Emerging Perspectives of the NEST - An Analysis of Self, Peer and Student Perceptions of the NEST in a Thai University Context

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Abstract

There are a growing number of scholars who argue against 'nativism' in English language teaching and posit that the demarcation between native and non-native speakers is an artificial and discriminatory construct. Emerging from this debate has been research focused on the NNEST (non-native English speaking teacher), which suggests that a "deficiency" model can actually mask their contribution to language education. This study offers a small contribution in the opposing direction by seeking to explore self, student and professional perceptions of the identity of the NEST (native English speaking teacher). It takes the perspective that language teaching requires multiple competencies, and so a singular or native language "proficiency" model may, in fact, mask other significant aspects of both the NEST's strengths as educators and areas of professional development.

This study utilized a qualitative short-response questionnaire with 80 English teachers and students, in order to draw on multiple perspectives (self, student and NNEST colleague perceptions) within a single institution, to seek insight into beliefs regarding the identifying characteristics, strengths and weaknesses of NESTs. The findings suggest that there were aspects of the participant's perceptions of NESTs that conform with more widely held "nativist" views, however, the results also indicate an awareness of areas of professional growth, particularly in the area of intercultural communication and ELT (English language teaching). This arguably implies a level of recognition among the respondents that English teaching requires a range of language teaching competencies that exceed a simple native-like language aptitude. Furthermore, the survey responses highlight several such competencies that the respondents value in English teachers. The competencies could be thematically grouped as: pedagogical and professional competencies, interpersonal and relational competencies, and linguistic and communicative competencies.

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Introduction

In South East Asian English teaching there is a level of preoccupation with the "native speaking" teacher as the model for, and standard of, both English teaching and language proficiency (Walkinshaw and Oanh, 2014). This can create a "native English" centred view of language teaching. This view favours native English speakers (NESTs) as teachers, and can lead to a tendency to simply "import", accept and use teaching methodologies and textbooks from certain target contexts (generally America and Britain) for use in teaching students from significantly different backgrounds (Halbach, 2002; Wandel, 2002). NESTs can be proficient language teachers, who arguably have a better fluency, feel for nuance and idiom, and ability to offer valuable cultural and linguistic insights (Kramsch 2001; Maum, 2002); this provides valuable motivation to some students (Gardner, 2005). However, a native speaker's linguistic proficiency does not, by default, bestow upon them the ability to teach the language in question (Oka, 2004, p.5-8). Furthermore, a native English language view of education may not value nor appropriately recognize and accommodate the student's own individual (linguistic and cultural) contribution to, or requirements in, the process of language acquisition (Jin & Cortazzi, 1998; Holme, 2002). A further complication of a native English centred view of English language education is that it may discriminate against and potentially ignore a wealth of talented non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs) (Paikeday, 1985; Phillipson, 2000; Maum, 2002).

Objectives

Widdowson, comments that "English and English teaching are proper to the extent to which they are appropriate, not to the extent that they are appropriated" (Widdowson, 1994, p. 389). This comment is at the heart of this research that seeks to, within a single institution, utilize a range of perspectives to study perceptions of the nature of the NEST, their strengths and weaknesses as English teachers, and the characteristics that are exemplified in "appropriate" or proficient English teachers.

This particular study surveys a small sample of students, NNEST and NEST teachers (80 participants in total, 40 students and 40 teachers) from a large international university in Bangkok, Thailand. The motivating query behind this study is whether any potential exaggeration or elevation of a single proficiency, native-like language proficiency, over the range of other proficiencies requisite for successful language teaching, may potentially limit the NESTs own self-critique and professional growth. This research recognizes that that

regional differences and small sample sizes restrict the "robustness" of findings, making them somewhat tentative (Walkinshaw and Oanh, 2014). As a way of partially compensating for this study's small, localized survey sample this paper will utilize other similar studies for comparison when discussing and drawing tentative conclusions from the survey results.

This paper has five sections, the first of which has provided the rationale for this study. This will be followed by the conceptual framework which briefly surveys a portion of the literature concerning issues related to "native speakerism" and its impact on the definition and contribution of the NEST in ELT. The research methodology will then be described and the results discussed, with some tentative conclusions and directions for further research offered.

Conceptual Framework

Walkinshaw and Oanh refer to the "convenient fiction" that persists in South East Asian English language teaching whereby the NEST is seen as the epitome and gold standard of both English language proficiency and English language teaching (Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2014, citing Braine 2010; Kirkpatrick 2010; Wang 2012). Maum cites several studies in commenting that "Native English speakers without teaching qualifications are more likely to be hired as ESL teachers than qualified and experienced NNESTs, especially outside the United States" (Maum, 2002, p.2 citing research by Canagarajah, 1999; Rampton, 1996; Holliday, 2006). However, while terms such as, "native speaker" and "NEST" are commonly used both in English teaching and the literature, finding widely accepted definitions of these terms is surprisingly difficult and contentious. Davies (2004), for example, states that the concept of the native speaker "occupies a curious position", for while it is frequently and widely used as a benchmark and as a condition for employment and so would seem to represent a well-established standard, its actual definition is somewhat elusive. He concludes that "the native speaker concept remains ambiguous, necessarily so, since it is both myth and reality" (Davies, 2004, p.431). The debate on the validity and definition of the native speaker of English and the NEST is a rich debate that has produced an influential and interesting body of work. This study, however, will limit itself to aspects of the debate that focus on the NEST, utilizing Davis' "myth and reality' ambiguity (Davies, 2003) to examine the literature as it relates to first the native speaker and then the NEST.

