

A multi-perspective and multi-method study on perceptions of English proficiency and pedagogical practices of NNESTs and NESTs in Chinese university classrooms

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This study investigates the perceived English proficiency and teaching practices of non-native and native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs and NESTs) in Chinese universities, utilizing a multi-method approach including surveys, classroom observations, interviews, and focus groups. Data were collected from 118 students, four NNESTs, four NESTs, and two administrators to assess proficiency in English for general purposes (EGP) and English for teaching purposes (ETP). Qualitative and quantitative analyses indicate that NNESTs rate their ETP proficiency higher than their EGP, while NESTs perceive their EGP and ETP proficiencies to be superior to those of NNESTs. Administrators affirm NNESTs' ETP proficiency but raise concerns about NESTs' writing skills for ETP. Although a majority of students (n=65) showed no preference, focus groups suggest their preferences are context-dependent. The findings contribute to the understanding of ETP versus EGP proficiency and highlight the need for professional development in teaching competencies for both NESTs and NNESTs.

INTRODUCTION

The dichotomy between native and non-native English-speaking teachers (NESTs and NNESTs, respectively), that is, teachers whose first language is English and those whose first language is other than English, is still a hot topic in today's English-as-a-medium-of-instruction (EMI) field (Mydgyes, 2017). English proficiency is often at the center of the debate about which of the two are better English teachers, where English proficiency is seen as the main attribute that determines the quality of language teachers' professional practice (Braine, 2010; Llurda, 2005). Along the line with the penetrating debate is the growing recognition of the legitimacy of global Englishes, English as a lingua franca, and English as international language (Kiczkowiak, 2020). However, it is undeniable that other professional qualifications of English teachers, NNESTs' shared linguistic and cultural backgrounds with students (Llurda, 2005; Ma, 2012a) and pedagogical preparedness (Choi & Lee, 2016) also account for successful language teaching.

While studies have examined the English proficiency and pedagogical practices of NESTs and NNESTs from multiple perspective of students, NNESTs and NESTs, and program administrators (e.g., Huang, 2018; Llurda, 2005, Medgyes, 1994; Moussu, 2006), the perspectives of *all* stakeholders within one intensive English program (IEP) still merits research. This study does so in the context of two IEPs in Chinese universities in which "English is most 'in play' in China" Hartse and Dong (2015, p.10). Employing a multi-method design that includes surveys, interviews (both individual and focus groups) and classroom observations, the current study examines the perceived English proficiency and pedagogical practices of NNEST and NEST practitioners.

LITERATURE REVIEW

For several decades, researchers in the field of applied linguists have examined issues related to NNESTs that ranged from teachers' perceptions of their own identity and language proficiency (Brinton, 2004), to students' attitudes and beliefs about NNESTs and NESTs (Huang, 2018; Llurda, 2005), to

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administrators' perceptions of their NNEST and NEST faculty (Mahboob, 2003), to implications for teacher training and education (Flynn & Gulikers, 2001).

Studies have elicited perceptions of NNESTs' language proficiency and professional practices from the perspectives of NNESTs themselves (Butler, 2007; Liu, 2005; Llurda & Huguet, 2003) as well as other language program stakeholders, such as program administrators (Mahboob, 2003; Moussu, 2006; Reid, 1997) and students (Liang, 2002; Mahboob, 2004). Studies focusing on NNESTs' perceptions have reported that they experience emotional challenges in their profession, such as anxiety and a sense of inferiority because of their self-perceived inadequate language proficiency (Brinton, 2004; Medgyes, 1999; Reves & Medgyes, 1994). Mirsanjari, Karbalaei and Afraz (2013) reported that English proficiency influenced teachers' efficacy in teaching because, as the results indicated, participating teachers were less confident about tasks related to English-use than other aspects of pedagogical practices (e.g., controlling disruptive classroom behaviors). However, Rajagopalan (2005) pointed out the importance of distinguishing NNESTs' self-perceived language proficiency and their actual English abilities, for it is the former that plays a key role in establishing their teaching confidence. Other than the emotional challenges of NNESTs, researchers have also looked into the advantages and disadvantages of NNESTs' language teaching compared to NESTs'. Ma (2012a) reported that the four main advantages of employing local NNESTs were the instructors' "ability to use students' L1, their understanding of student learning difficulties, the ease for students in understanding their teaching, and effective communication between students and teachers" (p. 295). Studies have also suggested that NNESTs have an advantage in teaching grammar (Cheung & Braine, 2007; Mahboob, 2004; Medgyes, 1994), having knowledge of the local educational environment (Medgyes, 1994), and providing learner models of proficient language users (Cook, 2005). Students identified inaccurate pronunciation (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005; Mahboob, 2004), lack of English proficiency (Guerra, 2017), and less opportunities for students to practice English (Ma, 2012a) as disadvantages of studying under NNESTs. As for NESTs', their unique advantage lay in being

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native speakers of the target language and being regarded as the standard (Stern, cited in Ma, 2012a). NESTs have advantages in helping students improve speaking and listening skills (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005), and their teaching style is also preferred by students (Ma, 2012a). However, NESTs are disadvantaged in their communication with students. For example, studies have reported that students have difficulty understanding NESTs (Ma, 2012a) and experience anxiety when communicating with NESTs (Luk & Lin, 2007).

