

# Self-Perceptions of Non-Native Students in an Undergraduate TESOL Program

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## Abstract

While debate continues as to the efficacy of Native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs), little research has been conducted to analyze how these teachers impact communicative competence in an EFL context. Research on NNESTs' self-perceptions has been done in many different contexts (for examples, America, Europe, East Asia), but rarely in Thailand. This paper reports on a mixed data collection study which examines the self-perceptions of undergraduate TESOL students in a Thai university. Data were collected through an online questionnaire responded to by 39 undergraduate TESOL students studying in a B.Ed. English program. Seven of these students were selected for semi-structured individual interviews. Findings show that the undergraduate TESOL students were aware of differences between NESTs and NNESTs and perceived both NESTs and NNESTs to have unique linguistic, cultural, and teaching strengths and weaknesses. The finding also shows that the undergraduate TESOL students had positive perceptions towards their non-native status and perceived themselves to be qualified and successful English teachers after graduation. This paper has implications for language teaching expertise and suggestions for developing TESOL degree curriculum and teacher preparation.

**Keywords:** self-perceptions, non-native English-speaking teachers, TESOL, undergraduate students, NESTs and NNESTs

## 1. Introduction

English has become the *lingua franca* of the world as English has gradually been transmitted by English speakers through historical events (Phillipson, 1992). Nowadays, more than 60 countries use English as their official or semi-official language. Additionally, the demand for English language is often necessary in countries in order to access global communication. During and after this process, various aspects of English Language Teaching (ELT) have been researched and discussed (see, for examples, Davies, Criper, & Howatt, 1984; McLaughlin, 1987; Lightbrown, 1987). Due to the high demand for English language uptake, and consequent educational needs, English Language teachers are in demand globally. Native English speakers have played a dominant role in fulfilling such needs. Even so, 80% of English teachers in the world are non-native (Canagarajah, 2005).

One of the aspects in ELT that has raised concerns since the last century is the divide between native English-speaker teachers (NESTs) and non-native English-speaker teachers (NNESTs). They were traditionally seen as two opposite categories and many scholars still use this dichotomy to strengthen their research validity. This traditional linguistic theory is radical, controversial, and debatable and has been the subject of many debates. In 1985, Paikeday's 'The native speaker is dead' countered this theory by stating that the native speaker 'exists only as a figment of linguist's imagination' (Paikeday, 1985, p 12). Moreover, the term 'expert speaker' was invented to support Paikeday's statement and to describe all successful language users regardless of their native-ness (Rampton, 1990). Davies (1991) supported the idea that a second language learner can become a native or near-native speaker of the target language. Later, Phillipson (1992) deconstructed the myth of the native speaker. He questioned the fact that to become an English teacher, a person who is eligible should only be a native speaker of English. He argued that 'teachers are made rather than born' (p. 194) and supported NNESTs as valid teachers of language learning processes. He also stated that the tenet or belief of the ideal English teacher

being a native speaker has no scientific validity. These statements were decisive and powerful as they gradually encouraged positive self-perceptions for non-native English-speaking teachers. Peter Medgyes was a pioneer who brought the NESTs and NNESTs issues to the field of ELT. Medgyes researched into the untouched and controversial topics of NESTs and NNESTs in his book 'The Non-native Teacher' in 1994. The book discussed many controversial topics, for example, 'the dark side of being a non-native', or 'who's worth more: the native or the non-native'. Medgyes also hypothesized, based on this assumption, that NESTs and NNESTs are different but "both can be equally good teachers on their own terms".

As mentioned, there were many assumptions supporting a non-native speaker as a successful language teacher. There was, however, discrimination against non-native teachers. In many ELT contexts, non-NESTs are disadvantaged, as NESTs are preferred and considered as the reliable source of language regardless of training and experience (Thornbury, 2006, as cited in Solhi, 2011). Moreover, many English language teaching jobs in many different countries considered only NESTs in their recruiting practices (Clark & Paran, 2007). It can be said that English teachers are generally evaluated and judged by their mother tongues regardless their teaching experiences, professional preparation or language abilities.

This study, therefore, aims to investigate how undergraduate TESOL students in Thailand perceive themselves as future English teachers and their self-perceptions as being classified a non-native English speaker and having to compete with native English speakers. The purpose of this study is to develop mutual understandings between NESTs and NNESTs to be aware of their value and limitations, and to improve their teaching performances.

## 2. Literature Review

Investigations into the differences between native and non-native English speaker teachers have been widely discussed since the 1990s (e.g., Medgyes, 1994; Braine, 1999; Liu, 1999). Medgyes (1994) set up hypotheses regarding positive aspects of NNESTs that they can: a) be good role models to language learners, b) teach effective language-learning strategies, c) supply information about the English language, d) anticipate and prevent language-learning difficulties, e) understand and empathize students' needs and problems, and f) use students' first language to the students' benefit. Regarding the negative aspects of being NNESTs, Tarnopolsky (2008) expressed concerns about NNESTs negative issues and summarised five principal points: 1) NNESTs commonly have foreign accents which are difficult to address. Some students, therefore, may have concerns about this issue, 2) Although NNESTs be aware of cultural issues, it is difficult to be aware of new trends or developments in those English-speaking countries as they are rapidly and constantly changing, 3) NNESTs can lack of cultural awareness as not every NNESTs has chance to visit, study, or stay in those English-speaking countries, 4) NNESTs lack of accessibility and availability to updated and advanced teaching materials and methods, and 5) Social discrimination is a serious issue regarding NNESTs, as students, institutes, and authorities usually consider NESTs as the best English language teachers.

