

Voices of the Unheard

Steve Engler, Kumi Iwasaki, and Masuko Miyahara
English Language Program
International Christian University

This paper describes a preliminary study to examine the notion that language learners generally prefer native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) to nonnative English-speaking teachers (NNESTs). Building upon an earlier study (Engler & Iwasaki, 2008) that found this was true for students from another university but not for International Christian University (ICU) students. This paper further investigates ICU learners' preferences and perceptions of NESTs/NNESTs, whether these preferences and perceptions change over time, and possible elements that can affect such changes. A total of 73 first-year students' questionnaire responses were collected at both the beginning and end of the first-term. Also, to gain a deeper insight into the learners' thoughts, six student interviews were conducted.

Since Phillipson (1992) introduced the concept of 'linguistic imperialism' and the 'native speaker fallacy,' there have been growing discussions on the value and the status of NNESTs. Medgyes (1999) responded to Phillipson and first clearly listed the six positive aspects of non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs). According to Medgyes, NNESTs can:

1. provide a good learner model for imitation;
2. teach language learning strategies more effectively;
3. supply learners with more information about the English language;
4. anticipate and prevent language difficulties better;
5. be more empathetic to the needs and problems of learners;
6. make use of the learners' mother tongue (p. 48).

Although this list gives certain credit to NNESTs' practices, it is still based on the view that the linguistic status of teachers by nature matters and NNESTs are understood as teachers of English who are not native English-speaking teachers (NESTs). Liu (2004), a former president of TESOL, asserts that the question, "can NNESTs and NESTs be equally effective at teaching English?" is the wrong question, for it is not being a NNEST or NEST that determines how successful one could be as a TESOL professional. Leaders in TESOL have suggested that applied linguistic theories, some of which have already been established notions, can easily make skilled and even experienced teachers view themselves as marginal just because they are not native speakers (Braine, Mahboob, Brady & Kamhi-Stein, 2007). For example, Mahboob (2005) critically points out that the original cause of this native preference comes from many established notions in applied linguistic theories, writing that:

The native speaker was centralized in applied linguistics and TESOL as a result of the Chomskian paradigm. Early applied linguists and SLA researchers used the 'native speaker' norm as being the goal of all language learners. And, any learner

language that fell short of this norm was considered interlanguage. Furthermore, if an individual did not show 'improvement' in the interlanguage over time, they were considered to have fossilized. Such terminology and its inclusion in reference books led to a general belief that language learners should speak a language like native speakers and therefore only native speakers can serve as genuine and worthy models/teachers (p. 90).

The native speaker model that assumes that NNESTs are inferior to NESTs in terms of their linguistic status has been increasingly scrutinized in the recent academic literature (Braine, 2005; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2002, 2005; Nemtchinova, 2005).

The main arguments can be summarized as follows:

- 1) growth of English as an international language has made the monolithic view of native speaker as the target model increasingly irrelevant (Cook, 1999; Jenkins, 2007).
- 2) acknowledgement of the potential strengths (as well as weaknesses) of both NEST and NNEST as "different" rather than one being more superior (or inferior) to the other (Medgyes, 1999).
- 3) more than the linguistic status of NNESTs, other issues such as teacher professionalism are given more priority in determining a "good" teacher (Braine, 2005; Watson Todd, 2006).

The continued search for finding roles of NNESTs and discussing their value also concerns the issue of discrimination in the hiring process (Illes, 1991). That is, it has been generally accepted that NESTs may be more preferred by administrators and learners. Despite the fact that academic arguments emphasize the equality between NESTs and NNESTs, there is still a broader social acceptance for NESTs (Thornbury, 2006). Although there are some questionnaire studies that indicate students prefer NESTs (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2002; Mullock, 2003), Mahboob (2004) points out that the basis for preferring NESTs has not yet been systematically examined; that is, students' attitudes and preferences have not been represented thoroughly in the literature. This study puts the learners at the center, and attempts to examine the learners' preferences for and their perceptions of their teachers in a Japanese higher educational context.