Compared with the body of research on NNESTs' and NESTs' perceptions of their language teaching practice, less attention has been given to the perceptions of other stakeholders such as students (Huang, 2018; Llurda, 2005) and program administrators (Moussu & Llurda, 2008). Recognizing the importance of looking at students' perspectives in order to gain a fuller understanding of NNESTs' and NESTs' professional practices, Huang (2018) reviewed previous studies students' perspectives, concluding that "students, both in ESL[English as a second language] and EFL[English as a foreign language] settings, did not seem to have a negative perception toward NNESTs and recognized that teaching experience and professionalism were more important than teachers' linguistic backgrounds" (p. 34).

As program administrators are involved in hiring, supervising, and supporting language teachers, their perceptions are fundamental when looking into the practices of NNESTs and NESTs. Previous studies involving administrators' views of NNESTs and NESTs have been primarily conducted in ESL contexts (Mahboob, 2003; Moussu, 2006). However, "the EFL context is in great need of further studies about practices and beliefs of language program administrators" (Moussu and Llurda, 2008, p. 340).

In global EFL contexts, China merits researchers' attention because of its large number of both NNESTs and non-native learners and because the NNEST issue is especially salient in the Asian context (Young & Walsh, 2000). Previous studies situation in Chinese university context has neglected administrator's perspective (e.g., Huang, 2018). The current study examines perceptions of

multiple stakeholders (students, administrators, NNESTs, and NESTs) in EFL context, with a focus on the perceived English proficiency and pedagogical practices of NNESTs and NESTs.

METHOD

Upon reviewing research devoted to NNESTs in applied linguistics since the pioneering work of Medgyes (1994), Moussu and Llurda (2008) commented that “the lack of past experience researching non-native teachers has determined the simplicity of some research design” (p. 332). Five types of studies dealing with NNESTs were identified by Moussu and Llurda (2008): “non-empirical reflections on the nature and conditions of NNEST teachers, personal experiences and narratives, surveys, interviews, and classroom observations” (p. 332).

Ma (2012b) emphasized the importance of data triangulation by using multiple instruments (e.g., questionnaires and interviews) and described interviewing “as a research method [that] enables gentle probing for elaborations and yields richer data” (p. 3). Further, Moussu and Llurda (2008) have pointed out the paucity of studies using classroom observations, as they could complement surveys and interviews. In light of this, the current study employed surveys and interviews for “richer data” and also included classroom observations as a complement to further probe the research questions and look at whether there were any divergences between NNESTs’ and NESTs’ perceived pedagogical practices and their actual classroom practices.

Participants and Context

The study involved the main stakeholders of IEP programs (four-year full-time Bachelor program with students majoring only in English) in two Chinese universities: NNESTs, NESTs, program administrators, and EFL students. As with many other university-level IEPs in China, students are taught by both NNESTs and NESTs to develop their English language skills. The prevalence of such teaching/learning contexts makes the two IEPs suitable for investigating

NNESTs' and NESTs' practices from multiple perspectives. Table 1 presents the participants' profiles.

Table 1. Participant Profiles

| | UA | | UB | |
|--|--------------------------|----------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| EFL Students (n=118): Chinese students studying in a university-level IEP | | | | |
| Number | n=56 | | n=62 | |
| Age | M=19.2 | | M=18.9 | |
| Gender | Female 85.5%; Male 14.5% | | Female 93.5%; Male 6.5% | |
| Education level | Undergraduate | | Undergraduate | |
| NNESTs (n=4) | | | | |
| | <u>NNEST 1</u> | <u>NNEST 2</u> | <u>NNEST 3</u> | <u>NNEST4</u> |
| Age | 36 | 37 | 48 | 38 |
| Gender | Male | Male | Female | Female |
| Education level | Ph.D. | Master's | Master's | Ph.D. |
| Years of teaching | 11 | 12 | 25 | 13 |
| NESTs (n=4) | | | | |
| | <u>NEST 1</u> | <u>NEST 2</u> | <u>NEST 3</u> | <u>NEST 4</u> |
| Age | 39 | 26 | 61 | 43 |
| Gender | Male | Male | Male | Male |
| Home country | U.S.A. | U.S.A. | U.S.A. | U.S.A. |
| Education level | Bachelor's | Bachelor's | Master's | Master's |
| Years of teaching | 7 | 5 | 26 | 13 |
| Administrators (n=2): IEP administrators in Chinese universities | | | | |
| | <u>Administrator 1</u> | | <u>Administrator 2</u> | |
| Age | 36 | | 40 | |
| Gender | Male | | Male | |
| Education level | Ph.D. | | Ph.D. | |
| Years of experience | 2 | | 9.5 | |

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According to surveys and interviews, both administrators received their doctoral degrees from the same top-tier institution in China. All four NNESTs had formal education (an advanced degree) in language teaching whereas only NEST 2 completed an online TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) certificate course, and NEST 4 had a master's degree in language teaching. With the exception of NEST 4 who had taught in other EFL settings, none of the participating NESTs had prior teaching experience.

