

NihongoBC: British Columbia Teachers of Japanese, Japanese 12 Provincial Exam Oral/Aural Component Survey

At the October 20th meeting of NihongoBC, members present decided to survey all NihongoBC members who are teachers of Japanese in BC as to their preparedness for the new oral/aural component of the Japanese 12 Provincial Exam set for June 2007 and for their professional opinion as to the soundness of this new component as an assessment tool. The survey was conducted by e-mail among members of NihongoBC from October 24, to November third, 2006. 30 British Columbia teachers of Japanese completed and returned the survey. This document presents the results of the survey. The results are presented in the following format:

- A. Survey Questions 1 to 8 and Tabulation of Responses**
- B. Teachers' Comments on Questions 1 to 8.**
- C. Teachers' Responses to Question 9 "outline of concerns"**

A. Survey Questions and Responses

Some respondents chose to not answer some of the questions.

1 I am teaching Japanese 12 this year.

Yes 27 No 3

2 I am aware of the changes to the 2007 Japanese 12 Provincial Exam.

Yes 30 No 0

3 I feel that I have adequate time to prepare my students for the exam this year.

Yes 7 No 20 Don't know 1

4 I feel that I have received adequate information from the Ministry of Education regarding this exam.

Yes 3 No 26

5 I feel that my school has adequate computer facilities which can be used to administer this exam.

Yes 12 No 9 Don't Know 8

6 I would like the oral/aural component of the 2007 Japanese Exam to be a pilot program only.

Yes 23 No 4 Don't Know 2

7 I would like the speaking component (oral component) to be eliminated in the exam as neither the questions nor topics are testing students' communication skills.

Yes 20 No 7 Don't Know 2

8 I feel the entire test is a valid method of meaningfully testing students aural/oral abilities.

Yes 6 No 22 Don't Know 1

9 Please provide a brief outline of any concerns you have regarding this issue.

See below.

Comments by Teachers for Questions 1 to 9

The following is a summary of the comments provided by teachers for items 1 to 9. They are grouped according to the question they refer to. Some individual comments are provided in their entirety as they serve to illustrate teacher concerns on that point.

Comments on Question 3

I feel that I have adequate time to prepare my students for the exam this year.

While teachers surveyed were aware of the changes to the final exam, most expressed concern that they would not have adequate time to properly prepare their students. As one teacher said:

"I may have "time" but this means that I sacrifice learning opportunities to prepare them for this. I do not think that I will have "time" given to me to mark etc."

Comments on Question 4

I feel that I have received adequate information from the Ministry of Education regarding this exam.

Most respondents were very dissatisfied with the information provided by the ministry on the new oral/aural component. Many noted the run-through of the new component held on Saturday, September 30th was not a success. The technology did not work for many of the teachers in the computer lab at the site so no realistic test of the technology for the teachers was possible.

It was pointed out that the oral/aural part of the exam is to be tested during a two week window at the beginning of June and that the ministry had not provided an answer as to why it is necessary to lose instructional time to accommodate this component.

Comments on Question 5

I feel that my school has adequate computer facilities which can be used to administer this exam.

While a few teachers felt their school's computer facilities were adequate, many others did not. Still other teachers worried how the loss of computer lab time would affect their colleagues at school and the students in other programs who also need to use computers. As one respondent noted:

“The computers are booked solid by other teachers.”

Comments on question 6

I would like the oral/aural component of the 2007 Japanese Exam to be a pilot program only.

A couple of teachers thought that at least the aural component should be implemented as the widely recognized Nihongo Noryoku Shiken (Japanese Ability Test) tests listening but not speaking. Most other teachers said the test should be a pilot project or eliminated out right.

Comments on question 7

I would like the speaking component (oral component) to be eliminated in the exam as neither the questions nor topics are testing students' communication skills.

There were three comments supporting the speaking component. One teacher in support of the component said: “Having read sample questions, I believe the speaking component gives students an opportunity to demonstrate their ability to communicate information that, at the minimum, they should be able to communicate after having taken Japanese 12.”

All others expressed concern with the format proposed and the purpose of the oral component.

Comments on question 8

I feel the entire test is a valid method of meaningfully testing students aural/oral abilities.

Some teachers felt the new component was worth trying and that it would be refined and improved over time. Others thought the listening component was feasible but not the speaking component. Still others thought the pedagogical validity of the test coupled with the technical and format concerns weighed against the introduction of the component. As one teacher said:

“I think that this is not an entirely valid method. The monolog does not test communication ability. There are too many technical difficulties that may occur

with the aural component, that it may invalidate this portion. I feel that it needs to be properly tested before being a required part of the exam.”

Comments on question 9

Please provide a brief outline of any concerns you have regarding this issue.

Not all teachers provided comments in response to this question, but all of those who did, expressed concern for the validity of the new component and concerns for the way students are to be tested. One teacher noted that the one instance of in-service provided so far for teachers on the exam has been in the Lower Mainland. The limitations of distance and time mediated against participation in that in-service by teachers outside the Lower Mainland.

Others reiterated concerns expressed earlier. Some of the more representative comments are provided below.

“I was unable to attend the BCATML conference, so the only thing I have to go on so far is the Ministry website information. I must admit I have only given it a cursory glance. My students did the sample questions and said that if the actual test is of that difficulty level then the whole thing is cakewalk, a joke.”

“I am concerned because schools do not all have the proper infrastructure to deal with fairly and adequately giving this exam. Teachers are not prepared with the technological training and the technology has not been adequately perfected to ensure that it works. Some schools will have better equipment and therefore a better circumstance for their students. No person should be subjected to receiving or giving an exam that they have little confidence in and are unfamiliar with. This component is putting extra time stress upon teachers who are already pushed to the maximum trying to best prepare their students. In short, this test is a big unknown which must be known well before it is administered.”

“The time frame we are given to administer the exam is not reasonable. The first two weeks of June are too busy and stressful for the typical Grade 12 student to perform to the best of their abilities. Many courses have final projects and in-class exams during this time. Teachers who teach in the computer labs also still require their lab space.

I have concerns about students sharing answers and experiences. Ideally, the whole exam should happen at the same time as with the reading/writing components.”

“I have concerns about teacher bias. This is the Provincial portion. All

students should be evaluated on as even a platform as possible. With classroom teachers administering and evaluating, this will not be the case.

Such assessment should be part of the School Mark, NOT the Provincial Mark.”