

**NNESTs' (Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers) Impact on the Realm of  
English as a Foreign Language**

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Recibido: 08/05/2025

Aceptado: 02/09/2025

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**Abstract**

The article analyses the ways in which non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) impact the teaching-learning process of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). It is relevant to consider that the mentioned process has been influenced by the idealization of native English-speaking teachers (NESTs). Principally, the present essay aims to provide a detailed depiction of NNESTs' features when developing the teaching role. This subject matter will be analyzed using students' perceptions. In the first place, a definition of both speakers will be introduced. Also, the various students' outlooks will be mentioned and described. Furthermore, the idea of NESTs' idealization will be explored.

**Keywords:** *NNESTs, NESTs, EFL, idealization, NNESTs' features, students' perceptions.*

### **Resumen**

El presente artículo analiza el impacto que tienen los docentes no-nativos en el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje del inglés como lengua extranjera. Es de suma importancia considerar que dicho proceso ha sido influenciado por la idealización de los docentes nativos. Principalmente, a través de este trabajo se busca ofrecer una descripción detallada de las características que presentan los profesores no-nativos al participar de dicho proceso, a partir de las percepciones de los estudiantes. En primer lugar, se introducirá la definición de ambos docentes. Por otra parte, se mencionarán y describirán las distintas perspectivas de los estudiantes. Asimismo, la idealización de los hablantes nativos será explorada.

**Palabras clave:** docentes no-nativos, docentes nativos, inglés como lengua extranjera, características de los docentes no-nativos, percepciones de los estudiantes.

### **Introduction**

A plethora of questions appear in the realm of English as a foreign language (EFL) when analyzing the role of teachers in the teaching-learning process. Some of them are: Who teaches English better? Who is the ideal teacher? Is there a preferred speaker to perform the teaching endeavor? The English language is spoken by two extensive groups of speakers: natives and non-natives. Being an EFL teacher in Argentina, a country where the local professionals are non-native speakers of English (NNESTs) has prompted the selection and research of the presented topic.

In the first place, Thornbury (2006) establishes that “a native speaker (NS) of a language is a person who has acquired the language as their first language in childhood. Native speakers are considered to know this language intuitively, and to use it accurately, fluently, and appropriately” (p. 140). Conversely, Medgyes (2001) defines that “most commonly, a non-NEST may be defined as a teacher: for whom English is a second or foreign language; who works in an EFL environment; whose students are monolingual groups of learners; who speaks the same native language as his or her students” (p. 433).

Moreover, the principal purpose of the present article is not only to give an account of NNESTs’ figure but also to describe their impact on the teaching-learning process in the context of English as a foreign language, built upon the idealization of the native English-speaking teacher. In this regard, Holliday (2006) introduces the notion of “native-speakerism” and defines it as “a pervasive ideology within ELT, characterized by the belief that ‘native-speaker’ teachers represent a ‘Western culture’ from which

spring the ideals both of the English language and English language teaching methodology” (p. 385).

Therefore, in the first place, the various ways in which students perceive NNESTs will be analyzed thoroughly with a view to examining the teaching-learning process of English. In order to achieve this task, there will be a report of a number of studies with the aim of exploring the way in which learners esteem non-native speakers. Likewise, the unique features owned by NNESTs when performing the role of language educators will be examined in depth.

In addition, NNESTs’ visibility in the mentioned field will be evaluated taking into consideration the ongoing process of globalization. In this endeavor, the convergence of heterogeneity of teachers will be examined for the purpose of understanding how teaching practices can be enhanced.

Moreover, the present paper aims to study the ways in which the idealization of NESTs can be removed from a plural EFL environment. Hence, the different courses of action that can be implemented to overcome the indicated ideology will be mentioned.

### **Students’ Perceptions**

To begin with, Mahboob (2004) introduces the notion that it is possible to categorize students’ perceptions according to three wide-ranging classifications. Similarly, Mahboob & Lipovsky (2010) work on the indicated assemblage. The first group is related to “linguistic factors” (p. 155). Mahboob & Lipovsky (2010) state that “oral skills”, “literacy skills”, “grammar”, “vocabulary”, and “culture” are embraced in this arrangement (p. 155). The second group is linked to “teaching styles” (p. 155). The “ability to answer questions” and “teaching methodology” are the pillars of this

category (p. 155). Finally, the third group, which relates to “personal factors”, “includes “experience as an ESL learner”, “hard work”, and “affect” ” (p. 155). Moreover, the researchers state that students impart both positive and negative remarks about the said sorting. It is pertinent to mention that these classifications constitute the main guidelines of the data that is both analyzed and described in the present article.

