The Korean Middle School EFL Learners’ Perception Towards NESTs and Non-NESTs

Hye-Min Kim
(International Graduate School of English)


This study attempts to investigate students’ perception towards the differences between native English speaking teachers (NESTs) and non-native English speaking teachers (Non-NESTs). For this purpose, 552 Korean EFL learners from two middle schools in Korea participated in responding the questionnaire. The questionnaire was broken down into three sections: General characteristics of participants; students’ experience with NESTs and Non-NESTs; and students’ perception towards effective English language teaching. The major findings are that Korean middle school EFL learners have the same criteria for identifying who qualified NESTs and Non-NESTs are; Korean Non-NESTs are still more dependent on grammar and receptive English language skills rather than Communicative Language Teaching and productive English language skills; Korean EFL learners prefer using both their first language (L1) and second language (L2) in their English classes, as apposed to exclusive use of L1 or L2; and NESTs often have trouble with their students because of lack of knowledge about their students.

I. INTRODUCTION

Communicative approach is one of the main principles that organize the 7th Korean National Curriculum of English (KNCE). The main purpose of the curriculum is to help students “to develop English language skills to enable them to communicate effectively with foreigners on general, everyday topics” (Liu, Gil-Soon Ahn, Kyung-Suk Baek & Nan-Ok Han, 2004, p. 606). Consequently, English listening and speaking skills have become more important to both Korean EFL teachers and learners than at any other time.

In 2001, the Korean Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (MOE) proposed that local Korean English teachers should teach English through English, “a progress which discouraged a majority of local English teachers since few had the English
language proficiency to meet the demand” (Mihyon Jeon & Jiyoon Lee, 2006, p. 57). Accordingly, due to their limitation of productive English language skills and the demand for English by Korean EFL learners and parents, native English speaking teachers (NESTs) from English speaking countries were employed by many of Korean public and private schools. On reflection of the government policy in 2005, MOE proclaimed “a Five Year Plan for English Education Revitalization,” which would place a NEST in each middle school by 2010 (a total of 2,900 NESTs nationally), and maintain a “one NEST per school policy” at elementary and high school levels in Korea. In the long run, the government plans that each elementary and high school will have at least one NEST (Mihyon Jeon & Jiyoon Lee, 2006, p. 57).

Despite the trend of employing NESTs at each school to meet the government’s policy, many schools are in a dilemma because they have not considered enough the advantages and disadvantages of having NESTs at school, nor have they considered how cooperation between NESTs and Korean non-native English speaking teachers (Non-NESTs) might contribute to effective English language classes. Furthermore, with the so-called “NESTs movement,” the value of Non-NESTs has been overlooked because of their lack of English language competency.

However, NESTs and Non-NESTs have both advantages and disadvantages when it comes to English language teaching. For example, Medgyes (2001, p. 434) argues that NESTs and Non-NESTs have their own values:

- NESTs and Non-NESTs differ in terms of their language proficiency.
- They differ in terms of their teaching behavior.
- Their discrepancy in language proficiency accounts for most of the differences found in their teaching behavior.
- They can be equally good teachers on their own terms.

To reflect the current issue of NESTs and Non-NESTs, there have been several pieces of research to examine their characteristics and to propose valuable pedagogical suggestions to the people involved in English language education (e.g., Benke & Medgyes, 2005; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005; Pacek, 2005). Braine (2005) grouped these studies into two categories according to the main participants of the studies: Self-perceptions of English language teachers and students’ perceptions about their English language teachers. Nonetheless, only a few studies have been conducted about students’ attitudes and preferences, when compared to the number of studies about teachers’ self-perceptions. For that reason, this research focuses on Korean middle school EFL learners’ perceptions towards their English language teachers, specifically both NESTs and Non-NESTs.

The purpose of this study is to investigate how Korean middle school EFL learners
perceive the differences between NESTs and Non-NESTs. It also aims to provide notable pedagogical suggestions concerning appropriate roles for both NESTs and Non-NESTs in English language classes. With these two aims established, the research questions are as follows:

1. How do Korean middle school EFL learners view NESTs and Non-NESTs?
2. What do Korean middle school EFL learners expect from NESTs and Non-NESTs?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Native English Speaking Teachers (NESTs)

1) Advantages of NESTs

In Barratt and Kontra’s study (2000), most of their respondents had experience with NESTs, and were asked to freewrite their positive and negative comments. Their responses about one of the NESTs’ most valuable advantages turned out to be “authenticity.” Thus, their advantages were summarized as authentic pronunciation, wide vocabulary, and information about culture. In addition, the respondents, from Hungary and China, added that NESTs displayed more relaxed attitudes towards grades and error correction.

In Tang’s study (1997), his research participants responded that NESTs were good for areas of speaking, pronunciation, listening, vocabulary, and reading. Furthermore, Medgyes (1994) revealed that NESTs were regarded as those who used more real language and provided more cultural information. Based on the above literature review, Lasagabaster and Sierra (2005) found that their respondents chose NESTs in the areas of pronunciation, culture and civilization, listening, vocabulary and speaking.

