

Localizing Team-Teaching Research

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Abstract

This study discusses the methodologies of recent team-teaching research conducted in Japan and puts forward a proposal for qualitative, interview-based research at the local level. Among the previous studies undertaken, various significant procedural and interpretative problems have been outlined in both quantitative and qualitative studies. To counter them, the ‘localization’ of research is proposed for team-teachers, in contrast to the reliance on research which seeks to generalize findings. To enable them to do so, I present an example of how following Nunan’s (1992) step-by-step approach to conducting research and Hycner’s (1985) interview data reduction can be effective for small-scale, qualitative research in one particular junior high school in Japan. Although I do not make claims of generalisability, it is concluded that the methodological framework could provide some useful techniques for other team-teaching researchers who have a large amount of interview data to process.

Background

Ozawa and McLauchlan (2003) briefly summarize the history and the purpose of JET (The Japan Exchange and Teaching) Programme. It was established in 1987 by the Education and Foreign Ministries as the biggest scheme offering team-teaching in Japanese school “with the aim of improving foreign language education and promoting international exchange” (Ozawa and McLauchlan, 2003: 16). In its first year of operation, 813 ALTs (Assistant Language Teachers) were hired for the scheme, and now approximately 5,500 ALTs from 22 countries have been engaged in foreign language education in the 2003-2004 Japanese school year (Ozawa and McLauchlan, 2003).

In terms of the general definition of team-teaching, Richards, et al (1992: 375) state that it is “a term used for a situation in which two teachers share a class and divide instruction between them.” In the Japanese setting, however, team-teaching between a JTL (Japanese Teacher of Language) and an ALT in Japanese schools seems to take on a rather different meaning. First of all, according to Monbukagakusho (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology) the aim of team-teaching is to improve communicative activities in the classroom (Mombukagakusho, 2002). Secondly, Mombukagakusho specifies team-teaching in the Japanese context as being one in which “a JTL and an ALT form a pair and are present at the same time teaching a class together” (Mombukagakusho, 2002: 14). Specifically, the policy document suggests that the two kinds of teachers need to plan and teach a class together (Mombukagakusho, 2002).

Although there seem to be many advantages to team-teaching in Japanese English classrooms (Sturman, 1992; Miyazato, 2001), many difficulties have also been pointed out in this partnership between a JTL and an ALT (Scholefield, 1996; Tajino and Tajino, 2000, Gorsuch, 2002). Most of these studies about team-teaching make use of either large-scale quantitative surveys (Sturman, 1992; Scholefield, 1996; Gorsuch, 2002) or report generally about studies undertaken into JTL-ALT interaction (Tajino and Tajino, 2000), making it difficult to understand localized problems often best revealed through small-scale, qualitative studies which do not seek generalizability. Difficulties exist, though, within the small-scale studies as well, for example, in research conducted by Miyazato (2001), the analysis of interview data collected from college students concludes that team-teaching is effective because it increases learners' motivation. However, as Holliday (1994, p. 29) suggests, such simplified conclusions are difficult to justify as "classroom culture" is very complex, and so research into that 'culture' requires a range of opinions from both the teachers and students.

This present study is a pilot study aimed at developing a more extensive investigation into appropriate and accessible research tools for use at the local school level. It adopts a classroom-based approach in which the primary objectives are to identify specific problems in team-teaching using qualitative data taken from actual team-teaching classrooms. In the course of this study, I observed two team-teaching classrooms and audio-recorded the lessons. After this, both the teachers and their students, the direct participants in team-teaching, were interviewed about their opinions towards team-teaching. This present study mainly focuses on the methodology in which the semi-structured interviewing data is analysed.

Survey Process of Team-Teaching Research

In order to elucidate the sequence taken in conducting a survey, Nunan (1992) shows a clear and concise process containing eight steps in **Table 1** below. For this reason, we have chosen these steps to carry out our team-teaching research.

Table 1: Steps in Carrying out a Survey (Nunan, 1992, p. 141)

Step 1	Define objectives	→ What do we want to find out
Step 2	Identify target population	→ Who do we want to know about?
Step 3	Literature review	→ What have others said/ discovered about the issue
Step 4	Determine sample	→ How many subjects should we survey, and how will we identify these?
Step 5	Identify survey instruments	→ How will the data be collected: questionnaire/ interview?
Step 6	Design survey procedures	→ How will the data collection actually be carried out?
Step 7	Identify analytical procedures	→ How will the data be assembled and analysed?
Step 8	Determine reporting procedure	→ How will results be written up and presented?

