

協働教育への問い： 外国語指導助手（ALT）との チームティーチングを通して日本における 英語教育のレベルを向上させること

An Inquiry into Collaborative Pedagogy:
Elevating the Standard of English Education in Japan
through Team-Teaching with Assistant Language Teachers

藤本 恭子
FUJIMOTO Kyoko

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This study delves into the effectiveness and significance of collaborative team-teaching practices involving Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) within the educational landscape of Japan. The primary objective is to contribute to the improvement of English language instruction in Japanese schools by addressing and overcoming identified challenges. This introductory chapter serves as a strategic roadmap for the subsequent sections, encapsulating key focal points of investigation.

Chapter 2 initiates an exploration into the contemporary working conditions experienced by ALTs, delving into the dynamics of team-teaching partnerships between Japanese Teachers of English (JTEs) and ALTs. This investigation is substantiated by data from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT), insights derived from Sophia University's 2017 research, and findings from the author's survey conducted in 2023.

Chapter 3, an analysis delves into students' perspectives on team-teaching involving JTEs and ALTs at the junior and senior high school levels. This assessment evaluates the aspects of this teaching methodology that students find advantageous, identifies areas where they perceive deficits, and explores opportunities for improvement.

Shifting the focus to strategies for enhancement, Chapter 4 explores potential solutions to elevate the quality of team-teaching with ALTs. This chapter discusses the

importance of allocating sufficient time for communication between JTEs and ALTs, providing additional training opportunities, revamping ALT employment procedures and evaluation systems, and raising awareness of the significance of team-teaching. Additionally, it highlights the conspicuous decline in the number of theses and research papers addressing team-teaching collaboration between JTEs and ALTs. This section further investigates optimal approaches to structure and execute team-teaching practices.

In the final chapter, Chapter 5, this thesis concludes that there is an impending need to broaden the discourse on language education and cultivate effective pedagogical strategies through the collaborative efforts of JTEs and ALTs in Japanese educational institutions. The findings and recommendations presented herein aim to contribute significantly to the ongoing dialogue on enriching the English education landscape in Japan.

Chapter 2: Contemporary Realities of ALTs

2.1 The Evolving Role of ALTs in Elementary Schools

Drawing insights from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT), the year 2021 witnessed a notable increase in the number of Assistant English Teachers (ALTs) in Japan, reaching 20,249. This surge was particularly accentuated by the implementation of the new Course of Study in 2020, which introduced English as a subject for upper elementary grades, thereby underscoring the escalating importance of ALTs in elementary schools. A striking statistic reveals that a mere 7.5% of elementary school teachers possess English teaching certificates, necessitating the deployment of 4,887 ALTs to elementary schools in 2021 (MEXT, 2021).

However, a survey conducted in 2023 by the author uncovered a concerning trend, indicating that 55% of elementary school ALTs lack English teaching certificates or 4-year English degrees. This deficiency points to a gap in specialized English education. Data from Sophia University in 2017 further supports this, revealing that 54% of ALTs at elementary schools, 53% at junior high schools, and 46% at senior high schools lack English teaching certificates or 4-year English degrees (Yoshida, 2017). This underscores the urgency for improvements in the teaching skills of both ALTs and Japanese Teachers of English (JTEs), particularly in elementary schools where JTEs often lack English teaching certifications.

Additionally, the survey highlights the challenges faced by 60% of elementary school ALTs, who are tasked with frequent travel between different schools, often spanning junior high and elementary schools. Conducting over 16 classes weekly, this demanding schedule leaves inadequate time for collaborative lesson planning and post-class reflection with JTEs

in both elementary and junior high schools.

2.2 Challenges in Senior High Schools

Senior high schools, where ALTs have been deployed for over three decades, present a distinct set of challenges. MEXT data reveals that ALTs are utilized for less than 40% of English class periods. In the 2023 survey, a staggering 90% of senior high school ALTs believe that JTEs do not fully leverage their potential, with only 50% asserting that their advantages are utilized both inside and outside of classes. This underutilization often confines ALTs to exam-oriented tasks, such as conducting speaking tests and correcting grammatical errors in writing assignments.