Purpose

The purpose of this exploratory study has its roots in both the literature reviewed above and an earlier study (Engler & Iwasaki, 2008). In this earlier study, 79 first-year language learners from ICU and 82 first-year beginning-level language learners from another university who only had NESTs as English teachers were asked to indicate on a questionnaire whether they preferred a NEST, a NNEST, or had no preference. The questionnaire was administered after approximately 15 weeks of instruction. It was found that 72 % of first-year ICU students expressed no preference, 25% expressed a preference for NESTs, and 3% expressed a preference for NNESTs. This was in stark contrast to the beginning-level students, of whom 90% expressed a preference for NESTs, 7% expressed no preference, and 3% preferred NNESTs.

The specific aims for this study were to determine (a) what a group of incoming ICU students' preferences would be at the very beginning of their first term,

(b) whether their preference's would change over time, (c) what were students' perceptions of NNESTs and NESTs, and (d) how and in what ways these perceptions might influence learners' preferences. In order to delineate the possible factors that might have impact on the students' choices, semi-structured, open-ended interviews were conducted with six focal students in addition to the questionnaires that were administered at the beginning and end of the term.

As mentioned earlier, some studies on learners' preference for NESTs or NNESTs have relied heavily on questionnaires, but as a Watson Todd, and Pojanapunya (2009) study indicates (they examined the implicit attitudes of Thai students towards NESTs and NNESTs by comparing the results with the explicit attitudes collected from survey questionnaires), students' attitudes and preferences for NESTs or NNESTs is not a simple, straightforward matter, but rather a highly complex issue that involves an interplay of various factors. This study attempts to outline the possible variables that appear to determine learners' preference and also suggests reasons for and implications of these preliminary findings.

Procedure

The questionnaire (See Appendix) for this study was developed from the earlier-mentioned Engler and Iwasaki (2008) study. The question regarding learners' preference for NEST/NNEST or lack thereof and why they had that preference was identical to the questionnaire from the previous study. However, on the questionnaire in the 2008 study, students were asked to respond to open ended questions regarding their perceptions of NEST/NNEST's respective strengths. For the questionnaire for this study, using the Deplphi Method (Linstone & Turoff, 1975), the learners' common responses from the first study were compiled to make a list of advantages which the learners for this study could simply check if they agreed that it was something they perceived as an advantage. They also had space where they could respond with their own ideas.

This revised questionnaire was then administered at the very beginning and the very end of the first term to first-year students in six different A and B sections of the English Language Program (ELP) comprising a total of 108 students. While the questionnaires were anonymous, the students were asked to put the same self-generated symbol, meaningful only to themselves, at the top of both questionnaires so the researchers could identify the papers for comparison sake. From the group of 108 students, a total of 73 questionnaires for which the symbols could be matched from the first to the second administration were identified.

In addition, semi-structured, open-ended interviews were conducted at the end of the term in the hopes of getting a further understanding of the learners' preferences and perceptions. Specifically, in the interviews the learners were asked about their backgrounds with learning English, their impressions of ICU so far, the reasons for their preference or lack thereof, the perceived strengths/weaknesses of NESTs NNESTs, and for their short- and long-term goals in regard to English. The volunteers included two students who began and ended the term with no preference, two students who began and ended the term with a preference for NESTs, and two students who began the term with a preference for NESTs but changed to no preference at the end of the term.

Results

Questionnaire

Table 1 displays the learners' preferences expressed at the beginning and the end of the first term.