The "NATIVE SPEAKER"- Myth and Reality

The origin and perpetuation of the ideal of the native speaker has historic, hegemonic and linguistic roots that make the ideal both persuasive and pervasive. By any measure, English has become a significant global language. Johnson (2009) suggests that "(s)ome 380 million people speak it as their first language", "perhaps two-thirds as many again as their second' and furthermore a 'billion are learning it" (Johnson, 2009, p. 131). As such, it seems generally accepted that English is definitely a world language, if not the global and international language (Halliday, 2003). Crystal (2003) cites two conditions requisite for a language to achieve global status: having a wide geo-political extent of influence and being the native language of countries that are powerful culturally, technologically and economically. Both of these conditions have hegemonic influences which, as Phillipson (2000) argues, ensure that the native speaker is idealized and the concept perpetuated, for as Mahboob states, nativism is "not simply a linguistic issue, but rooted in economic, political and cultural issues" (Mahboob, 2005, p.79)

Aspects of the literature also reflect this idealization of the native speaker. Scholars, such as Davies, (2004) insist that birth (childhood immersion) in a native speaking country is a requisite for native-speaking proficiency. He outlines six criteria that define a native speaker, the first of which is the acquisition of the language at birth, while the other five are functional criteria and are: intuitions about idiolectal grammar, intuitions about group language grammar, discourse and pragmatic control, creative performances and interpreting and translating (Davies, 2004, p.435). As such he posits that it is "difficult" for a non-native speaker to become a native speaker, though suggesting it is possible for an adult speaker to acquire communicative competence in an L2. For Mahboob (2005), Chomsky's conceptualization of the "idealized native speaker-hearer" and its extensive use in second language acquisition (SLA) research have also fixed and promulgated the concept of the native speaker in linguistics. Firth and Wagner (1997) used the term "a skewed perspective" to highlight the perspective which compares the non-native speaker to the native speaker, in ways that further entrench the ideal of the native speaker while conceiving the non-native speaker as deficient (cited in Mahboob, 2005, p. 295).

The opponents of "nativism" suggest that such terms incorrectly imply the existence of a single unified global body of native speakers, all of whom speak a standard English and come from a standard native speaking culture (see Halliday, 2003; Alptekin, 2002). However, the relationship between language and culture is complex, for as Cook (2003) asserts, while mutual interpretation of language depends on, and is so evidence of a shared culture, individual cultural identities are often diverse, and so a growing number of individuals cease to be typical (Cook, 2003). As such, while native speakers' ability to communicate in context evidences a level of cultural commonality, the question remains if the term "native speaker"

has become so expansive, including speakers from very diverse cultures, sub-cultures and nationalities, that it has lost its validity. Much of the literature agrees with Kramsch that the notion of: one unified body of native speakers, from one culture, who speak one language - is a fallacy (Kramsch, 1993; Paikeday, 1985). Several other scholars (for example Mahboob, 2005; Halliday, 2006) decry the appropriateness of holding other speakers to a native-standard altogether. Furthermore, while it certainly can be argued that the use of English as a lingua franca has many communicative advantages (Crystal, 2003; Graddol, 2000; Johnson, 2009 cite several advantages), there are those who argue that English socially stratifies, that it "excludes those who are not native speakers" (Davies, 2004, p.431). Graddol suggests even the use of the term native speaker has the "drawback" of locating "the "native speakers" and native-speaking countries at the center of the global use of English and, by implication, the source of model of correctness, the best teachers and English-language goods and services" (Graddol, 2000, p.10).

In conclusion, while traditional definitions of the native speaker seem to be inadequate or somewhat enigmatic, the "reality" appears to be, as Rampton (1990) suggests, that the terms "native speaker" and "mother tongue" remain in circulation, continuously insinuating their assumptions (cited in Davies, 2004, p. 213). As such cultural, economic and political forces, as well as several within linguistics itself, appear to maintain the pre-eminence of the "nativist" model. However there are a growing number of voices questioning this view. Davies does offer five potential "flesh and blood" or "reality" definitions 1) native speaker by birth, 2) native speaker (or native speaker-like) by being an exceptional learner, 3) native speaker through education (the lingua franca case), 4) native speaker by being a native user (the post-colonial case) and 5) native speaker by long residence in the adopted country (Davies, 2003), that exist and add breadth to the simple native speaker by birth conceptualization and may become more apparent in the future.

The NEST - Myth and Reality

The relationship or "fusion" that exists between culture, nationality and language, while complex, has "been well established by critics" (Morgan, 1998, p.239 citing works by Byram and Esarte-Sarries, 1991; Kramsch, 1991; Brislin et al, 1986). The same cultural, economic and political forces that advocate the native English speaker are also influential in English language teaching. Indeed, Berns (2005) comments that for many in outer and expanding circle countries, English (she notes the use of the singular - "English") is inextricably and deeply associated with a single cultural national identity. She presents a perception of the English language were it is assumed that learning English means learning a standard English, "British English", immersed in the conceptual framework of British culture. A significant effect of this relationship between language and culture, this "fascination" with

English as a native language (Seidlhofer, 2004, p.226), is the idealization of the native speaker as the ideal English language teacher (Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2014). This preference is well supported by the literature which suggests that there is a belief that both students and administrators have a preference for NESTs (Paikeday, 1985; Takahashi, 2013; Lai, 2014). Medgyes comments that administrators often employ NESTS because they feel pressured to meet a perceived preference for NESTs by the students and parents (Medgyes, 1992). This can lead to situations whereby native English speakers without qualifications may be preferred, as English teachers, over suitably qualified non-native English speaking teachers (Maum, 2002).