Communication barriers persist between ALTs and JTEs, as evidenced by 12% of ALTs reporting rare communication and 18% noting a lack of English proficiency on the part of JTEs. A comprehensive study conducted by Sophia University in 2017 further illuminates this issue, revealing that 44% of ALTs perceive infrequent or no communication with JTEs (Yoshida, 2017). Compounding this challenge is the fact that 56% of respondents identify insufficient English proficiency in JTEs as a significant hindrance to effective collaboration (refer to Section 4 of this chapter for an in-depth exploration of communication challenges).

On the other hand, the 2023 survey reveals a shred eagerness among ALTs for meaningful discussions with JTEs on various teaching aspects, despite time constraints. See the figure below.

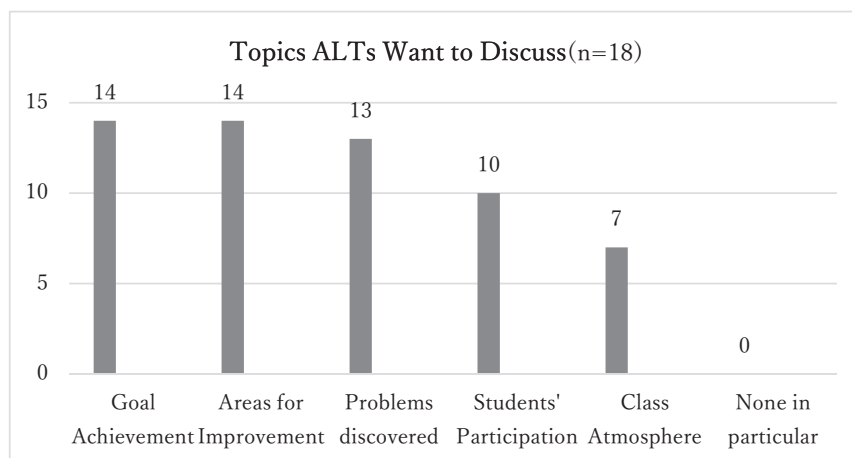


Figure 1.

To address these issues, two primary countermeasures are proposed. Firstly, fostering

stronger bonds and facilitating meaningful discussions between JTEs and ALTs is essential. This can be achieved through an increased investment of time by JTEs to engage with ALTs and collaboratively plan their classes. Secondly, there is a pressing need for seminars or training sessions aimed at enhancing the English proficiency of JTEs. These programs should be made available free of charge.

Implementation of these countermeasures requires urgent attention from the MEXT as well as regional Boards of Education. Critical to the success of these initiatives is a reduction in the workload of JTEs, ensuring they have adequate time for meaningful communication with ALTs. It is posited that by guaranteeing sufficient time for collaboration, not only will communication barriers be mitigated, but the overall quality of lesson plans and classes will be significantly improved.

2.3 ALTs in Practice: Shaping English Education Paradigms

ALTs, offering noteworthy testimonies, shed light on challenges within the current English education paradigm. These educators express a desire to transcend the role of mere “human recording devices” reading textbooks and stress the importance of fostering genuine communication skills in English. Criticisms target the overemphasis on testing, particularly the restrictive guidelines governing speaking tests, hindering authentic communication and cross-cultural engagement.

In response to the 2023 survey, ALTs express a need for a shift away from the exam-focused approach, with several respondents highlighting the extensive time spent on evaluating and correcting writing assignments outside of classes. The recent implementation of the new Course of Study in 2022 further intensifies the focus on speaking and writing tests and assignments, adding to the workload of ALTs. Strict criteria set by JTEs based on results of university entrance exams and English proficiency tests contribute to the deprivation of both students and ALTs from the joy and excitement of lively and authentic English communication.

