

Teachers' and Students' Perceptions of Team-Teaching Practices in Two Japanese Senior High Schools

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ABSTRACT

In this study I explored the perceptions of local Japanese teachers of English (JTEs), foreign assistant language teachers (ALTs) and their students of team-teaching practices in language classrooms in Japan. Data were collected from two pairs of team teachers and four of their students in two Japanese senior high schools through multiple qualitative methods, including interviews, pair discussions and focus group discussions. Findings suggest that the teachers and students considered team-teaching practices to be: unique, because of the participation of a native English speaker in the team, and also because of the particular nature of teamwork by both teachers; open-ended, due to vague definitions; and less important than other commitments at school. It is noteworthy that the participants had these perceptions with different degrees (from very strong to very weak) and with various, sometimes opposing, attitudes (from very positive to very negative). These participants' complex perceptions derived from their personal experiences, contextual factors and research conditions.

INTRODUCTION

Team teaching is said to facilitate teaching efficiency and learning effectiveness by encouraging the strengths and complementing the weaknesses of each teacher (Villa, Thousand, & Nevin, 2008). In English language classrooms, benefits of team teaching conducted by Native English Speaking Teachers (NESTs) and Non-Native English Speaking Teachers (NNESTs) include an increase in the quality and quantity of students' English talk (Bailey, Dale, & Squire, 1992). This collaboration by NESTs and NNESTs in

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the form of team teaching can now be observed in numerous parts of the world on a national level (e.g., Brazil, Hong Kong, Slovenia, South Korea) as well as on a local level (e.g., Taiwan).

Team teaching in Japan conducted by local Japanese teachers of English (JTEs) and foreign assistant language teachers (ALTs) through the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) program has received high acclaim both domestically and internationally (Council of Local Authorities for International Relations [CLAIR], 2014b). It has created a “foreign language classroom in which students are engaged in communicative activities” (Brumby & Wada, 1990, p. vi). Despite these positive claims, however, some researchers have reported that team teaching in Japan fails to improve the communicative ability of Japanese students (McConnell, 2000; Reesor, 2002). It might also cost more money and human resources than individual teaching and generate new types of problems such as class scheduling and conflicts between team teachers stemming from different beliefs about team teaching. Even after a quarter of a century since the implementation of the nation-wide team-teaching scheme, very few researchers have conducted in-depth case study, which values participants' real-life contexts, to inquire into the actual experiences of the stakeholders involved in team-taught classes.

Exploring teachers' and students' *perceptions* of team-teaching practices is a necessary step to improve team-taught classes because there is crucial interplay what teachers/students think and what they do (Barkhuizen, 1998; Freeman, 2002). In this study, therefore, I examined team teachers' and students' perceptions of team-teaching practices in two Japanese senior high schools; in particular, I show how the participants considered team-teaching practices to be unique, open-ended and less important than other commitments at school. I also discuss how strongly/weakly and how positively/negatively the participants held those perceptions. I hope my study, by adding particular perceptions of team teachers and students from two specific cases (two senior high schools in Japan), will contribute to the literature of team teaching in language classrooms in the Japanese and other similar contexts.

TEAM TEACHING

According to Sandholtz (2000), team teaching ranges from a simple allocation of responsibilities between two teachers outside the classroom (e.g., separately making lesson plans) to full collaboration inside the classroom (e.g., sharing equal responsibility for delivering lessons). Villa et al. (2008) argue that among the four different types of in-class collaborative teaching (i.e., supportive, parallel, complementary and team teaching), team teaching is the most sophisticated process, which allows teachers to divide their instruction

equally and alternate the leader and supporter role fluidly. Team teaching therefore comes in various forms and levels of collaboration, determined by individual teachers and their circumstances.

Two or more teachers productively collaborating in the classroom provides a range of benefits for both teachers and students. Team teachers, for example, can help each other by cooperatively making plans, implementing lessons and evaluating the results (Benoit & Haugh, 2001). They are also able to capitalize on their respective skills and knowledge (Hourcade & Bauwens, 2002). For students, team-taught classes are considered to improve lesson quality as a result of a lower student to teacher ratio (Benoit & Haugh, 2001). Buckley (2000) points to two other advantages: there are more opportunities for individual or small group support because two teachers are simultaneously present in the classroom, and the classroom could become livelier due to teachers' different personalities, teaching styles and voices. In sum, team teaching, which encourages the strengths and complements the weaknesses of each teacher, facilitates teaching and learning (Villa et al, 2008).

