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## Reimagining English Language Education: Unveiling the Strengths of Native and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers

Reimaginando la Educación en el Idioma Inglés: Descubriendo las Fortalezas de los Profesores Nativos y No Nativos de Inglés

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### Resumen


Esta investigación examina las fortalezas y debilidades presentadas por instructores de inglés nativos y no nativos, con un enfoque específico en dos aspectos: (1) las percepciones que tienen diversos interesados hacia cada grupo y (2) sus respectivas habilidades para abordar las destrezas del idioma inglés en un entorno de aula. Realizada como una revisión exploratoria de la literatura, se seleccionaron dieciséis estudios relevantes para su comparación, fomentando una discusión sobre sus hallazgos divergentes. Aunque este análisis revela preferencias predominantes por los instructores nativos en todos los casos, reconoce que factores más allá de la condición de ser nativo podrían influir en estas preferencias. Más allá de las percepciones, este estudio se adentra en las habilidades que cada tipo de instructor mejora en los estudiantes, con una notable omisión de las habilidades escritas en la literatura existente. No obstante, la competencia gramatical emerge como una habilidad adicional destacada en esta investigación. En conclusión, este documento resume los aspectos clave y señala limitaciones que podrían afectar los resultados, instando a su consideración en futuras investigaciones.

*Palabras clave:* nests, nnests, efectividad de la enseñanza, habilidades y sistemas lingüísticos, actitudes y percepciones, nativo-hablante

## Abstract

This research examines the strengths and weaknesses presented by Native and Non-Native English instructors, with a specific focus on two aspects: (1) the perceptions held by various stakeholders toward each group and (2) their respective abilities in addressing English language skills in a classroom environment. Conducted as an exploratory literature review, sixteen relevant studies were selected for comparison, fostering a discussion on their differing findings. While this analysis unveils prevalent preferences for Native instructors across all cases, it acknowledges that factors beyond nativeness might influence these preferences. Beyond perceptions, this study delves into the skills each type of instructor enhances in students, with a notable omission of written abilities in the existing literature. Nonetheless, Grammar proficiency emerges as an additional skill underscored in this research. To conclude, this paper summarizes key takeaways and identifies limitations that could impact outcomes, urging consideration in future investigations.

*Keywords:* nests, nneests, teaching effectiveness, language skills and systems, attitudes and perceptions, native-speakerism

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Acquiring proficiency in the English language has become an essential milestone in one's professional journey, and the methodologies employed in its instruction have undergone profound transformations. Ranging from tailoring diverse approaches to cater to individual needs to accrediting educators based on established teaching frameworks, the significance of English has magnified considerably. Unsurprisingly, English instructors have emerged as pivotal figures within the realm of teaching and learning. This has sparked extensive debates seeking to determine whether native English-speaking teachers (referred to as NESTs) or non-native English-speaking teachers (referred to as NNESTs) are better suited to facilitate the acquisition of English as a second or foreign language.

Furthermore, the prevalent but potentially misleading notion, driven by globalization, that only native English-speaking teachers can provide accurate and comprehensive learning experiences in a foreign language, raises a thought-provoking question. Moreover, scrutinizing the distinct strengths that NESTs and NNESTs bring to their students, and emphasizing the significance of competence and education over mere birth origin, assumes significance in the context of this study.

### **The Notion of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and World Englishes (WE)**

The concept of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) has garnered significant attention among researchers, including Jenkins (2007, 2015), who delineated its evolution through three distinct phases. Initially, during the 1980s, the term "English as a Lingua Franca" was absent, with only "World Englishes" being coined. Subsequently, ELF emerged as a theoretical consideration, denoting the use of English by non-native speakers for communication. Jenkins introduced language accommodation aspects, such as negotiating meaning and interpersonal dynamics, within this context. The final phase saw the establishment of a universally recognized concept, wherein ELF signifies communication among speakers with diverse mother tongues, ultimately giving rise to varied forms of English worldwide.

With the proliferation of diverse forms of English, the significance of Standard English has become pivotal. Honey (1997) argued that Standard English reflects an individual's education level, implying that many native speakers do not adhere to a standardized linguistic form. Llurda (2004) emphasized the global prevalence of English as an international language, particularly in contexts where non-native speakers communicate. Nevertheless, the transformation of English into a universal language remains an ongoing process. The concepts of English as an International Language (EIL) and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) aptly capture this evolving linguistic landscape.