However, the definition and role of the native English speaking teacher (NEST) is both complex and contentious and has in recent times become increasingly challenged both in terms of its relationship to the term "native speaker", its validity in ELT and hegemonic influence. Firstly, the same arguments that are applied to the native speaker also arguably hold for the native English speaking teacher (NEST). Scholars such as Kachru (cited in Kilickaya, 2009) and Widdowson (1994) suggest that the "global diffusion" of English (Kachru, 1998) denies the conceptualization of English as a single entity and the native speaker's (NEST's) ownership over it. Secondly, in ELT, researchers, such as a Schmitz (2013), observe that while both non-native and native teachers have been the focus of much research, the students often conclude that both groups have "advantages and disadvantages" (see also Medgyes, 1992). Cook (1999) states that while "(l)anguage professionals often take for granted that the only appropriate models of a language's use come from its native speakers", and thus encourage students to mimic them, he argues that from a student's perspective language education would "benefit" by paying greater attention to the student's culture and prior linguistic learning and experience (Cook, 1999, p 185, see also Graddol 2000, p.10). Finally, from a hegemonic perspective, a further issue with a "nativist" view of language education is its potential to construe NNESTS as being "knowledge deficient" and inferior (Phillipson, 2000: 715 -6; citing Dendrinos' comments on the state of Greek ELT). Furthermore, critics like Mahboob suggest that "(a)cquiring a native-like sensitivity" is not "a proper goal" for NNESTs; rather, the unique teaching abilities of both NESTs and NNESTs complement each other and together provide a better learning environment for L2 students. (Mahboob, 2005, p.86, see also Medgyes, 2001 for similar comments).

In conclusion, the "reality" of the NEST's position is that while there still pervades a belief shared by many employers that native speakers are better teachers than non-native teachers and that students have a preference for native speakers (Mahboob 2005); this "notion" has been increasingly critiqued in recent years (Lai, 2014 citing Murphy, 1988; Kachru & Nelson, 2006). New voices, such as Yilin (president of the TESOL International Association), suggest that "perceptions of what constitutes an effective English teacher are also changing" as "more people recognize that the effectiveness of English teachers should be

determined by their linguistic, instructional, and intercultural competence rather than simply by their linguistic identity" (Yilin, 2014). Cook (1999) concludes that while students, teachers and researchers are unlikely to give up their reliance on the native speaker quickly, " judicious changes" can, and indeed are, impacting the understanding of what makes a competent English teacher. Thus, the increasing "reality" for NESTs is that there has been a subtle movement away from a "nativist" view of English language teaching where employment is simply based on their country of birth (being representative of their native or mother tongue). There is, however, a steady movement towards a view of ELT that believes language teaching is complex and multifaceted and so values teachers, both NNEST and NEST, who are engaging, talented and experienced educators, with professional qualifications and interpersonal and intercultural skills.

Research Methodology

1. Sample Design

There were 80 participants in this study, which surveyed 40 university students and 40 lecturers from the English Faculty of a large international university in Bangkok, Thailand. The sample surveyed included NESTs, NNESTs and students. The lecturers comprised a broad sampling of both new and experienced lectures (20 new teachers and 20 experienced teachers), as well as NNESTs and NESTs (14 NNESTs and 26 NESTS). The new teachers were largely younger teachers (20 to 25 years old) and generally had no experience in teaching English (2 NNESTs and 18 NESTs). The student participants were all studying an advanced English course at the time of the survey and had experience with both NNEST and NEST teachers. These students were selected from the classes of two lecturers, one employed as a NNEST and the other employed as a NEST, for as Maxwell (2005) suggests, questionnaires can have a tendency to collect data informed strongly by immediate concerns and experiences, in this case the linguistic heritage of their current English teacher. The students were all within the 20-25 year age bracket and were predominately Thai (34 Thai and 6 non-Thai students), with 23 female and 17 male participants.

2. Measurement and Data Collection Design

The data collection instrument was a guided short-response, qualitative survey. The survey was written to be open-ended and the participants were encouraged to respond with as much information as they wanted. The questionnaire was influenced by similar studies such as those conducted by Walkinshaw and Oanh (2014) and Lai (2014), who also utilized an open questionnaire format to collect attitudinal data based in the participants' beliefs and perceptions.

The participants were asked to provide a brief written response to the following four questions:

1) In your opinion what are the strengths that you feel native-speaking English teachers have?

2) In your opinion what are the weaknesses that you feel native-speaking English teachers have?

3) How would you personally define a native-speaking English teacher? What are the attributes, characteristics etc. that would suggest to you that an English teacher is a native-speaker?

4) What do you think are three of the most important attributes (skills or characteristics) that both native and non-native speaking English teachers should have?

3. Analytical design

This study employed an open short-response survey designed to elicit self-generated responses from the participants. A qualitative methodology was utilized owing to its suitability in exploring the perceptions, beliefs and influences that shape "phenomena" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 19). Qualitative analysis also allows the thematic analysis of emergent beliefs that are derived from self-generated participant responses, rather than from pre-determined categories that impose an established hypothesis over the data (Flick, 2008). The data were worked through several times, and coded and categorized by sorting into similar themes (Newman & Benz, 1998) to allow the quantification and analysis of the data by determining the frequency of the responses related to each theme (Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2014).

It should be noted that the open-ended nature of the survey allowed the participants to write more than one response, and as such, during coding it was frequently observed that several codes were generated from a single participant's response. These responses could make multiple references to a single theme, as represented by either multiple different codes that were eventually combined under the same theme, or by multiple comments that evoked the same code. As such the data were analysed in two ways: firstly, RF - response frequency; compared the frequency of a particular thematic response to the total number of responses (N = total number of responses). Secondly, PF - participant frequency; recorded the frequency of an individual participant offering a thematic response, at least once, against the total number of participants (n = total number of participants that that group). In this latter field, multiple references to a particular theme offered by a single participant were simply recorded once. This allowed an impression to be formed regarding how widely a particular theme was perceived to be important, by recording how many participants believed a theme significant enough to mention it at least once.