Table 1.
Learners' Preferences

n=73	Preference in April	Preference in June
No preference	37 (51%)	48 (65%)
NEST	35(48%)	21 (29%)
NNEST	1 (1%)	4 (6%)

As can be seen, the total number of students expressing no preference increased by 14%, the total number of students expressing a preference for NESTs decreased by 19%, and the total number of students expressing a preference for NNESTs increased by 5%

The learners were also asked to explain their preference. At the beginning of the term, the students who expressed no preference overwhelmingly responded that they actually wanted to have both NESTs and NESTs, as they felt they both had advantages. This was mentioned by 24 students. The only other common response, which was mentioned five times, was that the students didn't care if the teacher was a NEST or NNEST as long as they had good English teaching skills. Their responses at the end of the term were quite similar, with 35 students explaining their preference by saying they wanted both NESTs and NNESTs, and four students saying English teaching skills were the important thing, not whether the teacher was a NEST or NNEST.

For students who preferred NESTs, the responses were not so easily categorized. Only five things were mentioned by three or more students. Seven students claimed they preferred NESTs because they could learn "real" English. Six learners mentioned that school was their only chance to speak to native speakers, and there were three responses each about pronunciation, culture, and the perceived necessity to speak only English in class. By the end of the term, there were only three categories. Seven students mentioned 'real' English, four students said it was their only chance to speak to native-speakers, and three said that they perceived they had to speak only English in class.

The one student who preferred a NNEST in the spring cited being able to relax as the reason for the preference. At the end of the term, two students cited being able to speak Japanese as the reason for their preference, and one student mentioned being able to feel relaxed.

Table 2 displays all the combinations of how students could have expressed their preference from the first administration to the second along with the corresponding raw number and rounded percentage of students in each combination.

Table 2.
Preference Groupings

Preference in April	Preference in June	Total number of students (n=73)
No preference	No preference	28 (38%)

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NEST	No preference	20 (27%)
NEST	NEST	14 (19%)
No preference	NEST	7 (10%)
No preference	NNEST	2 (3%)
NEST	NNEST	1 (1%)
NNEST	NNEST	1 (1%)
NNEST	NEST	0 (0%)
NNEST	No preference	0 (0%)

The most common trend was for students to come in with no preference and end the term with the same response. The second largest group consisted of learners who came in with a preference for NESTs, but then changed to no preference. The only other two trends which were somewhat common were students who came in preferring NESTs and left with the same preference, and a smaller group who changed from No Preference to preferring NESTs.

Table 3 displays the questionnaire results for the learners' perceptions of areas that it would be advantageous to have a NEST as a teacher. Both raw numbers and percentages are shown.

Table 3.
Perceived NESTs' Advantages

Perceived advantage	April	June
	n=73	n=73
For speaking.	52 (72%)	53 (73%)
For listening.	49 (68%)	58 (79%)
For authentic English.	48 (66%)	51 (70%)
For pronunciation.	43 (59%)	52 (72%)
For culture.	32 (44%)	36 (49%)
We must speak English only.	29 (40%)	28 (39%)
It is fun.	28 (39%)	31 (42%)

This table shows that the learners came in with the perception that NESTs would be especially good for teaching pronunciation, authentic English, listening, and speaking. There was an increase in this perception for all of four of these areas over the term, with speaking increasing only slightly. To a lesser degree, these learners came in thinking NESTs would be good for teaching culture, maintaining English-only as a class policy, and being fun. These perceptions changed only slightly over the term.

For the open ended question asking for the students other ideas, very few students responded, and those who did mostly repeated what was already on the questionnaire. The only new idea was that having a NEST allowed them to get accustomed to speaking to foreigners, which was mentioned four times in April and five times in June.

Table 4 shows the questionnaire results for the learners' perceptions of areas that it would be advantageous to have a NNEST as a teacher.

Table 4.
Perceived NNESTs' Advantages

Perceived advantage	April %	June %
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	n=73	n=73
They know how to learn English.	52 (72%)	61 (84%)
They understand us culturally.	37 (50%)	41 (56%)
We can be more relaxed.	27 (37%)	15 (21%)
For grammar.	23 (32%)	18 (25%)
We can use Japanese.	14 (19%)	14 (19%)

Clearly the area which the learners perceive having NNESTs as their teacher to be most beneficial is that they know how to learn English, with this response increasing over the term by 12%. A strong number two was that NNESTs will understand them culturally, which also increased over the term. The items about grammar and being relaxed each received a similar number of responses and both actually decreased over the term. Finally, some learners perceived being able to use Japanese as an advantage, and this number held constant.

