



Preparing NESTs and NNESTs for Team Teaching at the Pre-Service Level

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Abstract

Teacher collaboration is a key feature of effective professional development and is a necessary element for improved student achievement. This study investigated pre-service non-native English teachers (NNESTs)' attitudes toward and concerns about team teaching with native English speaking teachers (NESTs). The results reveal that the participants show a great interest and willingness to team teach with NESTs, and believe that this collaborative model has pedagogic benefits. However, they are concerned about being 'marginalized' by NESTs and potential communication problems with NESTs. The results show that there is an urgent need to prepare both pre-service NESTs and NNESTs for team teaching.

Key words: NESTs; NNESTs; Team teaching; Pre-service teacher education

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INTRODUCTION

NESTs-NNESTs team teaching is one significant form of teacher collaboration in English Language Teaching (ELT). However, it may cause tension and conflict between NESTs and NNESTs, relegate NNESTs to an inferior status, and result in a series of struggles about teaching ob-

jectives between NESTs and NNESTs (Carless, 2006; Fujimoto-Adamson, 2010; Tajino & Tajino, 2000). However, most studies on NESTs-NNESTs team teaching focused on in-service NNESTs. There is little understanding about pre-service NNESTs' attitudes toward team teaching with NESTs and their concerns about the teaching model. This paper focuses on pre-service NNESTs and discusses the implications for English teacher educators and policy makers in countries where NESTs-NNESTs team teaching is carried out. Survey and interviews were used to collect data from 258 research participants. This paper starts with a brief literature review on the practice of NESTs-NNESTs team teaching in ELT, followed by a description of the research methods and findings. Finally, the author argues that teacher educators need to take greater responsibility for preparing both NESTs and NNESTs for team teaching at the pre-service level to support their professional lives.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Teacher collaboration has been identified as one of the key features for effective professional development, improved student achievement, and continued school success (Delli Carpini, 2008). Traditionally, teacher collaboration is presented in different forms such as co-teaching and team teaching, with the selection based on students' needs and instructional intent in different educational contexts (Friend & Cook, 2010). In ELT, the belief that the cooperation between NESTs and NNESTs might make a unique contribution to English language education has been shown in a number of projects around the world, such as the JET Program (Japan Exchange and Teaching Program) in Japan, the EPIK (English Program in Korea) in Korea, and the NET Scheme (Native-speaking English Teacher Scheme) in Hong Kong (China), and the FETRP (Foreign English Teachers Recruitment Program) in Taiwan. These programs have become part of the central governments'

language education policies in these countries and the majority of the NESTs recruited via these programs are expected to carry out team teaching with local English teachers at public schools. Due to the prevalence of NESTs-NNESTs team teaching in global EFL/ESL classrooms (Carless, 2006), it is worth considering how team teaching is perceived by the two groups of teachers. There are a number of issues that have been identified in the literature and these are sometimes contradictory, hence showing the complexity of NESTs-NNESTs team teaching. For example, NESTs are often ignored and isolated by NNESTs who regard NESTs as badly-trained and irresponsible teachers, highlighting the difficulties and limitations of NESTs in team taught classes (Jeon, 2009; Tajino & Tajino, 2000). On the other hand, many NNESTs perceive NESTs as superior teaching professionals who are simply brought in to show them how to teach (Boyle, 1997). Many NNESTs avoid contact with their NEST partners and are reluctant to team teach with NESTs. They would rather teach English alone even though they are assigned to carry out team teaching with NESTs (Carless, 2004; Reiko & Lee, 2001).

In addition, even though the essence of team teaching advocates team-teachers' equal partnership and contribution, there is often inequality in practices and power relationships between NESTs and NNESTs (Fujimoto-Adamson, 2010). NNESTs are likely to assign the role of classroom leader to NESTs by letting NESTs take over the classes, and only a negligible number of NNESTs see NESTs as equals (Mahoney, 2004). NNESTs are often relegated to just being interpreters or disciplinarians without being involved in any teaching activities (Carless, 2002; Tajino & Walker, 1998). Finally, team teaching may result in a series of struggles between NESTs and NNESTs about teaching objectives. Communicative English teaching carried out in team taught classes is in conflict with grammar and reading-based preparation for examinations (Carless, 2004). Where the issue of innovative teaching (e.g., communicative and interactive English) and 'traditional' teaching (e.g., drilling and tests regimes) is concerned, the endless negotiation and compromises to be made between NESTs and NNESTs usually end up like "a tug of war" between NESTs and NNESTs (Carless, 2006, p.333).