Benke and Medgyes (2005) studied the differences in teaching behavior between NESTs and Non-NESTs based on the learners’ responses. Learners recognized NESTs’ high ability to teach conversation classes, to serve as perfect models for imitation, and to motivate their students to speak. Some of them also mentioned that NESTs were friendlier, and their classes were more “lively” and “colorful” than Non-NESTs.

Unlike other research using data obtained from questionnaires, Árva and Medgyes (2000) examined NESTs and Non-NESTs’ behavior in the classroom through a series of video-recorded lessons. They found some distinguishing characteristics of NESTs: NESTs were timetabled to do what they could do best and to use English for communicative purposes; NESTs were rich sources of cultural information about any topic around which the lessons were structured; their overall success of the lessons was ensured by thorough
preparation. None of them used course books in class; they designed and made their own materials in the form of newspaper cutouts, posters and worksheets. Also, their classes were plainly structured with activities linked to each other in the logical order.

2) Disadvantages of NESTs

Barratt and Kontra (2000) presented the disadvantages responded from participants. NESTs had a lack of awareness of their EFL learners’ grammar knowledge as well as that of their linguistic and cultural knowledge. Furthermore, since they were not language teachers, they did not have enough teaching experience.

Also, Benke and Medgyes (2005) found that NESTs often felt difficult to understand lower level learners. Without a shared native language, NESTs tended to leave problems unexplained and to create a communication gap between them and their learners because of the different cultural and language backgrounds.

In the research of Árva and Medgyes (2000), (it was noted that some activities, which were regarded as NESTs’ good aspects, were launched and never finished: They spent too much time with a certain group at the expense of others; after the groups had dwelt on a task for 10 minutes, some were not given a chance to present their project; discussions occasionally dragged on endlessly, stealing the time from other tasks.)

2. Non-Native English Speaking Teachers (Non-NESTs)

1) Advantages of Non-NESTs

“For although native speakers obviously have the more extensive experience as English language users, the non-native speakers have had experience as English language learners. They have been through the process of coming to terms with English as another language” (Widdowson, 1992, p. 338).

Recently, numerous studies have proven that NESTs find it very difficult to maintain their position as “representatives of the tongue” (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005). With the changing view of the role of English in the world, English is no longer considered as the property of NESTs only (Pacek, 2005). Thus, the status of Non-NESTs has been regarded as important as NESTs. According to Seidlhofer (1999), Non-NESTs can easily help students to pinpoint those linguistic and non-linguistic problems and to lead them to strategies that facilitate the learning process, since they have gone through the same foreign language learning experience as their students.

Related to the same issue, Tang’s research (1997) demonstrated that Non-NESTs were
associated with accuracy rather than fluency. Additionally, his research, conducted with Árva, was strengthened by the findings that unlike NESTs, Non-NESTs resorted more often to error correction and supplied less cultural information (Árva & Medgyes, 2000).

Lasagabaster and Sierra (2005) concluded that 70 percent of the groups clearly showed that students found Non-NESTs helpful as resources of learning strategies throughout the process of learning English. Similarly, Medgyes (1992) provided the following advantages of Non-NESTs from the students’ perceptions in his research: Non-NESTs are imitative models, and are effective teachers of learning strategies; they are great providers of language information, and have the ability to deal with language difficulties; they are more empathic to the needs and problems of learners; and moreover, they share the learner’s mother tongue.

Another interesting result gained from learners’ perception, conducted by Benke and Medgyes (2005), is that Non-NESTs always or often give a lot of homework, plan their lessons thoroughly, and consistently check for errors. Also, they can provide more thorough exam preparation and stand a better chance of detecting cheats. Since they can use their students’ mother tongue, they can supply the exact equivalent of certain English words and develop translation skills. Furthermore, they never or rarely lose their patience and tend to apply middle-of-the-road methods.

In Árva and Medgyes’ research (2000) based on the video-recorded NESTs and Non-NESTs’ behavior in the classroom, most Non-NESTs used English almost exclusively during the class, which is a totally different result from their interview and other related studies. They dealt with some aspects of grammar in class, but a variety of practice techniques and procedures, including communicative tasks, were applied to teaching structured patterns in context. Their lessons were more varied than NESTs’ lessons, putting more importance on speaking skills throughout the class.

Medgyes (2001) elaborated on six assumptions about benefits of Non-NESTs, partly inspired from the teacher responding to the survey. Compared to NESTs, Non-NESTs can:

- provide a better learner model,
- teach language-learning strategies more effectively,
- supply more information about the English language,
- better anticipate and prevent language difficulties,
- be more sensitive to their students, and
- benefit from their ability to use the students’ mother tongue (p. 436).

2) Disadvantages of Non-NESTs

Whereas there are many advantages of Non-NESTs seen above, their disadvantages also
exist. Medgyes (1994) stated that while Non-NESTs were relatively at ease with grammar and reading, their weak parts were in the area of vocabulary, speaking, and pronunciation. In Benke and Medgyes’ study (2005), the use of their mother tongue was also reflected as a disadvantage with their bad pronunciation and outdated language use because they used their first language too much in class.

