Differences between Native and Non-Native English Speaking Teachers in China from the Perspectives of Chinese EFL Students

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Abstract

This study investigated students' perceptions towards Native English Speaking Teachers (NESTs) and Non-Native English Speaking Teachers (NNESTs). Three research questions were asked: (1) What are Chinese EFL students' perceptions towards NESTs and NNESTs?, (2) Are NESTs' and NNESTs' teaching behaviors different according to Chinese EFL students' perceptions?, and (3) What are Chinese EFL students' opinions about the pros and cons of being taught by NESTs and NNESTs? A survey of 120 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in China was conducted. This study found significant differences between NESTs' and NNESTs' student-perceived teaching behaviors. Moreover, the findings of this study imply that some of these differences were possibly the result of the participants' cultural expectations towards the teachers, especially toward the local teachers (NNESTs). For example, the NNESTs were perceived to carry good teacher qualities in the traditional Confucian sense. On the other hand, although NESTs were not perceived as possessing the same traditional teaching traits, the participants seemed to still admire their teaching methods. In summary, the participants reported having different perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs, but they did not appear to favor one group over the other. One implication for these findings is that the belief of the native speaker fallacy was not found in this study. In other words, the participants did not believe that NESTs were inherently better teachers than NNESTs.

Keywords: Native English Speaking Teachers, Non-Native English Speaking Teachers, EFL, China, Students' perceptions

Introduction

In China, there are approximately 350 million English language learners, which is about a quarter of China's population (Liu, Zhou, & Fu, 2015). It is estimated that within few years, the population of all English-speaking countries combined will be outnumbered by the number of Chinese people who speak English as a foreign language (Whiteley & Xiangyi, 2011). Indeed, the English language represents the mediating tool of globalization, and govern-

ments in many Asian Pacific countries have placed English language learning as a top priority in education (Tsui & Tollefson, 2007). According to a news article reported by Ward and Francis (2010) at ABC News, the Chinese government extended English teaching programs to the kindergarten level and funded more programs for English teacher training and textbook development. It is estimated that China has the highest number of English language teachers compared to any one of the English-speaking countries (Liu, Zhou, & Fu, 2015). In response to the government's promotion of English language education, and in addition to hiring NNESTs, it is a common practice for teaching institutions in China to also hire NESTs from English-speaking countries. In fact, it is frequent to see that one of the requirements of language institutions for English language teachers is being a NEST. Moussu (2006) mentioned that after her observation of the international job board on a popular English language teaching and learning website, Dave's ESL Café, she concluded that the majority of the job offers required the applicants to be a native speaker of English. This is also true for English teaching jobs in China posted on this site. While this may not be surprising since postings on international job boards, such as Dave's ESL café, specifically target teachers outside of the local country, one can still see a strong preference for NESTs by simply visiting websites for two of the largest English training schools in China: *Disney English* and *English First*. In October of 2015, *Disney English* posted eight new English teaching positions on their website, all of which required applicants to be a NEST. On the Beijing *English First* website, the page presenting their teaching team has 13 NESTs and no NNESTs. Although Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) International Organization, the largest organization for teachers of English as a second or foreign language, made a statement two decades ago that it is discriminatory to use the native speaker status as a condition for employment (Llurda & Huguet, 2003); however, institutions seem to maintain their practice of hiring only NESTs. This discrimination toward NNESTs often occurs because they are seen as inferior to NESTs (Yoo, 2014). Often employers' explanation for choosing NESTs over NNESTs is that students prefer to be taught by NESTs (Clark & Paran, 2007; Holliday, 2008; Ma, 2012). However, it is not apparent that students prefer NESTs over NNESTs. In fact, many empirical studies showed that students believed both groups of teachers have their own strengths and weaknesses. The belief of the native speaker fallacy, meaning a native speaker is an ideal teacher (Diniz de Figueiredo, 2011), has no support from research (Walkinshaw & Duong, 2012). In light of this and the fact that China has the largest English teaching market involving the highest number of English language teachers in the world, it becomes necessary to understand the differences between the NESTs and the NNESTs in the specific learning context in China. Therefore, this study investigated the differences of NESTs and NNESTs by examining Chinese students' perceptions of each group.

