ABSTRACT

THE PERCEPTIONS OF COLLEGE TEACHERS AND STUDENTS TOWARD NON-NATIVE-ENGLISH-SPEAKING TEACHERS’ LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY IN ENGLISH DOMINANT ENVIRONMENTS

By

Leping Yu
M.A. English: TESL

Minnesota State University
Mankato, Minnesota

April.2007

This study aims to investigate how NNESTs are perceived in English dominant environments by themselves, their supervisors and their students, with regard to NNESTs’ language proficiency, NNESTs’ teaching focus, and characteristics that may influence people’s perceptions. Using data from face to face individual interviews gathered among 3 NNESTs, 3 of their supervisors and 7 of their international students, the author categorized four major topics, i.e. perceptions of language proficiency, perceptions of teaching focus, advantage of NNESTs, and preferences. It is found that NNESTs’ language proficiency has strong influence on how they are perceived; NNESTs with a high level of language proficiency usually receive positive perceptions from themselves, their supervisors, and their students in terms of their language ability, teaching focus, and understanding of the students in English dominant environments; overall professionalism is the main criterion for people to judge NNESTs’ qualification. Suggestions for NNESTs working in English dominant settings are also provided based on the outcomes of the study.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people that helped make this capstone project possible, but first I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Karen Lybeck, for her consistent support with countless hours’ hard working to assist me with organization and revisions over the last whole year. I would also like to thank the participants of the project that graciously took time from their busy schedules to support me in this research. Many thanks also go out to my friends who gave me great encouragement and help throughout the entire process.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................... 1

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW ............................................................................................... 5

  NNESTs vs. NESTs ...................................................................................................................... 5
    Definition Criteria .................................................................................................................. 5
    Differences in Language Proficiency .................................................................................... 9
    Different Features of Engaged Language Teaching .............................................................. 14
  Perceptions .............................................................................................................................. 20
    Self-Perceptions of NNESTs ................................................................................................. 22
    Self-Perceptions of future NNESTs ....................................................................................... 26
    Perceptions from students ..................................................................................................... 27
  Summary .................................................................................................................................. 30

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY ......................................................................................................... 34

  Participants ............................................................................................................................... 34
  Data Collection ........................................................................................................................ 36
  Data Analysis ............................................................................................................................ 38

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS ................................................................................................................. 38

  NNESTs’ self-perceptions ........................................................................................................ 39
    What are your Perceptions of Language Proficiency? ......................................................... 39
    What are your main focuses in the language teaching? ..................................................... 42
    What are the advantages of NNESTs in English dominant environments? ...................... 43
    What are your teaching preferences? ................................................................................. 45
    Do you have some concerns and suggestions for those NNESTs? ..................................... 47
Supervisors’ perceptions .............................................................. 49

How do you perceive the NNESTs’ Language Proficiency? .................. 49
How do you perceive the NNESTs’ teaching focus? .............................. 52
What are the advantages of the NNESTs? ........................................ 54
What is your hiring preference? ...................................................... 56
Do you have some concerns and suggestions for those NNESTs? .......... 58

Students’ perceptions ..................................................................... 59

How do you perceive your NNESTs’ language proficiency? ............... 59
How do you perceive your NNESTs’ teaching focus? ......................... 63
What is the advantage of the NNESTs? .......................................... 66
What are your preferences of English teachers? ................................. 68
Do you have some concerns and suggestions for those NNESTs? ...... 71

Discussion ...................................................................................... 72

How is NNESTs’ language proficiency perceived? .......................... 72
How are NNESTs’ teaching focuses perceived? ............................... 75
What is the advantage for NNESTs teaching in English dominant environments? .... 76
Which are the preferences of English teachers in English dominant environments? ...... 77

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION ................................................................ 80

Limitations of the Study and Implications for Future Research .......... 82
Implications .................................................................................. 83

APPENDIX I ................................................................................... 85

REFERENCE ................................................................................. 90
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

With the trend of globalization, English has been considered as an unchallenged world lingua franca and the most common medium of international communication for the past 20 years (Crystal, 1997; Kachru, 1992; McKay, 1992; Medgyes, 1994; Prodromou, 1992). According to Medgyes (1994), there are almost one billion people who are speaking English either as their first or as a foreign language, with the number of English learners dramatically increasing all over the world. Taking the United States as an example, within the past 10 years, the population of English language learners (ELLs) has increased by 105% (National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education, 2000, as cited in Freeman & Freeman, 2003, p. 5). As Crystal (1985) estimates, the number of English learners will probably surge toward two billion around the world in the near future. Under the globalization of English, a universal trend of English language learning and teaching has appeared, and it is likely that more and more teachers of English will be needed in the future.

With this ever-increasing global popularity of English learning, non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs), to whom English is not their native language, are becoming an important group. Since the majority of English learners live in foreign language settings and do not have much access to native-English speakers (NSs), NNESTs are becoming more populous than their counterparts, native-English speaking teachers (NESTs) (Braine, 2005; Samimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999). With the steady increase of English learners around the world, especially in foreign language settings, it is
not hard to imagine that NNESTs will continue to be the majority among English teachers.

Considering the importance and population of NNESTs in the field of English-language teaching, there is an increase of studies on NNESTs (Llurda, 2005). According to Braine (2005), however, these studies share some common characteristics that may lead to some limitations. First of all, most research on NNESTs is conducted by non-native English speaking scholars, and not many native-English speaking scholars have shed light on this area yet, which could indicate the limited attention among the field and also the strong self-consciousness among the NNESTs. Second, although many studies have focused on the differences of teaching practices between NESTs and NNESTs, only a small number have examined the perceptions held toward NNESTs, including student perceptions and self-perceptions. Thirdly, among those studies that have been conducted to examine the perceptions of students and teachers toward NNESTs, many are actually student theses and dissertations, so that it is hard for people to access and popularize the findings of these studies.

Taking those limitations into account, one may suggest that it is necessary to conduct more research on the perceptions and judgments toward NNESTs. Those perceptions may affect NNESTs’ teaching attitudes, performance, student-teacher relationship and working environments (Canagarajah, 1999). Moreover, it is especially necessary to investigate the perceptions toward NNESTs’ language proficiency, which is considered the key factor to differentiate NNESTs from NESTs (Medgyes, 1994). According to Canagarajah (1999), it is possible that people tend to judge NNESTs’
teaching skills or qualifications based upon their language proficiency, which will directly affect their job hunting and teaching performance. Thus, it is plausible that by investigating the perceptions of NNESTs and analyzing the possible rationale behind those judgments, the potential challenges and opportunities that NNESTs may face when teaching, can be effectively uncovered. Some practical suggestions can also be provided to help them overcome the challenges and utilize their opportunities, as well as to improve their professionalism.

Another consideration is the fact that since the majority of NNESTs are living and teaching in their home countries, most of the research on NNESTs has been conducted with NNESTs working in English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) settings. Few studies have been done in English dominant environments where English is the native language of the majority of the population (McNeil, 2005). The number of NNESTs working in English dominant environments, however, has been steadily increasing recently (Liu, 2005), so it is necessary to give more attention to NNESTs working in those environments.

Some scholars anticipate that NNESTs may possibly face more difficulties teaching and suffer more from negative perceptions of their language proficiency in English dominant environments because NNESTs are the minority in that environment and do not share the first language (L1) with either their students nor the majority people around them (Pacek, 2005). Therefore, it is important to give more attention to this particular group in terms of the perceptions of their language proficiency and its influence on their teaching performance and effectiveness.
Thus, this study looks at the perceptions of NNESTs’ language proficiency in English dominant settings. Chapter 2 of this thesis outlines the previous literature that relates to the definition criteria of and the differences between NNESTS and NESTs, as well as the perceptions of NNESTs, concluding with the statement of this study’s novel focus: the perceptions of NNESTs’ language proficiency and its influence on teaching by NNESTs’ students, supervisors and themselves in English dominant settings. Chapter 3 describes the methodology used to collect and analyze data from 13 study participants, including 3 NNESTs, their 3 supervisors and 7 of their non-native speaking students in an American university. Chapter 4 provides the results and further analysis of the participants’ experience and ideas about NNESTs in English dominant settings. Suggestions for NNESTs working in English dominant settings are provided in the last chapter based on the outcomes of the study.
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the pioneering work of Medgyes in the early 1990’s (1992, 1994) and the establishment of the Non-native English Speakers’ Caucus in the TESOL organization in 1999, there has been a surge of the studies on NNESTs, particularly in the areas of language proficiency, teaching behavior, teaching attitude and hiring status. A number of studies have been conducted to give voice to NNESTs in terms of their differences from NESTs, the perceptions and the possible difficulties (e.g., Braine, 2005; Boyle, 1997; Llurda, 2005; Liu, 1999; Medgyes, 1992, 1994; Phillipson, 1992; Prodromou, 1992).

NNESTs vs. NESTs

Definition Criteria

Although the concepts of NSs and non-native English speakers (NNSs) are frequently used and are often taken as common sense (Boyle, 1997; Pecek, 2005), there has been a number of controversies and complexities about the criteria of how to define them within the field for years, and even the simple use of the terms NSs and NNSs can be controversial (Edge, 1988; Kachru, 1992; Paikeday, 1985; Rampton, 1990).

There are a number of conflicts on why we should keep the dichotomy of NNSs and NSs (Davies, 1991; Paikeday, 1985). For instance, similar to the relationship of the dichotomy of majority versus minority, the labels of NNSs and NSs may indicate that English belongs to certain people from certain countries, which are likely considered as identity-burdened, confidence-influencing linguistic imperialism, and discrimination (Davies, 1991). Moreover, there is no standardized version of English which is universally accepted as yet, which makes it hard to define who is native or not (Bautista,
1997; Crystal, 1997; Paikeday, 1985). Some scholars also point out that NS and NNS labels limit the range of possibilities to a dichotomy rather than a continuum, and as such, it is difficult to define especially in bilingual or multilingual environments (Edge, 1988; Kachru, 1985; Liu, 1999; Rampton 1990).

In addition, there are a number of variables which make it complicated on how to define NSs and NNSs in terms of the language acquisition process, sociocultural background, birth place, length of stay in the target-language environment, competence of language fluency, linguistic knowledge, multilingualism, language attitudes, and ethnic identity (Liu, 2005). According to Chomsky, NSs and NNSs can be differentiated according to the state of speakers’ “language organ”, because NSs usually hold steady states of language control in their minds, while NNSs have an unsteady state of their foreign language so that they may forget or lose the language after learning (as cited in Paikeday, 1985, p84). Paikeday (1985), however, argues that this definition sounds too metaphysical and too ambiguous for outsiders to tell about the status of English speakers’ minds.

McKay (1992) suggests defining NSs and NNSs according to their original countries and regions based on Kachru’s three categories of English-speaking countries: inner circle, outer circle, and expanding circle. According to Kachru (1992), inner circle countries are those that use English as their L1 exclusively everyday and everywhere in the society; outer circle countries are those that have a language other than English as their dominant language, but use English as their second or official language; expanding circle countries are those who learn English in a foreign language setting and do not use it
as a daily language. Mckay (1992) suggests defining people from inner circle countries as NSs and all the rest as NNSs. This suggestion, however, is criticized by some scholars (Edge, 1988; Liu, 1999; Medgyes, 1994; Rampton, 1990), who insist that English has been accepted as a global language and universal medium of communication. Liu (1999) adds that it is not plausible to define people from outer circle countries simply as NNSs, because some of them grow up bilingually and have native English proficiency.

Admitting all the discussed contradictions and complexities of defining NNSs and NSs, the dichotomy of NSs and NNSs is still being used in this study, for they are so far the most recognized and most convenient terms to differentiate the two groups of people. Although there are some alternative terms that have been promoted to replace this dichotomy, such as “expert speakers (Rampton, 1990)”, “English-using speech fellowship (Kachru, 1985)”, “more or less accomplished users of English (Edge, 1988)”, or “more of less proficient users of English (Paikeday, 1985)” (as cited in Medgyes, 1992, p. 342), none of them provides a clearer definition of the two groups (Medgyes, 1992). Due to their vagueness, those alternatives are not used in this study. Additionally, Medgyes (1994) supports the retention of NS/NNS dichotomy because it is simply used to indicate the differences between the two groups instead of discriminating against NNSs. According to him, compared with NSs, NNSs may have a disadvantage in language proficiency, but they could also have the advantages of experiencing the language acquisition process and a higher level of linguistic knowledge. Keeping this in mind, the NS/NNS dichotomy does not necessarily indicate the inferiority of NNSs. In spite of all the debates over conventions, the NSs/NNSs dichotomy is still commonly
accepted in the minds of publics and widely used in the primary literature (e.g. Benke & Medgyes, 2005; Braine, 2005; Liang, 2002; Liu, 2005; Llurda & Huguet, 2003; Mahboob, 2003; Menard-Warwick, 2008; Moussu, 2002; Pacek, 2005; Samimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999).

In this study, NSs and NNSs are divided according to whether or not they have native-level language proficiency. To be specific, NSs are identified as those people who have learned English as their L1, or those who grew up under an English-included multilingual environment, or who learned English in their very early childhood and obtained a native-level English proficiency. On the other hand, those people who do not apply to the above situations, having lower language proficiency, and/or strong foreign-language accents are considered NNSs. Correspondingly, NNESTs are those English teachers who are NNSs and NESTs are those English teachers who are NSs.

This way of differentiating the two groups is considered reasonable. It has been commonly agreed and supported by scholars that language proficiency is the key criterion to distinguish NNSs from NSs, because no matter how much NNSs have learned and been exposed to the language, their language proficiency is still different from that of NSs (Cook, 1999; Edge, 1988; Kachru, 1985; Liu, 2005; Medgyes, 1992; Paikeday, 1985; Rampton, 1990). This criterion is also promoted by Medgyes (1994), who notes that by defining NSs and NNSs based on their language proficiency, NNSs may get more motivated to improve their language proficiency in order to get closer to native language level. This is especially true for NNESTs who usually have higher expectations and requirements for their language proficiency than general NNSs. Moreover, this way of
differentiating the two groups is supported by previous research on language accent (Gatbonton et al., 2005; Riney et al., 2005), which finds that if people have non-native accents from areas in which English is not the L1, they are probably viewed as NNSs. Riney et al. (2005) conducted a perceptual study, which investigated 15 listeners’ perceptions toward 16 speakers’ foreign accents in English. The results of the study show that people tend to judge speakers’ ethnicity according to their accent, and people with certain accents may not be judged as NSs. This result is supported by the study of Gatbonton et al. (2003), who recorded people’s speech and provided the speech data to listeners to judge. They found that there is a very close relationship between speaker accent and their perceived ethnic group. People tend to treat accent as an indicator of a speakers’ degree of ethnic affiliation. In addition, Liu (2005) claims that although there are many controversies about who natives are and who they are not, it is less problematic to categorize those NNETs who grow up in non-English dominant environments and learn English from foreign language classes. His insight helps to justify the criteria used in this study to define NSs and NNNs, since the target group in this study all grew up and learned English in EFL-classroom settings and can clearly fit in these categories.