Similarly, Árva and Medgyes (2000) found that Non-NESTs tended to rely on one or more course books. They also, resorted to students’ error correction, spent too much time checking students’ work, and assigned more homework to students than NESTs. As expected, Non-NESTs’ classes dealt with very little cultural content. Furthermore, Non-NESTs imposed formal discipline: Insisting on chorus greetings and formal reporting.

### III. METHOD

1. Participants

The participants in this research consisted of 552 Korean middle school students ranging in age 14-16 out of the original total number 593. All the students have studied English as a mandatory school subject since the third grade of elementary school. Two middle schools were selected for this study: S middle school in Seoul, and P middle school in Gyeonggi Province. S middle school has both a NEST and Non-NESTs for its English classes. However, only the second and third grade students of S middle school had been taught by a NEST and Non-NESTs, while the first grade students had never been taught by a NEST at school. In contrast, P middle school did not have NESTs but only Non-NESTs at school. Therefore, none of the P school students had ever experienced being taught by a NEST at school. Although the total number of 276 participants of S middle school responded the questionnaire, the questionnaires from 241 respondents were collected as valid data: 65 from the first grade students, 91 from the second grade students, and 85 from the third grade students of S middle school. In P middle school, on the other hand, 311 participants’ data, out of 317, were considered valid: 149 from the first year students, 120 from the second year students, and 42 from the third year students.

In this research, all the participants from both schools are divided into two groups according to their background data gathered from the questionnaire: One group (N=306) which has been taught by NESTs inside or outside of school and the other group (N=246) which has never been taught by NESTs inside or outside of school.
2. Materials

The data was collected by means of a questionnaire including a total number of thirty nine questions. After the questionnaire was piloted on a small sample, several modifications were carried out by expert validation. The questionnaire was broken down into three sections (see Appendix): General characteristics of participants; students’ experience with NESTs and Non-NESTs; and students’ perception towards effective English language teaching. The first section of the questionnaire contained eight items which asked for participants’ background information. The second section contained 11 items, including close-ended questions requiring one or more responses. The last section of the survey involved 20 items consisting of both close-ended questions and open-ended questions. The open-ended items in the last section were for gathering detailed information about students’ thoughts toward NESTs and Non-NESTs.

3. Procedures

The questionnaire was completed in class at the end of the second semester in 2006. It was mailed to teachers in S middle school and P middle school, and distributed to 282 S middle school students and 311 P middle school students. The purpose of the survey was clearly explained in advance to teachers with some additional important instructions. The teachers from each school were willing to hand out the questionnaire and to monitor its completion during class time, which allowed the high return rate (93%) of the survey.

The questionnaire was anonymous, and students were asked to be as honest and objective in their answers as possible. Although their questionnaire was unnamed, their background information was provided in the first section of the questionnaire. This was intended to find a criterion to divide the students into two groups for the study: The group exposed to NESTs (EN) and the group not exposed to NESTs (NEN).

4. Data Analysis

To analyze the data collected, SPSS 11.5 Version for Windows was utilized for data coding, entry, and analysis. In the close-ended questions, descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, and multiple responses were used to organize and analyze the data from the respondents; conversely, the various responses from the open-ended questions were grouped into a number of categories.

Originally, this study started with the assumption that the responses of EN and NEN might differ according to their experience with NESTs; thus, the questionnaire was analyzed by EN and NEN. Unlike the preliminary assumption, most of the results were
found to be similar. As a result, the following discussions are not concerned much with the difference between EN and NEN.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Criteria for Good English Language Teachers

With respect to the question, “What are the participants’ criteria for a good NEST and Non-NEST?” the results for a good NEST and Non-NEST has turned out to be the same (see TABLE 1). The top three criteria for a good NEST are English teaching method, familiarity with students and English proficiency level. The criteria for a good Non-NEST are English teaching method, English proficiency level and Familiarity with students.

As can be seen from the results above, the students have equivalent criteria for both good NESTs and Non-NESTs. Therefore, no matter which country their teachers are from, their most crucial standard for a good English language teacher is how good their teaching method is, how good their English language proficiency is, and how familiar and comfortable they are with their students. This result is analogous to Ae-Jin Kang’s research (2004) in that students’ interests in English language teaching is more related to the teacher being prepared for each class, providing proper feedback to students, and taking care of students’ affective aspects. In addition, they do not make any serious distinction between NESTs and Non-NESTs, concerning who should be in charge of an English class as long as their teacher’s English language proficiency is good enough to give a lecture in English.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>NESTs EN</th>
<th>NESTs NEN</th>
<th>Non-NESTs EN</th>
<th>Non-NESTs NEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English proficiency level</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>30.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English teaching method</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>38.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronunciation</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familiarity with students</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>.3</td>
<td>.7</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total responses</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Multiple Response

In terms of English teaching method, McCargar (1993) argues that teaching methods unfamiliar to students do not help students adjust their challenging risks because of the violation of their expectations about teaching methods. Therefore, one suggestion for
English language teachers is that they should become familiar with their students’ expectations and use the teaching method consistent with their expectations. He also suggests that when teachers need to change the teaching method, they alter or modify slowly or very little by using learner training to help students change their expectations.