In each IEP program, two classes and their instructors (one NNEST and one NEST per class) were recruited for the study. Students' English proficiency was intermediate level (B1 level in the Common European Framework). 17 out of 118 students volunteered to participate in the focus group discussions. Table 2 summarizes participants' involvement.

Table 2. Participants and Task Involvement

| Method | Students <i>n</i> =118 | NNESTs <i>n</i> =4 | NESTs <i>n</i> =4 | Administrators <i>n</i> =2 |
|--|----------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Surveys (30 mins) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Classroom recordings (2 x 50 minutes/class x 4 classes x 2 institutions) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | N/A |
| Interviews (60 minutes/person x 10 interviews) | N/A | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Focus group discussion (90 mins/session x 4 classes) | <i>n</i> =17 | N/A | N/A | N/A |

Data Collection

Surveys

Surveys, which consisted of both closed- and open-ended questions, were developed for students, instructors, and administrators. The closed-ended questions elicited general demographic information about the participants (e.g., age, gender, and years of teaching/learning/administrative experience), along with 7-point Likert-scale ratings for perceived English language proficiency of NESTs and /or NNESTs for general communication (EGP) and teaching purposes (ETP)

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(1=novice level, 7=expert level). The student version further elicited students' perceptions of NNESTs' and NESTs' strengths and weaknesses and their instructor preference (if any). The instructor version asked questions about instructors' teaching experience and self-perceived language proficiency levels (both EGP and ETP) in several language domains (speaking, listening, reading, and writing), and their perceptions of their strengths and weaknesses and those of their NNEST/NEST colleagues. The administrator version focused on administrators' educational background, administrative experience, and their perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of their NNESTs and NESTs. Administrators were also asked to rate their NNESTs' and NESTs' EGP and ETP proficiency.

Classroom Observations

A video recorder was set up at the back of each classroom to record NNESTs' and NESTs' classroom teaching. With permission granted by the administrators and instructors, two back-to-back 50-minute classroom teaching sessions were recorded (total time: [4 NNEST + 4 NEST classes] * 100 minutes= 800 minutes).

Interview Questions

The follow-up interviews aimed to obtain clarification and elaboration on participants' survey responses and the observations derived from the classroom recordings. A set of interview questions, ranging from 24 to 29 questions, was generated for each follow-up interview (e.g., As a NEST/NNEST, what challenges do you face in your teaching? I noticed that you translated words into Chinese in your teaching. What other occasions would you switch to speaking in Chinese in your instruction?).

Focus Group Questions

A set of 19 focus group questions (e.g., Do you participate differently in classes taught by NNESTs vs. NESTs?) was developed, with a focus of students' perceptions of NNESTs' and NESTs' teaching practices.

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Data Collection Procedures

The study adhered to the procedures approved by the institution's ethics board. They were carried out as follows:

1. Permission to forward the invitation by email to potential instructors was obtained from the administrators of each IEP through publicly accessible directories. The first four instructors from each institution who responded to the invitation were emailed the consent form the survey to complete and return within one week.
2. With permission from the instructors, the student participants filled out the surveys in class after the signed informed consent form.
3. After completing the surveys, students were given the opportunity to indicate through the completion of a sign-up sheet about whether they would be willing to participate in follow-up focus-group discussions. Those who submitted their sign-up sheets were then contacted via email to schedule their focus-group sessions.
4. With permission from the administrators and instructors, two 50-minute sessions were video-recorded for each of eight classes (4 NNEST and 4 NEST classes)
5. Follow-up individual interviews were conducted with each instructor and administrator, and focus-group discussions were conducted with volunteer students from each class. All follow-up interviews and discussions were scheduled at mutually convenient times and audio-recorded using preferred means of communication platform.

Data Analysis

Survey items with Likert-scale rating underwent descriptive statistical analysis (e.g., means and standard deviation calculation). Audio-recorded data collected from students, instructor, and administrator were transcribed verbatim

and checked again one week later for accuracy. A total of 59,520 words from the interviews, 19,474 words from the focus group discussions, 8,127 words from the open-ended survey responses, along with 800-minute classroom videos, were uploaded to NVivo 12 (QSR international 2018) for qualitative coding and analysis.

The transcripts were coded using an open and content-based method (Creswell, 2013; Ivankova, 2015; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The classroom videos were coded to capture information and episodes related to instructors' classroom teaching practices (e.g., medium of instruction-English, Chinese, or code-mixing, teacher-student interaction styles, and student ways of participation). The unit of analysis was an episode that reflected an instructor's teaching procedure. Special attention was given to coded information or episodes that captured characteristics of an instructor's classroom teaching that were used to identify instructors' language teaching approaches and methods (Richards and Rodgers, 2014). Multiple cycles of coding (e.g., codes were verified and checked for consistency; codes were combined and grouped to minimize redundancy) were conducted after the first round of coding. The total number of codes generated from the four sources of data are: Focus group (n=453), interviews (n=586), surveys (n=725), and videos (n=75). Coding checks were conducted through discussion with another researcher to reach agreement. Table 3 presents the seven major themes and 22 sub-themes developed and identified through the coding cycles.

