Attitudes of Students toward NESTs and NNESTs[1]

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Abstract

This entry provides a review of studies exploring students' attitudes toward native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs). The findings from a collection of studies suggest that students recognize individual qualities of NESTs and NNESTs alike, based on their teachers' background, pedagogy, and linguistic abilities, and therefore do not have a clear preference for one over another. In an ideal situation, they would prefer to be taught by teachers who have the experience and professionalism to best meet their learning needs and accomplish their goals. The pedagogical implications from previous research include creating awareness for students, teachers, and administrators in an attempt to enable NESTs and NNESTs to achieve their highest potential and become effective teachers regardless of their nativeness or non-nativeness.

Framing the Issue

The roles and identities of native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) are collective outcomes of social attributions by researchers, administrators, teachers, students, parents, and the general public. These stakeholders' opinions on what language teachers should know, and what they should look, sound, and act like, have historically impacted attempts to prepare and hire language teachers around the world. As students are at the heart of the teaching and learning process, it is critical to understand their attitudes to and opinions on NESTs and NNESTs. It is also imperative to study students' attitudes because administrators and institutions use students' attitudes in an attempt to excuse and justify discriminatory hiring practices, blended with neoliberal rules of the market economy (e.g., "this is what students [clients] want"). Contrary to hegemonic ideals about what language teachers should be like, recent research has indicated that English learners do not have a clear preference regarding their teachers' nativeness in English. In addition, nativeness is not necessarily visible to students; in several cases they mistook NESTs for NNESTs and vice versa (Moussu, 2010).

It is important to conceptualize the term *attitude* in its interdisciplinary context in order to better understand its use in the field of English language teaching (ELT). In this entry, attitude is defined as "a predisposition to respond in a favorable or unfavorable manner with respect to a given attitude object" (Oskamp & Schultz, 2005, p. 9). In social psychology, attitudes have been widely studied, along with their inherent connections to behavior. Social psychologists have emphasized the significance of attitudes in predicting behavior, and created several theoretical frameworks to measure and describe attitudes (see Oskamp & Schultz, 2005, for a discussion of various theoretical models of attitudes). According to one of these theories, the *tri-componential viewpoint*, an attitude is a single entity with three components: affective, behavioral, and cognitive (e.g., the ABCs of attitudes). To illustrate, an affective component includes the feelings one has toward a target: "Studying with my NEST (or NNEST) is enjoyable;" a behavioral component is comprised of one's actions toward the target: "I can ask my NEST (or NNEST)

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questions during the class;" and a cognitive component consists of the ideas and beliefs one has about the target: "My NEST (or NNEST) is easy to understand." This view requires a high degree of consistency among affective, behavioral, and cognitive components because they are all part of a single entity. According to another theory, the *separate entities viewpoint*, there does not have to be congruence across beliefs, attitudes, and behavioral intentions. It is possible to have multiple and conflicting beliefs about a target. For example, a student may agree with the opinion that "NESTs are better listening/speaking teachers, while NNESTs are better grammar teachers," but this does not suggest that the student will not find the NEST grammar or NNEST listening/speaking teachers overall favorable. On the contrary, the student may enjoy these classes equally, aligning or contradicting with their multiple and diverse beliefs about NESTs and NNESTs. The advantage of separate entities theory, compared to the tri-componential viewpoint, is that the former does not require a strong correlation among the components, but allows connections across them. A third theory, *latent process*, points to the development of processes operating within an individual as a result of the manifestation of stimuli events and the individual's responses. According to this theory, a stimulus event is processed through cognitive, affective, and behavioral components and triggers an attitude that is observable in cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses toward the attitude object. The advantage of this theory, compared to the former two, is that an attitude can stem from one, two, or all three of the components (cognitive, affective, or behavioral) as a response to a particular stimulus event, and the attitude that is triggered can be observed in one, two, or all three of the corresponding responses. For example, a student spends a considerable amount of time with their teachers in the classroom and builds a collection of experiences. When the student notices the NEST or NNEST making a grammar or pronunciation mistake, this does not necessarily impact what the student is going to think or feel about the teacher. The stimulus may not activate all three components nor result in corresponding responses. The student may notice the error and take down the correct language in his/her notebook (behavioral), but may not develop an unfavorable attitude (affective) or unfavorable perception (cognitive) about the teacher. What is common in all three viewpoints is that attitudes can never be directly observed or measured; only self-reports and overt behaviors can be measured.

Questionnaires and surveys using the Likert scale have dominated the measurement of explicit attitudes since the beginning of the 1930s. Explicit attitudes are intentional evaluations that are open to one's conscious analysis. It is assumed that a person can retrieve an attitude from memory and will be able to truthfully report it in response to a question. The majority of studies on students' attitudes toward NESTs and NNESTs have used questionnaires, open-ended questions, essays, and interviews. A small number of studies adopted implicit association tests to measure implicit attitudes. The survey studies constitute much of the NNEST literature (Moussu & Llurda, 2008).