Limitations: There are limitations to the generalizability and transferability of the findings based on the relatively small sample size (40 students and 40 lecturers in total), and geographical and contextual limitations (the survey only considered a single type of institute, in a single setting in Thailand). Including a larger and more diverse sample size, triangulating this study by comparing it with similar studies within the ASEAN region, and conducting a secondary study to interview and discuss the findings with some of the original participants would, to some extent, support and verify the data. A further limitation in this study is the potential of a gap between "perception" and "reality", as it is difficult for a person to see the cultural and linguistic "grid" in which they exist (see Kramsch 1993, p.105). The inclusion of participants from different groups, such as surveying the students and NNESTs (from both Kachru's Outer and Expanding circles), as well as the inclusion of new and experienced teachers, sought, in some measure, to counter this. While the relatively small sample size impacts this limitation, English ability was not considered to be a limitation, as all participants had sufficient English proficiency, as well as familiarity and experience with NESTs, the focus of the study.

Results

This paper sought to study aspects of NESTs' self-perceptions and examine these against the perceptions of their students and NNEST colleagues. The results from the survey are presented in tables 1 through 4, allowing comparisons between the responses that emerged from each individual group. These results will be discussed below by focusing on each group's data, starting with the general description of the NEST, followed by the perceptions of the NEST's strengths and weaknesses (Tables 1 to 3), and finally examining the data as it relates to the "ideal" English teacher (Table 4).

Table 1: Combined Results - What are the ***strengths*** that you feel native-speaking English teachers have?

	A. Totals		**B. NESTs RF – response frequency** N= **responses**		**C. Non-NESTs PF – personal frequency** n=**participants**		**D. Students**	
	RF N=192	**PF** n=80	**RF** N=63	**PF** n=26	**RF** N=31	**PF** n=14	**RF** N=98	**PF** n=40
1. Command of Language-Expertise	41 (21.4%)	39 (48.8%)	16 (25.4%)	16 (61.5%)	9 (29.0%)	7 (50.0%)	16 (16.3%)	16 (40%)
2. Pronunciation-Accent	53 (27.6%)	46 (57.5%)	12 (19.0%)	12 (46.1%)	3 (9.6%)	3 (21.4%)	38 (38.8%)	31 (77.5%)
3. Fluency in Speech	21 (10.9%)	19 23.8%)	12 (19.0%)	11 (42.3%)	3 (9.6%)	2 (14.3%)	6 (6.1%)	6 (15%)
4. Cultural Insights	17 (7.3%)	16 (20.0%)	98 (14.3%)	8 (30.8%)	5 (16.1%)	5 (35.7%)	3 (3%)	3 (7.5%)
5. Educative Advantages	38 (18.2%)	33 (41.3%)	9 (14.3%)	8 (30.8%)	4 (12.9%)	2 (14.3%)	25 (25.6%)	23 (57.5%)
6. Authenticity	22 (11.5%)	22 (27.5%)	5 (7.9%)	5 (19.2%)	7 (22.6%)	7 (50%)	10 (10.2%)	10 (25%)

Table 2: Combined Results - What are the ***weaknesses*** that you feel native-speaking English teachers have?

	A. Totals		**B. NESTs** **RF** – response frequency N= **responses**		**C. NNESTs** **PF** – personal frequency n=**participants**		**D. Students**	
	RF N=139	**PF** n=80	**RF** N=46	**PF** n=26	**RF** N=24	**PF** n=14	**RF** N=69	**PF** n=40
1. A lack of knowledge, experience or ability	58 (41.7%)	47 (58.8%)	26 (56.5%)	18 (69.2%)	12 (50.0%)	11 (78.6%)	20 (29.0%)	18 (45.0%)
1a) lack of teaching training/experience	*33 (23.7%)*	*27 (33.8%)*	*16 (34.8%)*	*13 (50.0%)*	*5 (20.1%)*	*4 (28.6%)*	*12 (17.4%)*	*10 (25.0%)*
2b) lack of experience in learning an L2	*10 (7.2%)*	*6 (7.5%)*	*8 (17.4%)*	*42 (15.4%)*	*2 (8.3%)*	*0 (14.3%)*	*0 (0.0%)*	*(0.0%)*
3c) lack of knowledge of student's culture or needs	*15 (10.8%)*	*14 (17.5%)*	*2 (4.3%)*	*1 (3.8%)*	*5 (20.1%)*	*5 (35.7%)*	*8 (11.6%)*	*8 (20.0%)*
2. Ethnocentric	18 (11.5%)	17 (21.3%)	7 (15.2%)	6 (23.1%)	6 (25.0%)	7 (57.1%)	3 (4.3%)	3 (7.5%)
3. Grammar	3 (2.2%)	3 (3.8%)	2 (4.3%)	2 (7.7%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.4%)	1 (2.5%)

Table 2: (Cont.) Combined Results - What are the ***weaknesses*** that you feel native-speaking English teachers have?

