Perceptions of Native and Non-native English Teachers by Taiwanese University EFL Students [1]

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Abstract

English is the dominant global language used for international communication, business, science, and education. It is the largest second language (L2) and foreign language (FL) learned throughout the world. Therefore, there are more L2 and FL speakers of English than native speakers of English. Globally the number of non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs) teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) has surpassed the number of native English speaking teachers (NESTs). The debate about whether NETSs are better suited for these positions has continued for years. This quantitative study involved 1,237 Asian EFL university students and investigated their perceptions and attitudes towards NESTs and NNESTs based on six specific areas: the correct use of English in the classroom, the ability to help and/or assist students' language learning, teaching methodologies and pedagogy, the understanding of L2 learner's difficulties and their empathy towards learners, general perceptions towards their English teachers, and perceptions regarding their own comfort level in the ESL/EFL classroom. The results indicate that the participants hold higher perceptions of NESTs than NNESTs in all six of the areas that were measured, with the exception of the teacher's ability to empathize and understand the learners' difficulties, which indicated no significant difference.

Resumen

Inglés el lenguaje dominante a nivel global utilizado en las comunicaciones, negocios, ciencia y educación. Es el idioma secundario más grande (L2) y lengua extranjera (LE) más aprendida a nivel mundial. Es por esto que existen más L2 y LE hablantes del idioma Inglés, que nativos hablantes en Inglés. Globalmente el número de profesores de inglés no nativos (NNESTs) que enseñan este idioma como lengua extranjera (LE) han superado el número de profesores nativos de enseñanza en el idioma Inglés (NESTs). El debate en que si NETs son los más adecuados para estos trabajos ha continuado durante años. Este estudio cuantitativo comprendió de 1,237 Estudiantes EFL en Universidades Taiwanesas y se investigó sus percepciones así como actitudes hacia NESTs y NNESTs basado seis áreas en específico: el uso correcto de Inglés en clase, la habilidad de ayudar a los estudiantes en su aprendizaje del idioma, enseñanza de metodologías y pedagogía, la comprensión de las dificultades y empatías de los estudiantes L2 en relación con el aprendizaje, precepciones generales hacia sus propios profesores de inglés, y las percepciones con respecto al nivel mas cómodo en una clase de Inglés como segundo idioma. Los resultados indican que los participantes tienen altas expectaciones de NESTs que de NNEST en todas las seis áreas medidas y anteriormente mencionadas, con la excepción de la habilidad de los profesores de enfatizar y comprender las dificultades de los estudiantes, lo cual no indica alguna diferencia significativa.

Introduction

At present, English is the dominant global language (Bhatt, 2001; Crystal, 2003; Medgyes, 2003). Not only is it used for international communication and business, it is also the main language used for science, technology, and education. Therefore, English has become the largest second language (L2) and foreign language (FL) to be learned throughout the world. Today, there are more second and foreign language speakers of English than there are first language speakers of English (Graddol, 1997), and Crystal (2003) states that the ratio of native English speakers (NESs) to non-native English speakers (NNESs) has now become 1 to 4. As English is becoming the *lingua franca* of

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the world, the demand for English language learning and English instruction has also dramatically increased, along with the number of English language teachers throughout the world. Globally, the number of non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs) has surpassed the number of native English speaking teachers (NESTs) (Matsuda & Matsuda, 2001). Canagaragh (1999) estimated that 80% of the English language teachers throughout the world were non-native speakers and that number has probably risen by now. Given these numbers, several researchers (e.g., Arva & Medgyes, 2000; Davies, 2003) are seeking to determine who the most suitable people are to be teaching English as a second language (ESL) or English as a foreign language (EFL).

Many people assume that NESs are best suited for these positions, while others disagree. In fact, this heated topic has been debated for years. However, one point which is seldom argued is that with such a large increase in the number of NNESTs in the world, research on NNESTs has become widely accepted (Kamhi-Stein, 2004) and will continue to grow as there is tremendous interest in issues related to NNESTs in both English as a second language and English as a foreign language contexts. Further research on the topic of NNESTs is vital for the future of ESL/EFL and this comparative study is situated to explore Taiwanese EFL learner's perceptions and attitudes towards both NESTs and NNESTs.