Step 1: Defining Objectives

The objective of my study is the investigation of team-teaching in a particular Japanese junior high school English classroom. Specifically, I wish to find out the opinions of the participants in that classroom.

Step 2: Identifying the Target Population

In my case, the target population is comprised of the three sets of direct participants in the classroom: the ALT, the JTLs and their students.

Step 3: Literature Review of Team-Teaching Research

In the case of team-teaching, although there are many studies dealing with this topic, research using surveys is relatively limited. I have selected four recent studies based on survey research. These studies are shown in **Table 2** below and are compared according to the following 4 criteria: (1) survey instrument, (2) size of the study, (3) subjects, (4) kind of school where the study conducted.

Table 2: Team-Teaching Research Based on Surveys

Researcher	Survey Instrument	Size	Subjects	School
Gorsuch (2002)	Questionnaire	Large-scale	884 JTLs*	Several senior high schools in 9 prefectures
Miyazato (2001)	Interview	Small-scale	18 students	1 university
Scholefield (1996)	Questionnaire	Large-scale	86 JTLs*	31 junior high schools
Sturman (1992)	Questionnaire	Large-scale	JTLs* 31 CES Teachers* Students	Several junior high schools in Koto-ku, Tokyo

* JTLs = Japanese Teachers of Language,

* CES Teachers = the British Council Cambridge English School Teachers

As can be seen above, the subjects of the studies are divided into three groups: JTLs, students and native English-speaker teachers. Gorsuch (2002) and Scholefield (1996) only targeted JTLs. Gorsuch (2002) collected questionnaires from 884 JTLs and Scholefield (1996) gathered data from 86 JTLs. In contrast, Miyazato (2001) interviewed only 18 students. As opposed to all other studies undertaken, Sturman

(1992) investigated all three types of participants in the team-teaching process.

Step 4: Determining Sample

In my case, we have conducted small-scale rather than large-scale research, focusing on one particular junior high school in a village in Nagano Prefecture. In that school, there were two JTLs, one ALT and approximately 200 students. We selected all three teaching staff involved in that team-teaching context and several students who had taken those lessons.

As for the determination of the number of student interviewees, I asked one of the JTLs to select 5 to 10 students because interviewing all students was difficult logistically. Group interviewing was conducted with the students because individual interviewing would possibly have placed 14-year-old teenagers under too much pressure. Cohen et al (2000, p. 287) confirm this view, but also point out that in the case where too many interviewees are selected, “the group fragments and loses focus”. Moreover, Breakwell (1990 as cited in Lewis 1992) expresses a similar view and suggests the ideal number of children in a group to be six or seven.

Step 5: Identifying Survey Instruments

Interviewing is used in my team-teaching survey as has been seen in the last section because it is considered to be more appropriate than questionnaires. This is explained by looking at other questionnaire-based research undertaken.

Scholefield (1996)’s statistical data, for example, was gathered from more than 80

JTLs but her conclusions became generalised for the sample used, referring to “internationalisation” in Japan, a topic unrelated to her research questions. Also, the research lacked clarity in how the questionnaire data was reduced and analyzed in light of the original research question.

The study conducted by Gorsuch (2002) was approximately 10 times larger than that of Scholefield (1996), collecting questionnaires from nearly 900 JTLs. Gorsuch (2002, p. 23) herself casts doubt on her own methodology by stating that “(JTLs) may feel reluctant to answer questions about what activities and methodologies they prefer” due to recent changes in educational policy. This reluctance led to, in her questionnaire findings, to a tendency to give responses “at a rating of mild approval” (2002, p. 23), in other words, a “conservative and cautious place” on the scale of responses available. Additionally, there seems to have been a lack of background context to respondents’ answers as basic information concerning teacher age and experience was not required in the questionnaire design. This greatly affected the ability to interpret her findings.

