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Graduate School of Language and Communication

Research Report

Only native English speaking teachers can teach aural and oral skills?

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Abstract

This research sits within the critical paradigm, taking into account people in their contexts and social equality. The study investigates the views of Thai English teachers (TETs) of one of the critical issues in Thai TESOL; perceived unfairness of allowing only native English speaking teachers (NESTs) to teach Listening and Speaking courses. From a critical stance, the study finds that TETs are aware of the discrimination that marginalises them. However, the acceptance of the non-native speaker label does not mean that TETs completely have lost their professional identity. They can see the differences between NESTs and TETs as well as their strengths in teaching Listening and Speaking courses. To some extent, TETs have challenged this current issue. Various interesting aspects regarding the reactions to the perceived unfair policy are revealed. Were TETs treated as equal partners in ELT, they would become more self-confident in their teaching career. Implications from the study contribute various new perspectives including collaborative team teaching by TETs and NESTs, the development of ELT professionals, and creating chances to discuss the issue of inequality in this particular context to better serve professional identity of TETs.

<u>Acknowledgements</u>

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Introduction

According to Chomsky (1965), a native speaker (NS) is defined as an ideal speaker-listener who perfectly knows the language. This has been further supported by Kramsch (1997) who remarks that the ideal of the native speaker is attributed to the importance of spoken, communicative competence in foreign language teaching. Hence, in such literature the idea of being a good model teacher, equipped with linguistic competence, is usually associated with being 'native'.

An increasing number of voices have questioned this ideology. Phillipson (1992) calls this ideology a 'native speaker fallacy' to refer to unfair treatment of qualified non-native speakers (NNSs). He perceives that NNSs can acquire such attributes through teacher training. Having gone through the process of learning a language can make them more qualified to teach language than NSs. In addition to Phillipson, a number of researchers (e.g., Davies, 1991; Medgyes, 1994; Quirk, 1995) claim that a native English teacher is not necessarily better than a non-native English teacher. Nevertheless, the realms of inequality or injustice between NETs and NNETs have not been sufficiently investigated nor has the massive contribution that NNETs make been accredited proportionally.

Contextual Background and Current Practice

With the aim of developing the English skills of Thai students and the increase in international competitiveness, the Ministry of Education (2009) of Thailand has been gradually implementing English as the medium of instruction. In accordance with the policy of the Ministry of Education in Thailand, academic administrators of the context of this study have been concerned about the importance of English proficiency of the undergraduate students. Therefore, it has been decided that only NESTs are allowed to teach Listening and Speaking courses as it is reasoned that the students will be given the best opportunity to learn communicative skills from NSs. Moreover, simply because NESTs have been labeled as 'native' speakers of English, the academic administrators seem to accept that NESTs are indeed in need and more qualified to teach these courses than TETs. For these reasons, some native speakers could easily take up positions of English teachers without a degree in ELT or in other related areas. Such a belief has given rise to the idea that a language belongs to its native speakers and has empowered them over non-native speakers in EFL and ESL contexts (Canagarajah, 1999).

To my knowledge, this practice is unchallenged in this particular context because most TETs lack critical views towards the teaching role of English and rarely problematise the issue of unfairness occurring in their teaching context. Nevertheless, I believe that some of the TETs might silently struggle against this discrimination. Therefore, I am interested in finding out whether there is a challenge to the notion of "Being a native speaker of English is a necessary condition to teach English." Also, the result of this study would

help the TETs become more aware of the undue prejudices and discriminations that marginalise them. Consequently, the findings of this study should help increase Thai English teachers' self-esteem in their teaching career, give them a voice, and recognise their position as equal partners in ELT.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework in which this research study is undertaken derives from critical approaches to applied linguistics which are fostered by those who believe that applied linguistics itself is absent of such a critical view in ELT (Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 1994, 2001). A fundamental principle within critical applied linguistics approach is that anything taken for granted has to be questioned and problematised.

In a more specific framework, my emphasis is on a critical issue in TESOL regarding inequality between native speakers and non-native speakers of English for several reasons. Firstly, based on my past experience in teaching English, I am able to detect sources of injustice within this context. Secondly, during a pilot interview, I asked three of Thai English teachers about their perceptions of differences between TETs and NESTs in terms of qualification of teaching Listening and Speaking courses. Their responses indicated that NESTs are in demand in these courses since they are 'native English speakers'. However, TETs would like to take part in teaching these courses as well. In this regard, I consider their answers are crucial and could contribute to the professional identity of TETs and EFL teaching in the context. These factors, therefore, were incentive to initiate this study.

Literature review

Critical approaches to TESOL

According to Pennycook (1999), a crucial challenge for critical approaches to TESOL always focuses on inequality, oppression, and compassion in a particular situation. Thus, the approaches need to be grounded in some forms of critical theory, subject to a constant skepticism, and see theory and practice as mutually supportive.

