

## **Students' Perception of Native English-Speaking Teachers and Japanese Teachers of English: The Effect on Students' Self-Efficacy and Emotional State**

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*(Received December 2016; Accepted April 2017)*

### **Abstract**

The Project for Promotion of Global Human Resource Development is a Japanese government funded project started in 2012 which aims to foster human resources in Japanese high schools and universities who can enhance unprepared discourse instructions in the classroom and contribute positively to the globalization and internalization of young Japanese people. Native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) are employed throughout Japan on almost all academic levels. It has been long believed by default that NESTs are preferable teaching models for second language learning, for numerous reasons, at the same time their direct influence on self-efficacy and emotional state of students in Japan's higher education has not been fully researched or documented. I have conducted a study about students' perception of their native English-speaking and Japanese teachers of English (JTEs). Based on the social cognitive theory, the study focused on students' self-efficacy as a major factor in the learning motivation and attempted to answer following questions: "What are the advantages and disadvantages of native NESTs and JTEs for Japanese high school students?" and "Who do the students feel the most comfortable speaking English with?" This study showed the overall preferences for teachers and the level of stress or comfort among students. In the present article I will discuss the students' preferences in their English instructors and the reasons for such preferences. The findings indicated that 55% of students who answered the questionnaire felt more comfortable with Japanese teachers of English, the most popular reasons for the preference were an ability to talk to the teachers in Japanese and lack of self-confidence in using only English. One third of the respondents prefer native English-speaking teachers of English. Among the most popular reasons were personal interest in the English language, teachers' language authenticity, clear pronunciation and the students' self-realization of the English language mastery process.

**Keywords:** *NEST, JTE, native-speakerism, self-efficacy, affective state*

## 1 Background

Easy access to information, the great mobility of modern Japanese and finally, the highly anticipated, 2020 Olympic Games have been for a long time changing the status of English. Japan's Ministry of Education, Sport, Science and Technology (MEXT) has implemented numerous programs to foster language education on all academic levels in Japan. Starting from 2012, efforts to promote the internalization of university education in Japan were given a priority support from the government (MEXT 2012).

Japanese people need and want to communicate internationally and the effectiveness of this communication is determined, to a considerable degree, by the ability to produce an unprepared oral or written discourse in English. The majority of English as a foreign language (EFL) learners in Japan lack the ability to engage in spontaneous English speech, even when they have all necessary grammatical competence to do so. One of the reasons why Japanese students, having sufficient grammar and vocabulary background, cannot engage into spontaneous oral or written English discourse is a lack of English rhetoric and communicative skills. Writing in Japanese high school is usually limited to drills and tests, with little or no focus on content based writing or academic report composition. Students learn how to write correct grammar sentences and pass tests, but when you ask them to write a short creative essay or a contrast and compare paragraph, they commonly end up producing "google type" Japanese to English translation of their thoughts and ideas, which are poorly organized, not supported by adequate facts and hard to comprehend. As a result, young Japanese adults enter universities, but they cannot write at their academically appropriate levels and present their ideas in oral form under the proper format of English rhetoric.

Japanese government provides funding for numerous projects that aim to foster human resources who can positively meet the challenges and succeed in internationalization and globalization of Japanese students on all academic levels. The task of educators in Japanese high schools, colleges and universities is to empower the students to recycle the rich baggage of grammatical knowledge they possess after years of English study and reuse it in practical and efficient way. One of the main concerns of English teachers in Japan is increasing student engagement and learning. They often wonder why there are so many students who are disengaged and apathetic in the English classroom. There is a chronic problem in Japanese higher education, which urgently needs to be addressed.

When entering a pool of language professionals in Japan, one eventually finds himself or herself involved into a battle of native and non-native teachers. Houghton and Rivers in their book on native-speakerism in Japan define native-speakerism as "prejudice, stereotyping and/or discrimination typically by or against foreign language teachers, on the basis of either being or not being perceived and categorized as a native speaker of a particular language" (2013: 14). Native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) are employed throughout Japan and are highly valued, welcome and usually well paid here. At the same time, they rarely get hired on tenured positions. One may dislike the

grammar based teaching techniques Japanese teachers of English usually use in their classrooms or their non-native accents, but they have an indisputable head start in this battle for stable employment. According to Houghton and Rivers native-speakerism is manifested in multiple work-related factors, that directly affect the professional careers of English language teachers in Japan. Numerous scholars, researchers and practicing teachers have recently been heard voicing their concerns about native-speakerism related issues in Japan (Motha 2014, Noriguchi 2006, Houghton and Rivers 2013, Toh 2013). This is a popular area in the contemporary research on English language teaching (ELT) in Japan, and one feels that students' voices need to be included in the discussion. Listening to the voices of students is a necessary step toward overcoming native-speakerism and improving ELT. Given the sorts of challenges that come with uncovering the underlying reasons for the current native-speakerism trend in ELT in Japan, I have assumed that finding out how NESTs and JTEs affect their students, how they impact students' emotional state, will facilitate understanding of the nature of current teaching and hiring practices and contribute greatly to their rectification.