Table 3. Major Themes and Sub-themes in NVivo

| No. | Major Themes | Ref | Sub-themes | Ref |
|-----|-------------------------------|-----|-------------------------------------|-----|
| 1. | Teaching and Learning | 555 | Instructors' Teaching Practices | 367 |
| | | | EFL Students' English Learning | 101 |
| | | | English-Only Classroom and L1 Usage | 72 |
| | | | Culture Learning and Teaching | 18 |
| 2. | NEST Strengths and Weaknesses | 445 | NEST Strengths | 284 |
| | | | NEST Weaknesses | 161 |
| 3. | NNEST | | NNEST Strengths | 253 |

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| | | | | |
|----|---|-----|--|-----|
| | Strengths and Weaknesses | 436 | NNEST Weaknesses | 183 |
| 4. | EGP and ETP Proficiency | 122 | Perceived Important Language Domain(s) | 72 |
| | | | Perceived EGP Proficiency | 31 |
| | | | Perceived ETP Proficiency | 8 |
| | | | Perceptions of EGP Versus ETP Proficiency | 11 |
| 5. | Education, Training and Work Experience | 117 | Factors Informing Current Practices | 58 |
| | | | NEST Education, Training, and Work Experience | 36 |
| | | | NNEST Education, Training, and Work Experience | 23 |
| 6. | IEP Programs in Chinese Universities | 94 | Administration-Related Information | 43 |
| | | | Perceptions of Program Effectiveness | 31 |
| | | | Teaching-Related Program Information | 20 |
| 7. | Professional Development (PD) | 67 | PD Constraints and Issues | 27 |
| | | | PD Activities | 19 |
| | | | PD Interests and Needs | 17 |
| | | | PD Support | 4 |

Note. Ref.=reference counts in NVivo

FINDINGS

Perceived Language Proficiencies

The surveys allowed both instructors and administrators to rate NNESTs' and NESTs' overall proficiency of EGP and ETP as well as their proficiency across language domains. The results are presented in Tables 4.

Table 4. NNESTs' and NESTs' Self-Perceived vis-à-vis Administrators' Perceptions of their EGP and ETP Proficiency

| | NNEST 1 | | NNEST 2 | | NNEST 3 | | NNEST 4 | |
|------------------|---------|-----|---------|-----|---------|-----|---------|-----|
| | EGP | ETP | EGP | ETP | EGP | ETP | EGP | ETP |
| Speaking | 6 | 6 | 5 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 |
| Listening | 7 | 7 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 |
| Reading | 7 | 7 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 |
| Writing | 6 | 7 | 5 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 |
| Overall | 6 | 6 | 5 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 |
| | NEST 1 | | NEST 2 | | NEST 3 | | NEST 4 | |
| | EGP | ETP | EGP | ETP | EGP | ETP | EGP | ETP |
| Speaking | 6 | 6 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| Listening | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 |

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| | | | | | | | | |
|----------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Reading | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 6 |
| Writing | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 6 | 6 |
| Overall | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 |

| | Administrator 1 | | | | Administrator 2 | | | |
|------------------|-----------------|-----|-------|-----|-----------------|-----|-------|-----|
| | NNESTs | | NESTs | | NNESTs | | NESTs | |
| | EGP | ETP | EGP | ETP | EGP | ETP | EGP | ETP |
| Speaking | 7 | 6 | 7 | 7 | 6 | 5.5 | 7 | 7 |
| Listening | 6 | 6 | 7 | 7 | 6 | 6 | 7 | 7 |
| Reading | 5 | 6 | 7 | 7 | 6 | 7 | 7 | 6 |
| Writing | 6 | 5 | 7 | 6 | 5 | 5.5 | 6 | 6 |
| Overall | 6 | 6 | 7 | 7 | 6 | 6 | 5.5 | 7 |

Note. The rating scale used was 1 to 7 (1=novice level and 7=expert level). Shaded cells= domains with different ratings in EGP vs. ETP.

Descriptive statistics results suggest that all NESTs perceived both their EGP and ETP to be at the expert level while NNESTs perceived their overall ETP proficiency to be greater than their EGP proficiency ($M=6$ vs. 5.75 ; $SD=0.5$ vs. 0). Both administrators rated their NNESTs' overall ETP proficiency lower than that of their NESTs ($M=6$ vs. 7 ; both $SD=0$), and they both rated NNESTs' ETP proficiency lower in the domains of writing (W) and speaking (S) than in listening (L) and reading (R) (W and S: $M=5.25$ and 5.75 , respectively, both $SD=0.35$; L and R: $M=6$ and 6.5 , respectively, $SD=0$ and 0.71). Administrators also rated NESTs' ETP writing proficiency to be the lowest among language domains (W: $M=6$; S: $M=7$; L: $M=7$; R: $M=6.5$).

In the follow-up interviews, NNESTs reported that they encountered communication limitations in everyday life more often than when preparing lectures (they rated their ETP proficiency higher than their EGP proficiency), as in Excerpt 1.