A far more prominent issue than social discrimination is NNESTs' perceptions towards themselves. These issues have been widely discussed and researched. The pioneering work of Reves & Medgyes (1994) 'The non-native English speaking EFL/ESL teacher's self-image: an international survey' showed that 216 NNESTs participants were aware of the students' judgment of their English language proficiency which led the participants to self-discrimination. This strong feeling further led to worse language performance, inadequacy, and self-doubt. After the work of Peter Medgyes in 1994, there have been many discussions and research about advantages and disadvantages of non-native English-speaking teachers (non-NESTs) and native English-speaking teachers (NESTs), for example, the study of Reves & Medgyes (1994), Samimy & Brutt-Griffler (1999), Moussou (2002), and Orlova (2014). A study from Reves and Medgyes in 1994 argued that NESTs can provide an English learning atmosphere in a classroom and also providing natural and genuine English. The two authors also debated whether non-NESTs are more capable of predicting and understanding learners' difficulties in learning English when they share their own L1 and learning experiences (Reves & Medgyes, 1994).

Samimy & Brutt-Griffler's (1999) study showed how 17 non-native TESOL students perceived themselves as future English language teachers. The participants were TESOL graduate students at a university in America. They had experience teaching English in both ESL and EFL contexts for years. The two researchers emulated Reves & Medgyes' methods of data collection of surveys and interviews. The result showed that the non-native TESOL students, from time to time, felt underqualified and unacceptable if they had to teach English in an ESL context. On the other hand, the students felt more comfortable when teaching in their own countries. It can be posited therefore, that teaching context can be counted as one of the factors that influence NNESTs' self-perceptions. The result of the study also highlighted other factors that determine NNESTs' self-perceptions, for examples, age and level of students, English proficiency levels, personality, identity, and motivation. It can

be seen in this research that NNESTs self-perceptions can be influenced by many factors, and they could recognize their advantages depending on these factors.

One of the factors that can determine self-perceptions of the non-native teachers is the students being taught. Examples of students' attitudes towards non-native English teachers were investigated by Amin (1997). He conducted interviews for 5 female non-native English teachers in an ESL context. These teachers revealed that they always felt judged and compared with native white teachers by their students. They believed their students thought only native speakers of English could use 'real' and 'proper' English. Moreover, his study suggested that these ESL students idealized English Language teachers as white native Anglo males. Another interesting point discussed was that it is acceptable for NESTs to occasionally make mistakes while teaching. However, when NNESTs produced the same mistakes, their English language abilities were suddenly questioned (Amin, 2004).

Another factor that played a significant role in self-perceptions of NNESTs was teaching experiences. Presumably, NNESTs who have more teaching experiences seem to be able to indicate more advantages out of their non-native status. The survey conducted by Orlova (2014) compared similarities and differences between experienced and less experienced NNESTs and NESTs. The result revealed that years of teaching significantly determined the teachers' self-growth. However, the study demonstrated that years of experiences were not considered the only factor that has an impact on self-perceptions. A recent study from Llorca (2008) found that NNESTs' self-perceptions could be significantly boosted by living and/or studying in English-speaking countries. This means NNESTs feel more confident and perceive their non-native status in a more positive light when they have experienced living or studying in English-speaking countries. This study supports the Tarnopolsky's statement (2008) that living abroad can have a positive impact on issues concerning cultural awareness.

Personal attitudes, identities, and personalities of NNESTs also reflect on how they perceive themselves. They perceive that accents of English play a significant role in self-perception. NNESTs believed that teachers of English should convey standard English accents in teaching (Moussu, 2006). A more extreme point of view is that NNESTs believe that only standard English accents (British and American) should be taught (Butler, 2007, as cited in Moussu and Llorca, 2008). However, in some EFL contexts (e.g., in Greece) local accent was not considered a problem (Sifakis & Sougari, 2005, as cited in Moussu and Llorca, 2008). In terms of identities, Dogancay-Aktuna (2008) investigated 21 non-native English-speaking teachers regarding their perceptions toward being non-native speakers of English. More than half of the participants had experienced prejudice caused by their non-native status and they also felt that being non-native were sometimes disadvantageous. Most of NNESTs did not consider their non-nativeness as a problem, but sometimes they saw themselves as non-ideal, and unprivileged. 60% of NNESTs in Japan believed that native speakers of English were the best ESL/EFL teachers (Butler, 2007, as cited in Moussu and Llorca, 2008). The perception caused by self-identity is difficult to dispel, and is a primary factor of NNESTs low self-esteem. The study of Dogancay-Aktuna, however, conflicts with Reves and Medgyes' work as the participants of Dogancay-Aktuna's study rated their English proficiencies as 'high', however it can still be seen that they feel disadvantaged and discriminated against by their non-native status and identities. Therefore, it cannot be generally said that a high level of English skills can determine high self-perception, further study is required. As discussed above, these personal perceptions of NNESTs are obviously controversial in different countries and contexts.