## **2 Methodology**

This section describes the design of a survey administered to high school students in Tokyo, Japan. In order to find out what Japanese students think about their teachers, I have conducted a survey study about students' perception of their NESTs and JTEs. Three hundred twenty freshmen students in a Tokyo metropolitan high school were asked to participate in this study. After the explanation and consent, they were given a questionnaire consisting of 16 questions in English with Japanese translation following each question. Half of the questions were designed to get statistical frequency distribution data, the other half of questions were designed to bring out students' opinions about their teachers and engage them dialogically.

Self-efficacy has been related to the motivation, quantity of effort and the willingness of students to be engaged in the learning process (Bandura 1997). Based on the social cognitive theory, the study focused on students' self-efficacy as one of the major factors influencing their learning motivation and attempted to answer following questions: "What are the advantages and disadvantages of native English-speaking teachers and non-native English-speaking (Japanese) teachers of English for Japanese high school students?" and "Who do the students feel the most comfortable speaking English with, NESTs or JTEs?"

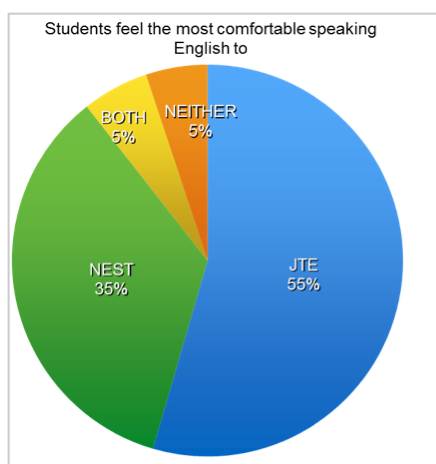
According to the social cognitive theory, learning most likely occurs when the observer has a high level of self-efficacy. Schunk defines self-efficacy as "an individual's judgments of his or her capabilities to perform given actions" (1985: 207), and Bandura (1994: 391) defines it as "people's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performance." Bandura (1994) said that, self-efficacy affects the amount of effort and persistence that a person devotes to a task. According to Mayer (2008), self-efficacy plays an important role in academic achievements and can be increased by improving emotional states of the observers (learners).

When a student's self-efficacy is raised, his or her understanding of the material increases. Students who have confidence engage in deeper processing of the learning material, which results in a better academic performance. Mayer (2008) said that there are four main sources of self-efficacy for students in any learning situation. First source of self-efficacy comes from interpreting one's own performance. When a student engages into a new task and after some time finds that she or he can do it successfully, his or her self-efficacy consequently rises. Second source of self-efficacy comes from interpreting the performance of others. When a student also sees that others around him or her can do the task well, his or her self-efficacy gets a boost. Third source comes from interpreting others' expressions of your capabilities, in other words from a peer and teacher feedback. Finally, the last source of self-efficacy comes from interpreting one's physiological state. When a student has a sense of high anxiety, his or her self-efficacy drops. On the other hand, the more relaxed a student feels, the higher his or her self-efficacy for the task. To understand the emotional state of the students, one of the four forces, which influence self-efficacy, and how it can be influenced by the teachers, I included the following question in the survey conducted to the Japanese high school students: "Who do you feel more comfortable speaking English to, a native English-speaking teacher or a Japanese teacher? Explain why." The present article will discuss the results of the survey and concentrate on the answers to the question mentioned above. Samples of students' answers will be written in Japanese with the original punctuation. English translation will follow.