Following the mentioned scheme, Mahboob (2004) explains that learners observe NNESTs as “good teachers of writing” (p. 11). Interestingly enough, the author includes some excerpts quoting the respondents’ observations. These data reflected that they considered these teachers to be more efficient in the mentioned area than native speakers. Even more, in the area of linguistic skills, the researcher points out that there were no positive comments about NESTs’ performance. Hence, Mahboob (2004) concludes that this situation implies that learners consider non-native speakers as outstanding instructors of the said language realm. Furthermore, the academic discusses students’ perceptions in the sphere of grammar. In this regard, the researcher elucidates that NNESTs are observed as good guides for the preparation of standardized exams. Similarly, Selvi (2014) supports both the notion that NNESTs offer students a more exhaustive preparation for exams and that they present advantages in the realm of “declarative knowledge” (p.15).

Additionally, Floris & Renandya (2020) provide an inventory containing some skills that “a good language teacher today should also possess” (p. 13). Some of the indicated features will be mentioned herein. In the first place, they state that teachers of English should have knowledge of the learners’ culture and mother tongue, which will help them to perform more competent explanations of the taught elements. Also,

educators should be able to “serve as an excellent model of successful English learners” (p. 14). Even more, the authors claim that generally trained NNESTs are the ones who appear to be in possession of these attributes.

On another note, Kiczkowiak, (2019) claims that several authors agreed on the fact that one of the modes in which nativespeakerism is present in the EFL environment is in a negative outlook on behalf of students. On this subject, Ma (2012) refers to the idea that students are frequently considered to be partial to NESTS in contrast to NNESTs. Relatedly, Floris & Renandya (2020) put forward the notion that the tendency to have a bias for NESTs can be justified by the students’ scarce awareness in terms of teaching methodology, the expounded nativespeakerism, the traits that conform to a good language educator, among others. Likewise, Kiczkowiak (2019) proclaims that the binary option of native speaker versus non-native speaker leaves aside all the elements that assemble a good language educator when students are presented with questionnaires.

Furthermore, Mahboob & Lipovsky (2010) put forward the idea that students consider that each teacher provides the classes with distinctive features. Likewise, Selvi (2014) alludes to a number of research works in which the results exposed the fact that learners do not have a marked tendency to any speaker. However, they expect language educators to be in possession of certain traits such as vast declarative and practical knowledge of the language as well as well-founded pedagogical abilities. In this regard, Tosuncuoglu (2017) alludes to the conception that NNESTs are able to reach better levels of comprehension concerning technical grammar.

Interestingly enough, Kiczkowiak (2019) also carried out an interview with a trailblazer of the topic being researched: Péter Medgyes. The interviewee agrees with the notion that being a non-native speaker leads to a number of challenges. Albeit this situation, Péter Medgyes appraises the fact that the teachers' "main clients", i.e. the learners of the language, do not coincide inexorably with the said viewpoint (p. 2). Even more, learners tend to realize that there are several benefits and drawbacks to both types of speakers.

### **NNESTs' Features**

With a view to characterizing the figure of the NNESTs, Medgyes (2001) proposes to contemplate the notion that regardless of NNESTs' native language, they are also able to evolve into language educators who perform their roles efficiently. Interestingly enough Medgyes (2001) applies the appellation "The Bright Side of Being a Non-NEST" when making reference to NNESTs' characteristics as language instructors (p.436).

On this subject matter, Medgyes (2001) introduces a series of premises esteemed as NNESTs' advantages to bring them up for discussion. The author explains that the mentioned considerations are presumptions that are based on the comparison between NNESTs and NEST's unique features. The linguist claims that NNESTs are able to:

1. Provide a better learner model;
2. teach language-learning strategies more effectively;
3. supply more information about the English language;
4. better anticipate and prevent language difficulties;
5. be more sensitive to their students;
6. benefit from their ability to use the students' mother tongue. (Medgyes, 2001, p.436).

In the first place, Medgyes (2001) explains that a teacher of a language has the possibility of becoming two types of guiding paradigms for their learners: “a language model and a learner model” (p. 436). More specifically, in the case of NNESTs, they are prone to become the second kind of model. One of the reasons why they are not always susceptible to developing into a language model is connected with the notion that they pertain to the same category as learners of the English language. They share the specified group with the students that they teach. Thus, NNESTs are able to strive to turn into “(...) a ‘perfect’ learner model” (Medgyes, 2017, p. 57). These speakers learnt English after their native tongues helps them excel in the role of an ideal paradigm to take into consideration.