### **Who is a native speaker?**

Medgyes (2001) defined a native speaker as someone for whom English is the first language or mother tongue. He delved into sociolinguistic perspectives, revealing the debatable nature of native speaker categorization, as exemplified by countries like India, where English serves as a second language in educational settings. Medgyes (1992) asserted that the notion of "nativeness" holds limited relevance in English language teaching (ELT) and should not rely solely on nationalistic viewpoints.

In another study, Cook (2012) construed nativeness as a fusion of factors, including subconscious rule knowledge and fluent language usage. Achieving native-like proficiency appeared elusive due to the myriad dialects existing within English, making the mastery of a standard form more feasible.

### **Perspectives on Nateness**

Aneja (2016) undertook a qualitative study involving four pre-service teachers to explore the subjectivities and archetypes surrounding nativeness. Through recordings, field notes, and interviews, the study unveiled that each iteration of native-speakerism contributes to the formation of subjectivities that influence future teaching processes and interactions. Walkinshaw and Duong (2012) investigated the value of being a Native English-Speaking Teacher (NEST) in Vietnam. Utilizing surveys and questionnaires, they found that students prioritized experienced and enthusiastic teachers over nativeness, debunking the misconception that NESTs were favored solely due to customer requests.

### **Native-Speakerism – Segregation amongst teachers**

The term "native-speakerism" has gained prominence in English Language Teaching (ELT). Holliday (2006) coined this term with a pejorative connotation, highlighting its paradigm-shaping impact on professional domains, employment policies, and teaching practices. Holliday (2015) extended the concept, positing it as a cultural belief that perpetuates a dichotomy between native and non-native English speakers in teaching. This perpetuates a misconception that non-native teachers lack language mastery and deep cultural insights.

### **The NESTs and NNESTs Dispute**

The distinction between Native English-Speaking Teachers (NESTs) and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers (NNESTs) carries significant implications, as noted by Medgyes (1994). The identification as NEST or NNEST has evolved into a contentious subject, causing considerable professional challenges. NESTs may perceive gaps in their understanding of language learning processes or grammar, while NNESTs often feel distant from achieving native-like mastery. Florence (2012) echoed this sentiment, highlighting strengths and weaknesses in both groups. NESTs exhibit linguistic prowess but lack nuanced pedagogical insight, while NNESTs possess diverse pedagogical strategies but grapple with linguistic challenges.

### **Student Motivation towards who their teachers are**

Pae (2017) surveyed 747 students and 39 teachers in Asia, revealing that NESTs prompted stronger intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, positive attitudes, and intentions to study English compared to Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers (NNESTs). The study indicated NESTs' ability to foster favorable attitudes and intentions to learn English.

### **Perceptions of NNESTs and NESTs**

Agudo and Robinson (2014) explored EFL student teachers' preferences through a Likert-scale questionnaire, noting a general preference for NESTs. However, students' past experiences with NNESTs may have biased their perceptions. Wang (2013) discovered that Taiwanese students favored a blend of NESTs and NNESTs for balanced English instruction, addressing concerns about NESTs' dominance and NNESTs' marginalization.

### **Self-Perceptions and Characteristics of NNESTs and NESTs**

Samimy and Brutt-Griffler (1999) found that NESTs were perceived as more fluent, while NNESTs were seen as more sensitive to students' struggles and more likely to contrast languages. Villalobos (2011) highlighted the perception that NESTs enhance language learning but emphasized the importance of recognizing the strengths of both NNESTs and NESTs.

## Teaching Behaviors of NESTs and NNESTs

NESTs are regarded for their superior pronunciation and language accuracy in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, as posited by Agudo and Robinson (2014). This perception reinforces the notion that native teachers offer enhanced learning experiences. Classroom behaviors further differentiate NESTs and NNESTs, particularly in the realm of oral corrective feedback (OCF) Demir and Özmen (2017) observed 14 teachers and concluded that both NNESTs and NESTs provided corrective feedback for phonological, grammatical, and lexical errors. NNESTs exhibited a higher percentage of error correction. Recasting was the predominant pedagogical intervention used by both groups. NESTs, on the other hand, tend to use recasts, rephrasing errors, whereas NNESTs prefer prompts to encourage students' self-correction, illustrating distinct teaching approaches in both groups.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This exploratory bibliographic research aims to identify gaps and potential areas for future investigation in the field of Native and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers (NESTs and NNESTs) within the context of teaching English as a foreign or second language. The research process involved the selection of relevant bibliographical and empirical studies based on specific criteria. The following criteria were used for study selection:

