application landscape, notably from the U.S., underscores the sustained appeal and perceived efficacy of the JET Programme. This synthesis of academic literature and empirical data from questionnaires paints a

comprehensive picture of the JET Programme as an esteemed and valued initiative within the realm of international educational exchange and English language education in Japan.

5.5 Complexities of Persistent Opposition Towards, and Advocacy of, the JET Programme

While the JET Programme enjoys substantial support and endorsement from its key stakeholders, including JETs and JTEs, it is important to acknowledge the presence of critiques and reservations. It is a cliché in the administration of large-scale governmental initiatives that achieving perfection and unanimous approval is an elusive goal; the JET Programme is no exception to this rule. This is evidenced by the nuanced feedback received from stakeholders, even among those who advocate for the programme. Theme Seven (Programme Sustainability and Areas for Improvement) highlights the conflicting nature of perceptions by both JET participants and JTEs. Despite encountering structural or supervisory burdens, JTEs predominantly advocate for continuing the programme. While JETs offer areas that could be improved and outline their dissatisfaction, they still offer their support for the JET Programme. These findings resonate with previous studies (Hiratsuka, 2022; McConnell, 2000) illustrating strong stakeholder loyalty even when concerns about finances, training or role ambiguity persist.

Among the JETs who express willingness to recommend the JET Programme, reservations and stipulations temper their endorsement, as evidenced in the analysis chapter of this study, particularly in Theme Five (JET Participant Satisfaction) and Theme Seven (Sustainability and Future Progression). These caveats often relate to the programme's various operational and structural arrangements, in that participants are often willing to suggest improvements or adjustments. Similarly, the responses from JTEs, while mainly positive, do not shy away from articulating specific concerns and challenges associated with the programme's implementation.

Persistent concerns voiced by both ALTs and JTEs raise significant questions regarding how CLAIR and other relevant governmental bodies effectively address these key stakeholders' feedback. The recurrent themes in academic literature and stakeholder commentaries underscore the imperative for a more responsive and adaptive approach to stakeholder engagement and programme refinement. Sturman (1988) was among the first to highlight feelings of discontent among ALTs, pointing out not only issues of underutilisation but also a lack of clarity in defining operational roles within the classroom for both JTEs and ALTs. Despite the programme's expansion over the intervening years, these concerns continue to be prevalent, as demonstrated in a recent study by Hasegawa and Sakamoto (2023), which contains statements from ALTs expressing ongoing underutilisation issues. These ALTs report experiencing considerable downtime and have articulated a need for greater trust and more substantive responsibilities from JTEs. The fact that this same issue bookends the start of the initiative, and is still apparent from my data collected via the JET Programme participants' questionnaire, suggests some inherent inflexibility in the programme's structure and application.

Hiratsuka (2022) notes that ALTs and JTEs involved in junior high schools teach only 22.1% of all English lessons. This involvement further diminishes in high schools, where the figure drops to 9.7%, with JTEs handling the majority of English lessons independently. The limited contact hours significantly constrain the ALTs' professional identities, undermining their perceived credibility, relevance, and legitimacy as integral school community members. This continuity of issues signals

the urgent need for evolving strategies in programme management and enhanced stakeholder engagement to address these enduring challenges.

Dissenting comments from JTEs often originate from their direct experiences and observations with ALTs within the educational settings of the JET Programme. The questionnaire responses elicited for this study highlight challenges such as cultural integration, issues posed by inexperienced ALTs, pedagogical discrepancies, communication barriers, and administrative and logistical difficulties within the programme. For example, JTEs frequently raise concerns about the motivation of ALTs for joining the programme, the ALTs' lack of proficiency in Japanese, the effectiveness of JET participants in teaching, the consistency in the application of teaching methodologies, and the level of collaboration and mutual understanding between JETs and JTEs. These sentiments are echoed by Galloway (2009) and Kubota (2002), who observe that some JTEs see ALTs and 'their communicative teaching methods as a virus that could potentially harm the intellectual development of students and traditional cultural virtues' (p.26).

Research conducted by Adachi et al. (1998), Hasegawa (2008), Hiratsuka (2022), and McConnell (2000) stress these issues, revealing that some JTEs exhibit varying degrees of passivity during team-taught lessons. This leads to frustration and mistrust between the ALTs and JTEs, whose cooperation is so vital to the success of the programme. Moreover, the studies highlight difficulties in communication between JTEs and ALTs, often exacerbated by insufficient language skills in either English or Japanese, or sometimes both. These complications are further aggravated by the fact that JTEs often do not have the option to choose whether they wish to collaborate with an ALT (Carless, 2006). Such constraints illuminate the inherent tensions and underline the need for strategic interventions to enhance the effectiveness and harmony of these cross-cultural educational partnerships.

There are further warning signs which pertain to broader systemic or structural issues within the programme and its implementation, such as the adequacy of support and resources provided to both JET participants and JTEs (Theme Five), the mechanisms for feedback and continuous improvement (Theme Six) and the clarity of roles and expectations (Theme Three). This lack of clarity perceived by both parties, as highlighted in the analysis chapter and earlier in this discussion, stems from the ambiguity surrounding the goals of the JET Programme (Themes One and Three). This uncertainty, present since the programme's inception, has resulted in a pervasive ambiguity regarding the designated roles of ALTs and JTEs. Hiratsuka (2015) reports on dissenting comments from ALTs and JTEs and concludes that 'the roles of team teachers in Japan do not seem to be clearly distinguished' (p.56).