The Spread of English throughout the World

The spread of English throughout the world has had major influences in several countries. English has become the *lingua franca*, or the most universal language, and is the chosen language for most international communication (Bhatt, 2001). According to Medgyes (2001), this can be seen in its widespread use in business, education, and technology. However, one of the side effects of a language becoming a *lingua franca* is that the language itself evolves as it is spread throughout the world and adapts to the local needs. Today, English is the official language or second language of more than fifty countries. Although there are so many English speakers who are sharing this common language, it is becoming increasingly diversified in its nature. Currently English has multiple linguistic variations, including accents, idioms, vernacular, etc. This phenomenon of English has been termed *World Englishes* (WEs).

In discussing WEs, Kachru (1996) offers a good explanation as he divided the world's English users into three concentric circles representing the global varieties of English: the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle, and the Expanding Circle. In the Inner Circle there are countries that use English as a mother tongue and include countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, etc. Traditionally, these speakers are viewed as model speakers of English and are referred to as native speakers. The Outer Circle countries are those that were introduced to English through colonization, mostly by the United Kingdom or the United States. Examples of Outer Circle countries would be India or the Philippines, and this is where the spread of English into non-native contexts began to take hold. Finally, Kachru describes the Expanding Circle as countries where English is being taught as a foreign language. Examples of these countries would include nations like Japan or China. Here is where the highest demand for English language learning and

teaching has been increasing in order to gain social and economic advantages in the world (Nunan, 2003).

In 1997, Crystal stated that there were almost two billion English language learners throughout the world. Therefore, there has also been a considerable growth in the number of language teachers over the years. It is this growing demand that has shifted the English language teacher from a NEST to a NNEST, and with it, perhaps it is also shifting who is considered the authority on English language teaching (ELT). Kachru (2001) also points out that as ESL/EFL speakers continue to outnumber native English speakers, it will increasingly become the responsibility of the non-native speakers to spread and teach the language.

A Brief Description of the Debate Regarding NESTs and NNESTs in ELT

This study uses the terms "native speaker" and "non-native speaker" because the distinction between them is the primary focus of this research. However, for the purpose of clarification, these key terms must be defined. In terms of this study, a *native speaker* will be defined according to Cook (2005) as "a person speaking a language they learnt first in childhood" (p.49). A *non-native speaker* will be defined according to Medgyes (2001) as everyone else who did not learn a language in a natural setting from childhood as their first language.

The debate over NESTs and NNESTs in ELT has largely been about who is better suited or better qualified to teach ESL/EFL. Maum (2002) clearly describes the situation:

> *The term nonnative-English-speaking teachers has created a division among professionals in the ELT profession. Supporters of the term believe that it is necessary to distinguish between native- and nonnative-English-speaking teachers because their differences are, in fact, their strengths and should be recognized. Those who oppose the dichotomy feel that differentiating among teachers based on their status as native or nonnative speakers perpetuates the dominance of the native speaker in the ELT profession. (p.1)*

According to several researchers (e.g., Amin, 2000; Braine, 1999), NES are more likely to be hired to teach ESL/EFL even without any specific teaching qualifications than qualified NNES. Some researchers have discussed this issue of *nativeness* as the *native speaker fallacy* and argue that merely being a native speaker of a language is not a guarantee that a person will be successful at teaching his or her own native language (Canagarah, 1999; Medgyes, 1994, 1999). Maum (2002) also argues that most of the intrinsic knowledge that a NES brings to the ESL/EFL classroom can also be learned by NNESTs through specific teacher training.

However, it is generally believed that native speaking language teachers have more advantages teaching L2 learners than non-native speaking language teachers (Liu, 1999). There is even a common belief that for NNESTs to become better quality teachers they need to "improve their linguistic skills to match those of native speakers, but they should also adopt the teaching practices and methods of NESTs" (Mahboob, 2004, p. 139). Some of the positive advantages that NES have been attributed with have been itemized by Beare (2013):

1. Native speakers provide accurate pronunciation models for learners.

2. Native speakers innately understand the intricacies of idiomatic English usage.
3. Native speakers can provide conversational opportunities in English that more closely mirror conversations that learners can expect to have with other English speakers.
4. Native speakers understand native English speaking cultures and can provide insight that non-native speakers cannot.
5. Native speakers speak English as it is actually spoken in English speaking countries. (p.1)

Not all researchers agree, as they point out that not all native language speakers will make good language teachers (Phillipson, 2001). Kachru (2001) believes that being a native speaker of a language is not the most important factor and that a NNEST who is well-trained can be equally effective. In fact, Medgyes (1994) believes that NNESTs have several strengths that NESTs do not have:

1. They can provide L2 learners with a positive role model for learning.
2. They can teach language learning strategies more effectively.
3. They can supply ESL/EFL learners with more information about the English language.
4. They can be more empathetic to the needs and problems of L2 learners.
5. They can incorporate the learners' first language (L1) as a method of teaching the L2 more efficiently.

