

# A Comparative Study Between NESTs and NNESTs

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**Abstract**—Since the education internationalization and the importance of English are enhanced continuously and proficiency occupies a primary role in the subject matter knowledge of English language teaching (ELT), the background of teachers as native or non-native English speakers is of major concern. Who is the ideal English teacher has been a hotly-debated issue for a long period. The research focuses attention on the students' attitudes for the two groups of teachers in a college. A total of 312 participants, including 6 native English speaker teachers (NESTs), 6 non-native English speaker teachers (NNESTs) and 300 students were involved in the study. A questionnaire was designed for 300 students. The findings of the study throw light to oral English teaching, which have significant implications for English language teaching in China.

**Keywords**—NEST; NNEST; comparative study; college oral English class

## I. INTRODUCTION

With the advancement of globalization, English, the main language of intercultural communication, is more and more frequently used in the world. English has become the language of business, technology, science and Internet, popular entertainment, and even sports (Crystal, 1997). Communicative English has played a more and more important role. Oral proficiency has become an indispensable part of second and foreign language teaching and learning research and practice (Kang, 1998). However, the low efficiency of traditional oral English teaching has attracted much concern, for many graduates could not communicate in English smoothly after having learned it for more than ten years (Liu, 2004). Fortunately, since China adopted a new policy of reform and opening up to the outside world, universities have been permitted to hire foreign teachers to teach foreign languages. Along with this surge in interest for English language learning is the great increase in the demand for native speakers. The number of native English speaker teachers grows faster and faster. They have made great contribution to English teaching in China.

A NEST has always been regarded as the ideal English teacher in the past few years. A NNEST has always been sensitive to the cause of the thousands of teachers of English, who have had to struggle with the language and overcome the threats to the self-confidence posed by the NESTs (Braine, 1999). However, is a NEST really the ideal English teacher? In fact, some complaints from Chinese teachers and students are often heard: “the foreigners are just a show of the school and the students can learn nothing from them. They are not responsible and just playing with and amusing the students.”

The dichotomy of NESTs and NNESTs has thus become a controversial issue in language teacher training and recruiting all over the world, and has aroused attention in the field of ELT in China. However, the existent research of NESTs and NNESTs is rather limited. The research compares the difference between NESTs and NNESTs and further explores who is the ideal English teacher in a college.

## II. THE RELEVANT STUDIES IN CHINA AND FOREIGN COUNTRIES

Soriano (2004) defined a native speaker as the person who speaks the target language from birth, the one who acquired the language as a child, giving some individuals the advantage of being a native speaker of two or more languages. The non-native speakers are those individuals who learn the target language after they have acquired their mother tongue(s). Tay (1982) includes three elements in the definition of a native speaker: “one who learns English in childhood and continues to use it as his dominant language and has reached a certain level of fluency” (p.67). Suarez (2000) also thinks that (none) native speaker is not only a question of terminology. The linguistic and educational differences between the two groups may be large or small.

NESTs have the advantage of having the cultural, phonetic, and lexical and usage, knowledge of the teaching language. They also have communicative competence and can identify something that is wrong when they hear or read it, but might have no idea of why this is so (Phillipson, 1992; Widdowson, 1994). Native English speakers without teaching qualified are more likely to be hired as ESL teachers than qualified and experienced NNESTs in the past few years.

Medgyes (1994) concluded that the NESTs and the NNESTs had an equal chance of success as English teacher. Compared to NESTs, NNESTs can: (1) provide a better learner model; (2) teach language-learning strategies more effectively; (3) supply more information about the English language; (4) understand the difficulties and needs of the students; (5) better anticipate and prevent language difficulties; (6) benefit from their ability to use the students' mother tongue.

In China, Chiang (2001) examined on learners' feedback to their English teachers. The result shows that learners taught by NNESTs lose the confidence in listening and speaking. On the contrary, about 60% English learners agreed their NEST help them improve the aspect of listening and speaking 45% pronunciation.

Cheung (2007) employed a design with none equivalent control groups in his research in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the native English speaker teachers in EFL teaching than NNESTs. The results support the hypothesis that both the NESTs and NNESTs have their own advantages and disadvantages, which may counterbalance each other.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### A. Aims and Research Questions

Based on the previous findings, this study proposes to investigate: (1) what are the differences between the two camp teachers in oral English class? (2) What are the students'

evaluations for the advantages and disadvantages of their English teachers? (3) Who is the ideal English teacher for college students?