2.4 Communication Challenges Between JTEs and ALTs

Communication barriers between JTEs and ALTs remain pervasive challenge, as indicated by the 2023 survey and Sophia University’s 2017 research. The insufficiency of communication between JTEs and ALTs is evident as Chart 1 shows, with 44% of ALTs reporting rare or no communication with JTEs.

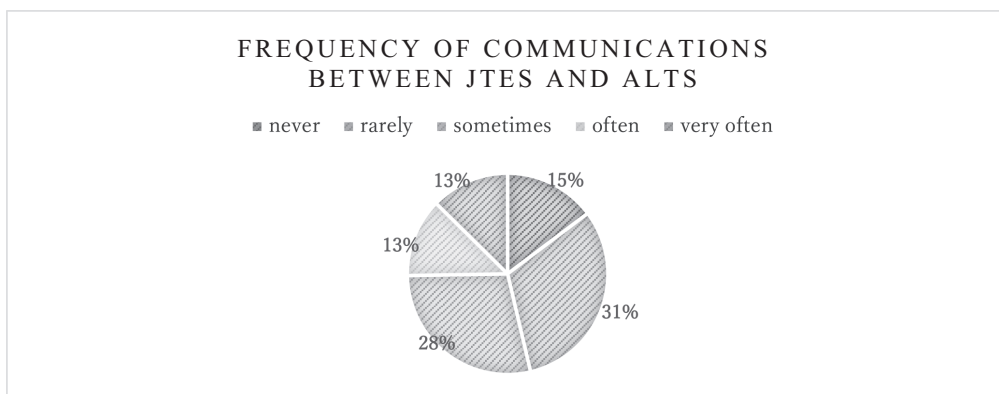


Chart 1.

An analysis of this communication gap emphasizes the need for improved channels of interaction between the two groups.

It is important to note that blame should not be directed solely at JTEs for communication challenges. Many JTEs face time constraints in maintaining or improving their English proficiency after becoming teachers, and they often feel embarrassed about making mistakes in front of students or other teachers. Providing JTEs with more training and seminars to enhance their English communication skills, along with creating more conducive workplace environments, requires collaborative efforts from the Japanese government and regional Boards of Education.

2.5 Motivational Challenges for ALTs

The assessment and tenure structure for ALTs within the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program pose formidable challenges. The imposition of a five-year limit, irrespective of competence or dedication, within the ALT evaluation system presents a considerable obstacle. This temporal constraint, coupled with the absence of a direct linkage between evaluations and subsequent compensation, diminishes incentives for ALTs, thereby influencing team-teaching dynamics and overall teaching quality.

The 2023 survey outcomes highlight the pressing need for a more effective and motivating evaluation structure, particularly for experienced ALTs. The prevailing system, wherein ALTs are often compelled to conclude their tenure after five years, results in the loss of experienced and dedicated educators. This not only disrupts the continuity of English education but also necessitates the recurrent training of new ALTs, some of whom may lack motivation or competence. Establishing a more promising career trajectory and

refining evaluation systems for ALTs would not only benefit students but also contribute to a more vibrant and sustainable English education environment within Japanese schools.

An examination of the current evaluation framework under the JET program reveals critical shortcomings. Constrained by a rigid five-year maximum tenure, ALTs encounter a dearth of incentives that does not adequately account for their competence and unwavering dedication. The findings from the 2023 survey underscore a collective desire among seasoned ALTs to persist in their teaching roles, emphasizing the need for a more efficacious and motivational structural framework. Evidently, 89% of ALTs express a keen interest in extending their teaching tenure if afforded the opportunity. However, illuminating insights from respondents who express reservations reveal systemic challenges. One respondent articulates, “I will most likely never be seen as a full-fledged teacher in Japan,” while another laments, “I feel I am underutilized.” Drawing upon data from Sophia University, a notable finding reveals that approximately 20% of ALTs express dissatisfaction, asserting that their strengths are either underutilized or scarcely acknowledged (Yoshida, 2017). In the absence of proper recognition and comprehensive performance evaluation, sustaining their motivation to enhance classroom experiences becomes a formidable challenge. The prevalent sentiment among ALTs that their capabilities are underutilized serves as a poignant indicator of systemic issues demanding nuanced scrutiny and reform. This underscores the imperative for a thorough examination of existing structures to foster an environment conducive to the optimal utilization of ALTs’ skills and contributions.