Another emerging point from this study is that JTEs, with their unique vantage point and professional investment in the success of English language education in Japan, may offer insights into how the programme's design and operational protocols could be refined to better serve the educational goals and foster more effective collaboration. However, the JET Programme's various government agencies are not currently soliciting their perspectives on these issues.

Furthermore, the insights collated during this study indicate a concerning gap in awareness among some JTEs regarding the fundamental objectives and nomenclature of the JET Programme, as

supported by JTE comments from Theme One. The perception among a segment of JTEs that the programme's primary function is merely to facilitate the recruitment of ALTs to Japan points to a potential disconnect in the communication and understanding of the programme's broader educational and cultural exchange goals.

This situation highlights the need for a more concerted effort to enhance the clarity, visibility, and understanding of the JET Programme's mission and objectives among all stakeholders. It also illustrates the need for a more dynamic and iterative approach to addressing the feedback and concerns of JETs and JTEs, who are instrumental in the day-to-day delivery of the programme's objectives and serve as its frontline representatives. Addressing these issues is crucial for the ongoing effectiveness and success of the JET Programme and ensuring it remains responsive to its key stakeholders' evolving needs and perspectives.

The findings emphasise the diverse and multifaceted experiences of individuals involved in the JET Programme, displaying an array of perspectives from highly favourable to critically dissatisfied. The overall trend in evaluations is mainly positive, suggesting that the programme is generally effective in achieving its objectives for both JTEs and JET participants. However, the evidence of contrasting experiences, particularly the significantly low scores from a minority of JET participants, details areas requiring improvement. Addressing these issues could further align the JET Programme with the expectations and needs of all stakeholders.

5.6 Suggestions for Applying the Data Emerging from this Study

In response to these findings, programme administrators and stakeholders should explore the underlying factors contributing to divergent perceptions of the JET experience and identify strategies for amplifying the programme's strengths while addressing any identified shortcomings. Fostering a more collaborative and mutually informative relationship between JTEs and JET participants could be a vital step in aligning their perceptions and enhancing the programme's effectiveness in contributing to the educational development of Japanese students.

Addressing these concerns necessitates a comprehensive approach that solicits detailed feedback from JTEs, BoE workers, and others involved with the programme, identifying specific areas of dissatisfaction or unmet needs and developing targeted strategies to address these issues. For example, Theme Three (Role Ambiguity) and Theme Six (Challenges of Cultural Integration) demonstrate the confusion about day-to-day teaching roles and broader professional adaptation. Meanwhile, JTE comments in Theme Two (Efficacy of English Teaching) highlight the need for continued professional development. Simple adaptations could include professional development opportunities tailored to the needs of Japanese educators, improved collaboration and communication mechanisms between JET participants and their Japanese colleagues, and enhanced support from administrative bodies to facilitate the effective integration of JET participants into the educational and community contexts.

By considering the diverse perspectives and experiences of those involved with the JET Programme, administrators and policymakers can work towards optimising its impact in terms of cultural exchange and language education, enhancing the professional practices and outcomes of Japanese educators and educational administrators. What is required, perhaps, is the political will to

invigorate the process and revitalise cooperation across the various government agencies and at the student-facing level in classrooms across Japan.

These opposing points of view underscore the requirement for the JET Programme's administrators and associated government offices to conduct a thorough evaluation. Such an assessment should aim to address the concerns raised by programme critics and the lower-scoring questionnaire respondents while building on the already existing positives. Ultimately, the objective should be to improve the JET Programme's effectiveness, ensure alignment with its cultural and pedagogical goals, and augment its value to the Japanese public and the broader international community. Hiratsuka (2022) succinctly writes that 'the program needs to be carefully inspected, adjusted, and improved upon to be suitable for contemporary times' (p.48).

5.7 Conclusion to the Chapter

In conclusion, this chapter has integrated insights from the policy contextualisation in Chapter 4, with a discussion of the current literature on the JET Programme and the seven themes identified via thematic analysis. This discussion underscores the complex interplay between policy intentions and on-the-ground experiences, highlighting areas of alignment and divergence. While JET participants and JTEs overwhelmingly advocate the programme's cultural benefits and personal development opportunities, recurring issues such as role ambiguity, burdensome supervision for JTEs, and limited professional pathways reflect core structural misalignments in the programme's day-to-day operations. The findings presented here emphasise the notion that although the JET Programme's original objectives may be evolving, its core values of cross-cultural exchange remain strongly upheld and valued by key stakeholders.

In the following concluding chapter, I will reflect on the study's overarching findings, considering their broader implications, positing recommendations, acknowledging the current study's inherent limitations, and addressing areas for further research that could address gaps. This will involve an evaluation of the research process itself, including an assessment of the methodologies employed and the insights they have yielded. The concluding chapter aims to encapsulate the study's contributions to the academic discourse on the JET Programme and articulate considerations for future policy development within this domain, while also reflecting on my own research journey.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction to the Chapter and Overview of the Study's Aims and Research Questions

This concluding chapter has been organised into seven sections. It draws together findings from the research relating to the study's aims and research questions. Section 6.2 considers the key findings in relation to each of the study's three research questions, the findings associated with each one and the conclusions reached in relation to the study's original aims. Section 6.3 offers a discussion of theoretical implications for policy contextualisation and thematic analysis in educational research, and Section 6.4 outlines the original contribution to knowledge offered by the study. Section 6.5 outlines the practical implications for policymakers and educators and recommendations for future JET participants. In Section 6.6, I detail the strengths and limitations of the study. Section 6.7 makes recommendations for future research, and Section 6.8 offers reflections on my research journey.

