# ALT, JTE, and Team Teaching: Aligning Collective Efficacy

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The Japan Exchange and Teaching Program has, for more than 30 years, brought the concept of team teaching to Japanese schools. However, research concerning precisely how these teachers perceive the roles of themselves and their teaching counterparts remains inconclusive and is focused primarily on what teaching methods are employed. In a team-teaching context, arriving at a mutual understanding of the respective roles and responsibilities of both teachers is vital for establishing and maintaining positive teacher efficacy. The current study analyzed perceptions held by ALTs and JTEs to see if there existed an alignment between the two that might benefit this collective efficacy. Data was taken from a national survey of Japanese teachers of English (*n* = 207) and assistant language teachers (*n* = 199) in which respondents focused upon their perceived roles in and expectations of team teaching.

　「語学指導等を行う外国青年招致事業」（ＪＥＴプログラム）は、30年以上にわたり日本の学校にティームティーチング（以下、ＴＴ）を提供してきた。しかし研究では授業で運用する教授法に焦点が当たり、担当教諭が本人及びパートナーの役割をどう認識しているかについては、はっきりしていない。ＴＴでは、両者の教師効力感を生み出し維持するためには、互いの役割と責任についての相互理解が不可欠である。この研究では、集合的効力感に有益な協力体制の有無について、外国語指導助手（ＡＬＴ）と日本人英語教師（ＪＬＴ）それぞれの認識を分析した。データはＴＴにおける役割認識とＴＴに求めるものを焦点に全国調査し、ＪＬＴ207人、ＡＬＴ199人が回答したものだ。このデータから、ＴＴ関係者が受ける恩恵についても考察する。

English language educators in Japan might associate the term *team teaching* with the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program. However, team teaching (TT) existed well before the advent of JET. Perhaps the earliest definition of TT was provided by Johnson, Lobb, and Patterson (1959): "a group of two or more persons assigned to the same students at the same time for instructional purposes in a particular subject or combination of subjects" (p. 100). Over 40 years later, Bailey, Curtis, and Nunan (2001) further specified that "team teaching really consists of three (reiterated) phases: pre-instructional planning, instructional in-class teamwork, and post-instructional follow-up work" (p. 181). Thus, one might say that TT means multiple teachers working together to plan, teach, and reflect on their lessons.

In the context of Japan, however, the definition of TT seems to remain that which was provided shortly after the JET Program began: "A concerted endeavor made jointly by the Japanese teacher of English and the assistant language teacher in an English language classroom in which the students, the JTE and the ALT are engaged in communicative activities" (Brumby & Wada, 1990, p. 38). Noticeably lacking any allusion to role distribution or the phases of teaching, this definition is perhaps purposely vague to allow team teachers autonomy to define their roles in a manner which befits their context(s) and the needs of their students. The line between a vague definition providing little guidance and an overly specific definition acting as a one-size-fits-all straitjacket for all those engaged in TT is necessarily fuzzy. However, there is mounting evidence that this definition of TT might benefit from increased specificity.

The research presented here synthesizes the responses offered by ALTs and JTEs when asked to elaborate upon how they perceived their own role and that of their team-teaching partner throughout all phases of TT: preinstructional planning, in-class lesson delivery, and postlesson reflection. The degree of (mis)alignment between the ALT and JTE role perceptions that potentially influence the collective efficacy of the team-teaching dynamic is also explored.

## Background

### Research on Challenges in Team Teaching

Research indicates a few interrelated issues that can undermine the effectiveness of TT: linguistic proficiency and anxiety of JTEs; how ALTs and JTEs can best interact within the classroom; the lack of role clarity in TT for both the ALT and the JTE; and a lack of guidance between and amongst policymakers, administrators, and the teachers themselves.

