

# Shared Identities: Our Interweaving Threads

## Taiwanese English teachers' perception of and attitude toward NESTs

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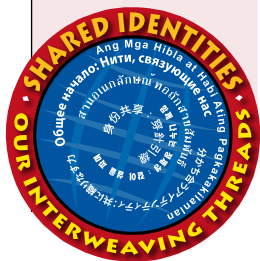
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The spread of English has meant the spread of certain varieties of English, such as American English and British English (Bamgbose, 2001). With standard American or British English being the only variety considered worth learning in other parts of the world, those considered best placed to teach English in those places are its native speakers (Jenkins, 2006). Like Japan, Korea, and Hong Kong, Taiwan has been hiring Native English Speaking Teachers (NESTs) as part of the central government's language education policy. The contracted NESTs introduced by the government are expected to team teach with Taiwanese English teachers in public primary and secondary schools. Do local English teachers, who have been facing fierce competition in securing teaching positions and are now expected to work with NESTs, see these newly-arrived foreign teachers as competitors in the employment market or collaborators in the classroom? This study attempts to further the understanding of Taiwanese English teachers' perception of and attitude toward the competition and cooperation with NESTs. The paper presents the results of a survey questionnaire completed by 258 Taiwanese pre-service English teachers and 11 Taiwanese in-service English teachers, and interview data from 46 research participants.

英語の拡散は、アメリカ英語やイギリス英語といった特定の英語の拡散を指すことが多い (Bamgbose, 2001)。標準アメリカ英語あるいは標準イギリス英語が学習に最適と考えられてきたことから、それぞれの英語のネイティブスピーカーこそが英語教師に最適とされてきた (Jenkins, 2006)。日本・韓国・香港のように、台湾においてもネイティブスピーカーが英語教師 (NEST) として雇用されてきた。NEST は台湾の公立小学校・中学校において台湾人の英語教師と共にチームティーチングを行うよう定められている。元来競争率の高い英語教師というポジションを勝ち取った台湾人教師たちはNESTをライバルとみなすのだろうか？それとも教育現場における協力者とみなすのだろうか？本研究は台湾人教師のNESTに対する認識の理解を深めることを目的とする。258人の教職課程履修生・11人の現職教員に対して行われたアンケート調査の結果、そしてその中から選ばれた46人とのインタビュー調査の結果が発表される。

The spread of English has, in practice, led to the spread of Quirk's (1985, 1990) position on *Standard English* in the English language teaching profession. Advocators of Standard English claim that American English or British English is the only variety that is worth learning for English language



learners in other parts of the world, and the best teachers to teach Standard English are its native speakers (Jenkins, 2006).

The belief that NESTs can make an important contribution to the learning of English is shown clearly in certain relatively wealthy Asia Pacific countries where achievement in English language proficiency is frequently seen as a central component of educational, economic or social progress. These countries, which include Japan, Korea, Hong Kong (China), and Taiwan, have been working on similar programmes to hire NESTs as part of their central government's language education policies. The Taiwanese government started recruiting NESTs as foreign language teachers much later than Japan, Korea, and Hong Kong (China). The Ministry of Education in Taiwan announced the Foreign English Teacher Recruitment Project (FETRP) in January 2003. According to the project, the contracted NESTs are expected to teach English along with Taiwanese English teachers in public primary and secondary schools.

However, experiences in Japan and Korea show that the introduction of NESTs through national education policy can be seen as a threat by domestic English teachers due to the increasing pressure of competition in the job market, a sense of loss of authority in the classroom, and decreasing self-confidence in the teachers' English proficiency (Boyle, 1997; Mahoney, 2004; McConnell, 2000). In Taiwan, the introduction of NESTs in the public schools will create an impact on local English teachers. In particular, fewer classes and teachers are now needed at schools due to the decreasing birth rate in the country. In 2006, for example, only 0.78% of the certificated applicants for teaching jobs at elementary

schools succeeded in securing employment (The China Post 2006, August 2). The introduction of NESTs into the school system could increase the competition for jobs among Taiwanese English teachers.

As well, team teaching conducted by NESTs and domestic English teachers in English classrooms involves not only subject knowledge and pedagogical skills, but also complex issues such as cultural awareness, power relationships, and duty distributions, which turn team teaching into a highly demanding task for both teachers (Buckley, 2000). In Japan and Korea, for instance, it has been found that team teaching is rarely put into effect due to the model's complexity and the insufficient training for teachers from both backgrounds (Gorsuch, 2002; Kwon, 2000; McConnell, 2000). Nowadays, local English teachers in Taiwan are expected to tackle this demanding task. However, Confucianism has significantly influenced Taiwanese teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning. The concept of team teaching could conflict with the teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning, eventually affecting their teaching practices in the classrooms.