Since people are trapped in unequal relations of power, they need to act and think differently in order to consider possibilities of change (Pennycook, ibid.). Transformative pedagogy is an important aspect of critical approaches in TESOL. Being transformative has various levels, one of which is a level of awareness. By this, Fairclough (1992) considers that critical language awareness is a fundamental factor of social change. Another main aspect is problematising practice which always questions the role of language or discourse in social and cultural categories (e.g., race, gender, and ethnicity) and language learning. Emancipatory modernism, underlying Marxist thought, is in accordance with this aspect; i.e., critical approaches should emancipate people through ways of thinking and questioning the givens of TESOL.

In trying to define critical applied linguistics work in language education, it is important to focus on the contextual concern and to relate aspects of language education to a broader critical analysis of social relations. In this regard,

English teachers are at the core of the most crucial educational, cultural, and political issues (Gee, 1994). To take up a challenge, teachers need to develop critical approaches to TESOL because these approaches can help them understand problems that exist in their context and offer the prospect of change.

The controversy of NS-NNS

From a sociolinguistic perspective, the debate over the native and non-native dichotomy has generated a number of controversial issues in the ELT profession (Medgyes, 1994). According to Davies (1991), the native speaker identity is considered as a sociolinguistic construct which can be overcome within certain circumstances. Therefore, the idea that a native speaker is uniquely and permanently different from a non-native speaker is rejected. L2 learners can acquire native linguistic competence of the language even if they are outside of the L1 environment. However, a non-native speaker is negatively defined as someone who is not regarded either by him/herself as a native speaker (ibid). In this regard, Braine (1999) comments that acceptance of the title 'non-native speakers' implies the very distinction and the lack of identity which could lead to low self-esteem as a professional.

The question of 'native' versus 'non-native' speaker is recognised as more or less maintained regarding its application to the ELT profession. Medgyes (1992) adopted the NS-NNS contrast as a clear distinction. Any NS, with or without EFL qualifications, has a better knowledge of English than NNSs. However, the effectiveness of language teaching is not based on the nativeness or non-nativeness. NNSs have an equal chance of success in their own practices despite being claimed as deficient users of English (ibid.).

Considering the inequality of NS-NNS, many concerns have been directed toward the ideology that NSs are the ideal teachers of language (Nayar, 1994). For NNSs, Medgyes (1992) considers that they can only serve as imitable models of the successful learners of English and can be labeled as 'pseudo-native speakers' even though they can acquire native-like proficiency. Notably, a growing number of native English speakers without teaching qualifications have been more likely to be hired as ESL teachers than qualified and experienced NNESTs (Maum, 2001).

This is in accordance with the issue existing in this particular context. According to the policy of Ministry of Education (2005) in Thailand, the academic administrators have been concerned about the importance of the proficiency in English of Thai students. It has been determined that Listening and Speaking courses must be taught by NESTs only (The Faculty of Management Sciences, 2003). According to Canagarajah (1999), the belief that NSs are the best for language teaching would reinforce the label of 'native speaker' and lead to the assumption that a language belongs to its native speakers. Also, it has empowered them dramatically over NNSs in ESL and EFL contexts.

It is very likely that NESTs only have to establish their professional identities as ESL teachers, while NNESTs often have the added pressure of asserting themselves in the profession as competent English speakers (Maum, 2001). The issue of accent, for example, has been used to question teachers' ability and credibility as a form of linguistic discrimination (ibid.). Many researchers (e.g., Canagarajah, 1999, Lippi-Green; 1997, Thomas, 1999) found that teachers with non-native accents were perceived as less qualified and less effective and were compared unfavourably with their native-English-

speaking colleagues. However, in accordance with the ideology of 'native speaker fallacy', Phillipson (1992) argues that qualified and trained NNESTs can contribute in meaningful ways to the field of English language education by virtue of their own experiences as English language learners and their training and experience as teachers.

According to Canagarajah (1999), not all NSs may make good teachers of their first language. ESL professionals should go beyond 'respecting differences'. The presence of NNESTs must be valued and acknowledged as equals of NESTs (Edge, 1996). Numerous attempts (e.g. Davies, 1991; Gill and Rebrova, 2001; Swales, 1993) suggest that it does not make any sense to see the NS-NNS dichotomy as negative and contradictory. Considering the positive aspects of these two counterparts in the areas of language teaching would be much more worthwhile. An ideal EFL environment should maintain a good balance between NESTs and NNESTs (Medgyes, 1994). Various forms of collaboration between the two, for instance, would bring about real benefits (Gill and Rebrova, 2001; Maum, 2001; Medgyes, 1992; Swales, 1993). In so doing, both can complement each other in their strengths and weaknesses in various aspects such as linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds. For example, NESTs are better aware of the appropriate contexts of language use (Widdowson, 1994) whereas NNESTs, especially ones who share the same mother tongue with their students, are often capable of explaining rules and language structure more explicitly (Harmer, 1991).

Research on NS-NNS issues

There is evidence of research on critical issues related to nativeness and non-nativeness in various settings. Samimy and Brutt-Griffler (1999)

investigated the effects of the NS-NNS dichotomy on NNS students in a graduate TESOL course in the United States. It was found that the students do not consider NSs superior, but only more proficient in the use of authentic English. The NNSs positively saw themselves different from their NS counterparts in the area of linguistic competence in English, teaching methods, and general characteristics. Similarly, Liu (1999) studied how ESL teachers are qualified regardless of NS-NNS status. The study reveals that ESL learners tend to appreciate their NNESTs' competence and achievement as learners of English. Therefore, from these two studies, it is not clear that successful teaching does not necessarily depend on nativeness. Rather, it is affected by learner factors, teacher factors, and contextual factors.