Unlike Gorsuch (2002) and Scholefield (1996), there are two types of questionnaires in Sturman’s (1992) study: one for teachers and the other for students. The questionnaire for the teachers seems to be open-ended; in contrast, the questionnaire for the students contains closed questions. Furthermore, the format of the students’ questionnaire involves self-evaluation, such as “Do you think your English has improved?” (Sturman, 1992, p. 156). Sturman himself reflects upon the possible invalidity of teacher self-evaluation for project evaluation. In addition, the same researcher also admits to some inconsistencies in the local administration of the study.

In contrast to these problems outlined with the use of questionnaires, interviewing, particularly with semi-structured interviews, offers both participants the chance to expand upon a topic question (Drever 1995). Tuckman (1972, p. 269, as cited in Cohen et al, 2000) expresses a similar view in which “opportunities for asking” for the interviewer are “extensive”. This allows the interviewer to discover the context missing from Gorsuch’s (2002) questionnaires and directly ask the interviewee about issues spontaneously arising in the course of the research. In essence, the “free form” (Drever, 1995, p. 13) of semi-structured interviews presents the interviewer with the necessary flexibility needed when seeking responses concerned with attitudes towards team-teaching.

Step 6: Designing Survey Procedures

In this case, one particular school was visited and a whole day was spent there. Four research methods were employed: (1) observation of two team-teaching lessons (2) interviews with two JTLs, one ALT and a group of students, (3) audio-recordings of the interviews and (4) field notes of the lessons.

This present study focuses on the second method employed, that of interviewing, which illustrates the opinions and comments about team-teaching from the three direct stakeholders. Three interviews with the ALT, two JTLs and a group of students were all conducted separately. While the interviews were conducted, the conversations were audio-recorded and the researcher took notes. However, as for the group interview with the students, I asked their English teacher and also their homeroom

teacher, Ms. Suzuki, to stay in the interview room as a note-taker because she knew the students very well. On reflection, though, this might have had a negative effect upon the students' opinions because their teacher was in the same room. This potential risk to reliable responses from student-interviewees is noted by Simons (1982) and Lewis (1992) (as cited in Cohen et al, 2000, p. 287) who advise researchers conducting group interviews to simply "get the children's teacher away from the children".

In terms of the selection of the students for the group interview, "purposive sampling" (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 89) by one of the JTLs was conducted, in which 10 students were handpicked according to their examination results. In retrospect, since the teacher herself was asked to choose the interviewees, there might be possibly have been bias in the group interview.

In terms of the style of the interviews, a semi-structured interview format was used for all participants. There were three main questions for all three interviews: (1) the advantages of team-teaching, (2) the disadvantages of team-teaching, and (3) suggestions for improvement towards team-teaching. When we interviewed the JTLs and the ALT, their background (university major and teaching experience) was also investigated to enrich the interviewing information.

Step 7: Identify Analytical Procedures

Miles and Huberman (1994) take the stance that qualitative research requires an analytical approach in which data reduction plays a fundamental role. This is supported by Stake (1995, p. 84) in that to "identify the best and set the rest aside" is

necessary. Wolcott (1990, p.35) expresses a similar view by advocating “constant winnowing” in order to “discover the essences” within the data. Accordingly, to analyse the interview my data for the seventh step, I decided to use an adapted form of the “phenomenological” approach proposed by Hycner (1985 as cited in Cohen and Manion 1994, pp. 292-296) because it presents a clear process of reducing and analyzing interview data. The original 15 steps were streamlined into 4 as follows:

Table 3: Streamlined Version of Hycner (1985 as cited in Cohen and Manion, 1994, pp. 293-296)

1.	Transcription
2.	Phenomenological reduction
3.	Delineating units of meaning relevant to the research question and eliminating redundancies
4.	Identifying general and unique themes for all the interviews

Steps 1 to 3 focus on individual interviews and step 4 collates the relevant information from all the interviews conducted. To illustrate how this abridged version of the phenomenological approach is used, we refer to a part of the interview transcription with the ALT. The first step of transcription below refers to the part of the interview with the ALT related to the advantages of team-teaching.

1. Transcription

Interviewer: What do you think about the advantages of team-teaching?

ALT: Uh, in this case, I think the students can learn, ah, a lot of things having two teachers there. For example, ah, usually the Japanese team, the Japanese teachers will have a lot more, on command being able to resuscitate (recite) grammar.