Excerpt 1: Personally, I'm very confident in the class, but outside the class when I communicate with people in everyday life. Sometimes you got short of vocabulary or find it difficult to express yourself. . . . I have been teaching the same course for several times . . . you're familiar with the topic. That will make it easier to express in English. (Interview, NNEST 2)

NNESTs described their EGP writing proficiency as weak ($M=5.75$) regardless of their confidence in ETP writing ($M=6.25$). In Excerpt 2, NNEST1 considered “native speaker” to be the standard for expert proficiency, or “the highest level,” that he could not achieve in EGP writing. As for ETP writing, NNEST1 rated himself as “expert” because he could manage classroom language usage and teach testing skills and strategies to students benefiting from his knowledge of English-language writing requirements in China.

Excerpt 2. There is still a gap with native speakers . . . in my teaching, I think I can control the classroom teaching according to my language proficiency. . . . I can teach them how to write a good paper. Actually, writing in China is a little different. . . . Like most of my colleagues, I can teach them the skills, the strategies how to write the paper. . . . I rated a 7 because skill teaching is my expert area, so I can teach them. For me, still my writing, I cannot reach “native speaker” writing. (Interview, NNEST 1)

NNESTs also reported their overseas teaching experience as having contributed positively to their perceived confidence in their ETP and professional development in teaching, as revealed in the following excerpt.

Excerpt 3: The improvements that I have made in my classroom language [are owing to my overseas teaching experience]. I used to teach in classroom by using translated Chinese classroom language into English. . . . My abroad working experience really helped me to gain this kind of [natural/authentic] classroom language. . . . I am pretty confident. (Interview, NNEST 3)

Teaching experience also played a role in how NESTs perceived their ETP proficiency. While sufficient experience in teaching improved NNESTs’ ETP proficiency, less teaching experience helps explain why NESTs’ ETP proficiency was lower than their EGP proficiency (Excerpt 4). Note, NEST 4 distinguished ETP and EGP proficiency, which he described as “two different ball parks,” in Excerpt 5.

Excerpt 4. Reading and writing I’ve had less experience teaching, and I struggle with it more than I do with listening and speaking. (Interview, NEST 4)

Excerpt 5. I will view it [EGP vs. ETP] differently, definitely. Teaching the language and your own skill at it are completely different, and that is what makes me angry in our field because so many people think just

because they speak English, they can teach English. Yes, two different ball parks. (Interview, NEST 4)

NESTs' perceptions of their language proficiencies are also context-specific. NEST 1 rated his speaking lower for both EGP and ETP proficiency, which was not based entirely on his perceptions of his underlying competence, but performance due to "social anxiety" and learners' low English proficiency, as he elaborated in Excerpt 6.

Excerpt 6: As to the six rating of speaking, I have some social anxiety. . . . It is not that I don't have the skill, it's just for speaking I just feel nervous in social situations. . . . Because these students, even at the university level, don't really have very good English skills, I have to dumb myself down. I am not really able to express myself to the full range of my ability. (Interview, NEST 1)

Further, NESTs also seemed to perceive NNESTs from a deficit perspective, especially in the speaking domain. For example, NEST 4 openly stated (Excerpt 7):

Excerpt 7: When I speak to some of my colleagues, I am surprised by their pronunciation and the word order that comes out of their mouth. And I think okay, you know, probably you are amazing in classroom in reading and writing areas, but I wouldn't want to learn from you in a speaking class because you don't speak in the way that a native person would speak. (Interview, NEST 4)

In contrast, both administrators reported positively about their NNESTs' use of EMI. Administrator 1 was okay with NNESTs using learners' L1 when encountering communication difficulties, as long as L1 use was limited to 15% of class time; he believed that teaching only in English in the classroom was impossible. Administrator 2 encouraged "all teachers to conduct their teaching in only English" except when explaining difficult concepts or theories, such as linguistics and translation theories, "due to the limitation of the students' [English] proficiency and also the teachers' [NNESTs] [limited] language proficiency, mostly it is because of the students." Both administrators rated the writing domain of their NEST instructors as weak. This perception led them to assignments to speaking and listening courses, but not to writing courses, as illustrated in the following excerpt.

Excerpt 8: I seldom heard from them that they can write some academic papers or get their papers published. So, in that way, I think they are not so competent in academic writing compared with their speaking listening which are the two key areas for us to use them in our teaching. (Interview, Administrator 1)

Overall, regardless of NNESTs', NESTs', or Administrators' perceptions, NNESTs were perceived to have lower abilities in both EGP and ETP across all four language domains, with the writing receiving the lowest rating across the board.

Reported and Observed Pedagogical Practices

Both NNESTs and NESTs were asked about their own teaching as well as their observations of their NNEST/NEST colleagues' teaching. This self-report data was compared with data gathered from the participating instructors' actual classroom teaching recorded by videos (i.e., observed data). Table 5 presents both reported and observed data for comparative purposes.

