English Language & Literature Teaching, Vol. 17, No. 2 Summer 2011

The Challenges Native English-Speaking Teachers Face in Korean Secondary Schools

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Nam, Hyun-Ha. (2011). The challenges native English-speaking teachers face in Korean secondary schools. *English Language & Literature Teaching, 17*(2), 59-77.

In recent years, as many native English speakers are working in Asia to as English teachers, team teaching with local teachers has been commonly implemented within the Korean EFL classroom. Using qualitative case studies, this paper aims to explore native English-speaking teachers' (NESTs) perceptions of team teaching and their challenges at different secondary Korean schools. The study documents the challenges faced by three foreign teachers embedded in intercultural teaching teams. The data shows that common challenges include vague role distribution among teachers, problems presented by mixed levels of students, large classes, and students' low valuation during foreign teacher's classes, which go ungraded. The study calls for serious governmental efforts to change these fundamental problems and closely examine local factors that strongly affect team teaching practices before initiating a system of importing foreign teachers without proper preparation.

[team teaching/teaching in Korea/native English teachers/secondary schools]

I. INTRODUCTION

With globalization's many growing demands, many Asian countries have implemented English-teaching programs and have recruited native English speakers to teach in them. The Korean government has launched a program for public schools, known as English Program in Korea (EPIK) and other similar local education programs. With a great number of these programs implemented, more and more foreign teachers have arrived in Korea and received assignments to teach at primary and secondary schools. The foreign teachers work at the national level through EPIK or at the local

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educational level through such programs as the Gyeonggi English Program in Korea (GEPIK). These situations represent common teaching arrangements across Korea (Carless, 2006).

Many consider importation of foreign teachers from English-speaking countries as a strategic way to introduce authentic language input into the EFL classroom and to enhance students' communicative skills. In fact, students have shown noticeable improvement in pronunciation, communicative competence, and cross-cultural awareness in foreign teachers' classes (Nam, 2010). Despite these benefits, some have criticized the system, citing the practice of hiring unqualified NESTs as well as unfavourable conditions such as large classroom size, an exam-oriented atmosphere, and students' inadequate preparation for English-only instruction (Barratt & Kontra, 2000; Mattos, 1997). In the meantime, EPIK and GEPIK's expectations hold that NESTs will co-teach with local English teachers and promote English learning more effectively in the Korean EFL context. Regarding co-teaching or team teaching, Richards and Farrell (2005) define team teaching as followings;

> Team teaching is a process in which two or more teachers share the responsibility for teaching a class. The teachers share responsibility for planning the class or course, for teaching it, and for any follow-up work associated with the class such as evaluation and assessment. It thus involves a cycle of team planning, team teaching, and team follow-up (p. 159).

However, not many teachers know what type of co-teaching to practice, how to divide responsibilities in real-time teaching, and what types of lesson plans to prepare beforehand. Under these circumstances, school districts have failed to set clear guidelines. Moreover, further follow-up approaches have not properly taken place to see what and how the teachers teach within the school unit. Studies of other countries' experiences with co-teaching between NESTs and non-native English-speaking teachers (NNEST), reveal a perceived lack of value for money, the difficulties of integrating foreigners into local systems, and conflicts between local and foreign teachers (Carless, 2006).

While some reports (e.g. Kim, 2010) using questionnaire present a broad and insightful views, there is not much empirical research examining what goes on in team teaching between these two groups of teachers or the opinions of NEST team teachers. In order to enable the voices of co-teachers to be featured prominently, this paper mainly draws on data across different contexts such as middle schools and high school and focuses specifically on the NESTs' challenging situations and their perceptions on those situations based on the qualitative method.

