

Benefits, Challenges and Improvements in Team Teaching at Public Elementary Schools

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Introduction

Team teaching has become the default means of instruction for English classes at Japanese public elementary schools. Generally, team teaching involves two types of teachers: a homeroom teacher and an English-speaking teacher being either Assistant Language Teacher or a Japanese Teacher of English. As most criticism against Japanese English instruction has been concerning lack of opportunity to engage in communication, the addition of an English-speaking teacher was designed to improve levels of engagement and encourage interaction. Team teaching was introduced into the regular curriculum in Japan in 1977 with a program called the Monbusho English Fellows Program, this was later modified to include ALT's with the creation of the JET Program in 1987 (MEXT, 1994).

The goal of language classes in elementary school according to the MEXT is twofold. One to give students a basic knowledge of language, and second, to develop their communicative competence (Hawkinson, 2018). This requirement necessitates the addition of an ALT or JTE to provide the context and motivation for communication skills, which most homeroom teachers in Japan do not have. As a result, team teaching is a forced collaboration without mutual cooperation, common strategies, guidelines or support. Teachers with various backgrounds and experiences are made to work together with minimal guidance and often incongruous goals. At the very least team teachers need to be aware of, or be assigned specific roles in the classroom (Benoit and Haugh, 2001). For example, Johannes (2012) found a mismatch between students' perceptions of their teachers' roles that the students prefer a combination of both teachers and

ISSN 0910-500X

英文學思潮

THOUGHT CURRENTS IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

VOLUME XCVI

2023

THE ENGLISH LITERARY SOCIETY
OF
AOYAMA GAKUIN UNIVERSITY

青山学院大学英文学会

英文學思潮

第九十六卷

青山学院大学英文学会

find team-taught classes more beneficial to developing their English skills. In this way, Team teaching does, however, have the potential to help learners engage with the language by making meaningful communication through practical student-centered usage. Conducted properly team teaching is a powerful tool to motivate and inspire students. Therefore, it is critical, that administrators and teachers understand both the challenges and benefits of team teaching in order for it to become a truly effective means of instruction.

McConnell (2002) found that even though team teaching has been in practice for over 30 years, The communicative goals are still in direct conflict with the exam centric requirements of high schools and universities. There have been numerous studies, (Mahoney, 2004; Tajino & Tajino, 2000; Tajino & Walker, 1998a; Voci-Reed, 1994). Mahoney (2004) conducted on conflicts concerning roles, duties, lack of guidance and generally how to use ALT's, or JTE's. At present there still remains no clear or consistent guidelines and even the purpose of the language teacher is vague and unspecified. Is the ALT or JTE a translator, interpreter, communication role, model, pronunciation model, cultural ambassador, grammar guide, or a dictionary? (Tajino & Walker, 1998a) found that language teachers were most effective and also popular with students when they were used to actively instruct communication, culture and pronunciation, as opposed to just being used as passive models of language for reference. Martin (2010) similarly found that as the rising costs of ALT's led to the increased use of untrained ALT's, quality of instruction decreased even though the quantity had increased. He concludes that simple planning, coordination, and training could greatly reduce costs and improve education even with limited contact hours.

Although Walter (2020) claims that the goals and guidelines of team teaching have not changed in over 40 years, the potential and efficacy of team teaching are high and remain essential to the quality and success of language teaching in Japan. Although a fundamental bottom-up change would be difficult and time-consuming, incremental changes from the top down, involving a deeper understanding of the roles, abilities, expectations and perspectives of the ALT's and JTE's combined with a consideration of learner's needs and perspec-

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tives could greatly improve the team-teaching experience. The following study, therefore, looks to understand teachers perspectives by considering their concerns, their experiences, strategies and recommendations from homeroom teachers' perspectives.

Rationale

How do teachers actually feel about the pros and cons of team teaching? Their experiences of fulfilling moments, challenges or stresses needs to be considered carefully in order to improve the overall experience and quality English learning. Furthermore, the combination of ALTs, working with JTEs is unique and rare, there is very little research on these special situations. Another point concerns the fact that homeroom teachers are very busy with other jobs and there are not many investigations in gauging homeroom teachers views and attitudes towards English classes specifically. Although the institutions which incorporate team teaching of homeroom teachers and JTEs are few, it will be worthwhile to research the pros and cons as well as methods of teaching for the purpose of pursuing the best team-teaching style for English teaching in Japan.