Compounding these concerns is the uniform compensation structure for all ALTs, inadvertently diminishing motivation to excel in their roles. Consequently, the imperative for an overhauled evaluation system, paired with promising career planning options for ALTs, emerges as a pivotal aspect. Addressing these issues is not only conducive to the professional growth and satisfaction of ALTs but also bodes well for the broader educational ecosystem, encompassing students and JTE colleagues alike.

Chapter 3. Students’ Perspectives on Team-Teaching English Classes

This chapter delves into an exploration of students’ perceptions and responses regarding team-teaching involving ALTs and JTEs. The objective is to critically assess the effective implementation of team-teaching from the students’ standpoint. The study involved 24 university students enrolled as sophomores to juniors at Aichi Shukutoku University, with nine of them consenting to interviews based on their survey responses, representing 21 different high schools.

3.1 Assessing the Frequency of Team-Teaching

The primary focus of the investigation centers on the frequency of team-teaching in English classes during students' junior and senior high school years. Findings indicate that approximately one-third of junior and senior high schools incorporate team-teaching on a weekly basis. However, the remaining two-thirds exhibit significant variability, ranging from bi-weekly occurrences to none throughout the academic year. This variability underscores the impact of decisions made by JTEs at each school, influencing the unequal provision of opportunities for students to experience learning English from ALTs.

Notably, nationwide analysis from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, indicates that about one-third of junior high schools and approximately one-tenth of senior high schools utilize ALTs for more than 40% of their English classes (MEXT, 2021). Despite the diverse high schools represented in the 2023 survey, all belonging to academic-oriented institutions, variations persist in how each school or group of English teachers perceives team-teaching, either as beneficial or inconsequential practice.

3.2 Understanding Students' Recall and Perceptions

This study delves into understanding how students perceive team-teaching classes and how these experiences are retained in their memory. Surprisingly, 12% of the students reported an inability to recall the frequency of team-teaching. Insights from interviews revealed that the team-teaching schedule was often not pre-planned or communicated to students in advance, resulting in surprise from the students' perspectives.

Of the respondents, 63% stated that team-teaching English classes were enjoyable and relaxing, expressing a desire for more such classes. Furthermore, 75% of interviewees reported having fond memories because ALTs were typically friendly and provided engaging activities. However, when asked about the educational and intellectually stimulating aspects of these classes, only 13% affirmed such experiences. Some students mentioned that the limited number of team-teaching classes made it difficult to assess, and others viewed them as recreational breaks from the regular English classes conducted solely by JTEs.

Concerningly, 70% of students indicated that they would not want their future children to have similar team-teaching English classes. Several interviewees expressed the expectation that future team-teaching classes should be more meaningful and purposeful, moving beyond mere recreational activities.

The survey and interviews revealed certain issues that need addressing. Firstly, team-teaching classes are perceived as additional fun events rather than educational and

meaningful language classes due to the lack of pre-planning and communication. Students, therefore, may not take these classes seriously. Secondly, while students enjoy team-teaching classes and interacting with non-Japanese language teachers, efforts should be made to design these classes to be more intellectually stimulating and challenging.

3.3 Students' Preferences and Suggestions for Improvement

Despite over 80% of students reporting positive experiences and enjoyment with ALTs during team-teaching classes, there is a collective desire for enhanced team-teaching experiences for future generations. Students prefer team-teaching over regular English classes conducted solely by JTEs due to perceived pressures in the latter. The importance of occasional relaxing moments with ALTs is emphasized, highlighting the need for a balance in the overall stress levels experienced by students in Japanese high schools.

