

EFFECT OF TEAM TEACHING AS A BRIDGE TO TAKE MORE ADVANCED CLASSES

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The purpose of this research is to present how beneficial team teaching is, where a Japanese teacher of English and an assistant language teacher work together in English classes aimed at developing global citizenship and encouraging students to learn different languages. Hiring an international teacher is highly recommended in KOSENs. However, conducting English classes without any use of the mother tongue seems to have for almost all students aged 15 to 18 a long way to go, with the exception of those who have experience studying abroad. Since the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme was installed in Japan in 1987, Japanese teachers of English have experienced a joint teaching style called team teaching. Therefore, it is now common for students to have an international teacher in their language classes, who gives students more incentive to learn English. However, it has not yet been thoroughly discussed how Japanese teachers and assistant language teachers should cooperate to achieve a certain goal within the classroom, even much less in higher education institutions such as KOSENs and universities where team teaching is hardly employed. The research question was to investigate how students experienced team teaching and the effect of team teaching aimed at making the classes a bridge to take more advanced classes conducted entirely in English. Team teaching was carried out in five classes of 215 third-year students in general education English language classes whose objectives were developing their communication skills in English and international competence, such as collaboration and diversity awareness. Students engaged in group work to learn SDGs-related subjects and present their ideas. The survey results showed that many students appreciated support from the assistant language teacher to encourage them to communicate in English. However, they preferred the current class model with a Japanese teacher and an assistant language teacher in future classes. In this paper, we will describe how we organized the classes and analyze what kind of support was helpful for students. The research also indicated that collaboration among Japanese teachers and an assistant teacher is crucial to conduct team teaching classes and create a better environment where

students can feel supported and engage in language learning.

Keywords: *TT (team teaching), collaboration, CLIL, English learning*

Introduction

The joint teaching style in English classes, called TT (team teaching), has been common since JET Programme (The Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme) was installed in Japanese educational settings from elementary to high schools in 1987. It aims to improve English language education and promote international exchange at the community level (CLAIR, 2015). Now there are 5,861 participants from 51 countries (as of 2024), and they are deployed in more than 1,000 cities across the country and mainly engaged in education as ALTs (assistant language teachers). In TT, a Japanese teacher of English and an ALT, who is a native speaker of English, work together in class to promote learners' communication in English. ALTs usually come to the school once or twice a week and join several classes accordingly, which means that students do not always have an ALT in English class. They appreciate having an international teacher who can give them more incentive to communicate in English and create an enjoyable atmosphere.

On the other hand, TT is not adopted in higher education institutions like KOSEN or a university. KOSEN strongly promotes hiring international teachers to proceed with internationalizing on-campus activities. Toyota KOSEN implemented a year-long science class for third-year students taught by a native speaker of English from the academic year of 2020 to 2023 to increase their input as a part of the first Global Engineering Project. However, participating in the course conducted in English without any use of the mother tongue was quite challenging for almost all students aged 17 to 18, except for those who have experience studying abroad.

Hence, we decided to redesign the subject where TT was adopted when the second project started, aiming that the course would be a bridge to the advanced classes conducted in English that students might take in the future. It employed CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) approach, whose purpose was that

students would develop their communication skills and global citizenship.

In the research, we will describe how we organized the course and analyze what kind of support can be helpful for students. The research aimed to explore the following questions:

1. How did students experience TT?
2. Did TT become a bridge to take a class conducted entirely in English?

With the support of an ALT, students are expected to have more opportunities for English communication, which enables them to acquire appropriate English expressions and experience the different cultures that the ALT can bring. Therefore, the significance of this research is to explore the benefits of TT, where each teacher plays a role in scaffolding, serving as a bridge to a class fully conducted in English in the future.

Materials and Methods

The participants of this research comprised five different classes of 215 third-year students (equivalent to the third-year students of high school) at National Institute of Technology, Toyota College, who were enrolled in the compulsory subject of Science Basic English I. Their English proficiency ranged from beginner level to intermediate level (CEFR A1 to B1).

Two Japanese teachers and one ALT were involved with the course. The purpose of the course and its teaching style were explained to students. The classes were basically conducted in English to increase their exposure to the target language. The course also featured project-based learning to cultivate generic skills such as problem-solving and collaboration, based on the topics from the textbook (*CLIL Primary SDGs*). Students used data and materials to grasp facts related to global issues, examined opinions from multiple perspectives, and learned basic discussion skills in English. At the end of the project, students performed a group presentation. Table 1 shows the products of the project-based learning. In the process of creating their products in a group, students discussed in Japanese. They were required to present the products in English.