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Although NESTs have contributed considerably to teaching English to Korean students for decades, we have only a limited number of teaching reports from NESTs. Their voices and expectations should comprise part of the whole context of teaching English in Korea. The current study, based on three NESTs' experiences working in Korean secondary schools, aims to offer such an account. With this goal in mind, this study intends to investigate the following research questions:

1. How do the focal foreign teachers perceive intercultural team teaching?
2. What, if any, challenges do the focal foreign teachers encounter?
3. What suggestions do NESTs have to improve current teaching styles?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the past decade, a growing number of studies attempted to better understand the nature of NESTs and NNESTs. Several studies have documented how they can specifically contribute to the language teaching profession (Benke & Medgyes, 2005; Medgyes, 1994) as well as to the new frame of pedagogical intervention to empower NNESTs (Braine, 2005; Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 2001; Cook, 1999; Llurda, 2005: Han, 2010). Clearly, the issues surrounding NNESTs' unequal status or concerns have been continuously addressed through the research. Just like NNESTs, many people from English-speaking countries have traveled to Asian countries to make a living teaching English. Some of them join government-initiated programs while many others work for private language academies. A large-scale EPIK program launched in Korea required a massive recruitment effort for foreign teachers mainly from English-speaking countries: the USA, the UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. According to EPIK, NESTs' duties include conducting English conversation classes for Korean students and teachers, developing teaching materials, and engaging in activities related to English teaching and learning.

Earlier relevant literature on NESTs' teaching in Korea reported some positive impact from NESTs' teaching (Caress, 2006) and also highlighted some challenges and conflicts that had arisen (Han, 2005). However, considering the time and effort invested by the Korean government, much of the research questions the effectiveness of the program. Han (2005) conducted a study investigating South Korean adult learners' viewpoints of NESTs teaching English at language centers and universities in South Korea. She interviewed 12 adult Korean learners' about their opinions on NESTs working in Korea. The study showed surprisingly negative general views from all the learners about NESTs. The interviewees reported that NESTs lacked an understanding of Korean culture,

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language, educational context, learners' needs, interests and preferences as the main causes of the perceived failure. They also reported that "NESTs appeared unable or unwilling to develop interpersonal relationships with learners and lacked the qualities of a good teacher, including sincerity, enthusiasm and responsibility" (Han, 2005, p. 206). She discussed the difficulty for both learners and NESTs in a classroom to fully understand each other without shared communication systems, shared knowledge, and cultural sensitivity.

Using a questionnaire survey of 20 EPIK teachers, Choi (2001) reported that the untrained and inexperienced NESTs requested more support and professional guidance, but in view of the organizational challenges facing program, these were rarely forthcoming. Kwon (2000) reported that cultural clashes occurred between NESTs and NNESTs were caused by a perceived lack of respect for well-established Korean practices.

Regarding the issues of English team teaching programs commonly implemented in East Asia, the role of the foreign teachers is meant to supporting local Korean English teachers through a somewhat vaguely defined concept of team teaching or co-teaching. Others have documented some countries' experiences with the inherent difficulties in such practices. In the case of Japan, researchers (Browne & Wada, 1998; Crooks, 2001) pointed out issues and problems including: insufficiency of teacher preparation in both groups of team teachers, lack of a well-established system to prepare Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) as new university graduates to co-teach English in an entirely different social and educational environment and failure to provide team teachers with clear guidelines on their roles and responsibilities for collaboration. As a result, the pedagogical aims of team teaching remain difficult to achieve, in that ALTs are often times viewed as human tape recorders and Japanese Teachers of English (JTEs) as interpreters (Tajino & Walker, 1998).

This phenomenon also persists in Korean classrooms. Carless (2001, 2004) found not only confusion among team teachers regarding the roles they should play in team-teaching classrooms, but also confusion among some schools about how to use the native English teachers. As Nunan (1992) argues that one of the important factors for collaborative team teaching is whether the involved teachers have the time to implement team teaching. In the Korean school context, local Korean teachers' heavy workloads prevent them from finding time for team teaching planning, which can be easily avoided if either partner, mainly NESTs dominated the lesson. Moote (2003) argues in an interview study that communication problems and a clash of teaching styles were two common challenges for intercultural team teaching. Choi (2001) also points out those EPIK program respondents have had a difficulty in teaching students who would not concentrate on a foreign teacher's class with no exam. Under these circumstances,

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however, Carless (2006) reports good examples of team teaching practice in counterpoint to the challenges. The author suggests that successful intercultural team teaching can be effectively ensured under the important conditions such as open-mindedness, flexibility, sensitivity and goodwill of participants. Therefore, researchers need to urgently investigate the current practices to understand the multiple contexts surrounding their work and thus explore the possibility of better collaboration between local and foreign teachers in the Korean context.

