

Roles and challenges of club activity instructors in community-based extracurricular sports development: An interview study of teacher advisors and instructors

AKIRA NAKAI*

Faculty of Health Informatics, Osaka Electro-Communication University, Osaka, JAPAN

Published online: October 31, 2026

Accepted for publication: October 15, 2026

DOI:10.7752/jpes.2026.10181

Abstract:

Problem Statement. In Japanese schools, extracurricular sports activities (undō bukatsudō) have traditionally relied on teachers' voluntary commitment, contributing to long working hours and placing additional burdens on teachers who coach sports outside their areas of expertise. These activities are now being reorganised through "community-based development" (formerly known as "regional transition"), with a six-year "Reform Implementation Period" beginning in the 2026 academic year. During this transition, club activity instructors—community-based, non-teaching personnel who provide coaching in schools—serve as a vital link between schools and local communities. Clarifying the realities of programme implementation and the challenges encountered can help inform its future design. **Approach.** In October 2023, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three teacher advisors and three club activity instructors, representing five individuals in total because one participant had served in both roles. All participants had experience coaching clubs in junior high schools and were purposively selected as information-rich cases. Guided by a grounded theory approach, the interview narratives were inductively coded and organised into categories, while expert triangulation was used to support the trustworthiness of the findings. **Purpose.** The study examined the current state of club coaching and the realities and challenges of serving as a club activity instructor from the perspectives of both teacher advisors and instructors. **Results.** Although both groups demonstrated a strong commitment to club activities, they differed in their perceptions of remuneration, role expectations, and instructors' impact. Teacher advisors reported reduced workloads but expressed concerns about instructors' limited familiarity with the school environment and the practical demands of coordination, and tended to recruit individuals they already trusted, including former students. Club activity instructors expressed satisfaction with their remuneration and recognised qualitative improvements in club activities. However, they also identified limited public awareness of the scheme and administrative burdens as significant challenges. Remuneration varied in both form and amount, while perceptions of the instructors' roles differed: teacher advisors viewed club activities as part of the broader educational mission, whereas instructors focused primarily on the activities themselves. **Conclusions.** Effectively utilising club activity instructors requires greater public awareness of the scheme, systematic human-resource development, improved matching between instructors and schools, remuneration arrangements based on equal pay for equal work, and a clearly defined division of responsibilities and collaborative framework between instructors and teacher advisors. Relying on teacher advisors' personal networks—a form of social capital—for recruitment may be effective in the short term, but it ultimately constrains the expansion of provision. These difficulties reflect broader challenges confronting community-based development. By drawing on insights from those directly involved, the study identifies important implications for the sustainable management of club activities.

Keywords: teachers' work styles, school–community collaboration, sports coaching personnel, social capital, human resource development

Introduction

In Japanese junior high and high schools, after-school and weekend club activities (bukatsudō) occupy a central place in school life. These activities are broadly divided into sports and cultural clubs. Although participation is officially voluntary, most students join one or the other, and activities often continue from weekday afternoons through the weekend. Extracurricular sports activities (undō bukatsudō), in particular, have evolved in a distinctly Japanese manner, differing both from the recreation-centred British model and from the professionalism-oriented American model. Nakazawa (2014) describes Japanese extracurricular sports activities as a distinctive institution with five defining features: (1) they are organised on a scale unparalleled in other countries; (2) although neither part of the formal curriculum nor compulsory, they are (3) administered under the leadership of teachers and schools rather than students; (4) they impose substantial financial and practical costs on schools, particularly teachers; and (5) because of this considerable burden, they have repeatedly prompted

efforts to transfer responsibility to local communities. Understanding the characteristics of this institution, which has few international counterparts, provides the foundation for the discussion that follows. This study focuses specifically on this aspect—extracurricular sports activities.

Although based on students' autonomous and voluntary participation, extracurricular sports activities have long been regarded as an integral component of school education. They are valued not only for developing students' skills and physical fitness but also for cultivating responsibility and solidarity (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology [MEXT], 2017). Teachers serving as advisors have primarily managed these activities, assuming responsibilities that extend well beyond technical coaching, including preparing activity plans, arranging practice facilities, accompanying students to competitions, overseeing finances, maintaining safety, and responding to accidents (Japan Sports Agency, 2017). These responsibilities often extend beyond contracted hours, contributing to teachers' excessively long working hours (Kondo et al., 2023; MEXT, 2020). Coaching activities outside their areas of expertise can also impose significant psychological strain on teachers who lack competitive experience in the sport assigned to them (Murakami, 2019). From an international perspective, Japanese club activities have likewise been examined as "communities of practice." Moreover, it has long been recognised that many teacher advisors receive no specialist coaching training in the activities they supervise (Cave, 2004). A survey by the Japan Sport Association (2021) found that 26.9% of junior high school teachers and 25.3% of high school teachers who coached their assigned sport had neither taught health and physical education nor possessed competitive experience in that sport. These findings demonstrate that teachers lacking relevant expertise continue to undertake coaching on a substantial scale. In this context, the time demands and compensation associated with club activities have come under growing scrutiny, prompting calls for the more active involvement of external coaches (Murakami, 2019).