NESTs and NNESTs can learn from each other, not only with regard to linguistic and cultural matters but also pedagogically (e.g., de Oliveira & Richardson, 2004; Gebhard & Nagamine, 2005). This is probably why team teaching by local teachers and foreign teachers has been widely recommended. For example, in 1995 South Korea started the English Program in Korea (EPIK), which had three aims: (a) to improve the English abilities of students and teachers, (b) to develop cultural exchanges, and (c) to reform English teaching methodologies (EPIK, 2014). Similarly, against the backdrop of the pressing need to improve the quality of English teaching and learning, in 1998 Hong Kong began hiring NESTs who held teaching and/or English qualifications (Education Bureau, 2014). Taiwan followed the trend of 'EFL team teaching' (Chen, 2009, p. 31), in which NESTs and NNESTs team teach English to local students, and NESTs have been recruited by the local governments since 2001 (Islam, 2011). Team teaching by NESTs and NNESTs is not only relevant to Asian countries but also to other parts of the globe such as Europe (Slovenia) (see Alderson, Pizorn, Zemva, & Beaver, 2001) and South America (Brazil) (see Corcoran, 2011). The team-teaching arrangement has thus gained increasing attention in language teaching and learning. Some studies, however, have revealed a number of problems with the arrangement, such as lack of planning time for team-taught classes (Carless, 2006) and insufficient collaboration between team teachers (Chen, 2009).

TEAM TEACHING IN JAPAN

Early discussions on team teaching involving JTEs and ALTs have concentrated on descriptive explanations of its advantages and shortcomings. Researchers have shown the benefits to team teachers such as the promotion of cultural exchange and, specifically to JTEs, enhancement of knowledge about communication-oriented approaches (McConnell, 2000). Brumby and Wada (1990) identified benefits of team teaching for students, such as increased interaction in English, more model conversation provided by team teachers and the promotion of cross-cultural awareness. Tajino and Tajino (2000) argue that students' linguistic and interactional competences improve, provided the notion of team teaching is clarified among teachers and students. Negative aspects of team teaching, however, have also been raised. McConnell (2000) found that some JTEs often treat their ALT like "a human tape recorder" (p. 190) and do not see the value of team-taught classes. Iwamoto (as cited in Miyazato, 2009) maintains that JTEs sometimes take a passive role, functioning merely as interpreters. Others (e.g., Hasegawa, 2008) warn that discrepancies exist between the aims and outcomes of team-taught classes and the requirements of student exams.

Empirical studies on team teaching have begun to appear. Adachi, Macarthur and Sheen (1998), for example, collected survey data from nearly 100 teachers and thousands of students. Both the JTEs and ALTs believed that ALTs have positive effects on student motivation, but the student participants considered team-taught classes to be unrelated to and easier than JTEs' solo classes. Exploring the roles of team teachers, Tajino and Walker (1998a) obtained questionnaires from 151 senior high school students. In another study, they collected questionnaires from 20 junior high school JTEs and 18 senior high school JTEs (Tajino & Walker, 1998b). In both studies, they found that the participants had positive perceptions of team teaching. The participants also perceived distinct roles for JTEs and ALTs, the former being grammar instructors and interpreters, and the latter cultural informants and 'authentic' English providers. Mahoney (2004) collected questionnaire data from over 1,400 junior and senior high school teachers. He discovered that participating team teachers were unclear about the roles of JTEs and ALTs. This underlined the lack of clearly defined teachers' roles and responsibilities, which he argues might have contributed to team teachers' doubts about the efficacy of ALTs and the JET program more generally.

Hiramatsu (2005) recruited eight JTEs and one ALT from a senior high school, and conducted interviews and class observations to examine the JTEs' and ALT's perceptions of team teaching. She found that: (a) team teaching could be either a threat or stimulus, dependent on JTEs' confidence with their English; (b) there were rigid team-teaching routines and team teachers' roles; (c) there were few opportunities for teachers to

cultivate collegiality; and (d) teachers faced conflicting tension between communicative English lessons and exams. Collecting questionnaires from 31 JTEs, 14 ALTs and 428 students, Galloway (2009) found that the participants had favorable attitudes toward ALTs and that they felt team teaching increased students' exposure to English and their cultural knowledge.

