



# 1 - Decoding Lesson Study: Narratives from Japan

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## Abstract

Lesson Study (LS) has long been a key part of teacher development in Japan and is increasingly recognized worldwide for its structured, collaborative approach to improving teaching practices. However, perspectives on LS vary widely between Japanese teachers (JTs) and foreign Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs), who often participate as observers. This study compares these differing viewpoints through interviews with three JTs and three ALTs. The Japanese teachers spoke positively about LS, highlighting its ability to sharpen their teaching methods, promote professional growth, and create opportunities for student progress. They acknowledged the heavy workload LS requires but saw value in its “performative” nature, which pushes teachers and students to perform at their best. In contrast, the ALTs viewed LS more critically, describing it as overly rehearsed, unrealistic, and detached from the day-to-day realities of the classroom. Three key points stand out. First, the level of involvement matters. Teachers who are directly engaged in the full LS process—planning, rehearsing, and reflecting—tend to see its benefits, while those on the sidelines, like many ALTs, are more likely to see it as performative for the sake of appearances. Second, LS is changing. Japanese teachers noted a shift towards lessons that are more natural and representative of regular teaching, a perspective not reflected in the ALTs’ static view of the process. Third, the role of attached schools—often seen as leaders in LS—is complicated. While they produce polished, impressive lessons, their selective student populations and demanding teacher workloads limit their relevance for regular public schools. This study highlights the need to understand LS within its cultural and professional context. It also suggests that involving ALTs more meaningfully in the LS process might help bridge the gap in perceptions. Finally, Japan could benefit from engaging with international research and evolving practices in LS to maintain its relevance at home and abroad.

**Keywords:** Lesson Study (LS), Teacher Development, Cultural Context, Performative Teaching, Attached Schools

## 1. Introduction

Lesson Study is a central component of professional development for teachers in Japan that has received increasing attention around the world over the past 20 years. International researchers have praised the practice, and Japan has sought to export LS to various regions through the Japan International Cooperation Agency and other organizations. This paper is a narrative inquiry, comparing and contrasting interview data from three Assistant Language Teachers (native-English speaking teachers who assist Japanese teachers in English language classrooms) and three Japanese teachers. The Japanese teachers view Lesson Study positively, while the native-English speaking teachers have a negative view, which also contradicts the literature. Three broad positions emerge from the narratives. First, the more that teachers feel personally invested in Lesson Study, the greater its potential impact. Second, lived experience reveals limitations to Lesson Study that many previous accounts in the literature have not captured. Finally, the international community has made significant contributions to Lesson Study, which Japan should consider integrating into practice and be aware of when promoting Lesson Study in other countries.

### 1.1 What is lesson study?

It is a common, formalized practice in Japan for teachers to bring their co-workers, supervisors within the school or board of education, and other interested members of the community to view their lessons with students. Individual teachers are not required to open their classes in this way on a yearly basis, but they will observe study lessons of their peers at least yearly, and they will probably

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open one of their own classes once every several years. This is a central component of professional development for educators, known in English as “Lesson Study” (LS). LS is conducted at the school, municipal, regional and national levels. Less experienced teachers are often chosen to conduct the lesson, but senior teachers are not exempt from LS. Pre-service teachers also engage in LS as part of their teaching practicum.

Though it is practiced across a range of situations, there are some commonalities, first being that teachers work very hard, sometimes for weeks or months, preparing the lesson and drawing up an accurate plan which is usually given to participants. Immediately following the lesson, a reflection meeting is held. Usually, the teacher comments on the lesson, followed by the observers in turn. LS is often connected to a theme such as a goal across the curricula, or curriculum changes introduced at the national level. Detailed descriptions of LS can be found in Marchesseau (2024), Lewis et al. (2019), Lewis et al. (2009), and Stigler and Hiebert (1999). In the author’s view, having been involved in education in Japan for around 30 years, LS is akin to subjecting your classroom teaching practice to peer review, where feedback is given in the form of the reflection meeting.

## *1.2 Previous literature*

Since LS has gained traction internationally, patterns can be seen in the literature. Earlier studies have identified compatibility issues when exporting the uniquely Japanese initiative to other cultural settings. As LS gained traction around the world, successful models have been described in the literature. More recently, researchers have sought to explicitly measure teacher learning and further document the effectiveness of LS.