Curriculum in the Research Site

In Japan, on a national basis, homeroom teachers are in charge of English classes alone, but there are some cases that only an ALT who tends to be a native English speaker, or a JTE, a Japanese teacher who is specialized in English teaching, are in charge instead of homeroom teachers or co-teaching with homeroom teachers.

The context where the research described here was conducted (A ward, hereafter) is one of the districts in which a JTE and a homeroom teacher or an ALT and a homeroom teacher co-teach. Students in A ward encounter English classes in the first grade for the first time at school. Here, in this stage as first and second graders, class objectives are to familiarize students with English and to allow them to enjoy learning English. Therefore, it is called *Foreign Language Activities* and it does not require a formal textbook. Each class welcomes an ALT and a homeroom teacher to co-teach with the ALT, and most children

expect to have fun and engaging moments in the classes.

There are two important facts about A ward: its uniqueness of consistent education and English curriculum, and its Story-based curriculum, which have been core elements of the English curriculum.

Firstly, this district launched early English education before any other districts. A ward is considered as one of the most progressive and pioneering wards in Tokyo with regards to English education. Tracing back its history, it was in 2006 when A ward first introduced English classes for all students in its public elementary schools, from first to sixth grades. A ward adopted the curriculum produced by Dr. Allen-Tamai, who is a professor at Aoyama Gakuin University. Another uniqueness is that A ward has promoted the consistent education from primary to secondary by establishing pilot schools where children from grade one to grade nine attend the same school facility and encouraging teachers of primary and secondary schools to collaborate to create the curriculum (Shinagawa Ward Board of Education, 2020).

Secondly, from 2010, Story-Based Curriculum (SBC) was introduced to an experimental school. This is an English teaching curriculum for young learners developed by Dr. Allen-Tamai. The SBC is, as the name suggests, a teaching curriculum using stories. Some studies show that it is effective for students to develop their English (Allen-Tamai and Matsunaga, 2018), and the SBC became one of core parts of the English education in A ward in 2014.

Table 1, on the next page, shows the typical lesson plan. First, students are given some warm-up activities such as reviewing or singing a song. Then there are literacy time, a story lesson and a textbook.

Table 1. Flow of the Class (Example)

Length of time (45 minutes)	Activity
0-5 min	① Activities for warm up or Songs
5-10 min	② Activities for literacy (ABC)
7-10 min	③ Joint Storytelling
10-20 min	④ Textbook

Method

In order to understand the nature, uniqueness, pros and cons of team teaching between homeroom teachers and JTEs, a voluntary questionnaire was administered to homeroom teachers whom I cooperated with to conduct lessons over the last four years. Teachers who I have cooperated with this year were not included to avoid a situation where they may give biased responses, or modify their behavior positively considering our ongoing duty and professional relationships as a homeroom teacher and JTE who must work together to give good classes. Cooperating well requires trust and a good impression of each other so it was considered that there is a risk that they cannot be critical enough to give honest answers. On the other hand, the teachers who I cooperated with in the past are free to give honest unbiased answers to the questionnaire because any professional connections has already concluded.

The questionnaire was simply titled "Team Teaching Survey in English Classes" and was a google form questionnaire in total of 10 questions. Subjects were informed that the purpose of the survey is to assess homeroom teachers' experiences and thoughts towards team teaching for English classes and the results will be used to better understand the nature of team teaching. They were also informed that results were for research purposes only and will be kept anonymous and confidential. A total of 14 homeroom teachers responded and a summary and analysis or their views and experiences is as follows.