Table 1. Products of the course

First term	Second term
Teacher A	
Drama-making activity -how to wear clothes Discussion -palm oil	Decision-making meeting -facilitation -pros and cons of Rally Japan
Teacher B	
Group presentation (Fact and Solution) -food problem Group presentation (Fact and Solution) -plastic problem	Group presentation (Fact and Solution) -energy issues Group presentation (Fact and Solution) -labor issues

After implementing TT in June 2024, the ALT participated in all classes with Japanese teachers, 10 times in the first term and 15 times in the second term. The Japanese teachers and the ALT discussed what topic students would cover and how the project should be organized to achieve the goals beforehand. They reviewed the class to improve as well. The main job of ALT during the class is to encourage students to communicate in English, as shown below:

- showing a role model of the presentation or conversation that students are going to learn
- checking the progress by asking some questions while students are working on the task
- evaluating the performance and giving feedback

Along with these, the ALT spontaneously gave some more instructions and explanations to develop students' understanding of linguistic knowledge and different cultures. The Japanese teachers also paraphrased the words that seemed to be difficult for students into easier ones. They occasionally had to explain in Japanese when the topic was too complicated to understand.

In this way, placing two teachers in a class increased the opportunities for students to communicate in English. Students also experienced a different culture and way of thinking, which was brought by the ALT.

At the end of the course, a survey was conducted to measure how students thought of TT and how beneficial TT was as a bridge to take a more advanced course. Students were informed that their responses would have no influence on course grades. It was also assured that the privacy of students' personal information and responses would be confidential, with identifiers removed and data securely stored.

There were six multiple-choice questions and two open-ended questions to answer on Microsoft Forms. There were 177 responses, including 36 students who had experienced studying abroad for nine months before joining the course.

Table 2. Items of the questionnaire

Multiple-choice questions
Compared to the beginning of the course
1. can understand spoken English
2. can speak English better
3. can speak more often to the ALT
4. accustomed to present in English
5. get more interested in other countries
6. Which type of classes do you want to join if you participate in CLIL class in the future?
Open-ended questions
7. What impressed you about your interactions with the ALT and the support you received?
8. If you take a class conducted in English, what kind of support or activities would be useful?

Table 2 presents the survey questions. For multiple-choice questions 1 to 5, students selected one of five options: "Strongly agree", "Agree", "Not sure",

“Disagree”, and “Strongly disagree”, to reflect their self-perception after participating in the course. They responded to multiple-choice question 6 using three options: “Completely conducted in English”, “Current style”, and “Japanese teacher of English”, to assess whether the course encouraged them to pursue a more advanced English class. For the open-ended questions, students were required to answer question 7, while we gathered 40 responses voluntarily for question 8.

Results

Results revealed that many students felt they had improved their listening comprehension and presented themselves better compared to the beginning of the course (Figure 1). The positive responses of “Strongly agree” and “Agree” to questions 1 and 2 accounted for 75% in both cases. The positive responses to question 5 accounted for 70%, indicating that the course made students more interested in overseas. The responses to questions 2 and 3 were slightly less positive than the other questions, but still accounted for 53% and 52% of the total responses, respectively. Compared to other items, it cannot be said that students feel they have become able to speak English through lessons or that this has led to them talking to the ALT.

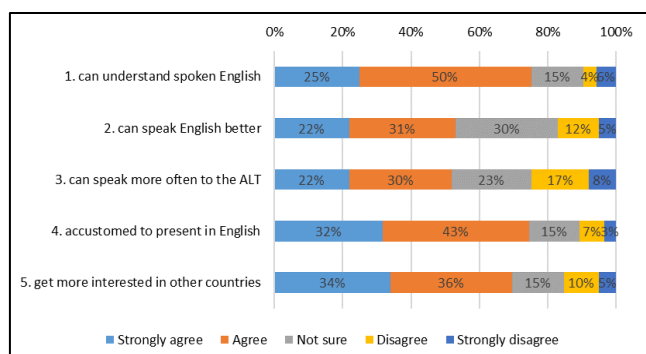


Figure 1. Results of multiple-choice questions

As mentioned above, the ALT played a significant role in encouraging students to communicate in English. The qualitative data regarding open-ended question 7 was collected to identify what support students appreciated and found helpful. In the analysis, the comments from students were categorized according to their experiences: “Language Experiences,” “Language Support,” “Supportive Prompting,” “Advice on Discussion,” and “Cultural Experience.” The categories of “Language Support” and “Supportive Prompting” include subcategories as Description, which illustrate more specific supports that students received. Table 3 also provides representative comments from each category.

