

# The Implicit Perspectives Between Native English-speaking Teachers and Non-native English-speaking Teachers In Chinese Higher Education

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**Abstract :** This thesis aims to explain the cognition and preference between native English-speaking teacher (NEST) and non-native English-speaking teacher (NNEST) from the aspects of identity, attitude, teaching and employment, and proves that effective teaching and professional competence are more important than ‘native speaker’ identity for achieving an ideal teacher, as well as a suggestion that balancing both is conducive to the development of Chinese higher education.

**Keywords :** Native English-speaking Teachers; Non-native English-speaking Teachers; Chinese Higher Education

## 1. Introduction

English is regarded as a universal language during the past. A large number of people have learned it as their second or foreign language. Currently, the number of foreign teachers has a dramatic increase, the proportion of language teachers (native English-speaking teacher) is relatively large. Although there are clear regulations on the education background and foreign teachers’ experience of cultivation, in the actual recruitment, a number of universities blindly seek the quantity of teachers and ignore their professional background, believing that native speakers are an important factor. Therefore, this has contributed to an issue that native speaker (NS) is the ideal teacher in Chinese higher education, which I strongly disagree with.

## 2. Identity

The language which people first learned was the mother tongue and that those who spoke this language were native speakers. Cook (1999) regarded native speakers as those individuals who learned their mother tongue in their infancy. Therefore, it can be shown that acquisition time of language and recognition of language community are two important factors, related to NES. For the definition of NNEST, it is those who are with fewer or fractional NES’s features. Moreover, the definition of NNEST has implied that NNESTs expects to be NESs, and express the superiority of NESs.

According to the statistics, 150,000 native English teachers were teaching in China in 2006 (Joan and Lee 2006), while the quantity will be surging as the rising requirements nowadays. Some provinces hire well-trained NESTs, while the others are willing to hire NESTs with only American senior school diplomas. That is to say, more and more NES teachers who do not have any educational experience or language teaching qualification are employed just because they are native English speakers. So we can see that identity of NEST is significant in China, while the dichotomy between NESTs and NNESTs may lead to this implicit perspective.

## 3. Attitude

### 3.1 Method

This paper focuses on the results obtained from a questionnaire and other scholars’ survey data. The questionnaire surveyed 30 college students who are major in English or have studied abroad in English-speaking countries through WeChat with the following

four open questions:

- (1) Do you prefer native English-speaking teachers (NEST) or non-native English-speaking teachers (NNEST)? Please explain the reason.
- (2) Which teaching style do you prefer when you learned English (NEST&NNEST)? Please explain the reason.
- (3) Who do you think is the ideal teacher (NEST & NNEST)? Please explain the reason.

### 3.2 Findings and discussion

According to the data, it can be shown that about 61% of the students prefer NESTs because students believe they are better due to the fact that NEST can speak native English. Moreover, eighteen college students regarded NESs as the ideal teachers because of their high oral fluency and more relaxed classroom atmosphere. In addition, some learners believed that they have more opportunities to enhance their speaking skills. Other twelve participants considered that NNESTs are more suitable, as they have the same cultural background and bilingual teaching and this advantage enables NNESTs to accurately predict language errors. Additionally, NNESTs have a similar English learning experience with learners, which makes NNESTs better understand the difficulties of students in English learning and are more sensitive to student needs.

In addition, the investigation of Hu (2004) also shows that most of Chinese college students accept NESTs much more in the process of learning language. Moreover, Wang's (2013) study provides some inspiration for English education in China, indicating that although her research participants have some positive attitudes towards non-native English, they have exposed their struggle between formulaically following native English and not. As a result, according to the survey, Chinese college students are more inclined to the former in terms of their attitude towards NEST and NNEST. One of the reasons that contributes to this view is that the stereotype of NEST is better. Therefore, whether or not having the identities of native English speakers is not necessarily a key factor affecting the pronunciation level of students, as students can benefit from both.

## 4. Teaching

### 4.1 Oracy

According to the investigation, most Chinese college students prefer foreign native English-speaking teachers because they consider the pronunciation of NETSs is more standard to help them improve oral skills and simulate the assorted phrases and structures used by native English speakers. In addition, NETSs tend to encourage students to speak English, therefore, learners have to stay in an English-only environment and they have more opportunities to practice speaking and listening in an oral class with a NEST. Moreover, communicating with NESTs makes students gain a sense of accomplishment and stimulates their interest in learning English. However, the others think that in the class of NESTs, sometimes they can't understand because the speed of NESTs is too fast.

