

Maximizing the Advantages of NSETs and JTEs Using Rotational Co-teaching

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Abstract

In the university sector, native speaking English teachers (NSET) and Japanese teachers of English (JTE) are at times hired and assigned courses randomly. Some universities however, assign NSET and JTEs to teach various English courses. At Jissen Women's University the Integrated English course is taught by both a NSET and JTE following the rotational team teaching model. A survey was held to find out if the students preferred a NSET, a JTE, or a combination of both. Results showed more than eighty percent of students favored a combination of NSET and JTE.

Introduction

In the university sector in Japan, native speaking English teachers (NSET) and Japanese teachers of English (JTE) are sometimes hired randomly and assigned courses arbitrarily. At Jissen Women's University the department of foreign languages employs both NSET and JTEs and the Integrated English course at Jissen Women's University is taught by both a NSET and JTE following a rotational co-teaching model. Japanese teachers of English (JTE) fall into the category of non-native speaking English teachers (NNSET), the legitimacy of such a distinction can be argued, but the fact remains that NSETs and JTEs are markedly different, both in their language use and teaching behavior.

Defining the Terminology

The use of the terms “native” and “non-native” is still very controversial with a large amount of literature devoted to the subject. The terms “native” and “non-native” in this paper will be used in the narrower sense to distinguish foreign teachers from Japanese teachers of English. This decision has more to do with the practicalities of differentiating between two groups of English teachers for the purpose of the study, rather than arguments for particular notions of nativeness.

Co-teaching terminology

The literature shows that the terms referring to co-teaching through collaboration are often interchangeable (Jang, 2006). Reinhiller (1996) explains that co-teaching was known in the 1970s as team teaching, and is also called collaborative teaching or co-operative teaching (Jang, 2006). These three terms all refer to two or more teachers contributing to the same group of assigned students through collaboration. Each term has different implications on how this teaching methodology is implemented. Co-teaching is a general term with broader implications and has been adopted to name different approaches to improve teaching through collaboration. Rotational co-teaching is when a class is shared between two different teachers. If the class is held twice a week, one teacher will teach the class one day of the week, while the other teacher will teach the class the next time the class meets. An example would be a JTE teaching the class every Wednesday and an NSET taking the same class every Friday. Rotational co-teaching will be used to distinguish the model employed at Jissen Women’s University from other forms of team teaching such as those often employed in Japanese junior high schools, where both teachers are present in the classroom at the same time.

The advantages and disadvantages of NS and NNS English teachers:

To understand the origins behind the decision to use a weekly rotation of NSET and JTE at Jissen, the literature showing the differences, strengths and weaknesses of NSET and NNSETs will be briefly summarized. Medgyes’s (1992) research on NSET and NNSETs shows that since NNSETs feel unsure in many aspects of the target language, and need to retain some kind of advantage over their students,

which can be shown through their knowledge of the grammar of the target language, they are more grammar-centered. Knowledge of English grammar is often a source of pride for NNS teachers, since they study the language in depth and can give clear and logical explanations for why answers are correct or incorrect (Medgyes, 1992). Conversely, Arva and Medgyes (2000) noted that one of the disadvantages of NSET was their poor knowledge of grammar. Their research showed that NSETs could often not explain clearly or give a precise reason why something was right or wrong. Boyle (1997) also noted that NNSETs have a greater ability to explain English grammar, although NSETs have implicit knowledge of what is acceptable grammatically, without sufficient language skills in the students' language, they may have difficulties explaining the complexities of grammar to their students. Unlike NSETs, NNSETs are more aware of the language learning process, and can therefore teach 'effective language learning strategies' (Medgyes, 1992, p. 76). Boyle (1997) proposes advantages and disadvantages of NSET and NNSET. He emphasizes in particular the NNSETs' lack of confidence in speaking, especially when compared to NSETs. Boyle found that one of the main advantages of NSETs was their linguistic competence, linguistic appropriateness richer vocabulary and confidence (1997). NNSETs, however, can relate culturally and linguistically to their students especially in homogeneously linguistic classrooms like those found in Japan, but NSETs provide students with more cultural information about English speaking countries than NNSETs (Boyle, 1997). In a more recent study Benke and Medgyes (2005) noted that while there are differences in the teaching behaviour of NSETs and NNSETs, neither group could be regarded as more effective. The researchers show that 'an overwhelming majority of the respondents argued that in an ideal situation both NS and NNS teachers should be available to teach them, stressing that they would be ill-prepared to dispense with the services of either group' (2005, p.208).

These studies suggest that there are qualitative differences between NSET and NNSET. Due to the evidence in the literature highlighting the positive and negative aspects of both kinds of teacher it was decided to employ the combination of a NSET and JTE to help further students' English proficiency for Integrated English classes at Jissen Women's University.