Miyazato (2012) conducted group and individual interviews with 31 students in three senior high schools to investigate their views on team teachers. They held positive images of the ALTs because of their 'authenticity' as well as their inclusion of activity-instruction in class. However, they perceived ALTs' lack of Japanese language skills and political power in class as a negative. As for JTEs, it was reported that the students appreciated their linguistic, cultural and psychological mediator roles but viewed their lack of target language skills as detrimental to their language learning. Johannes (2012) examined, over a ten-day period, the perspectives of 4 JTEs, 2 ALTs and 112 senior high school students through mixed methods – questionnaires, class observations, individual interviews with the JTEs and ALTs, and focus group interviews with 16 students. The results indicate, unlike previous studies (Mahoney, 2004; Tajino & Walker, 1998b), that JTEs and ALTs did not have conflicting perceptions of team teacher roles and that a wider mismatch existed between students' and teachers' perceptions. That is, the students regarded JTEs as teachers for grammar and examinations, and ALTs for foreign cultures and English pronunciation. However, the teachers did not hold such perceptions. The study also revealed that the students considered team-taught classes to be more beneficial to developing their English skills than their JTEs' solo classes. Johannes suggests that a 50/50 partnership between JTEs and ALTs is necessary to contribute to the instruction of grammar, culture, pronunciation and exam preparation.

As seen, most researchers interested in team teaching in Japan have focused on general perceptions of teacher roles and the benefits and shortcomings of team-taught classes, for the most part through anecdotes, surveys as well as questionnaires. Very few studies have taken into account all the people concerned in team-taught classes (i.e., JTEs, ALTs and their students) or have provided participants' particular personal and contextual information relating to team teaching (e.g., teaching experiences of teachers, age of students and type of school). In my view, one-dimensional descriptions of what team teaching is and how it should be practiced are unhelpful because they do not lead to the unpacking of perceptions and practices of actual teachers and students. My primary interests lie instead in exploring the perceptions of particular teachers and students in their idiosyncratic teaching and learning contexts, as the local contexts in which they teach and learn – social, political, economic, institutional and cultural – are influential in shaping how they think and practice (Barkhuizen, 1998; Johnson, 2006). The following research

question thus guided my study: What perceptions do participating JTEs, ALTs and students have of team-teaching practices in their situated contexts?

METHODOLOGY

The Participants

Two pairs of team teachers (each pair consisting of a JTE and an ALT) from two public senior high schools located in the northern part of Japan participated in this study. Aitani (JTE) and Matt (ALT) – all the names of the people and places are pseudonyms – worked together at Sakura High School. Takahashi (JTE) and Sam (ALT) taught together at Tsubaki High School. Background information on teachers is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Background information on teachers.

School	Sakura		Tsubaki	
Type of school	Vocational		General	
Name	Aitani	Matt	Takahashi	Sam
Type of teacher	JTE	ALT	JTE	ALT
Age	46	32	45	23
Gender	Female	Male	Female	Male
Nationality	Japanese	Australian	Japanese	American
Received degree	Master in English language teaching	Bachelor in visual arts	Bachelor in English linguistics	Bachelor in history education, minor in ESL
Teaching license	Senior high school (English)		Senior high school (English)	
Overseas experiences	Traveled to UK	Traveled to NZ	Lived in USA for 6 months	Traveled to China
Language proficiency	Advanced (English)	Intermediate (Japanese)	Advanced (English)	Beginner (Japanese)

Both Aitani and Takahashi had considerable teaching experience, and for both Matt and Sam, it was their first year to live and teach in Japan. Aitani had taught at four schools with 13 different ALTs over the course of her teaching career. Matt was teaching at eight schools and working with 17 different JTEs. Takahashi had worked at four schools with 10 different ALTs, and Sam was working at three schools with 13 different JTEs. Also in this study were four 2nd-year senior high school students from the two classes (2A and 2B) that each pair was teaching. The JTEs chose two focal students from each class

who were not busily engaged with club activities after school hours. Kanon and Tatsuya were chosen at Sakura, and Sayaka and Yousuke were chosen at Tsubaki (see Table 2).

Table 2. Information on classrooms and focal students.

School	Sakura		Tsubaki	
Class	2A		2B	
Courses	General		International	
Teaching subject	English II		English Expression	
Number of students	40		36	
Focal students	Kanon	Tatsuya	Sayaka	Yousuke
Gender	Female	Male	Female	Male
Club	Student council	Soccer	Japan culture	Student council

Data Collection Methods and Data Analysis

In this article, I describe part of a larger study conducted from December 2011 to March 2012. Multiple data were collected using the following methods:

- Semi-structured interviews (SI): At the beginning and the end of the study, all the teachers and the students took part in individual interviews at each school in their respective mother tongues. The length of each interview was approximately one hour.
- Teacher pair discussions 1 (TPD1): Each pair of team teachers had three separate discussions at each school in English. Each discussion lasted about one hour.
- Teacher pair discussions 2 (TPD2): The two JTEs and the two ALTs had three separate discussions at neutral venues (e.g., a community centre) outside school. The teachers chose the language to be used. All used their respective mother tongues, except when the JTEs had their second discussion in English. Each discussion lasted about a half hour.
- Focus group discussions (FGD): On three different occasions at neutral venues (e.g., a community centre) outside school, all four teachers watched video clips of both pairs' classes and, in English, had a focused discussion about them and

about team teaching in general. Each discussion took approximately one and a half hours.