Further, Cook (2005) and Tang (1997) have both argued that NNESTs can be successful because they have first hand experience acquiring English as an additional language and are perhaps more aware of their student's linguistic needs than NESTs. Canagarajah (1999) takes this point one step further as he believes NNESTs have an even better understanding of English grammar than NESTs.

Several previous studies (Arva & Medgyes, 2000; Benke & Medgyes, 2005) have demonstrated that NESTs and NNESTs have very different teaching approaches or behaviors in language classroom. These studies indicate that NESTs approach teaching English is a more relaxed and flexible style using a more student-centered approach, whereas the NNESTs tend to use a more traditional teacher-centered or curriculum-centered approach and rely more on the use of textbooks and very structured lessons. Figure 1 highlights some of the more significant differences in teaching behavior found between NESTs and NNESTs.

NESTs	NNESTs
Adopt a more flexible approach	Adopt a more guided approach
Are more innovative	Are more cautious
Are less empathetic	Are more empathetic
Focus on:	Focus on:
fluency	accuracy
meaning	form
language in us	grammar rules
oral skills	printed words
Attend to perceived needs	Attend to real needs
Are more casual	Are more strict
Prefer free activities	Prefer controlled activities
Use a variety of materials	Use a single textbook
Tolerate errors	Correct/punish for errors
Supply more cultural information	Supply less cultural information

Source: Medgye (1994)

Figure 1. General Perceptions of NESTs and NNEST.

Methodology

The purpose of this quantitative comparative study is to make a concrete contribution to the larger issues surrounding NESTs and NNESTs in the ESL/EFL classroom. The study intends to examine the perspectives of full-time EFL learners who have experienced both NESTs and NNESTs multiple times over the past ten years in order to achieve a better understanding of their overall perceptions and attitudes towards NESTs and NNESTs in the EFL classroom. Having a better understanding of learners' perceptions and attitudes is necessary because research has proven that students' attitudes are directly linked to student motivation (Cornelius-White & Harbaugh, 2010; Ferlazzo, 2011). In Taiwan, there is a general belief that foreigners, NESTs, can attract more students to learn English in the private sector and/or make better English teachers across all levels and learning environments.

Research Hypothesis

After studying EFL as a full-time student for ten years with both NESTs and NNESTs, will there be significant differences in the learners' perceptions and attitudes towards NESTs and NNESTs in the EFL classroom? Specifically, this study will be looking into six aspects of teaching EFL: the correct use of English in the classroom, the ability to help and/or assist students' language learning, teaching methodologies and pedagogy, the understanding of L2 learner's difficulties and their empathy towards learners, general perceptions towards their English teachers, and perceptions regarding their own comfort level in the ESL/EFL classroom. For this research there are three hypotheses:

Hypothesis number one: There will be a significant difference in the perceptions and attitudes towards NESTs and NNESTs in the EFL classroom.

Hypothesis number two: There will be more positive perceptions and attitudes towards NESTs in the areas of using English correctly in the classroom, ability to answer questions or provide adequate explanations, understanding of English speaking cultures, ability to accurately correct student errors, teaching methodologies, and L2 learner assessment.

Hypothesis number three: There will be more positive perceptions and attitudes towards NNESTs in the area of understanding of L2 learner's difficulties.

Setting

The study took place in Taipei, Taiwan, at a middle ranked private university. This university is unique in Taiwan, in that it requires all of its non-English majored students to participate in four years of EFL courses, when the standard at other Taiwanese universities is only two years for non-English majors. This university is also unique in that it is the first and only university in Taiwan to have U.S. accreditation, since 2009. There is no specific placement test within the English Language Center's EFL program and all students are placed into courses with their major's classmates. Therefore, all of the classes within this program have mixed-ability students, ranging from having basic to advanced language skills. However, students can take a standardized test, Test of English for International Communication (TOIEC), and if they achieve a score of 550, they have the option of not taking any EFL courses. The stated goal for the EFL program is that the students should be able to use English for meaningful, fluent communication with people from around the world. During the first two years of the program, all of the EFL courses are taught by NNESTs whose primary language is Mandarin Chinese, just as the students. The third and fourth year of the program are taught by NESTs. The curriculum and testing for this program is unified in that there are eight specific textbooks to be used, one for each semester of the program and all of the university exams only test students on vocabulary and topics from these textbooks. However, teachers have the option of using the designated textbooks or preparing their own curriculum. The EFL courses are taught by both NESTs and NNESTs and the majority of the teachers select to use the designated textbooks in the classes for a majority of the coursework. Specifically, the study took place during the 8th semester of the program, the second semester of the students' senior and final year, approximately one month before the students' graduation.