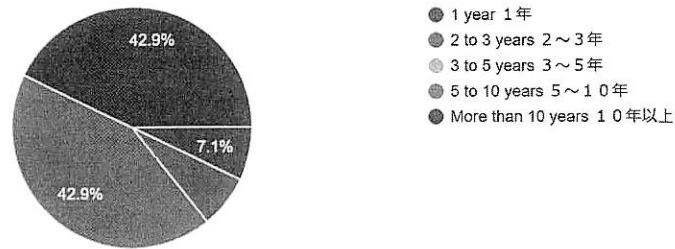
Results and Discussion

Background of the Respondents

The first two questions were about homeroom teachers' themselves: (1) How many years have you taught as a homeroom teacher in elementary school? and (2) What kind of English teaching have you experienced

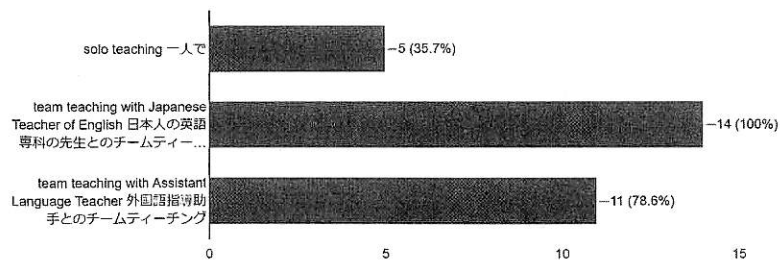
As pie chart 1 shows, among 14 homeroom teachers, 42.9% had more than 10 years' experience, and another 42.9% had 5 to 10 years. 7.1% had 2 to 3 years and another 7.1% were in their first year of being a homeroom teacher.

Pie Chart 1



As for their experience of teaching style, in addition to teaching with JTE, 5 out of 14 (35.7%) respondents had experience teaching by themselves and 11 out of 14 (78.6%) had experience teaching with ALT as bar chart shows.

Bar Chart 1

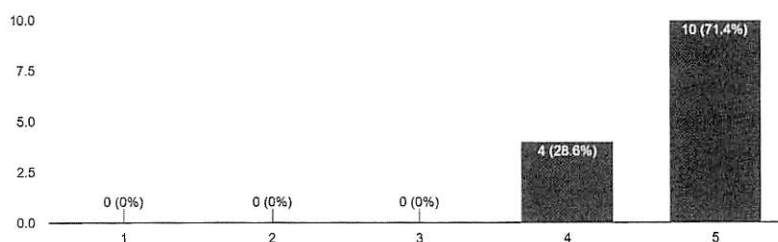


Homeroom Teacher's Opinion on the Effectiveness of Team Teaching

Bar chart 1 and 2 show respondents' personal opinion on the effectiveness of team teaching. All 14 teachers showed their positive attitude regarding the effectiveness of team teaching. 10 out of 14 teachers chose a score of 5, 4 teachers chose a score of 4 as their personal impression toward team teaching. 13 out of 14 teachers chose a score of 5 and just one teacher chose a score of 4 as the level of effectiveness they feel toward team teaching. These responses clearly show that they strongly feel that team teaching is effective but whether or not they like that style or they are comfortable to teach that way, seemed slightly less positive. Response indicate that team teaching is effective but there is an underlying variable which makes teachers feel challenged or unmotivated.

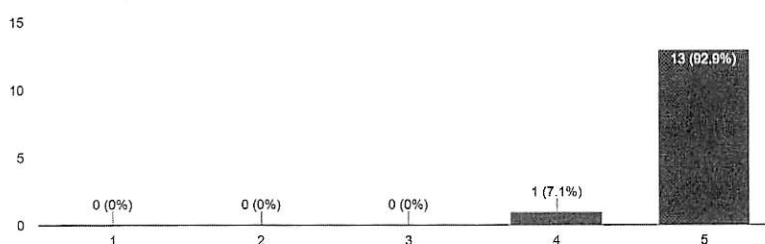
Bar Chart 2

3. What is your opinion of team teaching? チームティーチングについての意見を選んでください。
14件の回答



Bar Chart 3

4. How effective is team teaching compared to solo teaching? 一人での指導と比べて、チームティーチングはどのくらい効果的だと感じていますか。
14件の回答



Likes and Dislikes

As Table 2 shows, considering teachers answers, roughly three points were found to be the reasons for homeroom teachers to like team teaching: affective reasons of teachers themselves, giving good influence on students and their own growth as a teacher. Team teaching requires two teachers who have different teaching values and methods. Adding their own style into classes makes teaching more fun for each other and just having another teacher also seems to be the reason of homeroom teachers' confidence. One comment indicated that this collaboration with the JTE provided opportunities for even the homeroom teachers to learn and get to like English.