- Student pair discussions (SPD): Each pair of focal students had three separate discussions at each school in Japanese. The discussions lasted about a half hour.
- Field notes (FN): I kept a detailed record of events, incidents and participants' comments at the research sites.

All the interviews and discussions were either audiotaped or videotaped. I transcribed them and translated the Japanese transcripts into English. Data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) in which the focus is on the meaning of the participants' comments. This analytic process was applied to individual participants over time (e.g., Aitani, from the beginning to the end of the study) and across different participants (e.g., Aitani and Matt, two teachers working at the same school; Aitani and Yousuke, a teacher and a student at different schools). Although the participants' perceptions of team-teaching practices varied considerably, I present below salient categories most relevant to the research question. Inevitably, certain categories were discussed more by some participants than by others as they were more pertinent to them. For instance, classroom pedagogy is more relevant to and was discussed more by the teachers than the students.

FINDINGS

Team-teaching practices were considered to be: (a) unique practices because of a native speaker and a team; (b) open-ended practices due to vague definitions; and (c) less important practices as a result of the participants' other priorities and infrequent team-teaching schedules.

Unique Practices

Unlike teaching practices by JTEs alone or by other subject teachers, team-taught classes involved teamwork, including contributions of a native English speaker.

Contributions of a Native Speaker

The teachers and students focused on the fact that there is a native speaker of English in team-taught classes. During the first group discussion, for example, the ALT at

Sakura, Matt, drew everybody's attention to his native English: "the instruction delivered only in English pretty much is the key ... the purpose is for them [the students] to hear a native speaker" (FGD). The JTE at Tsubaki, Takahashi, emphasized the need for English provided by native speakers along much the same lines: "I should expose them [students] to native speakers' English more. They need to get used to listening to native speakers' English" (TPD1). Another example of how the participants valued native English appeared when JTEs prepared class materials. Aitani, the JTE at Sakura, said: "when making reading materials and classroom activities, I ask ALTs to run a 'native check'" (SI). The students also noted the key role that ALTs play. One of the focal students at Sakura, Tatsuya, commented on the native pronunciation of ALTs: "I noticed the difference between the English of Japanese teachers and the English of ALTs.... ALTs came here to show us correct pronunciation" (SI). An explicit response about the presence of a native speaker came from a focal student at Tsubaki, Yousuke: "there is a difference when we have actual foreign people in the classroom" (SI).

Apart from the positive contributions of the ALTs, several participants mentioned possible limitations associated with having them in the classroom. For example, Tatsuya wondered if ALTs could conduct classes with a full understanding of what was taking place, as classroom interaction is sometimes carried out only in Japanese. Yousuke indicated that team-teaching practices could become somewhat unfriendly and create "a space where everybody gets a bit tense" (SI) due to the ALTs' lack of familiarity with their students. On at least one occasion, however, Takahashi did not have any particular opinion about the contributions of native speakers of English. She stated: "Team teaching by Japanese English teachers would also work. We don't have to have native speakers of English. It is now common to incorporate team teaching in math classes or special education schools" (SI).

Although there were some exceptions, the participants recognized that overall 'authentic' English provided by native speakers of English was a key feature of team-teaching practices in the Japanese English language classroom.

Contributions of a Team

The teachers and students described another characteristic of team-teaching practices: two teachers working collaboratively. Aitani commented on how she perceived team teaching compared to her individual teaching:

There need to be differences between team-taught classes and JTEs' solo classes When there are two teachers, we can divide our attention and cover many

students If we are to increase the numbers of teachers, we should increase learning and teaching outcomes accordingly, right? (SI)

The teachers from Tsubaki, Sam and Takahashi, had the following conversation after watching a video clip of a team-taught class at Sakura:

Sam: I think because there were two of you [the teachers at Sakura], while you [Matt] are talking at the front, she [Aitani] can go around and help.

Takahashi: Yeah, it's good for the students.