Interviews brought to light some students' observations of classmates displaying indifference to team-teaching and resistance to active learning in pairs or groups. This indicates a need for improvements in certain aspects of team-teaching classes with ALTs. The introverted nature of Japanese students might make active learning in pairs or groups, especially in a foreign language, challenging. Therefore, fostering a strong bond between students and ALTs is crucial for successful team-teaching English classes.

Notably, 100% of student-respondents in the 2023 survey acknowledged the advantage of having JTEs when learning from ALTs. While university students find it beneficial to have classes solely with native English speakers at their university, they express the necessity of Japanese language support from JTEs for high school students.

Moreover, students and ALTs both appreciate JTEs' roles in team-teaching classes, with 72% of ALTs stating that JTEs positively contribute to class management and student understanding. This aligns with the views of the surveyed students, indicating a shared recognition of the importance of JTEs in the team-teaching dynamic.

Thirdly, as shown in Figure 2, the 2023 study uncovered that 65% of students find English enjoyable and worth learning when they manage to make themselves understood, 62% when they succeed in making friends with a non-Japanese person, and 58% when they understand what a native English speaker says. These motivating factors suggest that team-teaching English classes with ALTs can provide valuable opportunities for students to find English worth the effort.

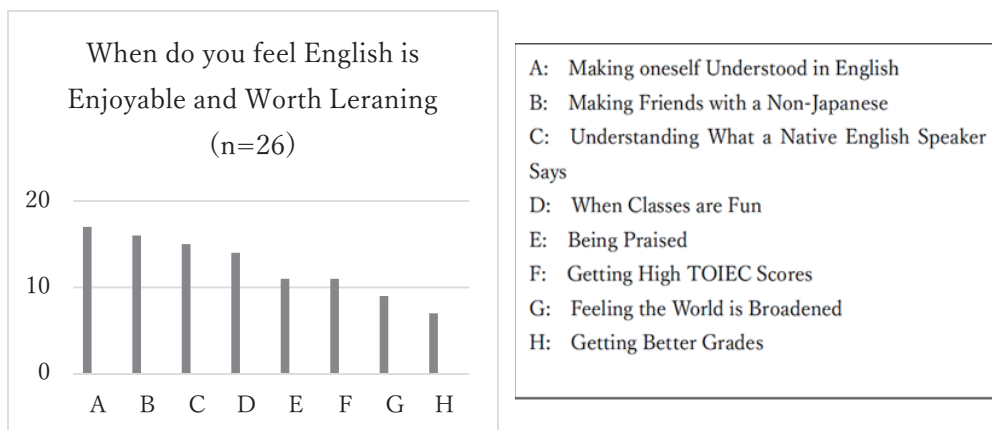


Figure 2.

In conclusion, this chapter illuminates the nuanced perspectives of students on team-teaching English classes. While positive experiences are prevalent, the findings highlight the need for improvements in pre-planning, communication, intellectual stimulation, and the overall balance of stress levels within these classes. Additionally, the chapter underscored the crucial role of JTEs in supporting both students and ALTs during team-teaching, providing valuable insights for the enhancement of the team-teaching experience.

Chapter 4: Strategies for Improvement in Team-Teaching English Classes

As elucidated in Chapters 2 and 3, this section endeavors to synthesize the identified issues and proffer viable solutions to enhance the efficacy of team-teaching English classes involving ALTs and JTEs. The following strategies aim to address these challenges comprehensively.

4.1 Ensuring Adequate Time for Communication between JTEs and ALTs

Facilitating collaborative team-teaching necessitates providing JTEs and ALTs with ample time for class planning and post-class reflection. To achieve this, a reduction in the workloads of JTEs is paramount, coupled with the strategic deployment of ALTs in a single school. Proposals for alleviating the burden on Japanese teachers include exploring models akin to the Assistant to Teachers of Japanese Programme (ATJP) in Australia, where additional support for ALTs' integration into a new cultural environment is provided independently of local teachers of Japanese. In the context of ATJP, as illuminated by Fushimi's scholarly investigations, the provision of accommodations and personalized support emerges as a pivotal facet facilitated by host families and the organizational framework