*Differences in Language Proficiency*

In the past decade after Medgyes’ pioneering work (Braine, 2005), more research has shed light on NNETs, considering them as a significant group of English teachers around the world. Due to the fact that NNETs and NESTs are mainly divided based upon their language proficiency, more studies have been conducted to focus on the differences between NNETs and NESTs in terms of language proficiency (e.g., Boyle,
According to the theories of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), the differences in language learning processes can greatly influence language users’ language competency (Boyle, 1997; Finegan, 2004). Finegan (2004) explains that L1 acquisition involves an initial language, acquired closely in “immediate surroundings and the context of language use”; whereas, SLA involves the learning in a classroom, where the language is used to “discuss imaginary or decontextualized events”, which are removed from authentic language use situations (p. 519). Due to the different learning processes between L1 and second language (L2), NSs and NNSs have the difference of “adaptability and malleability” in terms of mastering the language, which means L2 learners are usually less malleable and less quick-learning than L1 learners, while L1 learners are likely to have better intuition and control of the language than L2 learners. That explains why children sometimes seem to have the ability of mastering their L1 effortlessly, while some adult ELLs struggle during the L2 learning process even though their cognitive ability is more developed than children (Freeman & Freeman, 2003).

Due to the different learning processes, generally speaking, NSs are usually expected to have a higher level of language proficiency, including a larger knowledge of vocabulary, more awareness of idioms and expressions, and the intricacies of the language than NNSs (Medgyes, 1994). There are indications in some research that NSs’ language competency is more advanced, more stable, and less forgettable than NNSs.
(Boyle, 1997). Boyle (1997) states that because NSs learn the language through daily life from birth, they are more likely to have an instinctive understanding of the language. For example, it is common that a NS can tell right away whether an expression is acceptable or not under certain circumstances. Several studies (e.g., Reves & Medgyes, 1994; Samimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999) have been conducted to investigate specific differences in language proficiency between NNESTs and NESTs. According to Baratt & Kontra (2000), NESTs hold the advantage of language authenticity, including their authentic pronunciation, wide vocabulary, and target cultural understanding. In addition, some research indicates that, compared to professionally trained NESTs, NNESTs are likely to have inferior proficiency levels of English than NESTs in three aspects, representatively lower speaking proficiency, bookish-sounding language, and less self-confidence in using English (Medgyes, 1994; Samimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999).

It is not hard to notice that most of the difficulties mentioned in the research are related to communicative skills and language authenticity. One of the reasons that may lead to the inferiority of NNESTs in the area of communicative language use, according to Medgyes (1994), is that NNESTs can seldom use the target language as creatively and originally as NESTs can. Besides, many NNESTs, especially those who are working in EFL settings, are not provided with enough opportunities to use English authentically and interactively with NSs. Learning English mostly in non-English-dominant environments may directly affect their pronunciation and fluency. As some previous research has shown (Boyle, 1997; Judit, & Mariann, 2004; Reves & Medgyes, 1994), NNESTs, who learn English in non-English dominant environments, and NESTs, who grow up in
English dominant environments, contain different speech features in speech rate, accent, stress, intonation, and rhythm. NNESTs tend to speak more slowly and hesitantly when giving a lecture (Llurda, 2005) and have a noticeable foreign accent, which might be the last and the most difficult thing for them to change or remove completely.

In spite of the disadvantages of lower authenticity and speaking skills, NNESTs have their own advantages of linguistic knowledge over NESTs due to the different language learning processes (Finegan, 2004). Finegan (2004) explains that usually “second-language learners ordinarily have linguistic meta-knowledge that is lacking at least in the early stages of a L1 learner”, who acquire the language subconsciously and spontaneously (p. 520). As NNSs, they have the opportunity to realize the different linguistic systems between the languages in terms of vocabulary use, sound system, grammar rules, and discourse orders. Thanks to the L2 learning experience, NNESTs are sometimes found to be more sensitive to grammatical accuracy than NESTs, and often provide insightful and explicit explanations of English grammar functions (Reves & Medgyes, 1994; Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999). According to these scholars, a systematic set of patterns seems more learnable for NNESTs and may enable them to outperform NESTs, which motivates NNESTs to spend more time investigating in English grammar when they try to upgrade their language proficiency.

As for NSs, they sometimes have a hard time understanding the internal mechanisms of the language and its learning process, especially when they do not have professional language training and only acquire the language through an informal and colloquial process (Boyle, 1997). As Boyle (1997) mentions, NESTs’ difficulties with
grammatical knowledge can be that they know what is correct or incorrect, but they do not know why it is correct or not and find it hard to explain the rules explicitly. Llurda (2005) finds some supportive results of NNESTs’ advantages of having better linguistic knowledge than NESTs. He conducted a survey among approximately 100 supervisors of non-native TESL graduate students in the United States to investigate those future NNESTs’ language proficiency based on the supervisors’ daily observation and regular course assessments. Most of the supervisors report that those future NNESTs can do better or at least equal on linguistic knowledge to NSs: 50% of the participants stated that those TESL students had equal ability in understanding the language system, and 34% of the supervisors reported that the NNESTs had higher ability. The majority of the supervisors in the study noted that these future NNESTs had a good capacity for understanding and explaining the language system, mechanisms, and rules of the language at all teaching levels.

It is important to point out that, nevertheless, as second or foreign language learners, NNSs usually learn language through textbook-like materials and classroom instructions (Boyle, 1997), so sometimes NNSs may produce output that is grammatically correct but not really appropriate according to the situation. Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (1999) note that there are three interrelated dimensions of English grammar, i.e. form, meaning and use, which not only involve the accuracy of the language forms, but also emphasize the meaningful and appropriate use of the forms. They add that ELLs usually can clearly memorize the language rules and explicitly explain how a pattern is formed with detailed examples, but they sometimes have problems using the language
form meaningfully and appropriately in authentic contexts. Thus, although NNESTs may have explicit understanding of the grammar itself, they may still make mistakes when using it in context.

To summarize, it is often reported that compared to NESTs, NNESTs have both advantages and disadvantages in terms of their language proficiency. On the one hand, NNESTs usually have the disadvantages of not using the language authentically and interactively in a meaning-focused environment. As English learners, those NNESTs, who only learn English in EFL settings, often have difficulties with authentic language use in terms of idioms, expressions, fluency and pronunciation. It can be anticipated that when NNESTs teach in English dominant environments where they are surrounded by NSs, the lower speaking skills, inauthentic language use and strong foreign accent could bring them more challenges and disadvantages than in EFL settings. On the other hand, NNESTs have the advantages of having more linguistic knowledge and the ability to explain rules more explicitly than NSs. It is expected that when NNESTs teach among NSs, this advantage may become more useful, as many NSs have only a vague idea about how their L1 is formed.

*Different Features of Engaged Language Teaching*

The differences of language proficiency between NNESTs and NESTs as discussed above may influence the features of their practical language teaching. According to Braine (2005), most of the differences between NNESTs and NESTs in teaching practices are related to their different levels of language proficiency. Language teaching is a rather complex process that involves many aspects, such as language
competence, linguistic knowledge, professional training, teaching experience, and preparation (Canagarajah, 1999). Because of NESTs’ advantage of their communicative language proficiency and NNESTs’ advantage of their systematic linguistic knowledge, they will likely develop different and unique features in language teaching with regard to their teaching focus, language use, and understanding of the students.

Research (e.g., Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2002; Medgyes, 1994; McNeil, 2005) confirms that NESTs and NNESTs have different focuses while teaching. One different focus is that NNESTs are more likely to notice and correct students’ language errors due to their better insights of the language system and own learning experience. Medgyes’s (2001) conducted a survey between NNESTs and NESTs, where 82% of the participants reported the existence of differences in their teaching behavior. He collected the mentioned differences and found that one different teaching focus was that NNESTs tended to be more strict and sensitive of learners’ language errors and corrected the errors more often than NESTs do (Medgyes, 2001). He stresses that the discrepancy in language proficiency between NNESTs and NESTs may account most for influencing NNESTs’ attitudes and focus during teaching. He points out that NNESTs are likely to adopt a guided approach with attention toward language accuracy. On the contrary, NESTs, as some other studies show (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2002), tend to have a higher level of tolerance for students’ language mistakes, unless the errors affect their communication. Another different focus is that NESTs are more likely to adopt communicative approaches, which may present significant challenges to NNESTs with lower speaking skills and language authenticity (McNeil, 2005). As discussed previously, NESTs’
control of colloquial language enables them to produce correct, authentic, idiomatic language, and to be more intuitive about the language. These assets help them to use the communicative approach more easily, emphasizing the interactive use of the authentic language in the classroom. Moreover, by using authentic language confidently, NESTs can successfully increase students’ learning interests and immerse them in an English-dominant classroom with more target culture information involved. In the same study discussed above, however, Medgyes (2001) found that NNESTs may use more language-mechanism-focused approaches, including activities focusing on forms, grammar rules, registers, accuracy, and textbook-based controlled activities. This is particularly true in most eastern Asian countries, where the education system is still highly exam-driven. In order to focus on their teaching goals, Medgyes (2001) points out that NNESTs may assign students more homework, tests, and literacy-ability-focused activities. It can be imagined that students who study under this kind of focus will probably obtain a clear and systematic understanding of the language, just as their teachers do, but likely lower competency on communicative skills.

Another different teaching feature is that many NNESTs share their L1 and native culture with their students, which brings NNESTs more language choices and teaching advantages than NESTs in the classroom. From students’ perspectives, using students’ L1 helps reduce their working memory constraints and accelerate their understanding of the grammar rules. It avoids student overload and facilitates consolidation of their previous learning (Kern, 1994). From teachers’ perspectives, when teaching in their shared home country, NNESTs have the advantage of understanding students’ L1, coming from
diverse/non-English cultural background, and having the ability to conduct cross-language comparisons (Seidlhofer, 1999). Moreover, the knowledge of students’ L1 may help teachers teach more effectively and efficiently (e.g., Kern, 1994; McNeill, 2005; Pacek, 2005). Research (e.g. Cook, 2005; McNeill, 2005) shows that English teachers who share the same L1 with their students have less trouble identifying and understanding students’ lexical difficulties and give more focused answers to students’ questions. NNESTs can use both languages systematically and deliberately to express meanings, explain grammar, give clear instructions and conduct code-switching activities, which helps teachers increase the efficiency of the language class (Samimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999).

NNESTs’ advantages of using two languages in the classroom over NESTs are supported by Macaro (2005), who views bilingual ability as an important teaching tool by saying that “teachers, deprived of code-switching from their tool kit, cannot act as a bilingual dictionary for students” (p.75). He notes that if teachers lack the students’ L1, it is an obvious disadvantage because it limits NESTs total range of activities to use in the classroom and possible learning strategies to teach their students, such as translation exercises and dictionary use. Prodromou (1992) notes that many NESTs struggle with explaining difficult vocabulary due to their lack of knowledge of students’ L1, which also causes them problems of giving complicated instructions and hinders the pace of conducting the original lesson plan. Thus, NNESTs who share their L1 with students not only are able to facilitate students’ language learning but also make their own classroom teaching more effective and efficient. This shared background can likely become a
considerable advantage that favors NNESTs, but challenges most NESTs who lack proficiency in their students’ L1.

The third different feature of NNESTs’ teaching deals with their understanding of the students. To be specific, due to the different language proficiency and background of NNESTs and NESTs, their communication with students and understanding of their students deviate from one another. From the perspectives of cultural understanding, NESTs may have more problems with interaction and mutual understanding with their students, due to the lack of cross-culture understanding or shared cultural background. For these teachers, sometimes cross-cultural misunderstanding is inevitable during the interaction process (Prodromou, 1992). Modiano (2005) claims that NNESTs have advantages over NESTs in terms of multi-cultural perspectives, because NNESTs not only “have knowledge of the linguistic complexities of the L1 and the target language in contact,” but are also “well suited to provide students with a pluralistic cultural perspective, in contrast, the traditionalist NS practitioner, on promoting the legacy of the West, does not engage cultural pluralism from the perspective of the others” (p.26). So in contrast to NESTs, NNESTs can provide students with a different understanding of the target language and target society from a different cultural perspective, so students can view the language from various cultural angles. This plural cultural perspective helps NNESTs and their students to understand each other and the target culture better.

In addition, due to NNESTs’ own English learning experience, it is agreed that NNESTs may have the advantage of better understanding students’ learning process (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2002; Pacek, 2005; Phillipson, 1992; Saminy & Brutt, 1999).
Researchers state that the shared language-learning experience helps NNESTs predict students’ potential difficulties and learning needs (Saminy & Brutt, 1999, Tang, 1997), which helps NNESTs create effective solutions and teaching focus on students’ needs or difficulties. Reves and Medgyes (1994) also mention that NNESTs usually “show more empathy towards students’ language difficulties” (p. 361), which makes NNESTs become more patient and helps to close the distance between the teachers and students. These ideas are supported by McNeill (2005), who states that the awareness of the language acquisition process is important in language teaching and learning. He advocates that a successful and effective teacher needs to have a high level of metalinguistic awareness, the correct estimation of the difficulty level for their students, and the L2 learning process. He also agrees that communication between teachers and students may get easier when teachers can understand students’ learning processes better. Besides, from students’ perspectives, because of the shared English-learning background, they may psychologically feel closer to their NNESTs and regard them as role models of successful English learning, which can highly motivate students (Medgyes, 1992). On the contrary, NESTs may not have the assets mentioned above and may have to accept the greater linguistic and psychological distance between them and their students (McNeill, 2005).

Altogether, NNESTs and NESTs have different teaching features due to the discrepancy in their language proficiency. NNESTs tend to focus more on teaching linguistic knowledge, giving more attention to language accuracy, but use communicative teaching approach less often than NESTs. When teaching English in their home country where they share their L1 and native culture with the students, NNESTs have the
advantage of being able to teach the language more efficiently and provide various teaching activities by using students’ L1. NNESTs’ diverse cultural perspectives and special empathy toward students’ learning difficulties help to improve their relationship with their students. Their experience learning English also enables them to understand the students’ learning process, anticipate their potential problems and provide them effective suggestions accordingly.