Several researchers have presented evidence that the JTEs' lack of language proficiency frequently presents a challenge to effective TT. In a small case study of two team-teaching pairs, Miyazato (2009) found that while JTEs generally possess significant cultural power in the team-taught classroom, it is also possible that their "English language deficiency in general results in a lack of confidence" (p. 53), and that this perspective betrays JTEs' belief in a native speaker fallacy (Phillipson, 1992) that presumes native speakers of a language are naturally superior teachers of that language. Similarly, Kano et al.'s (2016) survey of elementary ($n$ = 655) and junior high school ($n$ = 890) ALTs found that 47% of elementary school ALTs and 32% of junior high school ALTs agreed that this was a problem they faced with JTEs (p. 77). Although Shiobara and Sakui's (2019) interviews and observations of elementary school ALTs ($n$ = 5), JTEs ($n$ = 2), and homeroom teachers ($n$ = 2) did not generate evidence of English proficiency being problematic per se, there was evidence that JTEs and homeroom teachers had extreme anxiety related to their English, so much so that in one instance a Japanese teacher reported feeling that "she does not have enough English ability to teach English" (p. 111). Given these various findings and the fact that in post-WWII Japan, English language proficiency has not been required to become a high school English teacher (Gorsuch, 2002), it is unsurprising that language-related challenges to the team-teaching dynamic are commonly reported. This is, however, complicated in such situations as the JET Program, in which TT is all about English and has been since the outset of the program, so much so that undergraduate students who apply for JET are often rejected if they have high proficiency in Japanese.

Focusing on the students who experience TT, Tajino and Walker (1998) reported that nearly two thirds of students said they would not need the JTE if the ALT had high Japanese proficiency. However, most programs, including the JET Program, were specifically designed around one teacher who could teach in English and another teaching in Japanese getting together to team teach. Furthermore, these program directors were, from the outset, explicitly told to bring in ALTs who were not proficient in Japanese or licensed as educators. Tajino and Walker's conclusion that a shift in perspective in which team learning is encouraged was supported by Tajino and Tajino (2000). This concept of team learning is supported by the early research of Kaneda and Fukazawa (1991), which focused on interaction patterns in which ALTs, JTEs, and students formed a communicative team triangle, and helps to visualize such an approach. The degree to which most team-teaching partnerships actually teach in this communicative triangle, which supports a team-learning approach, is unknown.

Further exploration of role clarity and distribution has revealed myriad challenges. Perhaps the most extensive study of team-teaching roles is Mahoney's (2004) survey of ALTs ($n$ = 431) and JTEs ($n$ = 971), which identified more than 40 possible roles that ALTs and JTEs could fill, found unclear role expectations amongst and between ALTs and JTEs, and observed differing expectations between teachers in junior high schools and high schools. Kano et al. (2016) reported that 47% of junior high school ALTs agreed that JTEs who "don't let you participate in lesson planning" is a challenge they experience and that 71% faced the problem of JTEs who "don't try to utilize your advantages as an ALT."

Part of the problem appears to be mixed messages, as Hougham, Walter, and Sponseller (2017) reported: Although MEXT's (2013) *Team Teaching Handbook* for ALTs states that ALTs "should not be expected to teach classes on [their] own" (p. 8), this happens frequently. Starting at the top of the Japanese educational food chain, MEXT's Course of Study also suffers from "a lack of clarity concerning. . . the roles of ALTs" (Reed, 2016, p. 84). This lack of clarity appears to be perpetuated by little-to-no guidance from educational administrators, unclear objectives from the outset of programs such as JET (McConnell, 2000), and Japanese English teachers who view the ALT as a "ball and chain" (Ohtani, 2010, p. 42). Despite calls for increased professional development for ALTs and JTEs (Crooks, 2001; Ohtani, 2010; Reed, 2016), role ambiguity persists unabated.

### Lesson Planning and Reflective Practices in Team Teaching

Most of the research on TT has focused on classroom-based practices and largely ignored how ALTs and JTEs plan and reflect upon lessons. Sponseller (2017) explored the role clarity of ALTs ($n$ = 12) and JTEs ($n$ = 18) during the preinstructional and postinstructional phases. He generally found ALT-JTE agreement about how lesson planning works: JTEs initiate the process, ALTs create the materials, and JTEs have the final say and make modifications. There was disagreement regarding just how cooperative this process was, however. The sample size limited the generalizability of findings regarding the reflective phase of TT.