Theoretical background

The term, native speaker, often implies being perfect in using the language. Defined by Chomsky (1965), a native speaker "knows its (the speech community's) language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions ... in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance" (p. 3). This prevalent notion in the 1960s of the native speaker as the ideal speaker has been brought into question (Llurda & Huguet, 2003) as the notion is considered problematic by researchers (Amin, 1997; Butcher, 2005; Ferguson, 1983; Kramsch, 1998; Leung, Harris, & Rampton, 1997; Paikeday, 1985). For example, Kramsch (1998) argued that native speakers cannot be ideal speakers as their language is influenced by their origins (e.g., geography or society). In fact, Paikeday (1985) questioned the true existence of a native speaker and believed that the term is a form of linguistic discrimination towards race. Butcher (2005) stated that the term implied the creation of a national identity and the divisions between groups. However, despite of these criticisms, it seems that the English language teaching (ELT) field still broadly holds what Holliday (2006) called the "native-speakerism" ideology, which is "characterized by the belief that "native-speaker" teachers represent the "Western culture" from which springs the ideals both of the English language and of English language teaching methodology" (p. 385). This ideology has impacted many aspects of the ELT profession, such as employment policy and training (Holliday, 2006), though it is not supported by any scientific evidence. As Diniz de Figueiredo (2011) stated, "the native/nonnative binary is still strongly present in ELT practice, despite the growing awareness that scholars have of how problematic this dichotomy is" (p. 420). Given the fact that China has the largest ELT market in the world and that Chinese employers hold the broadly believed native-speakerism ideology, it is important to understand the characteristics of NESTs and NNESTs working in China with hope that such understanding may help demystify the native speaker fallacy. Therefore, the purpose of the dichotomous identification of the NESTs and NNESTs in this study is not to make any generalization about them but to examine how they are actually perceived by the students. When identifying the two groups, this study took Medgyes' (1994) definition of the NEST, who

> was born in an English-speaking country and/or acquired English during childhood in an English-speaking family or environment; speaks English as his/her first language; has a native-like command of English; has the capacity to produce fluent, spontaneous discourse in English; uses the English language creatively; and has reliable intuitions to distinguish right and wrong forms in English. (p. 10)

Literature review

Since the pioneering work done by Medgyes (1994) on the differences between NESTs and NNESTs, researchers have applied different methodologies to investigate this issue in both English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. Many studies have taken the approach of learning the view of the students in understanding the differences between the two groups of teachers. Numerous studies (Benke & Medgyes, 2005; Cheung, 2002; Chun, 2014; Ma, 2012; Mahboob, 2004) found that students thought positively of NESTs' oral skills including pronunciation, vocabulary, and speaking. Another positive attribute of NESTs often identified by the students was their expert knowledge in western culture that they brought with them into the classroom (Cheung, 2002; Chun, 2014). However, NESTs were often seen as lacking understanding of their students' first language and culture (Grubbs, Jantarach, & Kettem, 2010) and as inadequate at explaining grammar (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005). In contrary, as former English language learners, NNESTs were viewed as successful role models for their students (Medgyes, 1994) who had more sensitivity, when compared to NESTs, to students' needs and learning difficulties (Ma, 2012). Nevertheless, NNESTs were perceived by their students as having inaccurate pronunciation (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005; Mahboob, 2004; Ma, 2012).