It is important to point out that most of the research focuses on the differences between NNESTs and NESTs in EFL settings. Some NNESTs advantages in EFL settings, however, may not necessarily be applicable in English dominant settings. For example, most NNESTs teaching in English dominant environments may not have the advantage of shared L1 and native culture with their students, due to the diversity of students’ language and ethnic backgrounds in English-as-a-second-language (ESL) settings. Moreover, since ESL students live in target language environments, they usually have to upgrade their communicative language skills first to meet their survival needs. In this case, NNESTs may receive negative perceptions and face teaching difficulties if they place too much emphasis on language accuracy and linguistic knowledge and not enough on communicative skills.

**Perceptions**

As discussed above, NNESTs and NESTs have many different aspects of their language proficiency, which result in their different features of language teaching. These considerable differences undoubtedly would influence how they are perceived by their students and colleagues (Judit & Mariann, 2004; Llurda, 2005; Medgyes, 1994).
According to the previous research, there are both negative and positive perceptions of NNESTs resulting from their non-native language proficiency (Judit & Mariann, 2004; Llurda, 2000). For instance, because of their non-native background, NNESTs sometimes suffer from the perception of being unqualified (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2002). Positive influences, however, can also be found because of NNESTs’ multiple language capacity and similar language learning process with students (Cook, 1999). For example, Llurda (2000) conducted a study on the effects of people’s intelligibility and speaking speed on the perceptions of NNSs’ personality. He analyzed the responses given by 28 NSs to a passage read by 10 NNSs of 5 different L1 backgrounds and found that if NNSs had a high level of language proficiency and good intelligibility, NSs tended to judge them as well educated, trustworthy, and intelligent. People’s perceptions can also affect NNESTs’ teaching and job hunting process (Canagarajah, 1999), which is supported by the results of a study conducted by Mahboob (2003) on the hiring status of NNESTs in the United States. He distributed questionnaires to 118 college-level adult ESL programs and found that NNESTs still account for a small portion (7.9%) in these ESL programs, which revealed administrators’ preference toward NESTs, although admitting that in ESL settings NESTs are more prevalent (as cited in Braine, 2005, p.20). Considering that the diverse perceptions may provide NNESTs with many potential challenges, it is indispensable to investigate closely the perceptions and the rationale behind it. By doing this, practical suggestions can be provided to help NNESTs seize opportunities, overcome challenges and successfully pursue professional
development in the future. Thus, the following sections will address in turn about NNESTs’ self perceptions and their students’ perceptions.

_Self-Perceptions of NNESTs_

As second or foreign language learners, NNESTs sometimes view themselves as deficient language users. As a NNEST himself, Medgyes (1994) mentions that, “sooner or later, they are halted by a glass wall. Few have managed to climb over it” (p. 342). He perceives NNESTs as forever learners who will never be able to use the language as creatively and originally as NESTs do, which seems like an invisible wall for NNESTs in their professional development. Although his statements sound harsh and arbitrary, they at least present his own lack of confidence and his attitude toward NNESTs’ language proficiency.

Research shows that many NNESTs, especially those working in EFL settings, hold negative attitudes toward their own English proficiency and teaching qualification (Boyle, 1997; Liu, 2005; Llurda & Hugues, 2003; Medgyes & Reves, 1994). Medgyes and Reves (1994) conducted a survey to investigate the differences in perceptions between NESTs and NNESTs on their own language proficiency and teaching habits. They sent the questionnaires worldwide to more than 200 NESTs and NNESTs from 10 different EFL countries. The results of this study show that when comparing themselves to NESTs, almost all NNESTs considered themselves as poorer listeners, speakers, readers and writers. 84 percent of the NNESTs in the survey reported that they struggled most with vocabulary, language fluency, speaking, accent, and listening skills. Many of the NNESTs stated that they did not have a high level of self-esteem in teaching
communicative language due to their various language difficulties. On the contrary most of the NESTs held positive attitudes toward their language proficiency and teaching confidence. Therefore, the difference in language proficiency was found to be the main factor influencing their teaching confidence and self-perceptions. Boyle (1997) also agrees with the result of the research, and mentions that due to the difference of their linguistic features, NNESTs usually lack confidence in their language competency while NSs are more confident in terms of both language proficiency and classroom teaching.

In addition to the overall negative perceptions among NNESTs, research (Llurda & Huguet, 2003) finds that NNESTs teaching in beginning levels hold more negative self-perceptions than those in intermediate levels. Llurda & Huguet (2003) conducted oral questionnaires with approximately 100 NNESTs in primary and secondary schools in Spain about their self-perceptions. In the study, all the primary teachers had a three-year degree in primary education and all the secondary teachers had a four-year degree in English Philology for secondary education, providing the secondary teachers with more specific training in English education than the primary teachers. The participants all had similar teaching experience. The results of the study showed that NNESTs in both elementary schools and secondary schools claim a deficiency of their language use. Despite the lower language proficiency, however, many secondary teachers (65.5%) considered being an NNEST an advantage in EFL settings. In contrast, primary teachers held more negative self-perceptions by reporting more insecurity and lack of confidence than secondary teachers, especially in terms of language fluency and linguistic knowledge. The primary teachers stated that they needed more help and training to
consistently improve their language skills. Due to the negative self-perceptions, half of the primary teachers indicated that they would like to hire NESTs rather than NNESTs to teach.

It is commonly suggested that NNESTs are more successful when teaching lower level learners due to NNESTs’ comparatively lower language proficiency, while NESTs are more successful when teaching advanced learners (Llurda, 2005; Medgyes, 1994; Reves & Medgyes, 1994). Interestingly, the NNESTs’ self-perceptions in Llurda & Huguet’s (2003) study as described above were opposite from their general suggestions of their suitable teaching level. When the teachers’ language proficiency is not high enough or they do not have enough language training, it is very likely that they will be put in lower teaching levels. In the study, the primary teachers did not have as many English-proficiency-focused courses as the secondary teachers do, so lower teaching levels and requirements were given to them. In this case, however, those primary teachers still reported the insecurity and lack of confidence during teaching because of their lower language proficiency. In contrast, although coming from non-native English background, the secondary teachers felt comfortable to teach higher levels due to their higher language proficiency and systematic language training. Thus the findings of this study indicate that NNESTs language proficiency may directly influence their teaching confidence and self-perceptions of their teaching qualifications.

As for the NNESTs teaching in English dominant environments, a limited amount of research has been conducted. Even so, some potential difficulties of NNESTs have been uncovered, including their lower language proficiency, lack of local cultural
understanding, and people’s stereotypes. Liu (2005) interviewed a group of Chinese Graduate Teaching Assistants (NNEST GTAs) who were teaching freshman composition to NSs and pursuing MA TESL degrees at an American university. According to the results, although going through professional training as English teachers in the United States, those NNEST GTAs still reported several challenges such as a lack of high proficiency in colloquial and spoken English, a lack of cultural background knowledge of the environment and the language, initially experiencing negative attitudes from their native students, and high expectations and demands from themselves.

Thus, according to the researchers discussed above, generally speaking, both NNESTs in EFL settings and ESL settings share difficulties in improving language proficiency and holding negative perceptions of themselves, which is closely related to their level of language proficiency. As for NNESTs in EFL settings, they usually have more difficulties with speaking skills due to the lack of exposure to authentic English, which also negatively influenced their self-perceptions and teaching confidence. As for NNESTs in ESL settings, there are not many studies focusing on their self-perceptions of language proficiency. Among the few, some studies (e.g. Liu, 2005) show that although NNESTs see some advantages in themselves, they still report many difficulties and negative opinions of their language proficiency and teaching confidence in English dominated environments. One limitation of the research is that it only focuses on one specific ethnic group, so the findings may not be representative of other NNESTs in ESL settings.
Self-Perceptions of future NNESTs

In contrast to those NNESTs who are in the work place as discussed above, some studies (e.g. Samimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999) show that some future NNESTs who study in pre-service programs seem to have more positive self-judgments with regard to their language proficiency and future duties. Samimy & Brutt-Griffler (1999) interviewed 17 non-native-English-speaking graduate students who were pursuing higher degrees in TESOL and analyzed their written responses on how they perceive themselves. Almost all the participants (90%) noted that there exists a difference in English proficiency between NNESTs and NESTs, and a majority of the them reported difficulties with language learning and its influence on their teaching behavior and teaching styles. In contrast to the findings of working NNESTs’ self-perceptions, however, participants in this study did not consider themselves to be superior or inferior to NESTs in terms of language proficiency and teaching practice, claiming that both groups have their advantages and disadvantages.

The possible reasons for the different attitudes between the working NNESTs and the pre-service NNESTs may result from their different settings and career status. As TESOL graduate students in the United States, those future NNESTs had the advantage of being immersed in authentic English environments. As a result, they are a rather advanced group of English learners and tend to have better competence in listening and speaking than NNESTs in EFL settings, in turn giving them more confidence in their teaching than some other NNESTs. The negative self-perceptions of working NNESTs’ might be influenced by outsiders’ negative perceptions, such as the general hiring
preference within the field, students’ preference for NESTs, and difficulties met in the teaching process. On the contrary, pre-service NNESTs might not have realized their disadvantage due to the lack of practical working experience, and have not sensed the possible negative social perceptions since they have not gone through the process of hiring and practical teaching.

Perceptions from students

NNESTs are not only influenced by their self-perceptions, they are also subject to different perceptions by their students. Research on students’ perceptions of NNESTs is a very recent phenomenon (Braine, 2005). Multiple studies have shown that most EFL students are not concerned about their teachers’ non-native language background and hold more positive judgments of their NNESTs than NNESTs do of themselves. Research (Benke& Medgyes, 2005; Cheung, 2002; Mahboob, 2003) shows that EFL students tend to consider their teachers’ qualification holistically, instead of just focusing on whether they are NSs or not. Mahboob (2003), for example, analyzed 32 students’ written responses of their perceptions toward NNESTs and NESTs. The results showed that NNESTs and NESTs both received positive and negative comments from students, whose responses were categorized according to linguistic features and teaching skills. The majority of the students stated that NESTs had the advantage of oral skills, vocabulary and culture understanding, but the disadvantage of grammar knowledge and teaching experience compared with NNESTs. Further, students commented favorably about NNESTs’ teaching experience, grammar knowledge, teaching methods, literacy skills and
ability to answer questions. This would indicate that students tend to focus on professionalism, instead of just language or ethnic background.

These findings concur with Cheung’s (2002) study, which collected both quantitative and qualitative data. He surveyed and interviewed 420 college students at seven universities in Hong Kong to find out their attitude toward NNESTs and NESTs. The results showed that the students in the study understood the differences between the two groups and saw their respective advantages and disadvantages. They stated that a qualified English teacher should have advanced language proficiency, sophisticated teaching techniques, ability to motivate students and enough care for students regardless of their native language.

Besides of the holistic judgments toward NNESTs, EFL students also hold NNESTs’ excellent linguistic knowledge and deep understanding of students’ difficulties in high regard. Benke & Medgyes (2005) surveyed 433 Hungarian EFL students to find out their perceptions. According the results, students held positive views about NNESTs’ teaching skills and the ability to explain grammar explicitly. They appreciated NNESTs’ well-organized approach to teaching grammar and dealing with their learning difficulties. Although some students expressed their preference of having native teachers to teach spoken English, many lower-level students think NNESTs are easier for them to understand.

Positive attitudes toward NNESTs are also found among students in ESL settings (e.g. Liang, 2002; Moussu, 2002). Liang’s (2002) survey of 20 ESL students in the United States found that although ESL students considered pronunciation an important
factor in English teaching and the learning process, they generally held positive views toward NNESTs, and did not show strong negative feelings about NNESTs’ foreign accents. From the view of these ESL students, professional and personal features rated more highly than teachers’ native language background. Liang (2002) concludes that instead of the language background, it is the professionalism of English teachers that plays a crucial role in students’ preference for NNESTs. Similar results were also found by Moussu (2002), who conducted a study of international students’ perceptions and the change in their perceptions during the learning process. 84 ESL students, from 21 different nations were asked to complete two questionnaires, one at the beginning of the semester, and one at the end of the semester. During the mid-term period, the researcher also conducted three sets of qualitative interviews with six students. He found that from the beginning until the end of the semester, the majority of the students had positive attitudes toward their four NNESTs. In the first questionnaire, 68% of the participants stated that NNESTs’ nationality did not hinder their learning. More positive attitudes and admiration of the NNESTs (79% of the students) were received from these students at the end of the semester, and 84% of the students considered their teachers as role models of successful English learning. Thus, both Liang (2002) and Moussu (2002) find convincing evidence to prove that ESL students tend to judge NNESTs according to their professionalism rather than their linguistic background, and they appreciate NNESTs’ understanding of ESL students.

Despite the overall positive perceptions of NNESTs from both EFL and ESL students, it is necessary to mention that some scholars still hold their concerns regarding
ELLs’ perceptions of NNESTs, especially in English dominant environments and when ELLs have high expectations of their teachers, although there is limited research so far that has justify these concerns (Pacek, 2005; Thomas, 1999). Pacek (2005) predicts that ESL students may hold more expectations of being taught by NESTs and have stronger negative opinions toward NNESTs in English dominant environments than EFL students. Thomas (1999) also notes that due to the high expectations of being taught by NESTs, ESL students may be disappointed by NNESTs, and give high demands for NNESTs’ language proficiency and teaching skills. Thus, more research needs to be conducted on students’ perceptions and expectations in English dominant environments to justify those scholars’ concerns and hypothesis.

**Summary**

As an important group of English teachers, NNESTs are garnering more and more attention within the field. Although there are some debates on the dichotomy of NNSs and NSs, they are still the most widely used and most convenient terms to present the two groups of English speakers. Therefore, this study uses the dichotomy of NNESTs and NESTs, and language proficiency is one of the key criteria to differentiate the two groups.

Studies show that NNESTs and NESTs have different strengths in language proficiency in terms of their language authenticity, communicative skills and metalinguistic knowledge. Generally speaking, NNESTs tend to be more sensitive and insightful of linguistic knowledge, while NESTs are likely to score higher on communicative and authentic language use. Moreover, the different strengths of their language proficiency have various influences on their corresponding teaching focuses.
First of all, NNESTs and NESTs tend to put a different emphasis on language accuracy and adopt different teaching approaches. Furthermore, NNESTs are likely to have the advantages of use the L1 and native cultural practices with students, which enables them to create more diverse activities and give more efficient and specific instructions than NESTs. In addition, considering the shared L2 learning process, NNESTs tend to have better interaction and closer relationships with students, and are more likely to understand better and show more sympathy to students’ learning difficulties.