To summarize, the topic about how NNESTs perceive their advantages and disadvantages is controversial yet of important pedagogical value. However, there are no similar, or only limited research studies conducted in EFL contexts, particularly Thailand. Therefore, further research is required to provide more validity and reliability, and also attempt to give new perspectives of TESOL students who will become NNESTs in EFL environment.

### 3. Methodology

The study was conducted in the forms of an online survey, online interviews, and email interviews. The research was influenced by previous research on self-perceptions of NNESTs. The research of Reves & Medgyes (1994) underlined the influence of the fear of students' judgment which determined NNESTs' self-image and language performance with factors which could influence NNESTs' self-perception: age, the level of students, the aim of the program, and teaching skills. The research questions included:

- 1) To what extent does a non-native student think that there are differences between native and non-native English teachers?
- 2) How do the non-native students who study TESOL in EFL context perceive themselves as future qualified and successful English teachers?
- 3) To what extent does the year in university change one's self-perception?

### 3.1 Participants and Context

The participants of this study comprised 39 non-native speakers of English who were undergraduate students at a public university in the Northeast of Thailand. The participants, aged between 19 to 23 years old, were in their first to fifth year pursuing a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) delivered in English, during the academic year 2016.

### 3.2 Instruments

This study used two types of data; questionnaires and interviews strategies to strengthen the results of the study.

#### 3.2.1 Online Questionnaires

The online questionnaire comprised six pages; the participant information sheet and the consent form were included in the first two pages of the questionnaire. Year of study was one of the main factors hypothesized as an indicator of self-perception. Levels of English and teaching experiences were collected for further investigations. Finally, the main part of the questionnaire contained closed-ended questions with yes/no and multiple-choice formats. Each close-ended question also provided a comment box, and the participants were encouraged to briefly explain their choices.

#### 3.2.2 Online Interviews

The one-on-one interview was conducted via an online video call feature offered by Facebook, and followed a semi-structured format. Semi-structured interviews were thought to address language issues when the first language of interviewees was not English (Bryman, 2012, p. 438). This structure could also help the researcher to ask varied follow-up questions either from the interview or from interviewee's questionnaires.

### 3.3 Procedures

The questionnaire was distributed through a private online Facebook group created by a graduate of the B.Ed. in the English program. After two weeks of the distribution, the interview participants were randomly selected based on their current years of study. This process addressed one of the research questions, i.e., to explore different self-perceptions through the different years of study. After that, the participants were interviewed individually and were asked follow-up questions for additional in-depth data. The process of interview was conducted in Thai to provide clearer understanding and analysis of the data.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

Cross-tabulated tables were used to compare and analyse participants' personal information with their specific responses. Text analysis was used to analyze, highlight, and categorize open-ended text responses in the questionnaire. The qualitative interviews were audio recorded using recording application on a mobile phone. The data were then transcribed and translated from Thai to English. The English transcriptions were uploaded to Box to aid data storage, coding, and thematic analysis of the interviews. During the coding phase, a deductive approach was applied. Interview data were coded with direct reference to the questionnaire results. The transcriptions were also supplied to relate the data to broad patterns of the questionnaire data. The coded data were noted as statements and categorized into specific themes. After that, the data was presented in a grid, analyzed, interpreted, and connected to the research questions to explore relations between them. These process of coding and categorizing were conducted many times to make sure that any essential information was not missed. Text responses from email interview were also analyzed using grid analysis. When the process was completed, a grid was produced to combine, analyze, and summarize the data. Finally, the data was interpreted to explore whether they could strengthen or support the survey and interview data.

## 4. Results and Discussion

The questionnaire was responded to by 39 current students with 8 students from the first year, 12 students from the second year, 6 students from the third year, and 2 and 9 students from the fourth and fifth year, respectively. All the fifth-year respondents had experienced teaching in a school for a year as a degree requirement. The rest of the respondents, first to fourth year who stated that they had teaching experiences, mostly taught in private language tutorial schools. Lastly, the rest of the respondents were those who had never taught English in any circumstances.

### 4.1 Findings from the Questionnaires

#### 4.1.1 Research Question I

In the questionnaire, the respondents were asked if they were aware of native and non-native status of an English teacher by the question "Are you aware of differences between native and non-native teachers of English?" The result shows that 26 students (66.7%) believe that there are differences between NESTs and NNESTs, while 13

students (33.3%) think that NESTs and NNESTs are not different (see Table 1). If the students answered that they were aware of NESTs and NNESTs differences, they were then asked to briefly explain reasons to support their views. All the responses were coded and categorized into groups and presented in the pie chart below (see Figure 1).

