

# To Speak or Not to Speak? Japanese University Students' Perceptions of Native and Non-native English-speaking Teachers

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## Abstract

Research into students' perceptions of their language teachers is still in its infancy. There has not been to date much research carried out in Japan into students' attitudes towards native and non-native English-speaking teachers, thus the focus of this research was an exploration of Japanese university students' perceptions of their native and Japanese Teachers of English (JTEs), students' views of the strengths and weaknesses of their language teachers and students' expectations from them. A 4-point Likert scale self-reported questionnaire comprising 31 items was administered to 57 Japanese university students enrolled in an intensive CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) programme at a language school in the UK. After completing the questionnaires, nine students with the highest linguistic capabilities were selected for the semi-structured interviews to further substantiate data collected via the questionnaires. The results evinced students' preferences for NESTs over JTEs, especially for tertiary education instruction, in the teaching of specific skills, particularly speaking, pronunciation and listening. Students

prized speaking over all other skills and expected teachers to create classroom environments that were conducive to maximising the development of speaking skills.

*Key words:* native speaker, non-native speaker, perceptions, students, English teachers

Based on Kachru's (1985) model of concentric circles of world Englishes, Japan falls inside of the Expanding Circle, which means that Japan is 'norm-dependent' (Kachru, 1992, p. 356) where English is a foreign language that 'has not gained the status of an official language, does not function as a *lingua franca* within the country and is taught albeit, extensively as a foreign language in the education system' (McKenzie, 2013, p. 219). The countries in the Inner Circle are termed as norm-providing because they use English as a native language and set the precedence for acceptable linguistic use of the language. According to Jenkins (2009) and McKenzie (2010), educators and policy makers in the Expanding Circle generally source native speakers from the Inner Circle 'for linguistic norms of use' (McKenzie, 2013, p. 219), and these Inner Circle varieties of English serve as the pedagogical means of instruction in the classroom. Therefore, it can be argued that in the case of Japan, the Inner Circle variety of English is held in high regard. However, here is no denying that the rise of English as an international language may impact on current students' perceptions of Native English Speaking Teachers (NESTs) and Non-native English Speaking Teachers (NNESTs). Students may be more open and receptive to embracing their own variety of English, rather than trying to imitate the native speaker, which for some students is an unrealistic goal. Students of English in an EFL context might simply need English for purposes of work and communicating with other non-native speakers. Hence, they might value proficiency over native like competence. Strevens (1992, p. 41) makes the point that "most ESL / EFL today relates to NNS populations requiring English for internal purposes, or for dealing with other NNS populations, without the presence or intervention of native speakers".

The English teaching profession is rife with studies conducted on students'

perceptions of NNESTs (e.g., Cheung, 2002; Liang, 2002; Liu, 2005; Moussu and Braine 2006; Torres, 2004; Yacoub, 2011); however, these studies have helped little in improving the image of NNESTs. Liang (2002), the first to investigate students' attitudes towards NNESTs in her study, found that students ranked the pronunciation and accent as paramount traits for a teacher. However, students' attention to accentedness and pronunciation in an ESL (English as a Second Language) context did not engender a negative outlook about their NNESTs in the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) situated context. Students rated characteristics such as interesting, prepared, qualified, and professional as being more valuable traits of teachers in their EFL home countries.

In Torres' (2004, p. 31) study of ESL students' perceptions of native and non-native teachers, students showed a statistically significant preference towards NESTs over NNESTs ( $p < .001$  level [ $t(101) = 9.19, p = .000$ ]), especially in terms of pronunciation. Similarly, Yacoub (2011) in his study of Jordanian graduate students' attitude towards NESTs and NNESTs reported that students demonstrated a strong preference towards NESTs in the areas of pronunciation and fluency. It can be seen in both studies that students lack confidence in their NNESTs in the areas of fluency and pronunciation. On the other hand, in both studies, students tended to prefer NNESTs for the teaching of grammar, and if the NNEST shared the L1 of the students, it made it easier to explain grammatical concepts via quick L1 translations. Similarly, Alseweed (2012) in his study concluded that Saudi students showed favourable and more pleasant attitudes towards NNESTs, but the preference for NESTs tended to be stronger the further in education the students progressed. Students also expressed more favourable attitudes towards NESTs with regard to teaching strategies employed by the NESTs as they "...use motivating teaching methods which assist in learning the language in a better and sound way" (Alseweed, 2012, p. 49).

Results of these studies validate the results of two other major and significant studies conducted on students' perceptions, that of Lasagabaster and Sierra (2002) and Cheung (2002). The study of Lasagabaster and Sierra (2002) revealed that students seemed not to mind having NNESTs but had a strong preference for being taught by NESTs for reasons of fluency, pronunciation and the

misnomer that NESTs have a stronger linguistic background because they have used the language all their life. Being born within a certain speech community does not come complete with meta-linguistic awareness. Thus, NESTs may not have a better linguistic awareness than their NNEST counterparts.

