



## **Teaching the Same Lesson Twice: Comparing Student Evaluation Surveys to Analyze Teacher Efficacy across Classes**

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### **Introduction**

Many teachers may teach the same class to two or more sections of students. There is some question as to whether the students receive the same education depending on if they are in the first or second section. For example, some teachers may feel more fresh, energized, and attentive the first time they teach a lesson. However, their timing, organization, and explanations may be improved the second time around. As a specific example of changes from the first to the second class, I will occasionally cancel certain portions of a lesson that went particularly poorly during the first lesson, and this leaves me with 5 or 10 extra minutes at the end of a 95-minute lesson during the second section. Therefore, the second section gets extra activities or speaking practice that the first section does not. Do these minor adjustments add up over the course of a semester and leave a large gap between the quality of education for the students in the first section versus the second?

### **Literature Review**

Repetitive teaching of the same course to two or more sections of students is a common part of professional work for most educators. There have been a number of studies showing mostly positive attitudes towards repetitive teaching from the teachers' perspective (Klein, 2012; Klein & Wasserstein-Warnet, 2006). However, it's difficult to accurately assess the students' attitudes towards being a part of this repetitive system. Student Evaluations of Teachers (SET) give us one look into what students think.

SET have become quite common at universities throughout the world (Spencer & Schmelkin, 2002). SET are in such general use, that nearly any university lecturer can summarize their use. At the end of the semester, students evaluate their instructor, occasionally evaluating their textbooks, Teaching Assistants, and other aspects related to the course. Students often are asked to complete a Likert scale to answer fairly generally worded questions or statements so that the survey can be applied to a number of different courses throughout the university.

There are three reasons that many universities administer these SETs. First, the teachers can use the information to change and enhance their lessons. Second, the administration can use the information to weed out poor teachers and reward exceptional ones. Finally, the students can use the information to learn about the faculty at the university (Spencer & Schmelkin, 2002).

These surveys are generally anonymous (including the ones in this study) so that students can feel free

to be as critical as they wish. However, although students can answer as honestly as they like, they are still likely to skew their answers towards the middle. In *How to Design and Analyze a Survey*, Peters cautions when analyzing survey results, that “people tend to avoid extremes” (Peters, n.d. Section 6, paragraph 23). For example, if using a Likert scale, respondents will avoid answering either 1 or 10, even if they feel strongly negatively or positively.

During an interview with the Director of the English Program at Asia Pacific University at Ritsumeikan, James Blackwell said that in his experience, students rarely choose the extremes in SET questionnaires. In fact, among 45 or 50 teachers in the English Language Department, “the difference between the highest and lowest scores between teachers on a certain question might only be from 3.2 - 4.6 out of a score from 0 - 5” (J. Blackwell, personal communication. Oct. 21st 2015).

Occasionally students complete these surveys without taking the care teachers would hope to see. There’s no argument that each student will put a different amount of care and attention into a survey of this type. Some students will thoughtfully answer each question, some will grow bored and begin rushing at some point in the middle, and some students may haphazardly answer neutral responses throughout the entire survey. The survey results may also be slightly skewed because students who tend to skip class are more likely to be absent on any particular day than other students. As a result students with lax attendance may well be absent on survey day and their (possibly more negative) reviews will not be noted. Perhaps they are absent because the teacher is boring, confusing, or offensive? Due to a lack of such response data, the teacher and university are less likely to discover problems of that nature. Bertrand and Mullainathan (2001) stated in their essay, *Do People Mean What They Say? Implications for Subjective Survey Data*, “Part of the problem comes from respondents’ reluctance to admit lack of an attitude. Simply because the surveyor is asking the question, respondents believe that they should have an opinion about it” (p. 68). It is also possible that the year the student is in school will affect his or her care when filling out the survey. Spencer and Schmelkin (2002) found that as students progress in their academic career, they treat these surveys with more distrust. The students may believe that the opinions of the students are not considered in any important decision-making processes.