In response, MEXT revised the Regulation for Enforcement of the School Education Act in 2017, formally establishing the role of club activity instructor (Article 78-2; e-Gov Law Search, n.d.). The regulation defined responsibilities including technical coaching and accompanying students to competitions under the supervision of the school principal. Subsequently, the Comprehensive Guidelines for School Sport Club Activities (Japan Sports Agency, 2018) and MEXT's policy document on club-activity reform in the context of work-style reform in schools (MEXT, 2020) established standards for appropriately regulating activities and promoted the gradual transfer of weekend club activities to local communities. In 2022, the Japan Sports Agency and the Agency for Cultural Affairs jointly issued the Comprehensive Guidelines for School Club Activities and New Community Club Activities (Japan Sports Agency & Agency for Cultural Affairs, 2022). The guidelines consolidated and comprehensively revised the two 2018 guidelines governing sports and cultural clubs, while designating the 2023–2025 academic years as the "Reform Promotion Period" to advance regional collaboration and transition of weekend activities. Subsequently, the final summary issued in May 2025 renamed "regional transition" as "community-based development," to be supported by the community as a whole, including schools. It also designated the six-year period beginning in the 2026 academic year as the "Reform Implementation Period" (Japan Sports Agency & Agency for Cultural Affairs, 2025a). In line with this decision, the Comprehensive Guidelines for the Reform of Club Activities and the Promotion of Community Club Activities were formulated in December 2025, establishing the government's basic approach and policy framework for the Reform Implementation Period (Japan Sports Agency & Agency for Cultural Affairs, 2025b). At the time of writing, the 2026 academic year represents the first year in which community-based development, focused on weekend activities, has formed part of this Reform Implementation Period.

Extracurricular sports are currently undergoing a transition from teacher-centred management to a new framework that incorporates local communities. However, this shift is progressing gradually and remains focused primarily on weekend activities, with the pace of implementation varying considerably across regions. The most pressing challenge is securing qualified individuals to lead coaching. According to the Japan Sport Association (2021), club activity instructors have been appointed at only 8.7% of junior high schools and 11.5% of high schools. Moreover, when schools recruit external personnel, they reportedly prioritise the ability to establish coaching arrangements in collaboration with teacher advisors and to maintain effective communication with them (MEXT, 2019). The transition's success depends critically on addressing both the quantitative challenge of securing enough personnel and the qualitative challenge of fostering effective cooperation among schools, communities, and coaches. The policy for the Reform Implementation Period further identifies two issues requiring resolution: the development of a certification system to ensure the quality of community club activities and the allocation of costs, including the appropriate balance between user fees and public funding (Japan Sports Agency & Agency for Cultural Affairs, 2025b).

This transition involves far more than simply reallocating managerial responsibility. It challenges the fundamental character of extracurricular sports as a cultural institution distinctive to Japanese school education. As discussed above, although extracurricular sports fall outside the formal curriculum, they have been maintained under the ideal of "student autonomy" largely through teachers' voluntary and devoted participation, thus relying on a customary yet fragile foundation (Nakazawa, 2014). This teacher-dependent structure has recently been reconsidered in the context of work-style reform, with its current state and long-term sustainability examined from the perspective of the sociology of education (Nakazawa et al., 2009; Uchida, 2021).

Community-based development can be understood as a structural transformation that extends this teacher-centred institution beyond the school into the community, thus redefining the boundary between the two.

The club activity instructor, while part of the community personnel outside the school's teaching staff, provides coaching in the school system and therefore occupies a position at the intersection of school and community. From this perspective, the circumstances and challenges associated with employing club activity instructors can be viewed as a microcosm of (and a preview of) the broader shift towards community-based development. Clarifying, from the perspectives of both teacher advisors and club activity instructors, the conditions that enable instructors to perform their roles effectively—including the awareness and securing of personnel, the division of responsibilities and collaboration with teacher advisors, and remuneration (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2020)—would provide valuable insights not only into management during the transition period but also into the design of the community-based model that is now poised to expand. However, few qualitative studies have examined these issues in close connection with the experiences of those directly involved. A distinctive feature of this study is its integrated comparison of two differently positioned groups—teacher advisors and club activity instructors—whose perspectives have typically been examined separately. By analysing their own accounts in a common framework, the study clarifies both the differences between their perceptions and the points at which those perceptions converge.

Accordingly, this study uses semi-structured interviews with teacher advisors and club activity instructors who have experience coaching clubs in junior high schools. It aims to clarify the current state of club coaching, as well as the realities and challenges associated with serving as a club activity instructor. Based on these findings, the study also examines measures that could support the sustainable operation of club activities as they transition towards community-based development. The interviews were conducted in October 2023, during the early stages of the Reform Promotion Period. The findings are interpreted in the context of subsequent advances in community-based development.

Materials and Methods

Participants

The participants were teacher advisors and club activity instructors with experience coaching clubs at public junior high schools (Table 1). The sample comprised five individuals: three teacher advisors and two club activity instructors. One participant (Advisor C) had worked as a club activity instructor while pursuing postgraduate studies and therefore responded to questions in both capacities. Accordingly, the analysis included three teacher-advisor accounts and three club-activity-instructor accounts. To examine the operation of the club activity instructor scheme from the perspectives of both teacher advisors and instructors, participants were purposively selected from individuals with experience coaching clubs at junior high schools. The participant who had served in both roles was especially valuable because this person provided a bridge between the two perspectives. To protect the identities of the participants and their schools, their characteristics are presented in anonymised form.

Table 1. Participant characteristics

Category	Age	Gender	Sport coached	Notes
Advisor A	49	Male	Tennis	Vice-principal; coaching experience at a previous school
Advisor B	25	Male	Athletics	Teaches health and physical education
Advisor C	37	Female	Tennis	Teaches home economics; while pursuing postgraduate studies, served as an athletics club activity instructor and also answered the questions intended for instructors
Instructor D	21	Male	Tennis	A graduate of the school where he coaches
Instructor E	20	Male	Rugby	A graduate of the school where he coaches

Note. To prevent the identification of participants and their schools, the data were anonymised. Advisor C had served as an athletics club instructor while a postgraduate student and responded to questions intended for both advisors and instructors. Therefore, although only five individuals participated, the data analysed comprised three teacher-advisor accounts and three club-activity-instructor accounts (covering tennis, rugby, and athletics).

Data collection

Each participant participated in a semi-structured interview conducted between mid-October and late October 2023. All interviews were audio-recorded using a linear PCM recorder (PCM-A10, Sony).