In Cheung's (2002) study of Hong Kong university students' attitude towards NNESTs, 420 participants reported that NESTs had a better oral ability, a wider expanse of vocabulary and a better understanding of English core countries. This does not mean that the results for NNESTs were discouraging. On the contrary, students also appeared to favour NNESTs because the NNEST was familiar with the local pedagogical culture, students' learning handicaps and could code switch to the L1 when explaining complex grammar concepts. These were the attributes that seemed to be lacking in the NEST.

Even though Mahboob's (2003) research focused on the hiring practices of NNESTs, part of his research included an investigation into learners' opinions towards NESTs and NNESTs. The results of this study indicated that there was no clear preference for either NESTs or NNESTs on the part of the students; rather, they felt that both types of teachers have unique attributes. The most substantial finding of the study in favour of NESTs was that they were perceived as better at teaching oral skills. There was also a strong indication that NESTs were better in their ability to teach vocabulary and culture. Based on student responses, the teaching of grammar seemed to be the NESTs' Achilles heel. Additionally, students highlighted the fact that NESTs could not always answer their questions well. Mahboob (2003) concluded that this could be attributed to NESTs' lack of experience learning a second language or poor methodology. On the other hand, NNESTs seemed to trump NESTs in the areas of teaching literacy skills and grammar. Students also seemed to prefer the teaching styles of NNESTs, which include the use of appropriate methodology and the ability to respond in a satisfactory manner to the questions posed by the students (Mahboob, 2003).

Shimizu (1995) conducted research at a Japanese university on 1,088 students to learn about their perceptions towards their NESTs and NNESTs. In her study, "students showed a clear bias when asked what their overall impression

of English classes taught by Japanese and foreigners were” (p. 7). The results showed that students felt that classes taught by Japanese teachers (NNESTs) were “gloomy, boring, dead, strict, serious and at times tedious” (Shimizu, 1995, p. 7). However, on a positive note, students reported that they felt comfortable posing questions to Japanese teachers and Japanese teachers were also easier to understand than NESTs. In contrast, more than half of the respondents believed that classes taught by foreigners (NESTs) were “interesting, humorous and energetic” (Shimizu, 1995, p.7). In short, classes with the NESTs were eventful and fun. This stands in stark contrast with Mahboob’s (2003) findings and it would be interesting to note if the present study will corroborate Shimizu’s (1995) findings.

The findings of most studies (e.g., Mahboob, 2004; Torres, 2004) have shown that most students prefer NESTs for many aspects of language teaching except for grammar. With the emergence of English as a *lingua franca*, it would be interesting to learn if there is a changing of the vanguard. Japanese students make good subjects for research of attitudes towards NESTs and NNESTs as the majority of Japanese students have been exposed to NESTs, who team teach with local Japanese Teachers of English (JTEs) through the Japanese Exchange Teaching programme or private companies that source NESTs for schools (Tajino and Tajino, 2000).

The aim of this paper is to acquire an understanding of the perceptions of Japanese university students towards their NNESTs (JTEs) and NESTs. To achieve the outlined aim, the research will seek to answer the following questions:

- 1) What are the perceptions of Japanese university students towards NESTs and JTEs?
- 2) From the point of view of students, what are the shortcomings and strengths of NESTs and JTEs?
- 3) What are the expectations of students from NESTs?

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The participants of this study constituted a non-probability convenience sample. They were first-year Japanese tertiary level students from a Japanese university in the Kansai area, who were required to study English at an affiliated language school in Kent in the UK. These students have been taught by both NNESTs and NESTs in an EFL context in their native country and, while in England, have had the experience of being exclusively taught by NESTs in an ESL context.

The sample consisted of 57 participants, 37 males and 20 females ages 17-21. On average, the students have been studying English between 6 to 10 years. Despite having studied English for this length of time, students fall between the ranges of A1 to B2 with the majority of students either being rated as A1 or B1 within the European framework. The participants' characteristics are displayed in Table 1.

The university students study in the UK for 6 months in an immersion English programme as part of fulfilling their obligatory English requirements. The students come from four faculties: tourism and management (29 students), economics (2 students), English (19 students) and teacher education (5 students).

It is important to note that two students responded that they had studied English for less than a year, which is unusual for Japanese students who, on average, study English for six years before entering university. This unusual answer could be attributed to the misunderstanding on the part of students of a question about the length of studying English. These two students might have indicated the length of studying English only at university instead of the intended overall time of studying English throughout their school life.

**Table 1** *Participant Characteristics*

Characteristic	Frequency	Percent
Gender:		
a) male	37	64.9
b) female	20	33.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>100</b>
Age group:		
1. 17-20	56	98.2
2. 21-24	1	1.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>100</b>
Number of years studying English:		
1. less than 1	2	3.5
2. 1-5	9	15.8
3. 6-10	39	68.4
4. 11-15	4	7.0
5. missing	3	5.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>100</b>
Major of students:		
a) tourism and management	29	50.9
b) economics	2	3.5
c) English	19	33.3
d) teacher education	5	8.8
e) missing	2	3.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>100</b>
Have you studied English abroad before coming to England?		
a) yes	4	7.0
b) no	53	93.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>100</b>

## Questionnaire

The questionnaire used in this study was adapted and modified from Cheung's study (2002) to fit a Japanese context. Based on the results of a pilot study with 32 students from a Japanese university of a similar academic standing to the one that the research was actually conducted at, the necessary changes in terminology were made before administering the questionnaire to the participants of the main study.

