



Exploring Students’ Preferences for Courses and Instructional Strategies in Thai NNEST-Led Classes

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Received 15/05/2025	ABSTRACT Studies of learners’ attitudes toward native English teachers (NESTs) and non-native English teachers (NNESTs) show that native-speakerism is widespread, including in Thailand, where local teachers greatly outnumber native speakers. In this qualitative study of ways to optimize learning outcomes in settings where only Thai instructors are available, open-ended questionnaires and focus groups were employed to gauge students’ preference for English courses taught by Thai instructors as well as the instructors’ pedagogical practices. This research also explores both Thai instructors’ and students’ perspectives on effective instructional strategies. Participants included 63 students in Phase 1, and 16 students and 6 Thai instructors in Phase 2. The results support previous studies indicating students’ preference for NESTs, with the additional finding that Thai students exhibit the least preference for Thai instructors in listening-speaking classes. However, the findings also suggest that the students prioritize
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	their instructors' supportive attitudes and personalities and their teaching proficiency over the proximity of their accents to native-speaker standards. The paper concludes by offering pedagogical recommendations that can be applied to contexts sharing similarities with the scenario discussed. Keywords: Native-speakerism, Thai-English accent, listening-speaking class, NEST and NNEST
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Introduction

Research across various Asian contexts indicates that native-speaker teachers of English have often been prioritized by students who believe it is necessary to achieve their desired linguistic outcomes (Harsanti & Manara, 2021; Liu, 2018; Silalahi, 2019). In Thailand, native English accents have consistently been held in the highest regard (Ambele & Boonsuk, 2021; Apiruangkit, 2018; Kanoksilapatham, 2013; Panthong & Rattanawaropas, 2023), resulting in a strong preference for native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) over non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) (Watson Todd & Pojanapunya, 2020). This bias against NNESTs is a phenomenon within the discriminatory ideology for which Holliday (2005) coined the term “native-speakerism.”

Despite the presence of native-speakerism in Thai pedagogical contexts, in the past, Thai NNESTs' teaching efficacy has not been subject to explicit criticism, so the issue of their English language proficiency, especially pronunciation, was long overlooked. However, the advent of COVID-19 and its effects on the delivery of education worldwide shed new light on the matter. This shift is illustrated by the following context:

On May 18, 2020, the Thai government officially announced the first day of online class implementation for all educational levels during the pandemic via the State Distance Learning Television (DLTV). DLTV had been established by the Distance Learning Foundation under the royal patronage of the late King Rama VIII to alleviate educational disparities and address teacher shortages and qualification gaps, particularly in schools in remote areas. The day after the announcement, DLTV began broadcasting instruction in several subjects, including English. As these programs were accessible nationwide, concerns were raised on social media platforms, including Twitter, regarding the instructors' English pronunciation and grammatical accuracy. This led to broader discussions about the challenges faced by Thai instructors of English in terms of language proficiency. In response, various organizations took steps to support local teachers. For example, the English Department at a renowned public university offered a

one-time free online English session for high school English teachers. However, such initiatives were perceived as temporary measures rather than long-term solutions to the underlying issue.

Although criticism on social media against this group of instructors may not represent classroom experiences across the country, its visibility highlights the need for a more systematic examination of student perceptions, which this study aims to provide. Data collection involved eliciting the in-depth opinions of two groups of English-instruction stakeholders, Thai university students and Thai English instructors, regarding their perspectives on learning and teaching English and on Thai NNESTs' teaching quality. Because it is unavoidable that most English courses in Thailand are taught by Thai NNESTs, it is crucial to find ways to promote effective teaching methods providing maximum benefit for Thai students as well as ways for Thai students and their Thai NNESTs to support each other in achieving high-level English proficiency. The study was guided by the following overarching research questions:

1. For what English skill-based courses do Thai students demonstrate the most and least preference when taught by Thai NNESTs, and which attributes of English instructors do they prefer?

2. Given that many Thai students learn English from Thai NNESTs, what instructional strategies do Thai students and their instructors believe best support a classroom environment conducive to learning, even in the English course students least prefer to be taught by Thai NNESTs?

Our aim is to provide valuable insights into how to improve Thai students' English learning experiences and support optimal learning outcomes by aligning their preferences with instructional practices in the courses they are required to take.

Literature Review

Native-speakerism refers to a bias, often implicit, favoring English native speakers over non-native speakers as teachers of English (Holliday, 2005, 2006). This bias, as argued by Holliday, can result in discrimination against local teachers and professional inequality, impacting learners as well as instructors. As a result, there has been a growing call to abolish the categorization of teachers into *native* and *non-native*, which reinforces the entrenched ideology of native-speakerism (Aneja, 2016; Holliday, 2014; Jain, 2022; Lowe & Kiczowski, 2016). Instead of focusing on native/non-native divisions, Hiratsuka et al. (2023) suggest adopting a new perspective termed *Trans-Speakerism*, which emphasizes the recognition and appreciation of teachers' diverse language backgrounds and language-learning experiences. Nevertheless, the impact of the two original categories remains strong.