Table 1. NNESTs and NESTs awareness

Number of participants	Response	Percentage
26	Yes	66.7%
13	No	33.3%
0	No response	0%

Differences between NESTs & NNESTs

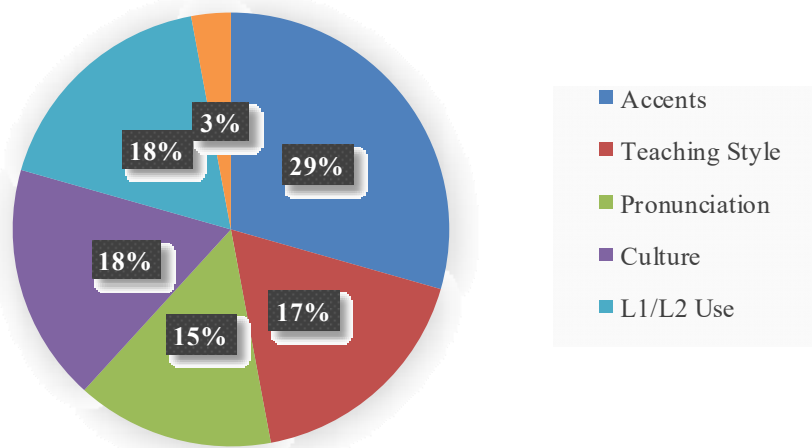


Figure 1. Differences between NESTs & NNESTs

According to the pie chart, the most raised issue between NESTs and NNESTs' differences was regarding accents (29%). Most of the students mentioned that they preferred 'authentic English accents'; NESTs were considered to have better accents than NNESTs. This perception implied superiority of the native status. This idea is supported by Tarnopolsky (2008); NNESTs are considered to have foreign accents which are difficult for students to understand. However, the respondents did not say that accents could determine teaching quality. These issues, namely accents and quality of teaching, were seen by the respondents as two independent and were not relatable.

The joint-second most raised issues were the use of L1 and L2 in classroom, and cultural supplementary, proving cultural knowledge (18%). The students identified that non-native teachers used more L1 in the classroom with little use of L2, while NES teachers mostly use L2. They also highlighted that even the aspect of the language of instruction and learning was different in both L1 and L2 use, however, each had their own benefits. The idea of the benefit of L1 relates to Tarnopolsky (2008), who theorized that NNESTs could use their L1 to facilitate their students, and that could contribute to students' faster-learning processes. Studying in a grammar class, non-native teachers could provide more insights of each grammar point with translations. This is the superior benefit of the non-native teachers with a shared L1. In contrast, native teachers could be the perfect example of the 'direct method' which students can listen and mimic accents and pronunciation more accurately. Native teachers, then, can be assumed as an ideal of listening and speaking classes. Another aspect mentioned above is culture. The students believed that native teachers were the better sources of cultural information since they were born and raised within that culture. Therefore, compared with non-native teachers, who may have limited exposure to the culture, this aspect was considered a stark difference between them. A lack of limited cultural knowledge and awareness, then, could limit students to understand the general context of why the language is used that way.

The respondents, then, were asked to identify advantages and disadvantages to two separate questions “What do think could be the benefits of being a native (and non-native for the second question) English teacher?” The charts below show the perceived differences between NESTs and NNESTs in advantageous aspects.