One of the adaptations made to this study from Cheung's (2002) study was the switch from 'NNS instructor' to 'Non-native speaking teacher'. Another change made was the omission of questions that inquired about students' level of proficiency or scores acquired on international or local (Japan) based examinations. A further modification to the questionnaire included the reformatting of the questionnaire layout and revising of terminology and questions to suit the Japanese context of the participants being researched. The

4-point Likert scale remained unchanged because even though Johnson and Christensen (2012, pp. 197) opine that using a 4-point rather than a 5-point rating scale does not appreciably affect the response pattern, the researcher agreed with Cheung (2002) that students should clearly show their answers.

A pilot of the questionnaire was conducted at a Japanese university of a similar academic standing to the one that the research was actually conducted at. The participants were 32 randomly selected second-year university students enrolled in English for academic purposes courses. Participants indicated that they had difficulty understanding some of the terminology used. Based on this feedback, the terminology was changed to more familiar and appropriate words that the students were accustomed to, i.e. 'primary education' to 'elementary education'. The necessary edits were made before administering the questionnaire to the participants of the main study.

The questionnaire comprises 31 questions in total and is divided into three sections. Section I of the questionnaire consists of six questions that concentrated on the students' personal data such as gender, age, number of years studying English, faculty affiliation and any previous experience of studying abroad. Section II of the questionnaire contains four questions that sought to elicit students' experience(s) of being taught by NESTs in terms of exposure to them, problems encountered and overall impact of the experience(s). This section was designed to provide the basis for the semi-structured interview. Section III was designed to vet students' responses and perceptions towards NESTs and JTEs. The section contains a set of 21 items, one designed for NESTs and an identical set for JTEs. Each set of items is divided into two parts. The first part required the respondents to evaluate their experiences with NESTs and JTEs while the second part sought to elicit the respondents' overall teaching preferences with regards to NESTs and JTEs. The respondents had to assess the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statements using a 4-point Likert scale.

With regards to the questionnaire, two limitations were identified. The first weakness lay with the questionnaire being lengthy consisting of 31 questions. The questions in section 3 required some deep thought and analytical skills. These could have led to questionnaire and mental fatigue. The other weakness was that the questionnaire necessitated the use of a translator due to the low

proficiency level of the majority of the students. It is possible that the translator did not capture or convey the full essence of the questions while rendering the translations.

### **Semi-structured Interview**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in English with nine students. The interview was designed independently without consulting the results of the questionnaires and comprised 12 questions, divided equally into two sections. The first section consisted of six close-ended questions that were intended to build rapport and give the interviewer some background information on the participants. The second section was composed of six open-ended questions that took into consideration the students' linguistic competence. The questions in their first part can be described as close-ended followed up with a 'why' to ascertain the richness of data quality that would substantiate the quantitative aspects of the research. The questions were purposefully designed this way so that the participants due to their relatively low proficiency would not become overwhelmed by the question and provide adequate answers. The data from the interview were used to corroborate the findings from the questionnaire to assist in answering research question 1 and were also used to answer research questions 2 and 3. The data from the interviews were transcribed, analysed and coded using thematic analysis based on a process of data reduction and interpretation (Marshall and Rossman, 1989, p. 114).

### **Results and Discussion**

Research question 1: *What are the perceptions of Japanese university students towards NESTs and JTEs?*

Students' survey responses of their attitudes towards and perceptions of NESTs and JTEs are presented in Tables 2 and 3, respectively.

**Table 2** *Students' Survey Responses for NESTs*

Statement	Agree %	Disagree %	Mean	SD	No answer
A native speaking teacher classes are fun and innovative.	53 (94.6%)	3 (5.4%)	3.5	0.7	1
A native speaking teacher is more suited to University Education.	50 (89.3%)	6 (10.7%)	3.5	0.8	1
If you had a choice you would choose a course taught by a native speaking teacher.	48 (88.9%)	6 (11.1%)	3.5	0.7	3
A native speaking teacher makes a more effective language teacher.	48 (87.2%)	7 (12.8%)	3.5	0.8	2
Students prefer to learn speaking from a native speaking teacher.	45 (84.9%)	8 (15.1%)	3.5	0.9	4
Students are able learn to more about the culture of English speaking people from native speaking teacher.	49 (87.5%)	7 (12.5%)	3.4	0.8	1
A native speaking teacher is better for listening comprehension.	48 (87.3%)	7 (12.7%)	3.4	0.9	2
In general, pronunciation is better learnt from a native speaking teacher.	48 (87.3%)	7 (12.7%)	3.4	0.9	2
A native speaking teacher is more suited to high school education.	50 (87.7%)	7 (12.3%)	3.3	0.7	0
A native speaking teacher makes the students feel more motivated about learning English.	49 (87.5%)	7 (12.5%)	3.3	0.7	1
Students are able to learn more vocabulary from a native speaking teacher.	48 (87.3%)	7 (12.7%)	3.3	0.7	2
A native speaking teacher makes the lesson enjoyable.	47 (83.9%)	9 (16.1%)	3.3	0.9	1
A native speaking teacher is easier to make friends with.	48 (88.9%)	6 (11.1%)	3.2	0.6	3
Students can learn equally as well from a native speaking teacher.	45 (83.3%)	9 (16.7%)	3.2	0.8	3
A native speaking teacher gives more strategies for understanding and learning the language.	45 (80.3%)	11 (19.7%)	3.2	0.8	1
A native speaking teacher is more suited to elementary education.	45 (78.9%)	12 (21.1%)	3.2	0.8	0
A native speaking teacher encourages all students to participate.	43 (78.2%)	12 (21.8%)	3.2	0.8	2
Students prefer to do reading classes with a native speaking teacher.	42 (76.4%)	13 (23.6%)	3.1	0.8	2
A native speaking teacher prepares students better for studying on their own.	41 (74.5%)	14 (25.5%)	3.1	0.8	2
A native speaking teacher gives better explanation of grammar.	39 (70.9%)	16 (29.1%)	3.1	0.8	2
A native speaking teacher understands and responds to the language learning difficulties of the student.	42 (75%)	14 (25%)	3.0	0.7	1