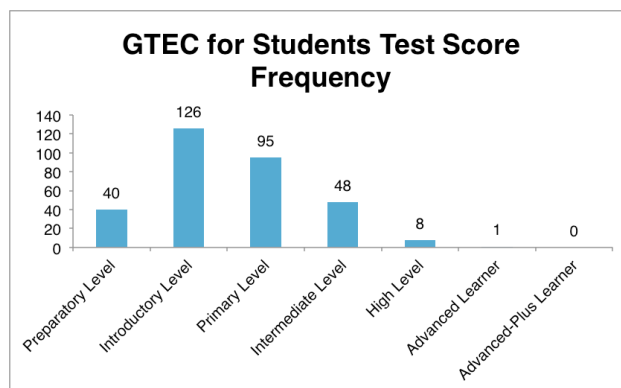
### **3 Results of the Survey**

The present study was conducted in a Tokyo Metropolitan High School in a greater Tokyo area. Freshmen in the school are ranked slightly above the national average according to *hensachi* system, which is a popular means of measuring academic performance in Japan and defined as the "abstract notion of a national norm-referenced person-indexed score" (Brown 1995: 25, quoted in Newfields, 2005). The acceptance *hensachi* score for the year 2016 was 52 points in this school. Among 320 high school students who participated in the study, 154 were female and 166 were male. Their average Global Test of English Communication for Students (GTEC) score was 380 points. According to the GTEC grade system this score falls into the range of Primary Level 3 (GTEC). Frequency distribution of the GTEC scores among the participants is shown in the graph below (Graph 1).

Two hundred twenty two of the respondents answered the question "Who do you feel more comfortable speaking English to?" in the questionnaire. Eighty nine students, 35% of the total, reported that overall they felt more comfortable learning from NESTs. One hundred thirty nine students, 55% of the total, felt better with JTEs. Fourteen students, 5% of the total, responded they felt equally comfortable with both, and thirteen students, 5% of the total, felt uncomfortable speaking to either NESTs or JTEs. The results are illustrated in the graph below (Graph 2).



Graph 1: Distribution of students' preferences in speaking English to different teachers



Graph 2: GTEC test score frequency distribution

According to the results, one of the main reasons for which students felt more comfortable learning from NESTs over JTEs was a guaranteed model of accuracy or authenticity. Some of the comments supporting this idea were: 「本場の英語の方が楽しいから」 (Authentic English is fun to learn), 「本場の発音を聞くことができるから」 (I prefer native teachers, because I can hear authentic pronunciation), 「ネイティブスピーカーだと元の出身の英語の訛りが聞けて面白いから」 (Because it is interesting to be exposed to a variety of native English accents), 「ネイティブスピーカーの方は英語がきれいだから」 (Native speakers' English is more accurate), 「英国原地で使われているポピュラーな言葉が学べる」 (We can learn cool new words used in English speaking countries), 「自然な英語だから」 (Native speakers' English is natural), 「表現などが豊かで楽しい」 (The language is rich and fun), 「日本で言うような略語 (今アメリカなどでは流行っていたりする) などを教えてもらう。日常的に使える (友達などと) ことは学べる」 (Same as in Japan, there are short forms of words in America, which are now popular. You can learn such forms that you can use (with friends etc.) every day), 「本物だから」 (Native teachers are better, because their English is authentic). I can conclude from the responses above and many similar ones, that the comfortable emotional state for these students, who prefer NESTs as their teachers of English is directly related to the state of excitement and personal interest. There are researchers who argue that students first get excited about the theme or topic, develop their personal interest, and then get involved into the learning activities. As they get involved into learning and engage in it over time, they develop higher self-efficacy with the development of expertise (Renninger, Hidi, and Krapp 1992).

English is a foreign language for the majority of Japanese learners in higher educational settings. Therefore, having a foreign teacher, usually a NEST, to teach this foreign language adds positively to the students' interest, and thus increases their motivation and engagement into the learning process. I can presume that many teachers of English in Japan share the desire for their students to have personal interest in the

English language and in the material taught. When a student has a personal interest, they can be easier involved into the content of English lesson in terms of the language value.

Mastery experience is another factor influencing self-efficacy, which students' who answered they felt more comfortable with NESTs indicated in their reasoning. 「ネイティブスピーカーのほうがいい。自分の英語で話が通じるかがわかるから」 (Native speakers are better, because talking to them I can really understand whether my English is good or not), 「ネイティブスピーカーの方がいい。伝わった時にうれしい。反応が大きいから」 (I am happy when I see my native English-speaking teachers understand my English and praise me for that), 「日本人教師だと日本語を話してしまうから」 (I prefer NESTs because with a Japanese teacher, I am inclined to use Japanese), 「ネイティブスピーカーの方がいい。今まで学んできたことが通用しているか実感できるから」 (I feel good speaking to native teachers, because I can fully utilize the extent of my English language knowledge), 「ネイティブスピーカーの方がいい。理由は、話していると、自分の英語が相手に伝わっていると実感できる」 (I feel good speaking to native teachers, because I feel happy when I see that they understand my English). These are the example of many similar answers from the students, who indicated in their responses they felt more comfortable with NESTs. Asking questions in English, talking to the teacher and getting him or her to talk back help some students realize their achievements and lead to more complex objectives. According to the research, students who see themselves as capable of performing well and receive positive feedback from their teachers, usually develop a higher level of self-efficacy, which in its turn leads to a higher motivation and better learning (Schunk 1985). Bandura (1994) said that “The most effective way of creating a strong sense of efficacy is through mastery experiences.”