	A. Totals		**B. NESTs** **RF** – response frequency N= **responses**		**C. NNESTs** **PF** – personal frequency n=**participants**		**D. Students**	
	RF N=139	**PF** n=80	**RF** N=46	**PF** n=26	**RF** N=24	**PF** n=14	**RF** N=69	**PF** n=40
4.Communication difficulties	51 (36.7%)	39 (48.8%)	8 (17.4%)	8 (30.8%)	5 (20.1%)	4 (28.6%)	38 (55.1%)	27 (67.5%)
4 a) Difficult for students to understand the teachers	*32 (23.0%)*	*20 (25.0%)*	*3 (6.5%)*	*3 (11.5%)*	*4 (16.7%)*	*3 (21.4%)*	*25 (36.2%)*	*14 (35.0%)*
4b) Difficult for the teachers to understand the students	*4 (2.9%)*	*4 (5.0%)*	*1 (2.2%)*	*1 (3.8%)*	*0 (0.0%)*	*0 (0.0%)*	*3 (4.3%)*	*3 (7.5%)*
4c) Language related communication difficulties	*15 (10.8%)*	*15 (18.8%)*	*4 (8.7%)*	*4 (15.4%)*	*1 (4.2%)*	*1 (7.1%)*	*10 (14.5%)*	*10 (25.0%)*
5. No weaknesses	11 (7.9%)	11 (13.8%)	3 (6.5%)	3 (11.5%)	1 (4.2%)	1 (7.1%)	7 (10.1%)	7 (17.5%)

Table 3: Combined Results - How would you <u>personally</u> define a native-speaking English teacher?

	A. Totals		**B. NESTs RF – response frequency N= responses**		**C. NNESTs PF – personal frequency n=participants**		**D. Students**	
	RF N=175	**PF** n=80	**RF** N=43	**PF** n=26	**RF** N=26	**PF** n=14	**RF** N=106	**PF** n=40
1. By Birth	21 (12.0%)	21 (26.3%)	15 (34.9%)	15 (57.7%)	6 (23.1%)	6 (42.9%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
2. Significant time in a native speaking country	7 (4.0%)	7 (8.8%)	5 (11.6%)	5 (19.2%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (1.9%)	2 (5.0%)
3. Having certain attributes	126 (72.0%)	61 (76.3%)	20 (46.5%)	16 (61.5%)	16 (61.5%)	9 (64.3%)	90 (84.9%)	36 (90.0%)
3 a). Having certain skills (linguistic and/or cultural)	*21 (12.0%)*	*21 (26.3%)*	*10 (23.3%)*	*10 (38.5%)*	*7 (26.9%)*	*7 (50.0%)*	*4 (3.8%)*	*4 (10.0%)*
3 b) Having certain knowledge (linguistic and/or cultural)	*10 (5.7%)*	*11 (13.8%)*	*5 (11.6%)*	*5 (19.2%)*	*3 (11.5%)*	*3 (21.4%)*	*2 (1.9%)*	*3 (7.5%)*
3 c) Having certain physical features	*11 (6.3%)*	*11 (13.8%)*	*0 (0.0%)*	*0 (0.0%)*	*1 (3.8%)*	*1 (7.1%)*	*10 (9.4%)*	*10 (25.0%)*

Table 3: (Cont.) Combined Results - How would you personally define a native-speaking English teacher?

	A. Totals		**B. NESTs RF – response frequency N= responses**		**C. NNESTs PF – personal frequency n=participants**		**D. Students**	
	RF N=175	**PF** n=80	**RF** N=43	**PF** n=26	**RF** N=26	**PF** n=14	**RF** N=106	**PF** n=40
3 d) Having a certain accent or pronunciation	*51 (29.1%)*	*37 (46.3%)*	*5 (11.6%)*	*5 (19.2%)*	*5 (19.2%)*	*5 (35.7%)*	*41 (38.7%)*	*27 (67.5%)*
3 e) Having a certain personal characteristics	*33 (18.8%)*	*17 (21.3%)*	*0 (0.0%)*	*0 (0.0%)*	*1 (3.8%)*	*1 (7.1%)*	*32 (30.2%)*	*16 (40.0%)*
4. Related to teaching ability or methodology	21 (12.0%)	21 (26.3%)	3 (7.0%)	3 (11.5%)	4 (15.4%)	4 (28.6%)	14 (13.2%)	14 (35.0%)

Table 4: Combined Results - What do you think are three of the most important attributes (skills or characteristics) that ***both native and non-native speaking*** English teachers should have?

	A. Totals		**B. NESTs RF – response frequency** N= **responses**		**C. NNESTs PF – personal frequency** n=**participants**		**D. Students**	
	RF N=229	**PF** n=80	**RF** N=81	**PF** n=26	**RF** N=38	**PF** n=14	**RF** N=110	**PF** n=40
1. Personal Characteristics	66 (28.8%)	48 (60.0%)	26 (32.1%)	17 (65.4%)	9 (23.7%)	8 (57.1%)	31 (28.2%)	23 (57.5%)
2. Pedagogical Characteristics	72 (31.4%)	57 (71.3%)	25 (30.9%)	20 (76.9%)	13 (34.2%)	10 (71.4%)	34 (30.9%)	27 (67.5%)
3. Linguistic Characteristics	37 (15.3%)	32 (40.0%)	13 (16.0%)	11 (42.3%)	6 (15.8%)	5 (35.7%)	18 (13.6%)	16 (40.0%)
4. Professional Characteristics	46 (20.1%)	44 (55.0%)	15 (18.5%)	19 (73.1%)	10 (26.3%)	8 (57.1%)	21 (19.1%)	17 (42.5%)
5. Cultural Characteristics	8 (3.5%)	8 (10.0%)	2 (2.5%)	2 (7.7%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	6 (5.5%)	6 (15%)

Total number of participants = 80; Total number of teachers - 40: New teachers = 20 (new non-NESTs=2 and new NESTs=18); Total - experienced teachers =20 (Experienced non-NESTs=12; Experienced NESTs=8); Total number of students – 40: Male students = 17 (Thai student s= 14; non-Thai=3), and Female students = 23 (Thai students = 20; non-Thai=3)

Findings: Part A - The perceptions of the NEST

The student's perceptions – When asked to personally define a native-speaking English teacher the students significantly favoured descriptions based on having certain attributes (PF - 90.0%, RF - 84.9%). Of these students, most indicated that either having a certain accent or pronunciation (PF - 67.5%, RF - 38.7%) and certain personal characteristics (PF - 40.0%, RF - 30.2%) were most significant in determining whether they perceived the teacher to be a native speaker. In this latter category, several students offered descriptive comments such as, "funny", "kind" and "friendly"; interestingly several also offered comments related to "physical look - like face and hair and eyes".