**Table 3** *Students' Survey Responses for JTEs*

Statement	Agree %	Disagree %	Mean	SD	No answer
Students are able to learn more vocabulary from a Japanese Teacher of English.	43 (82.7%)	9 (17.3%)	3.1	0.7	5
A Japanese Teacher of English gives better explanation of grammar.	42 (80.8%)	10 (19.2%)	3.1	0.7	5
A Japanese Teacher of English prepares students better for studying on their own.	41 (78.8%)	11 (21.2%)	3.1	0.8	5
A Japanese Teacher of English understands and responds to the language learning difficulties of the student.	40 (75.5%)	13 (24.5%)	2.9	0.7	4
Students can learn equally as well from a Japanese Teacher of English.	35 (76.1%)	18 (33.9%)	2.8	0.8	4
Students prefer to do reading classes with a Japanese Teacher of English	36 (69.2%)	16 (30.8%)	2.8	0.9	5
A Japanese Teacher of English is more suited to high school education.	36 (65.5%)	19 (34.5%)	2.8	0.8	2
A Japanese Teacher of English gives more strategies for understanding and learning the language.	35 (67.3%)	17 (32.7%)	2.8	0.8	5
A Japanese Teacher of English classes are fun and innovative.	35 (66.1%)	18 (33.9%)	2.8	0.9	4
A Japanese Teacher of English is easier to make friends with.	33 (63.5%)	19 (36.5%)	2.8	0.9	5
A Japanese Teacher of English encourages all students to participate.	33 (63.5%)	19 (36.5%)	2.8	0.8	5
A Japanese Teacher of English makes the lesson enjoyable.	34 (63%)	20 (37%)	2.8	0.9	3
A Japanese Teacher of English makes the students feel more motivated about learning English.	32 (60.3%)	21 (39.7%)	2.7	0.8	4
A Japanese Teacher of English is more suited to elementary education.	34 (61.9%)	21 (38.1%)	2.7	0.9	2
A Japanese Teacher of English makes a more effective language teacher.	29 (55.8%)	23 (44.2%)	2.6	0.8	5
A Japanese Teacher of English is better for listening comprehension.	28 (53.8%)	24 (46.2%)	2.6	1.0	5
Students prefer to learn speaking from a Japanese Teacher of English.	28 (52.8%)	25 (47.2%)	2.6	1.0	4
A Japanese Teacher of English is more suited to University Education.	26 (48.2%)	28 (51.8%)	2.6	0.9	3
Students are able to learn more about the culture of English speaking people from a Japanese Teacher of English	27 (51.9%)	25 (48.1%)	2.5	0.9	5
If you had a choice you would choose a course taught by a Japanese Teacher of English.	27 (51%)	26 (49%)	2.5	0.8	4
In general pronunciation is better learnt from Japanese Teacher of English	22 (42.4%)	30 (57.6%)	2.2	0.9	5

The tables highlight an interesting pattern. Students seem to share similar views in relation to NESTs, but their opinions appear to be more varied vis-à-vis JTEs.

### Preferences for NESTs and JTEs at Various Levels of Education

Figure 1 shows students' preferences for NESTs and JTEs at various levels of education. It can be seen that respondents [n = 57] displayed a clear preference for NESTs at all levels of education. Respondents indicated their strongest preference for NESTs being suited to university level education, with that item achieving a mean rate of 3.5 (SD = 0.8).

The apparent choice (89.3% of respondents) for having a NEST at university level with a mean rating of 3.5 is consistent with the findings of Alseweed's (2012) and Benke and Medgyes' (2005) studies that reflected students' preferences for having NESTs the higher up the educational scale they moved.