The positive influence on students were considered in the following five

Table 2 Reasons of Liking Team Teaching

【 】... number of specific comments

Category	Comment
Affective reasons of teachers themselves	I feel more comfortable and safe (not feel worried). 【4】 Teaching becomes more fun. 【3】 As a teacher, I myself can get to like English. 【1】
Good influence of students	Children learn more, can be taught high level learning context or learn more effectively. 【4】 We can conduct more fun classes together 【3】 Correct pronunciation can be taught to students. 【1】 Culture related information can be given to students. 【1】 Even if homeroom teachers are bad at English, English class will be given with good quality. 【1】 We can enjoy classes from the point of students' view and an open mind as a student. 【1】
Their own growth as a teacher	We can learn fresh or new ways to teach. 【3】 Homeroom teachers improve English skills. 【1】

Table 3 Reasons for Disliking English

【 】... number of specific comments

Category	Comment
Affective reasons of teachers themselves	It is sometimes hard to force my mood positively for English classes. 【1】 It is hard and uncomfortable for both of us if we are not a good match. 【1】 It is more tiring because we cannot give classes just following our own pace. 【1】 I don't like to feel sorry because I cannot contribute to the class that well. 【1】
Difficulty of having the same goal and mindset	It might have a time that it is difficult to adjust our passion toward English teaching and have the same mindset. 【2】
Difficulty of making time for discussion	It is hard for make time for discussion within working hours even though discussion is necessary. 【3】

categories: richness of contents of learning, effectiveness of teaching, increasing the level of enjoyment, getting quality of input (good pronunciations),

getting some knowledge about culture.

By looking at three categories all together, homeroom teachers' lacking confidence toward English teaching and their positive mindset that they want to be a better teacher has come to light. A few comments like "I do not feel worried." shows homeroom teachers lack of confidence toward being an English teacher alone and by having JTE, they are more comfortable to be in the classroom. One teacher even put their feelings into words, saying "Even if homeroom teachers are bad at English, English class will be given with good quality. [1] Also the comment which reflected on their own growth as a teacher, "Homeroom teachers get better in English skills." is also evidence that some of them do not think that their English skills are not good enough to be an English teacher and appreciate having JTEs together in their classroom. Apart from English, homeroom teachers appreciate opportunities to be able to learn other teachers' way of teaching and the chance to put students' shoes on as learners more than being teachers in English classes, whereas in other subjects they always have to be the main teachers.

The reasons for disliking English (Table 3) were related to how they feel, difficulty at having the same mindset and anxiety for making time for discussion with JTE. Some HRTs may find it difficult teaching effectively when the chemistry between them and the JTE is not good. Coupled with pressure of working at an expected but unachievable pace may result in the HRTs' feelings disheartened and defeated. Having the same mindset is also a challenge as a team teacher. Another point involved the difficulty of making time for discussion. Homeroom teachers seem to know how important discussion time is for better team teaching, but they are too busy and not always able to make time for discussion. Undesirably this may result in the HRT coming to believe that they are to blame.

Benefits of team teaching

From the question: "What are the benefits of team teaching?" The role of homeroom teacher and JTE's skills became clear. One teacher commented "Although it depends on words or who the teachers are, we can complement