Walter, Sponseller, and Fukazawa's initial (2018) analysis of national survey data from ALTs ($n$ = 272) and JTEs ($n$ = 611) concerning the lesson planning and postlesson

reflection phases of teaching yielded unreliable results. Though the Likert-style items on the survey were designed with the three teaching phases in mind, ALT and JTE responses indicated they did not conceptualize their roles in keeping with these phases. Rasch analysis and exploratory factor analysis showed ALT and JTE responses clustered around three central notions: (a) whether or not the team-teaching relationship truly comprised a "team" that was imbalanced and left one partner or the other with a larger share of the work, (b) whose job it was to lead lessons, and (c) whether or not it was appropriate for that person to lead lessons. Walter et al.'s dataset also included substantial open-ended response data concerning ALT and JTE thoughts on TT generally and the phases of TT specifically. That qualitative data is the focus of this report.

## Methods
### Instrumentation
Survey packages were sent to 560 public junior high schools and 560 public high schools across Japan. In each package was

1. An introduction letter to the principal explaining the study, assuring anonymity of the respondents and schools, and containing researcher contact information;
2. Three double-sided A3-paper-based surveys (two in Japanese [for JTEs] and one in English [for ALTs]); and
3. Three postage-paid (料金受取人払い) envelopes—one for each survey.

Each survey was prefaced with an introductory statement explaining the study, assuring respondent anonymity, detailing the voluntary nature of participation, and supplying researcher contact information. The survey items consisted of demographic questions, Likert-style items inquiring about the phases of TT, and the following open-ended statement designed to solicit responses concerning how ALTs and JTEs conceptualize the planning, teaching, and reflecting phases of TT:

> We appreciate any additional thoughts you may have regarding team teaching. We are particularly interested in your thoughts concerning ALT and JTE roles during the planning of team-taught lessons, delivering of team-taught lessons, and when engaging in postlesson reflective practices. その他にティームティーチングに関するご意見がありましたら，お聞かせください。特に，指導案の作成，授業の進め方，授業後の振り返りにおけるJTEとALTの役割について意見がありましたら，ぜひお聞かせ下さい。

Survey packages were sent in January 2018, and all responses were requested by the end of March 2018.

A Japanese graduate student with advanced English ability transcribed all survey data. Japanese responses were then translated into English by a native English speaker who is a licensed translator. Both individuals were paid for their work.

### Participants
Of the total 883 returned surveys, 272 ALTs (123 JHS, 149 HS) and 611 JTEs (270 JHS, 341 HS) answered the open-ended question. All the participants gave informed consent, and the researchers' home university institutional review board approved the project.

### Results
In the initial analysis of the dataset described above (Walter et al., 2018), a random sampling of 80 responses (40 from JTEs, 40 from ALTs) was taken to generate potential themes from the qualitative data. In the study, an overall view of teacher responses revealed a variety of categories including, but not limited to a lack of planning time, the language barrier, a lack of teaching experience, undeveloped working relationships, an age gap or social status concerns, a lack of communication, complications in separating work life from personal life, and a gap in teaching beliefs. Although the nature of the responses differed between ALT responses (which seemed to focus on their perspectives on their roles in the current TT system) and the JTE responses (which tended to focus less on the TT system itself and more on what specific jobs their partner was doing), this initial analysis resulted in the development of four response themes that appeared most commonly in the overall data: a lack of a working relationship, a push for more ALT involvement, mentions of a lack of TT, and time issues. A few samples of each are provided below. See the Appendix for a larger set of responses.

These four common themes from the initial random sampling were then used as a basis for the analysis of the full data set to see how those responses aligned with the previously collected sample. Responses were analyzed by searching for keywords relating to each theme across all the data using the software Max QDA. As it was possible for responses to relate to multiple themes, there were instances in which one response was classified under two or more themes. In the following sections, examples of these keywords are provided alongside a description of the data found.