The students generally perceived NESTs as having significant strengths in the areas of pronunciation and accent (PF = 77.7%, RF = 38.3%). Several students made positive comments with respect to the NESTs "speaking clearly", alluding to perceived communicative and educative advantages. Interestingly there were also several comments stating that the NESTs had, not just "clear" accents and pronunciation, but the "right accent" and "correct pronunciation". The students also saw educative value in being taught by a NEST, with over half of the students (PF = 57.5% and it was recorded 25 times - RF = 25.6%) making comments such as NESTs are "confident" and "active" teachers, who can explain "clearly". Several students also commented that learning with NESTs contributes to a student's ability to speak to foreigners.

However, the students noted that the most overwhelming field of difficulty was in the area of communication. Significantly, over two thirds of the students surveyed (PF - 67.5%, RF - 55.1%) made at least one reference to communication difficulties. Of these students, roughly a third mentioned that it was difficult for the students to understand their teachers (PF - 35.0%, RF - 36.2%), with several commenting that some students found it difficult to "listen to" or "understand native speaking English teachers". Others highlighted the communication difficulties caused by the students and teacher having different languages (PF - 25.0%, RF - 14.5%). Furthermore, several of these students (PF - 45.0%, RF - 29.0%) felt that the NESTs lacked knowledge, experience or ability in teaching them, with ten students perceiving the weakness to stem from a lack of training or experience in teaching English, with another eight feeling the issue was more related to a lack of knowledge of, or experience in dealing with, the student's culture.

The views of the students surveyed are largely attested to by previous research. Of the three groups, the students' perceptions of the NEST were the most "nativist" and potentially influenced by what Maum (2002) refers to as the "trickle-down effect of the native speaker fallacy". This conforms with Kramsch's (2002) white middle-class Anglo definition of the English teacher (see also Takahashi, 2013), and with other researchers, such as Florence, who notes that the distinction between NEST and NNEST is frequently "linked to

the speaker's appearance and accent" (Florence, 2012, p. 281, citing research by Mousso & Lurdra, 2008; and Luk & Lin, 2007), giving rise to what Mahboob calls the gate-keeping power of accent and pronunciation (Mahboob, 2005). It is therefore not surprising that the students valued the NEST's accent and pronunciation. However, of interest is the seeming paradox in the student's perceptions, for while many valued the NEST's language expertise, clarity of speech and teaching ability, their greatest concerns were in the area of communication. The research of Jin and Cortazzi (1998) concurs with Wilkerson and Oanh (2014) in noting while aspects of the NEST's language use were valued, there was a perception that communication with NNESTs was easier than with the NESTs, potentially due to differing cultural schemas (see also Marino, 2011; Medgyes 1992). It therefore may be possible to argue that one source of this seeming paradox is that the NEST's "foreign-ness", while giving the students the perception of "native" expertise and confidence, may at the same time be exactly that which makes communication difficult.

The NNESTs' perceptions - When asked to describe a NEST this small group favoured definitions that focused on the NEST's attributes (PF - 64.3%, RF - 61.5%) and particularly their linguistic skills (PF - 50.0%, RF - 26.9%), commenting that NESTs have a "correct and accurate" accent and pronunciation, a "first hand" knowledge and experience of the language, a "spontaneous fluency", and an "understanding of slang and idiom". Another significant perception of NESTs is that they are born in an "English speaking" or in one of the BANA (Britain, the Australasian and North American) countries (PF - 42.9%, RF - 23.1%). These NNESTs perceived that their NEST colleagues were teachers characterized by a command or expertise in using English (PF - 50.0%, RF - 29.0%) and an authenticity (PF - 50%, RF - 22.6%). These opinions were offered in comments such as, "They have a strong command of the English language", that "Students have no doubt with regard to their mastery of language", and that their English was "authentic" and "thought to be superior". However, of these participants, 11 out of the 14 (PF - 78.6%, RF - 50.0%) perceived that the NESTs lacked knowledge, experience or ability, representative of a deficiency, in some aspect of their English teaching. Approximately equal numbers pointed to a lack of training or experience in teaching or learning English, whereas others believed the problem to be based on a lack of knowledge of, or experience in dealing with, the student's culture. Comments are indicative of a general perception that NESTs are foreign teachers who do not have the experience of learning English as a second language, and as such may not know how to teach English, "have a good knowledge of the problems confronted by non-native students", or "understand the nature of their students", insights which many of the NNESTs believed were "very important in ESL/EFL teaching and learning".

Several of the beliefs raised here are common to the literature, such as the NEST's strength being in their "native" language use and their potential struggles with ELT and bridging cultural gaps. Lai (2014) comments of the while "the notion of employing the target

language culture to teach a foreign language was a mainstream view in TESOL for many years that has been critiqued more recently". (Lai, 2014, p.5). Several researchers suggest that while NESTs may be valued for their accent and natural language ability (Maum, 2002), they may have little experience in explaining more complex grammar, for "being a native speaker does not necessarily indicate an ability to explain the more intricate nuances of a language" (Oka, 2004, p.6).