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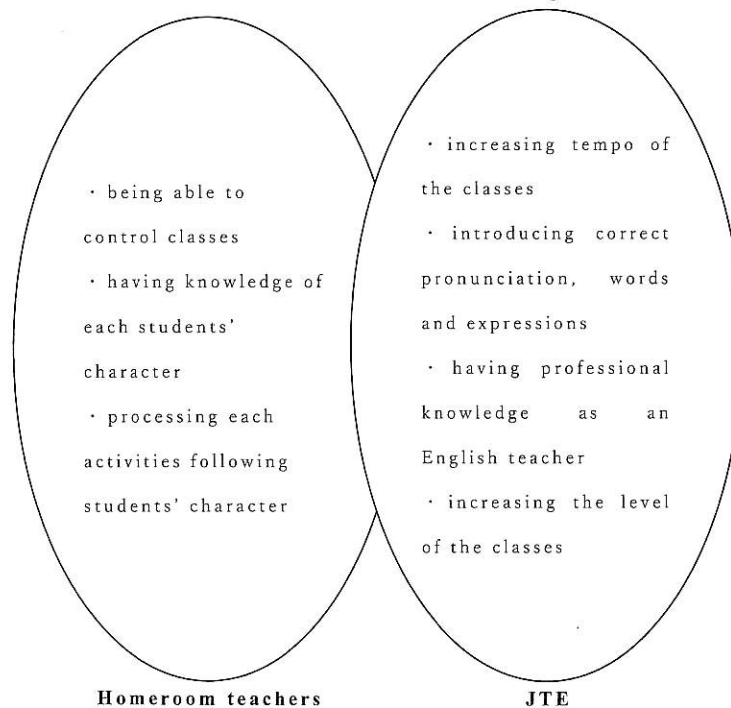
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each other.” It was pointed out that students can benefit from teachers who have multiple perspectives and teaching beliefs to learn more. Some other comments could be taken as advice for giving better team-teaching classes. If teachers are conscious about these specific unique roles of themselves and make sure that they are bringing that to classes, effective team teaching will be possible. The research described here has highlighted the importance of cooperating to create enjoyable or comfortable classrooms and activities for students in order to motivate them to learn English.

Chart 1 shows the skills of each role as homeroom teachers or JTEs. According to this chart, when homeroom teachers advise the method to process activities and JTEs create an activity where children can learn English fully, an effective class can be achieved. One comment suggested that “It brings effective

Chart 1 Homeroom Teachers / JTE's Effects on English Classes



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conversational interactions in classes." Therefore, both homeroom teachers and JTE's should be aware that they are co-teachers and try to appreciate and maximize each other's skills. They should consciously think about introducing effective English instruction to students, and in this way pursue better team teaching.

Challenges and Improvements

The following are the challenges: making time for discussion and sharing common perceptions to make it clear what is important in giving classes and how to teach (N=7), balancing who is leading and who is supporting (N=3), different perceptions and goals of English education depending on wards or schools (N=1), requiring JTEs not only have English teaching skills but also have skills for educating children.

Co-teaching is an unspoken power play. Therefore, both teachers need to have skills of empathy and collaboration for understanding how to be a co-teacher at any given time. In order to do that, it seems that homeroom teachers recognize fully that having time for discussion is necessary. The teachers themselves know that they are very busy with other work but at the same time they feel the importance of discussion. Therefore, institutionally it is necessary that perceptions are changed, and efforts are made to support homeroom teachers. This will enable them to grow and encourage them to make time for discussion to provide better English classes.

The following three points are a summary of responses for suggested improvements to team teaching practices: (1) Getting institutional support and making time for discussions and creating a routine for communication and exchange (N=9), (2) Introducing TEAMS, GOOGLE Classroom or networking tool to facilitate remote communication (N=1), (3) Planning more learning and relationship building opportunities.

HRT will have more training and exposure while also developing a collaborative perspective (N=1) especially when they co-teach with JTE who speaks Japanese. Another point is that homeroom teachers' feelings of importance of having discussion time seems to be very strong, this is clear in the comment by

one respondent that “teachers’ classes should be eliminated so that we can have time for discussion.”