(Fushimi, 2021). This strategic allocation of resources is specifically designed to liberate counterpart teachers, enabling them to channel their energies and attention exclusively towards the pedagogical aspects of teaching and collaborative discourse with assistant teachers. By alleviating JTE's from the responsibility of attending to ALTs' private affairs, a conducive environment is cultivated wherein JTEs can singularly dedicate themselves to the teaching endeavor alongside ALTs. This deliberate and nuanced approach not only holds the potential to optimize instructional efficiency but also lays the groundwork for a more concentrated and fruitful collaboration between JTEs and ALTs, thereby enhancing the overall educational experience within the ATJP framework.

During the academic year of 2011, an opportune circumstance arose, affording the author enhanced temporal availability for collaborative endeavors with an ALT within the team-teaching framework. The fortuitous mitigation of responsibilities stemming from the author's temporary exemption from club activity supervision and homeroom class management due to health-related constraints facilitated a more extensive and substantive interaction with the ALT. This temporal respite, emblematic of the symbiotic relationship inherent in team-teaching, engendered a successful and enriching series of collaborative classes throughout the academic term. The efficacy of this collaborative effort cannot be attributed to the author's individual dedication but rather stems from the conducive environment established by the team's ability to engage in comprehensive pre- and post-class discussions. This extended communication afforded the team the necessary time to strategize, refine, and synthesize lesson plans, resulting in a more cohesive and impactful team-teaching experience. As exemplified by the ensuing lesson plan from that particular school year, the collaborative efforts between the author and the ALT manifested in a pedagogically sound and engaging educational experience for the students involved.

Lesson 6-At a Restaurant

(45min) Restaurant	Objectives: For students to be able to understand the new restaurant vocabulary. Students should be able to order food at a restaurant by the end of class.			
Date: June 2011	Materials: Handout 1- At a Restaurant			
	Activity	JTE's Role	ALT's Role	Time
0	Opening	1. Introduction and roll.	1.Introduction. Introduction.	5
1	- Voice Book Work <i>Pg. 47 Practice</i> Student will practice reading the dialogue with a partner then we will have some students read aloud.	1. Help students with the book work. 2. Have students volunteer to read to the class. 3. Students should practice and switch.	1. Explain the book work and help the students complete the book work. 2. Make sure students understand. 3. Going to a restaurant today.	10
2	- Restaurant Role Play 1. Students are going to pretend to be customers and waiters/waitresses at restaurants. They will practice ordering food and taking orders. 2. Split the class up into customers and waiters/waitresses. 3. Have students rotate to different restaurants in the room and order food. 4. Students should practice while filling in the chart. ~~~If there is time students will switch roles~~~	1. Read the <i>Practice Pizza Hut dialogue</i> with the ALT. 2. Make sure students understand the dialogue. 3. Help students rotate around the room and order food from the various restaurants. 4. Help explain the activity-students should fill in their chart as they move to each restaurant.	1. Read the dialogue and practice repeating with the students. 2. Explain students will be either waiters/waitresses or customers today. They will move to each restaurant and practice ordering food. 3. Pair up the customers. Have restaurants set up around the room. 4. Tell students to rotate and visit as many restaurants as possible and fill in their chart. 5. Students who do well can get a stamp.	25
3	Homework Handout Word List 6	1. Handout Word list 6	1. Handout Word List 6	5

In the capacity of overseeing ALTs, the author assumed a supervisory role that, under normal circumstances, entailed additional responsibilities. However, in instances where extraneous tasks were alleviated, the prospect of engaging in substantive discussions regarding lesson plans and facilitating reciprocal feedback sessions with ALTs became more viable. This circumstantial reprieve from supplementary duties not only streamlined the supervisory role but, crucially, fostered an environment conducive to collaborative reflection and refinement after each instructional session.