On the other hand, the clear choice for NESTs over JTEs at the high school level (mean = 3.3 for NESTs and 2.8 for JTEs) is surprising in that Japan is a

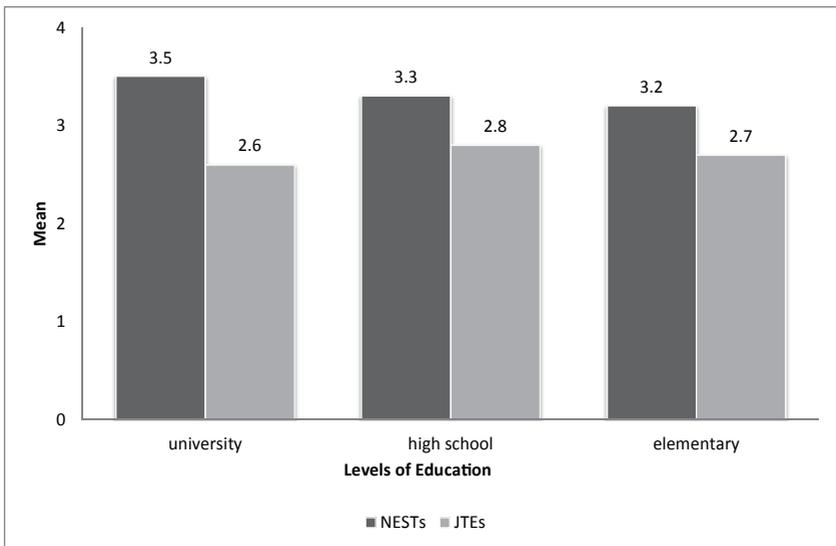


Figure 1. Students' Preferences for NESTs vs. JTEs at Various Levels of Education

highly exam-oriented country that prioritises grammar, vocabulary and reading comprehension (Gorsuch, 2000; Samimy and Kobayashi, 2004) and in the interviews, students reported that JTEs (NNESTs) had a firm understanding of grammar, especially grammar needed to pass the high stake entrance examinations.

Respondents in this study tended to affirm that NESTs placed more importance on speaking and listening than their JTE counterparts did and they believed that the earlier they learnt to use the language as a tool for communication, the more noticeable the trickledown effect would be, affecting and ameliorating all aspects of their language capabilities. Hence, the strong desire to have NESTs at elementary and high school level.

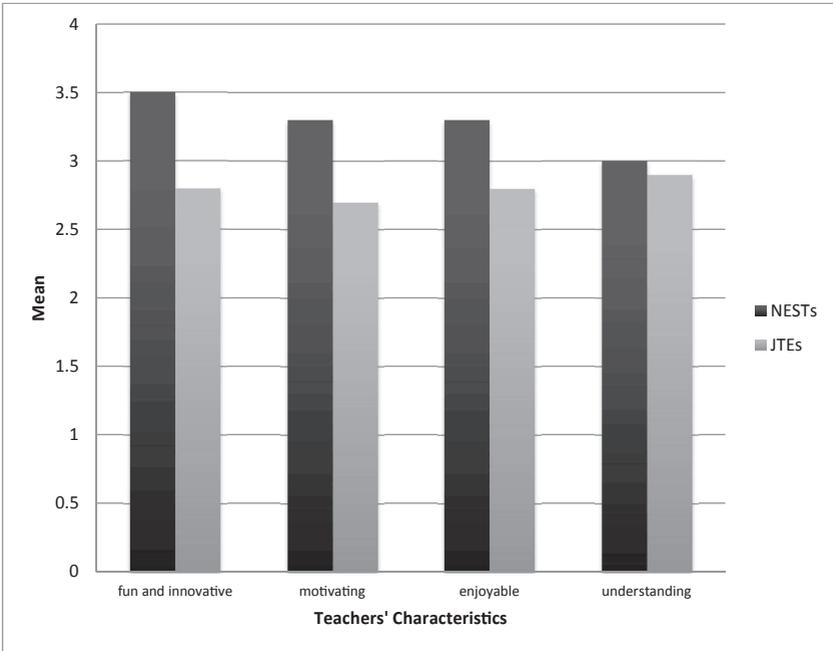
These findings appear to validate the conclusions of McNeill's (1994) study where it was found that due to NESTs guaranteeing the use of English in the classroom and language skills underscored by NESTs being relevant to students, NESTs are seen as more motivating for students than NNESTs.

### **Perceptions of Teachers' Characteristics of NESTs and JTEs**

The analysis of items 4-9 that pertained to teaching strategies showed that respondents indicated a strong preference for NESTs in all items. Figure 2 shows that students seem to hold the view that NESTs are more fun and innovative than their JTE colleagues with the mean rating for that item being 3.5 (SD = 0.7).

In terms of teacher characteristics, NESTs were seen as more fun and innovative (mean = 3.5), motivating (mean = 3.3), enjoyable (mean = 3.3) and marginally more understanding (mean = 3.0) than JTEs. A possible explanation for these preferences can be linked to the almost ubiquitous presence of the Grammar Translation Method in Japan, which easily lends itself to teaching of the traditional aspects of language learning, i.e. grammar, vocabulary, writing and reading comprehension that are emphasized by the entrance examinations (Samimy and Kobayashi, 2004; Takanashi, 2004). Students may view these traditional aspects as boring and banal.