Participants

The population of interest was Taiwanese undergraduate EFL learners and there were a total of 1,237 valid participants. Of which, 804 were female and 433 were male. All of the participants can be considered a convenience sample, as they were all enrolled in the university's EFL program at the time of the study. All of the participants in this study had studied EFL full-time for a total of ten years throughout junior high school, high school, and at university. All of the students participating in this study had experience

with both NESTs and NNESTS. On average, the number of full-time NESTs they had during this ten year period was 3.4.

Data Collection

Data was collected using one comprehensive instrument (see Appendix), a survey consisting of 24 questions (12 questions regarding NESTs and 12 identical questions regarding NNESTs). The survey questions were designed to illicit honest and natural responses regarding the participants' perceptions and attitudes towards NESTs and NNESTs of EFL in the six specific areas mentioned in the "Research Hypothesis" section. Each question used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0-4 points in value.

A statistical analysis of the data used SPSS to determine the mean scores of each question, and then paired samples T-tests, with NNESTs as the independent variable and NESTs as the dependent variable, were used in order to determine the statistical significance of the participants' responses. The two-tailed statistical significance value was set at $p < 0.005$.

Results

The results of the participants' surveys are similar across all six areas except one, understanding L2 learner's difficulties and teachers empathy towards learners.

Data Analysis

A statistical analysis using a paired T-test for the section pertaining to the correct use of English in the classroom can be seen in Table 1, the ability to help and/or assist students' language learning can be seen in Table 2, teaching methodologies and pedagogy can be seen in Table 3, general perceptions towards their English teachers can be seen in Table 5, and perceptions regarding their own comfort level in the ESL/EFL classroom can be seen in Table 6. All of these analyses indicate a p-value of $p < 0.000$, indicating a high level of significance for the mean difference in the participants' responses. A statistical analysis of the section pertaining to the understanding of L2 learner's difficulties and their empathy towards learners can be seen in Table 4. The analysis of this section indicates a p-value of $p > 0.05$, indicating no significance for the mean difference in the participants' responses.

Questions	NEST's mean score	NNEST's mean score	Sig. (2-tailed) p<0.005
Q1 and Q2: Ability to use English correctly in class	3.819	2.921	0
Q7 and Q8: Correct pronunciation	3.882	2.641	0

Q=question

Table 1. The Correct Use of English in the Classroom.

Questions	NEST's mean score	NNEST's mean score	Sig. (2-tailed) p<0.005
Q3 and Q4: Ability to answer questions and/or provide adequate explanations	3.661	2.48	0
Q9 and Q10: Ability to correct learners' speaking errors	3.839	1.903	0
Q11 and Q12: Ability to correct learners writing errors	3.384	1.915	0
Q21 and Q22: Ability to accurately assess learners overall English abilities	2.738	1.941	0

Q=question

Table 2. The Ability to Help and/or Assist Students' Language Learning.

Questions	NEST's mean score	NNEST's mean score	Sig. (2-tailed) p<0.005
Q13 and Q14: Using textbooks as curriculum or main resource for teaching	2.114	3.479	0
Q15 and Q16: Use of authentic English teaching resources	2.835	0.68	0

Q=question

Table 3. Teaching Methodologies and Pedagogy.

Questions	NEST's mean score	NNEST's mean score	Sig. (2-tailed) p<0.005
Q19 and Q20: Ability to understand the difficulties learner's have learning ESL/EFL	2.377	2.323	0.075

Q=question

Table 4. Understanding L2 Learner's Difficulties and Teachers' Empathy towards Learners.

Questions	NEST's mean score	NNEST's mean score	Sig. (2-tailed) p<0.005
Q5 and Q6: Understanding of English speaking cultures	3.859	1.684	0
Q17 and Q18: Make good English language teachers	2.94	2.039	0

Q=question

Table 5. General Perceptions towards their English Teachers.

Questions	NEST's mean score	NNEST's mean score	Sig. (2-tailed) p<0.005
Q23 and Q24: Comfortable using English in their classroom	2.281	2.1	0

Q=question

Table 6. Perceptions Regarding Their Own Comfort Level in the ESL/EFL Classroom.