- Studies had to focus on teenagers and adults as participants.
- Only studies written in English were considered.
- Studies conducted within the last 25 years were preferred, but relevant studies from before this period were also included.
- Studies were included if they covered perspectives, perceptions, and viewpoints of students, other teachers, and governmental institutions towards NESTs and NNESTs.
- Comparative studies between NESTs and NNESTs regarding teaching techniques and methodologies, as well as their effectiveness, were also considered.

The research was conducted using multiple academic databases, including Google Scholar, BASE, ScienceDirect, WileyOnlineLibrary, and OxfordAcademic. These platforms were chosen for their comprehensive coverage of academic literature in the field. The data collection process involved searching for studies that met the specified criteria. After a thorough review of potential studies, a total of 16 studies were compiled for analysis. The selected studies employed qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method approaches to explore various aspects of NESTs and NNESTs in English language teaching.

It is important to note that while studies focused primarily on English language teaching, information from relevant studies involving other languages might be considered if it contributes to the analysis. However, the core focus remains on studies meeting the outlined selection criteria. Throughout the analysis, the gathered studies will be evaluated to identify patterns, trends, and potential gaps in the existing literature. This exploration aims to shed light on areas that warrant further investigation and to provide insights into the evolving landscape of NESTs and NNESTs in English language education.

### **Research Inquiries**

What are the prevalent viewpoints among educators and learners concerning Native English-Speaking Teachers (NESTs) and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers (NNESTs)?

¿In what ways do NESTs and NNESTs contribute to the advancement of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students' language skills, and how do they approach the cultivation of these abilities?

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

What are the prevalent viewpoints among educators and learners concerning Native English-Speaking Teachers (NESTs) and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers (NNESTs)?

To address the first question of this research paper, Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4 present the distribution of studies based on perceptions, as analyzed from various stakeholders' viewpoints. A total of 13 studies were identified to center on perceptions.

**Students' perceptions**

**Table 1**

*Students' perceptions towards NESTs and NNESTs*

	<b>Negative perception</b>	<b>Positive perception</b>	<b>Neutral perception</b>
NESTs	2	5	3
NNESTs	4	2	7
N = 8			

Within the scope of this exploratory research, eight papers delve into student perceptions, revealing a prevailing positive inclination towards native English-speaking teachers (NESTs). In a majority of these studies, students participating as subjects consistently exhibit a favorable outlook towards NESTs.

Agudo and Robinson (2014) notably conclude that students believe NESTs to be more effective in facilitating language learning outcomes. These teachers are perceived as better prepared, equipped with innovative and diverse teaching strategies beyond conventional textbooks (Florence, 2012; Medgyes, 2001; Pae, 2017), thereby fostering motivation and enhancing attitudes towards English language acquisition. Lasagabaster and Sierra's research (2002) establishes that students' positive perceptions of NESTs intensify with higher levels of education, underpinned by NESTs' comprehensive competence across language skills, vocabulary, and cultural insights.

In contrast, NNESTs receive less favorable evaluations in four studies. Agudo and Robinson (2014) attribute this negative perception to students considering NNESTs suitable only for beginner classes, as their long-term outcomes tend to be unsatisfactory. Additional reasons contributing to this unfavorable perception include the perception that NNESTs employ traditional teaching methods and focus excessively on exams (Florence, 2012; Medgyes, 2001; Pae, 2016). Florence's study (2012) emphasizes that NNESTs' use of students' native language may discourage English language use in the classroom, creating an impression that English is unessential and overly complex.

However, not all assessments of NNESTs are negative. In certain studies, students express appreciation for NNESTs' ability to anticipate and address language-learning difficulties, often portraying them as effective role models when their English proficiency is high (Villalobos, 2011).

## Perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs Towards Each Other

**Table 2**

*NESTs and NNESTs perceptions towards each other*

	Negative perception	Positive perception	Neutral perception
NESTs	3	2	1
NNESTs	2	2	1
N = 5			

The perspectives held by teachers regarding their counterparts reveal a nuanced viewpoint, acknowledging both advantages and disadvantages associated with their nativeness statuses. Villalobos (2011) presents the idea that both NESTs and NNESTs possess advantageous teaching techniques, emphasizing that the effectiveness of classes and content delivery is more significant than nativeness. However, the literature also highlights the strengths and weaknesses attributed to each group.

NESTs are often acknowledged for offering more precise and authentic English, displaying greater tolerance towards students' errors, and facilitating faster acquisition of listening skills (Árva & Medgyes, 2000; Florence, 2012; Tajeddin & Adeh, 2016). These qualities contribute to their positive reputation in the teaching community.

Yet, some negative perceptions about NESTs can also be found. Wang (2013) indicates that the majority of NNESTs perceive NESTs as being employed primarily based on birth background rather than qualifications, due to governmental decisions. Árva and Medgyes (2000), Florence (2012), and Tajeddin and Adeh (2016) highlight additional drawbacks, such as NESTs' perceived lax approach to student work, grading, and formal educational requirements.

In contrast, NESTs hold varying opinions about NNESTs. Florence (2012) observes that NESTs view NNESTs as more empathetic to students' needs, with communication being more consistent (often utilizing the students' native language). Tajeddin and Adeh (2016) conclude that NNESTs excel at explaining grammatical concepts from a different perspective. However, NNESTs are also perceived as lacking the requisite language proficiency and displaying phonological deficiencies, particularly in pronunciation (Florence, 2012).

This diversity of perspectives underscores the complex interplay of strengths and weaknesses attributed to both NESTs and NNESTs within the educational landscape.

### Self-perceptions and other perceptions

**Table 3**

*NESTs and NNESTs self-perceptions*

	Negative perception	Positive perception	Neutral perception
NESTs	0	1	0
NNESTs	2	0	0
N = 3			

While the topic of Native English-Speaking Teachers (NESTs) and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers (NNESTs) perceptions of each other is not extensively covered in the literature, the studies that do address this aspect yield significant and revealing findings. The insights

obtained from these studies shed light on the distinct self-perceptions held by each group, offering valuable insights into the dynamics within the English language teaching landscape.

NESTs, in particular, tend to perceive themselves as the preferred choice among students for language learning, in contrast to NNESTs who often acknowledge and emphasize their own perceived shortcomings. A compelling example can be found in Florence (2012), where NNESTs self-report challenges related to their local accents, limited fluency, and diminished confidence, particularly in high-pressure situations.

Furthermore, a prevailing negative self-perception among NNESTs centers around workplace apprehensions. These concerns encompass being evaluated by their students and grappling with heightened self-awareness while communicating in English (Tajeddin & Adeh, 2016).

Although the volume of studies delving into these perceptions may be limited, the profound implications of these findings cannot be overlooked. The distinct self-perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs significantly influence their professional experiences, interactions with students, and contributions to English language education. These insights underscore the importance of fostering an inclusive and supportive environment within the teaching community, allowing both groups to leverage their strengths and address areas of concern.

**Table 4**

*Other stakeholders' perceptions towards NESTs and NNESTs*

	<b>Negative perception</b>	<b>Positive perception</b>	<b>Neutral perception</b>
NESTs	1	2	1
NNESTs	2	1	1
N = 3			

Finally, it is important to note that various other perceptions are also explored in select papers, but one of the most significant insights is found in Wang (2013). In this study, pre-service teachers are prompted to provide their thoughts on a governmental policy that mandates local teachers to co-teach alongside native English-speaking teachers (NESTs). The research reveals that the government holds the view that NESTs are superior to NNESTs, even in the absence of sufficient qualifications. This stance is met with strong criticism from study participants, as evidence suggests that such programs can foster a sense of marginalization among NNESTs, with NESTs potentially exhibiting condescending attitudes towards their non-native counterparts. This finding underscores the potential social and professional implications of prevailing perceptions within the English language teaching landscape.

In what ways do NESTs and NNESTs contribute to the advancement of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students' language skills, and how do they approach the cultivation of these abilities?