Teaching English is complex and requires skills that exceed simple language proficiency. Much of the NNEST-based research supports this and suggests, in general, that students do not have a significant preference for NESTs over NNESTs (Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2014), for as Medgyes (2001) suggests both have strengths and weaknesses. Several NNEST respondents suggested that NESTs may have an "overconfidence and stubbornness" in seeing their particular language use as normative, and so making corrections based on "this is how we say/do this at home" ("my way is the right way"). Others cited problems potentially caused by over-generalizations such as using slang and idioms without explanation, assuming that everyone understands. McArthur warns that, "native speakers are seen as needing to adjust linguistically, socially, and culturally in international situations just as much as anyone else: speaking with care, avoiding unnecessary idioms and slang, and toning down their regionalisms"(McArthur, 1998 cited by Decke-Cornill, 2003, p.68).

The NESTs' perceptions - When defining themselves the NESTs saw "Having certain attributes" (PF - 76.3%, RF 72.0%), such as their accent or pronunciation (PF - 46.3%,RF - 29.1%), and linguistic or cultural skills (PF - 38.5%, RF - 23.3%) as being most definitive. They also saw descriptions related to country of birth (PF - 26.3%, RF 12.0%) and teaching style (PF - 26.3%, RF 12.0%) as somewhat important, as demonstrated in comments such as "I would define a native-speaking English teacher as having grown up, (being) exposed to and having practiced English consistently - on a daily basis". Several the NESTs believed that "Experience, familiarity, fluency and confidence are major strengths" (command of language - expertise, PF - 61.5%, RF- 25.4%), perceiving themselves as having "expansive experience" with English, an "understanding of sentence structure, rules and grammar" and an "immediacy in their ability to correct utterances", even if these abilities were seen more as innate rather than able to be articulated and taught. They also valued their pronunciation-accent and fluency of speech (PF - 46.1%, RF - 19.0% and PF - 42.3, RF - 19.0% respectively), offering comments that NESTs could offer a "proper" or "authentic" model of pronunciation and speech, as well as having a "natural fluency".

However, in their own self-perception the NEST participants perceived a weakness in their knowledge, experience and ability to teach aspects of English (PF - 69.25, RF - 56.5%), with the majority of them (13 out of the 18 more experienced participants) recognizing that NESTs may lack teacher training and experience. Of the new NEST teachers 15 of the 18 made comments that they perceived a level of weakness in the ability to teach English

because they had "never formally studied English as a second language" and that they "knew how to correct grammar, but not how to explain it". This perception of the NEST's lack of experience was noted as the primary weakness by both groups of teachers and as the second most common comment from the students (NESTs - PF = 69.2%, NNESTs - PF = 78.9%, students - PF = 45.0% and total - PF = 58.8%).

Findings: Part B - The "ideal" English language teacher

There was a general consensus on what was considered to be the most important attributes that any English language teacher (either native or non-native speaking) should have. The three areas of competency, or proficiency, valued in general by the respondents were: 1) pedagogical competencies, 2) personal-relational competencies and 3) professional qualifications and competencies. The most significant attributes were those perceived to be pedagogical characteristics (Students: PF = 67.5%, NNESTs: PF = 71.4%, NESTs PF = 76.9% and total PF = 71.3%). This thematic grouping included attributes that were more specifically related to teaching or contained a specific reference to teaching. These included comments suggesting that English teachers require a knowledge of (and willingness to cater to) different learning styles, the ability to make the subject matter interesting or relevant and having the flexibility to adapt lessons. Other comments expressed opinions such as; able to "give good and clear examples to the students", "wanting students to understand", "a passion for teaching", "loves being in the classroom", "a teacher at heart", and the ability to "engage" and "inspire" students. Personal characteristics were also perceived to be of significance (Students: PF = 57.5%, NNESTs: PF = 57.1%, NESTs PF = 65.4% and total PF = 60.0%). These personal traits, while being seen as important in a language classroom, were more global in nature. The valued personal characteristics included having "care and understanding for the students", flexibility, empathy, enthusiasm and patience. The professional characteristics grouping (Students: PF = 42.5%, NNESTs: PF = 57.1%, NESTs PF = 73.1% and total PF = 55.0%) included comments such as being appropriately qualified, well-prepared and acting in a professional manner.

In the context of this discussion is it worth noting that the responses to this question, arguably do not favour NESTs as the ideal English language teachers. While linguistic competency did emerge as a theme (Linguistic Competence – students 4th with PF = 40.0%, NNESTs – 4th with PF = 35.7%, NESTs – 4th with PF = 16.0%), there were very few references to specific cultural characteristics. Comments regarding linguistic competence generally referred to "clarity of speech", "fluency" and "good speaking skills", grammatical competence and a "strong" vocabulary, and while certainly related to linguistic competence, were significantly devoid of overt "nativist" references.

Key Competencies of Proficient English Teachers - Questions 1 to 4

The combined analysis of the responses to the four questions in the survey are indicative of a broad valuing of several specific competencies or proficiencies that could be conveniently and thematically summarized into three distinct and prominent categories. This research found, that in general, the participants in this study valued 1) pedagogical and professional competencies, 2) interpersonal and relational competencies, and 3) linguistic and communicative competencies.