It would appear that the data, generated by this study, provides clear evidence relating to all three hypotheses of this study. The evidence supports hypothesis one for 5 out of the 6 aspects of teaching being measured in this study. The evidence also supports hypothesis two, in that the participants held more positive perceptions and attitudes towards NESTs than NNESTs in all aspects of this hypothesis. However, the evidence gathered does not support hypothesis three. Not only was there no statistically significant difference between the perceptions and attitudes towards NNESTs and NESTs in the area of understanding L2 learner's difficulties, the participants actually held slightly higher perceptions and attitudes towards NESTs in this area. For this aspect being measured, the mean score given for NESTs was 2.3775 with a standard deviation of 0.84890, while the mean score given for NNESTs was 2.3234 with a standard deviation of 0.70519.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to identify and examine if there were any significant differences in ESL/EFL learners' perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs. The study looked into the six specific areas noted in the *Research Hypothesis* section.

In examining the first grouping of questions, the NESTs scored higher values in both the correct use of English in the classroom and in correct English pronunciation than the NNESTs. The point-valued meaning of the responses best associated to NESTs is *always* using correct English and pronunciation, while the point-valued meaning of the responses related to the NNESTs is best associated to them using English correctly and correct pronunciation *most of the time*. These findings are in line with the advantages suggested by Beare (2013) and are also similar to the findings in other studies. In both Cheung's (2002) study in Hong Kong and Mahboob's (2003) study in the United States, the participants also reported that NESTs had better oral skills. Furthermore, Luk (1998) and Moussu (2002) identified NNESTs' English pronunciation to be an inadequate model for L2 pronunciation.

One factor that may be related to this issue is that many NNESTs may actually have very little experience speaking English. They may never have had a NEST and may have learned English in a more traditional classroom involving heavy bookwork and very little communicative language learning. However, Kirkpatrick (2010) recently argued that phonological proficiency in Asia should not be measured by NES standards. Instead, it should only be measured in the learners' ability to use English effectively and intelligently to communicate with other English speakers (Deterding & Kirkpatrick, 2006).

In examining the second grouping of questions looking at the NESTs' and NNESTs' perceived ability to help or assist the participants' language learning, the NESTs scored higher values in all four of the related questions. In the first two questions regarding the ability to answer questions or provide adequate explanations and the ability to correct the learners' speaking errors, the point-valued meaning of the responses is best associated with the NESTs is *always* being able to answer questions, provide adequate explanations, and to correct the learners' speaking errors. The point-valued meaning of the responses related to the NNESTs is best associated with *most of the time.*

The second questions regarding the ability to correct the learners' writing mistakes and accurately assess the L2 learners' overall language abilities indicated that the NESTs point-valued meaning is best associated with the response of *most of the time.* The NNESTs point-valued meaning is best associated with the response of *half of the time*. There is little doubt that these four qualities are necessary to be a successful and professional language instructor.

The findings in this study appear to refute Medgyes (1994) who believes that NNESTs have several strengths that NESTs do not have. This strength is specifically that NNEST can teach language learning strategies more effectively and can supply EFL learners with more information about the English language. The ability to answer questions effectively, provide adequate explanations, and accurately assess students are some of the most valuable and primary functions of a teacher. One would think it would be extremely difficult for a student to develop a positive relationship with their teacher if that student did not believe that the teacher had the ability to help them or accurately assess their language learning progress. This could lead to the students to lose any intrinsic motivation towards L2 learning they might have had prior to working with this teacher.

The third grouping of questions is related to the ability of teachers to empathize with the learner and understand the learners' difficulties in ESL/EFL learning. There was only a slight difference in the responses of the participants of only 0.1 with a p-value of p > 0.05. For both NESTs and NNESTs the point-valued meaning of the participants' responses are best associated with *half of the time*. Although the mean difference among the two groups may not have statistically indicated a significant difference, this in itself is perhaps the most significant finding.

Many of the researchers in the field supporting NNESTs as ESL/EFL teachers (e.g., Cook, 2005; Medgyes, 1994; Tang, 1997) have stated that they believe NNESTs have an advantage in the classroom due to their empathy and/or inside understanding of the ESL/EFL learner. They argue that NNESTs are more aware of the problems and difficulties ESL/EFL learners may encounter and can plan or prepare for them in advance. They further point out that NNESTs own ESL/EFL learning experiences allow them a better understanding of the ESL/EFL learners' weaknesses and can also better adjust than a NEST. Perhaps the claims made by these researchers may hold some value and in theory one might tend to believe that these factors could be an advantage. However, the data in this study does not support their conclusions. The participants in this study did not recognize any significant difference in that whether or not NESTs or

NNESTs teachers better understood their struggles or held any empathy towards their learning difficulties. Perhaps with regards to this issue, the relevant point is not whether the teacher is a NES or a NNES. Perhaps it is more about whether or not teachers are in tune with their students and has a greater awareness of language learning difficulties in general.