### 4.2 Teaching style

According to the questionnaire, fourteen participants prefer the pedagogical style of NESTs, as the teaching method is more flexible. There are more games and group discussions during the learning process, which makes learning easier. On the contrary, the remaining participants considered that the teaching styles of NNESTs are more suitable for them. Because they can find the vocabulary and grammar that students can't understand in time and explain them in bilingual. And beyond that, the teaching content formulated by NNESTs is suitable for examination.

## 5. Employment

Although the academic community is committed to promoting specialization among English teachers, rather than native-speakerism in the teachers of English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) occupation, the discrimination against non-native language teachers is still obvious, especially in the employment competition. It is worth mentioning that except the identity of native speakers, recruitment advertisements even have clear regulations on factors unrelated to competence, such as nationality and race. Furthermore, a large number of NESs without any teaching experience are employed as oral teachers by Chinese colleges and education institutions with high salaries because of their native identities. In addition to the insufficiency of professional qualifications and experience, most of them recognize little about Chinese culture and customs, and more importantly, little about Chinese education system. However, implicit discrimination in employment is not conducive to the development of higher education in China, and the preference of employers for NES is one of the reasons for this situation.

Employers prefer to choose NESs to teach high-level classes rather than choose NNESTs. This kind of the preference of employers for NES can cause two serious problems. Prejudices of employers about NNESTs will affect their development of future

career and teaching quality. More than half of NESTs in a university in China have only bachelor's degrees and unqualified professional knowledge of linguistics. Moreover, because managers rarely make clear requirements for NESs' academic certificate, professional background, and teaching experience, many NESTs who have none work experience or even training are not qualified for the job.

## 6. Suggestion & implication

It can be seen from the above researches that both Chinese college students and recruiters have a preference for NESTs as their 'native speaker' identities and high oral fluency. It is worth mentioning that NNESTs are more suitable for Chinese college students in aspect of teaching. Therefore, it is not necessary for a native speaker to be an ideal teacher. Effective teaching and professional ability are the requirements for achieving an ideal teacher. Moreover, five main characteristics (sorted by frequency) that effective teachers have or should have: learners and knowledge, participation in critical reflection, gaining past experience, informed lesson planning, and active student participation (Farrell, 2015).

### 6.1 Suggestions

Therefore, there is a suggestion that students and managers should change the views of the implicit discrimination against NNESTs in time. For Chinese university students, they should evaluate teachers in terms of their ability rather than their identity and abandon the discrimination, stereotype that native speakers are better. For Chinese higher educational employers, they should give NESTs and NNESTs chances to compete fairly. Moreover, balancing both is conducive to the development of Chinese higher education instead of blind recruitment of native English speakers. Furthermore, both teachers need to improve their professional abilities and have a effective teaching. NESTs need to refine their grammar knowledge, understand Chinese culture and make syllabus suitable for Chinese higher education. Additionally, NNESTs will keep improving themselves skills.

### 6.2 Implication

Chinese higher educational students and managers preference for NESTs cannot be completely changed in a short time. Therefore, Chinese higher educational sector needs to improve clear rules and regulations for the recruitment of native English-speaking teachers.

## 7. Conclusion

This essay has showed some implicit perspectives between NESTs and NNESTs in Chinese higher education. Firstly, in the aspects of identity, attitude and employment, there is an implicit preference for NESTs in Chinese higher education, which is unfair for NNESTs, as well as the negative effect of the further development of Chinese higher education. Secondly, in the field of teaching, the ability of NNESTs is not worse than NESTs, and they have their own unique advantages such as the same mother tongue as learners, the capacity of empathy, and sensitive to learners' requirements. Therefore, with the increasingly internationalization of higher education, Chinese colleges and universities not only need to attract outstanding NESTs, but also give full play to the advantages of NNESTs, make full use of teacher resources and promote the improvement of English education in China. What's more, this essay proved that effective teaching and professional competence are more important than 'native speaker' identity for achieving an ideal teacher. Therefore, both native and non-native English-speaking teachers need to constantly improve their professional ability and adjust the teaching methods in time to achieve effective teaching. In addition, although this essay is based on the results of the questionnaire, there are limitations in the process of investigation. Firstly, the survey has a small number of participants, so the views of the participants may be one-sided and lead to the incompleteness and limitations of essay. Secondly, there are fewer objective questions in the questionnaire, which may lead to implicit guidance for participants. Finally, the questionnaire has fewer questions, which may lead to less comprehensive analysis. Therefore, further investigation is needed.

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