However, the study of Golombek and Jordan (2005) indicates that the native speaker label can affect the credibility of NNESTs. Even though at first the two Taiwanese English teachers did not agree with the fallacy of native speaker superiority, they finally realised that accent and race could negatively affect their teaching professionals. Likewise, Amatashew (2000) has found that positive attitudes towards NESTs could make students more successful in learning listening and speaking. Additionally, the studies of Lee (2000) and Lippi-Green (1997) indicated that teachers with non-native accents were perceived by students as less qualified and less effective. This bias becomes stronger in an English conversation class where there is an expectation that the teacher should be fluent in the target language, and such fluency is always associated with NESTs (Kramsch, 1997). According to the studies of Braine (1999) and Thomas (1999), students will initially perceive NESTs as perfect models in language learning, but they become better familiar to qualified, competent NNESTs. This is because NNESTs can better understand their language problems and needs.

Conclusion

As teaching in an EFL context and also a non-native speaker of English, I have experienced issues of inequality and unfairness as far as the labels 'native' and 'non-native' speakers are concerned. In addition, there are many sources that mention these issues originating in a critical applied linguistics approach (Canagarajah, 1999). I am, therefore, convinced that there exists inequality in education as a whole as well as in my context.

Research Design

Research Objectives

There are several broad aims for this study. Firstly, I intended to investigate the views of Thai English teachers (TETs) of one of the critical issues in Thai TESOL, perceived unfairness of allowing only native English speaking teachers (NESTs) to teach Listening and Speaking courses. Secondly, I was interested to find out whether there is a challenge to the notion of "Being a native speaker of English is a necessary condition to teach English". Another objective was to help the TETs become more aware of the undue prejudices and discriminations that marginalise them would lead to another objective. Moreover, I hope that the result of this study could help increase TETs' self-esteem in their teaching career, give them a voice, and recognise their position as equal partners in ELT.

Research Questions

Corresponding to the objectives stated above, two research questions were developed as follows:

1. What do TETs think of the non-native speaker label?
2. How do TETs react to the policy which states that Listening and Speaking courses must be taught by NESTs only?

Research Paradigm

This research study was conducted within a critical framework which aims for social equality and emancipation. In order to liberate people, it is necessary to think first that people suffer from inequality and are not free even though challenging unfairness is not always possible. From my study, I can see that the participants are aware of their rights and situations to some extent. Raising awareness of such inequalities is an important step to overcoming them. Hence, I intend to question unfairness critically, which is considered the first step to emancipation (Pennycook, 2001).

Research Methodology

A methodology employed within the critical framework is ideology critique. It is a reflective practice which enables participants to reveal their conscious or unconscious interests to see whether a system suppresses a generalisable interest (Habermas, 1976). According to the purpose of critical theory, it aims to understand and change situations based on equality and democracy. This is also in relation to a critical practice which is concerned with questioning what is meant by in our reality and the official accounts of how they came to

be the way they are (Dean, 1994). Thus, critical theory has an important role in the process of taking social inequality and the possibility of change. In particular, it seeks to emancipate the disempowered and to enhance individual freedoms (Cohen et al., 2003; Habermas; 1972).

Regarding my research purpose, there are three stages in this study. Firstly, I described and interpreted what is going on in the current situation of this particular context in addition to accounting for how the inequity came into existence. Secondly, the participants were asked about unfairness happening to TETs in their contexts. Also, I offered them a critical alternative for changing the situation. Finally, I combined and analysed the first and second phases to see what changes to the situation in practice could be made, including how the participants were made aware of the issues of injustice.

Sampling

The participants are 16 TETs who have been teaching English in a public university in Thailand for 2-17 years. Their ages range from twenty-nine to forty-six. All of them hold at least a Master's degree in English Language Teaching (ELT) or in related areas.

Data Collection Method

It is evident in various studies on critical issues regarding nativeness and non-nativeness that different methods are employed such as closed questionnaires, open-ended questionnaires, observation, and interviews. According to Holstein and Gubrium (1995), interviews have been used as the main source of data collection or as a source complimentary to other procedures in many studies. Also, Mills (2001) remarks that interviews can

help a researcher access to personal reflections and thoughts of the respondents that could provide insight into the particular situation.

Hence, in this study, only semi-structured, in-depth interview was employed in order to allow the participants to express their feelings and thoughts and be guided and focused at the same time. This method enabled me to prompt the interviewees to explain and expand on their insightful ideas when they provided incomplete answers or too little information about the areas under investigation. In so doing, I could follow issues that might be overlooked when the questions were initially drawn up. In order to meet the needs of the present study, I constructed my own instrument by formulating specific in-depth interview questions, given the nature of small scale research and contextual and cultural uniqueness of the participants. The questions could help the interviewees to reveal their conscious or unconscious interests. Prior to the main study, the pilot interview was also carried out with three of the TETs in the context. They commented that the questions asked were comprehensible, straightforward, and relevant to the purpose of the study.