As this survey included mainly non-Japanese faculty and their mostly Japanese students, the findings may differ from situations in which teaching staff and students are of the same nationality. Japanese students (like those who participated in these surveys) tend to expect different things from their Japanese professors than their foreign professors. In Shimizu’s (2000) extensive survey asking Japanese students about their English teachers in Japan, she finds that students rated “how easy they are to get acquainted with” and “how entertaining they were” as the two traits most highly rated for foreign teachers. On the other hand, the same students rated as most important traits for Japanese teachers were “knowledge of the subject” and “pronunciation.” Are any of these four traits actually the most important things for teachers? Do these traits help students learn languages well? Is it fair to judge teachers by students’ standards?

Another question often raised about the use of Student Evaluations of Teachers regards how accurately they measure teaching. Spooren, Mortelmans and Denekens (2013) stated in their evaluations of SETs, that, “Teacher performance and the quality of teaching could be defined as the extent to which student expectations are met, thus equating student ‘opinions’ with ‘teacher quality’ (2013, p. 89). Should the students be able to decide who is a “good teacher” or not? Can they understand how they effectively learn?

Although it seems that there are a few reasons to have reservations about Student Evaluations of Teaching quality, there is evidence that shows that these SETs are a reliable way of measuring teaching skill. In Kulik’s (2002) Review, *“Student Ratings: Validity, Utility, and Controversy,”* he mentions a number of strong arguments in support of this system. Kulik (2002) found that, “Students learn more from highly rated teachers...students’ ratings agree with observer ratings...[and] student ratings agree with alumni ratings” (p.12-14). In short, Kulik’s (2002) analysis of many available SET studies shows that students’ appraisal of educators often matched many other assessors of student learning, independent observers, and alumni rankings. In response to the argument that students might merely be rating entertaining, easy or energetic teachers higher, Kulik (2002) further deduced that SETs do not, “Measure

Showmanship...Body Language...Lenient Grading...or Vocal Expressiveness” (p.22-23 ).

Teachers’ attitudes towards repetitive teaching have been studied by Klein and Wasserstein-Warnet (2006) in their article, “Repetition Teaching and Effective Learning.” In this article, they discuss the pros and cons of teaching the same lesson to multiple class sections from the teacher’s point of view, indicating a mostly positive viewpoint. In fact, they state that this type of teaching can improve, “both quality of teaching and teacher work satisfaction without any heavy investments in resources, simply by scheduling some repetitive work for teachers” (Klein and Wasserstein-Warnet, 2006, p. 69). In a survey of 288 teachers, Klein and Wasserstein-Warnet (2006) found that the ideal percentage (in the educators’ viewpoints) of repeated classes is 50-60% repetition of course from the previous year and 50% new courses. In a more recent study by Klein (2012), he found that this style of teaching greatly helped the teachers, as they learn from and adjust the lesson after they have taught it once. (p. 741). In addition, Klein (2012) noted that this manner of teaching the same class twice allowed the teachers to assist students more and delve more deeply into the class. ( p. 741).

All things considered, it appears that SETs have both positive and negative sides, but if utilized carefully, can inform educators and administrators about their teaching skills. In addition, teachers tend to be supportive of teaching multiple lessons, and have the viewpoint that these repeated lessons make them better teachers, particularly for the second class. However, do students agree? The following data attempts to answer that question.

### Methodology

The students involved in the study were studying at a private university in Japan. There were 497 student surveys analyzed from a total of 34 classes taught by 15 teachers. The courses included in this survey were Pre-Intermediate English, Intermediate English, and Upper-Intermediate English. There were 241 students who were in the first section taught by a teacher and 256 students in the second class section. Most teachers at this university teach two or three 95 minute classes Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday, and they frequently teach the same class twice in a row, even in the same classroom. Furthermore, most teachers make a strong effort to keep both classes on the exact same schedule in order to streamline planning.

The University asks all students to fill out a survey for each class at the end of the semester. This survey is the same for all the language classes. There are questions about the textbook, the difficulty of the class, the students’ effort and time spent studying outside of class, and finally, the survey asks about the instructor. The survey asks 29 multiple choice questions and two short-answer questions which take 10 to 20 minutes to complete. The students can choose to read and answer the questions in either English or Japanese. With the assistance of the University’s Research Office and the permission of teachers, I analyzed the results of the following 10 questions from the survey given to six classes at the pre-intermediate level, 14 classes at the intermediate, and 14 classes at the upper intermediate level. While some of these are focused on teachers’ behavior in the classroom, some of them are concerned about course content or teachers’ actions outside of class time. This combination of questions was chosen in order to see if there were changes from the first class section or the second class section both in things that could change within each particular class and things that were more general or set outside of the class time. The possible answers to these questions were either *strongly disagree*, *disagree*, *neutral*, *agree*, and *strongly agree* unless otherwise noted.