These findings concur with the findings of Shimizu's (1995), Benke and



*Figure 2. Students' Perceptions of Teaching Characteristics of NESTs and JTEs*

Medgyes' (2005) and Alseweed's (2012) studies. Students in these studies and the present one enthused that the methods used by NESTs were more motivating than the ones employed by JTEs and lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the language. Student F1 stated that coming to England has helped her English to improve and that "...Japanese teacher teaches English in Japanese, so we think [sic] English in Japanese. But native speaker teaches English in English, it is difficult but we are forced to use English every day and our English get [sic] better..." Notwithstanding, the findings of this study about NESTs being more understanding than JTEs concerning students' needs seem to contradict findings of other major studies (Cheung, 2002; Mahboob, 2003; Shimizu, 1995; Torres, 2004; Yacoub, 2011) in which students postulated that NNESTs were more understanding because of a shared experience of learning the language. This contradiction could be attributed to students' understanding

that having an L1 translation of certain grammar or key concept points and a teacher who shares the same cultural background and learning difficulties is good; however, JTEs use the L1 too much and not enough English, which, in students' estimation, does not help them develop the skills that they view they need and value. Student B1 opined that "...teacher uses too much Japanese and not enough English, so it does not help student [sic] to speak...".

### Students' Preferences in Skills Areas

Figure 3 illustrates that the three major language areas where students showed a stark preference for NESTs were speaking, pronunciation and listening. NESTs topped students' preference for speaking with that item acquiring the strongest level of agreement from the majority of respondents with a mean rating of 3.5 (SD = 0.9). Speaking was followed by pronunciation and listening both with a mean rating of 3.4 (SD = 0.9).

Surprisingly, JTEs were not rated higher than NESTs in teaching grammar with both sets of teachers having a mean rating of 3.1. Unlike the aforementioned studies such as Moussu (2002), Benke and Medgyes (2005), Medgyes (2004) and Lasagabaster and Sierra (2002), JTEs did not dominate in the area of teaching grammar (mean = 3.1). The similarity and discrepancy in results can be linked to students' attitudes towards accentedness and the misbelief that a

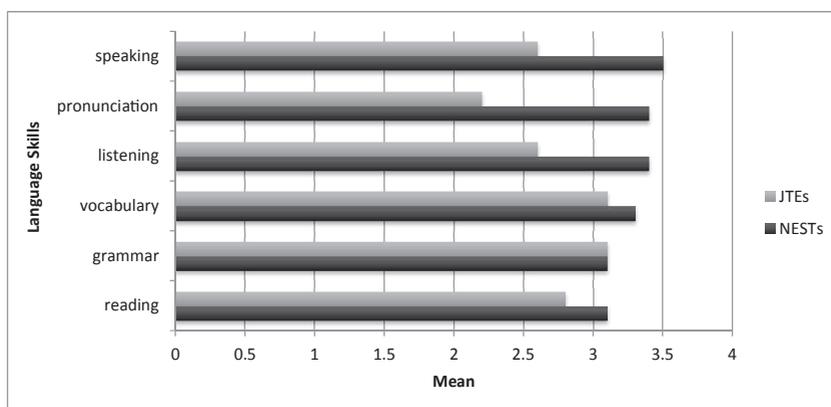


Figure 3. Students' Perceptions of Language Skills Taught by NESTs and JTEs

NESTs' understanding of grammar is superior to that of NNESTs' (JTEs') because they were born in that particular language environment and they use the language everyday.

Interviewee A1, a male Japanese university student explained why he would prefer to be taught by an NEST: since I want to learn to speak English better, I would choose a native speaker because a non-native teacher's English sounds strange...and a native teacher uses more English than an NNEST (JTE) which is good for getting better at speaking and listening.

In terms of absolute grammar knowledge of NESTs, two students asserted that "native speaker is English master...everything is good for me. Pronunciation and grammar is good" (Student C1) and "a native speaker knows everything about English because they are English speakers" (Student F1). The views of these participants seem to be in line with other students' perceptions described by Thomas (1999), Braine (1999) and Liu (2005) towards accentedness and pronunciation, and Cheung (2002) and Lasagabaster and Sierra (2002) in relation to metalinguistic awareness.

Despite the heavy bias towards NESTs in the teaching of the skills area, some students still favoured JTEs because they acknowledged that having an explanation available to them in the L1 expedited their language learning process. Student G1 maintained that an L1 translation helped her to understand English very well, while student E1 felt that she was not quite ready to be taught by an NEST because she felt she still needed the assistance of an L1 to help her learn and understand grammar concepts much better.

### **Students' Opinions of NESTs and JTEs**

As seen in Fig. 4, students seem to be of the opinion that NESTs would be their preferred teacher with a mean rating of 3.5 (SD = 0.7) and that NESTs make more effective teachers with a mean rating of 3.5 (SD = 0.8).