On this topic, Mahboob (2004) claims that several respondents in his research study relate being a NNEST to working hard. This idea is closely connected with NNESTs’ experience as learners of the foreign language that they teach. Even more, Mahboob (2004) explains that non-native speakers must exert themselves to become a speaker of the English language.

In other words, learners recognize their industrious path to achieve language proficiency. Hence, Mahboob & Lipovsky (2010) claim that the mentioned accomplishment has contributed to NNESTs becoming “role models” for their students (p.171). Learners feel motivated to follow a similar process to master the foreign language. On a final and noteworthy note, Mahboob & Lipovsky (2010) illuminate the notion that NNESTs can share the “enjoyment” of learning the language with their students (p. 171).

In addition, Medgyes (2001) avows that NNESTs have the skills to familiarize learners with a myriad of learning strategies to acquire the foreign language. On this point, the author clarifies the notion that the said strategies are not only involved with the simplification of the learning process. Conversely, the specified methodologies also speed up the achievement of the learning objectives, buttress the content within the process, and help to enhance the quality of the obtained knowledge as well as to extrapolate it to novel instances. Even more, Li & Jin (2020) purport that learners claim that one of NNESTs' advantages is their learning strategies. On the contrary, Li & Jin (2020) allude to the fact that NESTs never have or will undergo the learning process of the language. The researchers underline that the process of learning a mother tongue completely diverges from the process of learning a foreign language.

Furthermore, Medgyes (2001) states that it is the student's faculty to choose the appropriate strategies according to their preferences. Notwithstanding, it is pivotal for teachers to act as facilitators of this task, which can occasionally present a number of obstacles. In this regard, the linguist expounds that NNESTs own the capability of sharing with learners both the strategies that have been useful for them as language learners, as well as, other methods which are cognizant. In this procedure, educators can help students identify the strategies that will be more beneficial to their personal language- learning path (Medgyes, 2001).

Along the same lines, Mahboob & Lipovsky (2010) conducted an interesting study in which essays written by Japanese students were the corpus analyzed. The mentioned students attended an orientation course dictated by a NEST and a NNEST. The informants were asked to write the reports at the beginning and at the end of the

programme. The results demonstrate that NNESTs were the unique speaker to be positively described regarding “teaching methodology” (p.166). As a mode of illustrating the provided observation, the researchers mention that learners consider that NNESTs can distinguish which lexical items are easier for them to both understand and acquire (p. 166).

Correspondingly, Li & Jin (2020) assert that on account of the shared participation in the learning process of the English language, NNESTs are more cognizant of their experience. Henceforth, they are more capable of giving students a myriad of strategies to navigate the acquisition of the language. Moreover, they can interchange between students’ native tongue and English in order to adequate the teaching methodology according to their needs (Li & Jin, 2020).

Moreover, Medgyes (2001) manifests that NNESTs are inclined to be insightful in terms of the language being taught as a result of the enormous amount of knowledge gained by them. Therefore, these educators are able not only to perceive obstacles with anticipation but also to attend to them. On this point, the author accentuates that the previously mentioned problems might be almost imperceptible by other speakers. What is more, Medgyes (2001) argues that NNESTs have the skills both to interpret and recognize which items of the language would be difficult or easy to understand. In this regard, they can intercede in the path of linguistic errors with marked anticipation.

Relatedly, Mahboob (2004) analyses the notion that NNESTs’ experience as learners of the language has a great impact on the teaching-learning process. In this regard, the researcher elucidates that students esteem the specified familiarity with the language learning process as a critical aspect to give an account of teachers. Besides,

Mahboob (2004) claims that learners identify teachers' experience as an important resource for them to understand the problems that are present in language learning.

Likewise, this trait helps them not only to be better prepared to develop their roles as instructors but also to help students.

Even more, Adara (2018) adds that the study exposes that several learners are of the view that NNETs impart their knowledge better in the grammar area. Furthermore, Li & Jin (2020) state that they are perceived to give not only clear but also precise instructions regarding this topic. In addition, these speakers are observed as better providers of tactics for solving any problems that might arise. With a view to illustrating the specified situation, Medgyes (2017) refers to NNESTs' ability to compare the linguistic elements of their native and their target language in order to detect those points that might be more problematic. For example, the difficulties might appear as a consequence of a structure that constitutes the foreign language but that does not exist in the learners' mother tongue.