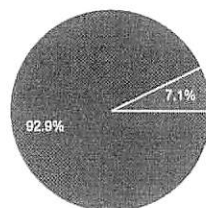
The most preferable teaching style

The final question in the survey asked which style of teaching was preferable. 92.9% chose team teaching with JTE and just 7.1% indicated that they felt specialized English teachers should be more common. The reasons were as follows: JTEs are generally easier to communicate with compared to ALTs, and good communication makes better classes. ALTs usually are only able to communicate in English, which makes sharing and discussing ideas challenging, especially when the HRT has limited English ability. Homeroom teachers seem to be more comfortable and feel safer communicating with JTEs. One response stated that “As a homeroom teacher who is not good at English, we feel safer and enjoy more by giving classes with JTE.” It is a very sad response in that they themselves as teachers, feel closed to communicate positively with English speaking people. Teachers’ attitudes influence students. Therefore, a subsequent challenge would be giving opportunities and guidance to help homeroom teachers overcome their fear, self-doubt and low confidence so that they could feel comfortable and safe communicating in English and do not shy away from English conversation.

Pie Chart 2 Preferable Teaching Style

9. Which style of teaching do you prefer? あなたが好む指導スタイルはどれですか。

14 件の回答



- solo teaching 一人で
- team teaching with Japanese Teacher of English 日本人の英語専科教員とのチームティーチング
- team teaching with Assistant Language Teacher 外国語指導助手とのチームティーチング
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Conclusion

Based on the questionnaire for the homeroom teachers, the following can be suggested for improvement as to what teachers could do to support students to have positive motivation: (1) being able to make time for discussion between homeroom teachers and co-teachers (2) introducing more training to understand the ethic of English teaching and how to interact with children for both homeroom teachers and the co-teacher (3) eliminating homeroom teachers feelings of inadequacy, not being good at English

Further research needs to be done to consider other contexts and to compare other methods and styles of team teaching. As team teaching is both beneficial and popular, this will go a long way in improving conditions, relationships and the overall quality of English lessons.

Appendix

Team Teaching Survey in English Classes (英語の授業におけるチームティーチングに関するアンケート)

The purpose of this questionnaire is to assess homeroom teachers' experiences and thoughts towards team teaching for English classes. Results will be used to better understanding the pros and cons of team teaching in order to improve the experience for all those involved. Results are for research purposes only and will be kept anonymous and confidential.

このアンケートでは、英語の授業におけるチームティーチングに関して、担任の先生方の経験や考えを伺っています。結果は、チームティーチングの良いところ・悪いところをよく理解し、改善するために用います。回答は匿名、秘密保持厳守で管理され、研究以外での用途で使用されることはありません。

How many years have you taught as a homeroom teacher in elementary school?
小学校の担任の先生としての経験年数を教えてください。

- ☐ 1 year 1 年
- ☐ 2 to 3 years 2 ~ 3 年
- ☐ 3 to 5 years 3 ~ 5 年
- ☐ 5 to 10 years 5 ~ 10 年
- ☐ More than 10 years 10 年以上
- ☐ Others その他

What kind of English teaching have you experienced? どのような英語の指導スタイルを経験しましたか。

- ☐ solo teaching 一人で
- ☐ team teaching with Japanese Teacher of English 日本人の英語専科の先生とのチームティーチング
- ☐ team teaching with Assistant Language Teacher 外国語指導助手とのチームティーチング
- ☐ Others その他

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What is your opinion of team teaching? チームティーチングについての意見を選んでください。

Strongly dislike	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly like
全く好まない						かなり好んでいる

How effective is team teaching compared to solo teaching? 一人での指導と比べて、チームティーチングはどのくらい効果的だと感じていますか。

Much less effective

Much less effective	1	2	3	4	5	Much more effective
全く効果なし						かなり効果あり

What do you like and dislike about team teaching? チームティーチングの好きなどころ、嫌いなどころはなんですか。

What are the benefits of team teaching? チームティーチングの利点はなんですか。

What are the challenges of team teaching? チームティーチングの課題はなんですか。

How do you think team teaching can be improved? どうしたらチームティーチングは改善されとお考えですか。

Which style of teaching do you prefer? あなたが好む指導スタイルはどれですか。

- ☐ solo teaching 一人で
- ☐ team teaching with Japanese Teacher of English
- ☐ team teaching with Assistant Language Teacher
- ☐ Others その他

Please provide further comments or reasons for your answer to question 9. 質問9の理由や、関連するあなたの考えを自由に書いてください。

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