III. METHODOLOGY

The current qualitative case study focuses on the challenges that foreign English teachers encounter in Korean secondary schools. The study also examines foreign teachers' collaboration with local teachers and their suggestions to improve English teaching in Korea.

1. Participant Recruitment

To enroll participants in this study, I attended an annual school demo-lesson jointly attended by NESTs and NNESTs in order to see what goes on between two team teachers at public schools. The annual demo-lesson is mandatory for a school with an assigned NEST, and English teachers from the same school district were invited in an effort to improve classroom teaching. An evaluation conference of the demo-lesson took place for attendees after the team teaching, and teachers shared ideas and made suggestions for better teaching. Using this opportunity, I recruited three NESTs out of the attendees for in-depth interviews to further explore their backgrounds, challenges and perceptions of current team teaching practices at their schools. I conducted the semi-structured interviews in a systematic and consistent order.

2. Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection began in early February of 2009, ended in late May of 2010, and included different methods such as interviews, field notes and researcher journals. Personal interviews with teachers following case study research design comprised the dominant strategy for data collection (Creswell, 2006). I conducted and audio-taped the semi-structured interviews with the consent of the participants. I also took field notes during the interviews and later rewrote these notes to integrate them into interview transcripts.

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In addition, within two hours of each interview, I typed initial thoughts on the interviews into a research log to include information about any distractions in the interview, or other noteworthy issues. All the interviews were transcribed verbatim within ten days of each interview for further data analysis. In keeping with qualitative research methods, I used analytic induction (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984) to analyze the transcribed interview data, recorded field notes during interviews, and maintained research journals.

IV. FINDINGS

1. Mary

1) Background information

After earning her Bachelor's degree, Mary came to Korea from Canada to teach English as a foreign language co-teacher at K high school. In her country, she did not have any teaching experience or credentials. She was assigned to teach at the school for three years through the GEPIK program, which she learned about through an advertisement on the Internet. She arrived in Korea in February, looking for a job to pay her student loan. Mary was advised to choose a public school, which would be a safer option than a Hakwon, or private institute. At K school, Mary taught first and second grade high school students along with five Korean English co-teachers.

2) Mary's perception of team-teaching with local teachers

Mary participated in a GEPIK conference before she began working at K school. In the training workshop, she obtained information on Korean culture, how to teach Korean students, and how to work with local teachers. Mary was told that the Korean co-teachers would collaborate with her in making lesson plans and sharing ideas with them. She assumed that the Korean teachers were fully prepared for and aware of their duties in the role of co-teacher. Her expectations toward co-teaching were that "co-teachers would work with her to develop lessons, and class time should be divided between her and them" (fieldnote, 02/11/09), so that Mary and her co-teachers were participating equally in the teaching of the class.

In practice, Mary became doubtful of whether "they [Korean co-teachers] received

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similar information or were even told what was expected of them" (interview, 02/11/09). In her experience, Korean co-teachers simply showed up to class and stood at the back of the classroom, translating and disciplining whenever she requested it. Fortunately, she had one good Korean co-teacher who worked well with her and provided input, but the majority of her co-teachers showed an unenthusiastic attitude in the classroom. Mary realized that the idea of co-teaching was great in theory, but it was not as effective in practice.