Taking the differences between NNESTs and NESTs into account, it is inevitable that NNESTs receive various perceptions from both their students and themselves. There are indications that many NNESTs hold negative judgments of their own language proficiency, especially their communicative skills and knowledge of authentic expressions. Studies show that NNESTs in the beginning level exhibit more anxiety and less confidence of their language proficiency and teaching qualifications than the ones in the intermediate level, which strongly supports the idea that language proficiency level can influence the perceptions of NNESTs. Moreover, among the few studies concerning NNESTs in English dominant environments, it is found that some Chinese NNESTs encounter significant challenges with regard to their communicative language skills and teaching confidence. Most pre-service NNESTs who study in TESL programs in English speaking countries have more positive attitudes than in-duty NNESTs. Although noticing their language difficulties, they actually show confidence in their communicative skills and teaching qualifications.
As for students’ perceptions of NNESTs, many English learners express their comfort in having NNESTs as their main English learning reference. Instead of judging NNESTs only based on their language proficiency, students tend to take teachers’ overall professionalism into consideration. Both EFL and ESL students report their openness toward NNESTs and regarded them as role models of successful English learning. However, there also exist some concerns about students’ potential negative attitudes toward NNESTs due to their possible higher expectations of teachers’ language ability in English dominant environments, but few studies have been done to justify the concerns.

One area of investigation that has been lacking is the perception of NNESTs by their supervisors. This is especially important because of the tendency toward favoring NESTs in hiring practices. Supervisors are able to comment on NNESTs’ professionalism comprehensively and subjectively, including classroom observations, final evaluations, and students’ reports. Their comments on NNESTs are usually informative, subjective and external, which can help to increase the credibility and reliability of the study. Nevertheless, most research on the perceptions toward NNESTs’ professionalism has centered on NNESTs’ self-perceptions, students’ perceptions, and classroom observation (Llurda, 2005). Although, as discussed in previous section, Llurda once conducted a study involving TESL students’ supervisors as participants to comment on their language proficiency, however, the participants only supervised TESL students’ course studies, but not their classroom teaching. Thus, there is no study that sheds lights on the perceptions of NNESTs’ language proficiency and teaching by NNEST supervisors. To begin to remedy this lack of information, supervisors’ perceptions are included in this study in
addition to NNESTs’ self-perceptions and the perceptions of some of their students. To the best of my knowledge, there has as yet been no published investigation that includes the perceptions from NNESTs, their students, and their supervisors in a single study.

Another limitation of previous studies is that most focus on NNESTs in EFL settings where teachers are more likely to share the background culture and L1 with students. Some features and advantages of NNESTs, such as bilingual language use in class, similar background with students and better cultural understanding, seem only available in EFL settings. Hence, one might hypothesize that NNESTs teaching in ESL settings may lose some of their advantages, such as knowing students’ L1 and native culture; or face more difficulties caused by their disadvantages, such as inauthentic language usage; however, they may possibly gain some advantages, such as well-developed knowledge of the L2 learning process, linguistic systems and understanding of students’ acculturation process.

This study aims to investigate the perceptions given by NNESTs, their students and their supervisors with regard to NNESTs’ language proficiency, teaching performances, and preferences in English dominant environments, so that constructive suggestions on developing professionalism can further be provided.
CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

This study aims to investigate college students’ and supervisors’ perceptions toward NNESTs’ language proficiency in English dominant environments, as well as the teachers’ perceptions of themselves. Individual interviews were carried out to find out not only the perceptions of NNESTs, but also the rationale behind those perceptions.

Participants

The participants in this study were 3 NNESTs teaching ESL classes or NNS sections of freshman composition classes in an American university, their 3 supervisors and 7 of their ESL students.

The 3 NNEST participants, Adam, Smith, and Katie (pseudonyms), were teaching either college-level ESL composition or freshmen English composition classes in sections reserved for non-native speakers. Smith taught the ESL class, an advanced level course designed to help non-native speaking students to develop literacy and meet the language demands of academic study. Adam and Katie were teaching freshman composition, which was designed to prepare all students to practice strategies for understanding and constructing academic essays of varying lengths. In addition to teaching, all three participants were studying for their Master’s Degree in TESL. The three participants were selected based on their L1 background and experience of teaching college English in the U.S. It was considered that their self-perceptions and their perceptions of other NNESTs would be valuable due to their previous language-learning and teaching experience.
Adam started learning English when he was 13 years old. He graduated from a Turkish university majoring in English teaching. He taught English for one year to 8th grade students, before enrolling in an MA TESL program in the US. As part of his degree, he worked as a Teaching Assistant in the English Department teaching freshman composition to NNSs. He had been teaching for three semesters when the interview was conducted.

Smith was exposed to English from the age of four, when he started English classes during school in Ethiopia. After graduating from university and teaching high school English for one year, he also came to the US to pursue his MA in TESL. He was awarded an assistantship in his second year to teach incoming international students ESL. He had been teaching for one semester at the time of the interview.

Katie started her English learning with a private English tutor when she was 6 years old in Ukraine. She had systematic English class learning from the 1st grade to the 12th grade. She came to the US as an exchange student for one year when she was in high school. After graduating from university with a major in English, she directly came back to the US and continued pursuing her MA in TESL. She, held the same position as Adam, working as a Teaching Assistant in the English Department teaching freshman composition to NNSs. She had been teaching for three semesters at the time of the interview.

The three NNESTs supervisors were Ellen, Amy, Cathy (pseudonyms). Ellen had been supervising Smith for one semester and considers herself as a NS, although officially she is a Malaysian NNS. Amy, a NS, was supervising both Adam and Katie for
their first teaching year. Cathy, also a NS, had been supervising both Adam and Katie during their third semester. Their positions included organizing training workshops for NNESTs, observing their classroom teaching twice a semester, helping with lesson plans, providing valuable teaching resources and giving final evaluations. The supervisors were also involved in the selection and hiring process of those teachers. Thus the opinions of these NNESTs’ supervisors are valuable and informative because they are familiar with the NNESTs and have a lot of interaction with NNESTs during the teaching and supervision process.

The 7 student participants were all international college students enrolled in the university. They were a diverse group with different genders, religions, ethnic backgrounds and nationalities, including 2 from Korea (Jojo and Serena, pseudonyms), 2 from Nepal (Sandy and Dennis), 2 from Bangladesh (Ryan and Shane), and 1 from Pakistan (Hanny). All of them came to the United States in their early 20’s and had been in the US for less than two years at the time of the study. They were pursuing higher education opportunities and trying to improve their English proficiency, especially their communicative competency, and had taken classes from the NNESTs mentioned above for four hours per week. Their interactions with the NNESTs included in-class participation, homework completion, and post-class appointment. At the end of each semester, they were also asked to provide confidential evaluations on the teachers’ performances and the course in general.

Data Collection

The data were collected using three multi-item interview question lists, one
corresponding to each group: students, NNESTs and supervisors. The interview question lists were piloted on a small sample. Several modifications were made to ensure the coverage and depth of the questions (See Appendix I). The questions of each group’s interview were divided into four sections. The first section contained questions about the basic information of participants’ language learning and teaching experience or supervision experience. The second section was about their general concepts of NNESTs and NESTs, including the definition and the main differences. The third section comprised questions about their perceptions toward NNESTs’ language proficiency, considering that language proficiency is considered as one of the key criteria to distinguish NSs and NNSs in this study. Specific questions in this section were designed to find out how participants considered NNESTs’ language proficiency, how they compared NNESTs with NSs and how they think about the necessity of knowing students’ L1s. The fourth section contained questions about how NNESTs’ language proficiency influences their practical teaching and the potential challenges/opportunities of NNESTs in English dominant environments. Questions were superficially asked about their perceptions of NNESTs’ teaching focus, teaching philosophy, advantages, preference, concerns and suggestions for NNESTs who want to teach in English dominant environments.

Individual semi-constructed qualitative interviews were conducted with all 13 participants. In order to provide participants with an unthreatening environment, the interviews were conducted in a sound proof, private location. They were encouraged to speak freely about their opinions on the issue of NNESTs and NESTs.
**Data Analysis**

During the process, all the individual interviews were recorded by a digital voice recorder and saved as MP3 files, then transcribed into electronic word documents. The qualitative interview data was analyzed using Nvivo 7.0 analysis software. The entire transcribed interview contents were imported into Nvivo and then coded into categories. Three main categories, NNESTs’ perceptions, supervisors’ perceptions, and students’ perceptions were identified. Under each main category, there were eight subcategories: NNESTs’ language proficiency, NNESTs’ language knowledge, NNESTs’ teaching performance and language use, NNESTs’ suitable teaching levels and subjects, NENSTs’ understanding of their students and their learning process, concerns, preferences, and suggestions. The coded data was closely analyzed within their categories and comparison/contrast analysis was conducted among the participant groups.
CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

This study was conducted to investigate how NNESTs are perceived in English dominant environments by themselves, their supervisors and their students, with regard to NNESTs’ language proficiency, NNESTs’ teaching focus, and characteristics that may influence people’s perceptions, as it will be presented in the following first section. Under each participant group, findings will be subcategorized with regard to their perceptions of the three NNESTs’ language proficiency, teaching focus, understanding of ESL students, and the participants’ preferences, concerns, and suggestions about NNESTs teaching in ESL settings. The second section of this chapter will qualitatively analyze the findings in order to discover the overall perceptions of NNESTs, the differences between the three groups of participants, and how the findings compare to previous research results.

NNESTs’ self-perceptions

What are your Perceptions of your Language Proficiency?

What aspect of your English-language knowledge do you think is inferior/superior to native speakers?

The three NNESTs’ comments in this area were grouped in three particular areas – grammatical knowledge, literacy skills, and accent. All three NNEST participants showed a high level of confidence in their own language proficiency, including both their communicative and literacy skills. Although growing up in and coming from EFL settings, all of the NNESTs considered their language proficiency high advanced and none of the NNESTs felt inferior to NSs in terms of vocabulary, idioms, accuracy,
fluency of speaking, or listening ability, which are usually assumed it be the weaknesses of NNESTs’ language proficiency (e.g. Baratt & Kontra, 2000; Boyle, 1997).

To be more specific, the three NNESTs all reported that they were able to show advantages over NSs in linguistic knowledge and literacy abilities, thanks to the systematic L2 learning process they experienced. Katie mentioned that “NSs are considered more proficient in language. However, often time it is just a myth.” Due to the L2 learning experience, she believed that NNESTs tended to have better understanding of language rules than NSs and she considered herself superior in knowing how the language functions. Her opinions were also shared by Adam and Smith. Adam mentioned that, “after I came to the United States, I saw that the grammar of NNSs is far more better than NSs”. Smith also compared himself with NESTs on the knowledge of language rules, “I can spot mistakes just by looking at the texts. NSs may know something’s wrong, that they might be able to tell. Some of them may not tell what is wrong, what is the grammar mistake.” In spite of the linguistic knowledge, all three NNESTs considered themselves better readers and writers than NSs. For instance, Smith claimed that “in terms of proficiency, if you compare me to NSs, in my level, I think I write better…and I know better about writing”. Adam showed a strong confidence on his reading skills and said “what I am strong at I think is reading. I can read very fast and sometimes I even don’t need to look up unknown words. I usually try to understand between the contexts”.

Despite these positive perceptions, however, the NNSs’ foreign accent was mentioned by Adam and Smith as one weakness for many NNESTs. Adam thought that
for NESTs, “for sure, pronunciation is one of their strongest parts” and he mentioned that one of his goals and motivations for staying in an English-dominant environment was to try to get rid of his foreign accent and sound more like a NS, although he knew it could be very hard after a certain age. Smith also agreed that NSs could be a good example for teaching pronunciation and it would be difficult and frustrating for NNESTs if their goal is to speak exactly like NSs without any noticeable foreign accent.

*Do you think English teachers should know about their students’ first language?*

This question was designed to find out how NNESTs perceive the necessity and possibility of knowing students’ L1. A shared opinion was found among the NNEST participants, who all reported that while they realized the benefits of understanding and speaking the students’ L1, for such purposes as making instructions more efficient and clear, enabling teachers to anticipate possible learning difficulties, and avoiding confusion in the classroom, none of them thought it was possible to know or to learn all the students’ L1s represented in their classrooms. Besides, none of them considered not knowing students’ L1 problematic for their teaching due to the low necessity of using students’ L1s in an ESL setting. For instance, Adam stated that it did not matter whether the teacher knew students’ L1 or not, because “language in ESL classroom actually doesn’t matter, your aim is to teach English…and sometimes you have 20 some students from different languages, it is impossible.” Katie added that NNESTs were actually in the same situation as ESL students, in that none of them were NSs, and English was the only lingua franca. Not knowing the students’ L1s actually encouraged their ESL students to practice English during the entire class.
**What are your main focuses in language teaching?**

Since the courses taught by the participants were all designed to help non-native international students improve their academic literacy skills, their activities centered around academic reading and writing. The three NNESTs all designed their courses to include a variety of academic genres, organized with the more complicated genres toward the end of the semester. They assigned one reading article every week and one genre writing assignment every unit.

With the aim of improving literacy skills, all the NNESTs chose to use balanced teaching approaches that combined communicative activities and academic literacy activities in the classroom, resulting in a variety of speaking practices, such as whole-class discussions, group discussions, issue debating, and presentations. Katie mentioned that “I try to follow the communicative approach, but not only…it is a combination of communicative approach and sentence structures.” She pointed out that she did not agree with the “myth” that only NESTs could teach communicatively and considered herself proficient enough to use the communicative approach in her class.

A similar teaching philosophy was also found in the other participants. As a previous EFL learner, Adam experienced accuracy as the main or even the only focus in his EFL classes. Thus, after coming to the United States to teach English, he made up his mind that he would emphasize language fluency more and use a communicative rather than form accuracy approach. For example, he always gave the least weight to accuracy, but the most weight to meaning in his assignment rubrics because he believed that, “it is the time now for them to understand that accuracy is not everything.” Smith also agreed
that language fluency, content, and organization of the paper are more important than accuracy for ESL students, especially when students are living and studying in English dominant academic environments.

What are the advantages of NNESTs in English dominant environments?

The participants considered NNESTs’ understanding of their students to be a significant advantage of NNESTs. They all confidently mentioned that compared to NESTs, as NNESTs, they could understand their ESL students better with regard to not only their English learning process but also life experience in an English dominant environment, which consequently helped to develop a closer relationship between students and teachers.