**Table 5**

*Language Skills and Systems and NESTs and NNESTs in EFL classrooms*

Teachers	Skills	Number of studies
NESTs		5
	Speaking	5
	Listening	1
	Reading	0
	Writing	0
	Grammar	0
NNESTs		2
	Speaking	2
	Listening	0
	Reading	1
	Writing	0
	Grammar	2

### **Language Skills and Systems Development and NESTs**

Among the selected studies, five delve into the role of teachers in enhancing students' speaking skills, with a focus on the proficiency of Native English-Speaking Teachers (NESTs). Arva and Medgyes (2000) and Florence (2012) underscore how NESTs excel in promoting conversational skills due to their ability to deliver language in a natural and authentic manner, thereby accelerating students' progress. However, Florence also raises a caveat, noting that having a NEST lead a beginner's class may result in inadequate communication as students with limited English proficiency lack the necessary vocabulary for comprehension.

NESTs are also recognized for their aptitude in evaluating spoken language production, offering more comprehensive feedback in this domain (Kim, 2009). The advantage of NESTs in fostering listening skills is highlighted by Florence (2012), who suggests that exposure to authentic English samples aids students in swiftly acquiring strong listening abilities.

### **Language Skills and Systems Development and NNESTs**

Conversely, several studies explore the language skills development facilitated by Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers (NNESTs). Levis, Sonsaat, Link, and Barriuso (2016) assert that NNESTs may excel in teaching reading abilities and printed material, based on student opinions and preferences. Additionally, the studies by Florence (2012) and Levis, Sonsaat, Link, and Barriuso (2016) reveal NNESTs' proficiency in presenting grammatical content. NNESTs are highlighted as being adept at offering clear explanations and employing effective techniques to facilitate students' understanding of this crucial aspect of language learning.

Interestingly, Farrell (2015) and Levis, Sonsaat, Link, and Barriuso (2016) propose that the nativeness factor does not significantly impact teaching speaking skills. Non-native teachers with proficient language use are deemed equally competent in teaching pronunciation patterns and speech production, challenging the notion that nativeness is a prerequisite for effective speaking instruction.

### **CONCLUSIONS AND COMMENTARY**

Throughout this study, a comprehensive exploration of Native English-Speaking Teachers (NESTs) and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers (NNESTs) has shed light on various facets of their roles in English language education. While birthplace has often been a focal point of discussion, it is evident that this factor alone should not be paramount in evaluating teaching

effectiveness. Other critical dimensions such as qualifications, teaching experience, academic degrees, and language mastery contribute significantly to a teacher's proficiency.

In today's interconnected world, English has emerged as an essential global language, rendering the exclusivity of native teachers impractical. Many non-native teachers have cultivated language skills to a point where they can effectively deliver native-like language experiences in the classroom. The debate over the perfect teacher remains unresolved, yet a more attainable notion of an ideal teacher emerges—one possessing comprehensive language skills, a suitable personality, and a readiness for teaching (Villalobos, 2011).

The dichotomy of native and non-native labels has engendered discrimination, perpetuating the concept of native speakerism and marginalizing a substantial portion of English teachers—around 80% by current estimates. Instead of fixating on weaknesses, which have contributed to this divide, a shift towards recognizing the strengths of both native and non-native teachers is imperative. Collaboration between these two groups can yield enhanced results in language learning, underscoring the need to embrace cooperative approaches for a more inclusive and effective English language education. Moreover, the notion of an effective teacher transcends nativeness, as both native and non-native teachers can leverage their strengths to address their respective shortcomings and advance language education.

Within the scope of the studies examined within this paper, not all language skills are thoroughly addressed or indicated to be effectively enhanced by the two cohorts of instructors under scrutiny in this preliminary analysis. An additional facet warranting consideration is the absence of any investigations conducted within the South American context, including our own country. Such contextual variation could potentially yield divergent results or reveal distinct patterns. Thus, conducting empirical inquiries within our local setting would provide a more comprehensive understanding of teacher perceptions and behaviors within the classroom.

Furthermore, the topic of self-perceptions was scarcely explored across the selected studies. Consequently, it would be prudent to allocate further research attention to this dimension, given that educators are best positioned to identify their personal strengths and limitations. This approach could open up a future research avenue, focusing on strategies to surmount self-perceived obstacles encountered by both groups while simultaneously addressing biases that have propagated discriminatory practices within the workforce and the broader landscape of English language education.

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