

*Exploration of Native Speaker Teachers and Non-native Speaker Teachers
Within the English Learning Communication*

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Abstract

The present research zeros down to the unending and much-debated topic of native speaker teachers (NST) and non-native speaker teachers (NNST). Nonetheless, this critical debate has always revolved around English language teaching (ELT) and fails to look at the different attitudes and preferences between the two sets of teachers in the ETL frameworks and how that impacts students' understanding; an area this paper attempts to explore. The study administered questionnaires to extract an understanding of perceptions of the influence of NS/NNS teachers at Japanese universities. The population to whom the questionnaires were administered encompassed students enrolled in English communication courses. The findings are enlightening; although a clearer student preference for NS teachers in language lessons was evident, students' attitude is ambiguous and not explicit. Instead, variant themes are seen, including conflicting expectations from teachers by students, optimistic attitudes towards a blend of NS/NNS teachers, and the connection between language learning goals and NS/NNS teacher combination. The results are that a blend of NS and NNS teachers' best suits students' learning needs.

Keywords: Native English Speaking Teacher, Non-native English Speaking Teacher, English Language Education, Students' Preferences

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Introduction

When English communication language was introduced as an international language and started being taught, the issue of non-native speakers as teachers sparked a controversial debate. This debate of the Native Speakers Teachers (NSTs) and Non-native Speakers Teachers' (NNSTs) preferences and attitudes has generated arguments and many controversies. This issue cannot be ignored since the current reforms in the education sectors are championing multilingualism, multiculturalism, diversity, and the aim of attaining bilingualism in the English course. A series of research has been conducted on the issue of native speakers and non-native speakers on definition, their differences, and the issue supporting and going against each aspect. Much of the research and study has been on emphasizing non-native speaker teachers' visibility, making their voices more audible in the professional sphere, and exploring their strengths in the English learning course. This research proposal aims to explore the core debate regarding native speakers and non-native speakers, focusing on students' preferences and attitudes in Japanese university.

Literature review

The debate between native and non-native English teachers is as old as the notion of teacher identity. According to Li and Jin (2020, p.1099) "In the history, there have been preferences for NESTs and NNESTs respectively." Also, Walkinshaw and Oanh (2014) researched Japan and Vietnam on assumptions accrued to native English speakers' teachers as the written language's gold standard (Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2014). In these assumptions, non-native English speaker teachers are inferior educators lacking essential innate linguistic skills. Besides, their article explored the advantages and disadvantages of learning English courses from NEST and NNEST. This study had a perceived assumption on pronunciation, correct language, and repositories of cultural knowledge. However, the study found that NEST had some poor grammar explanations and tension in their cultures. The article further found that NNEST had an excellent perception of restoring students' first language, were good grammar teachers, and students found the interaction between them and NNEST excellent due to shared culture. However, NNEST had inferiority in pronunciation. They have more accessible in comprehending. According to Daftari (2017), the linguistic insecurity of speakers of a language is mostly related to their pronunciation, in the case of non-native teacher's it is referred to as the feeling of insecurity when teaching grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation.

The term, 'native' was constructed by Davies (2004) as the language of childhood acquisition, language production, and comprehension of idiomatic, competent comprehension, fluently, and spontaneous discourse (Davies, 2004). Besides, according to Walkinshaw and Oanh (2014), native speakers are influenced by several factors that enable them to comprehend the language fluently. These factors are age, occupation, geography, social status, and the standard forms of English. Also, since English is the primary language used worldwide as a second/foreign language, it is more widely used as a bridge language. Besides, (Wang 2012) found that native speakers are the prominent teachers of the English language course, and they continue to dominate the English language teaching profession (Wang, 2012). This assumption leads to non-native teachers lacking job opportunities in teaching English courses. According to research conducted by Clark and Paran (2007) on UK higher education institutions, 72.3% of the employers would hire employees with a native accent (Clark & Paran's 2007). Mahboob (2003) examined the hiring practices of 118 adult