Ethical considerations

All procedures performed in this study complied with the ethical standards established by the relevant institutional and national research committees, as well as the principles set forth in the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and its subsequent amendments. This non-experimental qualitative study collected and analysed accounts from individuals directly involved through semi-structured interviews and did not constitute clinical or experimental research. Before the interviews commenced, all participants were informed of the study's purpose, content, and methods, as well as the procedures for handling their data. They were also advised that participation

was voluntary and that they could withdraw their consent at any time without disadvantage; written informed consent was subsequently obtained. Audio recordings and transcribed data were managed in a manner that prevented individuals from being identified. In this paper, participant characteristics have been anonymised so that neither the participants nor their schools can be identified.

Interview items

Teacher advisors were asked about the status of the clubs they oversaw, how they had assumed their advisory roles, whether they had competitive experience, the nature of their involvement, their workload, and the implementation of the club activity instructor scheme, including its effects and challenges. Club activity instructors were asked about the condition of the clubs they oversaw, how they had assumed their roles, how they had learned about the scheme, whether they held relevant qualifications or had completed training, the nature of their activities, what they found satisfying or unsatisfying, and the challenges they encountered. In both cases, follow-up questions were asked to obtain further details based on their responses. These interview items were developed and reviewed by multiple experts, including junior- and senior-high-school teachers with experience advising clubs or coaching sports, as well as qualitative researchers specialising in sport science, thus establishing their content validity.

Analysis

The audio recordings were transcribed with Rimo Voice (Rimo LLC) and organised into individual participant “accounts”. Each account was then divided into units of meaning. Concepts were developed inductively from the data, and related concepts were consolidated into categories through constant comparison. The resulting concepts and categories are presented in Table 2. This process of concept development and constant comparison was informed by the grounded theory approach (Kinoshita, 2003). During coding and categorisation, several experts—including practitioners who had worked as junior- or senior-high-school teachers with experience as club advisors or sports coaches, as well as qualitative researchers specialising in sport science—collaboratively examined the data and cross-checked their interpretations of how concepts were extracted, named, and classified (investigator triangulation). The categories for teacher advisors and club activity instructors were then organised into conceptual models (Figures 1 and 2), and their commonalities and differences were compared (Figure 3). This exploratory qualitative analysis examines perceptions that have received insufficient scholarly attention. The purpose was not statistical generalisation, but to achieve a deeper understanding of this early stage of the transition through a small number of information-rich cases, consistent with the logic of purposive rather than random sampling (Patton, 2015). The five participants were selected deliberately because they could provide insider perspectives on how the scheme operates. Advisor C, having occupied both roles, represents a pivotal case that connects these two standpoints and enhances the analytical value of the data. The study does not apply the full grounded-theory procedures of theoretical sampling and saturation. However, the analysis revealed a degree of coherence in both the shared perceptions and the differences in each group. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, we followed the criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Credibility was reinforced through expert review of the interview items and cross-checking of the coding by multiple experts, thus enabling triangulation. Transferability was supported by providing detailed descriptions of the participants and the study context. Dependability and confirmability were ensured by explicitly documenting the process from concept generation through categorisation. Because the study was performed collaboratively by a supervising teacher and the undergraduate student under his supervision, the analysis explicitly considered how this relationship might influence interpretation (reflexivity). The reporting process was guided by the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ; Tong et al., 2007). From this perspective, the small sample represents a deliberate design feature rather than a deficiency, with its primary consequence being reduced transferability (see Limitations).

Results

Characteristics of teacher advisors

Table 2 presents the categories, concepts, and representative accounts, while Figure 1 shows an integrated conceptual model of the teacher advisors as a whole.

Becoming an advisor. All teacher advisors had competitive experience in the sport they coached, with some having competed in national tournaments. The process for assigning the role differed among schools: school management sometimes selected teachers based on their curricula vitae, approached those with relevant competitive experience, or allocated the role according to the results of a preference survey. However, the teachers identified several challenges, including newly appointed teachers’ difficulty in declining the role, insufficient handover procedures, and the possibility that their preferences would not be taken into account. Despite these difficulties, it was clear that the continuation of club activities depends on the goodwill of teachers.

Commitment to club activities. The teacher advisors regarded cultivating deep, trusting relationships with students as “an asset that money cannot buy.” They viewed club activities as an opportunity to educate the whole person and as valuable time that would benefit students throughout their futures. These views formed the basis of their sense of fulfilment in serving as advisors.

The realities and challenges of club activities. Activities were held approximately five days each week, primarily on weekday evenings and Saturday mornings, while preparation and cleanup outside contracted

hours were also commonplace. Teachers frequently highlighted deficiencies in the advisory system, including having to manage activities alone without access to substitute support; expressed dissatisfaction with their compensation, which consisted of a standardised allowance determined by hours worked rather than by their level of commitment or the type of sport; and described the difficulty of balancing these responsibilities with their teaching duties. This burden was evident in remarks such as “there is no one to ask to take over”, “everything is managed by the teacher advisor”, and “it is difficult to balance with my private life”.

The realities and challenges of introducing club activity instructors. Club activity instructors had been introduced in all the schools surveyed, and their numbers continued to grow. Their involvement promoted the sharing of advisory responsibilities, with teachers reporting benefits including greater time and emotional capacity, improvements in their teaching, stronger relationships, and increased student motivation. However, several challenges remained. Because they felt uneasy about the instructors’ involvement, advisors often continued to attend activities constantly. Instructors unfamiliar with the clubs also required considerable guidance, and coordination between instructors and schools did not always proceed smoothly. Teacher advisors generally expected instructors to understand club activities and possess technical and coaching expertise, and regarded “a former student who can be entrusted with confidence” as particularly well suited to the role.