NESTs-NNESTs team teaching is a complex issue. In particular, the labels of NESTs and NNESTs have been a cause of concern because the rigid distinction between the two groups of teachers oversimplifies the complex realities of the teachers' language and cultural backgrounds, professional training and teaching experience (Andrews, 2007). With that in mind, the author focused on pre-service NNESTs and investigated their attitudes toward and concerns about team teaching with NESTs with the intent of providing constructive suggestions for teacher educators.

2. THE STUDY(Andrews, 2007)

The subjects were students in the English language departments at two national normal universities and three national universities of education in Taiwan. These universities offer four-year teacher training courses together with a one-year practicum for undergraduate students and two-year teacher training programs for graduate students. The English language departments at these universities are the major sources of public primary and secondary English teachers in Taiwan and had NESTs as teaching staff who taught language, literature, and pedagogy at the time this study was conducted. A total of 258 students enrolled in these departments was recruited as subjects of the survey, including 219 (84.9%) female and 39 (15.1%) male. Among the participants, 126 (48.8%) were in the third year (TY) of their studies, 115 (44.6%) were in the fourth year (FY), and the remaining 17 (6.6%) were students at the graduate school (GS). It was expected that the completion of two years of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teacher training programs and the experience of being taught by NESTs would help the participants to better understand and respond to the questions asked. Out of the 258 survey participants, 35 participants (26 female, 9 male) from 5 different universities located in 4 different counties were recruited to participate in an in-depth interview to reduce any effects resulting from geographical location.

Data collection was divided into two phases. In the first phase, relevant Likert-scale questions from a larger survey (Boyle, 1997) were used to collect quantitative data. In the second phase, individual in-depth interviews were used to collect data from the participants. The interview questions were semi-structured and conducted in Mandarin on the assumption that the participants would be able to express their feelings and offer their perspectives more clearly using their mother tongue. All the interviews were audio-taped for the purpose of transcription. For data processing and analysis, a code book was assembled to carry out the data coding of the completed questionnaires for frequency analysis. Amongst the items in the code book were coding frames (e.g., variables; values) and coding instructions regarding valid, invalid, and missing data. For the qualitative data, the author translated and categorized the data, identified the themes, and generated assertions for each theme using Nvivo 7. All the names of the participants presented below are pseudonyms.

3. FINDINGS

3.1 Attitudes Toward Team Teaching with NESTs

Before looking into the participants' attitudes toward team teaching with NESTs, it is worth knowing the extent to which these trainee teachers have received training in team teaching in their pre-service training programs. Only

about half of the participants (53.9%) claimed that they had taken courses that discussed team teaching in classrooms in teacher education, and only 30.5% of the participants said that they had taken courses in which they had two teachers teaching English together in their training programs. The interviews provide more detailed information about the participants' training in team teaching:

Daniel: My training program covers team teaching only a little bit. I am studying TESOL but in the curriculum of the department, team teaching is hardly covered. There is no specific course that focuses on team teaching because team teaching is not popular and common in Taiwan. Team teaching is scarcely applied to the classrooms and nobody pays attention to it. My training in the aspect is zero...I feel a little bit scared about team teaching probably due to my insufficient training in this area.

Bridge: I don't know in what way the class will be presented

under the distribution of roles in team teaching because I am not really clear about how team teaching works. I have never seen Taiwanese teachers and NESTs team teaching together. It seems to me that there is no difference between independent teaching and team teaching.

For the participants' attitudes toward team teaching, the survey shows that less than half (49.3%) of the participants claimed that they looked forward to team teaching with other Taiwanese English teachers (Table 1). In contrast, as high as 63.6% of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed that they looked forward to team teaching with NESTs (Table 2). The results suggest that most of the participants are willing to team teach with NESTs, and they are more interested in team teaching when their teaching partners are NESTs rather than NNESTs.