ESL program directors and administrators in the US. He found that the number of NNESTs teaching ESL in the United States is low and disproportionate to the high number of NNEST graduate students that are enrolled in MA TESOL programs. He also found that 59.8% of the program administrators who responded to his survey used the “native speaker” criterion as their major decisive factor in the hiring process of ESL teachers. A reason for this discrimination was that administrators believed only NESTs could be proficient in English and qualified teachers. The biasing of the teachers based on native language reduced motivation for non-native teachers, and a survey conducted by Seidlhofer (1996) indicated that more than 57% of non-native English teachers feel insecure and unconfident while in the classroom.

Research conducted by Cheung and Braine (2007) on the Asian English learner towards NNEST found a favorable attitude towards the NNEST, and their perceived effectiveness matched NEST. Besides, NNEST classes were termed as friendlier and less stressful. More study on the perception of the NNEST and NEST by learners showed that many students preferred NNEST as their English language educators, and the students have a more positive feeling towards the NNEST. Many studies on the issue of NEST and NNEST perceptions in Japanese universities have focused on the teacher's perception rather than students' perceptions. On this note, a study conducted by Butler (2007) on high school teachers' perception about an English assistant who was NNEST revealed that junior high school teachers had a more positive perception of these assistants than the senior high school teachers (NEST) (Butler, 2007). Besides, in her report, Butler found that many believed that NNEST were good educators for the elementary classes, and they taught English better than NEST's.

Árva and Medgyes (2000) investigated the diverse traits between NNEST and NEST and found that both teachers are qualified as English teachers but have different teaching behaviors. The difference in teaching behavior resulted from their differences in linguistic competencies. Of all the differences accrued to these teachers, NEST had poor knowledge of grammar. This pitfall was the advantage of the NNEST as their skills are generated from in-depth studies and the capability to provide a scientific explanation of English language construction and use. According to Madrid (2004), the most prominent advantage of NEST is their superior linguistic and communication competence since English is their mother tongue and first language. Therefore, the NEST can use the language with greater spontaneity and naturalness compared to the NNEST, who acquired the language through studies. According to Madrid (2004), NNESTs prepare for their English classes more professionally and meticulously, following the textbook faithfully and sticking to what the course outline dictates.

Meadows and Muramatsu conducted a survey to investigate the student perception of NEST and NNEST and found that NNEST teachers help students acquire an achievable learning model. Besides, in their article, they second the idea of NNEST having metalinguistic knowledge of the English language due to its studies and affirmed that NNEST is viewed as inferior because of their lack of native-ness (Meadows & Muramatsu, 2007). Their article defined that the English language is highly influential to multiculturalism on the education perception. More so, they narrated that the issue about NEST and NNEST started in 1961 at Makerere University in Uganda and identified that the most cited publication on the issues was the "native speaker fallacy" by Phillipson in 1992. There are many scholars like Robert

Phillipson challenging the myth of native speakers, putting forward “the native speaker fallacy” that is against the dominance of native speakers in teaching English.

In contrast, NEST had positive confidence in their teaching techniques based on their naturalness of language ability. Perception later shifted to administrative, where employees preferred hiring NEST for their English courses. Now, the shift is on the student perception where many students, especially international students, prefer NEST to teach them English courses.

The perception created in English course teaching has influenced many studies on the formed social inequality. English language teaching and the issue presented regarding NEST and NNEST stems from the hegemonic status of the English language worldwide. Therefore, Meadow’s and Muramatsu’s focus shifted to other foreign languages that have native speakers and non-native speakers teaching them. Despite focusing their attention on other foreign languages, the results were similar to most EFL studies (high students' preferences of NEST teaching the native language). According to an interview conducted by Nathan Croker to a NNEST in Japanese schools (Adina Nicolaiuc), he found that teaching as NNEST is advantageous since one has a deeper understanding of the struggle students are likely to experience while learning a foreign language. Hence, they are keen to explain the language construction, grammar, and idioms ("Teaching English in Japan – Non-Native Speaker | Write Teach Japan," 2022). Besides, it is very likely for NNEST to engage their students in language similarities and comparisons with their students and other teachers. According to the interview, NNEST can use language teaching approaches to explain concepts to a student by understanding the complexities involved.