The three participants agreed that, although they did not share an L1 with their students, their shared L2 learning experience helped them to anticipate some of the possible mistakes which their students would make. Thus, when teaching, NNESTs could use their understanding of the potential difficulties to design the course effectively. Smith said,

As a NNEST, I know what they are going through. I kinda empathize with them. I understand what they have, how they learn. In a lot of ways, I am just the same as them. I understand what they are going through. I understand that learning a language could be frustrating sometimes. And I understand that. I sympathize with that and I empathize with that.

Since NNESTs understood that the students’ learning process was a long one, they reported that they were able to show students’ more patience during the teaching process than NESTs by giving them a longer time to revise and edit their writing, and also providing additional instruction. For instance, whenever Smith gave instructions for the
homework, instead of just announcing it in the classroom, he would also write them on the blackboard, put them on the online course tool and send them to each student by email. He would also give more opportunities for students to correct their writing mistakes and re-edit their writing products. The participants anticipated that NESTs might not have as much sympathy or understanding as they did because of their lack of English-as-second-language learning experience.

The participants also mentioned that their similar life experience and non-dominant cultural background also helped to close the social distance between themselves and their students. For example, Adam claimed that “because not the dominant culture you are teaching at, and they see you close to themselves, they don’t see you as a stranger, and you have closer relationship with students usually”.

What’s more, the three NNESTs considered themselves as role models of successful English learning for their ESL students, which also contributed to improved relationships between students and teachers. Katie stated, “if students see that teachers can reach the level of native speakers, it motivates them. It gives them the idea that if she or he can do it that well, then I can do it as well.” Adam also clarified his belief in having NNESTs teaching in ESL programs because of their better understanding of students by saying that “it is important that they feel there are some teachers like them, which means it is possible to learn English at that level. To show them it is possible…usually NNSs understand each other mutually very well.”
What are your teaching preferences?

Do you feel more comfortable teaching English in North America, or in your home country?

Because all of the participants had the experience of teaching in both settings, their comments could be made based upon the comparison of these different experiences. Despite the fact that previous research suggests that NNESTs may feel more nervous teaching in English dominant environments, all of the participants in this study indicated that they felt comfortable teaching in both settings. In EFL settings, they shared the L1 and background culture with students so that they could understand the students and the working environments well. In ESL settings, as mentioned previously, the similarities between their own life and learning experiences and those of their students, led to the understanding of their students and an ease in building relationships.

Quite interestingly, all three participants felt that EFL settings were more demanding on their language proficiency than ESL settings. Adam explained that in EFL settings, the classroom is the only chance for students to learn English, so “you are everything for them and your responsibility is higher. Teaching foreign language, it is very demanding and you have to be very careful.” Teaching in EFL settings made him feel that maintaining a foreign accent could be a problem and he should be perfect, so he stated that “back home it is very important and you should be perfect.” In contrast, he added that in ESL settings it would still be acceptable if the teacher had slight foreign accent, because even though the NNESTs might have foreign accents, students could still be exposed to native accents outside of the classroom. Smith held a similar view that ESL
students had more chances than EFL students to learn authentic English and native accent from everyday-life experiences, which provided NNESTs with many possibilities to make up for their foreign accent. He said that “if my students are here, they have a lot of chance to practice their English. I can give them more tasks so they can go out to practice, which makes the process a little more fast…a lot of learning takes place outside of the classroom”. Thus, none of the participants shied away from teaching in English dominant environments due to their foreign language background.

*If you were a director of a post-secondary level academic institution in an English dominant environment, what ratio of NNESTs to NESTs you would hire?*

*What kind of class would you appoint NNESTs to teach?*

The purpose of these questions was to find NNESTs’ preference for teaching specific proficiency levels and skills, such as literacy, oral, grammar, pronunciation, etc. All three participants indicated that they would like to hire both NNESTs and NESTs as ESL teachers in the program, although they each gave different percentages. Considering the advantages of having NNESTs and NESTs at the same time, Smith gave the percentage of 50-50. In contrast, Adam said he would hire more NESTs than NNESTs in ESL settings, due to the reality that there are more available NESTs than NNESTs in English dominant environments. Katie indicated that she would not set a specific percentage, because she would prefer to consider each candidate, no matter a NEST or a NNEST, as an individual case. Though the three NNESTs gave some idea of a ratio for hiring, all three participants viewed candidates’ professionalism more important than their native language background. Regardless of the candidate’s L1, they believed that
teaching experience, language knowledge, and systematic training were all indispensable for qualified language teachers. Katie explained,

It depends on what experience they have and what pedagogical skills they have. That’s the thing I am going to pay attention to. I am not going to hire NSs who have no idea of teaching the language, because… why do that? We have lots of specialists who are NNSs who also can teach the language very well. So I would basically pay attention to their education background and teaching experience.

Adam also expressed his emphasis on teachers’ professionalism instead of just focusing on their native language, based on his previous teaching and learning experiences in EFL settings:

I will never hire native speakers who do not have any education background in terms of teaching. This is a very wrong action that usually happens. In many non-native countries, they just hire native speakers, doesn’t matter whether they come from accountant, business or whatever major. They just bring him or her to teach English. I think it is very wrong. English is a very distinct area, if you know the language doesn’t mean that you know how to teach English.

As for the teaching levels and subjects, NNESTs did not show any particular preference and indicated that any level class or subject seemed fine to them.

Do you have some concerns and suggestions for those NNESTs?

At the end of the interviews, participants were all asked about any additional concerns and suggestions on the subject.

Do you have concerns when you teach in an English dominant environment?

Neither Adam nor Smith worried about their working in English dominant environments at all. In contrast, Katie mentioned certain issues that might arouse her concerns, such as negative social perceptions toward NNESTs and lack of local cultural knowledge and living experience. She explained,
Because of the myth that NSs are better teachers of their language than NNSs, that’s the inferior environment I might have… and also, some maybe cultural or background knowledge of the English speaking country. This actually depends on the length or the period of staying in the particular country.

She also shared about how she changed her mind and fears from the past,

I was afraid the way the students would accept me. They might think that since English is not my first language or not their first language, why should I teach them… However, I never received that kind of attitudes. So I don’t have the fear anymore.

Katie’s acceptance by her students helped to change her mind and get rid of the initial worry that students may have negative perceptions of her. Katie also added that, “I am sure if I stay in the United States for longer, I will be able to acquire the background and culture knowledge.” It appears from Katie’s comments that living in the target culture and experiencing successful teaching could eventually help NNESTs overcome their concerns over other people’s possible negative judgments.

What are your suggestions for those NNESTs who want to improve their professional development and work in NEST-dominated working environments?

In terms of suggestions, three points, were common to at least two of the three participants. First of all, they encouraged all NNESTs to work hard on their language proficiency, especially their communicative skills. Smith viewed high language proficiency a key to working in English dominant environments, saying that “I don’t think the people who have better language proficiency will have the same confidence with the people who doesn’t have high proficiency.” Adam also strongly emphasized the importance of communicative skills,

I think first of all, they should improve their communication skills, that mean discourse skills. This is one of their weak points they have had for sure in their
own education so far. It is very common because the focus of teaching is in grammar, writing and sometimes reading, but the important thing is that without speaking, discourse and pragmatics, I think it is impossible to teach. So if they want to be a successful teacher, they should improve their skills in terms of speaking first of all and listening.

So according to Smith and Adam, advanced language proficiency with a high level of communicative skills can not only provide NNESTs with the opportunity to work in an English dominant environment, but also help them to build self-esteem in the teaching process.

Their second suggestion centered on the importance of improving teaching abilities and professionalism, including receiving systematic training, creating a successful teaching experience, and possessing advanced pedagogical and linguistic knowledge. The participants also offered some practical advice for new teachers, such as teaching collaboratively with experienced teachers, observing other teachers, and understanding the content and course organization clearly. The last suggestion given by the three NNESTs was for the new teacher to show confidence during the hiring and teaching process. Smith exemplified it when he advocated that as NNESTs, “you need the confidence. Be confident, be yourself. So the teacher will bring in the sympathy and understanding and own experience to the class.”

**Supervisors’ perceptions**

*How do you perceive the NNESTs’ Language Proficiency?*

Similar questions were also asked to the NNESTs’ three supervisors so that more objective information from superior positions could be provided in the study. As for the
perceptions about the NNESTs’ language proficiency, all the three supervisors highly praised the NNESTs’ overall language skills and linguistic knowledge.

Based upon daily interactions, regular classroom observations and periodical teaching evaluations, all the supervisors concluded that they had no problem communicating, understanding and working with the NNESTs. They also considered those NNESTs high advanced language users. For example, Ellen commented that “I would consider my supervisees pretty much native speakers. So I really don't have any problem with their language proficiency.” Cathy compared the communicative skills between NESTs and the NNESTs, pointing out “as for the spoken interactions with NNESTs, I don’t see the difference.”

In addition to the positive opinions of the NNESTs’ language proficiency, all the supervisors regarded sophisticated linguistic knowledge as one of their superior areas when compared to NESTs. Amy explicitly explained this advantage of the NNESTs,

I thought actually another advantage for NNESTs to NNSs was that NNESTs tend to have a better grasp of formal grammar and may be can make a little bit better explanation. They might be able to make better explanations on grammatical questions to NESTs I think, because they have the terminology, that some native speakers don’t have.

Both Cathy and Ellen shared this idea with Amy. They attributed the NNESTs’ superior linguistic knowledge to their systematic English learning process and appreciated their capability to compare two different languages. Ellen added that “I think a lot of NNSs…at least I am teaching both natives and non natives…those who came from EFL context, the grammar is really very good.”
One thing that needs to be pointed out is that the supervisors mentioned one weakness of the NNESTs’ language proficiency — their foreign accent, which is consistent with the NNESTs’ self-perceptions. Although noticing the NNESTs’ foreign accent, supervisors all claimed that having a foreign accent was almost unavoidable for NNESTs and usually it would not become a problem for language teaching as long as their speech was clear enough. This point was especially true for literacy-focused courses like the ones that those NNESTs taught. Ellen said, “I think it is very important that you are intelligible… you do need be intelligible and your students must understand you. As long as they understand you, then you will be fine.” Cathy expressed a similar opinion on having a foreign accent. She stated that clarity is more important than accent, “I think that if students have difficult time to understand what the teacher is saying, that becomes a problem… when clarity becomes a problem, that’s where the language needs changing.” Amy added that “accent doesn't have anything do to with writing”, so having a foreign accent would not hinder NNESTs’ classroom teaching ability, especially for writing classes. Nevertheless, Amy anticipated that it could become a problem or a disadvantage for NNESTs when they were assigned to teach certain classes. According to her, when NNESTs are assigned to teach American students or conversation classes with the focus on pronunciation and accent reduction, then having a foreign accent can become a disadvantage and hinder their teaching effectiveness. She said,

A disadvantage would be you are teaching native session but having an accent, because I think NSs, especially 18 to 20 years old NSs, may think you don’t know what you are doing… I couldn’t say right about the conversation of the non natives. Both sides have the accents, to some extent that can be a problem. It might be a disadvantage too. Besides, I don’t know what their focus on the conversation class, whether it is for accent reduction or whatever, or whether it is
for fluency… I think for fluency there won’t be disadvantage but for pronunciation there might be the problem.

However, she also continued to clarify that if a NNEST was assigned to help students increase fluency in speaking classes, then having a foreign accent might even become an advantage for NNESTs because it could help students to release their stress and it could motivate them to participate more in the class. She said that for ESL students, “somehow the teacher has a slight accent or NNSs as them make them feel closer and like we are in the same situation and able to... just talk. So they just talk.” Therefore, with regard to having a foreign accent, all supervisors agreed that intelligibility and clarity are the most important criteria to judge NNESTs’ language proficiency and generally foreign accents would not be a big problem for their teaching. However, when teaching certain courses, having a foreign accent might bring negative effects on a NNEST’s teaching. As for whether NNESTs should know students’ L1 when teaching in ESL settings, the supervisors all thought it sounded relatively impossible and unrealistic, considering the diversity among ESL students.

_How do you perceive the NNESTs’ teaching focus?_

When asked about the NNESTs’ teaching focuses, the supervisors appreciated their performance. Cathy gave a high level of evaluation, saying that “I see they’re hard working, they are highly motivated, over achievers almost.” She mentioned that her supervisees were always well prepared for their classes and their teaching materials were always well polished. Amy was satisfied with the NNESTs’ overall teaching performance. She had never received any complaints or negative opinions from students about the NNESTs’ classes. She actually encouraged native teachers to observe more non-native
teachers’ classes or spend some time teaching in EFL settings so that they could learn more from NNESTs and understand their coworkers better. Moreover, the supervisors agreed that the NNESTs tended to use combined teaching methods in the classroom. They explained that just because they were not natives, it did not mean that the NNESTs should only focus on reading and writing practices. Instead, their supervisees integrated many communicative activities into the classes. Based upon the consistent class observations, Ellen commented that “I didn’t find either one of them shy away from listening and speaking.” In the NNESTs’ classes, there were literacy practices, such as article reading and paper writing, and also many speaking and listening activities, such as classroom discussions, debating and presentations. Therefore, the NNESTs’ teaching methods were more comprehensive and balanced than just focusing on one aspect.

One special focus of NNESTs’ teaching was mentioned by both Amy and Cathy. Compared to their NEST supervisees, both Amy and Cathy noticed that the NNESTs gave more emphasis on the instructions of general academic culture, such as the basic conceptions of writing genres, the differences between research papers and normal papers, how to take notes in the class, the distribution of homework, the use of online learning tools, the importance of utilizing the school library, and some basic academic learning strategies. Amy gave some detailed examples,

They took time to talk about academic culture. All the students are NNSs also. So they took time to talk about where precisely to go in the university to get help, for your writing for instance, and so there were thoughtful kinds of things. They wouldn’t just say go to the library and do this. They would say go to the library and remember you could stop by the reference desk and you could ask this kind of questions and this would be how you would do your questions. They did stuff like that which was more procedural.
Cathy thought that the reason why the NNESTs often gave patient and detailed explanations on the academic culture was because they understood that American school environments were new to most ESL students. She noticed that students “who have no understanding of what a research paper is... seems to be more into where they were and how much they know about writing in US…and taking those background information into consideration.” So, Amy and Cathy both considered the NNESTs’ additional focus on American academic culture as one of their advantages over NESTs. They also agreed that this considerate focus resulted from NNESTs’ better understanding of ESL students, which will be detailed further in the next section.

*What are the advantages of the NNESTs?*

When it comes to the NNESTs’ advantages in English dominant environments, understanding of their ESL students was mostly mentioned by all the supervisors. They provided positive perceptions with detailed examples of the NNESTs’ understanding of their students according to what they had observed in the classroom. Ellen said, “NNESTs in our case are teaching international students. The fact that they are NNSs themselves actually is positive. The experience of being an international student and being an ESL speaker, it is very positive.” To be more specific, the supervisors thought that NNESTs could understand ESL students in three aspects better than NESTs.