The presence of ample time, unencumbered by ancillary obligations, proved

instrumental in the team's ability to implement and execute effective team-teaching classes. This temporal sufficiency afforded the team the luxury of meticulous planning, in-depth discussions, and interactive feedback processes, thereby contributing significantly to the overall success and pedagogical efficacy of the team-teaching approach.

4.2 Enriching JTEs Training

In addition to training initiatives for ALTs, a crucial component for successful team-teaching involves enhancing the training programs for JTEs. Augmenting their proficiency in English communication is essential, with particular emphasis on achieving at least CEFR B2 level. This improvement is integral to fostering seamless communication and collaboration between JTEs and ALTs. By providing joint seminars and training sessions, both parties can share ideas and methodologies, strengthening their working relationships.

4.3 Overhauling ALT Employment Procedures and Evaluation Structures

Revamping ALT hiring procedures and evaluation systems is imperative for ensuring the sustained quality of English education. While governmental policies may present challenges, grassroots movements involving educators, students, parents, and researchers can collectively advocate for higher standards in ALT recruitment and compensation. Recognizing the evolving expectations and responsibilities of ALTs, both financially and professionally, will contribute to attracting and retaining skilled professionals committed to elevating English education standards.

4.4 Elevating Awareness on the Significance of Team-Teaching

A pivotal dimension in advancing team-teaching practices lies in elevating awareness regarding its central role in English education. A comprehensive examination of research papers and theses focusing on English as an elementary school subject between 2020 and 2023 reveals a staggering total of 4,977 publications. Intriguingly, the discourse surrounding team-teaching in English classes during the same period is notably scarce, with only 46 documented instances according to the data CiNii Articles offers. Comparatively, the volume of research addressing the Common Test during the aforementioned period stands at 81, nearly twice the number dedicated to team-teaching English classes. This marked discrepancy in research output emphasizes the imperative for heightened attention to team-teaching within the realm of English education. Proposing and advocating for more expansive and sustained research efforts aimed at delineating effective team-teaching methodologies, particularly at the elementary school level, becomes essential to ensuring the

recognition it merits within the broader dialogue on language education. This fact underscores the pressing need for increased scholarly scrutiny and discourse surrounding the pivotal role of team-teaching in shaping English language education practices.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This thesis has undertaken an investigation focused on elucidating the perspectives of Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) and former high school students, contributing valuable insights to the discourse on team-teaching English classes. While these perspectives provide a foundation, the imperative to broaden the scope of this inquiry cannot be overstated. The inclusion of current junior and high school students, as well as an updated examination of perspectives of Japanese Teachers of English (JTEs), is indispensable for a comprehensive understanding of the evolving landscape of language education.

Central to the distinctive nature of this research is the amalgamation of opinions from ALTs and former high school students, a dimension hitherto unexplored and analyzed. The juxtaposition of this data with that sourced from Sophia University in 2017 serves to emphasize the need for ongoing research endeavors, underlining the dynamic nature of language education. The comprehensive and accurate insights derived from Sophia University's extensive respondent pool complement the author's survey, which, while less extensive, captures a diverse array of views in a descriptive style.

Undoubtedly, the perspectives of ALTs hold significant weight and merit profound consideration. Their unique position as native English speakers is not the sole basis for acknowledgment, but rather their extensive teaching experience, which likely fosters capacities for objective observations and incisive critical thinking. Additionally, the inclusion of retrospective opinions from former high school students through carefully constructed questionnaires and interviews further enriches the analytical feedback from the primary stakeholders in team-taught English classes.

In acknowledging the burgeoning significance of team-teaching English classes involving ALTs and JTEs, the imperative is underscored for continuous efforts in exploring more effective collaborative pedagogical methods. This commitment is not merely a desirable pursuit but an essential one for advancing English education in Japan and fostering the development of effective communication skills among students. The collaborative responsibility extends to JTEs, ALTs, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), and each regional Board of Education, all of whom are urged to prioritize and enhance the overall quality of team-taught English classes. This commitment reflects a collective dedication to the continuous improvement of language education,

ensuring its relevance and efficacy in the evolving educational landscape of Japan.

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