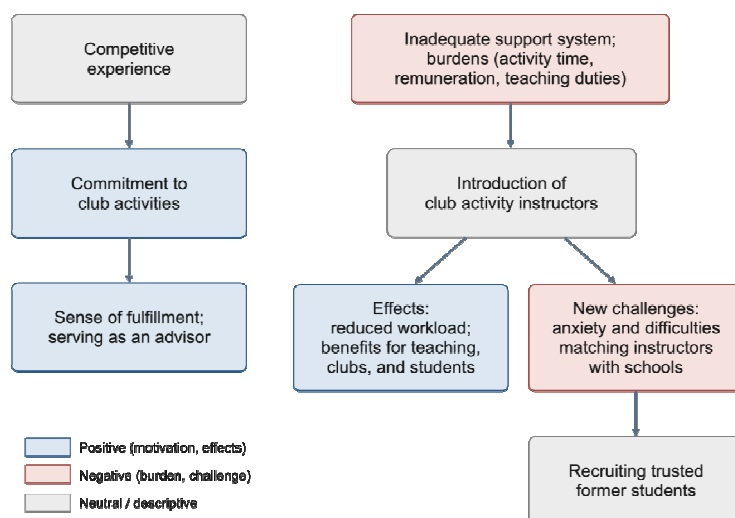


Figure 1. Conceptual framework for teacher advisors

Note. The colour and symbol of each box denote valence: blue represents positive, red negative, and grey neutral or descriptive content. Arrows show relationships between concepts, while the categories correspond to Table 2. Integrated model of the teacher advisors’ accounts: competitive experience fosters commitment to club activities and a sense of fulfilment. In an inadequate and burdensome support system, club activity instructors are introduced, producing both benefits, such as reduced burden, and challenges, including unease and difficulties with matching, before ultimately leading to the appointment of trusted former students.

Characteristics of club activity instructors

Table 2 presents the categories, concepts, and representative accounts, while Figure 2 shows an integrated conceptual model of club activity instructors as a whole.

Becoming an instructor. Two of the three participants reported having “no idea at all” about the scheme before taking on the role. They became involved only after being introduced or invited by a teacher advisor, suggesting that awareness of the scheme was limited.

Commitment to club activities. They shared a strong attachment to their respective sports and a desire to contribute to the students’ development, which fostered a profound sense of fulfilment.

The realities of instructor activity. Activities were performed approximately three to four days per week, primarily after school and for half a day at weekends, with instructors retaining the flexibility to select their days off. In general, instructors were satisfied with their remuneration, which consisted of an hourly wage subject to a monthly limit on hours. However, they identified two significant challenges: hours worked beyond the cap were treated as voluntary, and they were required to complete a substantial amount of paperwork. Their responsibilities focused on providing technical coaching, supervising safety, and fostering discipline.

The impact of introducing instructors. The instructors identified several benefits, including improved practice quality resulting from enhanced training programmes, reduced time wastage, stronger technical skills, greater student concentration and discipline, and coaching from a perspective distinct from that of the advisor.

Requirements for the instructors. The requirements included developing an understanding of club activities through training in first aid and safety, recognising their own responsibilities, communicating effectively with students, and demonstrating the personal qualities necessary to deliver student-centred coaching.

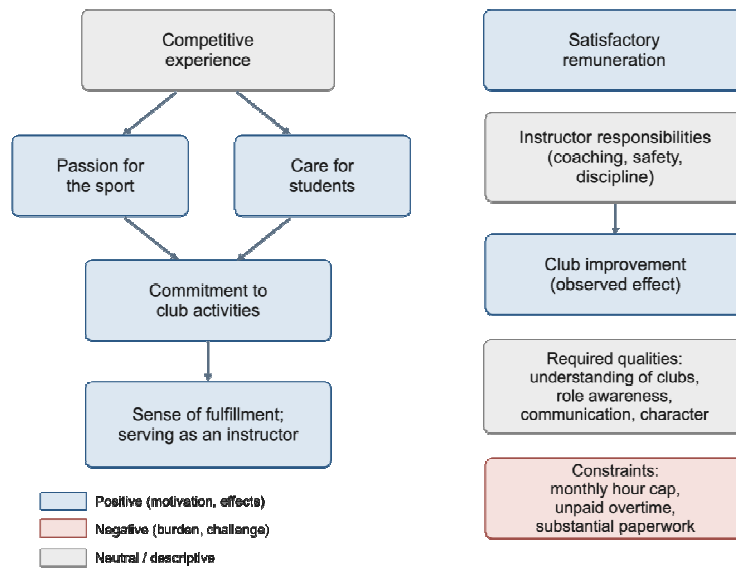


Figure 2. Conceptual framework for club activity instructors

Note. Colours and symbols correspond to those in Figure 1. Integrated model of club activity instructors' accounts: commitment to their sport and students fosters commitment to club activities and a sense of fulfilment. Their responsibilities (including technical coaching, safety management, and discipline) enhance club activities, alongside satisfactory remuneration, the qualities expected of them, and the constraints they encounter, such as the monthly cap, unpaid overtime, and administrative paperwork.

Comparison of roles: Teacher advisors and club activity instructors

For both groups, commitment to club activities provided the foundation that sustained their involvement (Figure 3). Drawing on their competitive experience and concern for students, both viewed club activities as an environment for personal growth.

There were, however, important differences. In terms of remuneration, teacher advisors expressed dissatisfaction with their pay for comparable work, whereas club activity instructors were satisfied. Their compensation also differed: teacher advisors received a daily allowance calculated according to hours worked, while club activity instructors were paid an hourly wage subject to a monthly cap. This discrepancy was identified as an issue requiring examination from the perspective of equal pay for equal work. Regarding perceptions of their roles, teacher advisors viewed club activities as part of the broader educational process, whereas club activity instructors concentrated on improving the clubs and providing students with direct support. In terms of the role expected of instructors, teacher advisors emphasised the need to understand club activities and possess technical and coaching expertise. Club activity instructors likewise valued an understanding of club activities but also stressed the importance of establishing a form of closeness with students distinct from that of the advisor, maintaining effective communication, and remaining conscious of their own responsibilities. These differences in perception may lead to disagreement about the future direction of club management, making it essential for the two parties to reach a consensus.