Sam: And that way, if they won't listen or they are not getting it, then there is somebody to kind of help direct them. (FGD)

The students also identified the value of teachers' teamwork. Kanon at Sakura said: "when there is only one teacher, the teacher only stands in front of the blackboard. But when there are two teachers, one of the teachers always walks around the classroom, so it is easy for me to ask questions" (SI). The benefits of having two teachers in class were also highlighted by Sayaka at Tsubaki: "Team-taught classes are good because we have plenty of opportunities to be exposed to proper English and when we don't understand the difficult English, the Japanese teachers can tell us what it means" (SI). Similarly, Yousuke noted: "The class goes on smoothly because Takahashi plays the role of translating into Japanese, and Sam of translating into English. We can learn a lot also because both teachers interact with each other in front of us" (SI).

The team consisting of a JTE and an ALT seemed to be effective in most cases. It was, however, to be expected that teams would not always function well. For example, Aitani confessed that working with another person necessitated more discussion when planning and conducting classes:

The ALT only comes to my school on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. We cannot discuss things thoroughly ... so there are parts left unfinished sometimes.... When more than one person plans a lesson, we need to negotiate a lot and meet half-way because each person has different ideas. We have to compromise and choose whichever idea we feel is right. This takes a lot of time and energy. (FN)

The fact that JTEs speak English as their second language made negotiation even more of a challenge. Aitani commented: "If possible, we [JTEs] want to avoid having discussions with ALTs about what is to be done in class because we might be hesitant to negotiate in English, which is not our mother tongue" (SI). Interestingly, Yousuke on one occasion stated that he did not see the difference between JTEs' solo classes and team-

taught classes: "In team-taught classes, one teacher teaches, and the other just observes. So team-taught classes are just like the usual JTEs' classes" (SI).

Overall, the participants were positive about the teachers' teamwork mainly because they viewed it to be an advantage having two teachers offering different areas of expertise. Insufficient coordination between team teachers, however, seemed to have sometimes restricted the productivity of the team.

Open-Ended Practices

According to CLAIR (2014a), team teaching provides "opportunities for active interaction in a foreign language in the classroom, enhances the students' motivation towards learning a foreign language, and deepens the students' understanding of foreign cultures" (p. 81). Apart from the reference that the ALTs should not "conduct classes alone, nor be the 'main' teacher" (CLAIR, 2014a, p. 81), team-teaching practices in Japan seem to be quite open-ended. Sam pointed out: "The contract is vague. From what I understand, I am obviously required to go to class, and my work time is set ... everything else is vague" (SI). Under the circumstances, it is not surprising that the participants held a variety of views about the roles of teachers and classroom pedagogy.

The Roles of Teachers: Divided or Undivided?

When team teachers work together, they usually divide their roles in terms of planning, instruction and evaluation so that they know how best to contribute to their practices (Villa et al., 2008). As described above, however, the roles of team teachers in Japan do not seem to be clearly distinguished. Moreover, it became apparent in this study that the teachers had limited opportunities to discuss their teaching roles. Matt claimed that his JTEs generally decide his role: "It's up to the JTEs what role we are able to play in team teaching or how much opportunity we are able to be given to lead or design" (SI). For Sam, the role he plays is flexible: "Sometimes I am an assistant, and I don't do anything more than check grammar and read stuff. And sometimes I lead certain activities or help explain things.... So it really depends on the lesson" (SI). The JTEs were also ambivalent about the roles of team teachers. Takahashi explained:

The ALT just came last summer, so we haven't been able to divide our roles successfully yet. As for Oral Communication classes, we conduct classes planned 100% by him.... As for English Expression classes, since he comes to them only once a week, I plan all the lessons. He is basically like a guest. Perhaps what

subject we teach has a lot to do with how we utilize ALTs.... Also it depends on the objective of the subject and on how those classes are usually conducted. (SI)

Both Takahashi and Sam seemed to agree that their teaching roles are variable. They made the following remarks when asked about what distinguished their respective roles:

Takahashi: We don't decide that kind of roles.

Sam: I guess, it depends. Sometimes you lead more, sometimes I lead more.

Takahashi: Sometimes I notice something, sometimes you notice. So whichever teacher who notices the good timing gives feedback first. (TPD1)

Aitani also commented on the changing nature of the roles of team teachers: "The role of ALT and JTE can be changeable. At one time, ALT is the leader of the lesson.... At another time, we both work the same amount.... At still another time, JTE can be the leader" (FGD). Particularly noteworthy here is that Takahashi and Sam believed that the ideal role allocation for team teachers is equal and tried to achieve it. In contrast, Aitani thought the roles of team teachers should not be inflexibly pre-determined.