Concerning the role of Korean co-teachers in disciplining the students, they and Mary did not always see eye to eye regarding when discipline was needed. Mary believed that Korean co-teachers should be responsible for the majority of discipline, since it was difficult for a non-Korean speaker to implement discipline and get results. In some scenarios, according to Mary, "I believed the class to be too loud or not focusing enough, and the Korean co-teacher thought they were just being high school girls" (Interview, 02/11/09). The difference in interpretations of the concept of co-teaching between a foreign teacher and Korean English teachers would likely decrease its benefits and effectiveness.

Furthermore, the other major role of Korean co-teachers, translation in the classroom, often created a rather awkward atmosphere. Since the class comprised mixed levels of students, the Korean co-teachers' partial translation assistance would be helpful for the lower level Korean students. However, Mary was often doubtful if three ways of translation were really helpful for the students. She noted, for instance, the following:

> I used lots of labels, pictures with words, repetition, and review. I also used a lot of body language, which the students picked up on and started using themselves, and I asked my co-teachers not to translate everything I say, rather to translate key words when I am certain the students don't understand. This helped the students to try to understand me, and try to speak to me. (Interview, 03-14/10)

Mary believed that her students were at the level of understanding where they could participate in an English-only classroom, assisted by facial expressions and context cues, without needing to revert to translation. The Korean co-teacher's translations often interrupted the natural flow of class discussions conducted by NESTs, since students and the foreign teacher had to wait until each translation was finished. In this sense, what her Korean students needed was not simple translation done by her Korean co-teachers line by line, but a more concentrated effort to develop students' ability to speak and express themselves in English.

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3) Mary's challenges

No-mark policy in foreign teachers' classes

One of major things that Mary struggled with in handling the Korean class was that the students depended too much on rote memorization of the texts. With so much stress placed upon the students preparing for upcoming tests and the expectation, they get 100% on every assignment. Mary found that students often used the English conversational class with her as their rest time or homework time, rather than focusing their full attention on the class. Mary expressed that, "In my class, there were no marks assigned to students. My class was presented to them as simply a conversation English class. Korean students take their marks to heart, and are under too much pressure to perform perfectly" (Interview, 03/20/09). Therefore, the native English speaking class was regarded by Korean students as a "free class" or "resting time," since they weren't being evaluated, which was the main source of controlling the students in all-Korean classrooms. Mary expressed her feelings as follows:

> I think that the students are overtired, overstressed and hopeless in my class. I try to encourage the studying of English and speaking of English in the classroom, but it cannot be done overnight. I used a lot of ESL lesson plans which are entertaining, valuable, and engaging. This is not easy and is virtually impossible given that the students don't care because there are no marks given in class. (Interview, 03/20/09)

Mary was often disappointed that there was little she could do to motivate the students who only really cared about the marks. Mary's frustration with the difficulty of implementing the activities did not take into account the expectations of students and teachers in the context of Korean culture, where hardly anything is considered more important than exams.

2. Tom

1) Background information

Tom came from the U.S. and had been teaching English as a foreign language in Korea since May 2001. Before he came to Korea, he did not have any teaching experience or related teaching credentials. Tom worked for the first five or so years in private academies, and now he had just signed a contract to begin teaching in a public middle school. He had worked most of the time in Gyeounggi-do, but he had also

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worked for two years in Ulsan and for six months in Jeolla nam-do. During his tenure as an English teacher, he had seen a lot of changes, both in approaches to teaching methods and in the results of teaching English in a Korean setting. Tom believed that he had gained a fairly good understanding of Korean culture and the state of education in Korea, compared to other foreign teachers.

2) Tom's perception of team-teaching with local teachers

The data collected from Tom indicated that the current co-teaching system can work splendidly, but it can just as easily be a "gigantic nightmare" (fieldnote, 03/11/2010). Tom has had experience with good and poor co-teachers. Tom described one good co-teacher as being agreeable and open to new ideas as well as new methods of teaching. In the classroom, the Korean co-teacher working with Tom was very helpful by pointing out terms and ideas with which the students were not familiar. She was also very interested in English riddles, puzzles, and unfamiliar idioms that he taught the students. Tom also said that a good co-teacher would direct the students to ask questions in English. In Tom's experience, compromise and adaptation were essential qualities for a good co-teaching relationship.