#### B. The Samples of Study

There were 6 NESTs and 6NNESTs involved in the study (as shown in "Table I"). They were teaching oral English in the same college.

TABLE I. INFORMATION PERTAINING TO THE TWO GROUPS OF TEACHERS

	Gender	Average			Average oral English
Groups	Ratio(F/M)	Age (yrs)	Origin	Degree	teaching experience
6 NESTs	2:4	41	American(3)	Bachelor( 2)	6 years
			Australian(2)	Masters(3) Doctor (1)	
			New Zealand(1)		
6 NNESTs	4:2	27	Chinese	Bachelor( 2 )	3 years
				Masters( 4)	

#### C. The Student Sample

300 students majoring in English and International Trade including freshman, sophomores were chosen as research subjects at the second term of the school year from the same college. They all had the experience taught by both NESTs and NNESTs. The age range of them was from 17 to 22 with an average age of 18. Their years of learning English ranged from 6 to 10 with an average of 7 years.

#### D. Methods and Procedures

Due to the complexity of the study, the procedures of data collection had been divided into two stages.

Step One: preparation and classroom observation period

The purpose of the period study was to observe the participation of the students between the two camps teachers. A total number of 12 periods of classes approximately 600 minutes lessons from 6 NESTs and 6 NNESTs were observed and recorded. All the 12 teachers were only informed that the researcher would like to investigate their classroom teaching without telling them the specific purpose of this research.

Step Two: the students' evaluation period

In this phase, a questionnaire for the students was administered with the purpose of finding the students' evaluation and preference.

Specifically, the questionnaire was designed on the basis of Medgyes's study of the strengths of NNESTs (Medgyes, 1992), Phillipson's description of the strong points of NESTs (Phillipson, 1996) and Wei's Students' Attitudes toward NESTs and NNESTs (Wei, 2003).

### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### A. The Time Distribution of NESTs and NNESTs on the Types of Classroom Teaching

Through observing each class, it was found that different teacher have different types of classroom teaching (as shown in "Table II"). For instance, some teachers tended to spend more time on teacher lecture, but some were willing to spend more time on teacher-student interaction (as shown in "Table III"). The research also found that the students in NESTs' class were more cooperative and tended to have more active reactions (as shown in "Fig. 1"). They showed more interest in the materials and topics that the teachers had prepared for them.

TABLE II. THE TIME DISTRIBUTION OF NESTS ON THE TYPES OF CLASSROOM TEACHING

NESTs	Teacher lecture (min.)%	Teacher instruction (min.)%	Teacher-student socializing (min.)%	Teacher-student interaction (min.)%
T1	14	8	5	18
T2	35	0	0	10
T3	8	7	7	23
T4	10	8	4	23
T5	12	4	4	25
T6	13	2	0	20
Means (%)	15.33(34%)	4.83(10.7%)	3.33 (7.4%)	19.83 (44%)

TABLE III. THE TIME DISTRIBUTION OF NNESTs ON THE TYPES OF CLASSROOM TEACHING

NNESTs	Teacher lecture (min.)	Teacher instruction (min.)	Teacher-student socializing (min.)	Teacher-student interaction (min.)
T1	12	2	4	27
T2	18	2	0	25
NNESTs	Teacher lecture (min.)	Teacher instruction (min.)	Teacher-student socializing (min.)	Teacher-student interaction (min.)
T3	10	1	4	30
T4	14	0	5	26
T5	11	2	5	27
T6	14	1	2	28
<b>Means (%)</b>	13.2(29.2%)	1.33(3%)	3.33(7.4%)	27.2(60.37%)