Data Collection Procedures

Interview questions were formulated based on the research questions (see Appendix). All questions were provided in Thai to minimise the risk of the participants' misunderstanding. Different wordings in translation were resolved through discussion with a researcher in TESOL. Then, I asked the 16 TETs for the interviews. I also explained my research objectives and assured the participants that all their names and information would be kept confidential.

All interviews were undertaken personally at the interviewees' office. Time arrangements were well prepared and each interview lasted approximately thirty to forty-five minutes. The interviews were conducted in Thai and the respondents were free to emphasise any answers if they wished. The interview scripts were translated into English were then returned to the interviewees via e-mail to allow them to review the scripts and add any additional information. Finally, a native English lecturer helped me to ensure acceptable translation of interview scripts into English.

According to Holliday (2002), qualitative researchers need to examine situations through the eyes of participants rather than themselves. At the same time, qualitative researchers have to be aware that their personal experiences and insights are an important part of the inquiry as they themselves are considered the data collecting instrument.

In this study, qualitative data from the interviews were analysed by using an interpretive approach. First of all, I transcribed the eight interviews into English. Then, all the transcripts were analysed to identify categories according to the answers to the interview questions. I also employed a coding process where the transcripts were read carefully to code content to the emerging categories. For the purpose of participants' anonymity, the interviews of all participants were named 'A' to 'P' in the data analysis process. Finally, I discussed the groupings with the researcher in TESOL to provide validity with the data. In addition, I ensured that the phenomenon under study was accurately reflected as perceived by the participants and could help me to find answers to my research questions.

Data Analysis Approach

The data collected through the interviews were analysed qualitatively. Qualitative analysis is less standardised and allows themes to emerged from data. Its aim is not to test, but to formulate patterns, relationships or theories (Strauss and Corbin, 1988). The analysis can start during the data collection process and help correct errors in the fields, adjust research instruments, and shape further data collection. Qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews were content analysed by using the interpretive analysis methods of 'topic ordering' and 'constructuring categories' suggested by Radnor (2002).

All the process of data analysis was carried out by using Microsoft Windows word processor. The interview transcription allowed close examination of the data collected in order to help find answers to the research questions. This process enabled the researcher to ascertain the respondents' views of unfairness of allowing only native English speaking teachers (NESTs) to teach Listening and Speaking courses.

Repetitive readings of the transcription allowed the researcher to stay 'close to the data' (Radnor, 2002: 70) and enhanced familiarization. I analysed and summarized them very carefully before listing them in clear descriptive phrases under the respective question which were then classified as minor categories. Thus, each minor category was a subset of a major category. In

total, there were 10 major categories and 20 minor categories which were formulated when I designed the structure on interview (see Appendix).

I assigned labels to all listed phrases in order to indicate the identity of the interviewees. This coding system helped keep the respondents' anonymity during the process of data analysis. Coding Ranged from T1 to T16 ('T') ('T' for 'teacher') equivalent to the numbers of teacher participants individually interviewed. By doing this, it is straightforward for any quotations from the interviews to be presented to enhance certain remarks.

I read the summarised phrases through several times in order to categorise them and identify common themes. The summary of the findings and interpretation were then made systematically in order to answer each research question. After coding the contents of the transcripts, the coded chunks of data were cut and pasted under the relevant categories. The data which did not fit into any categories were abandoned.

Limitations

This study is based on a critical paradigm which aims at emancipating people and social equality. In reality, it is not always possible. As a minimum, I intended to raise the participants' awareness and to question the inequity issues which are considered critical in the context of this study. In addition, I could not support the issue of unfairness occurring in this particular context with the documents about internal policies, indicating that only NESTs are allowed to teach Listening and Speaking courses.

Findings and Discussion

Qualitative data collected from the interview were analysed by using an interpretive approach. Various issues corresponding to the two research questions will be reported and discussed. An overview of interview questions and findings can be found in Table 1 and 2 (see Appendix).

Findings of Research Question 1 **"What do TETs think of the non-native speaker label?"**

Being a non-native speaker?

All of the participants (16) perceived themselves as non-native English speaking teachers. They reasoned that they were native Thai speakers who acquired Thai as the first language. English is not their mother-tongue. They considered Thai their native language as it represents their cultural identity. The following quotations illustrate these:

> *"I don't think I am a native English speaker because I was born in Thailand and have been using Thai as the first language."* (T3)

and:

> *"English is not my mother-tongue. I can't use English as natural as native English speakers. My English speaking still has Thai accent, I think."* (T12)

Even though some of the TETs could speak English fluently, they perceive that native English speakers are better language users. In addition, they merely learned English as an additional language.

The notion of "The ideal teacher of English is a native speaker of English."