Conclusions and Discussions

This research neither sought to support nor detract from the role of the NEST in the English language classroom, but examined aspects of the NEST's identity by drawing on multiple perspectives, including the NEST's self-perceptions as well as those of their students and NNEST peers. In this research the term NEST was used in the broadest of terms, rejecting a "nativist", narrowly defined view of the NEST as the ideal English teacher, but tacitly acknowledging the "reality" of its use in EFL employment and teaching. This research was conducted under the general assumption that English language teaching is both complex and multi-faceted and so allows for multiple and diverse approaches to teaching and classroom practice. As such, this research was conducted with the expectation that the NESTs would have both areas of significant professional contribution as well as areas of professional development. The specific aim of this study was to examine if the NEST's perceived "proficiency" and "native expertise" may possibly mask areas of professional growth in the same way that a "deficiency" model for NNESTs potentially masked valuable areas of their professional contribution.

This research found a significant level of correlation between the NEST's self-perceptions and those of their NNEST peers. There was also a moderate level of correlation between the students' and NEST's perceptions, with the most notable exception being in the area of communication. These results suggest a reasonable level of self-awareness among the NESTs. Moreover, that the majority of respondents generally recognized the NESTs having areas of weaknesses (eleven respondents suggested that NESTs had no weaknesses) is also indicative of varying levels of either acceptance or rejection of the "nativist" view of the NEST as the ideal language teacher.

It is also of interest to note that while the NESTs believed their strengths to be their fluency, pronunciation and accent, and their command of the English language (these three themes accounted for 63.5% of all responses), for the students, communication with their teachers represented their greatest challenge. Slightly over two thirds of the students, and over half the comments that the students offered (PF = 67.5%, RF = 55.1) concerned issues

related to communication. Furthermore, while the students also commented favourably on several aspects of the NEST's performance in the classroom, there was a general acknowledgement, from each of the groups of a perceived weakness in teaching English as a subject and a lack of knowledge of their students' culture or needs. Whether this evidences "masking", that is whether it indicates that a particular attitude or belief of the NEST's, such as their confidence in their native English proficiency blinding them of issues of intercultural communication or ELT, is arguable and was not able to be established on the evidence here. However, it could be more confidently stated that many of the students suggested that their NEST teachers often spoke too fast, used unexplained idioms and expressions, and could be difficult to communicate with in situations involving misunderstandings and cultural confusion. Also, that there was a general acknowledgement of areas where they lacked knowledge, experience and ability. As such, it may be more realistic and appropriate to suggest that the areas of intercultural communication and teaching English as a subject, quite possibly represent two areas for self-reflective practice and profession development.

Furthermore, these views are arguably indicative of a general level of awareness among the participants of the complex and multifaceted nature of language teaching and a valuing of teachers, both NNEST and NEST, who are engaging, talented and experienced educators, with professional qualifications, teaching ability and conduct, while also being approachable people with good interpersonal and intercultural skills. This is also attested to in the literature by several scholars who promote the importance of having language teaching skills and a language awareness that exceeds simple "native" language proficiency. Ellis (1994) states that metalinguistic awareness or sensitivity to language use are good attributes to have in the language classroom, while Leech also adds that a being a good language teacher also requires that the teachers be "aware of the contrastive relations between native language and foreign language". Muhlhausler adds that good language teachers need to be able to engage and empower their students, adding to their current skills and knowledge in ways that allow the students themselves to build on their current skill and knowledge base (cited in Ellis, 1994).

This study highlighted several general areas of competency that were valued by the participants, these being: 1) pedagogical and professional competencies, 2) interpersonal and relational competencies, and 3) linguistic and communicative competencies. Interestingly, within the aforementioned competencies the NEST teachers were paradoxically seen as having both strengths and weakness. NESTs were believed to be confident and active teachers who could, at times, offer clear explanations in aspects of both coursework and target language use. However, they suffered a potential lack of knowledge, training and experience in teaching English as a subject. Also, while NESTs were seen to be kind, caring and friendly teachers with good interpersonal skills, there was a perception they could lack an understanding of, and essential experience in dealing with, their students' culture.

Additionally, the NEST teachers were perceived to be educators with strengths in certain areas of communication, specifically pronunciation and accent, and a high level of command of and expertise in using English. However, this study found that two thirds of the students surveyed perceived that the NESTs' most significant weakness was in the area of communication.

In conclusion, I believe that the results of this study add to those voices proposing that language education look beyond the teacher's passport and consider all language teachers as needing to be multi-competent educators who, while requiring an aptitude in English, also have equal requirements for inter-personal and cross-cultural competencies, professionalism, and both general teaching and specific English teaching training and experience. This focus on the language teacher as a multi-competent teacher may offer a way to move beyond the native and non-native construct in ELT and best accommodate the students' needs by placing the most adept language educators in the classroom.

Suggestions

This study hypothesized that the NEST's perceived "proficiency" and "native expertise" may mask areas of professional growth. While it could be argued from the findings that the responses of the participants do indicate a level of masking, a more useful insight may be that the findings simply suggest areas where greater self-reflection and training could yield benefits in teaching and classroom practice. The two such potential areas for professional development, highlighted by the participant's responses, are the need for development of intercultural communication aptitude, as suggested by many of the students, and the more general call for in-service and supplementary training in ELT. Encouragingly the NEST's own acknowledgement and "ownership" of this latter area of development, suggests a potential receptivity to such in-service training.

While these results are of potential interest, they require further research which is both wider and more diverse in its selection of participants. Furthermore, as this research had a declared interest in examining strengths and weaknesses, the perception of the paradoxical nature of the NEST's strength and weaknesses, may be attributable to the style of question or methodology. However, it may also be the result of deeper issues. For example, it is possible that it is the NEST's "foreign-ness" lends the impression of expertise and confidence may also be exactly that which makes intercultural communication difficult. As such, further research in exploring the validity of each of the paradoxes and underlying relationships is warranted.

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