This thesis has examined the policy intentions and programme trajectory of the JET Programme from 1986 to 2024. In addition, key insights from ex-JET Programme participants and JTEs have also been analysed. This examination has been conducted with the main objectives and research questions at the forefront of the process. This study had three main objectives:

1. Evaluating the JET Programme's Policy and Operational Frameworks.
2. Understanding Stakeholder Perceptions and Experiences.
3. Exploring the Broader Impacts and Implications of the JET Programme.

These objectives are closely linked with the three central research questions:

1. How do the initial policy objectives align with the operational realities and perceived outcomes of the JET Programme?
2. What are the perceptions of key stakeholders, particularly JET participants and JTEs, regarding the effectiveness of the JET Programme in enhancing English education and cultural exchange in Japan?
3. What are the broader cultural, diplomatic, and educational impacts of the JET Programme, and how do they contribute to internationalisation goals in Japan?

6.2 Summary of Key Findings and Conclusions

Three primary research questions guided this research, each aiming to illuminate varying aspects of the JET Programme's policy intentions, stakeholder perceptions, and operational outcomes. This section analyses the key findings related to these questions, summarising the conclusions reached in alignment with the study's original aims.

Research Question 1: How do the initial policy objectives align with the operational realities and perceived outcomes of the JET Programme?

When comparing the JET Programme's original objectives of grassroots internationalisation and English improvement with how the programme operates today, claims of successes and failures are equally valid. A fluid model of a multifaceted governmental initiative that spans international diplomacy, education, and cultural exchange has emerged from my analysis of the JET Programme's policy intentions. From its modest origins as a policy initiative to appease the United States, it is now

considered one of the world's largest and most enduring cultural exchange programmes. The findings from this study indicate that while the programme's foundational goals of promoting grassroots internationalisation and improving English language proficiency in Japan remain central, its implementation has been marked by a complex interplay of divergent objectives from the three government offices involved (Hiratsuka, 2022; McConnell, 2000; Metzgar, 2017). This has led to a programme that is at once ambitious in scope but also plagued by ambiguities in direction and execution.

This study concludes that the JET Programme's evolution reflects broader shifts in Japan's educational and diplomatic strategies, yet these shifts have not always translated into a coherent operational framework. Despite Japan's consistently low scores on global proficiency indices, the continued focus on English language education underscores a misalignment between policy intentions and educational outcomes. However, the programme's success in fostering positive international perceptions of Japan among former participants suggests that its soft power objectives have been effectively realised (Metzgar, 2017).

Hiratsuka (2022) makes the point that Japan and, indeed, the rest of the world, are very different now from when the JET Programme was conceived. This is an observation also made in many of my questionnaire responses. Some respondents even speculated on whether or not the JET Programme was still really necessary, and the results of this research have left me to conclude that despite Japan being one of the most advanced nations in the world (Yoon, Ueno & Notoya, 2024), certain aspects of daily life remain dated. For instance, chalkboards are still prevalent in many schools and universities. My university still uses them in almost every classroom. Fax is still used by many administration offices (Yoon, Ueno, & Notoya, 2024), and the 3 ½ inch floppy disk has only been phased out from government offices as of July 2024 (Ng, 2024).

Despite Japan's modern infrastructure, many urban and rural areas maintain traditional lifestyles, retaining cash-only transactions and having limited direct exposure to foreigners. This is often more pronounced in remote localities, where the arrival of a non-Japanese individual can still elicit a 'Hollywood star' (Hiratsuka, 2022, p.192) effect. In this regard, placing a JET Programme participant in a smaller rural community remains a unique selling point of the programme, as it offers valuable cross-cultural engagement and educational benefits for younger generations and the wider community in which the JET is placed.

Examining how official policy intentions align or fail to align with the JET Programme's real-world operations directly addresses Objective One of evaluating the JET Programme's policy and operational frameworks, demonstrating that divergent ministerial goals and soft power aspirations have eclipsed consistent English proficiency improvements. The goal of Objective One was to respond to the study's first research question, critically assessing the complexities of implementing a large-scale, multi-agency initiative, and then reflecting on any data emerging from the study. In the next section, Objective Two will be addressed through analysis of the data emerging from responses to this study's second research question.

Research Question 2: What are the perceptions of key stakeholders, particularly JET participants and JTEs, regarding the effectiveness of the JET Programme in enhancing English education and cultural exchange in Japan?

JET Programme participants and JTEs perceive the JET Programme as facilitating cultural exchange and creating international awareness amongst Japanese students. It was evident from questionnaire responses that respondents understood the soft power and grassroots objectives of the programme quite well. JTEs, for example, responded to this topic with quotes such as 'To promote mutual understanding between Japanese people, especially students, and people from other countries' (#14) and 'The main goal is to cultivate students' global mindsets' (#13).

However, there was a clear divergence in the judgement of the effectiveness of the JET Programme in enhancing the English language skills of Japanese students. JET participants responded with comments such as 'teaching English isn't the real goal... it's clear speaking English just isn't that important in Japanese society' (#76) and 'Not teaching English. 😊 I see it as a way Japan tries to influence soft power.' (#5). In contrast, JTEs responded with such comments as 'To improve students' practical and academic skills of English' (#30) and 'to make English education more practical and authentic with the help of native speakers' (#3). This contrast in opinions clearly shows a misunderstanding of the role of the ALT and leads to dissatisfaction for many JET participants with regard to their teaching role.