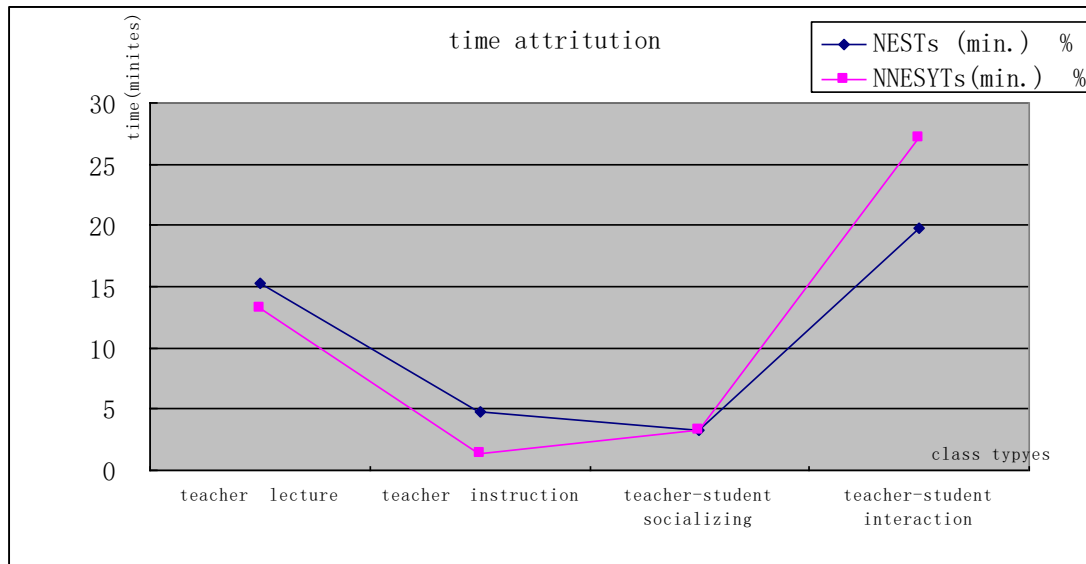


Fig. 1. Mean time distributions between NESTs and NNESTs on the types of classroom teaching.

**B. Analysis of the Students' Questionnaire**

1) *Comparison on respective advantages and disadvantages of NESTs and NNESTs:* The students' statement reveals again that both NESTs and NNESTs have respective advantages and disadvantages (as shown in "Fig. 2 and Fig. 3"). Standard pronunciation, knowing western culture and communicating with students in the target language are NESTs'

advantages while knowing the students' difficulty and needs, stressing the important and difficulty points and systematic teaching etc. are the disadvantages of NNESTs.

2) *Students' comments on oral English teaching at present:* From "Table IV", students' comments on oral English teaching at present can be showed in "Table IV":

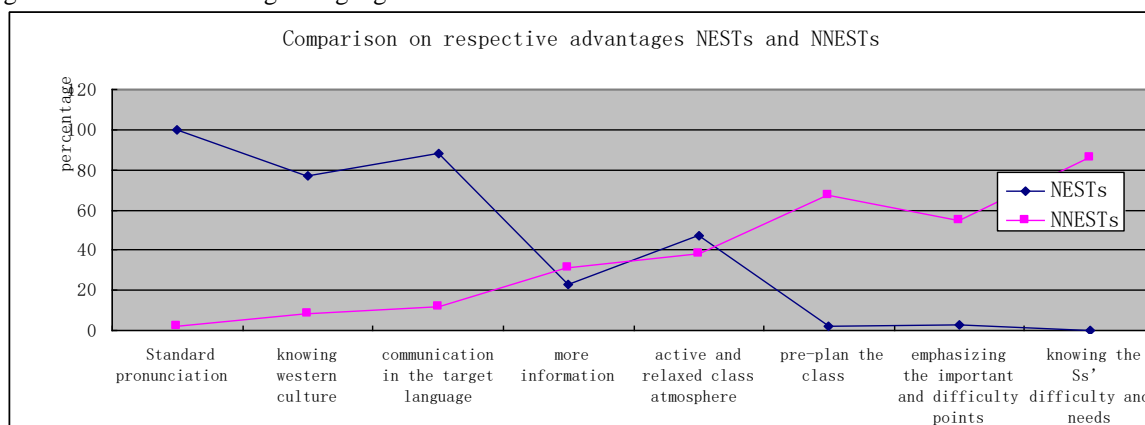


Fig. 2. Comparison on respective advantages NESTs and NNESTs.