Making the Case
The studies reviewed here represent collective trends from students' attitudes toward NESTs and NNESTs in inner-circle, expanding-circle, and outer-circle educational contexts. The findings of previous research suggest that there were observable differences in students' attitudes toward NESTs and NNESTs, but these differences did not necessarily make one group superior to another in the eyes of their respective students. In an early example, Moussu (2002) started with the assumption that ESL students at a US university would not find their NNESTs favorable, and explored the impact of time spent with NNESTs on students' attitudes. Her research findings

indicated that students' and teachers' first language did influence students' attitudes. For example, Korean-speaking and Chinese-speaking students had less favorable attitudes toward NNESTs compared to Spanish-speaking students. In addition, NNESTs who looked and sounded less foreign than their other NNEST counterparts received more favorable attitudes. Finally, students did not start with completely negative attitudes toward NNESTs at the beginning of the semester, and their attitudes became more positive by the end of the semester as a result of the experience of working with NNESTs (Moussu, 2002). In a similar study, Mahboob (2003) explored students' perceptions about NESTs and NNESTs using a questionnaire with open-ended questions. The results indicated that both NESTs and NNESTs received favorable and unfavorable responses from their students. NESTs were considered to be better equipped in terms of vocabulary knowledge and cultural knowledge, while NNESTs were perceived to have better grammatical knowledge and ability to understand students' learning difficulties. Cheung's (2002) study using questionnaires and interviews produced similar results, attributing language fluency and cultural knowledge to NESTs, while appreciating NNESTs for their ability to establish empathy with students, share a cultural background, and follow a stricter methodology of teaching. Lasagabaster and Sierra (2005) mirrored these findings in their analysis of students' opinions about their NESTs and NNESTs. Their results showed that students' perspectives were complex and multifaceted. While students tended to favor NESTs for their pronunciation, cultural knowledge, speaking, listening, and vocabulary teaching skills, they preferred NNESTs when studying grammar and learning strategies. Students believed that NNESTs were more empathetic and better at anticipating their students' language difficulties.

In addition to the perceived strengths and weakness by their students, different teaching styles were attributed to NESTs and NNESTs. NESTs were usually considered more positive, cheerful, easygoing, and casual, while NNESTs were found to be more demanding, thorough, traditional, and test-oriented (Benke & Medgyes, 2005). Students found the classes with NESTs more colorful and lively, but they felt like they learnt more with NNESTs. Students believed that NESTs were more diverse in their teaching and flexible in assessment, but would still prefer to learn grammar and learning strategies from NNESTs (Liu & Zhang, 2007). In both of these studies, NESTs were argued to be more advantageous in terms of their procedural knowledge about the English language and culture, while NNESTs were attributed superior declarative knowledge about the grammar and vocabulary of the English language.

The findings from previous research on students' attitudes toward NESTs and NNESTs should be interpreted with caution. First, the questionnaires and interviews used in these studies measured students' explicit attitudes, that is, beliefs and opinions that students reflected on and shared openly with the researchers. These attitudes were at the level of conscious analysis and may have reflected public opinion, shared group beliefs, or prejudiced beliefs toward NESTs or NNESTs. In addition, several of the survey studies approached attitudes as a single entity with congruent components adopting the tri-componential viewpoint, and assumed direct connections across opinions, feelings, and behavior. However, more recent theories of attitude such as separate entities and latent process viewpoints do not necessarily seek such alignment across attitudinal components. For example, in a comparative analysis of implicit and explicit attitudes of EFL learners in Thailand, Todd and Pojanapunya (2009) found that students showed more favorable explicit attitudes toward NESTs over NNESTs, as observed in their questionnaires, but their implicit attitudes did not show such difference, as measured through an implicit association test. In this test, students grouped pairs of concepts (NESTs and NNESTs) with positive and negative teaching attributes. Their response latencies and reaction times determined their implicit