NESTs seem to be the preferred choice due to the tendency of students to believe that the teaching strategies of NESTs corresponded more with their personal aims than those of the JTEs', thereby making NESTs more effective teachers. NESTs facilitated the use of more English in the classroom and

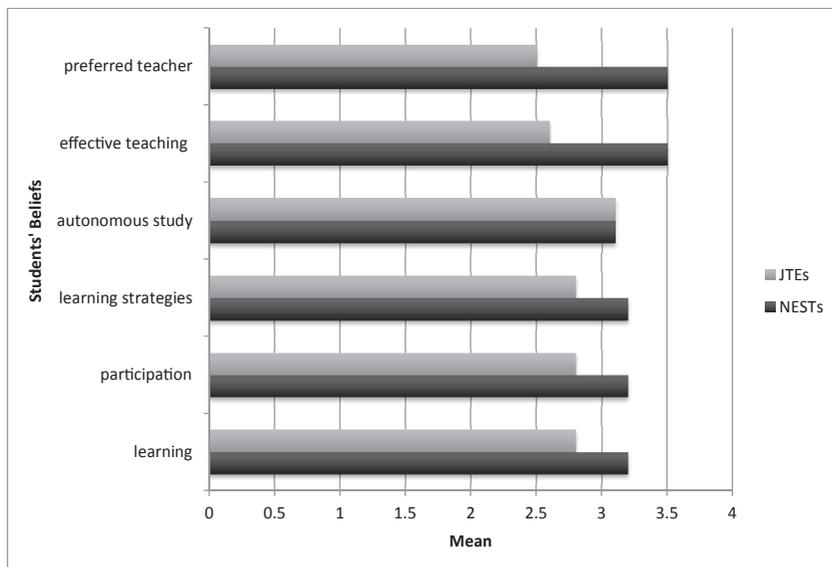


Figure 4. Students' Preferences for NESTs and JTEs

encouraged students to communicate in English, which helped students develop more proficiency. Moreover, NESTs were better at arming students with effective learning strategies because NESTs were teaching them how to conceptualise English in English without having to envisage it in Japanese first as interviewee I1 stated "...this help [sic] to improve [their] understanding of English...".

Most students were of the opinion that having a JTE at this stage of their language learning process is detrimental to their development. Having a JTE would make students overly reliant on an L1 explanation and may not provide them with the necessary impetus for developing coping strategies for learning English in English. This notion is reflected in the views of student C1 who postulated that learning English in English was difficult but good for me and for my future. Too much Japanese is bad because I can't better [sic] at listening and speaking. I want to speak English well, so that I can communicate with all over the world people [sic].

Correspondingly, these results mirror the students' perceptions found in other studies such as Cheung (2002), Mahboob (2003), Torres (2004) and Yacoub (2011) where NESTs were the preferred teachers, but perceptions were not overwhelmingly negative towards NNESTs. In the case of these students, NESTs seem to be the preferred choice for all aspects of language teaching because of their perceived superior linguistic skills and authority of language, which concurs with Phillipson's (1992) theorizing of the native speaker fallacy.

*Research question 2: From the point of view of students, what are the shortcomings and strengths of NESTs and NNESTs?*

Students in this study reported several strengths and weaknesses of NESTs and JTEs.

### **Strengths and weaknesses of NESTs**

Regarding the strengths of NESTs, students highlighted that NESTs had excellent pronunciation over JTEs and were more capable of helping students improve their oral and aural skills in comparison with JTEs (similar to those in the studies of Cheung, 2002; Lasagabaster and Sierra, 2002; Ma, 2012; Torres, 2004; Yacoub, 2011). Students affirmed that NESTs were more fun, interesting and motivating than JTEs (similar to those in Shimizu, 1995) and that NESTs used more interesting activities and teaching techniques. In student D1's estimation, "native speaker teacher [sic] topics are more interesting and motivating because teacher always begins the class with personal story and we can have discussion. In Japan, teacher never does this, only reading, writing, something like that". Student G1 stated that the use of gestures and facial expressions were novel to her and she found their use in teaching interesting because it was something that was not commonly seen in her native country of Japan, i.e. NESTs were found to be more non-verbally expressive.

Although students demonstrated stronger inclinations in favour of NESTs than JTEs, they identified the rate of speech and insufficient knowledge of their L1 as two salient weaknesses of their NESTs. Students at times found it difficult to follow or understand what their NESTs said. These findings were not

mentioned in other studies on students' perceptions, but the inability to follow their NESTs can be due to underdeveloped aural skills that can be linked to the lack of listening practice experienced and identified by students in their Japanese schools or their low linguistic competence. Another possible factor that may have contributed to students not understanding the NESTs could be that the NESTs, from the students' perspective, do not always adjust their level of language complexity and their rate of speaking to meet the level of the students' English and this can lead to a breakdown in comprehension. Student C1 expressed the following, "My teacher used a words [sic], which I don't know meaning [sic] and sometimes teacher speak [sic] very quickly...difficult to understand...". It could be that NESTs are not as understanding of the students' needs as JTEs are as illustrated in Figure 2. When considering JTEs, the reverse could be true by way of sharing the same culture and learning experiences, making them more empathetic to the students' language needs. This correlates to the arguments of Medgyes (1994) and Nemtchinova (2005) that NNESTs know first hand the levels and struggles of their students in learning the language.