Perhaps, due to the continually changing policy in Taiwan, there is little research regarding this issue that can be identified in relevant literature. There is a need to further the understanding of how Taiwanese English teachers perceive and respond to the arrival of the government-hired NESTs and the implications for establishing policy and for teacher education. This study attempts to further the understanding of Taiwanese English teachers' perception of and attitude towards competition and cooperation with NESTs. Do they see NESTs as competitors in the employment market or collaborators in the English language classrooms?

## The study<sup>1</sup>

### Setting

The majority of this study's participants were recruited from the English language departments at five national universities located in northern, central, and eastern Taiwan in the spring and summer of 2007. These English language departments offer 4-year programs leading to a Bachelor's degree and 2-year graduate programs leading to a Master's degree. These departments have their own curriculum in English language teaching and are the major sources of public primary and secondary English teachers in Taiwan. The study also included nine primary schools (1 private, 8 public) to recruit a minority of in-service Taiwanese English teacher participants. These schools were located in five different counties and, at the time the study was conducted, had different lengths of history of hiring NESTs as part of their teaching staff to work with local English teachers.

### Participants

A total of 258 students enrolled in the English language departments at the universities of education were recruited as subjects of the survey, including 219 (84.9%) female and 39 (15.1%) male. The ratio is in line with the demography of pre-service English teachers in Taiwan, of which about 90% are female. Among the participants, 126 (48.8%) were studying in their third year, 115 (44.6%) were in their fourth year, and the remaining 17 (6.6%) were studying at a graduate school. In addition, as many as 205 (80.4%) of the participants had more than 2 years' experience of learning English with NESTs. It was expected that the completion

of 2-year training programs and the learning experience with NESTs would help the participants to understand and respond to the questions for the study. From the 258 participants of the survey, 35 (26 female, 9 male) were recruited to participate in an in-depth interview.

A total of 11 primary school English teachers (1 male, 10 female) took part in the survey as well as in the follow-up interview. All of the teachers had experience of being taught by NESTs during their English learning history. Ten out of the 11 teachers were certificated English teachers and had had experience of teaching English together with NESTs at schools for a period of 6 months to 3 years at the time they were recruited for the study.

### Data collection

Data collection was divided into two phases. In the first phase, relevant Likert-scale items and closed-ended questions from a larger survey<sup>2</sup> were used to investigate the participants' attitude towards competition and cooperation with NESTs, and their background and experience in learning English with NESTs.

In the second phase, individual in-depth interviews collected data from both kinds of teachers. Among the 40 pre-service English teacher participants who showed willingness to participate in interviews, 35 were selected using a maximum variation sampling. The selection was accomplished by identifying diverse features and learning backgrounds and choosing participants who represented each feature and background. The interview questions are semi-structured and seen as a follow-up instrument to explore the

relevant issues. The interviews were conducted in Mandarin, on the assumption that the participants would be able to express their feelings and perspectives more clearly through the use of their mother tongue.

### *Data processing and data analysis*

A codebook was assembled to do the data coding of the completed questionnaires for computer analysis, including the coding frames and coding instructions regarding the valid and the missing data. After the process of coding and entering data into the computer, a series of data cleaning operations were performed on the complete data set to pick up probable inconsistencies. Running statistical analyses followed this procedure. Due to the rather small sample of in-service teachers, the statistical analysis was not applied to the data from these subjects. With regard to the qualitative data, the author translated and categorized the data, identified the themes, and generated assertions for each theme using Nvivo 7.

## **Results**

### *Competition with NESTs in the employment market*

Most participants in terms of competition in the employment market saw the introduction of NESTs in Taiwan as a threat. Most participants believed English learners in Taiwan did not favour Taiwanese English teachers. The survey shows that 71.6% of the participants believe Taiwanese English learners prefer to be taught by NESTs rather than Taiwanese English teachers (see Table 1).

**Table 1: English learners in Taiwan prefer to be taught by NESTs**

	SD	D	N	A	SA
Number	0	26	47	123	61
%	0	10.1	18.3	47.9	23.7

Note: N=257; one participant missed the item concerned. SD=Strongly Disagree; D=Disagree; N=Neither disagree or agree; A=Agree; SA=Strongly Agree.