Medgyes (1994, p. xi) wrote, "... in my view, the native/non-native distinction does exist not only in reality but also, and more significantly, in the minds of millions of teachers. It should not be rejected or blurred, simply because it runs in the face of certain theories or ideologies." We argue that this assumption, voiced decades ago, still holds true today. Copland et al. (2019), aiming to dismantle divisiveness and acknowledge the value of all English teachers, proposed the term *Local English Teachers* (LETs), which Watson Todd and Pojanapunya (2020) adopted in lieu of "Thai NNEST", as they "sympathise[d] with the view that the term NNEST implies a deficit" (p. 2). In this paper, the term "Thai NNEST" is used, as it aligns with most previous studies.

Based on a survey of 216 non-native respondents from 10 countries, Medgyes (1994) outlined first the disadvantages ("the dark side") of being an NNEST and then the advantages ("the bright side"). The major disadvantage is that NNESTs have difficulty with vocabulary and speaking/fluency, followed by writing and reading, while knowledge of grammar is the NNESTs' "favorite hunting range" (p. 37). In line with this view, Braine (2010) argued that NNESTs may sometimes prioritize grammatical accuracy and formal aspects of English, potentially hindering effective and fluent communication. Many NNESTs also admitted to having low English language proficiency levels and relying heavily on textbooks. In terms of advantages, on the other hand, Medgyes proposed six arguments in favor of NNESTs: (1) NNESTs can be good models for students; (2) as NNESTs have been English learners themselves, they can teach students effective language learning strategies; (3) NNESTs can inform students about the English language in addition to teaching English skills; (4) NNESTs understand their students' difficulties and therefore can help students overcome them; (5) having themselves been through the challenges and struggles of being English learners, NNESTs have empathy for their students; and (6) as they share the same native language, NNESTs and their students understand each other.

Braine (2010) reviewed several research studies on self-perceptions of both NESTs and NNESTs, which indicated that NNESTs tend to demonstrate more explicit knowledge of English grammar than NESTs, suggesting they may be more qualified to teach structural aspects of English. Another advantage noted for local NNESTs is their shared linguistic background with students, enabling them to communicate with their students, empathize with their language-learning challenges, and develop closer relationships with them. These advantages align with Medgyes' (1994) third and sixth arguments mentioned above.

For over two decades, the relevant literature has conveyed an optimistic outlook, indicating the decline of the NEST-NNEST dichotomy and the rise of progressive perspectives on EFL (Llurda, 2004) and World

Englishes (Rajagopalan, 2018). In numerous studies, the focus has now shifted from the NEST–NNEST divide to a more integrative perspective. Cook (1999) emphasized the need to view L2 English users as individuals who communicate in English in their unique but effective ways. Farrell (2015) calls for the abandonment of the NEST–NNEST dichotomy, arguing that in the twenty-first century, the quality of instruction, rather than teachers' background identities, should be the primary criterion in EFL classrooms. In other words, what defines an effective teacher is not who they are, but how they teach. He proposes that teachers engage in self-reflective practices to address the needs of their students and communities, while also aligning with institutional policies. Such practices can be situated within the framework of *critical competency*. Within this framework, critical competency refers to what teachers know and are able to do in order to teach effectively, regardless of their background. More specifically, it is defined as the teacher's "ability to continuously deliberate on their practice" (Farrell, 2015, p. 83). Building on this reflective practice framework, he outlines five stages of self-reflection. The first stage, *philosophy*, involves reflecting on one's beliefs as a person. Positioning oneself as an individual with a unique cultural and linguistic background can help teachers better understand their role. The second stage, *principles*, requires teachers to examine what they believe, assume, and conceptualize about teaching and learning. The third stage, *theory*, focuses on the theories teachers draw on, particularly in relation to lesson planning, classroom activities, and instructional methods. The fourth stage, *practice*, involves observing one's own classroom actions and interactions with students. The final stage, *beyond practice*, represents a holistic level of reflection that connects teachers' internal philosophies and principles with their actions beyond the classroom and their roles within the wider community. Ultimately, this reflective process aims to enable teachers to contribute to positive social change in relation to student achievement, as well as to their communities and society at large.