The inherent frustrations perceived by many JET Programme participants were addressed in Theme Two of the Analysis chapter, where respondents reported JTEs ignoring the advice of ALTs, and where ALTs were frequently used as human tape recorders. Similarly, JTEs voiced concerns about professionalism, ability to adapt to Japanese working culture and lack of language ability, either on their part or on the part of the ALT, which made planning for team teaching lessons difficult. All of these factors reduce the JET Programme's perceived impact on English proficiency.

Both stakeholder groups see the benefit of cross-cultural engagement but identify a lack of clarity in roles, responsibilities, and issues in conducting team-teaching classes as key barriers to maximising the educational objectives of the JET Programme.

Exploring JET Programme participants' and JTE's perspectives achieves Objective Two of this research study: understanding stakeholder perception and experiences. In highlighting the polarity of views between the successes of cultural exchange and the frustrations linked to role ambiguity and limited pedagogical autonomy, my research illuminates ways in which the JET programme meets, or fails to meet, its stated educational goals. It satisfies Objective Two's focus on understanding how these key personnel navigate and interpret the JET Programme's day-to-day realities.

Research Question Three: What are the broader cultural, diplomatic, and educational impacts of the JET Programme, and how do they contribute to internationalisation goals in Japan?

This study's findings suggest that the JET Programme's cultural and diplomatic impact is closely linked to its adaptability to Japan's evolving social and educational landscape. While increasing participant numbers (JET Programme, n.d.-d) and continued high application rates (JET Programme, n.d.-i), combined with positive feedback from participants, reflect the JET Programme's

broader appeal, persistent issues such as underutilisation of ALTs and role ambiguity continue to hamper its wider contribution to internationalisation goals. For instance, as referred to in the Analysis and Discussion chapters, insufficient integration of ALTs into the school curricula may limit deeper cultural engagement with students and communities, thereby impeding the programme's potential to enhance ongoing diplomatic goodwill and global awareness.

As a result, enhancing the JET Programme's broader cultural and educational impact may require a more coherent approach from MEXT, MOFA and MIC in conjunction with CLAIR, explicitly focussing on how JET Programme participants can facilitate internationalised perspectives in local communities. In addition, professional development that emphasises intercultural communication could enhance JET Programme participants' role in building and strengthening diplomatic ties and expanding English language proficiency. This would ultimately ensure that the JET Programme aligns more closely with Japan's aspirations for internationalisation.

The findings of this study highlight the importance of incorporating stakeholder feedback into efforts to enhance the JET Programme. The prevalence of continued issues from some of the earliest research conducted on the JET programme to the modern day suggests a persistent flaw in approaches to improve the initiative. Equally concerning is evidence from questionnaire responses revealing that some JTEs remain unaware of the official objectives of the JET Programme, exhibiting a misalignment in how information is being disseminated from top-level policymakers down to the classroom. A more direct and collaborative relationship between JTEs and CLAIR could help clarify the goals of the JET Programme and lead to a better understanding of the JTE-ALT relationship. As indicated in the questionnaire data, a single JTE may work with 15 or more JET Programme participants during their career; the collective impact of JTEs on the cultural and educational outcomes of the JET Programme is considerable. If adequately harnessed, this influence could significantly enhance the JET Programme's alignment with its broader aims of fostering internationalisation and meaningful cross-cultural engagement.

Finally, by analysing the JET Programme's broader cultural, diplomatic and educational outcomes, this section addressed Objective Three of the study, exploring the broader impacts and implications of the JET Programme. The findings of the analysis related to this objective highlight the programme's ability to foster positive international perceptions and intercultural understanding, although English proficiency objectives remain underwhelming. Although there is some misalignment between the JET Programme and Japan's internationalisation ambitions, the evidence shows it can still foster local cultural awareness and strengthen broader diplomatic connections. My findings address Objective Three by indicating how large-scale educational exchanges can shape local communities and the global relationships that Japan seeks to cultivate.

6.3 Discussion of Theoretical Reflections on Policy Contextualisation and Thematic Analysis in Educational Research

My study's findings have several implications for policy contextualisation and thematic analysis in educational research. By drawing on Hyatt's (2013) and Rizvi and Lingard's (2010) approaches to understanding the policy environment, this study has highlighted the complex nature inherent in the JET Programme's multi-agency environment. This work has shown the need for a

more integrated, coherent, and centralised policy approach, particularly in large-scale, multi-agency initiatives like the JET Programme.

In addition, this study also utilised Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach to explore and highlight stakeholder perceptions and experiences. This methodological approach allowed for a deeper understanding of the diverse perspectives of JET Programme participants and JTEs, revealing the complexities of their experiences and the challenges each group faces in working together on the JET Programme. Thematic analysis emphasises the importance of identifying patterns and themes in qualitative data. This approach proved particularly adept in capturing the multifaceted nature of the JET Programme and its cultural, pedagogical and operational impact.

This study's findings also indicate the value of a reflexive and critical approach to educational policy. The difficulties and vagueness of the JET Programme's policy environment reflect the importance of understanding the broader socio-political context in which educational policies are created and implemented. From this standpoint, a descriptive policy contextualisation approach can help researchers critically engage with the power dynamics, institutional structures, and discursive practices influencing policy outcomes, and this was certainly the case with this research study.