Dong-Il Shin (2003) presents the importance of the familiarity with students and English language proficiency for a qualified English language teacher by providing assessment criteria of Korean Non-NESTs derived from students’ perspectives. According to the study, the ability to be familiar with students and understand their stress is as follows (p. 96):

- controlling too active student groups in class,
- counseling those pressured by exclusive student groups,
- helping students have a good relationship with each other,
- teachers themselves actively participating in class activities,
- lessening the stress of English-medium course, giving orientation programs at the beginning of the semester,
- having extracurricular activities in class often, and
- using appropriate amount of Korean and building the rapport between teacher and students in and out of class.

In addition, in-depth items of English language proficiency include (p. 97):

- speaking English with the appropriate speed by considering students’ level of English,
- having a qualified English communicative competence to express what they are supposed to deliver, and
- having confidence when giving a lecture in English despite their errors or mistakes.

2. Necessity for Communicative Language Teaching

As the 7th Korean National Curriculum of English (KNCE) focuses on achieving English communication skills (Cunningsworth, 1995; Vogel et al., 1982), the current English textbooks are based on CLT approach. The change from the 6th curriculum involves “more variety of communicative functions, samples of communication, learner-oriented activities offered at different levels and in the techniques of putting together 4 language functions” (Mae-Ran Park & Kang-Oak Suh, 2003, p. 341). Unlike the approach of present English textbooks, however, it is recognized that many Asian Non-NESTs, including Korean Non-NESTs, still focused on grammar and translation, which caused students to have insufficient communication skills (Butler, 2004; Chen, 2002; Legaretta, 1979; Silver, Hu, & Iino, 2002).
Similarly, the data in this study has shown that Korean Non-NESTs generally teach grammar, reading, and listening the most (see TABLE 2). Furthermore, some of the students’ main responses towards Non-NESTs are concerned with Non-NESTs’ low English proficiency level and their too much focus on grammar. This concern reflects that Korean Non-NESTs have a high degree of explicit English grammar knowledge (Butler, 2004), and that until recently, many of the English tests have emphasized the importance of learners’ grammar knowledge (Silver, Hu & Iino, 2002). That is, it implies that despite the recommendation of the textbooks and curriculum guidelines, Korean Non-NESTs are unprepared for CLT in terms of their English language proficiency and how to teach communicative competence to students (Hae-Ri Kim, 2004).

TABLE 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>32.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronunciation</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning strategy</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total responses</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Multiple Response

The exclusive use of the target language in English classes has been regarded as crucial especially in the EFL context where students are not generally exposed to English language input except in the foreign language classroom (Ellis, 1984; Omaggio Hadley, 2001; Polio, 1996; Richard & Rodgers, 2001; Zéphir & Chirol, 1993). Because of the limited amount of exposure to L2 outside the classroom, the quantity of L2 input is greatly needed for EFL learners (Duff & Polio, 1990). Chaudron (1988) argues that “in the typical foreign language classroom, the common belief is that the fullest competence in the TL (target language) is achieved by means of the teacher providing a rich TL environment, in which not only instruction and drill are executed in the TL, but also disciplinary and management operations” (p. 121).

In order to provide L2 input in the EFL classroom, high proficiency of the target language is deemed “the most valued aspect of a non-native teacher’s competence” (Murdoch, 1994, p. 253). However, as Kyung-Min Lee (2002) reports, very few Korean Non-NESTs have a good command of English sufficient to teach English through English. To solve this problem, for
example, MOE required elementary school teachers to complete a minimum of 120 hours of in-service teacher training; nevertheless, teachers might need more supplementary support. Butler (2004) proposes the following steps for ELT educators to assist English language teachers: Identify necessary proficiency levels, create appropriate guidelines and assessments for specific contexts in each country, and provide more systematic support for teachers.

Duff and Polio (1990, p. 162) also suggest some pedagogical proposals about the effective use of L2 in the classroom:

- Make input comprehensible through verbal modifications,
- Make input comprehensible through nonverbal means,
- Have classes videotaped for self-evaluation,
- Establish an L2-only (“no L1”) policy for the teacher from the start,
- Establish a brief period when teacher and students can use L1 to clarify material from a lesson,
- Let the students speak L1 when necessary,
- Stress that all language need not be comprehended,
- Explicitly teach and then use grammatical terms in the L2, and
- Provide supplementary grammatical material in L1.

Furthermore, Non-NESTs who teach English in the EFL context need to make an effort to stimulate students’ communicative competence by integrating classroom activities and groupings on the CLT approach (Saito & Ebsworth, 2004).