The recent studies of the differences between NESTs and NNESTs were mostly conducted in EFL learning contexts in western countries (e.g., Spain and Hungary,) or in ESL learning contexts (e.g., United States and Canada). Studies investigating students' views in an Asian EFL learning environment, such as Chun's (2014) and Han's (2005) are rare. Chun examined 125 Korean EFL university students' beliefs about the strengths, weaknesses, and preferences of NESTs and NNESTs and found that, contrary to previous studies in which NESTs were preferred for teaching writing and listening, the Korean participants in the study preferred Korean teachers. Chun suspected that this preference could be the result of a growing number of Korean teachers receiving their degrees in English-speaking countries before going back to teach English in Korea. The study-abroad experience increased their oral skills in English. Another possible explanation for the finding was that the Korean education has made more efforts in training Korean teachers' linguistic competence. Chun's explanations for the distinct finding from other studies seem to suggest that the finding is context-specific as it only occurred in the Korean EFL environment. In the study of 12 Korean adult learners' views about NESTs working in Korea, Han (2005) also found distinctive results contrary to other studies. The participants in Han's study favored NNESTs and expressed negative impressions of NESTs who, to their opinion, did not possess the qualities of a good teacher. Chun explained that the negative opinions of NESTs could be attributed to the Korean teaching and learning perspective held by the participants, which was deeply rooted in Confucianism. In the Confucian sense, teaching is not a job, but a mission. The participants believed

that teachers should be sincere, enthusiastic, and responsible; qualities they believed NESTs were lacking. The participants used a cultural concept, "iue-ri", meaning "a feeling of friendship, trust, warmth and faithfulness" (p. 207) to describe their relationship with the Korean teachers. On the other hand, they used the word "cold" to describe their NESTs. As Chun stated, the distinctive findings seemed to be culturally specific. The participants judged the teachers based on their own beliefs and expectations rooted in Confucianism. The results in both Chun's and Han's studies suggested that the specific social and cultural context of the learning environment could affect participants' opinions about NESTs and NNESTs. Considering that only few studies on NESTs and NNESTs were conducted in specific contexts in Asian countries, many of which were influenced by the Confucian thinking, which is distinct from 'western' thinking, the current study with a focus on China is needed to add to the current literature.

Research questions

This study included the following research questions:
1. What are Chinese EFL students' perceptions towards NESTs and NNESTs?
2. Are NESTs' and NNESTs' teaching behaviors different according to Chinese EFL students' perceptions?
3. What are Chinese EFL students' opinions about the pros and cons of being taught by NESTs and NNESTs?

Methodology

Participants

Survey questionnaires for this study were completed by 120 mainland Chinese EFL learners in four different learning environments in a province in northern China. The four learning environments included a university, a public high school, an after-school language program, and an English corner group that met once a week. There were 80 female and 40 male participants ranging in age from 14 to 43 with an average age of 19 (SD = 3.95). Among the 120 participants, 77 of them had previous experience of being taught by a NEST, while the remaining 43 participants had never been taught by a NEST. The majority, 65 of the 77 participants had been taught by one to three NESTs while the rest of the 12 participants had been taught by four to seven NESTs. Although 43 participants reported of having no learning experiences with NESTs, this study still included them because they may have had certain opinions about NESTs based on information received from others. For example, their friends might have been taught by NESTs and might have shared/discussed their experiences with NESTs. It is worthwhile to investigate students' perceptions towards NESTs and NNESTs regardless of whether the

students were actually taught by them or not as students' opinions may affect teacher-hiring decisions by schools, which subsequently, could affect the teaching quality. All the participants were from and in China and almost all of them (116 out of 120) had been taught by an NNEST with most of them (n = 81) taught by more than three NNESTs. With respect to the participants' majors, 35 participants were Science majors (e.g. physics, mathematics, statistics, and chemistry), 27 were Business majors (e.g. management, finance, marketing, public administration), and 26 were majoring in other disciplines. The rest of the 32 participants were high school students who did not have a major.

Instrument

The survey was adapted from Benke and Medgyes (2005), which had three sections. The first section contained questions, which asked for the participants' background information (e.g., age, gender, and whether or not they had been taught by a NEST or NNEST, etc.). The second section comprised of survey items, which were statements that described teaching behaviors. There were 23 items designed for NESTs and an identical set of 23 items for NNESTs. The survey was originally in English only; however, a Chinese translation was included in this study because the participants' native language was Chinese. The survey items were on a five-point Likert scale that assessed the participants' opinions about NESTs' and NNESTs' teaching behaviors. The scores range from 1, being "strongly agree", to 5, being "strongly disagree". The third section of the survey consisted of open-ended questions, which elicited information about the pros and cons of being taught by NESTs and NNESTs. The survey items were reliable and suitable for use in the current study as the development of the items were facilitated by the findings of Medgyes' (1994) and Arva and Medgyes's (2000) studies on similar target participants (EFL students) and also had been tested in pilot studies by Benke and Medgyes (2005). The open-ended questions in the last section allowed for more insights into the students' perceptions.