Table 5. Pedagogical Practices: Reported and Observed

| | NNESTs | NESTs |
|-----------------|---|---|
| Reported | NNEST reports | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teacher-centered teaching • insufficient class activities • textbook/content bound (except NNEST 3 reported her approach more in line with NESTs' general approach) |
| | NEST reports | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sufficient class activities • enjoyable class atmosphere • poor organization; inefficient |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teacher-centered teaching • focused on memorization • lack of interaction | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • communicative, student-centered teaching • casual classroom atmosphere • empathy; “tone-down” (i.e., simplifying lexical usage and grammatical structures) for students |

| | | | | |
|-----------------|--------------------------|---|-------------|--|
| Observed | general approach | grammar approach | translation | communicative approach (except for NEST3's classroom: formal lecturing with a focus on vocabulary building) |
| | medium of instruction | mostly occasional L1 use (except for NNEST1: mostly Chinese) | English, | English only |
| | class atmosphere | formal and serious | | casual and friendly (except for NEST 3's class, which is more in line with NESTs' milieu) |
| | activities & interaction | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • few activities, mostly lecturing • occasional questions asking (except for NNEST3's class) | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • abundant class activities • high student participation (except for NEST3's class) |

Note. L1= first language (Chinese)

NNESTs' and NESTs' perceptions of their own as well as their NNEST/NEST colleagues seemed to be in line. As summarized in Table 5, NNESTs were generally perceived as using a teacher-centered and behavioral approach, with limited interactions and classroom activities. NESTs were generally perceived as using a learner-centered and communicative language-teaching approach, with activities perceived as positive, but a perceived lack of organization and efficiency. Data from classroom recordings mostly corroborated teachers' descriptions of their teaching, except for NNEST 3 and NEST 3. For example, NNEST 3's class was highly interactive and included a variety of activities, while NEST 3 adopted a formal lecturing style and included very few activities. For both NNEST 3 and NEST 3, the self-reported instructional approach mismatched with the approach observed in the recordings (Benke & Medgyes, 2005; Blackstone, 2019).

In the follow-up interviews, NNESTs reported that their evaluation was largely based on their publications and not on their actual teaching: "*They don't evaluate teaching. They evaluate research, papers, like how many papers published*" (NNEST 3). Consequently, NNESTs frequently sought for

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professional development (PD) opportunities in research-related activities, receiving financial support from their university to this end, but not for teaching-related activities. NNEST3 identified PD needs in teaching, such as “short-term training in classroom teaching” and “overseas teaching opportunities.” Oddly, none of the participating NESTs had been evaluated nor had they participated in any PD activities during their career in China (Excerpt 9).

Excerpt 9: I don’t think I’ve had any sort of evaluation or have received no feedback as to how I’m doing it . . . which is sort of, you teach your class as long as you fill in the grades at the end correctly. No one is going to question you. I don’t think there is any sort of evaluation. (Interview, NEST 4)

From the administrator perspectives, NESTs’ communicative approach in language teaching was appreciated by both administrators. However, both administrators had concerns about NESTs’ classroom activities, which included too many games, and poor classroom management. As for NNESTs’ lecture style, Administrator1 commented that it was “old but practical” and explained that it was Chinese students’ preferred learning style: more listening to instructors lecturing and less participation in class, resulting in NNESTs’ teacher-centered teaching. In contrast, Administrator2 described NNESTs’ classroom teaching as “strict and dull.”

Pertaining to research question 3 from the students’ perspectives, the students identified both strengths and weaknesses in their NNESTs’ and NESTs’ pedagogical practices during the focus group discussion. Table 6 provides an overview of students’ perceptions of NNESTs’ and NESTs’ EMI pedagogical practices. The top three most commonly reported strength and limitations are presented, along with one sample excerpt shared by students during the focus group discussions.

Table 6. Students’ Perceptions of NNESTs’ and NESTs’ Pedagogical Practices

| | NNESTs | Ref. | Sample Excerpts* |
|-----------------|--|-------------|--|
| Positive | Shared language and culture that made it easy to communicate | | <i>FG 4: “they can explain the question in Chinese, and I can understand easily....Our Chinese</i> |

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|-----------------|---|-------------|--|
| | with (n=111) | 222 | <i>teachers are more approachable.</i> " |
| | teaching competence (n=56) | | <i>FG 4: "Chinese [teachers] are good at teaching. They are good at improving our abilities of deep thinking."</i> |
| | grammar teaching (n=23) | | <i>Class 1 survey responses: "They can help us understand difficult grammar better."</i> |
| Negative | Non-naiveness (n=91) | | <i>Class 3 survey responses: "bad accent; weakness in speaking; poor pronunciation; they [NNESTs] can't understand or don't know about some English culture."</i> |
| | Teaching style (n=49) | 153 | |
| | Assessment: memorization, not reflective of language ability (n=9) | | <i>Class 2 survey responses: class is dull; a bit boring; no English-speaking atmosphere; teaching is less interesting"</i> |
| | | | <i>FG 4: "Chinese teachers' way to assess us is only about the [exam] paper, and many students just recite many things and they fill in the papers, and they will get a good grade. But it is not really about their ability, not about language."</i> |
| | NESTs | Ref. | Sample Excerpts |
| Positive | Native-speaker status (n=209) | 264 | <i>FG 4: "Foreign teachers, their spoken English is good because after all they are native speakers."</i> |
| | western teaching style (n=49) | | <i>FG 2: "In our foreign teacher class, we communicate with each other, and we learn together. Everyone participates."</i> |
| | assessment: skill-based (n=9) | | <i>FG 2: "Not remembering something, he tests our skills."</i> |
| Negative | communicative difficulties (n=90) | | <i>FG 3: "When I'm taking the foreign teachers' classes, sometimes I cannot understand what he is talking about."</i> |
| | class teaching(n=24) | 136 | <i>FG 1: "I'm sorry but some foreign</i> |