According to the survey, another reason why Japanese students prefer NESTs over JTEs was pronunciation. Some of the comments supporting the idea are following: 「ネイティブスピーカーの方はとても発音が良いので内容が理解できないこともありますが、とても話していて快適です」 (Even though, I do not always understand what they say, because of their clear pronunciation, I feel comfortable talking to native speakers), 「ネイティブスピーカーの発音とか上手で聞いていて気持ち良い」 (I enjoy listening to the clear speech of native speakers), 「発音が良くて、しゃべっていて楽しい」 (Good pronunciation, fun to talk with), 「現地の発音分かる」 (We learn local pronunciation), and many similar comments.

According to Linnenbrik and Pintrich (2003), utility value represents how useful the students believe the content is to them. Some students may have personal interest in English and be intrinsically fascinated with NESTs as sources of authentic and accurate material. Others may not be so interested in foreign teachers or English itself, but they see such teachers as very useful. Listening to clear speech brings certain satisfaction to students and thus positively influences their self-efficacy. They may not perceive English as personally interesting, but they see it as very important for their goal to find a stable employment in this globalizing society, and thus get motivationally engaged and excited to hear native or native-like pronunciation of NESTs in their classrooms. Value

beliefs operate by increasing the level of cognitive engagement and thus influence positively on self-efficacy (Pintrich and Schrauben 1992).

Indeed, native teachers are often hired as a source of standard pronunciation. While the rest of the world, has long ago discovered that British or North American pronunciation as a Gold Standard is a myth, Japanese employers still value it. Much of the English education in Japanese schools revolves around standardized test-taking and memorizing written grammar. New words are usually transcribed in Japanese alphabet, katakana, for the sake of better memorization. As a result, many Japanese English learners feel a lot of anxiety about their “katakana” English pronunciation. Bad pronunciation was one of the disadvantages of Japanese teachers of English mentioned by the students who participated in the survey: 「発音が日本人!」 (Japanese pronunciation!), 「発音がじゃっかん違う」 (Pronunciation is a little bit different), 「日本人の先生本当の発音は分からない」 (Japanese teachers don't know the real pronunciation), 「本当の発音があいまいになる」 (We cannot learn the real pronunciation), 「発音が下手」 (Bad pronunciation) and similar.

Bad pronunciation, however, did not stop JTEs from getting an overall preference from the students. About 55% of those who answered the question in the questionnaire indicated that they felt more comfortable learning English from Japanese teachers. Similar study on university students in Hong Kong, conducted by Clayton (2000) revealed that students felt strongly stressed out in classes run by NESTs because of lack of translation. The following replies were among popular reasons from the students in my study who indicated they prefer JTEs over NESTs: 「分からない単語を日本語で伝えても、意味が通じ単語を教えてくれるから」 (When we don't understand the meaning of a word, they can translate it in Japanese), 「困ったときに日本語が通じ、解決が早いところ」 (When in trouble, I can use Japanese and easily resolve it), 「もし、英単語がわからなくても理解してもらえる安心感がある」 (There is a sense of security with Japanese teachers), 「すぐ助けてくれるから。ネイティブスピーカーの先生は緊張しちゃう」 (Because Japanese teachers help me, and I feel nervous with native teachers), 「ネイティブスピーカーの英語が難しくてわからないから。日本人教師は日本語も混ぜながら教えてくれるから」 (Native speakers' English is difficult for me to understand. Japanese teachers mix English and Japanese), 「気が楽」 (I feel at ease with Japanese teachers) and many similar examples.