*I mostly spoke the language of instruction (English, Japanese, etc.) during lesson times.*

*The level of this course was (too hard, too easy, about right for me)*

*I understood the overall objectives of this course.*

*The teacher clearly explained the overall objectives of the course.*

*The teacher introduced the objectives of each lesson at the start of the lesson.*

*The teacher adjusted his/her speaking speed to the level of the course.*

*The teacher provided helpful feedback after assessments or homework.*  
*The teacher helped me outside of the lesson times when I asked him/her.*  
*The teacher was dedicated to the course which helped me to learn the language.*  
*I am satisfied with my class teacher in this course.*

### Results and Discussion

Most of the responses revealed very little difference between the first and second sections. However, three questions elicited responses that were quite different from the first to second section: *The teacher clearly explained the overall objectives of the course*, *The teacher introduced the objectives of each lesson at the start of the lesson*, and *The teacher adjusted his/her speaking speed to the level of the course*.

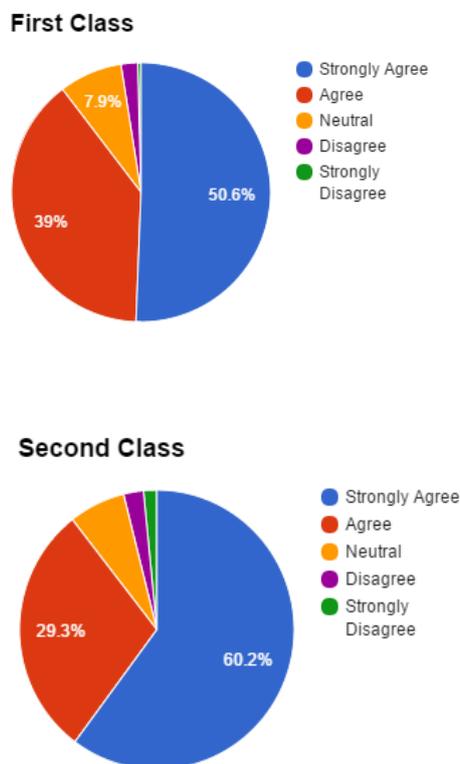


Figure 1. The teacher clearly explained the overall objectives of the course.

Although each course has clearly stated objectives, the explanation of, and reference to these objectives is left to the discretion of each instructor.. From the first class to the second class, the percentage of students who *strongly agreed* that the teacher clearly explained the overall objectives rose by nearly 10%. It's possible that the teacher felt better able to clarify the objectives the second time teaching the class.

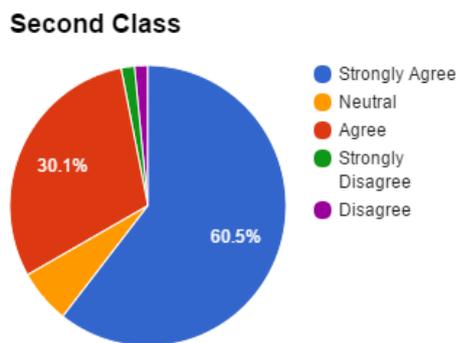
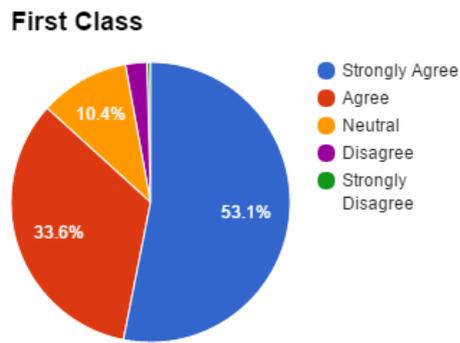


Figure 1. The teacher introduced the objectives of each lesson at the start of the lesson

Here, the *strongly agree* section increases by 7.4%. If you add together the *Strongly Agree* section and the *Agree* section in order to discover the general positive view, you see that there is still a difference of 3.9% in total positive responses. Perhaps in the earlier section the teacher had no time to write the day’s objective on the board before the lesson. However, as many teachers teach the next section in the same classroom, that teacher may have had time to write objectives on the board between the first and second sections, or during the class. Another possible explanation is that the teacher is not as well-prepared as he or she would hope to be and cannot clearly articulate the lessons objectives until after teaching the lesson one time.