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|-------------------------------------|---|
| assessment: validity issue (n=7) | <i>teachers will play some really stupid things. I don't think such kind of games worth my time. It is not real practice for English, just games. Just stupid games."</i> |
| | <i>FG 1: "I got a high mark, but I don't think my speaking ability deserves the score."</i> |

Note. ref.=reference counts in NVivo. *Sources: surveys and focus group discussions.

As shown in Table 6, students shared more negative perceptions ($n=222$) than positive perceptions ($n=153$) about NNESTs' EMI pedagogical practices. Students generally negatively perceived NNESTs' classes as lacking activities and being non-interactive (FG 4). Concerning NESTs' pedagogical practices, students were more positive than negative ($n=264$ vs. $n=136$). Students positively described NESTs' creation of an authentic English environment (FG 4), active class activities and atmosphere (FG 2), and skill-based assessment method (FG 2) positively. However, students also shared communication difficulties with NESTs (FG 3), perceived some class activities as "stupid games" (FG1), and assessment validity concerns (FG 1).

Communication (shared language and culture) was the top strength for NNESTs. Meanwhile, it is the top limitation for NESTs due to language barriers. Notably, "non-nativeness" was the top limitation ($n=91$) reported for NNESTs and "native-speaker status" was the top strength ($n=209$) associated with NESTs that was reported by students.

Research question 3 was concerned with students' preferences for NNESTs or NESTs. Table 7 summarizes students' survey responses addressing this sub-question. Overall, 55.1% of the students ($n=65$) did not have any preference, and 44.9% ($n=53$) had a preference for either NNESTs ($n=25$, 47.2%) or NESTs ($n=26$, 49.1%). No students in Class 3 preferred being taught by a NEST. In the focus-group discussions, students reported that they received support from both instructor groups, but in different situations. For example, when

students had pronunciation and culture related questions, they sought help from their NESTs, but when they needed further explanations of abstract concepts, they preferred NNESTs' support.

Table 7. Student Preferences for NNESTs or NESTs

| Class | Preference: No | Preference: Yes | Instructor | |
|--------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| 1 (n=28) | 57.1% (n=16) | 42.9% (n=12) | NNEST | 33.3% (n=4) |
| | | | NEST | 66.7% (n=8) |
| 2 (n=28) | 64.3% (n=18) | 35.7% (n=10) | NNEST | 30% (n=3) |
| | | | NEST | 70% (n=7) |
| 3 (n=28) | 53.6% (n=15) | 46.4% (n=13) | NNEST | 100% (n=13) |
| | | | NEST | 0% (n=0) |
| 4 (n=34) | 47.1% (n=16) | 52.9% (n=18) | NNEST | 33.3% (n=6) |
| | | | NEST | 55.6% (n=10) |
| Total | 55.1% (n=65) | 44.9% (n=53) | NNEST | 49.1% (n=26) |
| | | | NEST | 47.2% (n=25) |

Note. Two of the 18 students in Class 4 did not specify their instructor preference.

Discussions and Implications

Rethinking “English proficiency”

NEST 4 strongly argued against the notion that native-speaker teachers are experts in ETP because he recognized ETP and EGP, as he put it, are “*two different ball parks.*” He also factored in his lack of experience in teaching certain language domains, such as reading, when rating his ETP reading as lower. Even as a native speaker of English, NEST 4 did not see himself as having an expert level in the domains of writing: “*I just I don’t think my writing is that good.*” This is in line with the participating administrators’ concerns about their NEST colleagues’ proficiency in the writing domain, and as a result, they tended to assign speaking and listening courses to NESTs, rather than reading and writing courses (Excerpt 8). Administrators did not seem to distinguish ETP from EGP proficiency, as their assessment is based on instructors’ (in)ability to publish papers. This echoes what Selvi (2014) called “the typical forms of division of labor” when it comes to NNEST and NESTs’ assignment of courses to teach.

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Following the discussion of distinguishing EGP and ETP proficiency, all participating NNESTs perceived their ETP proficiency to be higher than their EGP proficiency. NNESTs were confident in their EMI practice (Abe, 2011), which contradicts the non-confidence and anxiety of NNESTs reported by Butler (2007) and Rajagopalan (2005). Administrators were confident about their NNESTs' language proficiency as they rated their NNESTs' overall ETP at the advanced level and expressed positive views about NNESTs' L1 usage in the classroom. Further, NNESTs took advantage of other experience to complement their limitations in EGP and gain confidence in their ETP usage, as shared in interviews. For instance, NNEST 1 taught "the same course for several times," NNEST 2 was familiar with the requirements of English writing in China and test strategies, and NNEST 3 relied on his experience of EMI teaching abroad (see also Lee, Schutz, & Vlack, 2017).

