

Collaboration in Senior High School

A Survey of Teachers' Attitudes towards Team Teaching

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Introduction

In a previous paper (Brown 2006), I presented the results of a survey of Junior High School English Teachers, with the aim of investigating their feelings about team teaching, and the ALT - JTE relationship. This paper draws its data from an identical questionnaire completed by High School Teachers. It is intended to explore their feelings on the advantages and disadvantages of team teaching, and identify what type of training they believe that they and their ALTs need. It also seeks to point out differences, where they occur, between the attitudes of High School Teachers and their counterparts in Junior High School.

Methodology and Background Information

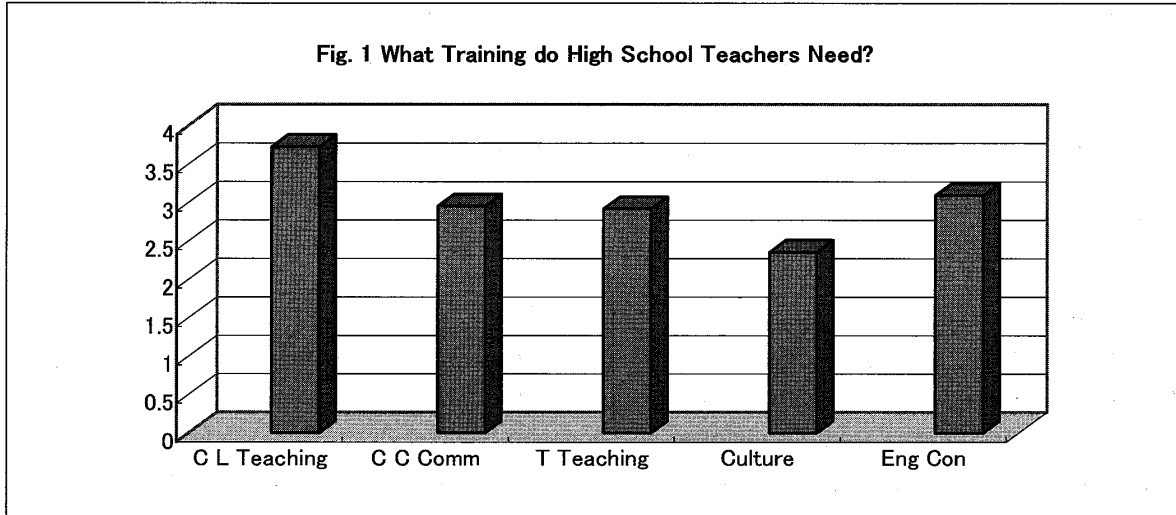
Questionnaires were distributed to 62 English Teachers working at public High Schools in Nagasaki Prefecture. As in the previous survey (Brown 2006), the respondents were attending a two-week training course in communicative teaching organized by Nagasaki Education Board. As with the previous set of respondents, the brief nature of the questionnaires (a single side of A4) brought both advantages and disadvantages. The return rate was 100% as before, but the limited time meant both that only a restricted amount of data could be collected, and a certain amount of error may have been introduced by the fact that the papers were completed during a 15-minute break between two halves of a workshop. Had there been a sufficient time lapse between the two surveys, I would have given Japanese help with the instructions or given verbal instructions to ensure that all numbers from one to five would be used in the ranking. Some respondents chose to rank in their own way (for example two items in first place, two in second place, and one item ranked third). This meant that again, a certain amount of averaging needed to be done when entering the data, thus slightly compromising the statistical validity of the results.

Of the respondents 33 were female, 29 were male (a much more even gender balance than was the case with Junior High School English teachers). Average length of experience was 13 and a half years (about two and a half years more than was the case with Junior High School teachers).

What type of training would help you to work with ALTs in the future?

Teachers were asked to rank various types of training, according to which they believed would most help them to make team teaching more successful (see figure 1). As with JHS teachers, the highest ranking was for training in Communicative Language Teaching, again highlighting the need for training for

English teachers to come more in line with current trends in English Education This may be largely the responsibility of the universities that supply those teachers, but also, especially in the shorter term, for local Education boards to offer in-service training in communicative methodology.