Evidence emerging from this study demonstrates the essential role of stakeholders' lived experiences in understanding how policy translates into practice. By introducing stakeholder perspectives into the analysis, researchers can gain a more complete picture of the practical realities of policy implementation and the factors that influence the success or failure of policy initiatives. This perspective is invaluable for designing, adapting and evaluating educational programmes that aim to balance multiple objectives and meet diverse stakeholder needs. It has been used to great effect in the context of this study.

As a result, this study reinforces Hiratsuka's (2022) and McConnell's (2000) research findings that divergent objectives from MIC, MOFA and MEXT continue to challenge cohesive policy implementation. While my findings partially support Metzgar's (2017) observation on soft power by highlighting the JET Programme's success in enhancing intercultural goodwill, they also echo Borg's (2018), Browne and Wada's (1998) and Carless's (2006) concerns regarding role ambiguity inhibiting substantial gains in English proficiency.

6.4 Original Contribution to Knowledge

In concluding my study, it is essential to reflect on the research holistically and define my original contributions to knowledge (Cooley & Lewkowicz, 2003). Firstly, by examining the JET Programme's complex policy environment, my research has demonstrated how multi-agency collaboration involving MIC, MOFA, MEXT and CLAIR causes operational and policy-level challenges. In critically exploring these difficulties, the study advances the wider discourse on policy coherence and alignment within this context, which also provides insights into how large-scale government initiatives can be hindered or aided by the complex interplay of divergent objectives among government entities.

Second, this study offers an original contribution by comprehensively examining the perceptions and experiences of former JET participants and JTEs in the JET programme. While previous research has often focused on one group in isolation, this study's dual-perspective approach, supported by a large-scale thematic analysis, provides a more balanced and interconnected understanding of the programme's operation at ground level. This contribution is especially relevant for continuing efforts to improve the initiative, where the success of the programme is dependent on effective collaboration between JETs and JTEs. By highlighting the shared experiences and points of divergence, this research contributes new insights into ongoing efforts to improve mutual understanding, institutional support and policy responsiveness.

Third, this research has contributed to a deeper understanding of the JET Programme's cultural, diplomatic, and educational impacts, situating it more firmly within the broader frameworks of internationalisation and soft power (Borg, 2008; McConnell, 2000; Metzgar, 2017). By examining how the JET programme has shaped participants' perceptions of Japan and promoted cross-cultural understanding, this study contributes to the growing literature on soft power dimensions of international educational exchange programmes.

Finally, the methodological approach of combining a critical, context-focused policy examination with thematic analysis provides a robust framework for investigating complex multi-dimensional educational initiatives. This integrated approach unites top-down policy scrutiny with bottom-up participant insights. It is an example of how combining these research traditions can yield significant and original insights into the relationships between policy, practice, and participant experiences, a connection often underemphasised in the existing academic literature. This study's methods could be extended to other educational programmes and policy contexts as a tool for researchers interested in understanding the interaction between policy, practice, and stakeholder experiences.

6.5 Practical Implications and Recommendations

The findings of this study have several practical implications for policymakers, educators and future JET participants.

For policymakers, the study points to a need for stronger coherence and alignment between the policy frameworks regulating the JET Programme. This includes an integrated approach across the ministries involved and consistent communication of policy objectives to all stakeholders to support its educational and cultural exchange aims. As shown during the analysis and discussion chapters of this study, many of the JET Programme participants understand the cultural exchange and soft power vision of the JET Programme. However, expecting ALTs to enact sweeping changes in a tradition-bound environment such as Japan's century-old approach to English instruction highlights the operational gap that policymakers could address through enhanced communication, more consistent training opportunities and more explicit policy guidelines.

For educators, the study highlights the need for more precise role definitions and comprehensive training and support for JET participants. For JTEs, in particular, this is complex; one suggestion is for a more specialised professional development route. This would give JTEs a choice of whether they want to work with ALTs, which is currently not the case (Carless, 2006; Galloway,

2009; Hiratsuka, 2022; Jeon, 2019). As this would likely add more work to their already packed schedule, it would be prudent to allow JTEs who want to work with ALTs the choice of being able to delegate other tasks, such as homeroom commitments and after-school club activities. A 2022 survey conducted by Nippon.com showed that many Japanese school teachers at all levels are 'at breaking point' (Senoo, 2023). The survey showed that Japanese teachers already have increasing workloads due to 'a shortfall of 2,778 teachers affecting 2,092 schools' (Senoo, 2023). Allowing this more flexible approach could mitigate stress and foster a more positive, sustainable JTE-ALT partnership.

For future JET participants, this study suggests three key recommendations. First, incoming participants should be made aware of and prepared for the constraints of working in the Japanese education system, where pedagogical autonomy is limited and exam preparation is paramount. Secondly, participants should be strongly encouraged to actively seek cultural exchange and participation with their local communities. These are often the most enriching experiences of the programme. On a personal level, I found that joining my local judo club gave me the opportunity to make friends outside my JET Programme circle and school circle, and also helped develop my Japanese language ability. Finally, JET participants should be trained to recognise the need to communicate effectively with JTE colleagues and plan accordingly for cross-cultural communication challenges. As an illustration of context, I often received emails from my supervisor at 3 or 4 am as she said that this was the only time she was available to perform class preparation. This insight into her personal life made me more cognisant of being empathetic and more flexible with our interactions. Ultimately, this aided in building respect and eased tensions, allowing us to create a better working relationship and enhancing our team-teaching classes.