Qualitative findings derived from the results with students provide valuable insights into their perceptions of TT and its impact on learning experiences. Students appreciated regularly having an ALT in class and gained experience in listening to and speaking English, which most of them do not usually encounter in their daily lives.

They noted two types of support: “Language Support” and “Supportive Prompting.” The former included two subcategories: first, the ALT paraphrased expressions into simpler forms to enhance student understanding, and second, they (as singular they) facilitated their attempts to express themselves in English. The latter comprised three subcategories, wherein the ALT actively engaged with students, gently prompting and striving to comprehend their English. The frequency of these comments within this category was the highest, indicating that students valued their approach to communication and encouragement over the technical support provided, such as aiding their language production. This suggests that emotional support is crucial for students to feel engaged in English communication. Many students remarked: “I was happy that the ALT spoke to me,” “They frequently spoke to us,” “I was happy to have some help communicating in English,” and “It was nice of them to listen to my English and try to understand what I wanted to say.”

Students also appreciated that the ALT gave useful advice during group activities to promote their discussion. One student remarked: “When the group discussion was stuck, the ALT summarized the discussion and presented a new perspective.” Students enjoyed that the ALT shared their experiences related to the topic they were learning.

Table 3. Counts per category and example (originally written in Japanese)

Category	Description	Count	Example
Language Experience	Listening and speaking English	31	“It was good to actually be able to speak English.” “I didn’t have many opportunities to speak with foreigners, so it was a good learning experience.”
Language Support	Paraphrasing	27	“When I couldn’t understand English, the ALT repeated it in simpler English.” “The ALT tried to explain things in the simplest English possible, so I learned the expressions and used them myself.”
	Helping speaking English	18	“When I didn’t know how to express my opinion in English during class, the ALT helped me.” “When I couldn’t express myself well in English, the ALT supported me kindly.”
Supportive Prompting	Speaking to students	34	“The ALT actively talked to me.” “I don’t usually speak up on my own, but the ALT approached me, giving me opportunities to speak English.”
	Gentle and kind	14	“The ALT responded thoughtfully to each and every opinion.” “The ALT responded with a smile and kindness, which made me happy.”
	Understanding	9	“The ALT made an effort to fully understand what I was trying to convey, which was heartwarming.” “Even when I spoke broken English, the ALT responded with a smile, making it easy to feel at ease.”
Advice on Discussion	Giving advice on group work	14	“During group activities, the ALT asked questions that helped facilitate more active discussions.” “When group discussions were not progressing smoothly, the ALT stepped in to support us, making the discussion flow more easily.”
Cultural Experience	ALT’s life story	9	“The ALT shared stories about the home country.”

Although the number was very small, there were comments that even when the ALT spoke to them, they could not understand at all. It seems that they exaggerated it. However, it must have been challenging for those students to participate in the class, which was mostly conducted in English.

There were comments that did not mention support from the ALT, such as “They noticed I dyed my hair,” or

“They like playing games.” Those were excluded from the analysis. Still, it shows that the ALT had a lot of interactions with students.

The result of multiple-choice question 6 showed that most of the students still want to participate in English class with the current style in the future (Figure 2). There were 33 students who wanted to join a class completely conducted in English, and 20 of them had studied abroad. The number of students wanting to join the class of a Japanese teacher of English was only 15 (8%).

We found that they desire more personal support and language assistance in Japanese if they enroll in a class conducted in English, as indicated by the responses to an optional question 8: “If you take a class conducted in English, what kind of support or activities would be useful?” There were 39 responses, and nine of them mentioned needing some more Japanese to understand the class. Very few, but some other responses indicated they wanted to practice English more: “I want to have more opportunities for presentation,” and “I want to discuss in English.” The proficiency in English varies among students. Therefore, it is challenging for teachers to find a balance in how to conduct the class in English.

Discussion

The qualitative findings are associated with the ATL’s perspectives on the course. They sincerely tried to create an atmosphere where students could talk at ease, which they found was most important when they interacted. They mentioned:

They started to speak more freely and without worrying too much about whether their English would be grammatically correct or not. I feel that creating this safe space where mistakes are okay is an essential basis for language acquisition.

This aligns with previous research on the relationships between student-centered approach and speaking skills, which shows that it is imperative to establish a supportive atmosphere (Larasati, 2018). The ALT worked incredibly hard to encourage students to speak English and feel emotionally supported, even when they had trouble expressing their thoughts, as shown in the results. In this regard, TT has been successful in motivating students to communicate in English, which owes a lot to the ALT.

