

What is Expected of Us?
– Study Abroad and Expected Roles of Native and Local Teachers

Tamami Kita, Japan Women's College of Physical Education, Japan

The Asian Conference on Education & International Development 2019
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

While the concept of native speakerism has been widely discussed (Braine, 2010; Houghton & Rivers (eds.) 2013; Fukunaga et al., 2018), the amount of research which has applied it to actual classrooms is still limited, especially in Japan. This study addresses that gap by investigating the expected roles of native and local teachers in English language preparation courses in Japan. The thirty participants from a study abroad college were studying for IELTS with British teachers, and had lessons with Japanese teachers in the middle school. A questionnaire of closed questions and open-ended comments was conducted to discover which aspects of study the different teachers were thought to have helped with more and the expected roles or benefits of native and non-native local teachers. Results were analyzed according to their proficiency levels and expectations. The categorized expectations collected from open-ended comments implied that native English teachers seemed to have the biggest effect on linguistic performance and acquisition of cultural background. Meanwhile non-native local English teachers were expected to provide insider strategies. These results were discussed focusing on the gap between stereotypes and their actual needs.

Keywords: Native speakerism, NET, NNET, LET, study abroad

iafor

The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

Introduction

When teaching English to other language speakers, the influence of native speakerism in English classrooms can be often recognized, especially in non-English speaking countries. Although it is often described negatively, as “a pervasive ideology” in English teaching (Holliday 2005), it is said to provide a certain impact in terms of not only academic but also business prospects. Researches such as Davies (2003) and Braine (2010) have developed the analysis of native speakerism. In Japan, for example, there are a number of private English language schools whose main sales point is solely English instruction from all native instructors.

Although Holliday (2005) stated that native English teachers (NETs) are often presented as the paragons of both the English language and English language teaching methodology, it may not be always true in Japan. Both “native speaker only” and “Japanese only” English teacher job advertisements are often seen in Japan. Instead of clear favouritism, it could be said that rather, different roles are expected of NETs and Japanese local English teachers (LETs). Despite several studies having been conducted with the participants of schools under the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT)’s control, there is less focus on schools providing western academic environments outside of MEXT influence. The first time students experience Western academic environment is vital, yet it bears asking if management’s estimation matched the roles students expect from schools. Therefore, with focus on the difference between what NET and LET are expected to be, this research examined what type of help and support students expected to receive from teachers.

Previous Literature

Davies (2003) defined “nativeness” with the following four factors: birth, culture, fluency, and idioms as shown in Figure 1. Although the word “native” is defined based on these interrelated factors, the word “non-native” seemed to exist simply as the direct opposite of “native.” Being that diametric opposite of native, non-native English teachers (NNETs) have accordingly been less successful with salary, career, and prejudice compared to NETs (Braine: 2010).

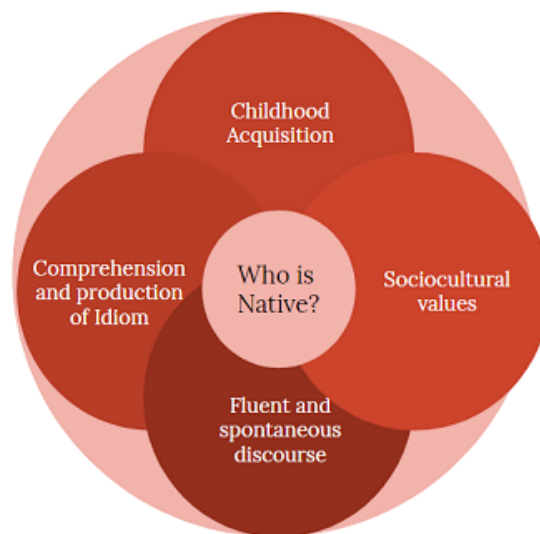


Figure 1: Davies’s (2003) definition of nativeness.

Researchers such as Kubota (2001) and Holliday (2005) identified that these gaps caused by the idea of native-speakerism are commonplace in not only teaching contexts but also literature or training, regardless of the specific culture. The attempts to classify the world in terms of English has been developed by dedicated scholars such as Phillipson's (1992) Centre and Periphery, and Kachru's (1992) Inner circle, Outer circle and Expanding circle.