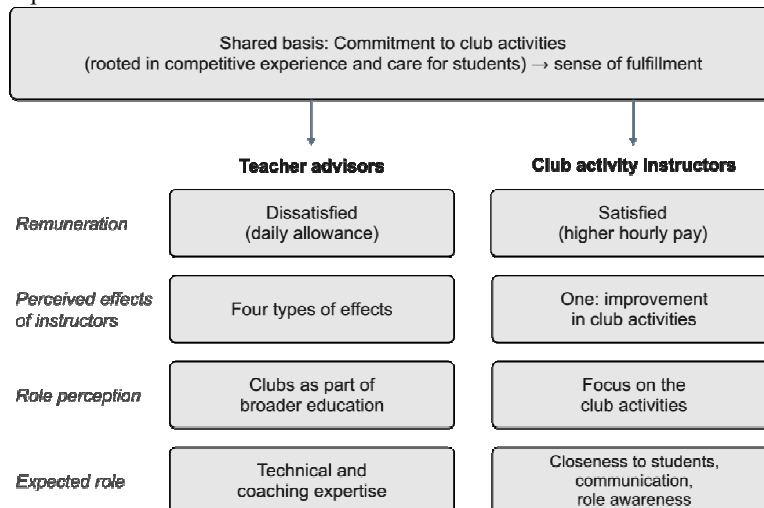


Figure 3. Comparison of teacher advisors and club activity instructors

Note. The shared foundation—a commitment to club activities grounded in competitive experience and care for students—is presented at the top. The two groups are then contrasted across four dimensions: remuneration, the perceived effects of introducing instructors, perceptions of the role, and the role expected or required.

Table 2. Categories, key concepts, and representative accounts

Classification	Core concepts: valence	Representative account
Teacher advisors		
Transitioning into an advisory role	Competitive experience; appointment method; appointment-related challenges (–)	“As a newcomer, you have no choice but to comply” (–)
Dedication to club activities	Building relationships with students (+) and their benefits (+)	“An asset money cannot buy” (+)
Realities and challenges of club activities	Shortcomings in the advisory structure (–), remuneration (–), and teaching responsibilities (–)	“No one is available to take over” (–)
Practical realities and challenges of introducing instructors (±)	Benefits of implementation (+); challenges (–); personnel required	“Circumstances became somewhat easier” (+) “in attendance at all times” (–)
Club activity instructors		
Transitioning into an instructional role	Awareness of the scheme (–); approach to assuming the role	“I had absolutely no idea” (–)
Dedication to participating in club activities	Dedication to the sport (+); commitment to student well-being (+)	“Seeing students flourish is deeply rewarding” (+)
The realities of instructional practice (±)	Remuneration (+); responsibilities; constraints—limits and paperwork (–)	“The hourly rate is attractive” (+) “A substantial amount of paperwork must be submitted” (–)
Impact of Introducing Instructors	Enhancement of club activities (+)	“All unnecessary time expenditure was eliminated” (+)
What instructors are expected to do	Understanding; role; dialogue; personal qualities	“Closer to the students than the advisor is”

Note. Valence: + = positive, – = negative, ± = ambivalent (*coexisting* positive and negative), and unmarked = neutral or descriptive. The “accounts” present participants’ remarks in anonymised form, including summaries and excerpts. The categories and concepts were developed through qualitative analysis, drawing on inductive coding in the grounded theory approach.

Discussion

This study examined the current state of club coaching during the transition period, as well as the realities and challenges surrounding the involvement of club activity instructors, from the perspectives of both parties directly concerned. The findings indicate that the club activity instructor system contributes, to some extent, to reducing the burden on teacher advisors and enhancing the quality of club activities. At the same time, several operational challenges emerged, particularly regarding awareness, personnel recruitment, collaboration, and compensation. The following discussion organises the findings around the sustainable management of club activities as a means of fostering community-based development and examines specific measures for achieving this goal.

Club activity instructors as a microcosm of community-based development

The study’s findings—limited awareness of the scheme, difficulties recruiting personnel, differing perceptions of roles among instructors and teacher advisors, and disparities in remuneration—collectively suggest that employing club activity instructors at the school–community interface already foreshadows the challenges posed by the broader transition to community-based development. Indeed, the policy governing the Reform Implementation Period continues to identify securing personnel, fostering cooperation between schools and communities, and determining cost-sharing arrangements as major challenges (Japan Sports Agency & Agency for Cultural Affairs, 2025a, 2025b). Accordingly, examining the conditions under which club activity instructors can be used in schools also has implications for the design of community-based club activities. The transfer of club activities to local communities was repeatedly discussed throughout the post-war period but was never implemented (Nakazawa, 2014). From the perspective of the sociology of sport, this study contributes by clarifying, in concrete terms and in close relation to the perceptions of those directly involved, where the principal bottleneck lies. The effort to open school-based sports coaching to the wider community presents challenges shared by other countries, where youth sport is supported by clubs and volunteer coaches operating outside schools. Internationally, the recruitment and retention of such personnel has long posed a significant challenge (Cuskelly, 2004). Accordingly, the present findings may also illuminate the broader difficulty of securing staff when sport provision shifts from schools to community or club settings. More generally, the

SPLISS model—a comparative framework identifying the sport-policy factors associated with international sporting success—regards broad participation and the recruitment, development, and availability of qualified coaches as fundamental pillars of a sustainable sport system (De Bosscher et al., 2006). Accordingly, securing and developing community coaching personnel should be treated as core infrastructure, not a peripheral responsibility. The bottlenecks identified here are best understood as a human-resource-management challenge involving recruitment, deployment, and retention (Cuskelly, 2004), rather than as an issue specific to Japan.