6.6 Strengths and Limitations of the Study

This study has several strengths that contribute to its rigour and validity. First, the mixed-methods design, which coupled a context-focused policy approach with thematic analysis, allowed a multi-disciplinary examination of the JET Programme. This gave a comprehensive view of the programme's policy environment, stakeholder perceptions and broader cultural or diplomatic impacts.

Second, the emphasis on policy contextualisation alongside stakeholder experiences provided an integrated picture of the JET Programme, highlighting the tension between policy intentions and the reality faced by JET Programme participants and JTEs. This double focus enabled a deeper exploration of factors determining the programme's success or failure. This approach also provided valuable insights into the opportunities and challenges facing stakeholders.

Third, the multifaceted approach to collecting data through questionnaire responses, official literature, academic research and media accounts provided a thorough dataset that enhances the validity and reliability of the data emerging from the research. This triangulation of data sources ensures that the conclusions here are evidential and well-supported. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018, p.265) stipulate that 'Triangulation is a powerful way of demonstrating concurrent validity'.

During the experience of this research study, however, several limitations emerged that need to be acknowledged. First, my focus on predominantly English sources means I have

overlooked media and academic sources written in Japanese. There are Japanese researchers who have published their research findings in English, such as Hiratsuka (2013; 2015; 2017; 2022), Kubota (2002), Tajino (2002) and Takeda (2023), and there may well be a greater corpus of research on the JET Programme published in Japanese. However, due to language constraints, I have not been able to incorporate these latter sources into the study. These limitations may constrain the transferability of the study's findings to other areas of the Japanese educational context, as generalisability is not typically the primary aim in qualitative research. Walpole (2019) and Konno et al. (2020) are just two studies that highlight the importance of using non-English sources to create more comprehensive and complete findings when conducting research.

Secondly, Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018) bring our attention to the fact that as more questionnaires are conducted online, such as in this study, one has to be aware of the issue of honesty and accuracy. The self-reported data from my questionnaires may have biased the study because participants provided socially desirable responses or may have acted on their own experiences and perspectives. Although careful questionnaire design and data analysis attempted to mitigate this bias, it is essential to acknowledge that this limitation may have affected the findings.

Finally, while this study has focussed on and provided valuable insights into the JET Programme, the narrow focus on this specific initiative could limit the findings' application to other international exchange programmes. Japan's often unique cultural and educational contexts may mean some of the findings are not fully applicable or replicable to similar programmes worldwide.

Despite these constraints, the study offers a meaningful lens through which we might understand the interplay of policy aims, institutional frameworks and stakeholder perspectives in large-scale educational exchange programmes.

6.7 Suggestions for Future Research

Reflecting on the findings and limitations of this study, there are several recommendations for future research. First, future studies should consider expanding the scope of the analysis to include Japanese language sources and perspectives. This would enhance the overall understanding of the JET Programme by providing valuable insights from JTEs and other Japanese educators involved in the JET Programme, who are often underrepresented due to the focus primarily being on JET participants, and predominantly on ALTs.

Another recommendation for further research is to include key stakeholders rarely mentioned, and these are the Japanese students taught by JTEs and ALTs during their team-teaching classes. Research on students is far more problematic due to their age. However, key insights from these students would provide first-hand information about the cultural interplay and English language lessons being received and how the lessons are conducted. This could shed light on the relationship between the ALT and JTE in terms of how their interpersonal relationship affects classroom dynamics.

Future research should examine the long-term effects of the JET Programme on its participants and their host communities. This could include longitudinal studies of former JET participants' experiences and career paths, and studies of the programme's long-term effects on

Japanese students and schools. As alluded to above, research of this kind could enhance academic, political and social perspectives around the JET programme's sustainability and long-term impact.

Another possible branch of study could investigate whether intercultural competence and communication have contributed to the JET Programme's success. This may include research into developing intercultural competence among JET participants or the impact of cross-cultural communication on collaboration between JETs and JTEs. This research could help inform the development of training programmes and support networks that will better prepare JET Programme participants for the difficulties faced when living and working in a new cross-cultural educational environment.

A final avenue of research that could yield compelling results would be comparative studies examining the JET Programme alongside other international educational exchange programmes. Brown (2023), Jeon (2019), and Kobayashi (2023) are just three studies mentioned in this thesis that looked more broadly at initiatives similar to those of the JET Programme. In the literature analysed for this study, there have been occasional references to how the JET Programme has either influenced or initiated other exchange programmes, such as the Native English-speaking Teacher (NET) scheme in Hong Kong established 1998, the English Programme Sichuan (EPS) in China established 2002, the English programme in Korea (EPIK) established 1995, and the Foreign English Teachers (FET) programme in Taiwan established 2021 (Brown, 2023; Turnbull, 2018). However, as of yet, there has been no large-scale corpus of academic research comparing these other initiatives with the JET Programme.

It may be worth mentioning my own attempts to contribute to the furthering of research on the JET Programme following on from this study. In order to support ongoing research and development, I have already been in contact with one of the largest ALT training groups in Japan, ALT Agora, to offer my services and to share the findings from my research. I will attend their national conference in 2025, and I am currently in discussions with JET Programme officials to help establish in-class training for ALTs and JTEs, which I hope will be held at my university later in 2025. From my email communications with the CLAIR head office, they have also expressed interest in reading my findings from this study once finalised.