Data Analysis

For research question *(1) What are Chinese EFL students' perceptions towards NESTs and NNESTs?*, the participants' answers were tallied and the means, standard deviations, and percentages were ranked in descending order in Table 1 according to the degree of agreement. For research question (2) *Are NESTs' and NNESTs' teaching behaviors different according to Chinese EFL students' perceptions?*, a paired t-test was run to examine whether there were significant differences between NESTs and NNESTs based on students' views. For research question *(3) What are Chinese EFL students' opinions about the pros and cons of being taught by NESTs and NNESTs?,* the researchers read the participants' answers for the open-ended questions and highlighted the schemes which emerged from the answers separately. Next, the researchers

reviewed each other's work and discussed the schemes that were not in agreements. Finally, the inter-rater reliability was calculated, which was found to be at 96%.

Results

Participants' perceptions toward NESTs

Table 1 below presents the simple statistics of the participants' perceptions toward NESTs. The survey items are ranked in descending order based on the degree of agreement. More than half of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with 12 survey statements and disagreed or strongly disagreed with only two items (see italicized text in Table 1).

Table 1
Participants' perceptions towards NESTs

Statement	Mean	SD	Strongly agree ----- disagree Strongly %				
			1	2	3	4	5
run interesting classes	1.85	0.86	42	34	21	3	0
are interested in learners' opinions	1.98	0.90	34	39	23	2	2
provide extensive information about the culture of English speaking countries	2.04	0.83	28	44	24	4	0
apply group work regularly in class	1.97	0.84	35	34	29	2	0
prepare conscientiously for the lessons	2.02	0.85	33	35	30	2	0
apply pair work regularly in class	2.06	0.93	33	33	27	7	0
direct me towards autonomous learning	2.10	0.76	24	42	34	0	0
correct errors consistently	2.09	0.88	30	36	29	5	0
focus primarily on speaking skills	2.10	0.86	27	38	31	3	1
prefer teaching "differently"	2.16	0.89	25	40	29	5	1
assess my language knowledge realistically	2.16	0.85	27	32	38	3	0
prepare learners well for the exam	2.39	0.96	18	39	29	13	1
stick more rigidly to lesson	2.70	0.97	13	25	42	18	2

plans							
are too harsh in grading	2.78	1.01	15	18	39	25	1
are happy to improvise	2.89	0.95	12	14	49	23	2
speak most of the time during the lesson	3.05	0.95	10	11	45	32	2
prefer traditional forms of teaching	3.09	0.90	9	7	50	32	2
set a great number of tests	3.34	1.01	10	4	33	47	6
use ample supplementary material	2.34	0.78	1	13	44	38	3
are impatient	3.63	1.12	8	4	26	39	23
put more emphasis on grammar rules	3.30	0.70	1	9	51	37	2
assign a lot of homework	3.53	0.75	1	7	37	48	7
rely heavily on the textbook	3.68	0.72	1	3	32	55	9

Among the 12 teaching behaviors that the majority of the participants agreed that NESTs possessed, some confirmed the findings of previous studies, while others did not. Statements such as NESTs run interesting classes, are interested in learners' opinions, provide information about English culture, apply pair and group work, support autonomous learning, focus on speaking skills, and prefer teaching differently, comply with typical NESTs' teaching behaviors found in other studies (Benke & Medgyes, 2005; Medgyes, 1994). However, this study found that more than half of the participants thought that NESTs corrected errors consistently, assessed learners' language knowledge realistically, and prepared learners well for the exam, which were atypical findings for NEST teaching behaviors. This could be due to the NESTs in China having more understanding of, and responding to, the Chinese educational and cultural expectation, which emphasizes exams and test scores. With regard to teaching behaviors, which NESTs did not possess, the majority of the participants disagreed that NESTs rely heavily on the textbook and that they are impatient. This finding is consistent with Benke and Medgyes' (2005) study in which both NESTs and NNESTs were found to be patient teachers.