First of all, the supervisors recognized that NNESTs had the capacity to anticipate students’ specific difficulties, to understand the struggling process of L2 learning, and to teach accordingly due to their similar English learning experience. Amy considered this as an advantage of NNESTs by saying that,
When you teach NNSs and being a NNS yourself, because I think that you might be able to give or to anticipate the problems and give sense of how you learn, the learning process, the shortcuts you might be take and the common problems that might be shown up a lot. You might be able to know those more quickly and address them sooner then. So I think it is an advantage.

Cathy shared this opinion with Amy and gave some specific comments on the advantage that NNESTs have in teaching writing courses. She mentioned that non-native “teachers themselves might better understand the problems students are having in writing”, especially the problems of vocabulary, sentence structures, and discourse organization.

The second aspect of NNESTs’ better understanding of the students is that they could share similar life experiences and multi-cultural perspectives with their students. The supervisors said that similar to their students, NNESTs could view the target language and environments from non-dominant cultural perspectives, which might enable them to understand students’ ideas and situations better. Amy expressed her impression of the cultural diversity in ESL classes, “I couldn’t say how many different cultures are represented among the students”, and she believed that NNESTs could, to some extent, understand students better than NESTs. She added,

Being able to tailor your argument to address the listener, need different cultural strategies. You know some cultures have the strategies that may not work here at all. You know those kinds of things; a NNEST may be superior to a NEST, who do not think from a multiple culture perspective.

Besides, Cathy considered NNESTs’ understanding of their students particularly helpful in writing-focused courses based upon some research she had read before. She mentioned that there was some logic behind students’ patterns of writing, which might be influenced by their non-dominant cultural perspectives. Due to their similar life experience and
situations, NNESTs could understand that “there is a logic guiding students’ writing” and could “respond to those intelligently instead just thinking them making errors”.

As for the third aspect of NNESTs’ understanding of the students, the supervisors pointed out that it was easier for NNESTs to understand ESL students because students were very willing to interact with or get closer to NNESTs. They mentioned that students tended to trust NNESTs more, are less intimidated by NNESTs, and worship NNESTs as their role models in English learning. Cathy indicated that, “I think non-native-English-speaking writers would feel more trust in them, ‘cause they know what’s like to be a NNS and what teachers do, so they might trust their teachers more.” Amy also added that NNESTs were “like a good example for the students” and they could deliver a message to students that “you can do this as well.” These shared features help to close the distances and facilitate the mutual understanding between NNESTs and their students.

What is your hiring preference?

When talking about their hiring preference, all the supervisors expressed that they would not emphasis a candidate’s native language background. Instead, their overall professionalism was more important to them. Ellen explicitly stated that “I think I wouldn’t particular think about native vs. non native. I will look at experience and language proficiency. I am interested in hiring the most qualified person.” She gave an example that “I don’t really care where they come from. If the best person for this job is a NNS, then choose the NNS. If the best person for this job is a NS, then choose the NS.” Amy also stated, “I would just go with the best people I had in general… I would look at the person to see how good level they have.” So, the supervisors all agreed that teachers’
professionalism, such as their teaching ability, teaching experience, education background and credibility, were the main criteria they would take into consideration during the hiring process.

Since none of the supervisors have problems hiring NNESTs in English dominant environments, the question becomes to what kind of class they would like to assign those NNESTs to teach. Cathy was very open about this issue. She stated that she would not care about the levels and subjects as long as the teachers were qualified and had strong background experience for the positions. She mentioned that she would like to respect NNESTs’ personal preference by “assigning them to teach the group they want to teach”. Moreover, according to her working experience, she noticed that NNESTs usually preferred to teach non-native students, because “a lot of the NNESTs here major in TESL and… this is a good group for them to think about teaching English for their future”. So when assigning the classes, she tried to give NNESTs more opportunities to teach international students if she could. Ellen also would like to assign NNESTs to teach non-native students, however due to a different reason. Ellen thought problems of self-esteem could arise when a NNEST teaches native students English, especially in speaking and listening classes. She explained,

It’s not just about their language proficiency. It’s more about their emotions that arise when you use the language which is not your native. Not that you are not proficient, but other factors which feed in how proficient, how comfortable and how confident do you feel.

Amy added that she would not recommend NNESTs to teach native students speaking either, because sometimes American students might hold some initial negative opinions about the NNESTs, because of their noticeable foreign accent. She mentioned that if she
could she would assign NNESTs to teach literacy classes or beginning level classes first and then move them to conversation classes or upper level classes, which to some extent indicates her consideration of NNESTs’ shortcomings with regard to their foreign accent and speaking skills.

*Do you have some concerns and suggestions for those NNESTs?*

The three supervisors were asked about their concerns and suggestions for NNESTs teaching in English dominant environments. None of them expressed concerns over having the NNESTs working with them. Instead, they showed comfort and positive attitudes toward working with NNESTs in their language programs.

With respect to suggestions, the supervisors shared several practical and important pieces of advise. Both Amy and Cathy suggested that NNESTs should establish their confidence by emphasizing their strengths and not shying away from their weaknesses. Amy detailed,

> I think it will be hard in a way to be a NNEST because so many people assume the language is all about grammar, correctness, and pronunciation and those kinds of things. I think the biggest challenging of teaching writing will be ideas and analytical skills and those kinds of skills. And NNESTs have those perfectly fine, it will be I think I will advise them to concentrate on those kinds of things…the strong parts…and not be too turned off by people thinking…

Cathy expressed her welcome and encouragements to NNESTs, saying that “I could say just come and teach what you have to teach… I have been impressed by the NNESTs here. I welcome more.” She additionally mentioned that it would be better if NNESTs could have some life or study experience in English dominant environments before they teach, so that they could build up knowledge of the local culture and working environments.
In addition, Ellen emphasized the importance of having a high level of language proficiency for NNESTs who want to teach in English dominant environments. She claimed that being a NNEST should never be an excuse for the teacher to stop improving language proficiency, although she admitted that language fossilization and noticeable foreign accent could always be hard to deal with. Ellen stated that, “as far as possible, think about that, the NNEST should always look into improving their language proficiency. I don’t think you can say well I am not a native speaker, I don’t think it is true.” Moreover, she said that gaining more teaching experience was important too. Since it could be hard for novice NNESTs to get full-time teaching positions in English dominant environments right away, she advised that,

Volunteering is very important. Not waiting to be paid to do something. If you want to wait until get paid to do something, you will never get hired. You need to be very active, clear about your weakness as NNESTs in the United States…Besides, gaining experience and knowing how to teach in the United States is very important.

**Students’ perceptions**

*How do you perceive your NNESTs’ language proficiency?*

Similar questions about perceptions of language proficiency were asked to the NNESTs’ students. A consensus was reached among all 7 student participants, that their NNESTs generally had advanced language proficiency. For instance, Shane felt that the “teacher is very skilled and his proficiency is very high.” Hanny agreed that “this teacher, NNEST, is teaching about vocabulary and reading. I think both are perfect. Their language level is high.” Ryan expressed that “they are pretty much the same with NESTs.” Moreover, 6 of the students mentioned that the NNESTs had better linguistic
knowledge than NSs due to their different English learning process. Serena stated that “I think her grammar is very good. She learned the language instead of getting it naturally…I think her grammar knowledge is better than those natives…and grammar stuff that they can really teach better.” Sandy shared a similar opinion, saying that “since they have good background and learned a lot of language, they also have good knowledge in grammar.” Jojo compared her NNEST with some English-native-speaking tutors in the school’s writing center and realized that “NNEST there are better than native teachers on grammar part”, especially in writing skills. Therefore, students all agreed that their NNESTs had advanced language proficiency with outstanding strengths at linguistic knowledge.

Despite the overall positive perceptions of the NNESTs’ language proficiency, two specific shortcomings in terms of pronunciation and speaking mistakes were also mentioned by some students. Four out of seven students noticed that their NNESTs had foreign accents in their spoken English, which made them sound different from NESTs. Nevertheless, students understood that getting rid of a foreign accent would be difficult for L2 learners based upon their own L2 learning experience, so they all showed a high level of tolerance of their NNESTs’ foreign accent. One participant stated that the NNESTs “have sufficient levels to teach us well. They are good in writing, grammar, their speaking is a little bit different from native speakers, but it is still easy for us to understand.” Another student recalled that although the NNEST in her class had a mixed pronunciation of Ukraine and British accents, it was intelligible enough for students to understand. One student mentioned, “maybe pronunciation can be a problem for
them… but it is really not a big issue… Speaking ability can be improved just by speaking. Even though they are NNSs and they don't have good pronunciation, I still can improve my speaking ability just by speaking with them.” The forth student compared NNESTs’ foreign accent with native accent and concluded that,

They don’t have to speak exactly like a NS. Those NSs, although we call them NSs, they are also from everywhere in the world. They are not really native from America. The natives are from all different kinds of places in the world with different accents. I came here with different accents. Everybody has accents and it is not a problem. There is only a problem when the accent is too strong that we cannot understand. This won’t be the problem with NNESTs, they have a little bit accents, but they are very good.

Thus, although some of the students noticed that the NNESTs had their own foreign accent, none of the students seemed concerned about it due to their understanding of the difficulty of changing accent and the high clarity of their NNESTs’ spoken language.

Another weakness of the NNESTs’ language proficiency mentioned by the students dealt with the accuracy of NNESTs’ spoken language. Two students realized that although their NNESTS had sophisticated literacy skills and linguistic knowledge, they sometimes still made grammatical mistakes when speaking the language. One student recalled that “I think his composition is perfect, nice. The only problem I saw is…sometimes he has a little bit mistakes of grammar when speaking… Because they are not NSs, they sometimes make mistakes here and there like we do.” Another student noticed the same problem, saying that “when she speaks the sentence, she sometimes makes mistakes but she will say that again and try to fix it.” Recognizing this shortcoming of their NNESTs’ language proficiency, however, none of the two students expressed their disappointment or negative perceptions. They explained that it was
unavoidable to make mistakes in speaking, which everyone would do. One student took NSs as an example, saying that those NNESTs “are very fluent but just some speaking mistakes. But natives are not perfect, either. They also make many many mistakes. So they are equal…slight mistakes everybody make it.”

As for whether the teachers should know students’ L1s, two opposite opinions were received. On the one hand, three students reported that it was not necessary or possible for NNESTs to learn students’ L1s considering the diversity in common ESL classes. For instance, one student said that there was no need for NNESTs to learn students’ L1 “because they are teaching us English, but not our language.” She thought it would be more helpful if the teachers did not know students’ L1s and used English all the time in the classroom. Another two students held similar opinions. Although acknowledging the benefits of teachers knowing students’ L1s in ESL classroom, they considered “it is not possible to learn all those languages in the short term”. Instead, these two students preferred the teachers to know something about students’ background culture or educational system. They stated that background knowledge was easier to learn than mastering various languages and could also help the teachers understand students better.

On the other hand, although realizing the difficulty of knowing the various L1s that could appear in ESL classrooms, the remaining 4 students expressed that it would be beneficial if NNESTs could try to know more about students’ L1s, especially the main characteristics of different languages. One student gave explicit explanations,

Teacher should know what students’ native language is and how it influences the second language, and that helps a lot… You don’t have to know the language
perfectly, but you just need to know the basic characteristics of the language, how it works, at least what kind of languages, some characteristics, for example Nepali sentence structure and English sentence structure are completely different. If they have a little bit idea of students’ language, then they will understand why and how students are making certain kinds of mistakes.

One Korean student also gave a detailed example,

For example, in Korean, we don’t have articles, so for me it is really hard to use articles. I always make mistakes about articles, so if teachers know about the language and they know about our problems, then can be more understanding when teaching articles to us.

Therefore, all four students agreed that NNESTs need to know at least some basic features of students’ L1s, which helps them to identify possible weaknesses for the students accordingly.

*How do you perceive your NNESTs’ teaching focus?*

Overall, all the students gave a high level of appreciation on the NNESTs’ teaching performance. The students mentioned several favored characteristics on the NNESTs’ teaching, such as hard-working, helpful, well-designed organization, and nice friendly personality. As for teaching methods, the 7 students all stated that the NNESTs did not only focus on literacy development activities or text-book languages. Instead, there were a lot of communicative activities and speaking practices in the NNESTs’ classes, with daily life expressions and authentic language involved. Jojo described her class in detail,

I just think the communication, speaking and making new friends are really important in ESL class. We had a lot in Katie’s class. Every class we have in-class discussion. It is really funny to see other culture and we learned how to communicate with students from other cultures. She didn’t point out the mistakes often. The teacher said, don’t think about the grammar and just say it. If we think about the grammar, we cannot speak at all.
Other students described similar activities in the other NNESTs’ classes. For instance, Dennis described Adam’s class by saying that “we did writing and also used to speak a lot. Like in-class activities, we speak a lot to each other, giving ideas, incorporating speaking and composition, both.” Some students also described Smith’s class as communicative, friendly, helpful and not dominating. Therefore, the NNESTs’ classes had comprehensive focuses of both literacy development and communicative skills.

What are your English learning goals in the US?

Has the NNEST’s teaching focus met your learning goals and expectations?

To categorize, students mentioned three kinds of learning goals in the United States: to improve communicative speaking skills, to receive a decent degree, and to experience a different culture and life. The students reported that the NNESTs’ teaching was very helpful and had an appropriate focus, which fit their expectations and learning needs. Jojo, Serena and Sandy shared the same goal of coming to the United States, to improve their communicative language skills. As students from Korea and Nepal, they reported that teachers in their home countries only focused on students’ literacy development and grammar drilling. So when they came to the United States, they really wanted to expose themselves to communicative language learning. Jojo expressed that “during my stay here, I want to improve my speaking ability first. I can learn the reading and writing in Korea, but here I need to speak and communicate with others.” Serena agreed that “I wish I could communicate with other students, other American students without any problem.” Sandy also mentioned that “I came learning this course to hope that it can help me improve my English. And it’s more for speaking.” All of them
reported that they felt satisfied and enjoyed the NNESTs’ classes, which involved many speaking activities and meaningful communication. Serena compared her NNESTs class with another class taught by a NEST:

> Last semester I took geography class and composition class. The professor of geography speaks very fast and I couldn't understand sometimes. I thought for me what I did was just studying for exam, not for speaking at all, ineffective. But from that Ukraine teacher, it was very good. It depends on her way of teaching and it fits my goal.