6.7.1 Broader Significance of the Study

While this thesis has examined the JET Programme within the context of Japan's education system, its implications extend well beyond language learning. JET can be understood not only as a policy of English education but also as a site where political, cultural, and historical forces intersect. By tracing the programme's shifting objectives over more than three decades, this study examines how educational initiatives can serve as vehicles for nation-building, cultural diplomacy, and the projection of soft power. In this respect, the analysis contributes to broader debates on the entanglement of language policy with nationalist politics and cultural attitudes.

The findings also hold significance for political and historical scholarship. The JET Programme reflects the enduring influence of post-war U.S.–Japan relations, domestic debates around internationalisation, and evolving discourses of national identity. Situating JET within these broader

trajectories offers a window into how governments utilise educational and cultural exchange to shape their position in the world. Scholars of nationalism and international relations may therefore find value in the ways this study connects classroom realities with wider ideological and political projects.

Ultimately, this research has broader relevance for international policymakers and researchers concerned with educational exchange beyond Japan. Comparable initiatives worldwide, whether through English language teaching, cultural institutes, or government-sponsored exchange schemes, often face similar challenges in balancing pedagogical aims with political objectives. By foregrounding the voices of JET participants and JTEs, this study demonstrates the importance of examining how such programmes are experienced on the ground, as well as how they reflect and reproduce wider sociopolitical agendas.

6.8 Final Reflections and Conclusions

Reflecting on my research journey, I see that the JET Programme is a complex and rich subject, and the more I researched the inner machinations of the programme, the more analytical avenues and deeper insights became apparent. This was equally rewarding and problematic in that it became challenging at times to keep the main focus of my research in mind. Many other aspects of the JET Programme are worthy of further research, most of which I was unaware of before undertaking this study. The programme's multi-layered spread across educational, cultural and diplomatic dimensions presented challenges as well as rich opportunities for analysis. On this journey, I have been constantly reminded of the importance of being critical and reflexive in my research approach when dealing with issues as broad and complex as the JET Programme.

One of the most demanding challenges I faced was navigating the, sometimes, conflicting perspectives of the various stakeholders in the JET Programme. Balancing these perspectives from a critical, analytical standpoint demanded careful consideration and a nuanced appreciation of the broader sociopolitical context in which the JET Programme functions. This experience deepened my appreciation for the policy contextualisation window, demonstrating why robust theoretical and methodological frameworks are crucial when grappling with the tensions that arise in a multifaceted educational exchange programme like JET.

Another key component of my research journey has been engaging with a wide range of academic literature, media reports, official documents, and the perspectives of former JET participants and JTEs. This process has further enriched my understanding of the JET Programme and given me valuable insights into the broader field of international educational exchange. This has been a salient factor for my particular professional circumstances, as international exchange in one form or another is prevalent at my university and across Japan. The Collective Action for Mobility Programme of University Students in Asia (CAMPUS Asia) is one example of a trilateral initiative currently backed by MEXT that aims to increase international exchange to 30,000 students by the end of 2030 across the three countries involved: Japan, China and South Korea (GRIPS, n.d.; MEXT, 2017; Travel Voice, 2024). Overall, through this engagement, I have a renewed appreciation for the value of interdisciplinary research and the importance of referencing diverse sources of knowledge and expertise.

Finally, this research study has been a deeply personal experience in that it has encouraged me to reflect on my own positionality and consider how my background, my experiences and my preconceptions have helped shape my research stance.

The reflexive process has helped me to be critical and self-aware during the research process, and it has reinforced my belief that reflexivity is essential for rigorous ethical research. I am reminded of my research journey with the first EdD assignment in part one of this programme. At that time, I had no idea about the concepts of epistemology, ontology and researcher stance. Now, reflecting on the whole process, I can see the common strand running through the entire programme and am incredibly thankful for the assistance I have received along the way from numerous individuals.

As I conclude this thesis, I am confident that the insights and findings presented here will contribute to the overall discourse on the JET Programme and international educational exchange in general. I hope this research can, in some way, help inform future policy and practice in this area, and stimulate further inquiry into the dynamic and complex field of international education and the JET Programme.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Questionnaire for JET Programme Participants

1. Gender
Male Female Non-binary Prefer not to say
2. Age
3. What is your nationality?
4. Why did you join the JET Programme?
5. Were you an:
ALT CIR SEA
6. Which prefecture were you based in?
7. Which year did you start the JET Programme?
8. How long did you stay on the JET Programme?
1 year 2 years 3 years 4 years 5 years 5+ years due to Covid
9. Upon completion of your JET Programme contract, did you:
Return to your home country
Stay in Japan
Go to another country
10. If you did not stay in Japan – why did you not do so?
11. If you stayed in Japan – why did you do so?
12. What do you believe is the main goal of the JET Programme?
13. The JET Programme stands for the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme. However, this is not an exchange in the usual sense, as you are not ‘exchanging’ your place with a Japanese national during this time – why do you think this is?
14. Just thinking about your time on the JET Programme, do you have an overall positive impression of living and working in Japan?
- Please choose between 1 and 10 using the following scale for all Likert style questions:
1 = Extremely negative 6 = Slightly positive
2 = Very negative 7 = Moderately positive
3 = Moderately negative 8 = Very positive
4 = Slightly negative 9 = Nearly extremely positive
5 = Neutral 10 = Extremely positive
15. Do you think the JET Programme is a worthwhile venture for the JET participants?
1 = Extremely negative to 10 = Extremely positive
16. Why did you give this score for Q15?
17. Do you think the JET Programme is a worthwhile venture for the people of Japan?
1 = Extremely negative to 10 = Extremely positive
18. Why did you give this score for Q17?
19. Do you think the JET Programme is worthwhile for Japanese students?
1 = Extremely negative to 10 = Extremely positive
20. Why did you give this score for Q19?
21. Do you think the JET Programme is worthwhile for Japanese teachers, Board of Education workers or others who work directly/indirectly with them?
1 = Extremely negative to 10 = Extremely positive