Fujii (2014) described attempts at LS in Uganda and Malawi as being unsuccessful due to cultural misconceptions of the practice. He suggested that the lessons themselves could not be considered a part of LS because the teacher prescribed a way to solve for the correct answers in a mathematics class, rather than adopting a more inquiry-based, student-centred approach. He then described the reflection session as being contentious because, when facing criticism, teachers had trouble separating their egos from their teaching practice and lesson design. He also criticized the teachers for revising and improving upon some of the activities for future use. LS requires a longer-term commitment to professional growth than what he observed in Uganda and Malawi.

I argued previously that many of his criticisms are unfair and unrealistic (Marchesseau, 2024), however, the importance of having a long-term outlook and not expecting immediate rewards has been echoed in other literature (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999). Ebaegu and Stevens (2014) administered the Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions survey to teachers in the Philippines to explain their lacklustre enthusiasm for LS. Not having a long-term outlook and having an unrealistic expectation of immediate, measurable gains seems to stymie the effectiveness of LS in the Philippines. Lim-Ratnam et al. (2019) studied LS in Singapore and similarly found that having a long-term outlook was a serious challenge in a competitive academic culture where educators look for quick results in the form of increased standardized test scores. Another cultural challenge to the successful implementation of LS is that there is no cultural framework for LS in educational settings outside of Japan (Lewis, 2016). In Japan LS is systemic, from very local levels, through to the national level. Trying to build a practice of LS from the ground up, however, is challenging without this framework of support.

Despite the challenges, recent years have seen many successful models of LS. Takahashi and McDougal (2016), for example, studied LS in the Chicago area at thirty schools. Initial implementation was muted, and it faded away at all but five schools. LS found success though, when it was reframed as Collaborative Lesson Research (CLR), thus freeing itself from definitional constraints. (I argue that there is no singular, narrow construct of LS even in Japan, so a flexible approach is entirely appropriate.) Importantly, Takahashi and McDougal (2016) also found that teachers had a vested interest in LS when it was connected to new educational guidelines that were being introduced by the board of education. Drawing on this research, LS has also been successful in recent years in Europe (Bakker et al., 2022; Uffen et al., 2022; van den Boom-Muilenburg et al., 2022; Wothuis et al., 2020).

Interest in LS has been high in recent years. One vein of research has concerned teacher-learning from observing and participating in LS. Dunken (2023) used a grounded theory approach to analyze



teacher feedback when participating in LS. Echoing Takahashi and McDougal (2016), the benefits were greater when LS was connected to curriculum reform. Similarly, Uffen (2022) distinguished between teachers who reported high and low teaching learning in the Netherlands. Correlating this distinction to different variables, they found that LS led to more teacher learning when it was personally relevant and connected to what they wanted to learn at the onset. Still focusing on teacher learning, Vermunt et al. (2023) identified three learning patterns which they measured by a questionnaire that was tested through factor analysis. On the qualitative side, Kager et al. (2022) created a coding system to analyze qualitative discourse in the reflection meetings. It should be pointed out that the studies above do not only measure the efficacy of LS, they provide templates and techniques for further research. I am aware of very little such research in Japan. This is only a sample of the studies on LS in recent years. Lewis et al. (2019) provides extensive earlier references.

### 1.3 Precursor to this study

This research expands upon previous research summarized below. Marchesseau (2024) is a narrative inquiry, drawing on interview data from three Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs). ALTs are native-English speaking assistants to Japanese teachers (JTs) of English in elementary, junior high and senior high schools. Defined narrowly, “ALT” is the job title of assistant English teachers participating on the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program, but the term is now used more broadly to refer to all non-Japanese assistant English teachers. Typically, ALTs are young and are not qualified to be teachers in their own countries. Contracts are usually renewed annually, with a 5-year contractual limit. ALTs tend to finish their time in Japan after two or three years. More information can be found in McConnell (2000), Marchesseau (2006), and on the official website (JET Program, n.d.).

The three ALTs interviewed in Marchesseau (2024) had distinctly negative opinions of LS, contrasting the positive reviews in the literature. In their experience, LS lessons were over-prepared and scripted. They are not typical of what teachers usually do in class and cannot be realistically duplicated in day-to-day classes. Teachers often demonstrate a very well-rehearsed method or approach which may be in fashion, only to go back to their traditional way of teaching the next day. The reflection sessions also seem to follow a pre-determined form and occasionally seem akin to hazing, rather than constructive criticism. Generally, the process seems more performative than genuinely beneficial or authentic.