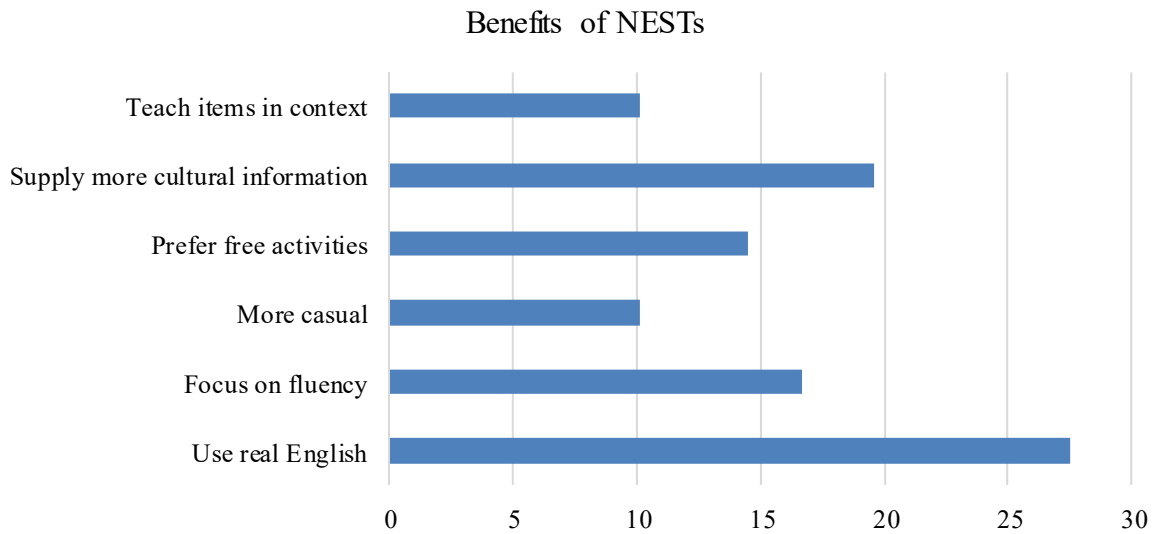


Figure 2. Benefits of NESTs

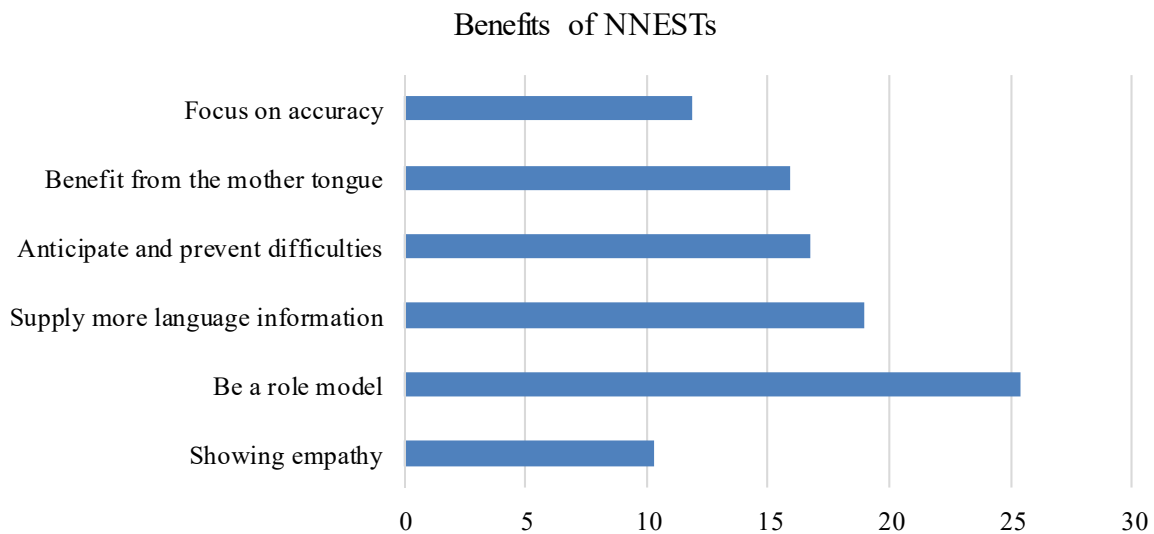


Figure 3. Benefits of NNESTs

The respondents perceived advantages of NESTs and NNESTs differently. The majority (27.5% and 25.4% respectively) of respondents agreed that NNESTs were perceived to have the use of ‘real’ English while NNESTs were mostly perceived to be a role model of a successful English language learner. The results support Medgyes’s work on ‘The Two Sides of Coin’ chapter in ‘The Non-Native Teacher’, saying that the first ‘dark side’ of being non-native to be considered is ‘the linguistic deficit’. The participants believed that NESTs could use more accurate and fluent English, which showed that they believed NNESTs had lower language proficiency. Also, the participants believed that NNESTs were role models for language learners, the first to be considered regarding the ‘bright side’ of being non-native. 19.6% of the respondents believed that NESTs could supply more cultural information, whereas a similar amount of the respondents (19%) stated that NNESTs could do better on

specific language information (i.e., grammar points). There were 16.7% of the respondents who said that a NESTs' class would focus more on fluency while a NNESTs' class would emphasize accuracy.

#### 4.1.2 Research Question II

In answer to the question "As a non-native speaker of English, who is currently studying B.Ed. English, do you see yourself in the future as a qualified and successful English teacher?" 92.3% of the students believed that they could be successful in their future career as an English teacher. Meanwhile, 7.7% of the participants did not think so. The Table 2 below shows the percentage and number of students who responded to the question.

Table 2. Response to qualification

Number of participants	Response	Percentage
36	Yes	92.3%
3	No	7.7%
0	No response	0%

Every participant, either responded 'yes' or 'no', were then asked to explain their choices. To present the result, the respondents were coded in number according to the order of their responses. According to the results, the students genuinely believed that if they work hard and practice both English and teaching skills their efforts will pay off and will enable them to be qualified English teachers. These are some extracted responses stated by the students:

"Now I try to improve my English to be as near as native speaker. I practice and study every day because I hope that I could give my students a real native experience as much as possible."

Student #22, 5th year.

"To become a better English teacher, I focus on English skills for sure. I try very hard to speak English all time."

Student #39, 2nd year.

The key point from the three extracts above generally concerns self-development regarding English language proficiency. This shows that the students thought that to become qualified, their levels of English should be excellent or as near native speakers as possible. Additionally, the students also stated that they trusted in the quality and reputation of the B.Ed. program that the university offered, and it would teach and underpin all essential subjects and real practice stages regarding both English and pedagogical skills. These are some extracts regarding the degree's curriculum provided by the respondents:

"I believe in my faculty which can make me to be a good teacher and I will always improve myself to teach accurately."

Student #4, 1st year.