Ten participants had positive views towards this notion. As English was a native speaker's mother-tongue, TETs considered that NESTs were the most expert at their own language and cultures. One said that:

> *"I think NESTs are more competent in language uses because they are native speakers. They would be more accurate in accents and pronunciation as well as more insightful in their own culture."* (T7)

Interacting and practicing communicative skills with native speakers helps learners to obtain useful expressions and correct pronunciation. However, another six participants argued that there was no empirical evidence indicating that NESTs were better than NNESTs. Being a native speaker did not mean that he/she was an ideal teacher. Many factors were integrated in an ideal teacher of English; e.g., educational background and teaching experience. In this regard, some TETs who could achieve native-like English proficiency could be ideal English teachers. As quoted from the interview, one explained:

> *"An ideal teacher would be a fantastic teacher, regardless of nationality. In my view, many successful and qualified teachers are not necessary to be native speakers of English."* (T11)

Effects of professional identities on teaching Listening and Speaking

All of the participants (16) believed that professional identities of NESTs and TETs could affect students' attitudes and TETs' self-confidence. Regarding students' attitudes, ten respondents felt that students might not perceive as credible the English proficiency of TETs. Consequently, this could lead TETs to the loss of self-confidence in their teaching profession. One of them stated:

> "I thought that Thai students prefer to study Listening and Speaking with NESTs who better know how to speak properly and naturally. With regard to this reason, it could make me inferior to NESTs that my confidence declines." (T15)

However, one TET commented that professional identity of TETs might not affect the basic level of Listening and Speaking courses. Additionally, teaching experience and qualifications could form credibility of professional identity.

Advantages of NESTs

Ten participants considered that learning Listening and Speaking courses with NESTs would be a definite advantage to Thai students in terms of language competence. The students would have an opportunity to become more familiar with native speakers. The greater possibility was improving proficiency in English. One interesting comment is that learning Listening and Speaking with NESTs required much effort and attention in trying to communicate with the teachers in English. He reflected:

> "I feel that learning listening and speaking skills with NESTs is more challenging. It is unavoidable to speak Thai with TETs when there are some difficulties in expressing their ideas." (T9)

In terms of cultural knowledge, six respondents believed that students could learn the culture of the target language in greater depth from the actual source, and that some discussions about cultural differences could be an interesting topic in class.

Advantages of TETs

Even though some of them agreed with the notion of "The ideal teacher of English is a native speaker of English.", all of the participants (16) considered themselves favourable to TETs teaching Listening and Speaking courses to some extent. TETs knew well how Thai students feel when learning Listening and Speaking because they have experienced this stage before. They could provide appropriate lessons and activities which corresponded to students' abilities and needs.

Six respondents suggested that learning the basic level of Listening and Speaking courses with TETs would be more effective. TETs could use Thai to describe basic knowledge of communicative English. Regarding linguistic knowledge, TETs would better understand the differences of phonetic systems between two languages. By this, they could explain clearly the differences of Thai and English articulation. When learners progress to advanced or intermediate level, they would study with NESTs so as to become more familiar to English.

Discussion of findings of Research Question 1

From the study, all of the participants comfortably accepted the 'non-native' speaker label, claiming that English was not their native language and they learned English as an additional foreign language. The TETs see themselves

as Thai, no matter how much English they have studied and that their deep understanding of Thai and teaching qualification are superior to those of English.

According to Braine (1999), the acceptance of the title 'non-native' speakers implies the very distinction and lack of identity. To this point, I would argue that even though TETs accepted the difference, it does not mean that they completely lost their identity. From the research findings, all of the participants could see the differences between NESTs and TETs as well as their strengths in teaching Listening and Speaking courses. In addition, most of them were confident that they could be in a better position when teaching the basic level of Listening and Speaking courses. Hence, in my view, this would not lead TETs to low self-esteem as a teaching professional as Braine (ibid.) claims.

Nevertheless, all of the TETs believed that professional identities of NESTs and TETs could affect students' attitudes and TETs' self-confidence since students might not be credible to the English proficiency of TETs. This can be implied that the TETs were being discriminated by a 'non-native' label. They accepted the added pressure of asserting themselves in the profession as competent English speakers (Maum, 2001). Hence, it is a fact that 'native' and 'non-native' labels have been completely involved in this particular context. Viewing it from a critical stance, I can see that 'native and non-native speaker labels' are so strong that a clear line between native speakers and non-native speakers is drawn regardless of teachers' experience and teaching ability. As for TETs, lacking English proficiency compared with NESTs might lead to a loss of credibility of their teaching professionals.

Taking Davies (1991) into account, the native speaker identity is considered as a sociolinguistic construct which can be overcome within certain circumstances. A 'native speaker label' implies a false assumption that challenges the credibility of NNSs. From my stance, TETs need to be against to what they are labelled. Knowing more than one language and being able to teach in a foreign language can empower them in their EFL context. Their ability to use two languages can benefit from sharing the learners' mother tongue and can facilitate the teaching and learning process (Medgyes, 1992). In addition, TETs can prove to their students that they, Thai English teachers, have in fact acquired a foreign language, and that therefore the students can as well. This is concurrent with Phillipson (1992), who has a view that qualified and trained NNEST can contribute in meaningful ways to ELT by virtue of their own experiences as English language learners and their training and experience as teachers.