Table 2 showed the simple statistics of the participants' perceptions towards NNESTs. The majority of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with 14 items while disagreed or strongly disagreed with only one item (See italicized text in Table 2).

Table 2
Participants' perceptions towards NNESTs

Statement	Mean	SD	Strongly agree ----- Strong-ly disa-gree %				
			1	2	3	4	5
prepare conscientiously for the lessons	1.81	0.78	34	55	8	0	3
prepare learners well for the exam	1.88	0.79	32	52	11	5	0
correct errors consistently	1.93	0.86	31	52	13	2	2
stick more rigidly to lesson plans	2.20	0.83	18	51	24	6	1
provide extensive information about the culture of English speaking countries	2.30	0.94	18	48	21	12	1
are interested in learners' opinions	2.21	1.05	28	37	24	8	3
assess my language knowledge realistically	2.25	0.94	22	41	26	10	1
apply pair work regularly in class	2.38	0.99	18	43	21	17	1
run interesting classes	2.29	1.08	29	28	32	7	4
use ample supplementary material	2.52	0.98	12	43	31	9	5
are too harsh in grading	2.50	0.90	12	42	33	12	1
apply group work regularly in class	2.39	0.95	20	34	33	13	0
speak most of the time during the lesson	2.55	0.95	12	41	29	17	1
direct me towards autonomous learning	2.40	0.94	20	32	37	10	1
prefer teaching "differently"	2.69	1.09	16	31	22	30	1
put more emphasis on grammar rules	2.60	0.93	12	34	39	13	2
prefer traditional forms of teaching	2.61	0.89	10	35	40	13	2
set a great number of tests	2.81	1.14	14	27	27	26	6
focus primarily on speaking skills	2.80	1.11	16	23	30	28	3

rely heavily on the textbook	2.95	1.04	10	23	30	34	3
assign a lot of homework	3.08	1.06	8	23	29	33	7
are happy to improvise	3.33	0.82	2	11	42	41	4
are impatient	3.76	0.89	2	7	24	48	19

The results for NNESTs in this study revealed that some of the NNESTs' teaching behaviors were similar to the findings in other studies (Benke & Medgyes, 2005; Medgyes, 1994) such as: preparing conscientiously for the lessons, preparing learners well for the exam, correcting errors consistently, sticking rigidly to lesson plans, assessing learners' language knowledge realistically, speaking most of the time during the lesson, and being too harsh in grading. However, similar to the findings for NESTs, this study also found atypical teaching behaviors for NNESTs. The majority of the participants felt that NNESTs provided information about the culture of English-speaking countries, applied pair and group work in class, were interested in learners' opinions, ran interesting classes, and directed learners towards autonomous learning. These atypical NNESTs' teaching behaviors could mean that the teaching style of the NNESTs in China might be changing and their knowledge of western culture might be improving. However, given the small scale of this study, no definite and generalized conclusions could be drawn and suggested until future research confirms it. With regard to the teaching behaviors that NNESTs did not possess, the participants disagreed that NNESTs were impatient. This finding is identical to Benke and Medgyes' (2005) finding that both NESTs and NNESTs were patient teachers.

Comparing NESTs with NNESTs

A paired t-test was run to examine any significant differences between NESTs and NNESTs from the participants' perceptions. The t-test results showed that two survey items ("are impatient" $t = -1.398$, $p = .165$ and "assess my language knowledge realistically" $t = -1.291$, $p = .199$) were insignificant. In other words, the participants felt that NESTs and NNESTs were equally patient and equally able to assess learners' language knowledge realistically. This finding was in contrary to other studies which found that NESTs were perceived to be less able to assess learners' language knowledge and needs (Benke & Medgyes, 2005; Medgyes, 1994), and were less enthusiastic and patient (Chun, 2014). On the other hand, this study found significance in all of the other items. The participants felt that compared to NESTs, NNESTs stuck more rigidly to lesson plans, were harsher in grading, were better at preparing learners for the exam, liked traditional ways of teaching more, lectured more, gave more tests, put more emphasis on grammar, relied more on the textbook, were more prepared for the lessons, corrected errors more frequently, and assigned more homework. In addition, the participants reported that compared to NNESTs, NESTs applied more pair and group work in class, gave more direction to students towards autonomous learning, were more willing to improvise,