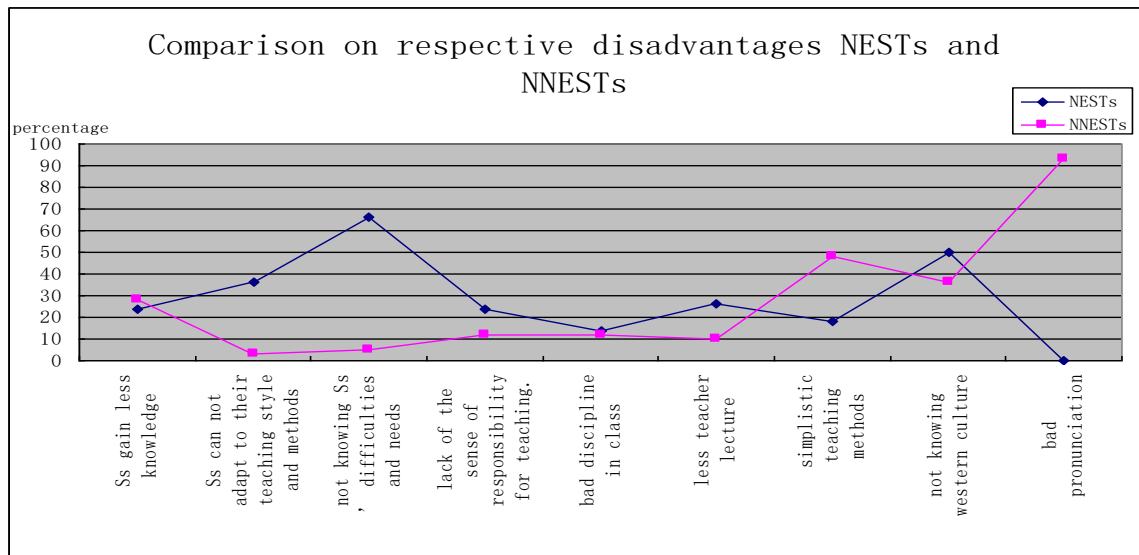


Fig. 3. Comparison on respective disadvantages NESTs and NNESTs.

TABLE IV. STUDENTS' COMMENTS ON ORAL ENGLISH TEACHING AT PRESENT

Students' satisfaction	Positive		Negative	
	Percent -age	Reasons	Percent -age	Reasons
<b>For overall</b>	43%	English cannot be taught but must be learned;	57%	Few oral English class and little time to practice spoken English;
<b>For NESTs</b>	36%	Ss can learn more knowledge and improve oral English; can communicate with NESTs face-to-face; standard pronunciation; The class is very interesting; The teacher is humor and dynamic.	64%	Bad discipline in class; the class is boring and dull; the method of the teaching is simple; The teacher can not speak Chinese; The NEST is not so good; The teacher has a bad temper and is arrogant; The Ss' English is not good and can not communicate with the NESTs smoothly.
<b>For NNESTs</b>	58%	Have a relaxed and dynamic atmosphere in class; more interaction between teachers and students	42%	The teacher's pronunciation is not standard; The student's spoken English has not been improved; Have no chance to practice oral English with a NEST.

V. IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The implications from this study will be illustrated from the following four aspects: teacher's professional development, collaboration between NESTs and NNESTs, evaluation criterion for NESTs' classroom teaching and course assignment for NESTs and NNESTs.

The limitation of this study lies in the size of the research sample, especially the number of NESTs. The second limitation is that the time counted and spent on the set oral English textbook is not exact and fair only by observing and recording.

VI. CONCLUSION

After analyzing and discussing the data derived from classroom observations and questionnaires, the following conclusions can be arrived in accordance with the research questions:

First of all, there are great differences of classroom teaching behaviors between NESTs and NNESTs. Second,

both NESTs and NNESTs have respective advantages and disadvantages, standard pronunciation, knowing western culture and communicating with students in the target language are NESTs' advantages while knowing the students' difficulty and needs, stressing the important and difficulty points and systematic teaching etc. are the disadvantages of NNESTs. Third, though half of the students claim that they are not satisfied with the oral English teaching at present and doubt the teaching of NESTs, three fourths of the students will regard NESTs as their oral English teacher if given a chance to choose from freely.

In the past ten years, a foreign teacher has been very rare in college campus. With the improvement of teaching standard, the students ask higher quality and requirements for their English teacher, especially for the oral English teachers. The days in which whoever can speak a little English can teach English has been gone forever. English teachers face great challenges nowadays even if a NEST is also nitpicked and doubted by students. A NEST should be able to speak Chinese, be good at communication and collaboration with others, have a strong sense of responsibility, know students' difficulties and needs, give

students more self-confidence even teach English with entertainment etc. For a NNEST, the challenge is fiercer according to the result of research, because even though most of the Ss are not satisfied with the NESTs, they will regard a NEST as their oral English teacher if given a chance to choose teacher.

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