The JTEs, however, did hold one invariable perception: ALTs should be 'main' teachers in team-taught classes. Both JTEs highlighted the fact that they tend to let their ALT lead the classes. Allowing ALTs to play the role of a 'main' teacher was at odds with the original concept of team teaching in Japan (CLAIR, 2014a). Nonetheless, Aitani said: "In team-taught classes with ALTs, I tend to be an assistant, rather than a person who would explain first" (TPD1). By the same token, Takahashi commented: "I try not to speak.... I want students to listen to Sam speak.... I always offer the role of writing" (TPD1).

Contrary to the teachers, however, the students clearly saw the division of labor in team-teaching practices. For the most part, they regarded the ALTs as 'main' teachers who direct lessons and provide instruction in English while they viewed the JTEs as 'supporting' teachers who sometimes help with Japanese translation. Kanon described an extreme case: "They [JTEs] just watch the ALT's class at the back of the classroom without doing anything" (SI).

The team teachers believed that team teaching was an open-ended practice, dependent on the beliefs and experiences of individual teachers as well as the subject and goal of the class. Some valued the flexible nature of teacher roles, and others attempted to reach an equal division of labor. Nonetheless, the JTEs had one recurring perception of teachers' roles: ALTs should be the main source of the target language in class. In the students' eyes, the roles of their teachers were simpler: ALTs are in charge of team-taught

classes by providing native English whilst JTEs offer occasional assistance in Japanese and sit backstage.

Classroom Pedagogy: Rigid or Flexible?

Classroom pedagogy in team-taught classes was also considered to be open-ended. Some JTEs consistently employed one pedagogical style, and others were more flexible. For instance, in this study the ALTs perceived Aitani and Takahashi to be pedagogically progressive and open-minded compared to other JTEs. Matt said to Aitani in a pair discussion: "I don't think they [other JTEs] think of it [team teaching] as progressively as you do in terms of really being kind of a give and take affair" (TPD1). This view was echoed by Sam when talking about Takahashi:

Takahashi is ... non-traditional.... She would disregard [what two of them had planned], but I know some teachers would be like, "It's in the textbook!" ... if they see it in the textbook, "Oh well, today's topic is cloning, and we use these phrases", and the whole lesson would be about cloning, and it's not useful at all. (TPD2)

In addition to the lesson content and classroom material, another pedagogical issue raised was the use of Japanese. During one focus group discussion, Aitani explained how much and why she used Japanese in her class. Her comment illustrates her changing perceptions about the topic:

I didn't mean to use that much of Japanese at first, but ... when I was explaining the situation ... I thought that it was a little bit unclear, so I unconsciously thought that I should reinforce it in Japanese. But later I changed my mind and thought: "I should just stick to English". (FGD)

In contrast, Takahashi was certain about her use of Japanese: "I use English only in my regular lessons even when I teach alone, and I don't use Japanese so much in team-taught class either" (FGD).

Less Important Practices

The participants considered team-taught classes to be less important than other classes, or other school commitments for that matter. This was mainly due to the limited

time available for JTEs, high-stakes tests for students, and infrequent/tokenistic teaching for ALTs.

Available Time

Available time for team teachers at school was often the focus of teacher interviews and discussions. Matt summarized the situation succinctly: “We don’t get the time to evaluate what is happening and what will happen [in class]” (SI). He felt that substantial interaction with his JTEs was not taking place. His JTE, Aitani, indeed found it difficult to allocate time for him: “When we had winter vacation, Matt and I could not really contact each other. And he was not here yesterday either. So today’s class was almost unprepared. We just dived into the class” (FN). She then admitted: “I feel team-taught classes end up a very low priority compared to other classes” (SI).

Takahashi at Tsubaki was in a similar situation. The demands on her time as a JTE were heavy. She explained: “The lack of communication is because we [JTEs] have to work other things during working hours. It often happens that I don’t have free periods or I have to talk with my students” (SI). She prioritized other work over team-teaching matters. During a pair discussion, Aitani asked Takahashi how she usually prepares for team-taught classes. Takahashi answered: “I don’t have time to prepare for team-taught classes with Sam. I teach just out of mere habit” (TPD2). In a focus group discussion, Takahashi admitted: “[Sam and I spend] one minute [for preparation] ... while we are going upstairs (laugh)” (FGD).

The JTEs thus perceived team-teaching practices to be secondary in comparison with other teaching or school work. This was primarily due to their time constraints and heavy workloads. Communication between the JTEs and ALTs reached only superficial levels.