The fourth grouping of questions is related to the NESTs' and NNESTs' teaching methodologies and pedagogy. These questions were interested in which kinds of materials teachers used and how often the teachers took this approach to teaching EFL. In regards to teachers using a textbook as their main resource for teaching the L2, the NESTs were assigned a point-valued meaning that is best associated with *half of the time*. The NNESTs were assigned a point-valued meaning that is best associated with *most of the time*. In fact, the NNESTs point-valued meaning was just below the border separating *most of the time* and *always*. In regards to the teacher using authentic English resources for teaching the L2, the NESTs were assigned a point-valued meaning that is best associated with *most of the time*. The NNESTs were assigned a point-valued meaning that is best associated with *once in a while*. In fact, the NNESTs point-valued meaning was just above the border separating *never* and *once in a while*.

The findings of these questions are also similar to several other studies. Both Medgyes (1994) and Arva and Medgyes (2000) reported differences in teaching behavior and methodology between NESTs and NNESTs. Both studies indicated that NESTs used a wider variety of resources in the classroom and that NNESTs mostly relied on a single textbook. Arva and Medgyes (2000) also reported that NESTs tended to use more authentic English resources in the classroom. Benke and Medgyes (2005) also examined Hungarian EFL learners' perceptions of the differences in teaching behavior between NESTs and NNESTs. One of the findings in their study was that NNESTs preferred to use more traditional teaching methods, which would include direct instruction using a textbook.

While one can only speculate on the teaching approaches of the NESTs reported on by the participants in this study due to the nature of the data collected, one could much more accurately identify the teaching approaches of the NNESTs as either teacher-centered or content-centered based on the data collected by the participants. Mermelstein (2010) describes the teacher-centered approach as the traditional approach of teaching a lesson in front of a classroom, where the teacher determines the content to be taught, plans for instruction, implements the instructional plan, and evaluates the students' progress. In this approach, most teachers use lectures and textbooks as their main avenue of instruction. Mermelstein (2010) also describes the content-centered approach where the primary task of instruction is to cover the course material in a systematic design that emphasizes the student's acquisition of the materials. However, Mermelstein (2012) suggests that the student-centered approach that focuses on the students' needs, abilities, interests, and learning styles may be a better approach for student learning. Although student-centered methods have repeatedly been shown to be superior to the traditional instructor-centered approach to instruction (Felder & Brent, 2009), any approach a teacher employs will most likely have a strong influence on the students' perceptions in the classroom.

The fifth grouping of questions is intended to gather more general information about the participants' perceptions of their teachers. The first question is meant to determine how confident the learners were in the ability of their NESTs and NNESTs to understand English speaking cultures. The NESTs were assigned a point-valued meaning that is best associated with *always*. The NNESTs were assigned a point-valued meaning that is best associated with *half of the time*. The participants' response to this question yielded the highest mean difference of all of the questions on the survey. In today's world, language learning in itself is not the only goal of the language learner. More than ever learners are also interested in learning about other cultures and cultural differences. Most likely, this is due to media outlets, such as movies, the internet, MTV, other T.V. shows, and often it is this curiosity about other cultures that motivate students to want to learn a second language. Other studies have also found similar results as this study.

Cheung's (2002) study in Hong Kong involving 420 participants also reported that NESTs had greater insight into Western culture than NNESTs. Similarly, Mahboob's (2003) study in the United States using thirty two ESL learners in an intensive English program found that the NNESTs involved in the study had less cultural insight and awareness than the NESTs. In addition, these findings also concur with the advantages suggested by Beare (2013), that NESs have a better understanding of native English speaking cultures and this can assist them in providing greater insight that NNES can not.

Generally speaking, if a L2 teacher is perceived to not know very much about the cultures where the L2 is spoken, he/she may be perceived as not being qualified to teach the L2. This is what the second question in this grouping sought to answer. The second set of questions in this grouping asks a direct question of whether or not they believe NESTs and NNESTs make good English teachers. The NESTs were assigned a point-valued meaning that is best associated with *most of the time*. The NNESTs were assigned a point-valued meaning that is best associated with *half of the time*.