Walter & Sponseller:  *ALT, JTE, and Team Teaching: Aligning Collective Efficacy*

### Table 1. Response Frequency by Analyzed Theme

| Theme | Participant | Number (*n*) | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| Lack of team teaching | JTE | 64 | 16% |
| | ALT | 100 | 25% |
| Time issues | JTE | 54 | 13% |
| | ALT | 43 | 11% |
| Lack of working relationship | JTE | 33 | 8% |
| | ALT | 47 | 12% |
| More ALT involvement | JTE | 34 | 8% |
| | ALT | 30 | 8% |

### Mentions of a Lack of Team Teaching

This refers to instances in which the respondents commented that they do not participate in TT or that there is one specific teacher in charge of everything. When analyzing the data for mentions of a lack of TT, the targeted keywords included *role, responsible, support, reading, job,* and *assist* across the full data set. Table 1 shows the overall percentage of instances in which these keywords were found.

In all, 16% of JTE and 25% of ALT responses were related to mentions of a lack of TT. More instances were found at the high school level for JTEs (40 high school JTE instances vs. 24 junior high school JTE instances), but more instances were found at the junior high school level for ALTs (52 high school ALT instances vs. 48 junior high school ALT instances). Examples of comments relating to a lack of TT include "At all schools receiving an ALT, the ALT is responsible for all decisions and conducting class, and in principle the JTE cannot say anything" (JTE) and "At times I wonder what an ALT's role is if it is not for pronunciation checks, class management, or checking papers" (ALT).

### Time Issues

The category of time issues refers to any responses about how a lack of time impedes teacher capabilities to teach as part of a team. When analyzing the data for mentions of time issues, the keywords focused on in the full data set included such words as *time* and *busy*. Table 1 shows the overall percentage of instances in which these keywords were found.

In all, 13% of JTE and 11% of ALT responses were related to time issues. More instances were found at the junior high school level for both JTEs (24 high school JTE instances vs. 30 junior high school JTE instances) and ALTs (19 high school ALT instances vs. 24 junior high school ALT instances). Examples of comments relating to issues with time include "Because we are too busy at school, there is hardly any time for JTEs and ALTs to meet" (JTE) and "Most are usually very busy preparing for the next period or do not have any time to talk for more than a few minutes" (ALT).

### Lack of Working Relationship

This refers to instances in which it was suggested that the ALT or the JTE did not feel comfortable with their fellow English instructor or did not feel that they could approach their partner for comments or questions. When analyzing the data for mentions of a lack of a working relationship, such key words as *relationship, burden, rude, understand, entrust, approach, workplace,* and *attitude* were targeted across the full data set. Table 1 shows the overall percentage of instances in which these keywords were found.

From a total of 326 responses only 8% of JTE and 12% of ALT responses were related to a lack of a working relationship. More instances were found at the high school level for both JTEs (18 high school JTE instances vs. 15 junior high school JTE instances) and ALTs (26 high school ALT instances vs. 21 junior high school ALT instances). Examples of comments relating to the lack of a working relationship include "I sometimes worry about how we should resolve situations when there are things we are both holding back" (JTE) and "I feel the need to discipline the loud/rude students but I do not want it to look as if I am going over the JTE's head" (ALT).

### Push for More ALT Involvement

This refers to instances in which it was suggested that the ALT be given a more responsible role in the teaching aspects of TT, including lesson planning and course instruction. When analyzing the data for mentions of a push for more ALT involvement, key words such as *role, charge, lead, main,* and *T1* were targeted across the full data set. Table 1 shows the overall percentage of instances in which these keywords were found.

Of the 326 responses only 8% of JTE and 8% of ALT responses were related to a push for more ALT involvement. More instances were found at the junior high school level for JTEs (16 high school JTE instances vs. 18 junior high school JTE instances), but more instances were found at the high school level for ALTs (19 high school ALT instances vs. 11 junior high school ALT instances). Examples of comments relating to a push for more

ALT involvement include "Ideally I'd like the ALT to be the main and the JTE to assist" (JTE) and "I think it is good for the ALT to largely take the lead in the lesson and lesson planning and for the JTE to offer ideas, input and additional content" (ALT).