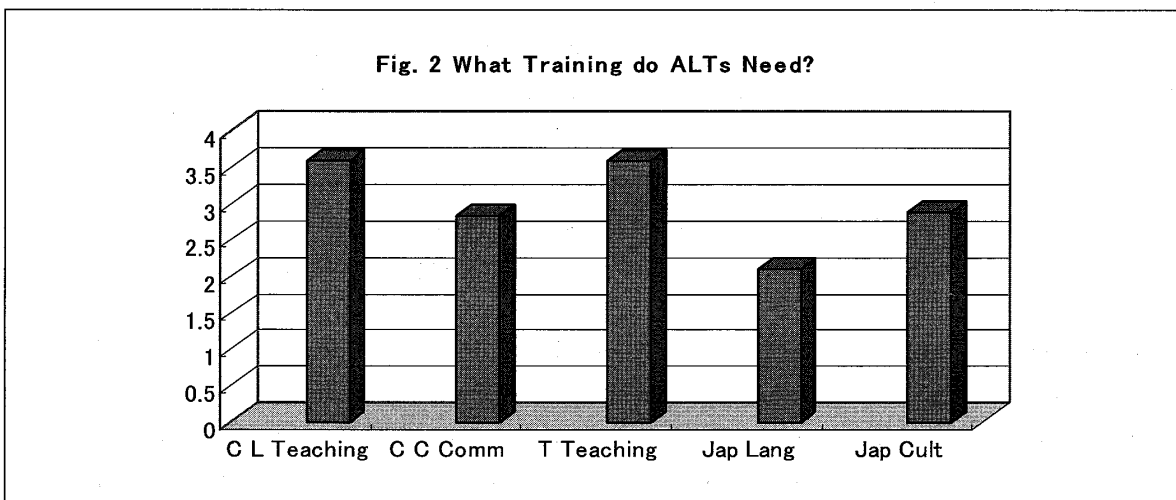


There was a slightly less frequent tendency to rank “Training in Everyday English Conversation” first. This was especially the case among older, male teachers. Training in team teaching, and cross-cultural communication were seen as almost as useful as English Conversation, while “the lifestyle and culture of English-speaking countries” was again by far the least popular choice.

What type of training do you think ALTs should receive before starting?

Teachers were asked to rank various types of training, according to which they believed would most help ALTs contribute to a more successful team-teaching partnership (see figure 2).

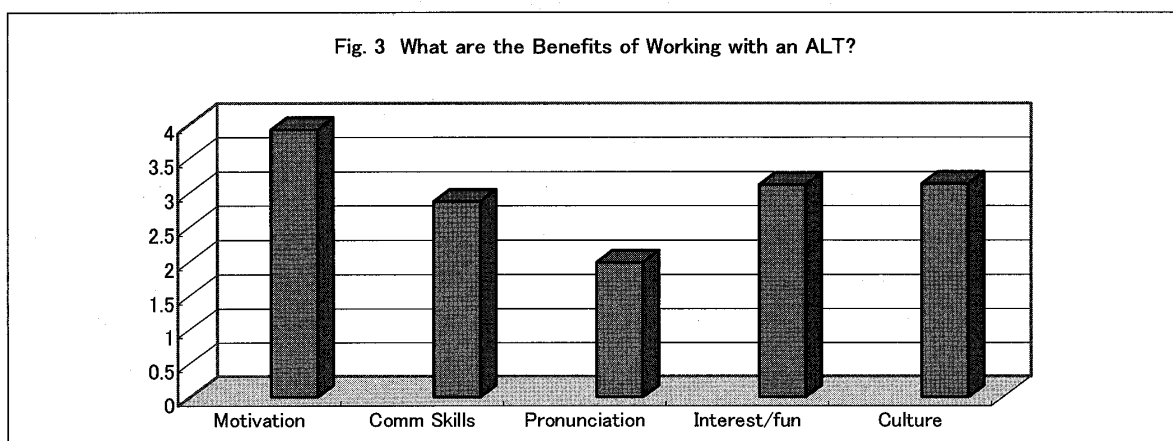
Results for Senior High School teachers were almost identical to those for their counterparts in Junior High School. They strongly believe that ALTs should be given more training in both Communicative Language Teaching and in team teaching.