In addition, I agree with many scholars who debate over the NS-NNS dichotomy in ELT profession (e.g., Davies, 1991; Medgyes, 1994; Nayar, 1994). The ideology that native speakers are the ideal teachers of language leads to the practice of treating TETs differently from NESTs in the unfair ways; i.e., in this context only NESTs are allowed to teach Listening and Speaking course. Therefore, this ideology needs to be rejected; otherwise, TETs will be eventually negatively defined as incapable language teachers either by themselves or by the academic administrators.

Findings of Research Question 2 **"How do TETs react to the policy which states that Listening and Speaking courses must be taught by NESTs only?"**

Qualifications for Listening and Speaking teachers

From the interview responses, four aspects of teachers' qualifications for Listening and Speaking courses emerged. Most participants (14) considered having a degree in ELT or in other related areas as a necessity. Otherwise, having taken a pre-service training course in ELT was necessary. One of them explained:

> *"It would be very beneficial if the teachers' degree corresponds to the subject they teach. Knowing only how to speak and use English is not enough. As well as without training in ELT, teachers might not know how to manage the classroom and find it hard to make students understand."* (T10)

Second, a number of respondents also considered teaching experience as another important qualification. One explained that the more teaching experience the teacher had, the better teaching performance was. Third, in terms of language awareness, linguistic skills and knowledge would help teachers understand the differences of English and Thai phonetic systems and could guide students to articulate words clearly. Additionally, teachers needed to have cultural awareness of the target language and of students'

language in order to better understand the students' attitudes towards EFL learning.

NESTs with a degree in ELT: Is it necessary?

Ten participants indicated that NESTs needed to have a degree in ELT or in other related areas whereas four other respondents perceived that at least NESTs needed to have taken a pre-service training course in ELT. In addition, having some teaching experience would be an advantage. From the interview responses, a degree or a training course in ELT could help guarantee that NESTs know how to teach English and were familiar with other aspects of language teaching (e.g., lesson planning, testing, and teaching evaluation). One commented:

> *"Proficiency in listening and speaking English is not enough. I notice that a NEST without a degree in ELT couldn't explain clearly why he uses grammatical structures that way."* (T2)

In this particular context, it is not a requirement for NESTs to have a degree in ELT, whereas TETs must hold at least a Master's degree in ELT. In this regard, one of the participants ridiculed that NESTs were qualified by means of the academic policy as they were native English speakers.

Another interesting comment was raised by some respondents. They claimed that it was the values of Thai society which regarded a degree as an official proof of knowledge. Other aspects, such as teaching skills and practices, were more important than having the degree. Many teachers without a degree in

this area could teach better than ones who hold a particular degree. The quotation below gives a typical idea of this response:

"Degree qualification merely enhances credibility to English teachers. It sometimes excludes many talented teachers who don't have a degree." (T6)

What if TETs teach Listening and Speaking courses?

With a degree qualification and teaching experience in ELT, the participants were asked if they would like to teach Listening and Speaking courses as well as if they could teach more effectively. Three different opinions emerged from the interview.

- *Certainly, I would love to have the opportunity.*

Nine respondents were interested in having the opportunity. One of them was confident that she could teach as well as NESTs could do, or even better.

The following quotation illustrates this:

"I can better understand and deal with Thai students than NESTs. I not only have a good command of communicative skills but know what the differences between Thai and English phonetic systems are." (T8)

Another three insisted that at the basic level they could teach more effectively than NESTs. One interestingly noted that students at the basic level still need a lot of assistance from TETs to give some explanations in Thai and to discuss what their needs and learning problems were.

- *Certainly not.*

Two other participants asserted that they were not keen on teaching these courses. Without having experience in foreign countries and much exposure to interacting with foreigners, one participant perceived herself incompetent in teaching listening and speaking skills. As English was the NESTs' mother-tongue, NESTs could do this job better and more effectively. Similarly, another made a comparison with Thai language teaching and learning; no one could teach Thai better than Thai native speakers. One respondent remarks:

> *"I couldn't be as perfect as NESTs in terms of pronunciation and accent. I don't think I am aware of cultural knowledge of the target language as well as the language owners."* (T15)

From this viewpoint, these two TETs might have forgotten that the purpose of teaching English to teach Thai students to use English as a foreign language and to apply their knowledge to their future careers. It is impossible that Thai people, as foreign language teachers and learners, can speak like native speakers. Additionally, it is the fact that most of the speakers of English in the world are not native speakers of English. Hence, the nativeness cannot guarantee the best quality of teaching.

- *Not sure.*

Another two respondents could not say exactly whether they could do better or more effectively until they had a chance to try these courses and saw what the teaching and learning outcomes were. One of them added that effectiveness of teaching depended on various factors; e.g., learners' ability, teaching performance, course levels, learners' motivation, teaching evaluation, and learning outcomes. With this, teachers could not know how effective their teaching practice was by using only their personal judgement.

Reactions to the policy: Taking up a challenge?