Another of Tom's co-teachers, on the other hand, was "closed-minded and confrontational, someone who was constantly looking for faults, both professional and personal." (fieldnote, 10/11/09). According to him, "the co-teacher was constantly late for class and, while in class, did not pay any attention to the lesson and mostly stared off into space. This teacher did not provide any help to me or the students in the class" (interview, 11/15/09). The relationship between Tom and this co-teacher deteriorated to the point where a verbal altercation took place in class, in front of the students, and Tom asked the teacher to leave the classroom. After several meetings with the principal and vice-principal, it was decided that they should not work together, and a new co-teacher was assigned to him. For Tom, this experience was a bad example of co-teaching with a local teacher.

Over his five years of teaching, Tom worked with many different Korean co-teachers. Some of them took full control of the lesson and used the native English teacher like an audio recorder, only including him in "listen and repeat" parts of the class, while other teachers had no involvement in lesson planning and left the teaching of the class entirely to Tom. Therefore, Tom's case showed that co-teaching doesn't function in practice exactly as it is imagined by stakeholders in theory. It needs the sincere involvement of both sides, as well as extensive preparation and clear guidelines, to make it work well.

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3) Tom's challenges

Dealing with mixed level of students

Students in the middle school where Tom was working felt the pressures of constant examinations that would be a large part in determining their future chances of getting into high-quality universities in Korea. The location of the school is in one of the new planned cities in the southern part of Gyonggi-do. Parents have high expectations about academic achievement of their children. Tom observed that as exams become more important, students begin to study for the exams rather than for knowledge. Especially, students cared so much about the scores of the regular exams which affect high school admission. They study past exam formats from teachers to predict future exam questions; they take special classes in private academies that focus on strategies to master multiple choice exams. Consequently Tom's students adapt their desires from wanting to participate in activities that have no influence on their final grade to only wanting to do activities or exercises that will allow them to boost their final score.

Although there are some students who give up on their chances for a university education, there are over-achieving students that are vying for the few open slots at the most prestigious universities in Korea. These students study every night and fight for every possible point available for academic success. Tom had a great difficulty in dealing with both of these groups of students who were potentially disruptive in the classroom. The low achievers were simply bored and were killing time until the bell rang and they could return to the soccer field. On the other hand, the over achievers were also bored because the material in the middle schools is far too basic for their advanced level so they tended to tease their classmates for not knowing this relatively easy material.

Tom expressed that one third of forty students in one classroom couldn't hold a very simple conversation with him. However, some students with overseas experiences or with intensive and long-term private education speak like native English speakers. Teaching them about the basic conversation skills presented in the regular middle school textbook obviously made them bored and unmotivated. Due to different levels and expectations, Tom expressed that it was difficult to know where the goal was to set and how to teach the students. In order to improve conditions for all students, he introduced a daily English diary in which students would write as much as they wanted to the teacher, in English, and he would respond in time for the next class. The higher level students wrote pages and pages of stories they wanted to tell him while the lower level students were just excited to see English on their page. It was one of the successful activities that Tom used to deal with the mixed levels of students.

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3. Dan

1) Background information

Dan has lived in Korea for two years. He worked at a private academy teaching elementary students English for one year. He taught at K middle school through a GEPIK program initiated by the Gyeonggi Office of Education. Originally from the U. K., he travelled to Korea to experience Asian culture and repay his student loan by working as an English teacher. Dan holds a bachelor's degree in tourism and worked at a hotel in Australia before he found a teaching job in Korea. Dan had no teaching experience or teaching training before he started his teaching job. After his one year of experience teaching kindergartners and elementary school students at a private academy, he wanted to move out of teaching young students by singing and dancing. He was happy to find a job at a middle school and began teaching first and second graders in February 2009.