A number of participants indicated that they were worried about the competition not because of any inadequacy in their English or qualifications, but because of the students' and the parents' favourable attitude toward NESTs. As a pre-service English teacher, Daniel<sup>3</sup> indicated that the public normally regarded NESTs as better teachers:

**Daniel:** My worry has nothing to do with my English proficiency, ability or education background. The key point is how the public see Taiwanese and foreigners... Taiwanese society thinks all the English teachers from abroad are good if they look like foreigners. NESTs are good because they are foreigners... This is the concept that is generally accepted by society. The way the public judges whether a teacher is good or bad is to see if he or she is a foreigner or not.

Likewise, the public's favouring of NESTs made Kate, another pre-service English teacher, feel that even those Taiwanese English teachers who attained higher education degrees in the English language or English teaching cannot earn trust from parents and students just because English is not their first language.

**Kate:** I am worried about the competition with NESTs because the general stereotyped impression of Taiwanese people is that foreign teachers are better than local Taiwanese teachers...Even Taiwanese teachers who have Master or Doctor degrees in the field of English literature or TESOL are regarded as incompetent teachers by the public because English is not their mother tongue at all.

The public's preference for NESTs has obviously put pressure on Taiwanese English teachers in the highly competitive job market. Helen was also a pre-service teacher and she mentioned she was frustrated when she found she was not eligible to apply for some teaching positions due to the public's preference for NESTs:

**Helen:** My experience is that learners always look for foreign teachers rather than Taiwanese teachers if they want to have tutors to teach speaking, listening, and to practice conversation. Even though I believe my speaking and listening abilities are as good as foreign teachers', I am not eligible to apply for the positions just because I am not a native speaker of English.

The participants' belief that the public prefers NESTs makes them feel NESTs are more in demand than they are in the employment market. Table 2 shows that as many as 79.7% of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed that, in Taiwan, NESTs could find jobs more easily than local English teachers could.

**Table 2: NESTs may find jobs more easily than Taiwanese English teachers**

	SD	D	N	A	SA
Number	0	19	32	134	69
%	0	7.4	12.9	52.9	26.8

Note: N=257; one participant missed the item concerned.

Chloe shared her job-hunting experience and complained that she was seen as inadequate by parents due to her lack of overseas experience. Her experience made her feel that parents in Taiwan did not care about the qualification of NESTs at all. Another teacher trainee, Maggie, mentioned that even she would hire NESTs rather than Taiwanese teachers if she were the supervisor of an English language institution.

**Chloe:** NESTs have certain advantages because parents always like NESTs. Every time when we apply for a tutor position or something, parents always ask for our experience of staying abroad. Otherwise, they prefer hiring foreigners. They do not care what the NEST can teach. They only care about the accent. They wish we had that kind of [native English-speaker] accent.

**Maggie:** I think we cannot beat them because they are native speakers. If I were a supervisor, I would also prefer hiring foreigners. It cannot be denied that most people think foreigners are better English teachers and do not want to hire Taiwanese teachers.

Joan is an in-service teacher and she teaches English in a large primary school located in central Taiwan. She agreed with Chloe's point, indicating that according to her observation, NESTs could get jobs easily, even if they had no idea about English language teaching.

**Joan:** It is easy for them to find jobs in Taiwan. In this country, the foreign English teachers' salary is almost twice as high as ours is. Even though their education background is awful and their knowledge about teaching theories is almost zero, they can still make a lot of money.

Chloe's and Joan's observations corresponded with the majority of the study's participants. The survey shows that 76.3% of the participants believed that in Taiwan, NESTs could find jobs easily even if they are not qualified teachers (Table 3).

**Table 3: In Taiwan, NESTs can find teaching jobs easily even if they are not qualified teachers**

	SD	D	N	A	SA
Number	6	21	34	111	86
%	2.3	8.1	13.2	43.0	33.3

Note: N=258.

The competition brought by NESTs in the employment market in Taiwan has created great pressure on local Taiwanese English teachers. Over half (51.2%) of the participants admitted that they were worried about their future as English teachers due to the competition from NESTs (Table 4).

**Table 4: I feel worried about my future as an English teacher because I have to compete with NESTs in the employment market**

	SD	D	N	A	SA
Number	8	73	45	107	25
%	3.1	28.3	17.4	41.5	9.7

Note: N=258.