Another study goal for international students was to earn a good degree from the United States successfully. The students reported that there were better education and career opportunities here, so they really wanted to succeed in American academic environments. According to the data, students who have this study goal all considered their NNESTs’ classes helpful for their major learning and academic literacy development. Dennis said, “I learned to write summary, research paper, those are the difficult parts in my major study. So his class helps me with study in those classes.”

Besides, some students reported that in the NNESTs’ classes, they received assistance on how to adjust to American academic culture, which greatly helped them to understand the learning environment better.

As for the third learning goal, some students pointed out that they wanted to experience a different life style and culture in a different learning environment. For those students, they preferred the NNESTs to cover some local culture or share some of their life experience with the class. Ryan compared his home country with the United States, saying that, “American culture is far different from my culture. It’s more flexible and more independent. We are not like that. We are more conservative people and family
concentrated. I would like to mix up with them.” Hanny recalled the NNESTs’ classes and expressed her satisfaction with the cultural coverage in the class, saying “when we study the language, we are learning the culture. When we study, we discuss about culture too... we learned a little bit of everything.” One student detailed that “I think the NNEST can also understand the American culture, and they also experience the culture diversity and culture shock here, so they can share about that.” Despite all the above positive opinions, however, one student mentioned that she wished her NNEST could have stayed in the United States longer so that she could have better understanding of local life style and culture. She explained:

The disadvantage, sometimes I feel language is a part of life, if she doesn’t experience that part of life, then she won’t have idea of the language… I wanna to know about the word for toothpaste, and the only way I can explain about that is Colgate. But she didn’t know about this brand, because she was living in other countries. However, the American friends here get that right away cuz they are familiar with their brand.

Thus, most students stated that the NNESTs’ teaching focus had met their English leaning needs, academic study goals, and cultural and life experience goals. However, one student expressed that it would be better if the NNESTs could stay in English dominant environments longer before they started to teach, so that they could understand the local culture and life style better.

What is the advantage of the NNESTs?

When it comes to the advantage of NNESTs in English dominant environments, the most frequently repeated comment from the students was “they really understand me.” According to the students, there was strong mutual understanding between the NNESTs and the students.
The participating students mentioned that the NNESTs could understand students’ L2 learning process and show sympathy for their learning difficulties. Dennis explained in detail,

He knows that it is difficult for us to learn the language perfectly. The native teacher just act like it is easy for everybody. NNESTs learned the English language like we do and they understand what we going through. NESTs learned the language from their birth, so they don’t understand what we are going through and why we are making certain mistakes and why we are having troubles. But these NNESTs they understand the differences between languages, they understand that it is a process that takes time, they also did it so they understand what we are going through.

He continued that due to the understanding of students’ learning process, the NNESTs were very patient and helpful in the class. He said that “for example, we used to make some mistakes, he corrected once. And again... we made the same mistakes again, and he would say again no, don’t do this, but do this. If it is a NS, I think he will get very angry.”

Hanny shared a similar opinion of having faith in her NNESTs,

For NNEST, she/he already knows how difficult it is to get into a language and they can guide us into a good direction. For NESTs, they don’t know about the difficulty of learning the language. When we have some problems, I think it is pretty hard for them to understand. While NNESTs, they can understand us easily, because they have already faced those things. They have everything in their mind already.

Jojo gave her perceptions of cultural perspectives, saying that “NNESTs are not from America so they can understand better about cultural diversity. They are from different countries and they can share different cultures.” Ryan also pointed out that the NNESTs often showed more care about students’ feelings. He compared that NESTs were more likely to use slang and short colloquial expressions, which were always hard for international students to understand, while NNESTs tried to speak slowly and clearly to
make sure students understand their meanings, because NNESTs understood that international students usually had problems of communication at the beginning stage.

The participating students also reported that they could understand better and feel more comfortable and motivated in the NNESTs’ classrooms. Sandy commented that “it is very easy to understand NNESTs, and it is very easy for students to catch what they are saying, and it is very easy to cooperate between teacher and students.” Serena compared her learning from both NESTs and NNESTs, saying that, “’Cause I am an international student, I can follow the teacher better than other native American teachers.” Jojo mentioned that she felt more comfortable and willing to learn in the NNESTs’ classes. She explained, “if I take other class with native speakers…I cannot speak English, ‘cause I feel like my English is bad and I feel shy of speaking something. But when I take ESL class with NNESTs, it makes me feel very comfortable.” Moreover, the students mentioned that they were motivated and inspired to learn from the NNESTs, because they considered the NNESTs as good examples of successful English learning. Ryan commented, “if they can why cannot I. Sometimes they are the example; they are the best… example to show that you can do it. If you want, you can do it.”

What are your preferences of English teachers?

When it comes to the question of their preferences of English teachers in English dominant environments, three different types of opinions were received from the participating students. One group of students claimed that they would not care about their English teachers’ L1 background. The more important criteria for them were the teachers’ qualifications, personality, understanding of the students, and the classroom
environment. One participant mentioned, “I don’t care about they’re native or non native. If their teaching way is good and make me feel comfortable and understand the cultural diversity, then they are good… really it is not where they from but their quality.” Another student expressed a similar idea, “I am going to see is that they have the quality or not. If they have the quality to teach and enough knowledge, they can teach anywhere, any field… if they have enough knowledge, understand us, they are good.”

The second type of the opinions was given by one student, who totally supported the NNESTs and would like to have NNESTs for all his English classes in the United States. He considered the NNESTs as his ideal English teachers and explained in detail:

I would prefer to have the NNEST, because NNEST can coordinate with students, understand what they are thinking and saying, and what background they are from. Since they are all international, they will understand each other better. It is good for them to teach reading, grammars, although their speaking is not like grammar, but it doesn’t matter. I don’t care.

The third preference was more balanced between NNESTs and NESTs. Four students mentioned that they would like to have both NNESTs and NESTs in their English program with a percentage of half-and-half, considering the strengths and weaknesses of the both groups. One participant indicated that “many things you can learn from both of them. From NESTs, it is better for you about how much you spend and speak to native speakers. From NNESTs, you can share your experience…about how to improve your English.” Another student explained that “because they are teacher, they have skill and knowledge about teaching. Gaining knowledge doesn’t matter with who is native or who is not native. Both native and non-native can get knowledge.” Since those students would like to hire both NNESTs and NESTs, they were asked about whether they had some
particular preference of NNESTs’ teaching levels or subjects. Interestingly, the four students all mentioned that they would like to take class from NNESTs first and then move on with either group of the teachers. One student explained, “it is better to have a NNEST at the beginning level. After you learned from NNEST at the beginning level, you can feel good with NESTs. It doesn’t matter in the later levels.” Another student also explained the reasons for his preference,

When I just come here and won’t be able to catch everything from NEST. It will be better if students can first learn from someone understand their situation better. If they see NNESTs, they will feel better and think that yeah, I also can do like that.

As for the teaching subjects, the two Korean students expressed their particular preferences while the other participants did not show differences. The two Korean students mentioned that it would be better if NESTs could teach pronunciation classes and NNESTs teach literacy classes. They explained that if the class was designed to improve students’ pronunciation or accent reduction, NNESTs might have a disadvantage because of their foreign accents; on the contrary, if the class was about literacy development, then NNESTs’ strong academic skills become an advantage.

Therefore, overall, the participating students showed positive preferences of NNESTs. Two out of seven students considered general qualification the most important criterion and did not care about teachers’ L1 background. One student strongly supported NNESTs and wanted to take class only from NNESTs. The remaining students preferred to have a balance between NNESTs and NESTs in the program. Besides, they would like to have NNESTs in the beginning level, for NNESTs could understand students better and help students adjust to the new learning environment at initial stages. Most students
did not show a preference for NNESTs’ teaching specific subjects, however, the two Korean students preferred to have NESTs teach speaking classes and NNESTs teach literacy classes.

*Do you have some concerns and suggestions for those NNESTs?*

With regard to the concerns, all of the students explicitly stated that they did not have any concerns of having NNESTs teaching English to them in English dominant environments. On the contrary, they considered the NNESTs good and qualified English teachers.

As for the suggestions, there were mainly two points mentioned by the participants. Some students mentioned that NNESTs could try to give more praise to students’ improvements, for ESL students usually need additional encouragement at the very beginning of their study, especially in a new learning environment. Dennis said,

> Teachers need to praise the students a little bit, even if students just make a little bit improvement. It encourages the students. My teacher used to lack a little bit on this one at very beginning, but from the middle of the semester, he did. He praised people and even if students are doing a slight improvement, and you praise students, that encourages students a lot… If they tried, even if the result is not correct, you still need to encourage them for trying.

Another suggestion mentioned by several other students was that NNESTs should accumulate the awareness of different cultures, including the local culture. They claimed that this accumulation of the cultural knowledge might require a couple years of teaching and living experience in English dominant environments. Jojo stated that “they should try to understand other people’s culture and make them very confident…and comfortable”.

Ryan added that he wished his NNESTs could “have some courses learned here, after that
they can teach.” He continued that “you cannot just come directly and teach. They need to spend some time for themselves” in English dominant environments.

**DISCUSSION**

Based on the data, the study compares the three groups of participants’ perceptions of NNESTs with each other and with the findings of previous studies. The following section is going to analyze and compare the data according to four major topics, i.e. perceptions of language proficiency, perceptions of teaching focus, advantage of NNESTs, and preferences.

*How is NNESTs’ language proficiency perceived?*

Generally speaking, the participants of this study perceived the NNESTs’ language proficiency to be at the advanced level, something they saw as positive. Several previous studies of NNESTs’ self perceptions of their own language proficiency (e.g. Boyle, 1997; Liu, 2005; Llurda & Hugues, 2003; Medgyes & Reves, 1994) and students’ perceptions of NNESTs’ language proficiency (e.g. Benke & Medgyes, 2005; Cheung, 2002; Mahboob, 2003), especially in EFL settings, find that many NNESTs and students hold negative attitudes toward NNESTs’ language proficiency, and NNESTs tend to feel a lack of confidence in teaching spoken language due to their lower speaking skills and foreign accent. However, the data from this study in an ESL setting indicates that both the NNESTs, their students, and their supervisors are all positive about advanced high language proficiency, considering it appropriate to teach effectively in an ESL setting. Additionally the NNESTs’ supervisors did not see big differences in language
proficiency between NNESTs and NESTs, including both literacy and communicative skills.

In addition, it is often discussed that NNESTs have sophisticated grammar and linguistic knowledge, as well as literacy skills due to their systematic L2 learning process (e.g. Boyle, 1997; Finegan, 2004; Llurda, 2005; Medgyes, 1994; Samimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999). The perceptions of the three groups in this study appear to concur with these findings. All the participants are highly confident of the NNESTs’ linguistic knowledge and literacy abilities, which are also perceived as the NNESTs’ advantages. One thing that needs to be pointed out, however, is that some participating students indicated that the NNESTs sometimes made grammatical mistakes in their spoken language, although they also agree that those mistakes do not hinder understanding or communication. This finding correlates with Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman’s (1999) reminder that, though NNSs may be competent in their understanding of grammatical forms, they may sometimes have problems using the forms appropriately in meaningful contexts. Likewise these NNESTs, who have a sophisticated knowledge of grammar, still make some mistakes when using the language in authentic contexts.

Despite the prevailing recognition of these NNESTs’ well-developed language skills, one weakness was pointed out by all three of the participant groups, namely, pronunciation. All the participants believed that it is unavoidable, to some extent, to retain a foreign accent. However, none of the participants considered this an obstacle for effective communication and mutual understanding between the students and the teachers. Compared to the participant NNESTs, the international students showed more tolerance
toward the NNESTs’ foreign accent, because they understand how difficult it can be for NNSs to get rid of their foreign accent. The NNESTs’ supervisors also state that for most English courses in English dominant environments (except pronunciation classes with the focus of accent reduction), having a foreign accent will not become a problem, because clarity and intelligibility are the most important criteria in the class.

Previous research (e.g. Kern, 1994; McNeill, 2005; Pacek, 2005, Seidlhofer, 1999) claims that it is one of the advantages of NNESTs to know students’ L1, especially in EFL settings, because it enables NNESTs to teach more effectively and efficiently than NESTs who usually do not have much knowledge of students’ linguistic background. The data from this study, however, shows that both the NNESTs and their supervisors agreed that this advantage is inapplicable in English-dominant environments because the diversity of international students makes it impractical for the teachers to know enough about all of their L1s. Nevertheless, the majority of the student participants suggested that NNESTs could try to learn more about the basic characteristics of students’ L1s, such as the basic rules of word order, the general lexical and functional categories and typical differences between students’ L1s and English, because this kind of knowledge would help NNESTs to anticipate their students’ potential learning difficulties. Thus, concerning the different perceptions and taking the students’ needs into consideration, it would be helpful if NNESTs could accumulate the knowledge of some typical features of a variety of student L1s overtime.
How are NNESTs’ teaching focuses perceived?

Although the three NNESTs were all teaching academic literacy courses, it was agreed among all the participants that a balanced teaching approach, combining both literacy and communicative practice, was effectively used in the NNESTs’ classes. In contrast to the findings of the previous studies conducted by Medgyes (2001) and McNeil (2005), who conclude that communicative approaches may bring significant challenges to NNESTs, and that NNESTs tend to focus on grammar drilling and language accuracy, it was discovered that these NNESTs in an English-dominant environment involved various speaking and listening activities, and taught communicatively, even in the literacy classes. These particular NNESTs did not shy away from teaching communicative and authentic language, and did not only focus on grammar accuracy and literacy practices. This probably results from the NNESTs’ advanced language proficiency, their teacher training, and a good understanding of the language learning needs of international students. Whether those NNESTs who study and teach abroad are able to do so because of their advanced proficiency, or whether they went abroad because they had language-proficiency improvement as a goal, it appears that their higher level of proficiency at the time of the study allowed them to teach differently than the NNESTs of previous studies who had lower proficiency and did not teach in ESL settings.

In addition to the comprehensive and balanced teaching focuses of these NNESTs, some supervisors reported that they also gave additional emphasis to helping students adjust to new academic environments by providing instruction on general academic culture. Although seldom mentioned in previous research, this finding turns out to be
highly favored by both the supervisors and the students in this study because they perceive it as something NESTs tend not to provide and helpful for student learning and adjustment, especially at the early stages.

As mentioned before, Pacek (2005) and Thomas (1999) expressed their concerns about ESL students’ possible negative perceptions toward NNESTs’ teaching, because they predicted that ESL students may hold high expectations for being taught by NESTs in English dominant environments. These concerns, however, appeared to be unfounded in the current study. As the data indicates, most the learning expectations and study needs of the participating international students were fulfilled. Students got adequate opportunities to use the language communicatively in the classroom and became familiar with various academic genres, which significantly helped them to achieve their goals of improving their spoken English and gaining the writing skills to earn a degree in the United States. Although it was mentioned that the NNESTs sometimes talked about local culture, some of the students suggested that it would be better if the NNESTs could live or study in the English-dominant environment longer before teaching, so that they could share more cultural experience with the incoming international students.