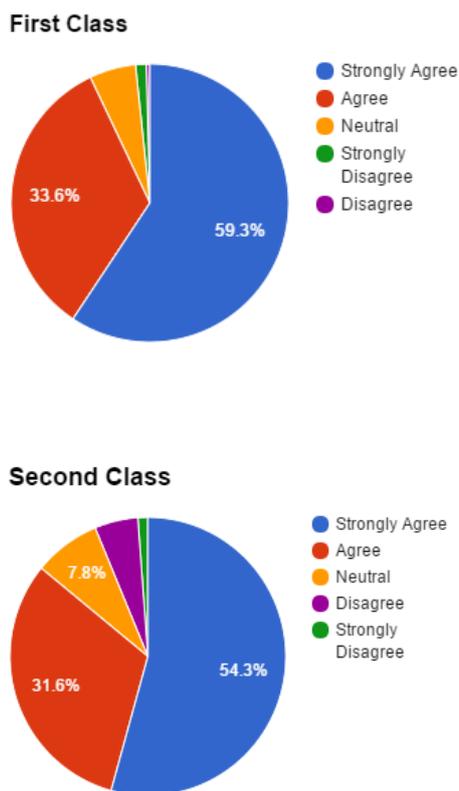


Figure 1. The teacher adjusted his/her speaking speed to the level of the course.

For this question the combined favorable responses decreased by 7% for the later section. It's unfortunate that the answers did not allow students to indicate if the teacher spoke too slowly or too quickly if the response was anything other than *Strongly Agree*. It's possible that the teachers unconsciously quicken their speaking speed in the second class. They've already delivered the instructions once, and so they do not notice that they are speaking too quickly for students. These student evaluations cover nearly all ranges of levels, so it's also possible that the students felt that the teacher was speaking unnecessarily slow in the high level classes.

### Conclusion

The only questions which showed a significant difference from the first to the second class were, The teacher clearly explained the overall objectives of the course, The teacher introduced the objectives of each lesson at the start of the lesson, and The teacher adjusted his/her speaking speed to the level of the course. It's possible that all three of these concerns can be solved by personal reflection on the instructor's part. It's easy to see how the second time a teacher goes through a lesson plan, certain changes occur, whether deliberate or otherwise. Teachers must be aware of these differences and take steps to mitigate the impact. All students deserve to understand the overall objectives of their courses. Teachers must plan well enough ahead to be able to write daily objectives on the board before every class. We need to develop the ability to monitor our speaking pace. It is these small things that make a significant difference in students' overall learning experience.

So, which class section gets the better educational experience? I had assumed that the second class

would have the better experience, due to my personal feeling that I was better able to introduce activities and instructions, could cut ineffective activities, and explain new grammar concepts. My assumptions in this case turned out to be false. The students felt that the classes were more or less equal except in the three areas mentioned in this report. In order to improve the quality of both sections, teachers do need to keep those areas in mind. Teachers must notice and regulate their speech speed and take care to explicitly introduce and explain the objectives for the course and for each class.

### Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

It would be interesting to see if the students' responses were affected by nationality, race, or gender of the instructor. Analysis in these dimensions was impossible in this case as 12 out of 15 of the participating instructors were non-Japanese, white men. In addition, there seems to be very little other research in the field related to changes in teacher efficacy across class sections. Various parts of this study, including student evaluations of teachers, teacher styles, and student attitudes towards teachers, have been studied in depth, but the minimal changes that occur from section to section have not been researched. It would be interesting to read more studies on how things like time of day, age of students, and so forth can impact the SETs.

### The Author

Sara Hendricks currently lives and teaches in San Jose Chiapa, Mexico. She teaches at the UTBIS-Puebla University in cooperation with the English Language Fellows, a U.S. Department of State Program. At the time this study was conducted she was based at Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University. Her interests include gender studies, rapid vocabulary acquisition, and self-study.

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