Table 1
Response to 'I Look Forward to Team Teaching with Taiwanese English Teachers'

(N=258)

	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean# (SD)
Number	5	40	86	109	18	3.37(0.90)
Percentage	1.9	15.5	33.3	42.2	7.1	

The higher the mean, the more the respondents agreed with the statement.

Table 2
Response to 'I Look Forward to Team Teaching with NESTs'

(N=258)

	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean# (SD)
Number	4	20	70	132	32	3.65 (0.85)
Percentage	1.5	7.8	27.1	51.2	12.4	

The higher the mean, the more the respondents agreed with the statement.

Another relevant survey result regarding the participants' attitudes toward team teaching with NESTs is their belief in the effectiveness of team teaching on students' learning. The majority of the participants (73.6%)

believe that it is beneficial to English learners if Taiwanese English teachers teach English together with NESTs in the classrooms, while 10.1% are against the benefits of team teaching on students' learning (Table 3).

Table 3
Response to 'It is Beneficial to English Learners if Taiwanese English Teachers Teach English Together with NESTs'

(N=258)

	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean# (SD)
Number	1	25	42	137	53	3.84 (0.88)
Percentage	0.4	9.7	16.3	53.1	20.5	

The higher the mean, the more the respondents agreed with the statement.

In the interview, Dorothy (FY) talked about the benefits of team teaching with NESTs and mentioned: *'I think team teaching is beneficial to students. NESTs can complement our [Taiwanese English teachers'] weaknesses and we*

can complement theirs'. Sharing a similar perspective, Andy (TY) said: *'NESTs and Taiwanese English teachers have their respective advantages and disadvantages. They can complement each other, which is a good thing to students'*. Some participants further pointed out that the most significant advantage that NESTs can bring to the

team taught classes is the model for pronunciation:

Bruce (TY): I think it is definitely beneficial to students if Taiwanese English teachers teach English together with NESTs. After all, our [Taiwanese English teachers'] accent is different from that of NESTs. So I think it would be a good idea to have NESTs.

Christine (FY): I think it [team teaching with NESTs] is beneficial to students. I personally think it is not easy for Taiwanese people to learn a foreign language. After all, English is their [NESTs'] mother tongue, not ours. Students would find there are so many things they can learn if they have a chance to see how NESTs pronounce or how NESTs use specific words.

In addition to the respective advantages that both groups of teachers can offer to students, a number of the participants are interested in the atmosphere and environment that team teaching creates for students' learning. Petty (TY) mentioned: *'I think it's beneficial to students because we [Taiwanese English teachers and NESTs] will create an English environment. The environment will encourage students to express themselves in English. And I think that's pretty helpful to them'*. Many participants are also convinced that the presence of NESTs together with Taiwanese English teachers can bring students a 'whole-new' learning experience:

Kevin (TY): The model [team teaching] is new to students and can motivate students to learn the language. They will find learning English is not only for exams but also for communication. In the short term, learning English is for exams. But in the long term, the purpose of learning English is to communicate with foreigners. Team teaching is a great help to students. English classes are no longer just exams, exams, and exams.

Janet (GS): I think students may learn more efficiently if they have access to a variety of teaching styles, including Taiwanese teachers' styles and NESTs' styles...The two teachers might have their own teaching styles, which provide students the chance to experience different teaching styles. Students will thus have more opportunities to find out the teaching styles that suit them the best.

In addition to the benefits of team teaching on students' learning, many participants believe that team teaching with NESTs is also beneficial to their professional development as ELT practitioners. They believe that they can get more opportunities to improve their teaching by team teaching with NESTs. The following quotes illustrate this perspective:

Laura (TY): I can fix up my weaknesses in teaching skills by watching the way NESTs teach. I can also improve my English proficiency by communicating with NESTs. And NESTs may learn grammar concepts which confuse them from me. I think this [team teaching with NESTs] is pretty good.

Christine (FY): I would like to take a look at their [NESTs'] teaching methods and compare them with ours [Taiwanese English teachers' teaching methods]. I feel that their teaching methods are much more open and flexible than ours. I would like to see how they manage classrooms and conduct teaching activities.