Again, as for students' other ideas, very few students responded, and those students who did simply mentioned things that were already on the questionnaire.

Interviews

Group A: No shift in learners' preferences (No Preference to No Preference). The following two interview summaries are from students who expressed no preference at both the beginning and end of the term. The names for all of the interviewees have been changed.

Jun: Jun started learning English at the age of eight or nine at home by using cassette tapes and watching movies and listening to music. At the age of eleven, he started taking private lessons with a NNEST as his teacher, whom he described as a good teacher because she recognized his talent for learning language and because she used authentic materials rather than a regular textbook.

Jun's impression of ICU so far is quite favorable, with class size being mentioned as a particularly valued factor. He did mention that he would like to get more explanation for why the students are studying the material they do and for why and how they should do certain activities, such as peer reviews.

When asked why he had no preference for NEST/NNEST Jun said he didn't really see a difference. He thought the difference between individuals could be quite important, but that NEST/NNEST wasn't an issue with him. He concluded by saying diversity is a good thing to him.

Despite his lack of preference, Jun was able to articulate what he saw as some strengths and weaknesses for NESTs/NNESTs. He saw NESTs strengths being in teaching speaking, pronunciation, culture, and essay writing and did not mention any perceived weaknesses. As for NNESTs, he mentioned a strength being that they share a common culture and common educational experiences. One perceived weakness for NNESTs that he mentioned was that they tend to use the same expressions which he feels does not give him a chance to add new vocabulary words or new phrases to his English.

As for goals, short-term Jun hopes to write a research paper. His long-term goals include to be able to examine Japanese culture and society and to be able to describe it using English.

Yuki: Yuki started to learn English at the age of four at home with her family through a commercial program that focused on listening, particularly to songs. She started learning English at school from the age of eleven. Her teacher was a NNEST

whom she said she liked so-so. She mentioned that on the negative side the teacher overused Beatles songs, which she suspected was just what he liked, not what the students preferred. She also mentioned that his pronunciation was different from what she was used to in her previous language study. She liked the fact that he sometimes let them communicate naturally in English and that he corrected the students' mistakes.

As for her experience at ICU so far, Yuki characterized it as being even better than what she was expecting. She said she felt that her English had progressed and that her teachers were good because of their kindness, their passion, and their willingness to answer questions.

When asked about her lack of preference, she said that the language used is always English, so it didn't matter to her whether the teacher is a NEST or a NNEST. She also mentioned that at ICU the NNESTs' English is so good that it doesn't matter.

As for strengths and weaknesses of NESTs/NNESTs, she said that she liked how NESTs are laid back and have a good atmosphere in the class, but that they sometimes don't understand the mistakes Japanese might make with their English. Yuki said that NNESTs can better understand and anticipate students' mistakes, and that NNESTs know grammar well.

Yuki's short-term goal is to be able to teach Japanese using English. Her long-term goal is to use English in a career in Japan.

Group B: No shift in learners' preferences (NEST to NEST). The following two interview summaries are from students who expressed a preference for NESTs at both the beginning and end of the term.

Saki: Saki began learning English at the age of 11 at school. She said it was the regular Japanese curriculum and that she liked it because it was something new. She did not, however, like her first teacher, a NNEST, as she often found his pronunciation to be unintelligible, and he would get angry and scold her when she asked him what he had just said. In high school, she had a NEST and liked him because he spoke only English in the classroom. She also studied for a year as a sophomore in Canada. She said her English teacher was helpful, but that some of the other teachers were hard to understand.

She likes ICU so far very much because she feels that her English has improved, and she believes that the teachers are good because they have helped her improve.