Enhancing awareness and developing human resources

In this study, many individuals who ultimately served as club activity instructors reported that they had been unaware of the scheme until assuming the role, indicating that limited awareness constrains the pool of potential personnel. This interpretation is consistent with the notably low appointment rate nationwide (Japan Sport Association, 2021). Conversely, increasing awareness could help attract new personnel, as the scheme requires relatively few activity hours and allows instructors considerable flexibility in selecting their days off. Promising candidates include students and members of the public with sporting backgrounds but no experience coaching in schools, as well as aspiring teachers who have worked with school sports clubs. To attract these groups, it would be effective to organise information sessions explaining the scheme and offer training opportunities covering the fundamentals of school education and sports-club coaching. Osaka University of Health and Sport Sciences, for example, offers a 60-hour certification programme in extracurricular sport coaching for students and members of the public who wish to coach school clubs or community sports. The programme addresses school education, student understanding, safety management, and sports ethics, and awards a certificate of completion pursuant to the School Education Act (Osaka University of Health and Sport Sciences, n.d., 2026). Identifying new coaching personnel through such training and matching them with teacher advisors who lack competitive experience could help alleviate the shortage of qualified staff. Coaches at community-based junior sports clubs likewise frequently report insufficient knowledge and skills in coaching and child development, while noting that training strengthens their confidence (Ohashi et al., 2016). Accordingly, systematically developing personnel with an understanding of school education is also valuable for the community organisations receiving their support. At the same time, providing instructors with systematic training on their roles and responsibilities could help alleviate the concerns of teacher advisors who feel uneasy about “leaving things to the instructor alone”.

Designing matching and cooperation

When schools seek external personnel, they emphasise the importance of establishing coaching arrangements in collaboration with teacher advisors, as well as maintaining effective communication (MEXT, 2019). In the present study, teacher advisors recruited individuals with whom they were already familiar, including “a former student who can be entrusted with confidence,” highlighting the importance of understanding and trusting the school’s culture. Recruitment has therefore proceeded primarily on a personalised basis, relying on individual teacher advisors’ relationships of trust and personal networks (social capital), rather than through universal, institutionalised appointment procedures. Such personalised recruitment works effectively during the initial stages of the transition. However, as provision expands to secure sufficient personnel throughout the community, it becomes essential to move beyond dependence on personal connections. This requires the systematic development of new personnel with an understanding of school education, alongside matching mechanisms that align the sports an instructor can coach with schools’ needs. This represents one of the bottlenecks limiting the quantitative progress of the transition from school to community. The challenges of securing personnel who possess both specialist expertise and an understanding of school education, as well as matching personnel to specific sports, have been repeatedly documented in government surveys (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2020). In addition, this study identified schools that prohibited advisors and instructors from working concurrently, indicating that reducing teacher-advisors’ time burden was, in some cases, prioritised over the benefits that collaboration could provide. Reducing the burden and fostering collaboration are fundamentally compatible objectives. Achieving high-quality cooperation requires clearly defining their respective roles during the design phase and establishing regular opportunities for information exchange.

Differences in responsibilities and compensation, alongside consensus-building efforts

Teacher advisors and club activity instructors differed in how they perceived the scheme’s effects. Teacher advisors described a range of effects, including reduced advisory responsibilities, implications for their teaching, improvements in club activities, and effects on students. By contrast, club activity instructors focused primarily on improvements to club activities. This contrast reflects different perspectives: teacher advisors viewed club activities as part of education more broadly, whereas instructors focused on the activities themselves. The distinction indicates the coexistence of two frames of reference: one that understands club activities as an integral part of school education, emphasising their multifaceted educational value, and another that evaluates them primarily in terms of enhancing the competition or activity itself. Cave (2004) likewise observed that teachers articulate the purposes of club activities through multiple discourses, a finding consistent with the present study. From the perspective of organizational role theory, these divergent expectations constitute latent role ambiguity and role conflict (Rizzo et al., 1970): the instructor’s authority is grounded in sporting expertise, whereas the teacher advisor’s derives from the school’s organizational hierarchy. When

responsibilities remain implicit, the two may develop conflicting expectations about who determines club policy—circumstances that can undermine cooperation and satisfaction. A clear, written allocation of duties therefore serves to prevent such conflicts rather than functioning as a mere formality. Large-scale surveys have likewise identified two coexisting orientations among teachers: one that prioritises students' enjoyment over outcomes and another that seeks to improve competitive performance (Uchida, 2021). Accordingly, effective collaboration between teacher advisors and club activity instructors requires deliberately defining differentiated roles that reconcile these competing frames of reference. Regarding the role expected of instructors, teacher advisors stressed technical expertise and coaching ability, whereas instructors highlighted a distinctive closeness to students and a clear understanding of their own responsibilities. If these differing perceptions remain unaddressed, they could lead to disagreements over club policy. Regarding remuneration, teacher advisors continue to receive a daily allowance calculated according to hours worked, despite the relatively low rate compared with the workload involved. By contrast, club activity instructors are paid an hourly wage subject to a monthly limit on hours—up to 60 hours per month in the City of Osaka—and are comparatively better compensated. Therefore, a disparity in remuneration was observed for comparable work (City of Osaka, 2023), and some teacher advisors expressed an interest in serving as instructors. Although the level of involvement and the scope of responsibility differ between the two, the principle of equal pay for equal work makes aligning their remuneration an issue that warrants consideration. Sustainable management depends on clearly defined roles, consensus-building, and appropriately aligned remuneration.