3.2 Concerns about Team Teaching with NESTs

In the interviews, participants discussed different concerns regarding team teaching with NESTs, among which the most frequently mentioned was NESTs' dominance and NNESTs' marginalization in the classrooms. Based on their observation or experiences, they are afraid that in team taught classes, NESTs might take over the whole class and they might become teaching assistants, living translators, or servants who are only responsible for preparing teaching materials or running errands without actually getting involved in the teaching. The following quotes illustrate this concern:

Emily (GS): I have had the experience of observing a team taught class and it was like the Taiwanese teacher was just a translator and the NEST dominated the class. The Taiwanese teacher just followed what the NEST said and assisted the NEST. The feeling is that the Taiwanese teacher was just a translator and there's actually no team teaching.

Edward (FY): I observed a classmate of mine who taught English together with a NEST in a primary school. What I saw was that my classmate was just like a translator. He didn't need to have too many teaching skills. He did whatever the NEST needed him to do. He was not like a teacher. He was like a translator standing there.

Laura (TY): When NESTs teach in the classrooms, they show little respect to Taiwanese teachers who are allocated to team teaching with them. They even see Taiwanese teachers as teaching assistants and ask them to prepare teaching materials or run some errands. Team teaching is actually a lie because Taiwanese teachers seldom have a chance to talk when NESTs teach on the platform. Basically, it is NESTs who dominate the classes. Taiwanese teachers are like assistants or servants.

Another major concern the participants have about team teaching with NESTs is communication problems with their NEST partners. Many participants see communication quality with NESTs as a crucial factor in determining whether team teaching can be carried out successfully. Edward and Bruce, for example, both believe that the success of team teaching depends on whether the two teachers can communicate effectively:

Edward (FY): Communication before conducting team teaching is very important. I think it is necessary for two teachers to communicate well regarding the purpose of the lesson, the essence of teaching and the distribution of duties in advance if team teaching is applied.

Bruce (TY): I think we [the NEST and I] might need to communicate a lot before we cooperate. It may become a big problem if we cannot get along with each other well. In that case, it would be really difficult to carry out team teaching. It is very important to cultivate our consensus beforehand.

To a number of participants, establishing effective communication with NESTs is not an easy job even though they are aware of its importance. They are worried about the conflicts and tensions between them and their NEST partners because of the differences in character,

beliefs about teaching English, and cultural and training backgrounds. The following quotes illustrate their concern:

James (FY): I feel that foreigners are quite stubborn. It seems that it's hard to persuade them to change their mind. I am quite worried about this. They might be very direct with me if they don't like my lesson plans. They might not change their feeling or opinion regarding my lesson plans.

Vera (FY): I think more or less there would be communication problems. After all, we [The NEST and I] have different cultures. The professional training we have taken might also be different from each other. It's possible that we have different

opinions about teaching methods.

The participants' concerns about team teaching with NESTs are also reflected in their attitudes towards conducting English classes without the presence of NESTs. Table 4 shows that as high as 44.9% of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed that they would prefer teaching English alone if they could choose, while 16.6% either disagreed or strongly disagreed. This finding suggests that given the choice of conducting English classes alone, nearly half of the participants would opt for individual teaching rather than team teaching with NESTs.

Table 4
Response to 'If I could Choose, I would Prefer Teaching English Alone'

(N=258)

	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean# (SD)
Number	5	38	99	85	31	3.38 (0.94)
Percentage	1.9	14.7	38.4	32.9	12.0	

The higher the mean, the more the respondents agreed with the statement.

The interview that followed provides more in-depth information about the survey results. Audrey, Daniel, and Theresa all mentioned that they would prefer teaching alone even though they thought team teaching was beneficial to students' learning. They opted for teaching alone simply because they thought that in comparison with team teaching with NESTs, teaching alone would be a more 'effective' way of teaching English given the complexity of carrying out team teaching:

Audrey (TY): Our [NESTs' and my] beliefs regarding teaching and learning might be different and our preference for teaching methods might also be different. So I believe the effect of teaching alone is better than that of team teaching with NESTs.

Daniel (FY): There are a lot of things that need to be taken into account in team teaching, including the distribution of the duties and the timing of exchanging the leading role and supporting role played respectively by the two teachers. It is hard to control the timing and tempo. I prefer teaching alone because I think it is more effective. Team teaching involves more jobs and takes more time to prepare the classes. I think it is a bit troublesome.