When asked why her preference for NESTs hadn't changed, she mentioned that she did not want to have a repeat of the problem she once had with her NNEST teacher in junior high school.

As for strengths of NESTs, she mentioned that using only English with them was a big plus. She also mentioned that NESTs' English is 'real'. As for NNESTs, she said that ICU teachers are good but she is worried about encountering pronunciation problems. Furthermore, she is concerned that NNESTs may not be able to explain why a native speaker uses a certain expression.

Saki's short-term goals are to get a good TOEFL score so she can study abroad and to help people from overseas to learn Japanese. Her long-term goals are to be a Japanese teacher and to maybe live overseas on a trial basis.

Yu: Yu first started learning English at the age of ten while living in Germany from a Greek English teacher who came to her house once a week. In addition, she had English classes three times a week at the Japanese school she attended in Germany. When she returned to Japan for junior high school, she studied English in the regular Japanese curriculum and had both NESTs and NNESTs. She didn't

particularly enjoy her classes taught by NNESTs as she felt they were geared towards passing exams. Additionally, she felt her teachers lacked enthusiasm for teaching English, the class atmosphere was bad, and that many students had no motivation to learn English. She liked the classes taught by the NEST since they featured oral communication, although she did think they were too easy, with a focus on games and expressions.

Yu described her experience at ICU as very interesting, and especially likes the ELP Reader and what she perceives to be an English-only environment. She also mentioned that she found ARW and RCA classes to be very well-organized. She said that ELP teachers are good, especially in the area of challenging the students but that they sometimes talk too fast.

As for the respective strengths and weaknesses of NESTs/NNESTs, she thinks that both are good, but that NESTs can teach better about culture and are better at teaching communication. She feels that NNESTs strengths are that Japanese can be spoken in tutorials if necessary, and that NNESTs know how to learn English. She feels that the mix of NESTs and NNESTs is necessary for the ELP.

When Yu was asked about her preference for NESTs, she said she views language as a means for communication, but she again mentioned that she thinks both NESTs and NNESTs are necessary.

Yu's short-term goals are to improve her essay writing skills and to express her opinions to the world. Her long-term goals include wanting to get a job in which she can use English and to change the biased views of the world.

Group C: Shift in learners' preferences from NEST to No Preference. The following two interview summaries are from students who expressed a preference for NESTs at the beginning of the term and then switched to No Preference at the end of the term.

Rie: Rie started to learn English while at a private junior high school in Japan. She had both NESTs and NNESTs as teachers. She said she generally liked what she could recall of her classes, specifically mentioning singing songs as enjoyable. She found some classes taught by the NNESTs to be boring such as listening to lectures, doing translation, and memorizing vocabulary. Likewise, she found her oral communication classes taught by a NEST to be boring as he talked too much without allowing the students to interact with each other. Rie's background does include a three-week home stay in Canada, but she found it to be more of a life experience than a language learning experience, noting that there wasn't enough interaction with native speakers of English.

At ICU Rie says she is happy and satisfied, mentioning that she enjoys the close relationship she has with her teachers. She also finds ELP classes to be comfortable and appreciates the many opportunities to speak English.

Rie had a hard time expressing what she thought were respective strengths and weaknesses of NESTs/NNESTs. She mentioned that NESTs were better for pronunciation and that NNESTs can sometimes understand their students better because of their experience.

When asked why she had changed from NEST to No Preference, Rie said that the teachers in the ELP are like NESTs in the sense that their English is so good, so it doesn't matter.

As for Rie's short-term goals, she wants to talk more fluently, especially with international students in her dormitory. She also hopes to move up to Program B and to improve her TOEFL score. Her long-term goal is that her English will be good enough to be an advantage when trying to find a job.

Kana: Kana first started learning English in the 5th or 6th grade at a cram school. She said she didn't recall having English in her regular school. Her teachers were all NNESTs. She didn't like her initial experience learning English because she found the teacher to be boring and not interested in teaching English. She changed cram schools and found the next teacher to be good because she could explain about grammar very well, although she did say that the teacher's pronunciation was not so good.