were more focused on speaking, preferred teaching "differently", ran more interesting classes, used more supplementary material, provided more information about culture, and were more interested in learners' opinions.

It seems that when examining one group of teachers alone using simple statistics, some of the atypical teaching behaviors of the group were found; however, when comparing the two groups for distinguishing differences in teaching behaviors, most of the typical teaching behaviors of the groups found by other studies were confirmed in this study. This could be due to the typical teaching behaviors being the strongest teaching traits of the two groups, though the atypical teaching behaviors also gained the participants' attention. For example, although the participants agreed that NNESTs lectured more than NESTs, NNESTs were also recognized for doing pair and group work by more than half of the participants.

The pros to being taught by an NEST

The participants expressed that NESTs possessed good pronunciation and oral skills, and focused on improving students' oral skills in the classroom. The participants used the keywords such as "fluent", "wonderful", "pure", "standard", and "authentic" to describe NESTs' spoken English. Due to NESTs' expertise in spoken English, the participants believed that NESTs could help them better improve their oral skills. The participants mentioned that their pronunciation could become more standard, their spoken English could improve, and they could learn pragmatic uses of English from NESTs better. In addition, many of the participants believed that their improvement in oral English would be quicker if they talked with NESTs. The participants also believed that NESTs focusing on the teaching of oral skills, which represent authentic communication in English, would lead students to studying better Spoken English. Along with good oral English, the participants thought that NESTs brought them "foreign culture", which refers to the culture of English-speaking or western countries. Many participants expressed that NESTs had a deeper understanding of the foreign culture, which was interesting and fun to learn. As one participant described, NESTs' cultural knowledge could help them "better adapt to a foreign culture, understand their ways of thinking, open up to a world view, and understand western society better." Besides the expert knowledge in English and its culture, the participants liked that NESTs offered an active and interesting teaching style, which created a positive classroom environment. The keywords appearing in the data coding regarding NESTs teaching style were "active", "creative", "flexible", "fresh", "fun", "interesting", "lively", and "humorous". One participant felt that with NESTs, "the students have more freedom. They express their opinions when they want and there are many small games. It makes the classroom very active. There are benefits that help students develop their ability to express ideas and improve their creativity."

The cons to being taught by an NEST

The cons of this study, due to being taught by NESTs, were mainly related to communication difficulties between NESTs and their students. One reason, which resulted in communication problems between the two parties, was the participants' weak English listening skills and their NESTs fast speaking pace in English. As many NESTs did not speak the students' L1, explanations in English were sometimes not adequate and effective. One participant explained, "in the classroom there is a lot that I don't understand, and the teacher has no way of explaining." A second reason often showed in the participants' answers about the communication barrier was a result of cultural differences between NESTs and their students. Some participants felt that there was a gap between NESTs' and students' ways of thinking. One participant expressed that he was "not able to follow the teacher's way of thinking at times." Another participant guessed that his NEST and he "probably have some cultural collision." Another participant believed that "there are some definite gaps in culture, ideology and values." A third reason that explains the communication problems is the type of English accents NESTs have. Most of the Chinese EFL students studied American English; therefore, if the NESTs were not from America, or had heavy local accents, students would have a hard time comprehending them. One participant said, "Some have very strong local accents making them hard to understand." As a result of the communication problems, the participants felt that it decreased their interest in learning English.