The last question was intended to offer a critical viewpoint to the participants by questioning the academic policy which stated that "Listening and Speaking courses must be taught by NESTs only." Two different reactions emerged from the participants: positive reactions and negative reactions. According to the positive reactions, four participants concurred with the academic policy. NESTs were considered more qualified to teach these courses as they were competent in English proficiency and could bring the most beneficial learning outcomes to students. One reasoned:

> "It doesn't matter as long as students are satisfied with their learning outcomes and NESTs' teaching practice." (T9)

Regarding negative reactions, twelve participants felt resistant inside and have never expressed their feeling aloud. They considered it unfair. At least, TETs should be given an opportunity to try these courses. One of them reflected:

> "It's not fair! I wish the policy makers took this issue into consideration. Some of us are better qualified to teach in terms of understanding of different aspects between Thai and English, and learning problems of Thai students." (T16)

In respect of professional identity, eight respondents remarked that both NESTs and TETs were English language teachers, but they were treated differently. Conflicts and potential problems could happen to TETs: the loss of credibility and self-esteem in teaching profession, for instance. In this regard, eight of the participants would like to see some changes. Yet, no one has opposed the policy explicitly and has revealed what the actual reactions were. One interestingly noted:

"We should stand up for our rights. We shouldn't just comment on the unfair policy. Instead, this issue must be raised up and discussed formally at the faculty meeting   in order to have some change." (T5)

Discussion of findings of Research Question 2

The results of the study showed that a degree qualification was considered the most important aspect for teaching Listening and Speaking courses, and training courses in ELT and teaching experience were also required. Considering the educational background and teaching experience of TETs in this context, their qualifications meet all the requirements. Hence, TETs wondered why it was not necessary for NESTs to have a degree in ELT or even in other related areas: one of them had only six months teaching experience of English at a private school in Thailand. Interestingly, one TET made a pointed remark about the degree qualification of NESTs:

"At least NESTs' qualification matches with the academic policy as they were native English speakers." (T13)

In my view, it seems that NESTs have been equipped with privileges in relation to teaching professionals merely because they are 'native speakers'. In accordance with one participant's claim, I wonder why the academic administrators were not concerned about the value of Thai society which regards a degree as a knowledge evaluation and a fair credential when recruiting NESTs. Similarly, Maum (2001) notes that a growing number of native English speakers without teaching qualifications have been hired than

qualified and experienced NNESTs. This can be attributed to a 'native speaker' label which undermines the required qualifications for English language teaching.

In terms of language and cultural awareness, the participants believed that these two aspects were also important for teaching Listening and Speaking, whilst these might be considered more important than a degree qualification in other contexts. I can see that even though TETs have superior degree qualifications, most of them perceived themselves to be inferior to NESTs in communicative competence. They accepted that NESTs were more qualified in language proficiency and cultural knowledge. Similarly, Samimy and Brutt-Griffler's (1999) study reveals that the NNS graduate students in TESOL do not consider NSs superior in every aspect, but only more proficient in the use of authentic English. The participants had a view which is consistent with Medgyes (1992) that effectiveness of language teaching is not based on nativeness or non-nativeness. Instead, effective teaching could possibly depend on other factors (Liu, 1999; Samimy and Brutt-Griffler, 1999); e.g., learner factors, teacher factors, and contextual factors.

Even though 12 out of 16 participants had negative reactions to the policy, they have never expressed their actual feelings aloud. Coming from the same culture, I believe that their acceptance of this unpleasant situation is because of the attitude that they cannot change it. Therefore, it is culturally appropriate to accept it calmly. However, the participants gave opinions that an objection to the perceived unfair policy should be raised in a formal discussion among the academic administrators or policy makers. Their feeling of resistance inside should be expressed. From their responses, I consider that to some extent they were concerned about the current issue

which could lead them to the potential problem of low self-esteem in their teaching profession.

Conclusion

According to Pennycook (1994), a crucial challenge for critical approaches to TESOL always focuses on inequality and oppression in a particular situation. It is the fact that the inequality of teaching profession is now happening in my context and others. In this study, through their responses to the last question regarding the reactions to the policy in particular, it is apparent that most TETs were aware of the unfairness and discrimination that marginalised them in teaching Listening and Speaking courses. Evidently, the TETs perceived themselves as being labelled as non-native speakers of English and how they reacted to the perceived unfair policy.

Implications

The findings of this study suggest several implications. First, both TETs and academic administrators need to understand what the realistic aim of English language teaching in a Thai context is. The main purpose is not to teach Thai students to speak like native speakers of English, but to use English as a foreign language and to achieve a number of English skills which will be beneficial for their future careers. Therefore, it is not necessarily to study English with NESTs. The majority of English teachers in the world, including in Thailand, are not native speakers of English. They are people who speak other languages; nevertheless, they can contribute their best knowledge and abilities in teaching profession as well as or even better than native speakers of English.