Glen is in his last year of study as a pre-service English teacher in a university and he was pessimistic about his career after graduation from the university when he discussed his concern about competing with NESTs:

**Glen:** I do worry about the competition because the number of English teachers needed in Taiwan is limited. The more NESTs come to Taiwan, the fewer vacancies the Taiwanese teachers can occupy. In the end, we might have to look for other jobs.

Due to the public's favourable attitude toward NESTs, most of the participants sensed pressure brought by NESTs in the employment market. They were not worried about their English proficiency and qualifications, but believed they were not eligible to apply for some teaching positions because of the public's preference for NESTs. They felt unqualified NESTs could still find jobs more easily than they, and were worried about their future as English teachers due to the fierce competition for teaching positions.

### Cooperation with NESTs in the classroom

According to government policy, Taiwanese English teachers should team teach with NESTs in the classroom. Table 5 shows that the vast majority (73.6%) of the participants believed team teaching should be beneficial to English learners.

**Table 5: Team teaching is beneficial to students**

	SD	D	N	A	SA
Number	1	25	42	137	53
%	0.4	9.7	16.3	53.1	20.5

Note: N=258.

A number of participants believed team teaching was helpful to students based on their belief that two different teachers could offer different things to students. Janet, for instance, saw team teaching as an effective teaching model, which could provide students with access to a variety of teachers' teaching styles:

**Janet:** I think students may learn more efficiently if they have access to a variety of models, including Taiwanese teachers' models and foreign teachers' models... I think it is beneficial to students because they can have stimulating and varied presentations of culture. Teachers have their own different teaching styles, which provide students with one more chance to experience different learning approaches. Students will thus have more opportunities to find out the learning approaches that suit them the most.

The participants' belief that team teaching with NESTs is beneficial to students also shows in their attitude towards cooperation with NESTs. Among the participants, 63.6% indicated that they would look forward to team teaching with NESTs (see Table 6).

**Table 6: I look forward to team teaching with NESTs**

	SD	D	N	A	SA
Number	4	20	70	132	32
%	1.6	7.8	27.1	51.2	12.4

Note: N=258.

Nicole mentioned that the reason she would like to team teach with NESTs was that, through exchanging and sharing beliefs, two different teachers could come up with an approach that suited their students the best:

**Nicole:** I would expect to team teach with foreign English teachers. I would share my thoughts and ideas regarding English teaching and learning with them. I would also talk to them about the features of my students and their learning styles. Then, I would like to listen to their voice regarding the teaching materials and the teaching methods. I think we can have some productive discussion about the teaching contents and students' learning conditions, in order to develop some teaching materials that suit our students.

Kevin also showed his positive attitude toward team teaching with NESTs and stressed that, in comparison

with traditional English classes in Taiwan, team teaching presented a different picture of English language teaching to students:

**Kevin:** I would expect to team teach with NESTs because the model is new to students and can attract students to learn the language. They will find learning English is not only for exams but also for communication. In the short term, learning English is for exams. But in the long term, the purpose of learning English is to communicate with foreigners. Team teaching is a positive help to students. The English class is no longer just exams, exams, and exams.

Unlike Nicole and Kevin, Laura and Christine looked forward to team teaching with NESTs because they believed it was beneficial to themselves as English language educators. Through the model, they can learn from NESTs and improve their teaching performance.

**Laura:** I would look forward to team teaching with foreigners very much. I can strengthen my weakness in teaching skills by watching the way foreign teachers teach. I can also improve my proficiency by communicating with foreign teachers. And foreign teachers may learn grammar concepts, which confuse them, from me. I think this is pretty good.

**Christine:** I would expect to team teach with NESTs because I would like to take a look at their teaching methods and compare them with ours. I feel that their teaching methods are much more

open and flexible than ours...I would like to see how they control classroom management and the process of planning a lesson.

Caroline and Elisa both teach English in remote public primary schools and they also find team teaching is beneficial to both their students and themselves. They described their experience of team teaching with NESTs as pleasant and looked forward to having more opportunities to team teach:

**Caroline:** I think team teaching is helpful to students and to me as well. Team teaching provides me with a chance to know foreigners who might think very differently from us. I think team teaching is meaningful.

**Elisa:** I look forward to team teaching with NESTs. I hope I can learn something such as cultural spirit, teaching skills or techniques from NESTs. I also hope NESTs can learn Taiwanese culture from us. We can share our teaching experience and opinions about teaching with each other. I think this kind of cooperation with NESTs is positive and necessary to help students learn English.