NNEST are pressured to prove their capabilities to clear the notion created in most Japanese universities of the perfection of NEST over NNEST. However, some students were indifferent as long as they learned the language; they were satisfied with the NNEST teacher. Nevertheless, NEST is employed on the basis that they can speak English fluently and not because they outdo the NNEST in terms of teaching competencies. Therefore, the administration ends up having teachers with good language skills but poor teaching skills (Braine, 1999). One major disadvantage of NEST is the lack of attainable goals and intimidation of the students, making them feel they are not making progress or enough effort to attain the set goal. Christen (2008) found that NEST is not strict on learners when they make mistakes. NNEST take advantage of their native language to explain to students who may understand the native language (L1). Also, NNEST are likely to supply their students with more information about the target language.

Methodology

This research is based on both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The qualitative research method involves collecting and analyzing non-numerical data to understand the research question. In this case, the research question is the attitude and preferences between NEST and NNEST in the English learning teaching frameworks and their impact on students' understanding of the English language. Therefore, the literature review is a fundamental method in this research. Articles relating to NEST and NNEST will be reviewed to determine the current existing reports on the issue. The primary data collection method is through survey given to 93 students from one Japanese university. These students shall be categorized into two groups according to their year of studies (first year and second year).

The quantitative research method involves collecting and analyzing numerical data. There were 54 females, 37 males, and 2 more students with other gender identities involved. 95.7% of the respondents spoke Japanese as their mother tongue (L1). The questionnaire was distributed among all the 93 respondents, and they were to answer to their best level, and honestly. The questionnaire asked 31 questions.

Data collection

The data collection instrument is the self-test questionnaire (Appendex-A) for English learners in Japanese university. The questionnaire was designed to collect quantitative data. It was based on two studies: 1) *University Students' Perceptions of Native and Non-native Speaker Teachers of English* (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2002), and 2) *Native Speaker/Non-Native Speaker Teachers: Beyond the Learners' Gap*, (Sekigawa, Sugino, Okayama & Ascough, 2003). The researcher adapted the 2 surveys to suit the context of her research.

This method is essential as it allows for data to be collected in a readily processable form. The questions in the forms were attitudinal, eliciting students' attitudes towards NEST and NNEST in the EFL environment. An open-format guide will be used to explore the general perception since it is not feasible to anticipate themes that may accrue, as a closed format guide could not provide pre-prepared feedback categories. Since this is investigative research rather than experimental, the respondents will be asked several questions for accuracy. As the correspondents are first- and second-year students with knowledge of the English language, translations shall not be provided. The questions in the form are close ended, removing grammatical errors, preserving the collected data. The study was performed within a mandatory four-skills English course. Participation was fully voluntary, and students were advised that collected data would be kept confidential, and participation would have no bearing on course grades.

Limitations

There are several limitations of this study. The first limitation to this research was gender imbalance, as the majority of the respondents were females. The second drawback of this study was the participation size. While the insights acquired are valuable, the study might benefit from a larger study size. In addition, data were collected from a single survey conducted in the middle of the second semester, so a study conducted over a longer period of time, and with regular surveys, may have produced different results. Finally, all survey questions were written in English, prompting students to submit their answers in English. Had students been provided with a questionnaire that offered Japanese translations, not only would it ensure that participants fully understood the intent and meaning of the question, but it may have encouraged participants to provide more thorough responses.