Kana says classes at ICU are great so far and that she likes almost all of her teachers.

When asked about the strengths and weaknesses of NESTs and NNESTs, Kana didn't have any specific thoughts other than the fact that she had had a bad experience with a NNEST's enthusiasm as a teacher before and didn't want to repeat that.

When Kana was asked why she had changed from NEST to No Preference, she again referred back to her bad experience with a NNEST in cram school, but said that here in ICU she sees no gap between NESTs and NNESTs, so she changed to No Preference.

Kana's short-term goals are to improve her English during an overseas program and to improve her debate skills. Her long-term goals are undecided, but she would like to get a job in which she can speak English.

Discussion and Implications

Many studies have indicated the broad social preference for NESTs regardless of the recent global discourse of equality between NESTs and NNESTs in the academic literature. However, clear scholarly evidence that supports the general preference for NESTs is difficult to locate, and a number of studies including Watson Todd & Pojanapunya (2009) have called for further examination of the matter.

The findings of our present study hold interesting implications on this general perceived understanding for a NEST-preference. As we have seen, in our particular context, most of the students had no preference for either NESTs or NNESTs at the outset of the term, and many of them ended the term with the same response. Furthermore, the total number of students expressing initial preference for NESTs decreased by 14% by the end of the term. Also, we observed slight changes in the percentage of students who preferred NNESTs, which increased from 1% to 6%.

The major change observed here is that the percentage of students expressing no preference increased by 14%, while the percentage of students who expressed their preference for NESTs decreased by 19%. Also, a slight increment was observed with students who indicated preference for NNESTs. How can we account for such shifts in the learners' attitude? What are the potential explanations for the changes? Our previous study has suggested that learners' proficiency of the target language, and also their perception of the strengths and weaknesses of NESTs and NNESTs, have relevance in expressing their choices (Engler & Iwasaki, 2008). In order to obtain a more detailed account of the matter, we decided to examine our open-ended interview data.

As a result, several issues emerged from our collected interview data, but we focused on the following three themes that appear to influence each other:

Theme 1: the relationship between learners' previous experiences with their English teachers and their preferences.

Theme 2: the relationship between learners' conceptualization of a "language teacher" and their preferences.

Theme 3: learners' views towards "English" or "learning English".

Theme 1: Excerpts from the transcripts show that students who expressed no preference tend to have positive experiences with their teachers (whether NESTs or NNESTs). On the other hand, students who had negative experiences with NNESTs usually indicate initial preference for NESTs, and most of them remain with the same responses. As Saki indicates "I don't want to have to repeat the problem I had with a NNEST" (responding to the question of why her preference for NESTs has not changed at the end of the term). Students who had negative experiences with NNESTs resulted in their initial preference for NESTs; however, their positive experiences with "good" NNESTs shifted their preference to No Preference at the end of the term. Although it is difficult to identify any kind of tendency from this small scale research, it seems quite likely that these students' past experiences with their teachers strongly influenced their choices.

Theme 2: In addition to learners' previous experiences with their teachers, they also appear to be influenced by their own conceptualization of "English teachers" in determining their preferences. For instance, for Jun (Group A: No Preference to No Preference), the dichotomy of NEST vs NNEST was definitely not an issue. As Jun explicitly states, "I don't really see the difference. NEST/NNEST is not an issue for me. I like diversity." In a similar line, although not articulated as strongly as Jun, Yuki (also categorized as Group A) states that "the language used (in the classroom) is always English, so it doesn't matter".

For Jun and Yuki, NNESTs are valued not only for their linguistic status, but for other non-linguistic qualities as well: "(NNESTs) share common educational culture, so they are able to understand our concerns." On the other hand, learners who expressed preference for NESTs (Group B) and for learners who expressed their initial preference for NESTs (Group C), teachers' proficiency in the target language appears to be a dominant factor in expressing their preferences for NESTs/NNESTs. For these students, "authentic pronunciation" was only made possible through interactions with native English speakers: "we can only use 'real English' with native speakers." Apparently, differences in learners' understanding of what constitutes "English teachers" appear to have a strong impact on their preferences for NESTs or NNESTs. It is also interesting to note that "shifts" in their preferences occur as their perceptions towards their teachers changes.