Testing and Grading

Testing and grading practices inevitably affected the participants’ perceptions of team-taught classes. Matt remarked that although he had once made “a small contribution to their [JTEs’] overall grading” (SI) by creating parts of listening questions, he had never been given other evaluation tasks. Sam mentioned that he could sometimes lose entire classes for a day due to testing: “If it’s a test week next week, almost all my classes would be used to review. You gotta finish some area of the textbook, so all of my classes can get taken over by JTEs” (FN).

Because team-taught classes were not directly related to high-stakes tests, and the academic performance of the students in those classes was not graded as rigorously as

other classes, the students did not view team-taught classes to be of great importance. For instance, in response to a question about the frequency of team-taught classes, Tatsuya said: "I want to prepare for tests.... So it's a bit too much if the ALT comes five times a week. I think having team-taught classes once or twice a week is about right" (SI). Sayaka maintained that team-taught classes could be somewhat troublesome if she had them every day: "I don't want to have team-taught classes all the time, but maybe once a month" (SI). Sayaka added that the content covered in team-taught classes does not appear in term tests, which usually consist of a number of questions associated with translations, idioms and grammar rules.

Infrequent and Tokenistic

Team-teaching practices were also regarded as infrequent and tokenistic. Matt believed that infrequent teaching was the main reason for him feeling underused at his schools: "I do feel somewhat underused. But that's the symptom of being shuffled around different schools all the time. It's just too disjointed to have a more active or more enriched role" (SI). In a pair discussion, Sam was surprised at Matt's teaching schedules (i.e., visiting eight schools). Matt and Sam concurred about how challenging it is for them to build relationships with their students:

Sam: I know some of the kids, but I don't know as many as I probably should.

Matt: I mean, you are not in one school either ... so that doesn't make it easier. I know my situation. It's not really possible to spend much time [with each student].

Sam: Yeah, it's odd that your job is like, big thing is to get more connected to kids and you get so many schools that it's basically impossible. (TPD2)

This perception of team-teaching practices as infrequent was also expressed by Takahashi: "ALTs visit different schools, and it is almost impossible to make a team all the time. So the important question is how we [JTEs] use ALTs who show up very infrequently" (SI). For some students, like Tatsuya, team-taught classes were so few and far between that they did not seem to have a large impact on their lives at school: "I didn't notice the ALT had not come to our class this year (laugh)" (SI).

The participants also considered team-taught classes to be tokenistic. Matt perceived his teaching practice to be "almost a token gesture" and felt that "it is about a foreign presence and just hearing the language a little bit" (FN). Matt told an illuminating story, which describes how ALTs' classroom practices and team-taught classes as a whole are treated:

It was very frustrating, a couple of times lately. Half of the class time has been spent marking their written tests that they have done the week before. And the test was returned to the students and they were given the answer sheet. They spent 25 minutes And then, the second half of the class was just me demonstrating how to say words. Yep, they would do better with the CD that comes with the textbook. (SI)

Token practices also occurred in all the schools where Sam worked. The best example came from 'the best high school in the area' (TPD2). Sam explained his experience in the school to Matt: "I go to three different classes within each period and do like one 10-minute activity. So I basically teach the same, mildly boring activity six times" (TPD2). Matt exclaimed: "Only 10 minutes! What the hell can you do in 10 minutes?" Sam continued:

What I have been doing is I pick news articles ... and I rewrite it, and then we will do a listening activity.... And then, next class I do it again and next class and next class ... it's very boring, very boring. (TPD2)

A small number of benefits, however, were underlined. Matt believed that one upside of the infrequency of his teaching schedules is that the students are able to see "a fresh face" with "slightly different energy" (SI). This view was echoed by Tatsuya: "Aitani is usually the only teacher in the classroom. When that lasts for a long time, I don't get excited. But when an ALT comes, I feel tense in a positive way" (SPD). Matt also highlighted the benefit of working at three different institutional sectors: "I have the luxury of being involved in all three levels of schooling from elementary, junior high, high school I have a nice way of seeing how the education system works through that progression" (SI).

DISCUSSION

The participants in this study, both teachers and students, were cognizant of the unique contributions to their classes of a native speaker of English (see Adachi et al., 1998; Galloway, 2009; Miyazato, 2012) and teamwork in team teaching (see Buckley, 2000; Hourcade & Bauwens, 2002). However, the teachers were confused by the open-ended nature of team-teaching practices and ended up being indecisive about classroom pedagogy and the roles of teachers (see Mahoney, 2004; Tajino & Walker, 1998b). The students, however, appeared to see clearly distinct roles for team teachers: JTEs as

assistants/translators and ALTs as main teachers/English providers (see Johannes, 2012; Tajino & Walker, 1998a). Both teachers and students generally felt that team-taught classes were less important than other classes/school activities due to the limited available time of the JTEs, the concerns the students had about tests, and the infrequent visits of the ALTs (see Hiramatsu, 2005).