"As I study B.Ed. English, I have learned many essential subjects and practices to be a qualified and successful English teacher."

Student #8, 5th year.

From the extracts above, the students expressed their concerns about the curriculum of the B.Ed. program. They had a strong trust in the quality of the program and believed that their linguistic and teaching skills could be improved after studying all the essential subjects. In contrast, as mentioned above, there were some respondents who did not perceive themselves to be a successful or qualified English teachers. These negative self-perceptions were mostly concerned with levels of English language and self-confidence. These are some comments by the respondents:

"My English skills are rather poor which make me not sure whether I can be a qualified and successful English teacher in the future or not."

Student #14, 2nd year.

"I need to improve myself more, I sometimes struggle when speaking English and that makes me feel anxiety and self-conscious."

Student #3, 3rd year.

According to the extracts above, the students felt unqualified because of their limited English language proficiency. These are obvious perceptions to support the first three extracts from student number 22 and 39, which strongly implied that English language skills determine the levels of self-perceptions.

In conclusion, most of the students (92.3%) strongly believed that they can be successful and qualified teachers of English. They demonstrated strong passions for becoming English teachers and were confident this would be achieved as a result of hard work and practices. Also, the students believed that the B.Ed. program itself could offer a wide range of both theoretical and practical modules and activities. However, there were a few students who did not perceive themselves that way. This negative self-perception may be caused by various factors. For example, low English proficiency, in which was supported by Ma's finding (2012) states that English teachers' self-criticism was mostly regarding linguistic weaknesses (p. 8).

#### 4.1.3 Research Question III

Two questionnaire questions were selected, namely "What year are you currently studying in B.Ed. English?" and "As a non-native speaker of English, who is currently studying B.Ed. English, do you see yourself in the future as a qualified and successful English teacher?" The table below shows the result of the cross-tabulated analysis (see Table 3).

Table 3. Cross-tabulated: year of study to self-perceptions

Do you see yourself in the future as a qualified and successful English teacher?	What year are you currently studying in B.Ed. English?					No Answer	Total
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th		
Yes	9	11	5	2	9	0	36
No	0	2	1	0	0	0	3
No Answer	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	9	13	6	2	9	0	39

According to the table, it is difficult to correlate clearly years of studying and changing one's perception. All of the first, fourth- and fifth-year students, perceived their teaching career positively, a few second- and third-year students did not. This complexity needs to be discussed at an individual level. Therefore, the students' comments were included in the analysis to provide more evidential and reliable results. The data presented in the table below is a comparison of the students' opinions given in the question "As a non-native speaker of English, who is currently studying B.Ed. English, do you see yourself in the future as a qualified and successful English teacher?" These are some comments given by the students:

"I think I can surely improve myself."

Student #26, 1st year

"I'll do my best to become a successful teacher."

Student #38, 1st year

"Maybe 'yes'. I will try my best to teach English as non-native speaker of English."

Student #30, 2nd year.

"Actually, for now I don't know exactly if I could be a successful ET or not. But if the time comes, I will do my best for my students."

Student #20, 2nd year.

"Because I'll adopt the direct method, even they don't under me, but I will try to speak to them and let them speak out."

Student #15, 3rd year.

"From the first year until now, my English is getting better. I'm absolutely going to be an English teacher and I will try to improve myself to become a successful."

Student #21, 3rd year.

"Now I try to improve my English to be as likely as native speaker because I hope that I could give my student the real native experience as much as possible. In class, I try not to speak Thai. Even I am non-native English language teacher, but I think I could teach and transfer information to my students correctly and successfully."

Students #22, 4th year.



“I have practiced using classroom language, classroom management, activity design, and teaching strategies a lot in past 4 years. All of these could make me become more professional in teaching in the future.”

Student #27, 4th year

“I’ll use theory and method that I have learned in my class. I’ll plan my lesson plan both study grammar and learning by doing activities. I’ll give more chance to students using four English skills in my class. I’ll also use cooperative learning in each activity.”

Student #11, 5th year

“I believe that if I adopt the direct method by always using English with my students both inside and outside classrooms, the students will love to learn English.”

Student #33, 5th year

According to some extracts above, it can be noticed that the students in higher years (4th-5th year) seemed to be more objective and provided more rationales to support their own opinions. They mentioned the theories that they had learned so far, for example, ‘the direct method’, ‘cooperative learning’ and ‘teaching strategies’. These students also brought up many interesting teaching aspects, such as, classroom language, classroom management, and lesson planning and designing. They also mentioned general aspects that could help reduce the gap between themselves and the native teachers, such as emulating an English environment, talking with native speakers, and travelling abroad. In contrast, the students who were in the first to third year were a little more subjective in explaining their point of views. For instance, they usually included subjective words and phrases such as ‘I believe’, ‘I’ll try’, ‘I’ll do my best’, etc. These students, the first to the third year, focused mostly on themselves and perceived individual effort as the keys to success, while the fourth- and fifth-year students relied more on strategies and pedagogical knowledge. It can be generally stated that the higher the year of study correlated with gradually changing perceptions.