In Japan, this superiority of NETs from English-speaking countries over NNET in Japan is often recognized in the wider English education industry. Such dichotomy of NET and NNET has allowed Japanese English teachers to be categorized as NNETs rather than LETs. However, it is not always true that LETs in Japan are bewildered and disgruntled because they can only hold less successful positions than NETs. Today, a number of company websites and job boards post jobs whose requirements include "Japanese only" in equal number to those containing "native English speakers only." Typically, LETs in Japan are allocated classes for qualification preparation such as Eiken Exam and TOEIC exam, university entrance exam preparation, and learners at a beginner level. This may support the proposition that there are different, not unequal, expectations. However, comparing with studies of Native-speakerism focusing on the situations surrounding teachers, less studies have been published focusing on the students' expectations.

According to MEXT, the number of Japanese students completing their studies abroad dropped from a peak of 82,945 in 2004 to 57,501 in 2011⁽ⁱ⁾. Yet, English-speaking countries are still the main destinations. Although the number of Japanese students studying abroad has stopped continually increasing, the number of language schools in Japan is still growing and recognized as a huge market, with market size reaching 0.8 billion yen⁽ⁱⁱ⁾. It can be said that in-country language preparation courses have become a popular option today. Most of these language schools are targeting learners with variegated aims and goals such as business communication, travel conversation, reading as a hobby, and preparation for English exams. These courses allow Japanese students to acquire not only English but also academic skills before they actually progress onto foreign universities. While study abroad requires various preparation in terms of language and cultural adjustment, the number of studies focusing on study abroad preparation for Japanese students are still limited.

Research Questions

In order to reduce this imbalance of studies, the following questions were designed to further the research within this field.

1. How do students in study abroad preparation courses perceive their NET and LET?
2. How do those perceptions connect to their performance?

Methodology

30 students (13 males and 17 females) aged between 17 and 60 were investigated. They all belonged to study abroad college in Tokyo. One of the groups were pre-intermediate students who were in IELTS preparation for a single term. The other group contained upper-intermediate level students who were in a pre-session course for UK universities. Both groups were taught by the same NET twice a week for three

months. Those NETs were all from Britain. All of the students had already applied for postgraduate course in the UK and some of them had received conditional offers which required the improvement of their English. It may suggest that students were generally motivated to brush up their English. Both groups were prepared for the style of discussion with Socratic seminar style teaching, and moderation practice.

After three months of instruction, an anonymous questionnaire was conducted to access students expectations of NET and LET respectively. It was designed as a likert-scale questionnaire of closed questions (see Figure 2) and open-ended comments. The instruction was given in the class and participants were asked to answer in the class.

I think Native English Language Teacher helped me improve my... *

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Listening Skill	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reading Skill	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Speaking Skill	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Writing Skill	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Test-taking Skill	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Grammar	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Vocabulary	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Attitude toward English	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Attitude toward Class	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Self-study Skill	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Figure 2: Questionnaire of closed questions regarding to NET.

Results

Likert scale scores were analyzed to identify divergences in the results, which shows how students' expectations differ according to proficiency levels and teachers' nativeness.

As Table 1 shows, for example, in lower-intermediate group, the average positive feedback for LET instruction was higher than NET among most items, while the

result was the opposite with upper-intermediate groups. The highest score of NET instruction was speaking in both lower and upper intermediate groups. That of LET instruction was attitude toward class for lower group and test-taking skill for upper group. It is possible to claim that upper-intermediate students appreciate native instruction but the score will decrease in lower-intermediate classes.

Table 1.
Result of Questionnaire: "I think NET/LT helped to improve the following skill."
(5: Strongly Agree, 4: Agree, 3: Neither Agree nor Disagree, 2: Disagree, 1: Strongly Disagree)

ITEMS	NET (Lower)	NET (Upper)	LET (Lower)	LET (Upper)
Listening	4.38	4.59	4.38	3.24
Reading	3.69	3.59	4.38	3.47
Speaking	4.46	4.82	4.38	3.06
Writing	4.00	4.41	4.00	3.53
Test-taking	3.38	3.53	4.38	4.06
Grammar	3.54	3.82	4.15	3.82
Vocabulary	3.85	4.18	4.00	3.24
Attitude toward English	4.31	4.71	4.54	3.47
Attitude toward Class	4.15	4.12	4.62	3.53
Self-study skills	4.08	3.41	4.38	3.47

The biggest gap between NET and LET in each group was test-taking skill in lower group (NET:3.38, LET:4.38) and speaking skill in upper group (NET: 4.82, LET:3.06). The biggest gap between lower group and upper group for NET was self-study skills (Lower: 4.08, Upper: 3.41) and for LET was listening (Lower: 4.38, Upper: 3.24)

Almost all students submitted the form by writing questions they would like to ask NET and LET respectively. Participants' questions were then categorized according to the framework based on Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, and Thurrell's (1995) communicative language abilities, including discourse competence, linguistic competence, actional competence, sociocultural competence, and strategic competence. However, some gave comments which could not be categorized into the existing framework such as relating to emotions. The most popular type of questions were related to linguistic competence for both NET and LET. Although the second most popular category was sociocultural competence for NET, it was strategic competence for LET. Examples are shown on Table 2.