One of the ALTs worked at a university-attached elementary school, and the account of these schools contrasted the description of such schools in Lewis et al., (2016). University-attached schools (henceforth referred to as “attached schools”) are technically part of the public school system, but they are administered by universities and require applicants to take entrance exams. Therefore, they are not representative of the larger population, and pedagogy at the attached schools might not be effective at other public schools. The teachers at these schools also do not seem to be chosen based on superior teaching ability. They are drawn from the larger population of public-school teachers, and they transfer in and out of the attached schools every several years. There seems to be a range of criteria affecting these transfers, but superior teaching ability does not seem to be a major factor. It is common practice for teachers to transfer from school to school every several years. Usually, teachers have no say in these transfers, but they do have the right to refuse transfer into the attached schools, in principle. Some teachers may view attached schools as prestigious, but most do not want to work there because they are required to work considerably longer hours. The conditions in the attached schools, and the role of the attached schools in the community is more complicated than indicated by Lewis (2016).

Marchesseau (2024) goes on to suggest that international research and practice of LS has progressed significantly in the last 20 years, and that Japan would be advised to stay current with these developments, least they lose relevance in an area to which they lay claim. One major limitation identified in Marchesseau (2024) is that the study relied on reports from ALTs. ALTs are not permanently employed by prefectural schoolboards, and they often come to Japan with limited linguistic and cultural knowledge. Moreover, they are often treated as guests in their schools and are not actively involved in decision making processes. A resulting sense of alienation may contribute to negative feelings about LS. Having been involved in English education in Japan for almost 30 years, I

am confident that the ALTs did raise important issues with regards to LS that were not seen in the literature, but a study such as this is incomplete without narratives from JTs. The purpose of this study is to provide a more balanced view of LS by comparing and contrasting the views of ALTs with those of JTs.

## **2. Methodology**

This research relies on interview data to compare JT and ALT perceptions of LS. The preceding section outlines the results of the ALT interviews. In this section, the primary focus is on the Japanese participant data.

### *2.1 Participants*

One ALT participant worked at an attached school. The other two worked at public schools, with one going on to work in higher education for the past 20 years. Purposive sampling was conducted to gather representative and comprehensive views. Further details can be found in Marchesseau (2024).

The three JTs were also collected with purposive sampling in mind. F-sensei, has worked at an attached junior high school for the past 10 years. She has been teaching for a total of 20 years, with previous experience at three different public junior high schools. I asked her why she was transferred to the attached school. She said that she had been chosen to study in the United States for one year. When she returned, her school principal suggested that she transfer to the attached school. Ordinarily, teachers can opt against transferring to the attached schools, but since she had been given the opportunity to study abroad, it was an offer that she could not refuse. F-sensei, was chosen as an informant because we have developed a close working relationship and I believed that she would give frank, honest answers. Getting unfiltered interview data is often a challenge in a highly contextualized society like Japan, and all informants (both ALTs and JTs) were chosen with this in mind. It was also important to have a participant from an attached school, since this was a theme in both the literature, and the ALT data. Her interview was conducted in English, though I gave her the option of speaking Japanese at any time.

The second participant, M-sensei, was an in-service elementary school teacher, currently doing post-graduate studies. Her experience of around 15 years has been entirely within the public school system at elementary schools. She was also chosen because I had gotten to know her well over the past year through her participation in classes and extra-curricular activities, including a study-tour to a foreign country. Very generally, I would describe her as a “typical” elementary school teacher. Her interview was conducted in Japanese and then translated by the author into English, with some consultation with the translation application, DeepL. Over their careers, both F-sensei and M-sensei have experienced LS lessons as observers, tens of times, and been chosen to conduct LS themselves close to ten times.

O-sensei, the third participant, has been a faculty member at a university for around 30 years. LS is not typically done at university, so he has never personally conducted a lesson, but he has observed around 30 LS lessons. Many of these have been for pre-service teachers, but he has ample experience with LS of all types. He was chosen because he is a personal friend, and therefore, I was confident that his answers would be honest. I also know him to be a bit of a contrarian. I thought that his narrative data may reveal aspects of LS which the others might not express. The names of the participants have been changed to preserve anonymity.