Initiatives aimed at achieving sustainable management

In light of the foregoing, the following measures are proposed to support the sustainable management of club activities and promote community-based development. First, a systematic approach should be adopted to cultivate new personnel by publicising the scheme among students, members of the public with sporting backgrounds, and aspiring teachers, while also expanding training opportunities modelled on the certification programme at Osaka University of Health and Sport Sciences. Second, matching services and personnel banks that connect the coaching capacities of sports instructors with schools' needs should be established and expanded, thus reducing reliance on personalised appointments (Japan Sport Association, 2021; City of Osaka, 2023). Third, the disparity in remuneration between teacher advisors and club activity instructors should be reassessed in accordance with the principle of equal pay for equal work. Fourth, the respective roles of the two groups should be clearly defined in writing, and cooperation and consensus-building should be promoted through a collaborative framework, including reconsideration of restrictions on advisors and instructors working at the same time. Fifth, instructors' administrative workload should be reduced—for instance, by digitising registration, attendance records, and the paperwork associated with accompanying students to competitions—to promote retention. Sixth, these measures should be complemented by a multiple-advisor system, such as appointing deputy advisors, to distribute responsibilities across the school, reduce the burden on the principal advisor, and alleviate the psychological strain of coaching a sport outside one's area of expertise. The feasibility of these measures depends on the entities responsible for providing and financing them. A viable prototype is a tripartite partnership: a university provides training and certification, as the Osaka University of Health and Sport Sciences programme already does; the municipal board of education manages a personnel bank and finances remuneration for community club activities through the public budget; and community sports clubs employ the certified personnel and host weekend activities. By distributing costs and operational responsibilities among existing institutions instead of creating a new body, this model identifies the implementing organisations and funding sources that the proposals otherwise leave unspecified, thus giving them practical force rather than leaving them merely aspirational. Moreover, full-time employees may also serve as coaches if their work arrangements can be modified and they obtain approval for outside employment. Accordingly, institutional measures are needed to expand the available personnel pool. These measures are closely related to the challenges of securing staff, promoting cooperation, and sharing costs identified during the Reform Implementation Period (Japan Sports Agency & Agency for Cultural Affairs, 2025b). The experience of employing club activity instructors in schools can also inform the development of community-based club activities.

Limitations

This exploratory qualitative study draws on five participants from a single region, which limits the generalisability of its findings. In addition, the survey was performed in 2023, during the early stages of the Reform Promotion Period; its results should therefore be interpreted in the context of subsequent advances in community-based development. The Methods section details the procedures used to establish the trustworthiness of the analysis, while validation on a larger scale and across multiple regions remains an important priority for future research.

Conclusions

This study found that, although teacher advisors consider club activities highly significant educationally, they face challenges related to long working hours, inadequate advisor arrangements, and insufficient remuneration. Club activity instructors, motivated by their competitive experience and concern for students, derive a sense of fulfilment from their work and believe that it contributes to qualitative improvements in club activities. However, the two groups differ in their perceptions of club activities, the roles they expect to

play, and their views on remuneration. For the scheme to operate sustainably, effective cooperation and consensus-building between them are essential. The study's distinctive contribution is to juxtapose the perspectives of two differently situated groups and, through their own accounts, expose "personalised recruitment"—the reliance of appointments on individual teacher advisors' social capital—as a human-resource-management bottleneck. This bottleneck limits the quantitative shift from school-based to community-based provision and connects this Japanese policy issue to international debates about securing personnel for community sport.

These findings mirror the challenges encountered in community-based development: raising awareness, cultivating human resources, establishing effective matching processes, defining roles, coordinating with teacher advisors, and aligning remuneration. Accordingly, the study proposes a set of concrete measures: promoting awareness of the scheme and systematically developing personnel through training courses; creating matching mechanisms; aligning remuneration; clarifying role divisions and fostering collaborative cooperation; reducing administrative burdens; and combining multiple advisors in an integrated support system. A university–municipality–community-club partnership is presented as a feasible model for implementing these measures. Because club activities have long depended on teachers' voluntary participation and goodwill (Nakazawa, 2014), developing a sustainable management system that alleviates teachers' burden while ensuring students' access to a sporting environment has become an urgent priority as personnel shortages worsen. By conveying the perspectives of those directly involved during this transitional period, this study provides foundational evidence for designing such a system. Future research should continue to examine the issue from multiple perspectives in step with the ongoing development of community-based initiatives.

Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

In preparing this work, the author used Claude Opus 4.8 (Anthropic) to help structure the draft, check and verify references, and draft and edit the English-language text. The study's conception, design, data collection, analysis, interpretation, and conclusions are the author's own and were not generated by AI. Following use of the tool, the author reviewed and edited the material as necessary and accepts full responsibility for the publication's content.

Conflicts of interest The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest related to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

Acknowledgements This study is based on findings from a graduation research project performed jointly with Ruka Kobayashi under the author's supervision. The author is sincerely grateful to Kobayashi for her dedicated contributions to planning and conducting the interviews, collecting the data, and carrying out the analysis for that project. The conception, restructuring, and writing of this paper were carried out by the author. Sincere thanks are also extended to all participants who generously made time for the interviews despite their busy schedules.

Funding This research received no external funding.

References

- Cave, P. (2004). Bukatsudō: The educational role of Japanese school clubs. *The Journal of Japanese Studies*, 30(2), 383–415. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jjs.2004.0041>
- City of Osaka. (2023). *Ōsaka shiritsu chūgakkō bukatsudō shien jinzai banku (bukatsudō shidōin) kaikei nendo nin'yō shokuin: Tōrokusha boshū* [Osaka municipal junior high school club-activity support personnel bank (club activity instructors), fiscal-year appointed staff: Call for registrants]. <https://www.city.osaka.lg.jp/kyoiku/page/0000550635.html>
- Cuskelly, G. (2004). Volunteer retention in community sport organisations. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 4(1), 59–76. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184740408737469>
- De Bosscher, V., De Knop, P., van Bottenburg, M., & Shibli, S. (2006). A conceptual framework for analysing sports policy factors leading to international sporting success. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 6(2), 185–215. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184740600955087>
- e-Gov Law Search. (n.d.). *Gakkō kyōiku-hō shikō kisoku* [Regulation for Enforcement of the School Education Act] (Article 78-2). Retrieved from <https://elaws.e-gov.go.jp/document?lawid=322M40000080011>
- Japan Sport Association. (2021). *Gakkō undōbu katsudō shidōsha no jittai ni kansuru chōsa hōkokusho* [Report on a survey of the actual conditions of leaders of school sport club activities]. https://www.japan-sports.or.jp/Portals/0/data/katsudousuishin/doc/R3_houkokusho.pdf
- Japan Sports Agency. (2017). *Gakkō kyōiku-hō shikō kisoku no ichibu o kaisei suru shōrei no shikō ni tsuite (tsūchi)* [On the enforcement of the ministerial ordinance partially revising the Regulation for Enforcement of the School Education Act (notice)]. https://www.mext.go.jp/sports/b_menu/hakusho/nc/1383344.htm
- Japan Sports Agency. (2018). *Undōbu katsudō no arikata ni kansuru sōgōteki na gaidorain* [Comprehensive Guidelines for School Sport Club Activities]. https://www.mext.go.jp/sports/b_menu/shingi/013_index/toushin/1402678.htm
- Japan Sports Agency & Agency for Cultural Affairs. (2022). *Gakkō bukatsudō oyobi aratana chiiki kurabu katsudō no arikata tō ni kansuru sōgōteki na gaidorain* [Comprehensive Guidelines for School Club