A similar line of argument, consistent with this emphasis on teaching quality over teacher identity, can be seen in Aslan and Thompson (2016), who found that ESL students evaluate their teachers based on characteristics such as attitudes, teaching style, classroom practices, and personality, regardless of whether they are NESTs or NNESTs. Similarly, Savova and Azarnoosh (2024), applying a sociolinguistic lens, reported that Iranian students admired speaker role-models who demonstrated English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) as "successful individuals, competent and intelligible language users, accomplished professionals, and appealing human beings" (p. 19), regardless of whether the models were NESTs or NNESTs. Recently, Jain (2022) reported that sharing her experiences as a translingual teacher through in-class discussions helps students critically assess the limitations of the

NEST/NNEST labels. These findings regarding students' preferences are complemented with recommendations that all teachers, regardless of their linguistic backgrounds, should continually seek to enhance their knowledge and teaching skills (Faez, 2018).

Despite the ongoing progress in deconstructing the NEST/NNEST dichotomy at the global level, however, Thai learners' preference for NESTs, particularly as models of native pronunciation, persists. Jindapitak and Teo (2013) reported that British and American accents were the most highly favored English accent models, followed at a far distance by the Thai accent. Nevertheless, it was also found that the students in their study were aware and accepting of World Englishes. Kanoksilapatham (2013) also found that Thai college students favored the English pronunciation models of native speakers. Later, Kanoksilapatham (2016) suggested that practitioners should respond to students' native-model preference but at the same time make use of a Thai variety of English to promote local culture and identity.

In an investigation of Thai students' attitudes toward learning English at a private tutoring school in Bangkok, Apiruangrit (2018) identified their preferences for a wide range of personality traits associated with NESTs and NNESTs, including the former's native English accents, which they deemed to have higher status, while the latter's Thai-English accents received higher ratings for solidarity traits such as friendliness, sincerity, and kindness.

Watson Todd and Pojanapunya (2020) replicated their 2009 research to determine changes in students' perceptions during the intervening decade. They expected students' preference for NESTs to have decreased, but on the contrary, it had grown stronger, which they speculated was due to students' greater exposure to NESTs today. Having more opportunities to learn with NESTs created a false impression that NESTs outnumbered NNESTs. According to Ambele and Boonsuk (2021), students feel positive about their Thai accent, but some still want to sound like native speakers.

While previous studies focus on students' preferences regarding various aspects of NESTs and NNESTs, Jitpaiboon et al. (2025) question students' understanding of who NESTs and NNESTs are. They investigate how students conceptualize these categories and report complex findings. First- and second-year English major students sometimes confuse NESTs with speakers from outer-circle countries, whereas third- and fourth-year students demonstrate a clearer understanding. Their findings highlight the need for educators to address students' misconceptions about what constitutes NESTs and NNESTs, emphasizing the importance of providing accurate information so that students can properly position themselves within the global landscape of English usage.

Although evidence of a strong preference for native English teachers over non-native English teachers does not necessarily imply the dominance

of native-speakerism in a country, it does suggest its presence. Holliday (2005) reported that, when asked if she had any Thai colleagues, an English teacher in Thailand “sadly said no, because of divisions in the workplace, and teachers from a western country are automatically treated as superior” (p. 57). Copland et al. (2019) suggest that negative attitudes associated with native-speakerism in the field of language education may not be as prevalent as traditionally assumed. In line with this perspective, both NESTs and NNESTs bring unique strengths to English teaching (Jieyin & Gajaseeni, 2018). However, despite the lessening of negative attitudes, NNESTs have nonetheless experienced adverse effects due to native-speakerism (Houghton & Rivers, 2013; Lowe & Kiczowski, 2016).

Thai NNESTs constitute the majority of English teachers in Thailand, outnumbering both NESTs and non-Thai NNESTs such as Filipinos (Jitpaiboon et al., 2025, p. 84), making it effectively unavoidable for most students to take English classes with Thai NNESTs at some point. Yet despite this reality, no research, to our knowledge, has specifically investigated which English courses students prefer — or least prefer — to take with Thai NNESTs, nor what those instructors can do to enhance classroom efficacy. Prompted in part by public concerns over Thai English teachers' effectiveness, as highlighted by the DLTV broadcasts described above, this study addresses both questions by examining students' course preferences and exploring the perspectives of both students and Thai NNESTs on teaching strategies that could improve learning outcomes.

Methodology

This qualitative research was conducted in two phases. The first phase was an investigation of Thai students' preferences regarding English skill-based courses taught by Thai instructors, who constitute the majority of EFL teachers in Thailand. Also in this phase, the perspectives of the student participants regarding teacher attributes that facilitate effective English learning were examined. The second phase was based on the finding of the first phase that the student participants least preferred to study English listening and speaking with Thai NNESTs. This result led to an exploration of the participants' perspectives on effective strategies for maximizing English oral skills when they were required to learn English speaking from a Thai NNEST despite their preference for a NEST in this area.