*What is the advantage of NNESTs teaching in English dominant environments?*

Previous studies (e.g. Lasagabaster, 2002; Modiano, 2005; Pacek, 2005; Phillipson, 1992) find that due to their similar L2 learning experiences, NNESTs often have the advantage of understanding their students better with regard to the students’ L2 learning process, their potential difficulties, and cross-cultural perspectives. Medgyes (1994) and Tang (1997) point out that NNESTs usually exhibit more sympathy and
patience toward students and have closer relationships with their students, especially in EFL settings. The findings of the current study may concur with these previous studies, in that many participants in this study consider NNESTs to be an advantage in English dominant environments. However, no comparison was done with ELLs who had NESTs.

As the data indicate, it is widely agreed among all the participants that NESTs sometimes take international students’ learning for granted and assume too much during the teaching, while NNESTs have a deeper understanding of the students’ learning and living situations. They explain that new international students usually have to struggle with lower communicative skills, unfamiliarity with the western academic environment, and uncertainty of future development. Since the NNESTs have had similar experiences, they are more likely to understand international students’ situations. Students additionally claimed that they could understand the NNESTs better than NESTs and use their NNESTs as their role models, because the NNESTs often provide them with effective and trustworthy guidance. Thus, teaching in English dominant environments makes NNESTs’ advantage of better understanding students become more pronounced, because students tend to need more support for adjusting to the new environment.

What are the preferences of English teachers in English dominant environments?

Llurda & Hugues’s (2003) found that NNESTs teaching at the beginning levels had more teaching anxiety than did the ones teaching at the intermediate level even though they might be assigned to teach beginning level classes which require less than higher level classes, because they felt they had a low level of language proficiency, which implies that NNESTs’ teaching confidence is closely related to their language proficiency
level. Within the data in the current study, supporting evidence can also be found. None of the NNESTs in this study expressed any anxiety or low confidence teaching within English dominant environments due to their widely acknowledged advanced language proficiency. Additionally, the NNESTs view professionalism, including language proficiency, education training, pedagogical skills, and teaching experience, as the most important criterion to judge the qualifications of an ESL teacher. The majority of the supervisors and the students share the same view in that they prefer to have an overall qualified English teacher, regardless of their L1 background. One of the students, however, unexpectedly stated that they prefer NNESTs over NESTs in English dominant environments.

When it comes to the question of preferred courses or levels for NNESTs to teach, different opinions were received. The three NNESTs did not have clear preference for teaching specific levels or subjects. Some supervisors and students believed that as long as the NNESTs were qualified, it would not be a problem for NNESTs to teach any course or level in English dominant environments. However, considering the potential problems caused by NNESTs’ level of self-esteem and foreign accent, one supervisor indicated that they would prefer to assign NNESTs to teach international students (with the exception of teaching pronunciation classes with a focus on accent reduction). Many students preferred to have some NNESTs teach their classes, because they wanted to study with teachers who could understand them better, especially at the initial stages in a new learning environment. Two Korean students preferred to have NESTs teach
pronunciation or speaking classes and NNESTs to teach academic literacy so that the strengths both groups could be maximized.

Therefore, although different opinions were given, none of the participants had problems with NNESTs teaching in English dominant environments. NNESTs were considered well-qualified and effective teachers. Considering the advantages of their linguistic knowledge and sophisticated understanding of their students, NNESTs were particularly preferred by international students to teach academic literacy classes and beginning-level classes in English dominant environments.

All in all, these findings lead us to the conclusion that NNESTs’ language proficiency has the strongest influence on how they are perceived; NNESTs with high-level language skills are perceived positively in terms of their language ability, teaching focus, and understanding of the students in English-dominant environments. Overall professionalism, however, was the main criterion used to judge NNESTs’ suitability. Certain preferences were also given to NNESTs with regard to teaching levels and course content.
CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

With the increase of global popularity of English learning, NNESTs have become an important group of English teachers. There has been a surge in studies on NNESTs since the early 1990’s. Many studies have compared NNESTs with NESTs in terms of their language proficiency, teaching behavior, strengths and weaknesses, and how they are perceived by themselves and their students. It is often stated that compared to NESTs, NNESTs have lower speaking proficiency in terms of language authenticity and communication skills, but stronger grammatical knowledge. Due to the differences of their language proficiency, different teaching focuses and perceptions are also noticed, such as NNESTs tend to focus more on grammar drilling and language accuracy. Furthermore, many NNESTs report negative attitudes and low confidence in teaching communicative language. It is also discovered that NNESTs have their own advantages with regard to the shared knowledge of students’ L1 and a good understanding of students’ learning process. However, most of these findings are collected in EFL settings with the participants coming from similar ethnic backgrounds. It is unclear whether NNESTs with diverse ethnic backgrounds living and teaching in English-dominant environments share the same characteristics and are perceived similarly to NNESTs in EFL settings or not. Moreover, there are few studies investigating the perceptions of NNESTs’ supervisors, who are able to comment on NNESTs from a more objective perspective. Thus, how NNESTs, their students and their supervisors perceive NNESTs’ language proficiency and teaching in English-dominant environments was the focus of the study. The participants in this study presented a range of ethnic diversity, including
people from Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America. Additionally, to the best of my knowledge, there are no investigations that include perceptions on a group of NNESTs from the NNESTs themselves, their students and their supervisors in a single study.

Based on the data collected from 13 individual interviews conducted with 3 NNESTs, their 3 supervisors and 7 of their students at an American university, it was found that these NNESTs were perceived, differently from previous studies, to have sophisticated language proficiency that included a high level of communicative language proficiency. It is widely believed throughout the literature that NNESTs have a good knowledge of the language system and good literacy skills, but due to the communicative ability of these NNESTs', all of the participants reported positive attitudes toward having the NNESTs teach English in this English dominant environment. It was found that they did not shy away from communicative language teaching and tended to use balanced teaching approaches to help students develop both literacy skills and speaking ability at the same time.

In addition, these NNESTs are reported to have an outstanding advantage over NESTs due to their understanding of international students’ L2 learning process, potential difficulties, life situation and emotional status. Because of all these positive features, the NNESTs were highly revered by supervisors and students alike. Most participants indicated that teacher qualifications and professionalism were more important than the teachers’ L1 background. The students emphasized that having NNESTs teach them, especially at the initial stages, was helpful due to the understanding and sympathy they provided. Two students stated that considering NNESTs’ foreign accent and strong
literacy skills, they would prefer to have NESTs teach speaking classes and NNESTs teach literacy. One differing opinion was also found between the students and the other participants. The NNESTs and their supervisors all believed that it is impossible and unnecessary to know about all international students’ L1s, while most of the students would prefer that the NNESTs know at least some basic features of their L1s, so that the teachers could anticipate and understand their mistakes better.

Therefore, contrary to the opinions of some scholars (e.g. Pacek, 2005; Thomas, 1999), these NNESTs teaching in an English-dominant setting did not receive more negative perceptions than NNESTs in EFL settings. On the contrary, due to their high language proficiency, the NNESTs were widely perceived as qualified, excellent English teachers, and in a number of cases were preferred over NESTs even in this English-dominant setting with a diverse set of language learners.

**Limitations of the Study and Implications for Future Research**

While the study shows the participating NNESTs receive overall positive perceptions, we cannot generalize beyond this group. Therefore, there are some concerns regarding the participants of this study. Due to its qualitative nature, this case study does not cover a large, random population in English-dominant environments, and all the participants come from the same university. It would be better if some quantitative data from a larger, more diverse population could be used to triangulate the interview data. Moreover, it was mentioned by some participants that they would have more concerns about NNESTs teaching English to native-English-speaking students than to international students. Therefore, it would be enlightening to investigate native-English speaking
students’ perceptions of having NNESTs teach them English in English dominant environments in future studies.

**Implications**

Consequently, for NNESTs who want to teach in English dominant environments, several suggestions can be given. As the data indicate, NNESTs’ language proficiency, including their literacy skills and communicative ability, has a direct influence on people’s perceptions toward their teaching qualifications. Many participants suggested that NNESTs should continuously work toward improved language proficiency, especially in some potentially weak areas such as foreign accent and errors in oral discourse. Although having some foreign accent and speaking errors may not greatly hinder intelligibility, a higher level of language proficiency can always help to increase the confidence, credibility, and positive perceptions of NNESTs.

For teachers coming from non-dominant cultural backgrounds, students suggested that NNESTs accumulate some experience and knowledge of the local cultural and lifestyle. It is preferred by many students that NNESTs can share some local culture and life experience with their incoming international students. Thus, NNESTs might try to spend some time living or studying in English-dominant environments prior to teaching and keep reflecting on their own experience and cultural understanding consistently.

It is valuable for NNESTs in English-dominant environments to have the advantage of understanding their students. It is always wise for NNESTs to provide students with additional help to adjust to the new academic environment, be able to understand students’ learning process, show sympathy toward students’ difficulties, and
give consistent guidance and encouragement. NNESTs need to pay attention to students’ learning needs and expectations, so that they can design the teaching content and methods accordingly. It is beneficial and also favored that NNESTs accumulate knowledge of some basic characteristics of students’ L1s overtime.

For novice NNESTs, who have just completed their pre-service teacher training, it is suggested that finding some volunteering job opportunities to build up teaching experience in English dominant environments would be practical. Moreover, consistent self-confidence is indispensable during the job hunting process, regardless of the potential negative attitudes that might be received.

Last but not least, for supervisors of ELL programs in English dominant environments, it would be wise if they could consider NNESTs’ professionalism holistically during the hiring process, rather than hiring based on L1 background. When NNESTs’ proficiency level is high enough to perform the job, supervisors should not shy away from NNESTs, because they actually can bring many valuable things to the program that NESTs may not, such as their sophisticated understanding of international students.
APPENDIX I

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR NNESTS

Participants’ Information

Can you briefly tell me about yourself and your English learning background?

General Concepts:

1. When I say “Non-native English Speaking Teachers”, what are the first thoughts that pop into your mind? Why?

Language Proficiency

2. From your point of view or experience, what are the differences of language proficiency between NNESTs and NESTs?

3. What are your perceptions of your language proficiency? What aspect of your English-language knowledge do you think is inferior/superior to native speakers? What are the difficulties for you to improve English?

4. How important do you think it is to use the language like a native speaker? Why?

5. Do you think English teachers should know about students’ first language? Why?

Influences of their Language Proficiency

6. What are the advantages and disadvantages of being a NNEST in an English dominant environment?

7. What are your main focuses in the language teaching? In what level do you prefer to teach? Are they influenced by your language proficiency?

8. Do you feel more comfortable teaching English in North America, or in your home country?
9. Have you gotten any comments from your students about your language proficiency or your teaching? Have they shown any preference over NESTs or NNESTs?

10. If you are going to conduct a collaborate teaching with another English teacher, do you have a preference over NNESTs and NESTs?

11. If you were a director of a post-secondary level academic institution in an English dominant environment, what ratio of NNESTs to NESTs you would hire? What kind of class would you appoint NNESTs to teach?

12. Do you have concerns when you teach in an English dominant environment? What is your biggest worry of being a NNEST in an English dominant environment?

13. What are your suggestions for those NNESTs who want to improve their professional development and work in NEST-dominated working environments?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR SUPERVISORS

Participants’ Information

Can you briefly tell me about your supervision?

General Concepts:

1. When I say “Non-native English Speaking Teachers”, what are the first thoughts that pop into your mind? Why?

Language Proficiency

2. How do you think about the language proficiency of those NNESTs you are supervising? In what area do you think their language proficiency is superior or inferior to NESTs?
3. From your point of view or experience, what are the differences of language proficiency between NNESTs and NESTs?

4. Do you think English teachers should know about students’ first language? Why

5. How important do you think it is for NNESTs to use the language like a native speaker? Why?

6. Do you have difficulties during the work to communicate, understand and cooperate with NNESTs’ language outputs?

7. What are the advantages and disadvantages of having a NNEST teach English in an English native speaking countries?

8. What are the differences between your main focuses and NNESTs’ main focuses in the language teaching? Are there any differences in suitable teaching levels? Are they influenced by the language proficiency?

9. Have you received any comments from students about NNESTs’ language proficiency or teaching?

10. What do you think of those NNESTs’ performance?

11. What kind of concerns do you have when you have NNESTs as coworkers?

12. If you were a director of a post-secondary level academic institution in an English dominant environment, what ratio of NNESTs to NESTs you would hire? What kind of class would you appoint NNESTs to teach?

13. If you are going to conduct a collaborate teaching with another English teacher, do you have a preference over NNESTs and NESTs? Why?
14. What are your suggestions for those NNESTs who want to improve their professional development and work in NEST-dominated working environments?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS

Participants’ Information

Can you briefly tell me about your ESL class with NNEST and your previous English learning experience?

General Concepts:

1. When I say “Non-native English Speaking Teachers”, what are the first thoughts that pop into your mind? Why?

Language Proficiency

2. How do you think about the language proficiency of those NNESTs you took class from? In what area do you think their language proficiency is superior or inferior to NESTs?

3. From your point of view or experience, what are the differences of language proficiency between NNESTs and NESTs?

4. Do you think English teachers should know about students’ first language? Why?

5. How important do you think it is for NNESTs to use the language like a native speaker? Why

6. Do you have difficulties during the work to communicate, understand and cooperate with NNESTs’ language outputs?
Influences of their Language Proficiency

7. What are the advantages and disadvantages of having a NNEST teach you English in English native speaking countries?

8. What are your English learning goals in the US? Have NNESTs’ teaching focus meet your learning goals and expectations? At what level do you prefer to have NNEST to teach? Are they influenced by the language proficiency?

9. Have you discussed about NNESTs’ language proficiency or teaching with other of your classmates?

10. What do you think of those NNESTs’ teaching performance?

11. What kind of concerns do you have when you have NNESTs as coworkers?

12. If you were a director of a post-secondary level academic institution in an English dominant environment, what ratio of NNESTs to NESTs you would hire? What kind of class would you appoint NNESTs to teach?

13. Do you prefer to be taught by NNESTs or NESTs? Why? What kind of teacher is your ideal teacher?

14. What are your suggestions for those NNESTs who want to improve their professional development and work in NEST-dominated working environments?
REFERENCES


challenges and contributions to the profession (pp. 107-128). New York, NY: Springer Science+Business Media, Inc.