2) Dan's perception of team teaching with local teachers

Dan appreciated the co-teacher system because he did not know the Korean educational system and needed help from co-teachers in terms of teaching and making lesson plans. In class, Dan often requested his Korean co-teacher to explain difficult words and directions for the activities. Despite these benefits from his Korean co teachers, most of the problems that Dan had were related to the different classroom culture. Since their methods of disciplining students differed culturally, the two teachers did not share approaches to class rules and punishment. For instance, Dan confessed his shock at the ways Korean teachers treated the students who misbehaved in class. According to Dan, "I have seen co-teachers slug students, and verbally berate and embarrass them" (Interview, 04/24/09). Dan wanted to implement a point system in his class, and asked his co-teachers to call the disruptive students' parents directly or take the students to the principal's office. However, the teachers did not support him. Dan said,

> It can be difficult when one teacher says one thing and the other teacher something else. The form of classroom management with some of the teachers can be a bit disturbing for me. (Interview, 04/24/09)

In addition to the different classroom management styles of NESTs and NNESTs in team teaching, Dan found that Korean students acted as a group rather than as

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individuals. He also found it difficult to have students express their ideas or opinions confidently, regardless of their scores. Meanwhile, according to Dan,

> The Korean classroom is structured to the Korean teacher lecturing and the students listen. The students do not seem conditioned to think for themselves and form an opinion and certainly not to share it publicly. My questions often go unanswered because they are too shy to speak out. Interview, 04/21/09)

While Dan suffered frustration from the students' unwillingness, Korean teachers felt comfortable with students' passivity and the teacher's strict, unchallenged authority during class. These different expectations and classroom cultures between the two teachers brought misunderstandings and unnecessary tensions in class.

3) Dan's challenges

Large size of classroom

More than anything else, a large classroom size of forty students represents a challenge for any teacher. With forty students of different skill levels, foreign teachers have little chance to meet the expectation that they will improve students' communication skills. The interaction between the teacher and students tends toward the simple and predictable due to communication barriers and large classroom management issues. Dan said, "I prepared activities in which the students are working in small groups, but it didn't go well, actually" (Interview, 03/20/09). Dan wanted more than the simple "yes" or "no" he heard from his students. However, his leading role as a foreign teacher with forty students did offer more chances go with a lecture format in front of the class because of the language barrier, low motivation, and large classroom size. Dan said, "When you have forty students, you cannot really do discussion-like class. If you did, the class would be chaos. Most students end up talking with their friends" (Interview, 03/20/09). Dan clearly recognized his role as a foreign teacher to help students communicate better in English, and he realized that having the students talk more freely would get better results, but conditions did not allow him to implement a conversation class.

Meanwhile, in order to combat these problems, Dan made continuous efforts by having students prepare personal folders for each student. Inside, there was a piece of paper which had a question based on the week's lesson on one side, and their English diary on the other. Students who answered the weekly question 4 times in a row received stickers and at the end of the year the students with the most stickers received a prize such as box of chocolate and candies.

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4. NEST Suggestions for Improved English-language Teaching in Korea

The participants in the study made suggestions to improve English-language teaching in Korea from their experiences. The suggestions ranged from fundamental and macro level changes to personal issues. The most elementary issues as taken from the interviewees' experiences as follows: First, the interviewees pointed to the systematic improvement of large class sizes.

> Smaller classes would be the biggest thing. I would also suggest having the classes separated into levels more. I like the after school class for the low level students and ones for advanced students. I would take it even further though and have advanced classes during normal school hours. You could have the students take a placement exam before the school year starts and then put them in the appropriate level class, regardless of their grade. First, second and third grade students could all be in the same class. (Mary, 04/28/10)

Participants articulated their concerns about large classes with one voice, saying 30 to 40 students in one class fails to meet the needs of an English-conversation class. Conversation classes targeting communicative skills do not work well with a large class size regardless of the teacher.

Besides the basic problem of a large class size, the participants mentioned the exam-oriented atmosphere. Dan questioned the multiple-choice exam format, which fails to test any speaking skills that students learn in NESTs' classrooms.