It is reasonable to cast doubt on whether EGP proficiency matters to English language teaching as much as ETP proficiency does. Rajagopalan (2005) has pointed out the importance of distinguishing NNESTs' self-perceived language proficiency and their actual English abilities, for it is the former that plays a key role in establishing their confidence in teaching. In a similar line, Macaro, Sahan and Rose's (2021) study of the profiles of EMI teachers in higher education indicated that "the majority of teachers see a difference in [English] language proficiency needed in conferences compared to teaching" (p. 10). Thus, it is important to examine NNESTs' and NESTs' perceived ETP proficiency versus their EGP because it may be the actual ETP proficiency that influences their pedagogical practices.

Rethinking NNEST and NEST dichotomy

NNESTs and NESTs had distinct pedagogical practices according to all the stakeholders. The main criticism of NNESTs' teaching was their teacher-centered style (also see Qiu & Fang, 2021), formal class atmosphere, and lack of interactive activities. The classroom videos (see Table 5) confirmed that most NNESTs used formal lecturing for the majority of class time and incorporated

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little interaction and participation (see also Ma, 2012a) and NESTs' perceived pedagogical practices: casual class atmosphere, many classroom activities that allowed students to participate and practice (Ma, 2012a), and affluent instructor-student interaction (Qiu & Fang, 2021).

Recall, the teaching style of NNEST 3's and NEST 3's run counter to that of their respective instructor group as presented in Table 5. When digging into instructors' background, NNEST 3 was the only NNEST who had overseas language teaching experience, which helps to explain the similarity of her teaching style with NESTs' teaching styles, especially considering that her statement of her overseas teaching experience changed her teaching approach and made her more confident in ETP. NEST 3 taught his class very differently. His teaching style was similar to the grammar-translation approach commonly adopted by many Chinese NNESTs: formal lecturing and a teacher-centered approach. His 16-year language teaching in China might have largely led him to adopt the local NNEST-like teaching style even though his pedagogical style was not preferred by his students, as not a single student in Class 3 indicated a preference for NESTs (see Table 7). Thus, in the light of globalization and the cases of NNEST 3 and NEST 3, it is important to re-think the rationale of treating NNESTs and NESTs as homogenous groups based purely on their native language.

Importance of Multiple Sources of Data

Slightly over half of the students did not have a preference for NNESTs or NESTs. Similar findings have been reported by several studies conducted in EFL contexts. For example, Lasagabaster and Sierra (2005) reported that most students wanted both NNESTs and NESTs, and Díaz (2015) found that students were inclined either towards NNESTs or both NNESTs and NESTs for instruction in most language skills (e.g., grammar, culture, and strategies), though not for speaking. While the survey responses presented a no-preference attitude from over half of the students, focus group discussion revealed more nuanced students' preferences for NNESTs or NESTs that were context dependent. As synthesized

by Uzum (2018) from a body of research on learners' attitudes and found that students recognize NNESTs' or NESTs' qualities, such as background, pedagogy or linguistic abilities, thus, do not have a clear preference. Students no longer "buy into the 'native speaker fallacy'" (Mahboob, 2005 p. 66) as they can clearly articulate the qualities and effectiveness of instructors in a more comprehensive view. Methodologically, this study underscores the importance of using multiple data collection techniques and sources/perspectives not only to strengthen the credibility of the findings, but also to enhance the interpretations of the perceptions, both congruent and divergent, which are different versions of the realities.

Conclusion and Limitations

With multiple sources of data, the current study reveals that all stakeholders in this study were confident about both NNESTs' and NESTs' ETP proficiency but expressed concerns about other aspects of NNESTs' and NESTs' pedagogical practices (e.g., class activities). PD activities designed to strengthen instructors' pedagogical competence were lacking and merit administrators' attention.

Limitations of the current study must be recognized. As dynamic as one's classroom teaching is, the 800-minute classroom recordings along with surveys, interviews and focus-group discussions might still not fully reflect or provide a comprehensive picture of the ways the participating instructors teach. In the same line, while generalizability is not the goal of the study, we recognize the inter-relatedness of variables, such as linguistic and cultural background, teachers' and students' language-teaching/learning experiences, beliefs of stakeholders towards NNESTs and NESTs, pertaining to perceptions of practitioners' practices. A larger sample size, along with the gathering of production-based ETP/EGP proficiency scores, may permit the use of statistical measures to examine the two proficiencies for specific purposes.

This study elicited concerns from all stakeholders regarding instructors' pedagogical practices, which should lead instructors to seek PD opportunities to

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improve their pedagogical competence, especially in terms of class activities and student assessment. At the institutional level, the study highlights the need to re-evaluate instructor evaluation, as the current practice is heavily, if not solely, based on instructors' scholarly publications (as reported by the NNESTs and administrators). Further, the study calls for a consideration of distinguishing instructors' ETP proficiency from EGP proficiency and factors that influence instructors' ETP proficiency in order to inform teacher-training programs. Lastly, given NNEST 3 and NEST 3 teaching style running counter to those of other NNESTs and NESTs, the study calls for a re-examination of the rationale of treating NNESTs and NESTs as two homogenous groups solely based on their 'nativeness'.

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