The pros to being taught by an NNEST

The positive traits the participants in this study often used to describe NNESTs include "serious", "disciplined", "meticulous", "strict", "responsible", and "patient". Although according to the statistical finding aforementioned in this study, both NESTs and NNESTs were equally patient, the participants emphasized the NNESTs' patience more often than that of the NESTs' in the open-ended answers. They also stressed how responsible NNESTs were. As one participant said, "Every non-native English teacher is responsible." The participants also highlighted the barrier-free communication they had with NNESTs. They thought that it was because the NNESTs shared the same L1 and culture with them. As one participant said, NNESTs "understand students' actual abilities because they understand Chinese people." In the participants' opinion, NNESTs not only knew how their students felt, but also knew more about the education system and the students' needs.

The participants identified NNESTs' teaching style as "traditional", which as one participant described, "is logical and it concentrates on accumulating knowledge and teaching to the test", and was considered a positive teaching trait of NNESTs. To the participants, the traditional way of teaching English also focused on the teaching of grammar. The participants felt that NNESTs were able to teach grammar in more depth as their explanations of

grammar were logical and clear, which was helpful in improving their test scores and reading skills. Many participants mentioned that it was easier to accept and adapt to the traditional Chinese way of teaching as the teachers and students sharing the "same culture makes it easier to learn." Besides understanding more about the students due to the shared culture, NNESTs were seen as knowing each student's strengths and weaknesses, and teaching students in accordance of their aptitudes. Both of these traits were advocated by Confucius as great teacher traits. This finding suggests that the participants might be influenced by Confucian thinking taught throughout their schooling in China.

The cons to being taught by an NNEST

Many of the participants agreed that one weakness of NNESTs is their English accents. The participants used the following words to describe the accents: "bad", "incorrect", "terrible", "not standard", "not pure", and "not authentic". The negative opinion of the participants of NNESTs' accents made them believe that NNESTs lacked proficiencies in speaking and listening; therefore, they were not qualified to teach oral skills. Some participants even thought that spending too much time with an NNEST will negatively affect their learning of oral skills as one of them said, "Too much time with a Chinese teacher can make it difficult to adjust to foreign teachers [NESTs]." The other negative trait of NNESTs that the participants strongly felt was that their teaching style could be boring. As the participants described, NNESTs used a single method of teaching, which was mostly lecturing and the teacher did not have frequent interactions with students. Some participants explained that this kind of teaching method had the objective of teaching to the test in order to prepare students for high scores; however, many of them thought it was "rigid", "boring", and "not interesting". One participant expressed, "Most of us don't need to understand English too well, just need to communicate without hindrance, can write and speak. The rigid teaching styles make us very annoyed. I think it's a very dry and boring style." Despite feeling bored, the participants also felt more pressured to perform in NNESTs' classrooms. One participant described her experience with an NNEST and said that the NNEST "makes us recite the texts we learned in the last class. If we can't give the right answer, we will have to stand still. That's the most terrible thing."

Conclusion

This study intended to answer three research questions. For research question *(1) What are Chinese EFL students' perceptions towards NESTs and NNESTs?*, in addition to identifying typical teaching patterns of NESTs and NNESTs found by previous studies, this study also found atypical teaching features of NESTs and NNESTs that more than half of the 120 participants agreed with. For example, other studies (Barratt & Kontra, 2000; Medgyes, 1994) found that NESTs tolerated errors, but in this study, the participants