Table 2.
Result of the questionnaire: open-ended comment
(L): Lower intermediate course, (U): Upper intermediate course

Student	Question to NET [sic]
Student A (L)	(NET) How to write and speak in appropriate English. (LET) How to study English as a Non-Native English Language Speaker.
Student B (L)	(NET) natural phrases way of saying (LET) strategy and common mistakes which Japanese people likely to make.
Student C (L)	(NET) Do British like Japanese people? (LET) When did you start learning English?
Student D (U)	(NET) I want them to improve my speaking and writing skills. (LET) I want them to teach grammar and different points from Japanese to English.
Student E (U)	(NET) The common mistake words which sound unnatural for native speakers even though the words seem correct on the dictionary. (LET) What was the most difficult things you faced to in studying English?
Student F (U)	(NET) my pronunciation is typical Japanese. how much would you care? (LET) tell me things I need to live in Britain

These results may suggest that NET were supposed to play a role of proofreader and also representatives of the community which students aim to join, regardless of their proficiency level. On the other hand, questions to LETs may suggest that they recognize LETs as models who share the same language and cultural background so can share English learning strategies. Questions for LETs were rather asking advice or seeking insider knowledge as a former English learner. Although LETs also received questions related to sociocultural competence, it was more about the experience of how they integrated themselves into that community and asked to share their experience, which were quite different from questions to NET in the same category.

Conclusion

This research suggested that the gaps of the situation between NET and LET may not always be based on inequality, but on different expectations. Returning to the research question, it could be said that students in study abroad preparation courses expect different roles from NET and LET and these expectation tendencies differ by proficiency level. Although questionnaire results of closed questions may allow teachers to acquire immediately comprehensible responses from students, it is also true that open-ended section enabled deepening of the analysis. The findings seem to indicate that the collaboration between NET and LET can provide more comprehensive and effective scaffolding. As in- country preparation courses continue

to grow, hopefully these categories will provide some assistance to teachers planning a culturally sensitive, motivating and challenging combination of NET and LET teachers. More and more studies should be conducted.

Footnotes

(i) Cited from http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/houdou/26/08/attach/1350731.htm
(accessed April 2019)

(ii) Cited from <https://www.yano.co.jp/press/download.php/001720> (accessed April 2019)

References

Bailey, K. (2006). Marketing the eikaiwa wonderland: Ideology, akogare, and gender alterity in English conversation school advertising in Japan. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 24(1), 105-130.

Braine, G. (2010). Nonnative speaker English teachers: Research, pedagogy, and professional growth. Routledge.

Celce-Murcia, M., Dörnyei, Z., & Thurrell, S. (1995). Communicative competence: A pedagogically motivated model with content specifications. *Issues in Applied Linguistics*, 6(2), 5-35.

Davies, A. (2003). *The native speaker: Myth and reality* (Vol. 38). Multilingual Matters.

Fukunaga, S., Hashimoto, N., Lowe, R. J., Unser-Schutz, G., & Kusaka, L. (2018). Collaborative deconstruction of native-speakerism. In P. Clements, A. Krause, & P. Bennett (Eds.), *Language teaching in a global age: Shaping the classroom, shaping the world*. Tokyo: JALT.

Holliday, A. (2005). *The struggle to teach English as an international language*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Houghton, S. A., & Rivers, D. J. (Eds.). (2013). *Native-speakerism in Japan: Intergroup dynamics in foreign language education* (Vol. 151). Multilingual Matters.

Kachru, B. B. (1992). World Englishes: Approaches, issues and resources. *Language teaching*, 25(1), 1-14.

Kubota, R. (2001). Teaching world Englishes to native speakers of English in the USA. *World Englishes*, 20(1), 47-64.

Phillipson, R. (1992). Linguistic imperialism. *The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics*, 1-7.