> I would continue to emphasize listening and speaking because I think it is the most useful for the students. I would encourage more group projects, speeches, listening exercises, and other things to base their grades on instead of just tests. But the problem is that such skills are not measured on the exams. There should have more writing questions and less multiple choice on the tests. (Dan, 04/02/10)

Further, the participants expressed their concerns about exam-oriented issues, which seriously affect Korean teaching and learning style and attitudes. Considering the huge impact of the Korean SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) on class teaching, participants wanted their teaching represented to a certain extent on the tests and elimination of many of the multiple choice questions.

> I would say that the class of the NEST is not valued at anything for the students.

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> There is no homework, no tests, no marks, no quizzes, and no final grades. Perhaps even making the NEST's class count towards a small percentage of the student's final grade would help add value to the English class. (Tom, 03/11/10)

The fact that the NEST's class does not get a grade may effect the value students place on their classes. The schools should explore a more appropriate form of exam. Furthermore, NESTs also pointed out the importance of careful screening of qualified foreign teachers. In this regard, Tom felt strongly, saying:

> Last, something I haven't mentioned yet is the quality of teaching of the NESTs. I think the easiest way to improve the current system is to be more selective in hiring NESTs. I've met so many NESTs who I thought seemed unqualified to be teaching: NESTs who openly talked about their hatred for their students, coworkers, and Korea in general; NESTs who explained they were only teaching in Korea to party, to have an easy job, or to find a girlfriend, etc; NESTs who were unknowingly teaching incorrect meanings of vocabulary and incorrect uses of grammar. (Tom, 05/12/10)

In addition to the issues mentioned above, the participants suggested improved working conditions; paying foreign English teachers based on performance; and rooting out xenophobic elements in the Office of Education and the government, who sabotage efforts to move Korea toward learning English. They also pointed out that students speak too much Korean in the English-language classrooms, and they hope to see an English-only rule enforced, saying a multilingual Korean is better than a unilingual Korean. Furthermore, they felt cultural training for first-time NESTs and NNESTs would greatly benefit future co-teaching efforts

V. DISCUSSION

The three participants, Mary, Tom, and Dan, all taught through the EPIK or GEPIK programs. Having to cope with unfamiliar demands in the new educational context challenged them in many respects. The three participants commonly mentioned the ineffectiveness of the vague design for team teaching and the fact that the teaching goals constantly drifted, made it impossible to set goals and handle Korean classrooms pedagogically. The unclear regulation of NEST and local English teacher duties in the classroom confused all three participants. The data revealed that the Korean co-teacher's role remains that of translator or disciplinarian rather than someone actively engaged in

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developing lesson plans and sharing class ideas.

However, according to the guidebook on foreign teacher management published by the Gyeonggi Provincial Office of Education, NNESTs should play a role of no greater than thirty percent, so that students have more exposure to NESTs. No specific guidelines exist as to how to work together and which lesson content each should teach. Wong's (2006) study also showed that most NESTs have no idea of their role or how to teach certain content. This leaves a situation with the two different groups possessing a different set of standards about teaching who must meet the stated ESL or EFL goals in a very particular local context.

This failure to provide clear guidelines for the two types of teachers can only worsen team teaching efforts, and leaves Korean students with the results of ineffective team teaching. To make things worse, NESTs have no proper channel or platform to share their teaching experience in Korea or to exchange ideas on teaching with each other. Although EPIK or other local GEPIK programs hire NESTs and assign them to a certain school, they do not monitor or disseminate information well. NESTs and local teachers at each school annually must attend a demo-lesson, but this merely shows an eventful demo-lesson that is not a part of regular lessons. In addition, the three participants of this study work in individual offices by themselves while the local teachers share a teachers' room. This situation does not give them sufficient opportunities to discuss lesson plans. We know that local teachers have an overwhelming amount of administrative work as well as teaching duties, and to boost the success of team teaching, they need district-level systematic support.