## Further Themes

During the analysis of the full data based on the predetermined criteria explained above, the researchers became aware of the presence of two further themes not found in the initial sampling. These themes involved responses that seemed to suggest an unclear role alignment for all teachers involved and those that mentioned a lack of training or knowledge in TT. In terms of the first of these, it seemed that the teachers were often not sure what was expected of them in the TT relationship or the views of the roles of the ALT and JTE were not fully aligned. For example, an ALT wrote, "I would like to see efforts to develop guidelines (or rather, clearer or more specific guidelines) for the goals of English education as a whole. I also think there is a lot of confusion about how ALTs should be used in the classroom."

In the responses referring to a lack of TT training or knowledge, the comments generally suggested that more opportunities should be given to ALTs and JTEs to learn how to work in a TT dynamic. One example of a comment from a JTE is "Because many [ALTs] aren't used to teaching, I'd like MEXT to hold training sessions that are a little more serious." Unfortunately, as these themes emerged outside of the initial analysis of the data, they were not fully analyzed to the same degree as the initial four themes, but the emergence of these themes and their implications for future research will be discussed in the following sections.

## Discussion & Implications

> The condition of the times in which we live requires constant reappraisal of the methods and techniques of instructional improvements being used in the public schools of America. To assume we have found the answer is as fallacious as to assume that the answer cannot be found. (Johnson et al., 1959, p. 99)

We share these sentiments concerning the state of TT in Japan. The substantial body of research on TT has yet to reach firm conclusions, and at times it seems the challenges reported in the research might never be overcome. More frequent, rigorous, and collaborative research between policymakers, administrators, teachers, teacher trainers, and students is needed.

According to the results of the full data survey, which were based on the four categories analyzed to better understand perceptions of current ALTs and JTEs, there is a strong perception (as was found in 41% of responses) that despite being designated as team teachers there is no actual TT happening in their situations. Further, one of the most significant barriers toward developing more effective TT is a lack of time for teachers to meet and discuss their TT (as shown in 24% of the total responses). This is compounded by reported feelings of not belonging to a teaching team and an inability to approach fellow teachers as equals (as seen in 20% of responses to the survey question). Although these seem to be serious issues for the current TT system in Japan, the full analysis of the data set revealed two further themes, not found in the initial study from which the initial four themes were developed,  that seemed to be more commonly represented: unclear role alignment and a lack of training or knowledge in TT.

What is most interesting about these two themes is that the comments of ALTs often did not align with those of JTEs. In terms of role alignment, although many teachers commented that they felt the ALT should be given more responsibility in the classroom (from a JTE: "The ALT should be allowed to take charge of the class"), others feel the ALT is there as a tool (from an ALT: "At times I wonder what an ALT's role is if it is not for pronunciation checks, class management, or checking papers"), and still others suggested the ALT generates more work for the JTE (from a JTE: "The JTE has the burden of taking care of and training the ALT"). One response from an ALT sums up this issue in role alignment: "I think the main problem with team teaching cohesion is the lack of a standard to or a lack of understanding of what each partner should be doing in terms of their role." In contrast to this misalignment, many comments from teachers suggested that there was just not enough instructional knowledge in the TT system for it to work properly, whether it be on the side of the ALT ("The ALT should learn about Japanese culture and the Japanese school system"), on the side of the JTE ("The JTE should learn how to team teach with an ALT"), or just in general ("There should be more opportunities for ALTs and JTEs to learn how to work together"). Although further analyses of the data and collection of a larger data set may be required to make any specific recommendations, it does seem that the current TT situation would benefit greatly from some form of cooperative training or team building conference in which the specific roles of each teacher may be clarified and suggestions for improvement may be provided by the government or TT companies themselves. Furthermore, the implementation of required planning periods, whether weekly or monthly, would also help to keep both ALTs and JTEs on the same page.