### *2.2 Interviews*

All interviews were conducted with a casual, but systematic approach. Please consult Marchesseau (2024) for further details on the ALT data. JTs were initially asked to describe their experience with LS. They were then asked follow-up questions based on their answers. For example, F-sensei said that she felt LS improved both students’ English ability and her ability as a teacher. The interviewer prompted more data, asking, “How does it improve teacher’s ability?” The overall approach was to elicit as large an amount of qualitative data as possible, without leading the participants or revealing



any personal bias. However, it was important to gather data addressing several points to compare and contrast the ALT accounts and the literature. The amount of rehearsal prior to the LS study, and the similarity (or not) with their typical classes were areas that were addressed. Participants were also asked about LS at the attached schools, and the overall roll of the attached schools within the community. O-sensei and M-sensei had both observed LS at the attached schools, and F-sensei was a teacher there, as mentioned.

In the last 15 minutes of the interviews, participants were told that I had conducted similar interviews with ALTs, and that their impressions of LS were distinctly negative. I suggested that ALTs may have various biases. JTs were welcomed to provide further comment to contrast or balance the views of ALTs.

### 2.3 Analysis

The 45-minute interviews were recorded and transcribed for thematic analysis. While coding methods were considered, they often compress data. Given the small dataset, accurate summaries could be achieved without systematic coding, as it wasn't large enough to justify such methods. Researcher objectivity remains a concern in qualitative summaries, but with a manageable dataset, trust from the reader is reasonable. If objectivity is a concern, I can provide transcripts upon request.

## 3. Results

Because the ALT results have already been discussed a length in Marchesseau (2024), the data was briefly summarized here, in section 1.3. More thorough summaries are provided for the Japanese teacher interviews in this section, with excerpts to illustrate the themes of the interviews. ALT and Japanese teacher data will be compared and contrasted in the discussion section.

### 3.1 F-sensei

F-sensei perceives LS to be very effective at improving both teaching ability and the English ability of the students. LS requires her to carefully consider her teaching plan and the presentation of her lesson in a way that she does not do in her day-to-day practice. Asked how LS improves teacher ability, she states:

Because I have to check a lot of study plans and also think about the procedures – how to teach. And before the practice lesson, I do three or so practice lessons in other class. I practice the LS class in other classes before trying it in the LS class.

LS essentially puts the class under a microscope, revealing aspects in the student-teacher discourse that are not observed in normal circumstances. F-sensei makes it clear that she does not “want to do demo lessons so often” because “it takes time to prepare”, but she speaks very positively of another senior teacher who often volunteers to do LS. She describes his interest in LS:

This school's math teacher demonstrated 7 times – one teacher using another grade's students. He needs practice. He needs to check how students respond to his questions. He's a mature teacher. He loves LS. He is very active! He just kind of volunteered.

The teacher enjoyed doing LS so much that he requested to conduct these lessons for other classes outside of his own. The enthusiasm was evident in F-sensei's voice, but to be clear, this teacher is an anomaly.

The benefit for students seems to come from the productive pressure to perform that LS brings. F-sensei reported that she does student-centred, communicative activities in their regular classes, but students' motivation to communicate is always higher during LS, when there are international guests, or when classroom tasks have a specific goal which is connected to the real world. About LS, F-sensei says:

I felt students enjoyed the speaking lesson. [...] It's different from a normal lesson because if there are some observers,

other teachers will look at the students' activities and atmosphere. This schools' students can enjoy LS. Students' performance improves because they become more active. If there are no observers, students are not so active.

F-sensei also seemed to indicate that students from the attached school are particularly motivated to show off their communicative ability during LS, with the implication that public schools may not see the same effect.

I directly asked about the attached school's role as a community leader, to which F-sensei replied, "Kind of. One of the leader schools." However, when asked if many teachers seek inspiration from attached schools, she responded, "Some. Not many." For example, a recent nationally publicized LS attracted fewer than ten observers, with only two or three from outside the prefecture. This contrasts with Lewis' (2019) portrayal of attached schools.

The critical views that ALTs have of LS were not shared by F-sensei. If LS lessons are performative, they represent an ideal that teachers should strive for in their every-day practice. The problem is not that LS lessons are not representative of regular classes; it is that regular classes do not meet the standards of LS classes. She states:

The biggest negative side is the difference from the normal lessons and LS. We should do that kind of lesson, LS style lesson, every time in the English lessons. However, many Japanese English teachers do grammar translation.