3. Effectiveness of Using Both L1 and L2 in Class

As shown in TABLE 3, the most effective way of teaching English for students is when they are taught by two languages, both Korean and English. The top three effective ways of teaching English are “Korean Non-NESTs use both Korean and English,” “Both Non-NESTs and NESTs teach together;” and “NESTs use both Korean and English.”

In the same way, the result of the least effective way of teaching English support the outcome of the former question; that is, students have considered using only one language in class the least effective way of teaching English. The three least effective ways of teaching English were “Non-NESTs use only Korean,” “NESTs use only English,” and “Non-NESTs use only English.”

Based on the students’ open-ended responses toward NESTs and Non-NESTs, the reasons originated from problems of communication breakdowns between teacher and students when the teacher uses only English in class. Accordingly, it is necessary that Non-NESTs’ use of some Korean in teaching English through English (TETE) to help
Indeed, several studies show that the partial use of the learners’ native language can be more helpful than the exclusive use of the target language (e.g., Antón & DiCamilla, 1998; Atkinson, 1987, 1993; Auerbach, 1993; Brooks & Donato, 1994; Cook, 2001; Hagen, 1992; Jensen & Vinther, 1983; Kharma & Hajjaj, 1989; Macaro, 1996, 1997; Polio & Duff, 1994; Schweers, 1999; Swain & Lapkin, 2000; Turnbull, 2001; Van Lier, 1995; Villamil & De Guerrero, 1996). According to Auerbach (1993), for instance, using L1 reduces affective barriers to English acquisition and allows for more rapid progress. Saito and Ebsworth (2004) also argue that Non-NESTs in the ESL or EFL contexts should be patient with “the judicious use of students’ L1, particularly when this support allows for a complex explanation or the expression of sensitive feelings and ideas” (p. 119). Moreover, Kraemer (2006) made eight different functions to use L1 in the classroom: Classroom management and administrative vocabulary, translation of individual words, repetition or explanation to remedy and prevent students’ lack of comprehension, and when talking to individual students during pair or group work. Since the students’ native language can be a resource rather than an obstacle, therefore, it is recommended that L1 and L2 should exist simultaneously in the English language classroom (Auerbach, 1993; Cook, 2001; Jensen & Vinther, 1983; Kharma & Hajjaj, 1989; Seong-Ae Kim, 2002; Polio & Duff, 1994; Turnbull, 2001).

**TABLE 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ways of teaching English</th>
<th>Most effective way (%)</th>
<th>Least effective way (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EN</td>
<td>NEN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-NESTs use only Korean.</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-NESTs use only English.</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-NESTs use both Korean and English.</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>37.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NESTs use only English.</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NESTs use both Korean and English.</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both Non-NESTs and NESTs teach together.</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>25.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Necessity for Understanding Korean EFL Learners

Another noteworthy issue in this research is that NESTs need to make an effort to understand Korean EFL learners. From students’ open-ended responses about NESTs, it seems that most of their complaints or problems with NESTs are rooted in NESTs’ lack of knowledge about Korean EFL learners. The participants’ comments about NESTs are presented with four categories in the subsequent notes:
Communication breakdowns

- Students cannot communicate with NESTs.
- NESTs need to learn and use some Korean language and culture to communicate with students.
- NESTs should grade their language to help students understand well.
- I want NESTs to slow down their speaking to understand them better.
- NESTs should take care of those students who can not follow their class.
- NESTs do not seem to understand the difficulty of students. They should teach according to students’ proficiency level.

Some personality problems of unqualified NESTs

- NESTs become upset easily. I do not like it.
- When students do not concentrate on their class, a number of NESTs use some bad words or what we cannot understand. We feel bad.
- NESTs tend to ignore Korean students.
- It is very hard for students to get close to NESTs.
- NESTs should get rid of some bad prejudice about Koreans.

Some teaching problems of unqualified NESTs

- Students are not disciplined with NESTs, so English classes do not work well.
- I do not want games any more, but do want a “real” class.
- Please do not kill time during class. I want NESTs to finish studying first, and then play with students.
- NESTs teach us some strange words such as emesis and diarrhea.
- NESTs’ teaching level is for kindergarteners. It is too low and childish.
- It is a nonsense that NESTs do not know about grammar of their own language.

Other comments

- I want NESTs to correct my pronunciation or speaking.
- NESTs should give each student enough opportunities to speak.
- I want to learn some foreign culture from NESTs.

In fact, previous studies criticize the conflict between western and non-western ways of teaching English (Alptekin & Alptekin, 1990; Bahloul, 1994; Bax, 1997; Kramsch, 1993). Cheongsook Chin (2002) also notes that NESTs lack insight into students’ typical language problems and familiarity with the host educational system. She suggests that NESTs should be offered an orientation, including a description of the curriculum and the types of the methodology familiar to students, which could help NESTs understand the cultural
diversity and the way Korean learners approach learning. Above all, NESTs themselves ought to strive to understand the constraints of the Korean educational and cultural systems to which Korean EFL learners are accustomed.