attitude; faster responses meant the two categories were more closely related (e.g., NNEST + effective grammar; NEST + effective vocabulary). The findings indicated that students preferred NESTs over NNESTs in their questionnaire responses, but they did not show such preference in the implicit association tests, and showed warmer feelings toward NNESTs. These findings lend further support to the separate entities and latent processes theories of attitude because there was a dissonance between reported beliefs (cognitive) and actual subconscious feelings (affective). In light of these observations, future research should adopt more recent theories of attitudes, such as separate entities and latent processes, and explore students' implicit attitudes using association tests. Furthermore, while some of the studies listed here divided NESTs and NNESTs in terms of strengths and weaknesses, recent studies on NNEST issues tend to conceptualize strengths and limitations in a situated manner; sensitive to individuals' sociohistorical negotiations of professional identity and development. For example, Moussu (2010) argued that it is no longer possible to group all NESTs and all NNESTs together, based on only their nativeness and non-nativeness. Individual qualities and experiences such as personality, background, and pedagogical skills are at the forefront of teachers' professional identity, and these factors are what students report on and respond to in their attitudinal responses. Therefore, students' attitudes toward NESTs and NNESTs are not for all NESTs and NNESTs, but toward their own teachers based on their experience with them. Finally, attitudes are formed through individual experiences and change as a result of time and exposure to NESTs or NNESTs (Moussu, 2010). Students' initial attitudes that were informed by resources such as media, public opinions or peer opinions may transform as a result of first-hand experiences with NESTs and NNESTs in the classrooms. Therefore, context and other variables such as students' and teachers' first language, social, cultural, and historical backgrounds, and time spent in the classroom may have an impact on students' attitudes, and should be researched more extensively in future studies.

In light of previous research on students' attitudes toward NESTs and NNESTs, it is clear that students do not have a preference for one group over another. They reflect on their teachers' linguistic, personal, pedagogical, and professional skills, alluding to what they think good teaching is. In terms of qualities of good teaching, regardless of their teachers' nativeness, students want their teachers to speak English fluently and clearly, have a comprehensive understanding of English language and culture, create an enjoyable learning atmosphere with songs, videos, games, and movies, be understanding and friendly in providing corrective feedback, and invest in learning about their students' local culture. Students want their teachers to be empathetic leaders, with strong pedagogical and professional skills, and to guide them with effective language-learning strategies. In conclusion, students cared more about their teachers' professional skills such as knowledge of their subject, preparation, and being able to make lessons interesting, than about their nativeness or non-nativeness.

Pedagogical Implications
The literature on students' attitudes toward NESTs and NNESTs suggests ample practical implications for teachers, students, and administrators. Any attempt at improving teaching quality starts with awareness. In order to provide high quality teaching, regardless of their nativeness or non-nativeness, teachers need to be aware of their individual strengths and weaknesses. The distinctive qualities summarized in previous research may not be applicable to all NESTs or NNESTs alike, and may emerge based on individual experiences in diverse educational contexts. An aware teacher should reflect on their own teaching practice and make an effort to improve their weaknesses. Weakness is not meant to be used as a negative term here,

but to indicate an opportunity for professional growth. For example, this could be learning about the local/target culture by familiarizing himself/herself with the traditions, movies, songs, and games in English, or learning about the local culture of students to have a better understanding of their language difficulties, and to be able to provide culturally sensitive instruction. In another example, providing corrective feedback in an appropriate manner may vary across cultures, and an aware NEST and NNEST should know how to best provide corrective feedback without embarrassing or humiliating students in front of their peers.

In addition to reflecting on their own teaching, NESTs and NNESTs should be supported by the administration to diversify their teaching experiences. For example, in a school with both NESTs and NNESTs, it is a common practice to have NESTs teach only speaking and listening classes, while assigning NNESTs to only grammar, reading, and writing classes. This would not only limit the experiences NESTs and NNESTs can acquire in their practice, but also perpetuate essentialized beliefs about what NESTs and NNESTs can or cannot do. Students may become used to seeing their respective teachers in certain classes and make associations accordingly, which is visible in previous research on students' explicit attitudes. An aware administrator should not let NEST or NNEST status dictate their teaching assignments, and should also make sure that NESTs and NNESTs acquire diverse teaching experiences by teaching a variety of classes. Another strategy is to have a team/mentor system in which NESTs and NNESTs can cooperate in lesson planning, lesson delivery, and assessment so that their input is equally integrated into the lessons. Finally, advocacy initiatives can be utilized to create an educational context with improved equity and professionalism for NESTs and NNESTs. These initiatives should start by exploring the common misconceptions about NESTs and NNESTs existing in an educational context. Then, they can focus on the sources of the false beliefs and challenge them with an evidence-based curriculum; for example, in the form of a series of professional development workshops, book clubs, reading groups, webinars, debate teams, or advocacy groups dedicated to improving the professional development of NESTs and NNESTs alike.

In order to fully benefit from the pedagogical implications suggested here, an action plan needs to take into account the various needs of students, teachers, and administrators. In addition to students' attitudes, the attitudes of administrators, and the self-perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs should also be researched. All involved groups should make an effort to better understand each other, and work together in order to make curricular and administrative changes.

SEE ALSO: Attitudes of Administrators toward Native English Speaker Teachers and Non-Native English Speaker Teachers; Attitudes of Non-Native English Speaker Teachers toward Themselves; Discrimination and Discriminatory Practices against Non-Native English Speaker Teachers[/xr]

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