The Context:

The research was conducted at Jissen Women's University in Tokyo, Japan. Integrated English is one of the Jissen Standard subjects, which are basic classes required for all first-year students. The other Jissen Standard classes are basic computer skills and an introductory study-skills class. The original name of the Integrated English class was Basic English. This commenced in 2000 as a once-a-week year-long required class with the same teacher for the whole year. With the move to a semester system in 2006, the class changed to a twice-weekly one-semester class. Based on previous research showing the benefits of rotational co-teaching, the teachers allocated to the Integrated English were a NSET and a JTE using a rotational co-teaching model and employing Full Contact (the parallel textbook and video activity book of "Interchange 1") by Jack C. Richards (2006). Under the new curriculum introduced in 2009, the name of the course was changed to Integrated English.

Until now, there is little or scarce research on rotational co-teaching in Japanese university settings. This research attempts to find out by way of a questionnaire if the students prefer being taught by a NSET, a JTE or a combination of the two.

Methodology:

The questionnaire asked the students their opinions about the Integrated course, and included one question about the combination of teachers: which did the students prefer - a course taught twice a week by a native English speaking teacher, a course taught twice a week by a Japanese teacher, or a course taught twice weekly by a combination of native English speaking and a Japanese English teacher. Instructors distributed questionnaires to 582 freshmen enrolled in the Integrated English class which were completed anonymously by the students.

Results:

The results of the questionnaire will now be presented:

1. Do you like having one Japanese teacher and one native English speaking teacher? Which do you prefer? a) Native speaker only (64 responses) b) Japanese teacher

only (43 responses) c) Japanese and native speaker (456 responses)

2. How did you feel about English before you started the Integrated English class?

a) I disliked it very much (102 responses) b) I disliked it a little (235 responses) c) I liked it a little (199 responses) d) I liked it very much (46 responses)

3. How do feel now? a) I dislike it very much (33 responses) b) I dislike it a little (179 responses) c) I like it a little (308 responses) d) I like it very much (63 responses)

Although causation cannot be proven, there appears to be a positive correlation between the students' attitudes towards English and their opinion of the rotational team teaching model adopted in Integrated English classes. The students' positive attitudes could be due to a changing of classroom dynamics each week due to the different teacher. This may lower boredom, affective filters and possibly increase anxiety to a level that may be beneficial for learning. This increased feeling of novelty toward the teacher will allow students to be more receptive and have more positive attitudes toward the class and the teacher. These positive attitudes can be due to the authentic pronunciation and cultural explanations as well as the novelty factor and confidence exhibited by the NSET combined with the common understanding, empathy and ability to understand the grammar in the JTE's class. The Integrated English course is aimed at using the best of both the native-speaker teacher and the Japanese teacher as evidenced in the literature: the native speaker teaches the textbook section on one day of the week, while the Japanese teacher teaches the video activity section on another day of the week. The grammar and content of both sections are the same and both teachers reinforce what the other teacher has taught, allowing students greater opportunities for clarification and review. The NSET focuses on communicative aspects of the language, conversation, pronunciation and introducing culture, while the JTE focuses more on grammar and accuracy. Furthermore, students can ask the Japanese teacher to explain aspects of grammar in Japanese. Although the literature shows both teachers have strengths and weaknesses, using a rotational co-teaching model, the strengths and therefore the efficiency of L2 instruction may be maximized and students' positive feelings toward the class might be increased.

Most students will have taken compulsory English classes in junior and senior high school, taught most likely by a combination of JTE and an assistant language teacher who would be a native speaker. Due to this previous experience of a form of team teaching, students' answers may contain an element of bias in thinking that a

combination of JTE and NSET is the best method of instruction due to it having been the method employed during their schooling. This bias needs to be taken into account in light of the results.

Implications:

These findings have curricular and pedagogical implications for foreign language education in terms of NSET and NNSET hiring. Rather than randomly selecting NSET and NNSET to teach classes at Universities, it appears to be more advantageous to apply the rotational co-teaching model as used at Jissen Women's University to maximize the advantages of NSET and NNSET while minimizing their disadvantages. In Japanese schools where NSET/JTE team teaching takes place, it may be more beneficial to adopt a rotational co-teaching model. The latter may not be possible if the native speaking assistant language teacher has no formal teaching background.

Ideas for further study:

Further research examining which aspects should be taught by each teacher could also be carried out to perfect the rotational co-teaching method. This study is limited in scope as there was no qualitative data or triangulation due to time constraints. A focus group or one to one interviews with the students would shed more light on the results.

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