### 3.2 M-sensei

M-sensei's positive opinion of LS was similar to F-sensei's. When English was introduced in elementary school, many teachers were at a loss, and seeing what their peers were doing helped provide direction. It's a lot of work for teachers, and she does not typically volunteer to do LS, but it is a valuable form of professional development for both teachers and students. The arduous yet beneficial aspects of LS were highlighted throughout the interview. The excerpt below is a brief example:

When we do LS, there's a lot of pressure. I wonder if I can do it. I feel anxious about how it's going to go. But there's a value in that challenge and it's connected to my professional development.

Students also benefit from LS. M-sensei says that they are often nervous about being watched, but their reactions are usually positive. Referring to LS in "Moral Studies" classes, she explains that often the LS lesson is the product of a succession of lessons. In the process leading up to the lesson, she has observed that, "you can see a big change in the children's emotions, eyes, hearts and ways of thinking." LS is also beneficial for observers. Particularly when there is curriculum reform, it can provide examples of teaching methods and approaches.

I wanted to address several issues raised in the ALT narratives. When asked about the reflection sessions, M-sensei felt that they were generally productive. Valerie, one of the three ALTs suggested that the reflection meetings can be unnecessarily critical, but M-sensei viewed them as primarily positive, stating:

They're mostly positive but some of the teachers watching give me strict comments. It hasn't happened much, but I've never been told anything that strict. They don't say anything nasty. They usually give me advice.

The ALTs also implied that LS lessons might be rehearsed with students prior to the lesson. M-sensei was quick to deny this: "No, we're not allowed! There's no point in that case. It would be just a performance." However, like F-sensei, she practices the LS lesson with different students before delivering it in front of observers. This seems to be a common practice.

When asked if the attached schools were seen as leaders in the community, she responded that they were to an extent, but she also emphasized the difference between attached schools and regular public schools, which limits their relevance:

Maybe, I think so [attached schools are leaders], but attached-schools are attached-schools. Public schools are public schools. They are separate. The students are different. The conditions are different. I think the tests are different too.



M-sensei went on to describe a LS lesson that one of her former colleagues had given at an attached school. She was impressed by the extensive work that he had put into the lesson and said that it could not be realistically replicated in normal conditions, because of the sheer amount of preparation required. She made it clear that she would not want to work for the attached schools because of the heavier workload.

Another important theme that emerged in the interview was that LS has evolved over the years. While she flatly denied lessons being rehearsed with the same group of students, she said that this might have been done in the past. The general trend in recent years has been for LS to become more representative of normal lessons and more replicable under normal conditions:

Before, I took a completely different approach to LS, but recently it's been changing, and teachers are showing lessons that other people can do too. Before, many lessons were not realistic, they couldn't be repeated in other conditions. But recently, lessons have become more natural. Otherwise, there's no point, right? If it's a lesson that no one else could do, then there's no point.

When the negative views of ALTs were raised, she suggested that this may stem from their lack of involvement in the process. She elaborates:

Do they know the process leading up to the lesson? It depends on how much that person is involved, right? If we were all involved in that process together, I don't think you could say that. If you were just there as a guest for the final lesson, then maybe you would think that, but if you could clearly see what we're going to do here, then I don't think you could say that.

### 3.3 O-sensei

O-sensei's view stands in contrast with the other JTs. While he recognizes constructive examples of LS, he has no reluctance to criticize the practice. He describes how the performative, rehearsed aspect of LS limits its efficacy:

In a way, they're good. But sometimes I think it's nonsense because some teachers do the lesson before they let us see the class. They just want to show a better class. They do the same class once and then do it again. ...They do that to show the other teachers: 'We're doing this kind of thing - I'm a good teacher!'

However, similar to M-sensei, O-sensei has also observed that LS is evolving:

But recently the situation is changing. Teachers don't prepare. They don't do the lesson before they show the class. Now, it's less rehearsed. ...That seems good. We should not do big preparation before class. If they prepare too much, that's not good for the kids. It's not good for us. We just want to see and learn what's going on. We want to see students' natural reaction.

He summed up the interview saying that "if it works, it's good, but the problem is the way it is practiced".

O-sensei's mixed review of LS was consistent across the interview. He suggests that the reflection meetings can be beneficial, but that observers often either lack critical insight, or they are excessively critical, as if to suggest their own superiority. About the reflection meetings he states:

Sometimes it's nonsense. The teachers, the audience speak very well of the teacher. - "You're great!". But we don't need that.

When asked if teachers are sometimes too critical, he answers:

Oh yes. Too critical. Everyone was quiet but one person was just complaining. I thought he wanted to show that he is a good teacher. That's not common. It happens more than once, but it's not common.