Results and discussion

After collecting data, it was found that the majority of the respondents had been learning the English language for more than six years (72.1%). Besides, 85 of the respondents affirmed to have had a native speaker as their English teacher. Also, it was found that the majority of the students believed that a native English speaker is somebody who comes from a country where English is the official language. The assumption could result in data bias since the official language might not be the mother tongue. It might be the second language, meaning English

is not their native language to that speaker. A significant number believed a native English speaker is someone from either UK, USA, Canada, Australia, or Ireland.

The majority of students perceive it as crucial to have a native English speaker as their English teacher. This attitude and preference are constructed under the attitude of native speakers making the best language teachers without considering teaching behavior and skills. Although, 36% of students do not have a preference. The data collected further indicated that the majority of the students' attitude on pronunciation was influenced by native speakers being their teacher. Also, the students believed that speaking fluent English was very influential by a native speaker being their teacher. There was a slight variation on how important it was in general vocabulary to have a native speaker as an English teacher, where the majority believed it was essential. In contrast, a significant number (35%) believed it did not matter either way. Also, on the issue of slang, there was a varied attitude, with the majority believing it was essential to have a native speaker as the teacher while (11%) students believed it did not matter.

The question on how important it was in grammar to have a native teacher as the English teacher can be thought to form the thesis of this research since it resulted in a wide variety of responses. Listening skills were intensely expressed when the teacher was a native speaker, with 71% of students firmly believing it. 46% of students believed their grammar could be influenced when the teacher is a native English speaker, while 44% of students believed it is not essential for the teacher to be a native English speaker or non-native. Also, there was a divergent attitude on the influence of native speakers and non-native speakers on students' writing and their reading skills. 57% of respondents believed it was essential to have a patient and tolerant teacher.

In comparison, 62% believed it is essential to have a teacher knowledgeable about the English language. 80% of the respondents believed and preferred a helpful and kind teacher regardless of whether they are native or non-native speakers. There was a divergent attitude on the importance of teachers' experience, although the majority favored an experienced teacher. Ironically, there was also divergence on the essentiality of qualified teachers. Although the majority support for a teacher to be qualified, a significant number did not mind. Enthusiasm and passion are other characteristics that students had a divergent attitude about.

82% of the respondents believed that a native speaker teacher could better understand why English is difficult. The native teacher being kinder and more supportive also had a diverse response, although the majority supported them. On the issue of grammar, native and non-native speakers as teachers had almost the same response. The majority of students do not feel embarrassed when a native speaker openly condemns their mistakes. 84% of the respondent wanted to learn English at a native speaker level. There were diverse responses on the feasibility of learning English as a second language to a native speaker.

Recommendations

With results of this study in mind, the research proposed the following recommendations. It is important to encourage collaboration between NESTs and NNESTs. Team teaching approach in which a NEST and a NNEST share the same class develops not only cross-cultural awareness but boosts also the motivation and the confidence of the NNESTs. They could

also leverage their unique abilities respectively in Japanese education system. The two also different types of teachers could complement each other, but they could not be replaced by each other completely.

The study recommends further research on the effect of gender on influencing students' attitudes towards their NESTs and NNESTs and doing research on larger sample sizes. Additionally, more research is needed to find if any difference, in low and high proficient students' perceptions concerning NESTs and NNESTs.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to investigate students' perceptions of English as a foreign language (EFL) of their NEST and NNESTs. Barry (2016, p. 208) quotes McKenzie (2013) who suggests that language attitudes towards non-native speakers of English may be changing because of the remarkable growth of global non-native varieties of English. However, this may not yet be applicable to the EFL industry within Japan. The majority of Japanese university students that were questioned prefer to be taught English courses by native English speakers. The reason was based on the perception created of native speakers being good teachers, and many did not consider skills, experience, and competence. However, it is important to state that the majority of the respondents had a positive image of non-native speaker English teachers. Therefore, the point is that both are able to be good English language teachers in their own terms.