The quotes reveal that the participants, both pre-service and in-service teachers, believed team teaching with NESTs was beneficial not only to students' English learning, but to their own professional development. They saw team teaching with NESTs as a model representing a different learning approach to students, either culturally or pedagogically. Under the model, students are given an opportunity to access different teaching styles and cultural knowledge, which

helps them find learning approaches that suit them best. To themselves as local English teachers, team teaching provides a chance to exchange teaching skills, methods, and ideas.

## Discussion

As Braine (1999) points out, "in the case of non-native teachers operating in ESL contexts, no issue is more troubling than that of discrimination in employment" (p. xvi). To Taiwanese English teachers, who must complete education and training, pass English proficiency tests, and get through a series of selection procedures in order to get teaching positions at schools, the Taiwanese government's favouring of NESTs, like that of the public and the employment market, makes intending teachers suspect discrimination and experience frustration in the job market. The favour given by the government and the public to NESTs in the job market brings a sense of insecurity to Taiwanese English teachers and diminishes the teachers' self-confidence. To restore the teachers' confidence and sense of security, teacher education and professional development should put more emphasis on raising the teachers' awareness of the advantages of being Non-Native English Speaking Teachers (NNESTs) in the sociocultural context in Taiwan and the unique contributions NNESTs can make in the English language teaching profession.

With regard to the cooperation with NESTs, the majority of the participants showed their willingness to team teach with their foreign teaching partners in the English language classroom. The established literature in the neighbouring countries, however, has reminded us about the complexity and difficulties of carrying out team teaching in Asian

teaching contexts (Mahoney, 2004; McConnell, 2000; Tajino, 2002). Since Taiwanese English teachers have shown a positive attitude towards cooperation with NESTs, further investigation is needed in order to find out whether Taiwanese English teachers as well as the government-hired NESTs are well-prepared with sufficient knowledge and skills to embark on the demanding mission of collaborating in the classroom. At the same time, school administrations need to play a significant role in creating a culture of acceptance for both kinds of teacher, with a view to building up strong teacher relationships on campuses.

## Conclusion

Achievement in English language competence is frequently seen as a central component of educational, economic or social progress in Asian countries, including Taiwan. The Taiwanese government believes the introduction of NESTs may help English learners in Taiwan achieve higher English language proficiency. This paper attempts to further understanding about Taiwanese English teachers' perception of, and attitude towards, competition and cooperation with NESTs. The results show that the majority of the Taiwanese English teachers saw NESTs as strong competitors in the employment market due to the public's preference for native speakers, but they looked forward to team teaching with NESTs, based on their belief that this model is beneficial to their students and to their professional development as well. The author argues that the government's preference for NESTs, like that of the public, has a negative impact on Taiwanese English teachers' professional identity, and questions whether both Taiwanese English teachers and

NESTs are equipped with sufficient appropriate knowledge and skills to embark on the mission of team teaching in classrooms. Finally, teacher education and professional development need to play significant roles to help Taiwanese English teachers face future challenges.

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### Notes

1. The study is part of a larger study conducted by the author.
2. The questionnaire used in the larger survey consists of 55 questions, from which items relevant to the present study were selected.
3. All names are pseudonyms.

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## Appendix 1

### Survey questions

1. English learners in Taiwan may prefer to be taught by Native English Speaking Teachers.
2. In Taiwan, Native English Speaking Teachers may find jobs more easily than Taiwanese English Teachers.
3. In Taiwan, Native English Speaking Teachers could find teaching jobs easily even if they are not qualified teachers.
4. I feel worried about my future as an English teacher because I have to compete with Native English Speaking Teachers in the employment market.
5. It is beneficial to English learners if Taiwanese English Teachers teach English together with Native English Speaking Teachers in the classroom.
6. I look forward to team teaching with a Native English Speaking Teacher.
3. Do you think certification is important for NESTs to find teaching jobs in Taiwan? Why?
4. Do you worry about the competition with NESTs in the employment market? If yes, why are you worried?
5. What do you think about team teaching? Do you think it's beneficial to students? If yes, in what way do you think team teaching is beneficial to students?
6. Do you look forward to team teaching with NESTs? Why?

## Appendix 2

### Interview questions

1. Do you think English learners in Taiwan prefer to be taught by NESTs? If yes, what do you think the reasons would be?
2. Do you think NESTs can find jobs easier than Taiwanese teachers? If yes, what do think the reasons would be?