Theme 3: Another interesting point (a common thread in all three groups) that emerges from the transcript is how learners appear to regard "English" or their process of "learning English". When asked about their long-term goals for learning English, most of them expressed their wish to be able to communicate in English, and most hopefully, to be able to "use" English in their future careers: "I want to get a job where I can use English that I've learned. I hope to be able to examine Japanese culture and society and to describe it to the world."

One cannot help but sense a sort of "detachment" towards the target language from these transcripts: that is, learners would like to interact with speakers of English, but they are not particularly interested in identifying with them. As Jun indicated, they would like to be able to "examine Japanese culture and society and be able to describe them in English." Perhaps this is characteristic for students learning English in an EFL setting where exposure or opportunities to use the target language is limited.

Thus, this preliminary study indicates that the learners' previous experience with teachers, their perceptions of "English teachers" as well as their views towards

“English” and “learning English” are important factors to consider when discussing the issue of learners’ preferences. It highlights the fact that students who do not have a preference tend to frame NNESTs from a broader perspective rather than restricting them to their linguistic status. In this respect, our present study is in line with the current understanding in the literature: that NNESTs’ linguistic status is increasingly downplayed, and learners tend to take into account non-linguistic features such as being sympathetic with their learning process or providing mental support: “(NNESTs) understands our anxiety towards using English, and can be more sympathetic to us.” Portraying NESTs and NNESTs as opposite ends of the pole is obviously “fading” in this particular educational context. The study also brings to fore the significance of how learners’ views toward “English or learning English” have impact on making their choices. In fact, it appears that all three themes do not function independently, but instead, the issue of preference is largely the result of the complex interplay of all three factors that is context specific.

Conclusion

The focus of our current study is to examine the issue of the preference for NESTs or NNESTs from the learners’ perspective: to hear THEIR voices, for we believe that learners’ accounts could give us more insightful views in employing more appropriate approaches of teaching English as a foreign language. In particular, this study addressed some possible reasons for the changes of learners’ preferences and perceptions of their English teachers in Japan. However, factors such as the level of the learners, teachers’ profile (including their pedagogical approaches), and the details of the context of the study must also be taken into account to obtain a fuller picture. The issue should also be considered from a more global perspective as well: for instance, the present growing understanding of world Englishes may have reduced the value of “English” so that there no longer exists a so-called “authentic English”. This would in turn contribute to learners’ identifying with the international community of English users rather than a specific English speaking group, which could influence learners’ preferences. In spite of these limitations, we hope that this study helped to draw attention to the complex nature of the issue of NEST –NNEST preference, and set a direction for future studies.

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Appendix

Participant Questionnaire

1. In what ways do you think it is better to have a native speaker of English as your instructor here at ICU? Please check as many of the following as you wish. Also, please list any other reasons you may have:

- For Pronunciation
- For Authentic English
- For listening
- For speaking
- For learning culture
- We must speak English only.
- It is fun.

Other ideas? Please list them. You can respond in Japanese or English.

Voices of the Unheard

2. In what ways do you think it is better to have a non-native (Japanese) English speaker as your instructor here at ICU? Please check as many of the following as you wish. Also, please list any other reasons you may have:

They know how to learn English.

They understand us culturally.

We can use Japanese.

For grammar

We can be more relaxed.

Other ideas? Please list them. You can respond in Japanese or English.

3. While you are a university student, do you prefer to have a native English speaker for a teacher, a non-native (Japanese) English speaker for a teacher, or do you have no preference?

Native Speaker

Non-native Speaker

No preference

Please explain why below. You can respond in Japanese or English.