Besides, when conversation breakdown occurs in the EFL classroom, Butler (2004) maintains that teachers need strategic knowledge of English and the ability to use it to compensate for those breakdowns. It is regarded as crucial because communication breakdowns are one of the main reasons that cause misunderstandings between NESTs and students. Therefore, if NESTs try to use some Korean and understand students’ culture, students are likely to be more reactive because they know that their teacher is making an effort to “understand and share the frustrations of learning a new language” (Cheongsook Chin, 2002, p. 126).

5. The Answer to Research Questions

The two research questions have been examined with the following responses:

1) How do Korean middle school EFL learners view NESTs and Non-NESTs?

Students in this study were aware of the advantages and disadvantages of NESTs and Non-NESTs. They considered the advantages of NESTs to be twofold: First, since NESTs’ mother tongue is English, they can teach English listening, speaking, pronunciation, and culture effectively; secondly, NESTs motivate students through a variety of English materials and activities. However, students also recognized three disadvantages of NESTs: First, students cannot communicate with NESTs; second, because of the lack of teaching experience, NESTs do not understand Korean students well; and third, NESTs spend too much class time on games. Conversely, when students reflected on the advantages of Non-NESTs, they found that: Non-NESTs are more comfortable with students; Non-NESTs can teach English grammar effectively, which is important for English exam; and Non-NESTs know how to study English as a foreign language well, because they have had the same experience in learning English. The disadvantages of Non-NESTs were noted as: Non-NESTs have poor practical English language skills such as speaking and pronunciation; Non-NESTs are likely to focus too much on grammar; Non-NESTs often waste the class time for disciplining students; and Non-NESTs tend to use only English textbooks in class.

2) What do Korean middle school EFL learners expect from NESTs and Non-NESTs?

In the question, “What do you want to learn from NESTs in class?” students expected
The Korean Middle School EFL Learners’ Perception Towards NESTs and Non-NESTs

209

the most from NESTs in terms of speaking, pronunciation, culture, and listening. In contrast, what they expected the most from Non-NESTs was grammar, listening, and speaking (see TABLE 4). In addition, when students were asked questions regarding who was more helpful in each of the English skills, NESTs or Non-NESTs, they preferred NESTs in the areas of listening, speaking, pronunciation, and culture; and they chose Non-NESTs for areas of writing, grammar, and learning strategy. In areas of reading and vocabulary, students did not show any distinctive preference towards either NESTs or Non-NESTs (see TABLE 5). These results are analogous to Lasagabaster and Sierra’s findings (2005).

**TABLE 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>NESTs EN (%)</th>
<th>NESTs NEN (%)</th>
<th>NESTs EN + NEN (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>25.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronunciation</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning strategy</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total responses</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Multiple Response

**TABLE 5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>NESTs EN (%)</th>
<th>NESTs NEN (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>75.5</td>
<td>24.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>84.3</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>43.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>68.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>78.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>57.5</td>
<td>42.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronunciation</td>
<td>95.8</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>85.6</td>
<td>14.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning strategy</td>
<td>39.2</td>
<td>60.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To sum up, Korean EFL learners are aware of the advantages and disadvantages of NESTs and Non-NESTs. They also have their own preferences for NESTs and Non-NESTs concerning specific English language skills.
V. CONCLUSION

This study attempted to investigate students’ perception towards the differences between NESTs and Non-NESTs. For this purpose, 552 Korean EFL learners from two middle schools in Korea participated in responding the questionnaire. To review what has been discussed so far in this research, the pedagogical implications can be categorized into four. First, Korean middle school EFL learners’ criteria for a good NEST and Non-NEST are the same. English language teachers should focus on English teaching methodology, English proficiency level, and familiarity with students. Second, Korean Non-NESTs need to approach their class with a CLT approach in order to meet their students’ needs, and to provide plenty of L2 input. Third, using both L1 and L2 in class, when needed, is necessary for effective English language teaching. Lastly, NESTs should try to understand Korean EFL learners to lessen misunderstandings between NESTs and students.

As for the criteria for a good English language teacher, both NESTs and Non-NESTs should have the ability to organize and explain the lesson (English teaching methodology), good knowledge and command of the target language (English language proficiency), and fairness and availability to students (familiarity with students) (Brosh, 1996). In particular, NESTs are likely to have difficulty in getting close to their students in the EFL classroom. Thus, they ought to have the responsibility of creating a non-threatening and comfortable classroom environment for their students to feel secure and to take risks (Cheongsook Chin, 2002).

When it comes to CLT approach, according to Seonghee Choi’s study (2000), Korean Non-NESTs seem to hold positive beliefs about CLT. Nevertheless, their classroom practices do not reflect their beliefs because of certain limitations. These limitations include a lack of language proficiency and teaching expertise related to CLT, constraints coming from the students’ passive attitude in class and their desire to focus on learning grammar and vocabulary, difficulties deriving from the education system, and questionable suitability of CLT and CLT-compatible assessment in EFL contexts (Li, 1998). Despite all the difficulties, however, English language teachers need to move beyond the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) in the current teacher-centered class. They need to progress toward a CLT approach in order to “develop the ability to take part in spontaneous and meaningful communication in different contexts, with different people, on different topics, for different purposes” (Celce-Murcia, Dörney, & Thurrel, 1997, p. 149) as Guilloteaux (2004) insists.