## Limitations & Future Directions

Although a number of measures have been taken to strengthen the current study, there is one aspect that must be considered a limitation. The results might have a response bias. Those who replied to the survey may more likely be leaders in their schools and TT relationships. As a result, the researchers must recognize that the dataset may have been influenced by this self-selection sampling bias. Furthermore, the revelation of two larger additional themes (one of role alignment and one of a lack of TT training and knowledge) after the initial analysis holds high potential for future studies, especially as no full analysis was performed in the current study. The emergence of these further themes suggests that future research might benefit from an analysis of JTE and ALT perceptions of their role in a TT situation and the effects of programs or workshops developed to help in the training for both types of teachers in a TT setting.

## Notes

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*Walter & Sponseller:  ALT, JTE, and Team Teaching: Aligning Collective Efficacy*

## Appendix
### *Example Responses for Each Analyzed Category*
#### *Lack of a Working Relationship*

- "I sometimes worry about how we should resolve situations when there are things we are both holding back."
- ". . . there are JTEs who don't approach the ALT, even about classes, and this is a problem."
- "They can only teach from early May, and sometimes they suddenly send someone who has never taught before (not enough training), so I am anxious every year."
- "I don't think an approach that entrusts too much to the ALT is good."
- "Some barriers for discussing post lesson include the language barrier and the fact that most JTEs are incredibly busy and ALTs feel uncomfortable bothering them."
- "I feel the need to discipline the loud/rude students but I do not want it to look as if I am going over the JTE's head."
- "A few times in the past I have tried to correct the students' behavior . . . But the JTE became somewhat [offended] and our relationship suffered a little. Weird, I know."
- "I am viewed as a one-time-a-month exposure to a native speaker. That is my only role in team teaching."

#### *Push for More ALT Involvement*

- "The ALT taking the lead and communicating in English brings energy to the class."
- "I think having them lead the class would be a good opportunity for students."
- "I think the ALT should take more of a leading role in conducting the class."
- "I think that it is better for students when the ALT takes charge."
- "Ideally I'd like the ALT to be the main and the JTE to assist."
- "In an ideal situation, I feel the ALT would be less of an assistant and more of a primary teacher."
- "I plan and teach the whole class as a leader, with the JTE there to back me up . . . I think things should be this way."
- "I think it is good for the ALT to largely take the lead in the lesson and lesson planning and for the JTE to offer ideas, input and additional content."

- "I think it is appropriate for ALTs to take a loading role in lesson planning and in the classroom as we have been hired for our knowledge of English."

#### *Mentions of a Lack of Team Teaching*

- "In reality, since there are few ALTs who have acquired so-called methodology or training, it's natural that they serve as an assistant under the JTE."
- "They aren't assistants but have the position of being the main person responsible for teaching at a particular time."
- "At all schools receiving an ALT, the ALT is responsible for all decisions and conducting class, and in principle the JTE cannot say anything."
- "Since this school is a college-prep school, some say we don't need an ALT."
- "The 'LT' [from 'ALT'] is so dropped I am basically just an assistant to the teachers."
- "My role is an assistant to the JTE hence ALT."
- "At times I wonder what an ALT's role is if it is not for pronunciation checks, class management, or checking papers."
- "I think most of the JTEs in Japan are very overworked and often end up using the team teaching lessons as a time when they can take a break and let the ALT lead the class rather than an opportunity to do real team-teaching lessons."

#### *Time Issues*

- "The JTE and ALT are both busy, so we don't have enough time to plan or reflect."
- "I feel bad because I am too busy and put off the monthly planning for TT."
- "I think it's tough because the JTE doesn't have enough time. If the JTE doesn't have any free time, they cannot physically find the time. Because ALTs leave work at 4:30."
- "Because we are too busy at school, there is hardly any time for JTEs and ALTs to meet."
- "It is quite difficult to have much preparation time together."
- "I often go to different schools so I have not had as much time to involve myself in the planning stages."
- "Most are usually very busy preparing for the next period or do not have any time to talk for more than a few minutes."
- "A lot of the time, however, it feels that both the JTEs (and now, ALTs too) get so busy that we fail to spend time planning and having discussions before and after class."