
Conference Reviews

JALT 2022 International Conference Review

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The 48th JALT International Conference was held in Fukuoka from Friday November 11th to Monday November 14th, 2022, with the theme “Learning from Students, Educating Teachers - Research and Practice”. There were many fascinating presentations and I wanted to attend the entire program across all the four days. Unfortunately, due to teaching commitments on Monday and Friday, this was not possible. What follows then, are the highlights that I noted from the sessions that I was able to attend on Saturday and Sunday.

As this was the first JALT International Conference that I had attended, I was somewhat overwhelmed by the number of presentations available. Fortunately, this year visitors were supported by a useful app called “CVENT” to navigate the conference. I found it to be useful in organising my time, deciding what to see, and most importantly, making sure I did not miss anything that I thought worthwhile.

So, with the app’s guidance, I attended my first presentation by Jim McKinley on Saturday morning. Focusing on the conference theme, he discussed the growing divide between teachers and researchers, and highlighted the fact that teachers seldom engage with academic language journals or find them relevant to their needs. He discussed how research tends to be more highly valued in academic environments than actual teaching, since research is far easier to measure through publications. As a teacher-practitioner myself, I was pleased to hear him extol the benefits of a more grassroots approach, with teaching-led research to counter this one-way flow of knowledge from researchers to teachers.

After the plenary session, I watched a presentation by Rika Otsu, whose study investigated the influence of reading English picture books on university student volunteer readers and elementary school pupil listeners. She found that there were benefits for the children who were listening and benefits for the readers, such as improved intonation. In addition, she showed that through reading books to children, the readers developed closer connections with those children.

Next, I gave a research-oriented talk based on my final MA dissertation, which evaluated the use of YouTube playlists in CLIL environments, sponsored by my home chapter, JALT Nagoya. Since it was my first face-to-face presentation at a JALT event, I was somewhat nervous, but pleased that attendees were interested and engaged. This was an excellent opportunity to develop professionally, so if you are considering presenting for the first time at a JALT conference, I recommend that you contact your local JALT chapter or SIG to see if there are openings.

After lunch with my co-worker, I attended the afternoon plenary session by Ryoko Tsuneyoshi, who discussed the problematic role of English in the internationalisation of Japanese education. The presentation highlighted her interesting perspectives, such as the fact that “Foreign Language” and “English” seem to be interchangeable terms within Japan’s education system, even though English is not the primary language of many foreigners within Japan. The presenter posed some thought-provoking questions, such as whether English language education can truly internationalise the Japanese education system.

Following the plenary session I attended an engaging workshop from Jeffrey Goncalves, Malgorzata Polczynska, and Eduardo Castro. The workshop focused on the use of two interesting advising tools – “The Wheel of Language Learning”, which asked learners to rate themselves in different developmental areas, and a motivation graph whereby learners could demonstrate their different motivation levels over time. The presenters showed how reflections related to language learning could be scaffolded using these tools. I value providing learners with opportunities to reflect on their studies, so found this workshop especially helpful, and I will be using these tools in my classes next semester.

After this, I joined Junko Yamanaka’s practice-oriented workshop, which

focused on connecting learners to the world and raising their awareness of important contemporary issues. She offered useful tips on how to enable learners to develop communication skills, cooperate with one another, and to think both globally and critically.

Since I do not have access to a research budget, I attended the forum by Peter J. Collins and Gregory Scholdt entitled “Getting Your Research Funded Through JALT”. There are three research grants of up to ¥ 100,000 available for people without financial support from their institutions. The presenters gave attendees a very thorough overview of the application process, and how to improve the chances of grant applications being successful. The presentation was well organised and informative, and I will consider applying in 2023.

On Sunday morning, I attended the plenary session by Kensaku Yoshida in which he described how the New Course of Study from MEXT with its focus on “Can Do” statements, is being implemented in junior and senior high schools. I found this particularly interesting, as improvements in the English level of students who enter my teaching context (university) will have a direct impact on my teaching.

After the plenary session, I attended Tim Andrewartha’s presentation about learner attitudes to English as a Lingua Franca. I had often wondered which areas of pronunciation would most benefit my learners, so this presentation was especially helpful, since it highlighted specific pronunciation areas to focus on to ensure that learners can be more easily understood when communicating in English.

Next, I attended Joe Wood’s presentation, which compared student perceptions of extensive listening and extensive reading. I have just started an extensive reading programme, and I also produce a podcast for my learners for extensive listening purposes, so I was interested to hear about this pilot study and gained valuable insights into his recent research. In particular, he discussed difficulties when implementing extensive listening programs, for example finding suitable materials for learners that are within their listening comfort zone, and how these problems might be resolved.

With my time ending, I visited the Educational Materials Exhibition to look

for new materials. There were many exhibitors including book publishers, and institutions from around the world promoting their higher education programs. I was pleased to have the chance to pick up samples of graded readers, and to discuss potential further education opportunities. Finally, I briefly stopped by JALT's Job Information Center (JIC) and received advice on improving my resume.

I would have liked to stay longer, as there were some interesting presentations on Sunday afternoon and Monday, but I had to return to Nagoya. I am very grateful to the CUE SIG for making it possible to attend the conference this year. Attending the conference was excellent for my professional development, and without a grant to support the travel costs, I would not have been able to attend. Additionally, the grant provided this opportunity to have this review published. I would encourage readers who do not have access to funding support to apply for the JALT CUE Member Support Conference Grant.

Author bio

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