Theresa (FY): We [Taiwanese English teacher trainees] went observing English teaching at a school once. There was a NEST and a Taiwanese teacher team teaching together. I found that the NEST couldn't discover the students' confusion in the class. The teaching practice was actually dependent on the Taiwanese teachers' coordination...I was wondering why it took two English teachers to accomplish the class that actually could have been done by just one single Taiwanese teacher.

DISCUSSION

Although the concept of team teaching has been around for some 40 years, many still consider it a 'new' methodology, and a fairly 'threatening' one at that (Marilyn, 2010). The pre-service NNESTs in this study showed a

great interest and willingness to team teach with NEST, which is quite different from the findings in the literature. However, team teaching with NESTs seems to be a threatening model to the participants. The participants' concerns about their marginalization in the classrooms and potential communication problems with NESTs might explain why nearly half of the participants prefer teaching alone rather than engaging in team teaching with NESTs. Since teachers can benefit professionally from team teaching, it is important to engage both NESTs and NNESTs in team teaching. In particular, for pre-service NESTs and NNESTs who are in the critical stage of constructing their identities as teachers, they need greater exposure to team teaching. Engaging NESTs and NNESTs in collaborative teaching at the pre-service level may yield improved results when these teachers eventually take part in team teaching at the in-service level.

To achieve that, teacher educators need to take greater responsibility in preparing pre-service teachers for team teaching. Firstly, training programs should reinforce in pre-service NNESTs that in comparison with NESTs, NNESTs possess unique assets in ELT (e.g., capability of speaking students' mother tongue; understanding about students' cultural background; familiarity of educational system). This awareness would help pre-service NNESTs to feel more empowered when they take part in team teaching. Secondly, team teaching may be most effective when it is 'team learning', in which all the team members are encouraged to exchange ideas and cultural values although it is expected to face varying levels of resistance from team members because team teaching is complex by nature. Collaborative skills such as collegial enquiry and reflection are needed to resolve conflicts and tensions, and engaging in collaborative learning seems to be a promis-

ing way to develop these collaborative skills (Laurillard, 2009). Thirdly, training courses need to be put in place to help pre-service NESTs and NNESTs gain knowledge and develop skills involved in team teaching partnerships. For example, courses which provide specific descriptions of instructional strategies (e.g., joint engagement in progressive planning of all aspects of the course; joint attendance in all class meetings) would provide trainee teachers with opportunities to understand the roles and responsibilities of teachers in team teaching partnerships and thus enhance their understanding about how team teaching can be effectively carried out. Lastly, teacher training institutes should provide pre-service NESTs and NNESTs with sufficient opportunities to practice team teaching in classroom settings through collaborative projects with schools to allow teachers to explore how team teaching can best serve pedagogy.

CONCLUSION

NESTs-NNESTs team teaching is claimed to be beneficial to teacher development, student achievement, and school success, but is a complex issue because of the necessary involvement of two different groups of teachers. This study investigated pre-service NNESTs' attitudes toward and concerns about team teaching with NESTs. The results show that the participants believe that team teaching with NESTs is beneficial to English learners and are willing to team teach with NESTs, but are concerned about their marginalization in the classrooms and potential communication problems with NESTs. Since successful team teaching requires effort from both NESTs and NNESTs, teacher educators need to take greater responsibility in preparing pre-service NESTs and NNESTs for this challenging task.

NOTES

1. The study is part of a larger study conducted by the author. The larger study investigated the impact of NESTs on pre-service NNESTs' professional identity formation in an EFL context.
2. The questionnaire used in the larger survey consists of 55 questions, among which relevant items regarding the issues concerned in this study were selected.

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APPENDIX

Survey questions relevant to this study:

1. If I could choose, I would prefer teaching English alone
2. It is beneficial to English learners if Taiwanese English teachers teach English together with NESTs
3. I look forward to team teaching with NESTs
4. I look forward to team teaching with Taiwanese English teachers
5. I have had courses that discuss team teaching in classrooms
6. I have had courses in which I had two teachers working together