#### 4.2 Findings from the Semi-Structured Interview

##### 4.2.1 General Findings

The interviewees were chosen based on their current years of studying and their agreement whether they would like to take part in interviews. The semi-structured interview took about 15 minutes through an online real-time video platform. After the interviews, the participants were coded into alphabets to make their names confidential and their audio data was transcribed and translated from Thai to English. The table below shows the information of the interviewees:

Table 4. Information of the interviewees

Interviewees	Age	Gender	Years of Studying	Teaching Experience
Student A	20	F	1	N
Student B	21	F	2	Y
Student C	21	F	3	N
Student D	20	F	3	Y
Student E	23	F	4	Y
Student F	23	F	4	Y
Student G	23	F	5	Y

##### 4.2.2 Research Question I

On this part, every interviewee was asked to provide any concerns about disadvantages of themselves as NNESTs. The interviewees were asked “As you already answered the question about NESTs’ advantages, do you have any concerns about NNESTs’ disadvantages?” These transcriptions of audio recorded interviews below illustrate some undergraduate students’ perceptions towards NNESTs weaknesses:

Extracted transcription from student A

[...]

Interviewer: Previously on the questionnaire, I already asked you about advantages of both native and non-native English teachers. So, let’s look at it from another side. Do you have

any concerns about disadvantages of non-native English teachers? (All interviewees were asked this question)

Student A: I do concern about my pronunciation. I'm afraid I might make pronunciation mistakes while teaching.

Interviewer: Right. Do you have any teaching experiences before?

Student A: No, I don't. But I think right now my pronunciation is not that good. So, this is what I concern about myself being a non-native.

Interviewer: Aha. So, your concern is about your pronunciation. Umm...do you think there are any other weak points of being a non-native?

Student A: Umm...from my experience as a student back in my high school, sometimes I didn't really understand what a non-native teacher tried to explain. Even she explained in Thai, but it was still confusing.

[...]

Extracted transcription from student B

[...]

Interviewer: (Question)

Student B: I think Thai teachers produce lots of pronunciation mistakes. A native teacher teaches better in a speaking class because he/she will know immediately when students mispronounce words. So, this is one of the disadvantages of non-native teachers.

Interviewer: Right. Any other points?

Student B: I also think that if Thai students have a chance to only study with non-native teachers, their speaking skill or accent may not be as good as the native.

[...]

Extracted transcription from student C

[...]

Interviewer: (Question)

Student C: I think a non-native teacher is less fluent in speaking which may be caused by anxiety of grammar mistakes. The teacher also may not be able to understand or explain English idioms because they were not born in the culture.

[...]

Extracted transcription from student D

[...]

Interviewer: (Question)

Student D: Based on my experience studying with both native and non-native teachers, I think non-native teachers' classes were less fun as we needed to study lots of grammar. So compared with native teachers' classes, I found it was more productive. However, I did not say that non-native classes were not good. I know that the teachers needed to follow the national curriculum which is kind of an exam-based curriculum.

[...]

According to the extracts above, most of the interviewees had a huge concern about NNESTs' pronunciation. They indicated that NNESTs' are less accurate in pronunciation than NESTs. This idea was supported by Medgyes (1994) in which NNESTs are less proficient than NESTs in terms of oral fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary. It can be noticed that sometimes NNESTs tried to use L2 in class, but it turned out negatively. This implies both positive and negative aspects; it sounds ideal to use L2 in class to surround students with an English-speaking environment, but NNESTs themselves must make sure that their English is comprehensible and understandable. The participants also mentioned that NNESTs have a disadvantage in conducting a speaking class in which inefficiency was caused by pronunciation problems and the anxiety that they might make grammar mistakes. The students also had a concern about NNESTs classrooms which were less fun and tend to be conducted in exam-based environments. The exam-based lessons can be generally seen in most Asian

countries, for examples, Thailand, Japan, and South Korea. The same argument was supported by Samimy & Brutt-Griffler (1999), as expressed by one of their interviewees who was an experienced teacher from Asia, stating that “It is very difficult for the teacher to conduct a fun classroom. It is because the national curriculum does not support this idea. Students just want to study because of the national examination to universities”.

#### 4.2.3 Research Question II

The interview question was aimed to elicit in depth data on how they perceive themselves being a teacher in Thailand and also in other countries. The extracts below illustrate some of the students’ opinions regarding this issue:

Extracted transcription from student G

[...]

Interviewer: Could you imagine yourself teaching in a country where English is not an official language, and you couldn’t also share your mother tongue with students. Do you think you can do that?

Student G: Umm...well, I think. (2 seconds pause) I think I could. Even though the students and I do not share the first language, but I could just teach in English and try to simplify the language. And I think I’d be more comfortable teaching in our neighboring countries like Vietnam or Laos than in Europe. It is because my identity is Asian.

[...]

Extracted transcription from student F

[...]

Interviewer: (Question)

Student F: I would love to do so even in an English-speaking country. It’s going to be very challenging. I don’t see language barrier as a problem. I think it’ll be fine because even in my micro teaching class here, everyone is not allowed to use Thai for instruction. So, during my third to fourth year, I barely use Thai. I’ve been trained to use English as a medium and I’ve learnt lots of classroom language. So, I think I could teach anywhere in the world.