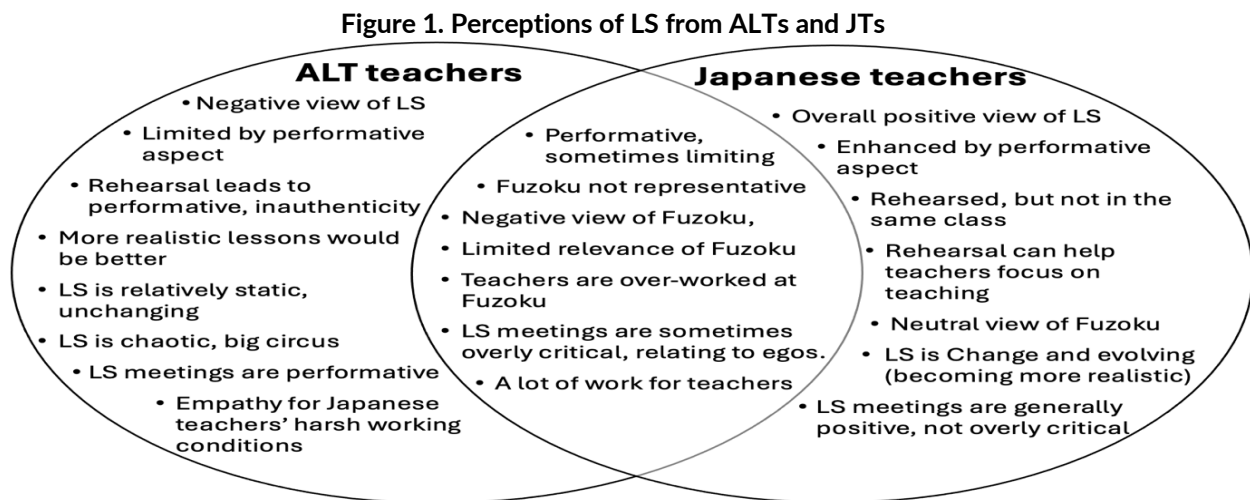
All participants were asked about the attached schools, and this is where O-sensei was most critical. One reason O-sensei was chosen as an informant was because of his anti-authoritarian tendencies. I knew of this bias. Purposive sampling was done precisely so that a somewhat alternative take on LS (and the attached schools) would be represented. O-sensei went to an attached school as a child and has visited or worked with several attached schools in his position as a university professor.

He chuckled as he describes how the students master how to impress adults. This plays into the performative aspects of LS. He describes the schools as having a uniform culture across Japan and fostering a sense of snobbish superiority among children and parents. From the teachers' perspective, some used to covet positions at attached schools, but as times have changed, public school teachers do not want to work at such schools because of the vastly increased workload. His view is summed up in the following excerpt:

It's rotten! The feudalistic system and trying to make teachers into workaholics. And the students are no good. They're from good families, but they're very proud of themselves and their families. I've almost never seen a kid from an agricultural family. My father was a schoolteacher. Half of my classmates' parents were doctors, lawyers, teachers, public workers, like that. It's a kind of 'high society'. I don't think it's good. Some teachers told us to be proud of being part of [the attached school] That's crazy! That's not rock and roll!

#### 4. Discussion

Figure 1 summarizes the similarities and differences in perceptions about LS between ALTs and JTs. ALTs viewed LS as predominantly negative, while JTs had a positive view.



The two experienced public-school teachers viewed LS as an essential part of professional development, for teachers, while the university professor, who had never actually performed an LS lesson, and whose biases were previously noted, was more negative. ALTs, on the other hand, were consistently negative. They felt that both the lesson and the meeting afterwards emphasized form over content, describing the entire practice as performative. Clearly, ALTs viewed the performative aspect of LS negatively, but F-sensei, felt that the requirement to “perform” in front of guests put productive pressure on students and improved their English output. Thus, both groups recognize that LS is performative, but disagree on the effect.

Similarly, ALTs and JTs both report that LS is rehearsed, but they disagree on the effect and extent of rehearsal. According to JTs, rehearsing the lesson with other classes prior to the LS lesson allows teachers to hone their teaching approach and lesson content, enhancing the beneficial effects of LS. ALTs, however, seem to believe that the lesson is rehearsed simply to ensure that it runs smoothly and matches formal expectations. ALTs imply that the lesson might be rehearsed with the same group of students, prior to the LS lesson. JTs responded that this is not true, though it may have been done in the past. There is universal agreement that LS requires a great deal of work from those directly involved. While JTs recognize it as beneficial, they are reluctant to volunteer for LS, and ALTs expressed their sympathy for their Japanese counterparts.