The acceptance of being called 'non-native' speakers reflects that TETs are contributing their own discriminatory. Then, the assumption that NESTs represent the ideal teachers of English needs to be rejected because both TETs and NESTs can be equally good teachers in their own terms. The differences in the areas of culture, language, and teaching should not be seen as negative and contradictory but should be recognised and valued as positive and complementary. The unique contribution of TETs should be acknowledged as an important and very credible force in the TESOL profession. TETs should have more self-respect in their own abilities and worth. When TETs are not considered as inferior to NESTs in teaching abilities either by themselves or by others, at least in teaching Listening and Speaking courses, the discrimination against TETs and a sense of inferiority will not happen.

The issue of inequality of native and non-native teachers has been recognised in literature of critical issues in TESOL (e.g., Braine, 1999; Davies, 1991; Liu, 1999; Medgyes, 1992; Phillipson, 1992). Nevertheless, oppression regarding unfair policies has not been considered a critical issue of teaching career in my particular context. Hence, as the final implication, there should be more formal discussions on specific issues and concerns related to the equality of NESTs and TETs. Also, the continuation of using 'native' and 'non-native' labels which is the source of discrimination and injustice may be argued. On a regular basis, seminars and workshops should be organised in my work context to increase the opportunities for giving voice and to help define where the TETs are now in terms of ELT professionals. Consequently, these important issues should be raised in the university annual conference which is recognised as a forum for academic discussions. In this way, various new perspectives, such as collaborative team teaching by TETs and NESTs, and the fairer policy would be given greater consideration.

Conclusion

This study investigated the perceptions of Thai English teachers towards the policy of "Listening and Speaking courses must be taught by NESTs only." The participants have offered various viewpoints regarding native and non-native speaker issues and reactions to this perceived unfair policy. With the methodology employed in the study, ideology critique, the participants provided their subjective critical perspective allowing them to see the inequality and discrimination existing in their workplace.

From the study, the participants accepted the 'non-native' label and could see the differences between NESTs and TETs as well as their strengths in teaching Listening and Speaking courses. To some extent they were concerned about the issue of inequality which could lead them to the potential problem of self-esteem in their teaching profession. Various interesting aspects regarding the reactions to the unfair policy were revealed. Even though the participants have realized what their strengths and weaknesses are compared with their native counterparts, it is not possible to clearly indicate who are better English teachers. Rather, the two counterparts would complement each other in their strengths and weaknesses by having collaborative team teaching in

order to provide the most advantages to students. Taking this into account, the academic administrators must reconsider the policy in order to bring some changes for the better.

Recommendations for further research

Further issues have arisen throughout the process of this study since the research deals with people's perceptions in the real world. The issues pertinent to this study may be the subject of more thorough research in the future. The study can be replicated in other contexts by using similar or different methods as appropriate in order to offer a more complete view of the issue of injustice between NESTs and NNESTs. Similar research studies could be carried out in various educational levels and settings in Thailand. The results obtained from these studies in different contexts could be analysed and compared in order to gain a deeper insight. Moreover, a study of NESTs' perceptions towards the unfairness of allowing only NESTs to teach Listening and Speaking courses would also be worthy of consideration. In this way, it would be possible to investigate whether there is a mismatch or resemblance between TETs' perception and NESTs' perception.

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Appendix

Structure of interview questions and findings

Table 1: Overview of interview questions and findings of Research Question 1 (question 1-5)

	Interview questions	**Findings**
1.	What do you think about being called non-native speakers?	*Being a non-native speaker?* • Perceive him/herself as being called.
2.	What do you think of the notion that the ideal teacher of English is a native speaker of English?	*The notion of "The ideal teacher of English is a native speaker of English."* • Agree • Disagree
3.	Do the professional identities of NESTs and TETs have any effect on teaching Listening and Speaking courses? Why / why not?	*Effects of professional identities on teaching Listening and Speaking* • Students' attitude • TETs' self-confidence

4.	What are the advantages of studying Listening and Speaking courses taught by NESTs?	*Advantages of NESTs* • Language competence • Cultural knowledge
5.	What are the advantages of studying Listening and Speaking courses taught by TETs?	*Advantages of TETs* • Understanding Thai students' abilities and needs • Teaching the basic level of listening and speaking

Table 2: Overview of interview questions and findings of Research Question 2 (question 6-10)

	Interview questions	Findings
6.	What qualifications should English teachers possess to be able to teach Listening and Speaking courses in your context?	*Qualifications for Listening and Speaking teachers* • Degree or training in ELT • Teaching experience • Language awareness • Cultural awareness
7.	In teaching Listening and Speaking courses, do you think it is necessary for NESTs to have a degree in English language teaching or other relevant fields of study? Why / why not?	*NESTs with a degree in ELT: Is it necessary?* • Certainly. • Not necessarily.
8.	If you have a chance, would you like to teach Listening and Speaking courses in your context? Why / why not?	*What if Listening and Speaking courses taught by TET?* • Certainly. I would love to have the opportunity.

9.	Can you teach Listening and Speaking courses more effectively than NESTs? If so, how? If not, why?	*(I could do or even better.)*
		• Certainly not.
		  (NESTs would do better.)
		• Not sure.
		  (Till I could have a chance to try.)

10.	What do you think about the academic policy that Listening and Speaking courses must be taught by NESTs only?	***Reactions to the policy: Taking up a challenge?*** • Positive reactions • Negative reactions inside