- Activities and New Community Club Activities]. https://www.mext.go.jp/sports/content/20221227-spt_oripara-000026750_2.pdf
- Japan Sports Agency & Agency for Cultural Affairs. (2025a). *Saishū torimatome* [Final summary]. https://www.mext.go.jp/sports/b_menu/shingi/039_index/attach/1420653_00001.htm
- Japan Sports Agency & Agency for Cultural Affairs. (2025b). *Bukatsudō kaikaku oyobi chiiki kurabu katsudō no suishin tō ni kansuru sōgōteki na gaidorain* [Comprehensive Guidelines for the Reform of Club Activities and the Promotion of Community Club Activities]. https://www.mext.go.jp/sports/b_menu/sports/mcatetop04/list/1405720_00025.htm
- Kinoshita, Y. (2003). *Gurandeddo seorī apurōchi no jissen: Shitsuteki kenkyū e no izanai* [The practice of the grounded theory approach: An invitation to qualitative research]. Kobundo.
- Kondo, Y., Sato, R., Yamatsugu, S., Yamada, T., & Numakura, M. (2023). Undōbu katsudō no chiiki ikō ni tsuite no giron ni kansuru ichikōsatsu [A consideration of the debate on the regional transition of extracurricular sport activities]. *Memoirs of the Faculty of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Fukui*, 7, 285–303.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage.
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. (2017). *Chūgakkō gakushū shidō yōryō (Heisei 29-nen kokuji): Sōsoku* [Course of Study for Lower Secondary Schools (2017 notification): General provisions]. <https://www.mext.go.jp/>
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. (2019). *Reiwa 2-nendo gaisan yōkyū (gakkō taiiku kankei) ni tsuite, Shiryō 2* [On the FY2020 budget request (school physical education), Document 2]. https://www.mext.go.jp/sports/content/1421884_1.pdf
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. (2020). *Gakkō no hatarakikata kaikaku o fumaeta bukatsudō kaikaku ni tsuite* [On club activity reform in light of work-style reform in schools]. https://www.mext.go.jp/sports/content/20200902-spt_sseisaku01-000009706_3.pdf
- Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, Administrative Evaluation Bureau. (2020). *Gakkō ni okeru hatarakikata kaikaku ni kansuru jittai chōsa: Kekka hōkokusho* [Survey on work-style reform in schools: Results report]. https://www.soumu.go.jp/main_content/000687329.pdf
- Murakami, J. (2019). Gakkō bukatsudō ni taisuru hihanteki gensetsu ni kansuru ichikōsatsu [A consideration of critical discourses on school club activities]. *Bulletin of Human Science (Bunkyo University)*, 40, 67–75.
- Nakazawa, A. (2014). *Undōbu katsudō no sengo to genzai: Naze supōtsu wa gakkō kyōiku ni musubitsukerareru no ka* [Extracurricular sport activities in post-war and present-day Japan: Why is sport tied to school education?]. Seikyusha.
- Nakazawa, A., Nishijima, H., Yano, H., & Kumagai, S. (2009). Chūgakkō bukatsudō no shidō • un’ei no genjō to jiki shidō yōryō ni muketa kadai ni kansuru kyōiku shakaigakuteki kenkyū [A sociological study of the guidance and management of junior high school extracurricular sport activities and the issues for the next Course of Study]. *Bulletin of the Graduate School of Education, The University of Tokyo*, 48, 317–337.
- Ohashi, M. M., Togo, E., Iume, Y., & Kawata, Y. (2016). Problems faced by coaches in community based sports clubs: Towards enhancing coaching skills. *Journal of Japan Society of Sports Industry*, 26(2), 243–254. https://doi.org/10.5997/sposun.26.2_243
- Osaka University of Health and Sport Sciences. (n.d.). *Undōbu katsudō shidō nintai puroguramu* [Certification programme for extracurricular sport coaching]. Retrieved from <https://www.ouhs.jp/goodcoacheducationprogram/>
- Osaka University of Health and Sport Sciences. (2026, May 26). “*Shin undōbu katsudō shidō nintai puroguramu*” shidō [“New certification programme for extracurricular sport coaching” launched]. Sportsnavi. <https://sports.yahoo.co.jp/official/detail/2026052500033-spnaviow>
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Rizzo, J. R., House, R. J., & Lirtzman, S. I. (1970). Role conflict and ambiguity in complex organizations. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 15(2), 150–163. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2391486>
- Tong, A., Sainsbury, P., & Craig, J. (2007). Consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative research (COREQ): A 32-item checklist for interviews and focus groups. *International Journal for Quality in Health Care*, 19(6), 349–357. <https://doi.org/10.1093/intqhc/mzm042>
- Uchida, R. (Ed.). (2021). *Bukatsudō no shakaigaku: Gakkō no bunka • kyōshi no hatarakikata* [The sociology of club activities: School culture and teachers’ work style]. Iwanami Shoten.