From the responses above I can conclude that the emotional state influencing students' self-efficacy in the case when they prefer JTEs is a state of security and predictability. Some of the respondents who indicated they prefer JTEs also mentioned they felt nervous with NESTs in the classroom. 「緊張してしまいます」 (I feel nervous with native teachers), 「伝わるか不安だから、日本人教師と話すときに安心する」 (I feel uneasy whether native teachers cannot understand me, I feel safe with Japanese) etc. The research shows clearly that high levels of anxiety in classroom situations are negatively related to learning and performing (Zeidner 1998). There is both theoretical and empirical evidence that emotions can influence self-efficacy (Wright and Mischel 1992). But there is also research to suggest that self-efficacy influences emotions. Students, who have high self-efficacy are more likely to feel less anxiety and more

positive emotions in academic contexts (Harter 1992). I can suggest that students, who answered they felt more comfortable with JTEs as the teachers to speak English to, and who indicated in their answers, that they felt nervous with NESTs for such reasons as a lack of language skills, had the emotional state like this due to the original low self-efficacy levels. 「英語が上手しなくても、伝わる」 (Even when I can't speak English well, I can explain myself to a Japanese teacher). 「英語わからなくて、思い出せないときに言いたいこと理解してくれるから」 (I prefer Japanese teachers, because I don't know English, and when I forget words, my teacher can still understand me). 「日本人教師がいい。英語が苦手だから」 (Japanese teachers are better, because I don't like English). 「ネイティブスピーカーと話せるほど自分の英語に自信がないから」 (I prefer Japanese teachers, because I have self-doubts about my English capabilities) were among popular answers.

The students who answered similar to the above were not sure they were good enough to speak only in English, and had negative beliefs about their capability to do the work. Their low self-efficacy resulted in a negative emotional state with NESTs and consequently, in a more positive emotional state with JTEs. Self-efficacy beliefs refer to specific and situational judgments of capabilities. In a situation where NESTs do not speak students' first language, and a student does not believe his or her cognitive abilities are good enough to participate in tasks only in English, low self-efficacy results in anxiety toward NESTs and preferences toward JTEs. Identification also plays a major role in teacher modeling for these students. Identification allows students to feel a one-to-one similarity with the model (Japanese teacher), which leads to a better learning from the model. 「日本人だから」 (Because we are Japanese) was also a common response among students who prefer JTEs to NESTs.

Being able to use Japanese while learning foreign language was not the only advantage of Japanese teachers according to the survey. One foreign student who participated in the survey mentioned that "I can learn English in a very academic style" as an advantage of learning from Japanese teachers. Other similar replies were: 「文法を正解に教える事ができる (日本語だから)」 (Because they speak Japanese, we can learn the correct grammar), 「本当に英語だけだとわからない文法などを学ぶとき」 (Japanese teachers are good when you want to learn grammar points which you really do not understand if you are taught only in English). Students who answered they felt better with JTEs, because they could discuss difficult grammar rules in Japanese, saw the importance of English grammar and valued the ability of JTEs to explain it to them in Japanese. Their choice was based not on emotional state, but on the utility value discussed earlier in this article, and which represents how useful the students believe the content is to them. Japanese teachers can explain grammar in Japanese and grammar is what needed to pass difficult entrance examination tests for many students in Japan's higher education.

#### 4 Discussion

Students' affective experience is an important part of their motivational engagement. Emotions can play an important role in raising or lowering levels of students'



self-efficacy and contribute to their motivation in learning. Fifty five percent of respondents indicated that they felt more emotionally positive with JTEs and 35% indicated that they preferred NESTs. The differences between self-observed emotional states among students may be influenced by various factors, among which the fact that many higher education institutes in Japan have a strict policy regarding languages used in classroom. NESTs are asked to use only English and avoid using Japanese. Students in such classrooms are also commonly asked to use only English. Students with low levels of self-efficacy, who have doubts about their abilities to perform tasks only in English, feel anxious in such settings, give up easily when confronted with difficulties, even when they have the skills to perform the task. Such students achieve a more comfortable emotional state with JTEs present in the classroom. At the same time, majority of learners in the study, who indicated that they felt more relaxed and comfortable with JTEs did so because of the possibility to use Japanese with the teachers when needed. Rivers (2011) states that the “English only” classroom should be regarded as a part of prohibited pedagogies. He argues that such classrooms create undue tension for students and fail to use the value of their first language. One may suggest that NESTs should not be restricted to using only English, in the contrary Japanese should be allowed to facilitate the flow of the class instruction and contribute to the relaxed emotional state of the learners.