Some of the findings reported in the literature were also evident in my data, but others were not. It is particularly noteworthy that in my study the participants had different perceptions of team-teaching practices (i.e., unique, open-ended and less important) to varying degrees (from very strong to very weak). For instance, the Tsubaki teachers were quite convinced that they needed to use the target language only in class (strong perception) – e.g., “I use only English in my regular lessons ... and I don't use Japanese so much in team-taught classes either” (FGD); the Sakura teachers were not so certain (weak perception) – e.g., “I didn't mean to use that much of Japanese at first... But later I changed my mind” (FGD). The participants had different perceptions with various, sometimes opposing, attitudes as well (from very positive to very negative). For example, Kanon at Sakura and Yousuke at Tsubaki had positive views on team teaching – e.g., “when there are two teachers ... it is easy for me to ask questions” (SI) – whereas Tatsuya and Sayaka did not consider team teaching always to be a preferable learning option – e.g., “I don't want to have team-taught classes all the time” (SI). It also became apparent that contradictory comments came even from the same participants. Although Takahashi said in an interview: “Team teaching by Japanese English teachers would also work. We don't have to have native speakers of English” (SI), in a pair discussion she remarked: “I should expose them [students] to native speakers' English more” (TPD1). Yousuke at one time said: “team-taught classes are just like the usual classes” (SI). At another time, however, he told me: “there is a difference when we have actual foreign people in the classroom” (SI).

Findings in previous studies have often been presented in an either-or manner – e.g., “results reveal positive attitudes towards English and the ALTs, that ALTs have increased students' exposure to English and cultural knowledge” (Galloway, 2009, p. 169), and recommendations to date are sometimes deterministic – e.g., “students ... find team-taught classes more beneficial... These results suggest the school might want to offer more team-taught classes” (Johannes, 2012, p. 181). In an attempt to compare ALTs' job satisfaction, Tsuido, Otani and Davies (2012) assessed their questionnaire data collected from current ALTs with that of ten years ago collected from different participants and argue that “the ALTs' responses indicate that situation [of the ALTs] has improved” (p. 57). These findings and recommendations might not have taken into consideration the particularities of the participants, their surroundings and the processes of data collection. Instead, I maintain in this article that the participants' perceptions of team

teachers and teaching practices inevitably vary, depending on the participants' individual traits (e.g., age, previous perceptions and previous experiences), contextual factors (e.g., school and class culture) and data collection conditions (e.g., timing/place/methods of data collection).

CONCLUSION

My study investigated teachers' and students' perceptions of team teaching conducted by JTEs and ALTs in Japan. At first glance, the participants seemed to have positive attitudes toward the unique practices of team teaching due mainly to the contributions of a native speaker of English (ALT) and the collaborative work by both team teachers, negative feelings about its open-ended practices because they generated confusion regarding teacher roles and pedagogy, and negative perceptions about the less important status of team-teaching practices. A closer look, however, uncovered the complexity of the participants' perceptions, revealing divergent degrees and attitudes. Individual participants' personal experiences, contextual factors within which they live, and changing research conditions such as the timing of data collection might have affected their perceptions. Therefore it is perhaps advisable that teacher educators and researchers should neither value one team-teaching practice over others nor expect all team teachers to carry out their classes in prescriptive ways. Individual team teachers and students, who are familiar with their particular needs and situations, should often have an opportunity to (re)consider and discuss issues raised in this article (e.g., what team-taught classes mean to them; how the roles of team teachers can be defined; to what extent they should use Japanese; what to include in student tests) without limiting themselves to taken-for-granted conceptions of what team teaching should be. They can create this opportunity on their own in the form of teacher research (Borg, 2013) or with support from the board of education. By doing so, they could compare their perceptions with those of the participants in this study and attempt to alternate their perceptions (and practices) if deemed appropriate.

Although the small number of the participants (i.e., eight) means that the findings of my study will not represent all team teachers' and students' perceptions about team-teaching practices, my study nevertheless adds illuminating cases to the literature of team teaching in language classrooms. Future inquiries should involve several types of teachers and students (e.g., novice JTEs, experienced ALTs, elementary school students) in diversified contexts (more urban/rural research sites) with various data collection conditions (e.g., employing questionnaires) in order to more fully understand the teachers' and students' experiences with their team-teaching practices. Every team-teaching pair is unique, and no teaching practice is black and white.

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