The sixth and final grouping of questions sought to determine whether or not the participants felt comfortable using English in a classroom that has a NEST and NNEST. To which, both NESTs and NNESTs were both assigned a point-value meaning of *half of the time*. However, the NESTs were reported to have a 0.18 higher mean score than the NNESTs, which is statistically significant and indicates that the participants feel more comfortable using English in classrooms taught by NESTs. Learners who are more comfortable and whose affective filter (Krashen, 1987) is lower, or more open, are more likely to take more risks when trying to produce in an L2. This is significant to the learning process as taking risks, and even making mistakes are vital to the learning process. Krashen (1991) also points out that the reduction of classroom tension also allows for an increased retention of input.

Overall, the results of this study indicate that the 1,237 participants hold higher perceptions of NESTs than they do of NNESTs in all six of the categories that were being measured, with the exception of the teacher's ability to empathize and understand the learners' difficulties. These findings are similar to a recent study conducted by Lasagabaster and Sierra (2005) who also sought to determine learners' perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs. Their study involved 76 university students and demonstrated a

stronger preference towards NESTs. Their study indicated that the learners believed they could learn more vocabulary, better pronunciation, and better speaking, listening, and writing skills from NESTs. They also indicated that the NESTs could better assess the learners' language ability and performance.

One factor which may play a role in the abilities of NNESTs and/or their perceptions among L2 learners could be their own educational experiences in English speaking countries. If a NNEST studied abroad, especially for undergraduate and graduate school, this could have an impact on the pedagogical approaches they use in the EFL classroom and it is possible that learners might observe a difference. This experience could also have given them the opportunity to reflect on their own language learning, both positively and negatively. Further, it would also have given them an opportunity to experience and learn more about an English speaking culture. NNESTs that do not have this experience may never generate different methods of teaching beyond the traditional methods used in the home countries.

Another issue to consider when evaluating the qualities of NESTs and NNESTs is their commitment to the teaching profession. In many EFL countries, teaching is considered a stable career and many people seek out teaching positions for this reason, instead of their commitment to teaching or helping others. There is no doubt a significant percentage of NNESTs who have found themselves as EFL teachers simply because they themselves have more adequate English abilities than others around them and/or those around them have such low English abilities they cannot properly evaluate English abilities in others. Similarly, there is a vast number of NESTs who have absolutely no experience or teaching skills prior to becoming an English teacher. However, being a native English speaker is often qualification enough to land a teaching position in an EFL speaking country. For this style of NEST, if their education and background training is in another field or if they are not planning on staying in the EFL country for a longer period of time, they may also lack commitment and have poor quality instruction (Griffith, 2011).

Freeman and Johnson (1998) believe that a lot of what language teachers know about teaching comes from their own past experiences as learners, language learners, and perhaps as language teachers. This is most likely true for both NESTs and NNESTs. Williams and Burden (1997) also agree that teacher beliefs can play an important role and that it is important for teachers to understand their own beliefs and practice the process of personal reflection. However, there are also other variables to consider. Most importantly this would be specific education and teacher training. Having said this, perhaps one of the defining differences between NESTs and NNESTs may be the cultural differences in their education systems and/or teacher training. The teachers of one culture may be heavily trained in a teacher-centered approach where classes are often directed by the lecture model and where students are usually exposed to extrinsic motivators (Mermelstein, 2012), while the teachers of another culture may be heavily trained in a student-centered approach or multiple approaches. One culture may be considered a test-based system, while another would be considered a skills-based system and/or utilizes multiple assessment methods. The current study indicates that the Taiwanese participants have a stronger preference towards the non-traditional

student-centered approach, which is not considered the *norm* in Taiwan. In fact, it is quite the opposite.

An earlier report by Matsuda (1999) indicated a large influx of NNESTs into graduate level TESOL programs in the United States. One might argue that if a NNES studies abroad or gets their graduate education or teacher training in a native English speaking country, they will automatically be a different teacher than if they had stayed in their native country for education or training or that they are automatically more qualified. Further, it could also be argued that studying abroad should automatically make the NNEST equal to the NEST. In this researcher's experience, this has not been found to be accurate. While it does make sense that a NNEST could have been exposed to new or different ideas or methodologies while studying abroad, and this could absolutely improve or change their teaching abilities and/or teaching appearance to their students, there is no guarantee that this will take place. Students from all countries who study abroad or in different cultures tend to bring with them the study habits and cultural perspectives from their native countries. In this researcher's opinion, it takes time for students to adapt, reflect, respect, and finally accept cultural differences. Perhaps one or two years of studying abroad are not enough time for full integration.