thought NESTs corrected errors consistently. Another example is that in other studies, NNESTs were found to be less knowledgeable about teaching the cultures of English-speaking countries (Mahboob, 2003); however, the participants in this study believed that NNESTs provided extensive information about the culture. Even though the simple tally of the survey answers showed that both NESTs and NNESTs were perceived by the majority to conduct atypical teaching behaviors, when the results were compared against each other in order to answer research question *(2) Are NESTs' and NNESTs' teaching behaviors different according to Chinese EFL students' perceptions?* using a paired t-test, the typical teaching behaviors were still the strongest teaching traits of the two teacher groups. The findings from research questions one and two imply that there is a possibility that the teaching behaviors of both the teacher groups are slightly changing. For example, NESTs understand more about the Chinese students' needs for testing well; hence, correcting their errors more frequently, and NNESTs in China gaining more knowledge of western culture; hence, able to teach it extensively to students, though the change was not large enough to make a significant difference when comparing the two groups. For research question *(3)What are Chinese EFL students' opinions about the pros and cons of being taught by NESTs and NNESTs?*; the findings in this study regarding NESTs' teaching behaviors that the participants liked such as good oral skills, expert knowledge in culture, and active teaching style were consistent with the findings in other studies (Benke & Medgyes, 2005; Cheung, 2002; Chun, 2014; Ma, 2012; Mahboob, 2004). The NESTs' teaching behaviors that the participants disliked in this study, such as communication barriers resulting from cultural and language differences also confirmed the results found in the other studies. However, when asking about the pros and cons of NNESTs' teaching, most keywords that emerged from the participants' answers are related to Confucian thinking. Keywords such as "responsible", "patient", "knowing each students' strengths and weaknesses", and "teaching students in accordance with their aptitudes" were all teacher characteristics identified and promoted by Confucius in his book, *Analects of Confucius*. Ironically, while the participants stressed the good teaching characteristics of NNESTs and how suitable and easy-to-adapt their traditional teaching style was, when asking them to identify the cons of being taught by NNESTs, the same teaching behaviors become negative. The participants felt the teaching style could be boring and stressful, though earlier they mentioned it as a pro for their learning style and for preparing them for the test. This could be attributed to the participants being caught between their learning preferences and the importance of doing well on tests in their culture. In other words, it is possible that the participants believed that the traditional way of teaching was easy to adapt to, as it had been the way for them to learn in the Chinese education system and would help them prepare for tests. However, the traditional way of learning might be boring, especially if the participants had experienced more interactive teaching approaches in the past. The fact that they were constantly learning to prepare for tests could also be stressful. It is also interesting

to note that unlike Chun's (2014) Korean study, in which the participants with Confucian thinking spoke negatively about NESTs, the participants in this study spoke positively about NESTs' teaching style. These findings are new to the field and did not confirm the findings in Benke and Medgyes' (2005) study, which used the same survey questions to elicit students' answers. In Benke and Medgyes' study, the participants' answers for the open-ended questions regarding the pros and cons of NESTs' and NNESTs' teaching reiterated the answers in the earlier parts of the questionnaire. Conversely, in this study, Chinese cultural elements, specifically the Confucian thinking and the testing system, had influenced the participants' perceptions of the NNESTs' teaching.

Discussion and implications

Similar to other studies, this study found significant differences between NESTs' and NNESTs' student-perceived teaching behaviors. Moreover, the findings of this study imply that some of these differences were possibly the result of the participants' cultural expectations towards the teachers, especially toward the local teachers (NNESTs). It seems that the NNESTs were perceived to possess good teacher qualities in the traditional Confucian sense. However, although NESTs were not perceived to carry the same traditional teaching traits, in fact, most of the teaching was the opposite of the traditional traits, the participants seemed to also admire their teaching.

In summary, the participants reported having different perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs, but they did not appear to favor one group over the other. One implication for these findings is that the belief of the native speaker fallacy was not found in this study. In other words, the participants did not believe that NESTs were inherently better teachers than NNESTs. These findings confirm other studies; the native speaker fallacy is not supported by research and the English-teaching communities need to discontinue the belief of the native speaker fallacy when making hiring decisions. Rather, they should select teachers, regardless of their status as NESTs or NNESTs, based on professional knowledge and skills to teach language learners. Another implication of these findings is that NESTs who plan to teach English overseas should acquire knowledge of the local culture to diminish the communication and cultural conflicts when they are in contact with their students. On the other hand, NNESTs who already understand and comply with local ways of teaching, can explore new pedagogical methods to try to achieve better teaching practices.

Finally, these findings showed that different contexts and variables could have influenced the participants' perceptions towards NESTs and NNESTs and more studies will be needed to confirm the findings in this and previous studies in different contexts. For example, as the literature review section of this paper shows, there is a lack of studies such as this, investigating students' views in an Asian EFL learning environment. It would be beneficial to study the different Asian EFL communities in both Confucian and non-Confucian cultures.

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