Furthermore, NESTs at this university cannot speak Japanese; therefore, they might be unable to aid students in understanding concepts efficiently through a translation. These findings are congruous to those of Medgyes' (1994) and Ma's (2012) who purport that NNESTs, chiefly those that share the same L1 as their students, can use it to the benefit of the students, which can be viewed as being definitely one of the JTEs' greater assets.

### **Strengths and weaknesses of JTEs**

As for JTEs, students perceived the ability to use the L1 to give explanations and to teach appropriate grammar relevant to examinations and a shared background as strengths of JTEs. Student D1 reflected this position by stating that "JTEs have same culture [sic] and background, so they understand better my problem [sic]". This aligns with the position that NNESTs (JTEs) use appropriate methodology and respond in a satisfactory manner to questions posed by students as illustrated in Boyle (1997), Lee and Lew (2001), Mahboob

(2003) and Cook (2005). In essence, it can be argued that JTEs are indeed more sensitive and cognisant of their students' language abilities than NESTs are.

Students also agreed that JTEs have low proficiency and competence in the L2 and focus excessively on reading and writing. This can be attributed to the fact that JTEs have been through a similar learning process. JTEs themselves were taught English for six years in school using the Grammar Translation Method. It is logical to speculate that in an EFL context such as Japan, JTEs do not have to prioritise speaking and listening skills because they are not necessary for the examinations. Thus, it can be said that JTEs are victims of their educational system. These sentiments are also evident in the findings of Braine (1999).

*Research question 3: What are the expectations of students from NESTs?*

It would appear that students expect NESTs to use and facilitate the use of English as much as possible in their classes, speak at a moderate pace and foster a learning environment that is favourable to learning English. This involves placing an emphasis on speaking and not writing, not overcorrecting mistakes and not being overly strict with students. These sentiments are reflected in the views of student E1 when she claimed that she enjoyed her time in the UK because NESTs were not as strict as JTEs and in the opinion of student I1 when he stated that NESTs force students to use the target language.

During the interviews, some students voiced disappointment with some of their courses in the UK. From the point of view of the students, these courses reflected similar methodology to that which they were accustomed to in Japan. With their appraisal of the courses, the students said they expected to do more speaking; instead, these courses were too writing-centred. The expectations of NESTs appear to be the reverse for those of JTEs.

## **Conclusion**

The findings in this study are, to an extent, consistent with those of other studies, being, Cheung (2002), Benke and Medgyes (2005) and Lasagabaster and Sierra (2005). However, unlike these studies, the Japanese students in this

study did not show a preference towards NNESTs (JTEs) for teaching grammar and for teaching at high school level. This proved to be very surprising because NNESTs are knowledgeable about what is required for the examinations taken at the end of high school, and many proponents of NNESTs have argued that their meta-linguistic awareness and understanding are at times even better than that of NESTs (Canagarajah, 1999; Seidlhofer, 1999; Mahboob, 2004). The results seem to suggest that there is a discrepancy between the educational aims of Japan and the aims of the students who participated in this study.

The discrepancy can be linked to the students studying in an ESL context, in which the students' aim is to develop their speaking skills, while the main aim in the EFL context (Japan) would be to pass the national entrance exams.

Based on the results of this study that tend to intimate that these Japanese students seem to prefer NESTs over JTEs because NESTs seem to fit the profile of helping students, particularly those at university level, a few recommendations can be suggested.

NESTs and JTEs can engage in collaborative projects as advanced by Kamhi-Stein (1999) because these types of projects allow NNESTs (JTEs) to contribute their wealth of knowledge of the linguistic, social and cultural needs of the students, while NESTs, as noted by Widdowson (1994), are able to share their socio-linguistic and communicative expertise. This can be implemented through team teaching initiatives such as adequately government-supported training workshops where trained NESTs and JTEs can collaborate and exchange ideas and through the development of supplementary materials that draw on the JTEs' knowledge of their students' needs and curriculum requirements and the NESTs' language use and awareness. Based on one of the researcher's experience, English Language Teachers working in junior and senior state high schools tend to be non-trained native speakers who have only an undergraduate degree and are hired by educational state departments because they are native speakers.

Another recommendation would be to implement to all university entrance examinations an oral component or listening comprehension tasks that focus on meaning, which the Japanese government is already looking into (Gorsuch,

2000). Alternatively, reducing the large class sizes of approximately 40 students to more manageable groups, advantageous to conducting oral activities, could be considered.

A move towards embracing English as a *lingua franca* and Japan's own variety of English that encompasses its idiosyncrasies and accentedness may be a welcomed way of allowing students to maintain their Japanese identity while at the same time being fluent in English. In this case, students may feel at ease with their use of English, instead of trying to imitate and pursue the goal of 'native' like fluency.

A last recommendation would be to provide teachers with opportunities to be exposed to the L2 as it is used in its natural linguistic environment by making it obligatory for JTEs to go overseas on short-term language courses to develop their communicative competence. This idea may at first seem counterintuitive to the ideas espoused in this study. Again, the centre is norm-providing and the periphery is norm-dependent, but the offset would be that eventually one may have teachers who can proficiently work in the L2 without having to rely heavily on hiring NESTs to fill that void, above all at high school level.

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