Appendix-A

Questionnaire

Part A: Background Information

1. Academic Year
 - a. First-Year
 - b. Second-Year

2. Your Gender
 - a. Female
 - b. Male
 - c. Other

3. What is your mother tongue (L1)?
 - a. Japanese
 - b. English
 - c. Spanish
 - d. Portuguese
 - e. Korean
 - f. Chinese
 - g. Other

4. How long have you been learning English?
 - a. 4-5 years
 - b. 6-7
 - c. More than 8 years

5. University Major
 - a. EIBEI
 - b. English Communication

Learner Questionnaire

6. Have you ever had a native speaker of English as a teacher?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

7. For me, a 'native speaker' teacher is somebody, who...
 - a. is from a country where the official language is English.
 - b. has at least one parent whose mother tongue is English.
 - c. has lived at least 5 years in an English speaking country.
 - d. was born in the UK, US, Canada, Australia, Ireland etc.
 - e. Other (please specify):

8. How important is it for you to have a native speaker as your teacher?
 - a. Very important
 - b. Neither very important nor important
 - c. Not important

9. How important is it for your pronunciation for you to have a native speaker as your teacher?
 - a. Very important
 - b. Neither very important nor important
 - c. Not important

10. How important for speaking is it to have a native speaker as your teacher?
 - a. Very important
 - b. Neither very important nor important
 - c. Not important

11. How important for general vocabulary is it to have a native speaker as your teacher?
 - a. Very important
 - b. Neither very important nor important
 - c. Not important

12. How important for learning slang is it to have a native speaker as your teacher?
 - a. Very important
 - b. Neither very important nor important
 - c. Not important

13. How important for listening is it to have a native speaker as your teacher?
 - a. Very important
 - b. Neither very important nor important
 - c. Not important

14. How important for grammar is it to have a native speaker as your teacher?
 - a. Very important
 - b. Neither very important nor important
 - c. Not important

15. How important for writing is it to have a native speaker as your teacher?
 - a. Very important
 - b. Neither very important nor important
 - c. Not important

16. How important for reading is it to have a native speaker as your teacher?
 - a. Very important
 - b. Neither very important nor important
 - c. Not important

17. How important is having a teacher who is patient and tolerant? (Regardless of native/non-native status).
 - a. Very important
 - b. Neither very important nor important
 - c. Not important

18. How important is having a teacher who is knowledgeable about language? (Regardless of native/non-native status).
 - a. Very important
 - b. Neither very important nor important
 - c. Not important

19. How important is having a teacher who is helpful and kind? (Regardless of native/non-native status).
 - a. Very important
 - b. Neither very important nor important
 - c. Not important

20. How important is having a teacher who is experienced? (Regardless of native/non-native status).
 - a. Very important
 - b. Neither very important nor important
 - c. Not important

21. How important is having a teacher who is qualified? (Regardless of native/non-native status).
 - a. Very important
 - b. Neither very important nor important
 - c. Not important

22. How important is having a teacher who is passionate and enthusiastic? (Regardless of native/non-native status).
 - a. Very important
 - b. Neither very important nor important
 - c. Not important

23. Compared to a non-native speaker a native speaker teacher can understand why English is difficult better.
 - a. Definitely
 - b. Maybe
 - c. Definitely not

24. Compared to a non-native speaker a native speaker teacher is kinder and more supportive.
 - a. Definitely
 - b. Maybe
 - c. Definitely not

25. Compared to a non-native speaker a native speaker teacher can explain English grammar more clearly.
 - a. Definitely
 - b. Maybe
 - c. Definitely not

26. Do you feel embarrassed when a Native Speaker/teacher points out your mistakes?
- a. Definitely
 - b. Maybe
 - c. Definitely not

27. Do you want to learn English to a native speaker level?
- a. Definitely
 - b. Maybe
 - c. Definitely not

Your Goals

28. Is it possible to learn a foreign/second language to a native speaker level?
- a. Definitely
 - b. Maybe
 - c. Definitely not

29. What image do you have of a language teacher who is not a native speaker of English?

30. I prefer to be taught by..... because.....

31. Do you have any comments?

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