Unlike the common belief that L1 use might hinder students’ progress in their L2 acquisition, the effectiveness of using L1 in the English language classroom is supported by many researchers (e.g., Collingham, 1988; Piasecka, 1988; Rivera, 1990; Shamash, 1990). Collingham (1988, cited in Auerbach, 1993, p. 21) argues that L1 use in the English
language classroom helps “to develop ideas as a precursor to expressing them in the L2; to reduce inhibitions or affective blocks to L2 production; to elicit language and discourse strategies for particular situations; to provide explanations of grammar and language functions; and to teach vocabulary.” Furthermore, Auerbach (1993) maintains that “a monolingual approach to ESL is rejected not just because it may slow the acquisition of English but because it denies learners the right to draw on their language resources and strengths” (p. 22).

With respect to necessity for understanding Korean EFL learners, NESTs should be aware of that Korean culture is quite different from their own culture in terms of English language classes; that is, they could offend their Korean students by responding to their reactions negatively or they could be respected by valuing their Korean culture (Cheongsook Chin, 2002). As Nimmanit (1998) reports, it is useful for NESTs to show their students some knowledge of Korean culture and to occasionally speak Korean. Thus, it is suggested that NESTs should endeavor to study the language of their students’ culture (Barratt & Kontra, 2000).

These findings are notable in that Korean EFL learners’ attitudes and perceptions could provide important implications for Korean English education. By taking their expectations into consideration, “teachers and curriculum developers will benefit from a reflective approach in which the views and feelings of learners play an active role in the evolution of second language acquisition pedagogy and student-teacher relationships” (Saito & Ebsworth, 2004, p. 119). As a result, it will pave the way to execute suitable policies for NESTs and Non-NESTs in Korea in the perspective of main consumers in the Korean EFL context.

Since the participants of this study were collected from only two middle schools in Korea, the results should be considered with care. For future research, in-depth interviews with students and teachers or classroom observation should be considered to ensure the actuality of NEST and Non-NEST performance in English language classes. Despite the limitations of this study, it is hoped that this research could contribute to the progress of English education in Korea.

REFERENCES


Hoadley-Maidment (Eds.), *Current issues in teaching English as a second language to adults* (pp. 81-85). London: Edward Arnold.


APPENDIX
Questionnaire

This survey is to investigate your perception towards native English speaking teachers and non-native English speaking teachers. The results of the survey will be used only for academic purposes. Please answer the following questions.

Hye-Min Kim from International Graduate School of English

Middle school: ____________ Grade: ______

<Part I>

1. What is your gender?
   ① Male  ② Female

2. What English proficiency level are you in?
   ① Beginner  ② Low-intermediate  ③ Intermediate  ④ Upper-intermediate  ⑤ Advanced

3. How much are you confident in English?
   ① Very low  ② Low  ③ Middle  ④ High  ⑤ Very high

4. When did you start learning English?
   ① 3rd grade of elementary school  ② 2nd grade of elementary school
   ③ 1st grade of elementary school  ④ Preschool: ____ years old

5. How long did you study abroad?
   ① No experience  ② Less than 6 months  ③ 6 months - 1 year
   ④ 1 year - 2 years  ⑤ More than 2 years

6. How long have you studied with NESTs?
   ① No experience  ② Less than 6 months  ③ 6 months - 1 year
   ④ 1 year - 2 years  ⑤ More than 2 years

7. Why do you study English?
   ① To get high score from exam  ② To communicate in English
   ③ To study abroad  ④ To make foreign friends
   ⑤ Not sure  ⑥ Others: ____________________________

8. How much do you like English?
   ① Not at all  ② Very little  ③ Somewhat  ④ Very much  ⑤ Greatly

<Part II>

1. Do you have native English speaking teachers (NESTs) at your school?
   ① No  ② Yes

2. What country would NESTs from?
   ① New Zealand  ② Australia  ③ Canada  ④ Britain  ⑤ Ireland
   ⑥ Scotland  ⑦ America  ⑧ South Africa  ⑨ Others: ____________________________
The Korean Middle School EFL Learners’ Perception Towards NESTs and Non-NESTs

3. What NESTs would you choose for your English teacher?
   ① New Zealand  ② Australia  ③ Canada  ④ Britain  ⑤ Ireland
   ⑥ Scotland  ⑦ America  ⑧ South Africa  ⑨ Others: ________________________

4. What are your criteria for a good Non-NEST? (You may choose more than two.)
   (   ) English proficiency level  (   ) English teaching method  (   ) Grammar
   (   ) Vocabulary  (   ) Pronunciation  (   ) Familiarity with students
   (   ) Others: ________________________

5. What are your criteria for a good NEST? (You may choose more than two.)
   (   ) English proficiency level  (   ) English teaching method  (   ) Grammar
   (   ) Vocabulary  (   ) Pronunciation  (   ) Familiarity with students
   (   ) Others: ________________________