Interviewer: Uh...

ALT: For us, for, ah, for people native speaker of English, we of course, we know grammar but teaching grammar is a little bit difficult because we take it for granted.

The second step involves the “phenomenological reduction” of the extracted part of the interview, meaning that a summary is made of what is said in terms of a “sense of the whole” (Hycner, 1985, p. 293) interaction between the two participants, as follows:

2. Phenomenological reduction

Students “can learn a lot of things having two teachers” in the classroom. For example, the Japanese teachers usually have a greater focus on grammar and they are better able to “recite” grammar for the benefit of the students. Native speaker ALTs tend to “take it for granted” even though we may “know grammar”.

Viewing this reduction, it is clear that the particular research question – that of determining the advantages of team-teaching perceived by the ALT – is addressed but redundancies in the summary can be eliminated through highlighting, as illustrated below for step 3:

3. Delineating units of meaning relevant to the research question and eliminating redundancies

Students “can learn a lot of things having two teachers” in the classroom. For example, the Japanese teachers usually have a greater focus on grammar and they are better able to “recite” grammar for the benefit of the students. Native speaker ALTs tend to “take it for granted” even though we may “know grammar”

Such highlights effectively crystallize only what is important to the research questions.

This process of decision-making as to what constitutes relevance (or irrelevance) is clearly open to a high degree of subjectivity.

Finally, step four turns to a collection of comments and opinions made by all the interviewees concerning this same research question. It is a compilation of the

highlighted summaries from step 3 for the ALT, the JTLs and the students, closely related to Nunan's (1995, p. 141) final step to "Determine Reporting Procedure".

Step 8: Determine Reporting Procedure

For this purpose, it was decided to use the final step of my adapted version of the "phenomenological approach" (Hycner, 1985 as cited in Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 295), since that step of "identifying general and unique themes for all the interviews" entails the same representation of the findings as prescribed in Nunan's final eighth step. In our case, the identification of "common" opinions among three interviews of team-teaching participants and "unique" points in a specific interview are seen again through the technique of highlighting of distinguishing words and phrases in the summaries of each interview.

Conclusions

One main conclusion is that previous studies have not consistently involved all the relevant 'stakeholders' in team-teaching apart from Sturman (1992). It is important to recognize the importance of data from participants other than teachers so that, as is illustrated in my research, a more balanced set of perspectives on what happens in the classroom can be analysed. Also, in terms of the methodologies chosen in other research, it is to be noted those studies using a quantitative paradigm have methodological weaknesses in questionnaire design and have the tendency to over-generalize the findings (Scholefield, 1996). In contrast to the limitations inherent in some questionnaire formats, the use of semi-structured interviewing in this study offers a "free form" (Drever, 1995) for more expansion on significant topics than

previous questionnaire-based research.

Despite these criticisms, procedural weaknesses still exist in my chosen approach, for instance, the presence of the teacher in the group as a note-taker and the potentially biased selection of students by the same teacher. In this situation, the students may not have felt comfortable in expressing their true opinions freely about a teacher in the team-teaching classes in front of their Japanese teacher.

As for recommendations for appropriate methodologies in team-teaching research in Japan, qualitative research in the field of interviewing tends to gather large amount of data, so it is advisable to reduce it according to an analytical framework (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The data reduction in this study has involved the “identification” (Stake, 1995) of the “essences” (Wolcott, 1990) in the transcribed talk. For this purpose, a combination of Nunan’s eight steps, including Hycner’s (1985) adapted “phenomenological approach”, could be a useful technique for researchers to adopt, as it is a visually effective means, especially through the use of highlighting, to reduce large amounts of data.

Finally, in terms of the methodology I have adopted, this pilot study mainly focuses on interviewing as a research tool. Looking at the next steps which can feasibly be taken in developing a more extensive methodology for use in the investigation of team-teaching in Japanese schools, a triangulated approach combining an analysis of the actual classroom discourse and interviewing with teachers and students is proposed. Research taking into account the perspectives gained from these two approaches may

give us more insights into the local team-teaching situation.

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Notes

1. This study was originally presented orally at the 28th Annual JALT (Japan Association of Language Teaching) International Conference on Language Teaching/ Learning on 22 November, 2003, Shizuoka in Japan.

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