Moreover, Mahboob (2004) highlights NNESTs' "ability to answer questions" (p. 16). In this regard, the author elucidates that learners tend to feel content with the answers provided by non-native speaker educators. In the same vein, the author insists on the notion that NNESTs are capable of achieving students' expectations. The specified attainment is a consequence of their experience as learners of the language. Subsequently, Mahboob (2004) alludes to the fact that learners observe NNESTs' applying more efficient teaching techniques. The mentioned outlook is related to the diversity of pedagogic styles and classroom dynamics offered by NNESTs. Even more,

these educators are generally described as taking into careful consideration both students' learning preferences and styles (Mahboob, 2004).

Besides, Medgyes (2017) reinforces the idea that NNESTs' familiarization with both the teaching-learning process of the target language and the educational context signifies a benefit. The mentioned knowledge allows them to establish learning objectives that are possible for students to accomplish. NNESTs embark on the task of complementing their students' profiles, i.e. motivations and capability, with the expectations set by the social and educational environment.

Subsequently, Medgyes (2001) insists on the idea that NNESTs have a deep connection with learners' experiences. Thus, they are generally more sympathetic towards various aspects of the students' paths as learners of a foreign language. In the first place, they tend to be more sensitive about their real needs. Namely, Medgyes (2001) asserts that NNESTs are known for defining learning objectives that are achievable by their students. Especially, they have a precise awareness of the working curriculum, the examination parameters, as well as both the kinds and the availability of the materials to work with. Thus, NNESTs tend to elaborate more suitable teaching plans for their classes taking into careful consideration the mentioned guiding elements. Secondly, Medgyes (2001) declares that these speakers are susceptible to the levels of motivation owned by the students in each institution where they develop their profession.

Likewise, Mahboob (2004) mentions that learners appraise the fact that NNESTs can provide them not only with pedagogical tools but also emotional support. The said notion is associated with NNESTs' experience as learners. In a similar vein, Ma (2012)

states that they are considered to exhibit greater levels of empathy towards not only the difficulties undergone by students but also their needs within the learning process.

Mahboob (2004) explains that the sense of empathy is congruent with having been involved in the teaching-learning process. Their participation in such a process has given them an awareness of what it feels like to acquire the language.

Accordingly, Medgyes (2017) explores the notion of empathy within the teaching- learning process of the target language. The linguist professes the idea that “(...) empathy is one of the most characteristic features of the successful teacher” (p.68). Even more, Medgyes (2017) explains that students expect their teachers to be a source of both empathy and comfort. Further to this, research has indicated that students perceive NNESTs as being empathetic figures in their learning process. On this topic of analysis, the researcher expresses the fact they are able to both understand and direct their attention to the learners’ real needs helps to build the aforementioned considerations. In other words, Medgyes (2017) asserts that NNESTs are in possession of an admirable quality. The said virtue is related to their ability to thoroughly understand the learning scenario. By way of explaining, Medgyes (2017) refers to NNESTs being comprehensively aware of the learners’ context in terms of language, culture and personal experiences.

Regarding the use of students’ native tongue, Medgyes (2017) supports its usage and questions its avoidance because English is not their mother tongue. Even more, the author buttresses the said notion by mentioning that NNESTs tend to share the mentioned language. Hence, Medgyes (2017) inquiries about the reason for students using English, which is not their L1, entirely in the language classes. It is pertinent to

add that Medgyes (2017) elucidates the fact that it has not been determined the proper amount of the students' L1 that might be included in the lessons. Nevertheless, the author points out two guiding principles. In the first place, it is important to also take into consideration learners' preferences towards this tool. Secondly, Medgyes (2017) alludes to the conception that there are occasions on which its appliance resolves understanding situations in short periods.

Additionally, Tosuncuoglu (2017) states that in the cases in which NNESTs share their mother tongue with students, the latter is favored with their educators' assistance when difficulties arise. As a mode of illustration, the author mentions that a potential issue might be instances of misunderstandings in communication. Specifically, the said advantage is of benefit in the beginning learning stages (Tosuncuoglu, 2017). Similarly, Li & Jin (2020) refer to the shared mother tongue as an important facilitator of the teaching-learning process of the language. All the agents partaking in the process are able to understand one another with great success.

Equally, Ma (2012) points out that students value the possibility of comprehending complicated grammar and lexical items more favorably. Likewise, Mahboob & Lipovsky (2010) expound that learners behold the said feature as a facilitating tool to comprehend the language. Therefore, it is categorized as a NNEST's advantage.