6. What do Non-NESTs teach the most in class? (You may choose more than two.)
   (   ) Listening  (   ) Speaking  (   ) Reading  (   ) Writing
   (   ) Grammar  (   ) Vocabulary  (   ) Culture  (   ) Pronunciation
   (   ) Learning Strategy  (   ) Others: ________________________

7. What do NESTs teach the most in class? (You may choose more than two.)
   (   ) Listening  (   ) Speaking  (   ) Reading  (   ) Writing
   (   ) Grammar  (   ) Vocabulary  (   ) Culture  (   ) Pronunciation
   (   ) Learning Strategy  (   ) Others: ________________________

8. How much do Non-NESTs use English?
   ① Never  ② English < Korean  ③ English > Korean  ④ English all the time

9. How much do NESTs use Korean?
   ① Never  ② A little  ③ Very often

10. What do you want to learn from Non-NESTs in class? (You may choose more than two.)
    (   ) Listening  (   ) Speaking  (   ) Reading  (   ) Writing
    (   ) Grammar  (   ) Vocabulary  (   ) Culture  (   ) Pronunciation
    (   ) Learning Strategy  (   ) Others: ________________________

11. What do you want to learn from NESTs in class? (You may choose more than two.)
    (   ) Listening  (   ) Speaking  (   ) Reading  (   ) Writing
    (   ) Grammar  (   ) Vocabulary  (   ) Culture  (   ) Pronunciation
    (   ) Learning Strategy  (   ) Others: ________________________

<Part III>

1. How much do you understand your Non-NESTs’ instruction?
   ① Less than 20%  ② 20-40%  ③ 40-60%  ④ 60-80%  ⑤ More than 80%

2. How much do you understand your NESTs’ instruction?
   ① Less than 20%  ② 20-40%  ③ 40-60%  ④ 60-80%  ⑤ More than 80%
3. What is your strategy when you do not understand your NESTs’ instruction? (You may choose more than two.)

① I do nothing.  ② I look up some words in books or dictionaries.
③ I ask my friends.  ④ I ask NESTs.
⑤ I ask Non-NESTs.  ⑥ Others: ________________________________

4. What is the most effective way of teaching English, and why?

① Non-NESTs use only Korean.
Reason: ____________________________________________

② Non-NESTs use only English.
Reason: ____________________________________________

③ Non-NESTs use both Korean and English.
Reason: ____________________________________________

④ NESTs use only English.
Reason: ____________________________________________

⑤ NESTs use both Korean and English.
Reason: ____________________________________________

⑥ Both Non-NESTs and NESTs teach together.
Reason: ____________________________________________

5. What is the least effective way of teaching English, and why?

① Non-NESTs use only Korean.
Reason: ____________________________________________

② Non-NESTs use only English.
Reason: ____________________________________________

③ Non-NESTs use both Korean and English.
Reason: ____________________________________________

④ NESTs use only English.
Reason: ____________________________________________

⑤ NESTs use both Korean and English.
Reason: ____________________________________________

⑥ Both Non-NESTs and NESTs teach together.
Reason: ____________________________________________

※ Who is more helpful, Non-NESTs or NESTs? (6–14)

6. Listening

① Non-NESTs  ② NESTs

7. Speaking

① Non-NESTs  ② NESTs
8. Reading
   ① Non-NESTs
   ② NESTs

9. Writing
   ① Non-NESTs
   ② NESTs

10. Grammar
    ① Non-NESTs
    ② NESTs

11. Vocabulary
    ① Non-NESTs
    ② NESTs

12. Pronunciation
    ① Non-NESTs
    ② NESTs

13. Culture
    ① Non-NESTs
    ② NESTs

14. Learning strategy
    ① Non-NESTs
    ② NESTs

15. From whom do you want to learn English, Non-NESTs or NESTs?
    ① Non-NESTs
    ② NESTs
    ③ Both of them

16. Who do you prefer, NESTs or Non-NESTs, and why?
    ① NESTs
    Reason: ____________________________
    ② Non-NESTs
    Reason: ____________________________
    ③ Either one
    Reason: ____________________________

17. Do you think you should learn English from NESTs?
    ① Yes
    Reason: ____________________________
    ② Not necessary
    Reason: ____________________________

18. Which kind of team-teaching do you think is more helpful for improving your English?
    ① Non-NESTs and NESTs co-teach in the same class.
    ② Non-NESTs and NESTs take turns.

19. Please make some comments or complaints about Non-NESTs.
    ________________________________
    ________________________________

20. Please make some comments or complaints about NESTs.
    ________________________________
    ________________________________
Applicable levels: Secondary education
Key words: NESTs, Non-NESTs, Criteria for English language teachers

Hye-min Kim
Dept. of English Language Teaching
International Graduate School of English
449-11, Seongnae3-dong, Gangdong-gu,
Seoul, 134-847, Korea
E-mail: ikhmi1@igse.ac.kr

Received in August, 2007
Reviewed in September, 2007
Revised version received in November, 2007