As mentioned above, Toyota KOSEN placed a science teacher who was a native speaker of English in the first Global Engineering Project. For many students, attending a class conducted entirely in English was too demanding. One major reason was that students felt unsupported both in terms of language and emotionally, which demotivated them from engaging with the class, except for those who were highly motivated or had studied abroad. Although the current students began learning English in elementary school, the results revealed that they still needed language support in Japanese and, more importantly, emotional support to become more confident in speaking English.

Another contribution to the success is attributed to the collaboration between the Japanese teachers and the ALT, as the previous research described (Carless & Walker, 2006; Tajino & Smith, 2015). It is often pointed out that many challenges exist in ensuring effective collaboration. Since the teachers are too busy to develop the team teaching partnership, they do not fully realize the advantages that TT is expected to bring, as MEXT (the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in Japan) and many other educators hope (Miyazato, 2009). Therefore, we set up the time to discuss the course or lessons beforehand, as working hours for the ALT aside from the periods of classes, which brought us more understanding and trust of each other. The ALT noted:

I perceive the two Japanese teachers as very experienced and professional. The students seem to enjoy their classes and the topics they chose for them to discuss. I personally appreciate working together with them because of the smooth workflow and well-prepared, as well as well-structured classes. Both are extraordinarily reliable, and either of them takes their work with a high level of responsibility, which I find highly inspiring. Working together with them taught me a lot about the teacher-student connection and how to make enjoyable classes with a high educational value.

Collaboration among teachers is implicit in students’ learning during class. However, teachers’ interpersonal communication is crucial for the successful implementation of TT, which will create a more favorable environment where students can feel more motivated and supported.

While teachers have been able to create an environment where students can relax and enjoy classes, it is necessary to examine how this has contributed to the improvement of communication skills and global mindsets. According to the survey, many students perceived TT as beneficial, acknowledging their improvements in listening and speaking skills in English. We also found that they developed an interest in other countries. With a lot of help from the ALT, students engaged in presentations.

However, it remains unclear whether these improvements and developments served as prompts to participate in a course entirely conducted in English, as many students want to join the class in its current style in the future. Even high-achieving students in academic grades desire emotional support from an ALT and language assistance in Japanese from a Japanese teacher to ensure their understanding of what they hear or want to express in English is accurate.

This indicates that the most important aspect for students, particularly when focusing on developing their productive skills in a language class, is to accumulate successful experiences and build confidence. In this respect, TT was effective, but not sufficient to the point where students are motivated to take a more advanced course.

It is extremely difficult to make every student feel confident enough to take on more challenges. The results also showed that students wanted more personal assistance when communicating in English, which is not easy to realize because of a large class size of 40 students or more. As the ALT mentioned:

It is very difficult to find things to improve when the classes already run so smoothly. The teacher and ALT teamwork was very good, and the classes were always well prepared and thoroughly thought through. I think distributing my time more efficiently between more students by asking questions which are more likely to be answered with ease, would be a feasible option. The best but probably not possible to change is the size of the classes. 40 students is a large number and if I could distribute my time perfectly by giving every student 2 minutes of speaking practice with me, 80 minutes of a 90 minutes class would be necessary.

Class size and time constraints do not lead us to an ideal setting; however, we should pursue a more optimal environment where more students can engage and feel more confident. These practical adjustments can contribute to a more positive and productive experience with classes, thereby benefiting students' English learning.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study is to investigate how students evaluate TT and to explore the advantages of TT based on the survey. The research revealed that students appreciate TT since they have experienced interactions in English. The findings suggest they become more confident when they have linguistic and emotional support, which motivates them to communicate in English. KOSEN students who experienced TT were in the same age group as high school, they needed language and emotional support as scaffolding.

While MEXT (2022) provides online content describing how to collaborate during class and what to expect from their assistance, it is evident that interpersonal communication outside the classroom is more crucial to enhance collaboration inside the classroom. We strongly suggest that Japanese teachers and an ALT be guaranteed time to discuss how they organize their classes. The two Japanese teachers in the research acknowledged it all too well since they had experienced TT in their former workplaces in junior and senior high schools.

There are two potential limitations that could be addressed in future research. First, the research focused on how students perceived TT, it needs to be associated with their academic grades or linguistic proficiency to measure the extent to which their communication skills have developed. Second, the research does not address how they should be fostered to participate in a more advanced course conducted in English. It is apparent that encouragement is insufficient in language learning. Nevertheless, what scaffolding is necessary for students to become autonomous learners should be discussed.

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