All three JTs have observed that LS has been changing over the years. The lessons have been becoming more representative of what teachers usually do in class. Slowly, the formal aspects of LS have been loosened. The ALTs presented a more static view of LS. This might be explained by the JTs' more extensive experience with LS over many years. This is an important point that was not well-addressed in Marchesseau (2024).



The interviews indicate that direct involvement affects the perception of LS. The most positive views came from the two teachers with extensive direct experience with LS. The ALTs' experience was generally limited to the lesson itself and the reflection meeting. The entire process of LS can last weeks or months, and ALTs were not typically involved in the planning or other parts of LS. Lewis et al. (2019) suggested that the Self-Determination Theory (STD) of motivation may explain perceptions of LS. According to SDT, motivation is driven by a sense of autonomy, relatedness and competence (Sansone & Harachiewicz, 2000). As assistants with limited-term contracts, ALTs often feel a lack of relatedness and autonomy (Hiratsuka, 2022; Ohtani, 2010; Marchesseau, 2006; McConnell, 2000), and this may affect their perceptions of LS and other aspects of their job. As M-sensei said, when she learned of the negative ALT accounts, "That's just because they're not involved, right!?". Relatedly, the literature also shows that LS has been the most successful when it has been relevant to teachers' situation. ALTs, even when they participate in the lesson itself, maintain a distance from LS and do not seem to benefit in the same way that JTs do. If ALTs are more directly involved in the process, they too might see the benefits and their perceptions might change. However, ALTs often work at several schools, so their position precipitates a lack of continuity, which may make deeper involvement in practices like LS impractical.

Another theme in this research was the attached schools. They are sometimes touted as leaders in the community, but the perception of these schools is mixed. The ALTs were free with their criticism of attached schools, especially Valerie, who worked at one of these schools. The JTs were more nuanced in their opinion, but amalgamating the interviews, there are at least two factors which limit the role of attached schools as leaders in the community. Firstly, students are not representative of the larger population. They are admitted to attached schools based on results of a competitive entrance exam. This contributes to a sense of elitism, and a distinct culture within the schools. This is keenly felt by those who are deeply involved in the attached schools, including the author, and it is clearly expressed in the interviews. These schools are different from normal public schools. Generalizability is weak. Secondly, while we found no evidence that teachers at the attached schools have superior ability, they are required to work far longer hours than teachers at regular schools. The amount of effort that they put into LS is exorbitant and not realistic for other teachers. The narratives make this clear, and I have seen it firsthand over the years that I have been involved in Japanese education.

## 5. Conclusion

This study compared perceptions of LS from ALTs and JTs. Initial results from ALTs present a negative view. The researcher also has previous experience as an ALT. Prior to an adequate survey of the research and discussions with JTs, my view was consistent with that of other ALTs. Studies on LS, however, show that there is much interest in the practice, and that it has been successful in various settings around the world. The literature is persuasive. Moreover, interviewing JTs provides a more complete picture, and shows that the practice benefits teachers by requiring them to focus in fine detail on their teaching. The benefit to students and the other participants was discussed in less detail, but probably depends on the situation and purpose of LS. When a new curriculum is introduced, for example, seeing what other teachers are doing and sharing ideas helps move pedagogy forward.

Two of the conclusions by Marchesseau (2024) are supported and maintained in this study. First, practice and research on LS has progressed a great deal around the world, arguably more so than in Japan. The JTs in this study indicate that LS has been evolving, with the lessons become more representative as formalities have eased. However, researchers abroad have gone further to propose specific templates and tools for conducting and researching LS. In Japan, LS may be able to draw influence from these advances, and Japanese educators promoting LS abroad should be well acquainted with the literature. Ridged approaches like that implied in Fujii (2014) are not relevant in other regions, and they may not be representative of LS practiced in Japan at present. Second, the attached schools are not representative of regular public schools, and public-school teachers are well-aware of this. While the teachers at attached schools do not seem to possess superior skills, their workload is considerably higher and probably unsustainable. The students are also not representative of the population, since there are stringent entrance requirements. Visitors from abroad may be

impressed when visiting attached schools, but spending time in regular public schools provides a much more realistic picture of education in Japan.

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