As was the case with JHS English teachers, very few respondents expressed the opinion that ALTs need to be able to speak Japanese before taking up their posts in high school. There is a clear sense among teachers that, when it comes to training, teaching skills should come first, while Japanese language skills are an optional extra.

Benefits of Working with an ALT

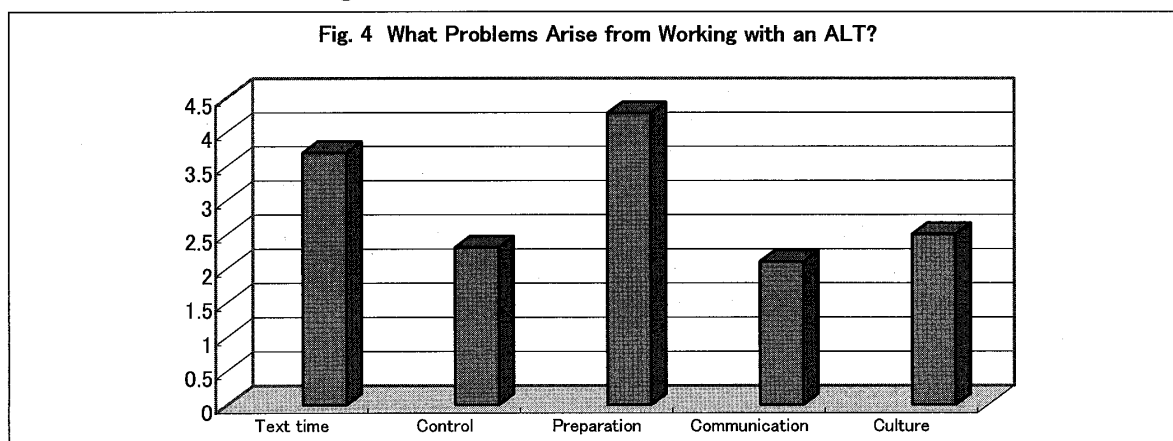
Teachers ranked the advantages for students of having an ALT in the classroom. (see figure 3). As was the case with Junior high school teachers, the motivational benefits stood out, though the element of fun (also linked to motivation) was less prominent. Unlike their counterparts in Junior high school, Senior high school teachers ranked learning about another culture in second place (just ahead of increasing interest and fun). Perhaps it is the case that the level of students' comprehension in Senior high is reaching a stage where more of the cultural aspects of the ALT's native country can be successfully exploited in the classroom.



As was the case in Junior high school, “improving students’ pronunciation” receives an extremely low score, and is not seen as a significant advantage of the team-teaching situation.

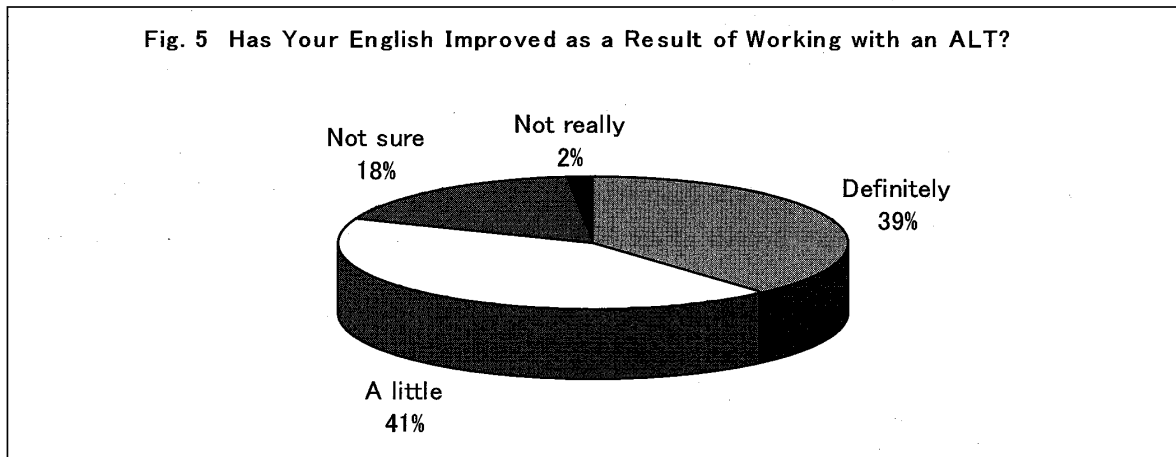
Problems Associated with Working with an ALT

Teachers ranked the downsides of collaborating with an ALT, both in terms of what happens inside and outside the classroom (see figure 4).