22. Why did you give this score for Q21?
23. What is your current employment status?
- | | |
|---------------------|-------------------|
| Full time employed | Unemployed |
| Part-time employed | Other |
| Stay at home parent | Prefer not to say |
24. Has the JET Programme had any kind of impact on your current employment?
- 1 = Extremely negative to 10 = Extremely positive
25. Why did you give this score for Q24?
26. Have you/would you recommend the JET Programme to someone?
- | | |
|-----|----|
| Yes | No |
|-----|----|
27. Any further details for Q26?
28. Any other free comment is welcome about your time on the JET Programme

Appendix 2 – JET Programme questionnaire for Japanese English Teachers who have worked with JETs

1. Gender

Male

Female

Non-binary

Prefer not to say

2. Age

3. Which prefecture do/did you work in?

4. How many years have you been an English teacher?

5. Have you worked with:

ALT

CIR

SEA

choose as many as necessary

6. How many JET Programme participants have you worked with in total?

7. Have you ever been a direct supervisor of a JET Programme participant?

Yes

No

8. What kind of work did you do with the JET Programme participant?

choose as many as necessary

Team teaching

After school activities

Just worked/spoke/interacted with them in the staffroom etc..

Board of Education work

Other

9. What do you believe is the main goal of the JET Programme?

10. The JET Programme stands for the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme. However, this is not an exchange in the usual sense, as Japanese teachers are not 'exchanging' places with the JET Programme participants during this time – why do you think this is?

11. Just thinking about your time working with JET Programme participants, do you have an overall positive impression of working with them?

Please choose between 1 and 10 using the following scale for all Likert style questions:

1 = Extremely negative

6 = Slightly positive

2 = Very negative

7 = Moderately positive

3 = Moderately negative

8 = Very positive

4 = Slightly negative

9 = Nearly extremely positive

5 = Neutral

10 = Extremely positive

12. Could you give any further details to your answer for Q11?

13. Do you think the JET Programme is worthwhile for the JET participants?

1 = Extremely negative to 10 = Extremely positive

14. Why did you give this score for Q13?

15. Do you think the JET Programme is worthwhile for Japanese people in general?

1 = Extremely negative to 10 = Extremely positive

16. Why did you give this score for Q15?

17. Do you think the JET Programme is worthwhile for Japanese students?

1 = Extremely negative to 10 = Extremely positive

18. Why did you give this score for Q17?

19. Do you think the JET Programme is worthwhile for Japanese teachers, Board of Education workers or others who work directly/indirectly with them?

1 = Extremely negative to 10 = Extremely positive

20. Why did you give this score for Q19?

21. Who do you think benefits the most from the JET Programme?

The JET Programme participants

Japanese teachers

Japanese students

The Japanese government - MEXT, MOFA, etc... - promotes positive relations with foreign countries

The general Japanese public - JET employees have to spend their wages in the local community

The country where the JET participant has come from

22. Any further details for your answer to Q21

23. What is your current employment status?

Full time employed

Unemployed

Part-time employed

Other

Stay at home parent

Prefer not to say

24. Any other free comment is welcome about your thoughts on the JET Programme and its participants

Appendix 3 – University of Sheffield Ethics Approval Letter



Downloaded: 28/03/2025
Approved: 24/03/2022

Jaime Morrish
Registration number: 180131066
School of Education
Programme: Doctor of Education

Dear Jaime

PROJECT TITLE: Mixed messages: an analysis of the policy intentions and programme trajectory of the Japan Exchange Teaching Programme from 1986 to 2022

APPLICATION: Reference Number 045701

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 24/03/2022 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form 045701 (form submission date: 13/03/2022); (expected project end date: 31/12/2022).
- Participant information sheet 1103350 version 1 (13/03/2022).
- Participant consent form 1103351 version 1 (13/03/2022).

If during the course of the project you need to [deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation](#) please inform me since written approval will be required.

Your responsibilities in delivering this research project are set out at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely

ED6ETH EDU
Ethics Admin
School of Education

Please note the following responsibilities of the researcher in delivering the research project:

- The project must abide by the University's Research Ethics Policy: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/research-services/ethics-integrity/policy>
- The project must abide by the University's Good Research & Innovation Practices Policy: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.6710661/file/GRIPPpolicy.pdf
- The researcher must inform their supervisor (in the case of a student) or Ethics Admin (in the case of a member of staff) of any significant changes to the project or the approved documentation.
- The researcher must comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data.
- The researcher is responsible for effectively managing the data collected both during and after the end of the project in line with best practice, and any relevant legislative, regulatory or contractual requirements.