Conclusions

Maybe the most important factor regarding language teachers' abilities is not whether or not they are a native speaker. Perhaps it is more important that they actually know how to teach to students of different ability levels and if they are actually passionate about being a teacher. If teachers have passion towards their career, they are more likely to reflect this in their actions and seek out methods of improvement. As teachers, they should be more willing to put more effort into their classroom preparations and give more time and energy to their students. Some people, both native and non-native speakers, are natural born leaders and would most likely make excellent teachers even if their language proficiency is lower. Others may have been born with high linguistic aptitude and may possess excellent language proficiency, but just do not have the skills or patience to become effective teachers. Although most teaching environments around the world require teachers to have at least a little previous teaching experience or some sort of teaching certification, the high demand for teachers in many markets makes this difficult to enforce. Poor teachers can often slip through the cracks and go unnoticed by their employers.

However, one cannot, and should not, ignore the preferences of the learners as it can have a huge impact on their language learning interest and intrinsic motivation. The learners, or customers in many L2 learning environments, are also spending a vast amount of the time interacting with their teachers. Although they are not professionally trained to evaluate their teacher's performance or abilities, they are generally paying a lot more attention to their teacher's performance in the classroom than administrators. This puts them in a unique and excellent position to offer insight into the classroom practices of teachers.

It seems foolish to assume that just because a person was born and raised in an English speaking country, they can teach English more effectively than a NNEST. It does not

appear that the participants in this study made that assumption. Nevertheless, it seems that NNESTs may be facing many challenges in the field of language teaching. The findings of this study suggest that NESTs are generally viewed more positively than NNESTs. However, it is recommended that both NESTs and NNESTs should take steps to continually improve their teaching methodologies and classroom performance. As the debate regarding who makes a better EFL teacher, a NEST or a NNEST, continues, it seems clear that more studies in this field are needed.

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Appendix English Version of Student Survey

Read all of the statements carefully and circle the answer that best represents the way you think or feel. If you have any questions, please ask your teacher.

1. I feel confident in my NEST's ability to use English correctly in class.
never   once in a while   50% of the time   most of the time   always

2. I feel confident in my NNEST's ability to use English correctly in class.
never   once in a while   50% of the time   most of the time   always

3. I feel confident in my NEST's ability to answer questions or provide adequate explanations.
never   once in a while   50% of the time   most of the time   always

4. I feel confident in my NNEST's ability to answer questions or provide adequate explanations.
never   once in a while   50% of the time   most of the time   always

5. I feel confident in my NEST's understanding of English speaking cultures.
never   once in a while   50% of the time   most of the time   always

6. I feel confident in my NNEST's understanding of English speaking cultures.
never   once in a while   50% of the time   most of the time   always

7. I feel confident that my NEST's English pronunciation is correct.
never   once in a while   50% of the time   most of the time   always

8. I feel confident that my NNEST's English pronunciation is correct.
never   once in a while   50% of the time   most of the time   always

9. I feel confident in my NESTs ability to correct my speaking errors.
never   once in a while   50% of the time   most of the time   always

10. I feel confident in my NNESTs ability to correct my speaking errors.
never   once in a while   50% of the time   most of the time   always

11. I feel confident in my NESTs ability to correct my writing errors.
never   once in a while   50% of the time   most of the time   always

12. I feel confident in my NNESTs ability to correct my writing errors.
never   once in a while   50% of the time   most of the time   always

13. How often did your NESTs used a textbook as the main source of teaching English?
never   once in a while   50% of the time   most of the time   always

14. How often did your NNESTs used a textbook as the main source of teaching English?
never   once in a while   50% of the time   most of the time   always

15. How often did your NESTs used authentic English teaching resources?
never   once in a while   50% of the time   most of the time   always

16. How often did your NNESTs used authentic English teaching resources?
never   once in a while   50% of the time   most of the time   always

17. I believe NESs make good English language teachers.
never   once in a while   50% of the time   most of the time   always

18. I believe NNESs make good English language teachers.
never   once in a while   50% of the time   most of the time   always

19. I feel confident in my NEST's ability to understand the difficulties I have learning English.
never   once in a while   50% of the time   most of the time   always

20. I feel confident in my NNEST's ability to understand the difficulties I have learning English.
never   once in a while   50% of the time   most of the time   always

21. I feel confident in my NESTs ability to accurately assess my overall English abilities.
never   once in a while   50% of the time   most of the time   always

22. I feel confident in my NESTs ability to accurately assess my overall English abilities.
never   once in a while   50% of the time   most of the time   always

23. I feel comfortable using English in a class with an NEST.
never   once in a while   50% of the time   most of the time   always

24. I feel comfortable using English in a class with an NNEST.
never   once in a while   50% of the time   most of the time   always