[...]

From the extracts, it can be said that the students were confident about teaching English abroad. They stated that the B. Ed. program had sufficiently and effectively trained them to serve all teaching contexts. This perception revealed a different finding from Solhi (2011), who indicated that “the greatest disadvantage of teaching in EFL context is not knowing students’ L1 and culture (p. 858)”. However, the result of the interview still needs further investigation, as because of its subjectivity, the interviewees had not experienced it themselves.

#### 4.2.4 Research Question III

According to the interviews, it is still difficult to establish whether the years in the university could change students’ self-perceptions. The selected interviewees were all confident about their teaching proficiency and had positive self-perception. However, it can be noticed that the higher the year, the more objective and more confident they were. The students E, F, and G showed more theoretical knowledge of pedagogy to support their statements, while the students A, B, C, and D mostly spoke out based on their individual opinions. The table below compares and analyses the responses of two interviewees, student A and student F of the same question:

Table 5. Self-perceptions on Teaching English Abroad

Self-perceptions on Teaching English Abroad	
Student A (1st Year Student)	Student F (5th Year Student)
“I think I can do well in Asian countries like Japan or China, or countries that English is not an official language.”	“I would love to do so even in an English-speaking country. It’s going to be very challenging. I don’t see language barrier as a problem. I think it’ll be fine because even in my micro-teaching class here, everyone is not allowed to use Thai for instruction. So, during my third to fourth year, I barely use Thai. I’ve been trained to use English as a medium and I’ve learnt lots of classroom language. So, I think I could teach anywhere in the world”

#### 4.2.5 Summary of the Interview

To sum up the interviews, the undergraduate students obviously showed positive perceptions towards themselves. They were able to identify their weaknesses of being non-native and concerns for their ‘pronunciation’ as their prior disadvantage. The result also implied that the students perceived themselves more confident in teaching grammar classes rather than listening or speaking classes. This was associated with their lack of pronunciation accuracy. The participants, nevertheless, still felt confident teaching English in both Thailand and a foreign country. However, it can be noted that the students in the lower years preferred to teach in Asian countries, while those in the higher year were more confident in teaching English all around the world.

### 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the undergraduate TESOL students in a Thai university expressed various concerns regarding the differences between native and non-native English language teachers. They agree that both NESTs and NNESTs have unique strengths and weaknesses in terms of linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical expertise. A finding of particular note was that even they hold a non-native English teacher status, the undergraduate TESOL students could still picture themselves as successful and qualified English teachers after graduating from the program. It is also noted that higher years of study can gradually build the students’ linguistic and pedagogical skills. They confidently and strongly believed that all the modules they had learned from the B.Ed. program could reduce the gap between themselves and native teachers and could help them to achieve native’s proficiency levels. Compared with NESTs, Thailand still has a high demand for NNESTs. NNESTs in Thailand are trained to serve a local need of English teachers who can share their first language with students, understand Thai students’ problems and needs, and work effectively in a Thai culture. Therefore, it can be assumed that NNESTs or future NNESTs in Thailand consider themselves to have an equal chance of success in English language teaching careers as NESTs.

#### 5.1 Pedagogical Implications

To realize the full potential of an English classroom, NESTs and NNEST should cooperatively work together so that both NESTs and NNESTs can fulfil and compensate for each other’s weaknesses. NNESTs need to improve their English language competence, for example, pronunciation, listening, vocabulary, etc. Presently there are many free online English language sites that can help NNESTs develop in specific areas. Additionally, NNESTs should find a way to expose themselves to an English-speaking culture, i.e., travelling to or staying in an English-speaking country, so that they will be able to integrate the culture into their teaching. Another implication of the findings suggests that a TESOL degree curriculum in a country where English is considered a foreign language (e.g., Thailand, Vietnam, Lao) should provide students a chance to expose themselves in English-speaking countries. In turn, students can learn the cultures of a country and acquire an English-speaking environment to acquire expertise in their teaching career in the future.

#### 5.2 Limitations

The main limitation of the study is a small sample size within one specific context. This limitation makes the study difficult to generalize to a larger population, as the result cannot guarantee the quality of all B.Ed. programs in other universities in Thailand or other Asian countries. The study could have gathered more respondents if the researcher had met the target participants in person. The online data collection method limited the opportunity to enable familiarity between the researcher and the participants. However, a delimitation of this study is that little research has been done before in this context in Thailand. It is hoped that this piece of writing can contribute to the NNEST/NEST conversation and pave the way for further research in this context.

#### 5.3 Further Research

It is statistically important for the researcher to gather as many participants as possible in future research. Additionally, researchers need to approach students who are equivalent in a program studied in many different universities so that the results can be easier to generalize and more valid within the context of the country. In addition, further research needs to consider gender aspects, as these may affect self-perceptions of students. The research would be more interesting and meaningful if the range of participants included graduated TESOL students or experienced NNESTs, and then compared self-perceptions of those participants.

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