### **NNESTs' Visibility in the EFL World**

In a changing world, the process of globalization has provoked the far-reaching expansion of the English language worldwide. Therefore, NNESTs' visibility has become an important matter in the field. Selvi (2011) states that the said space has been

moving towards an environment that embraces the diversity of speakers. Hence, the heterogeneity of teachers together with their strengths and weaknesses are being recognized. Therefore, a place for collaboration has been facilitated, which will probably be transmuted into a series of more appropriate educational instances and opportunities.

As a result, collaborative teaching practices have been a topic of interest in the EFL environment. Importantly enough, academics such as Mahboob & Lipovsky (2010) and Medgyes (2001) deduce that students consider this setting favorable for balancing both NESTs and NNESTs' benefits and drawbacks. Consequently, the teaching-learning process is significantly improved. Besides, not only the pedagogical sphere is enhanced but also the professional links are ameliorated. As was previously described, Medgyes (2017) emphasizes the notion that NNESTs are given the possibility to also be considered the main character of the teaching process with this assemblage. Thus, the collaboration between both speakers is an interesting strategy to put an end to the examined ideology within the field.

Notwithstanding, however profitable this arrangement is described to be, teachers are not fully aware of the various possibilities in which they can collaborate. Thus, educators should be motivated to take over the task of creating novel spaces of cooperation.

Also, Braine (2010) explains that NNESTs' points of view and contributions are increasingly taken into account. Besides, the way in which the language teaching sphere is assembled has been modified. Llurda (2015) exemplifies this tenant by mentioning the process of going beyond the idea that it is an activity best developed by native

speakers. The mentioned exchange will eventually pass through the native speaker model's hegemony in the academic sphere. In order to achieve the mentioned task, Braine (2010) highlights the importance of non-native speakers taking over the different investigations that have been carried out in the field. However, the scholar expounds that when critical topics to NNESTs are included, their veracity of them is sometimes questioned.

Thus, Braine (2010) manifests the idea that it would be advantageous for non-native speakers to also participate in the investigations to diversify the areas of study. In the same vein, novel branches of research should be addressed. The author proposes three premises to address said processes. They are the improvement of NNESTs' proficiency in the language in question, the collaboration with native-speaker teachers, the maximum utilization of professional organizations and the variety of approaches in the research of NNESTs.

### **Conclusions**

As a final note, NNESTs' participation in the teaching-process has been thoroughly put into question in the face of the idealization of NESTs. It is pertinent to consider that students' perceptions towards NNESTs have been important factors in the EFL world. The study of the learners' points of view has been crucial both to delineate and to understand the mentioned process. As a consequence of the specified work of research, a plethora of features have been able to be listed on behalf of NNESTs. For instance, these speakers are regarded as imitable acquirers of the language, important providers of learning strategies, and empathetic figures in the learning process. Likewise, they are described as possessing the ability to recognize difficulties in

advance. Notwithstanding, it is relevant to add that some of the responses mentioned the potential benefit of having both NESTs and NNESTs in charge of the teaching-learning process of English.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy to infer that students consider these teachers as valuable instructors of the foreign language. More precisely, NNESTs' distinctive characteristics are highly appraised. Even more, as previously referenced, Selvi (2014) surmises that learners are not partial to any specific type of speaker. On the contrary, the researcher points out that they demonstrate their preference for educators who have certain characteristics. For instance, they value extensive expertise in the language and pedagogical skills.

Correspondingly, it is important to gather that they provide learners not only with an effective model of a learner but also with vast information about the language. They teach strategies more efficaciously, anticipate difficulties in the learning process, are more sensitive towards students' need and, lastly, are able to resort to their shared native tongue. NNESTs act as learning models for learners, can predict potential linguistic problems, are the source of empathy, learning strategies and further information about the language, and share the native tongue with the learners.

Therefore, it can be concluded that there is not an ideal speaker to perform the role of language teacher. Each professional owns a unique and valuable set of methodologies. Most specifically, NNESTs do generate a positive impact on the teaching-learning process of English as a foreign language, particularly in an era where the idealization of the native speaker is still prevailing.

**Bridging Cultures**– Nro. 10 – Año 2025 – Departamento de Lenguas, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras. Universidad Católica Argentina.

Notwithstanding, it is of utmost importance for us, NNESTs, to actively engage in pertinent actions with a view to highlighting our participation in the field. For instance, it is necessary to embark on varied branches of research or on collaborative practices in which the development of our strengths will permit our growing visibility.

Consequently, it would be possible to overcome the paradigm of idealization in the EFL realm.

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