Moreover, the greatest difficulties NESTs in Korea encounter involve the pedagogical environment, including large class size, the exam-oriented culture, and classroom management issues. Mary expressed her agony that students considered her class a "free class" or "resting time." Under the Korean pedagogical context, students do not take ungraded classes seriously. In terms of mixed ability, having students with mixed ability in one classroom greatly challenged teachers who cannot speak the students' native tongue. Large class sizes in Korea do not lend themselves to effective language teaching. All participants struggled with systematic problems, which made it difficult for NESTs to implement their teaching methods. This would make it difficult for NESTs to meet the expectations of the Korean system and to implement any communicative approach to language teaching in the classroom, despite the fact that hiring NESTs is part of effort to improve students' communicative skills.

The language barrier of monolingual teachers also prevents qualitative interactions between NESTs and students. This kind of language barrier and different cultural base do not help NESTs manage classrooms successfully even with the involvement of local Korean teachers. One of the NESTs in Tsai's (2003) study indicated that the language

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barrier may represent the direct cause of the high turnover rate of NESTs. In a similar context, a NEST in Tsai (2007) study proposed that NESTs in Taiwan may face specific difficulties in the classroom, including compulsion, mixed ability, and class size. As for compulsion, the author commented that it is impossible for English to be taught in a meaningful way as a compulsory learning subject under the exam-oriented educational system like those of Asian countries.

Therefore, under the heavy stress of entrance exam preparation, NESTs find themselves in an awkward position because the course content and teaching activities of English lessons require helping students pass exams. As Walker (2001) stated, “It does not make sense to have NESTs also operate as exam trainers” (p. 69). Due to the compulsory nature of the entrance exam, the foreign teachers, as strangers to the local contexts, have no power or authority over teaching materials and contents, which are heavily exam-oriented. The tension between the teaching philosophy of native English teachers, which is more communication-oriented, and that of nonnative local teachers, which usually places much more emphasis on grammar and exam preparation, as well as different perspectives on teaching, all lead to unwanted situations in which the foreign teachers become isolated from the entire teaching staff and, ultimately, frustrated (Carless, 2004).

Finally, these challenges caused by fundamental problems also contribute to increasing the burden of financial and political concerns of the Korean government. With the high cost of hiring NESTs from other countries, the government faces potential unemployment of local English teachers by reducing the budget for local teacher training. Therefore, under the circumstances, we should note Nunan’s (1992) argument that collaborative language teaching can only hope to succeed under three conditions: they must have time to implement team teaching; they should receive appropriate administrative or managerial support.

VI. CONCLUSION

While the current study mainly addresses the aspects of ineffective team teaching and their agonies, I do not mean to say that NESTs’ contribution to improving students’ learning should go unrecognized and unappreciated. This study seeks a better understanding for future teaching. For Korean students to get maximum benefits from intercultural team teaching and foreign teachers, more systematic support should go toward NESTs and NNESTs. Under the Korean EFL system, teachers find it hard to teach students at the individual level. More than anything else, the exam-driven environment represents a serious obstacle to overall teaching and learning, especially

교보문고 KYOBO Book Centre

communication classes conducted by NESTs in Korea.

In addition, schools should make the effort to reduce the burden of Korean local teachers. Most NESTs expressed the view of Korean teachers are enslaved by administrative work and teaching hours, making it hard to conduct discussions during work hours. Accordingly, reducing the burden of local teachers and helping them focus on their primary job of teaching would represent a first step to ensure support. For their part, NESTs need to make an effort to understand the culture and students' expectations. Receiving more initial preparation on the target culture would eliminate some unnecessary trial and error and would promote mutual understanding. The successful implementation of co-teaching requires government-level support. I strongly recommend regular mutual feedback at the individual schools in regular conferences between teachers and extending this to the school district level, so that teachers—both NESTS and NNESTS—can share opinions and ideas.

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Examples in: English and Korean
Applicable Language: English
Applicable Level: Secondary

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Received in April 15, 2011
Reviewed in May 20, 2011
Revised version received in June 11, 2011

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