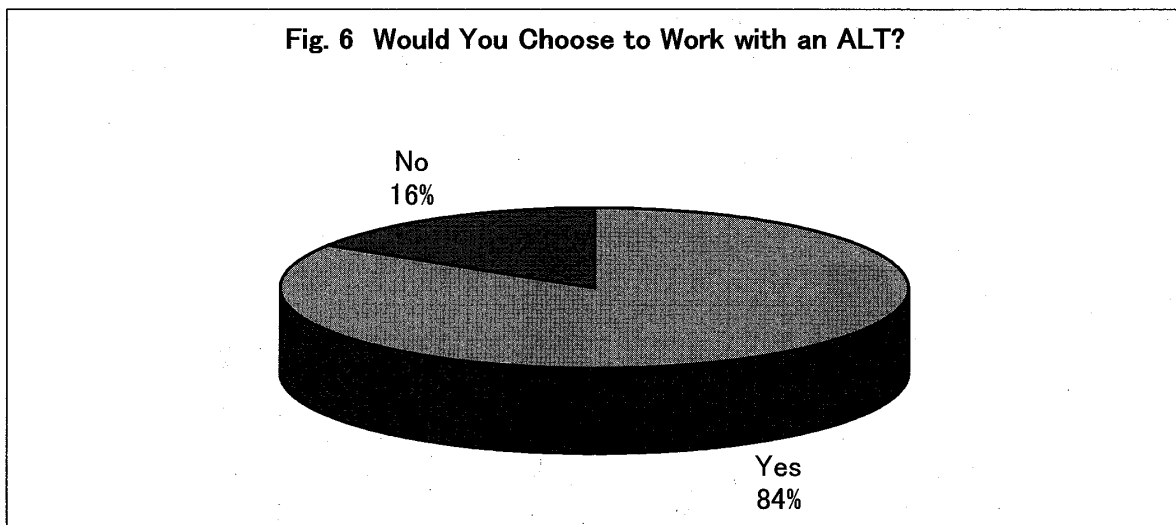
Responses to this question showed no significant difference compared to those of Junior high school teachers. Preparation time is by far the most pressing concern, again supporting Tajino and Tajino's (2000) findings. As before, lack of time to work on the text book was regarded as the second biggest problem.

Benefits of Team Teaching for JTEs



High school English teachers were generally less convinced than their Junior high school counterparts that working with an ALT had contributed to their own linguistic development. 39% reported that their English had “definitely improved”, compared to 52% of Junior High School teachers. Moreover, 20% responded “not sure”, “not really” or “not at all” compared to only 9% of teachers in Junior high (see fig 5).

This slightly less positive view of the team-teaching situation was also reflected in responses to the question, “If you could choose whether or not you work with an ALT next year, how would you answer?” 10 out of the 62 teachers surveyed (16.1%) responded that, given the choice, they would prefer not to team teach. This is somewhat closer to the “persistent minority” reported by Sturman (1992: 151)



Conclusions

This study reveals few significant differences between Senior and Junior High School teachers in Nagasaki as regards their feelings about team teaching with an ALT. Generally speaking they perceive a number of advantages in team-teaching, especially in terms of increased motivation. Unlike their Junior High School counterparts, they see access to a foreign culture as more valuable than increasing the level of fun in the classroom, perhaps related to the more advanced level of the students, and a more serious attitude to learning.

Perhaps most significantly, High School English teachers show a generally less positive attitude towards the presence of the ALT, compared to those in Junior High School. Perhaps feeling more confident of their own English to begin with, they perceive less value in the relationship in terms of their own linguistic development, with less than 40% reporting a significant improvement. Moreover, a significant minority of 16% would prefer not to team-teach at all. Education authorities might do well to bear this in mind when deciding allocations of ALTs.

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