The increase in negative emotions towards NESTs most likely occurs because students with low levels of self-efficacy do not feel as they can perform in tasks without Japanese backup. Further correlational studies are needed to be done in future to examine in details the relationship between students’ self-efficacy and their emotional state and to investigate whether students who feel more comfortable with JTEs have lower English proficiency than those who prefer NESTs. Future research will determine whether it is students’ low proficiency which causes negative emotional state with NESTs and thus low self-efficacy, or the affective state has no correlation with the original language proficiency. An experimental study where students who have high levels of anxiety in NESTs classrooms are assigned different treatment conditions may be needed to investigate whether “Only English” policy is a factor, which decreases emotional state of students and whether NESTs with Japanese language abilities can positively influence students’ self-efficacy and their motivation for learning. Assessment and Placement Tests may be designed and implemented prior to deciding on the acceptable amount of Japanese used in the classroom to assure that students are given tasks that are challenging, but not too difficult.

Personal interest in English and English language related culture results in a higher emotional state of the students; it increases their motivation, learning and comprehension. Value beliefs like importance of clear pronunciation or knowledge of grammar rules in English, may have direct effect on motivation and self-efficacy. Authenticity of language provided by NESTs in classroom results in overall excitement and up-lifted spirit among learners, which positively influences their self-efficacy and thus learning outcomes. Learners feel excited to learn about something new, different, even when it is cognitively challenging. When they feel emotionally positive, they pay

attention to the teaching modeling and produce more learning outcome. According to these findings, it may be possible to foster students' motivation by increasing their interest in English by diversifying English lessons with modern, authentic, and culturally enriched topics and tasks.

Bad pronunciation of JTEs evokes negative emotions among students and thus leads to a lower self-efficacy. The recent tendencies in language learning shift away from the necessity of perfect Standard English pronunciation toward the acceptance of its variations and accents. Should a bad pronunciation really be holding Japanese students back? Does the current trend of globalization in Japan include self-acceptance of "katakana English"? What would be a better way to approach the problem, to concentrate on improving JTEs pronunciation or to educate students about acceptance and diversity? Further research should be focused on how different self-efficacy constructs work together and influence the students' engagement in classrooms with Native English-speaking teachers and Japanese teachers of English.

## 5 Conclusion

Based on the study I have conducted, it seems clear that emotional state and self-efficacy play an important role in the way students perceive NESTs and JTEs. It is important to consider what it means in terms of native-speakerism, in NESTs and JTE relationships and whether teachers of English should be judged, valued and classified as natives and non-natives. 「誰でも良い。英語を話すこと自体快適に感じるから」 (Everyone is fine. Because I feel comfortable speaking English) was one of the similar responses among 14 respondents (13% of the total number) in the study who indicated they felt equally happy communicating with either NESTs or JTEs. The main reason for such state of affection was their perceived English fluency and self-confidence. A confident in his or her English proficiency student is confident enough to relax and enjoy learning from both NEST and JTE. Higher levels of comfort during classroom instructions boost the self-efficacy and as a result facilitate learning process and further mastering of the language.

Low levels of comfort among the respondents in the present survey were mainly caused by the inability to use Japanese with NESTs. Houghton and Rivers' book "Native-speakerism in Japan: Intergroup Dynamics in Foreign Language Education" discusses recent research in foreign language education that suggests the benefits of using students' first language. The authors state that we learn more in a bilingual or multilingual environment. Not only our first language enriches the learning experience, it also helps to prevent anxiety among students, it gives them backup or a safety belt (Houghton and Rivers 2013).

Noriguchi (2006) outlines that contemporarily institutional practice of hiring NESTs on limited terms is supported by the idea of "freshness" and "novice". Knowledge of Japanese language and the country's culture brings more damage to the value of NESTs in the eyes of institutions for as they are commonly regarded as a resource of authentic material. A NEST who speaks Japanese is no longer "fresh". He or she is rather an "adjusted" NEST. And adjusting to suit the needs of students is

regarded as a bad habit in Japan (Noriguchi 2006). While majority of the respondents from the present survey indicated they too valued language authenticity of NESTs, they never stated that it was “freshness” that interested them, or specifically the lack of Japanese skills in NESTs boosted their excitement. Contrarily, the students who felt nervous with NESTs indirectly stated that they would prefer them to speak some Japanese. The knowledge that the students could use their first language in case of misunderstandings or lack of vocabulary would bring comfort to the respondents with high level of anxiety, and thus contribute positively to the affective side of their self-efficacy.

Students who have positive self-efficacy are more likely to be more motivated to be actively engaged in the classrooms. NESTs and JTE can work together and design their instructions to foster students’ motivation and learning. Listening to the voices of students is an essential step in order to unravel current teaching practices and to overcome native-speakerism in Japan.

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