Participants and Setting

This study took place in the Department of English of a university in Thailand. The department serves various student groups, including those with

English majors, those with English minors, and those in diverse academic disciplines. Participants in this research were obtained through purposive sampling and constituted three groups: (1) student participants of mixed majors enrolled in English courses, who responded to an open-ended questionnaire in phase one; (2) student participants who participated in a focus group interview; and (3) teacher participants who participated in a focus group interview. The focus group interviews were conducted in phase two of the study.

The curriculum at the institution covers key areas of English language study, including skill-based courses, linguistics, literature, and translation. The skill-based courses, listening-speaking, reading, and writing, were offered as separate subjects, particularly in the first and second years. Both NESTs and Thai NNESTs were assigned to teach these courses. As a result, students are exposed to instruction from both groups during their early years of study. The participants in this study were in their second to fourth years and had already completed these skill-based courses. Consequently, they had direct learning experience with both NESTs and NNESTs. This was also reflected in their responses, as many students referred explicitly to their high-school experiences with both groups of teachers. This exposure enabled the participants to express their views and preferences regarding different types of English language instructors, particularly in relation to native-speakerism.

Phase 1 Participants:

Participants in phase one were 63 students ranging from sophomores to seniors, who were enrolled in skill-based courses offered by the Department of English.

Phase 2 Participants:

The student participants were 16 English majors, ranging from sophomores to seniors, who had previously taken a listening and speaking course.

The teacher participants consisted of six Thai instructors in the Department of English at the same university. They had 5 to 24 years of experience teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL), including English listening-speaking courses at the university level, consistently earning end-of-course evaluations surpassing 4 points on a 5-point scale. The reason for including instructors with varied experience levels was to capture a comprehensive range of insights and reflections on the dynamics of language learning and teaching within the university context.

Research Instruments and Data Sources

Questionnaire (phase one):

An open-ended questionnaire that required long-form written responses was employed as the primary data-collection instrument. The questionnaire consisted of the following three open-ended questions:

- A. If you are taking an English class taught by a Thai NNEST (Thai instructor), which English skill would you most prefer to learn from that instructor (e.g. grammar, listening-speaking, reading, writing)? Why?
- B. What English subjects would you least prefer to learn from Thai NNESTs (Thai instructors)? Why?
- C. What attitudes, characteristics, and/or qualifications of Thai EFL instructors help you improve your English? Why?

Focus Group Interview Protocol (phase two):

Focus group interviews were conducted in separate sessions to elicit in-depth insights into students' and teachers' perspectives on ways to effectively promote learning in English-speaking classes with Thai NNESTs. Building on Question B of the questionnaire, the primary goal was to identify teaching methods and strategies that would optimize both learning and teaching in the English listening and speaking course, for which Thai students expressed the least preference for instruction by a Thai NNEST. We posed the following questions to the student participants:

- A. Based on your experience of learning English listening and speaking with Thai instructors, what did you like about their teaching? What strategies or activities did they use that you found effective?
- B. Conversely, what aspects of teaching did you not like? What strategies or activities did they use that you did not find effective?
- C. Despite your preference for learning English listening and speaking with native-speaking instructors, in situations where you are required to learn with Thai NNESTs, what actions can you take to enhance the learning atmosphere and improve your listening and speaking skills?

Three interview questions for instructors were related to those for students to facilitate comparison of their perspectives:

- A. What is your opinion of the findings that indicated students' preference for learning English listening and speaking with a NEST? How would you respond to this student viewpoint?
- B. What instructor attributes do you believe are most conducive to enhancing students' listening and speaking skills?
- C. What teaching strategies do you employ to promote effective learning in a listening and speaking class?

Development and Validation of the Instruments

Both instruments were developed through a rigorous process aimed at ensuring their relevance, clarity, and ability to gather data. Initially, key themes and constructs relevant to the research topic were systematically identified.

Based on this, the questionnaire and interview questions were drafted, focusing on open-ended questions that encouraged detailed responses and group discussion. The instruments were validated through a combination of expert review and pilot testing to ensure they accurately addressed the research questions. The feedback from experts and results of the pilot test led to a few necessary adjustments in the wording to improve the instruments' effectiveness in eliciting data.

Summary of data collection for the two phases

Phase 1 focused on collecting opinions from students enrolled in English courses offered by the Department of English at the university. The aim was to determine the types of English courses in which students most and least prefer to have Thai NNESTs, as well as the attributes of Thai NNESTs that they prefer.

An open-ended questionnaire was distributed to students taking English courses. The students were instructed to complete the questionnaire within two weeks; to answer in either Thai or English according to their preference; and to complete the questionnaire anonymously so they would feel comfortable expressing their opinions freely. All 63 participants submitted one- to two-page responses, yielding a total of 71 pages of text to be analyzed. Consent to participate was obtained from students before participation by having them read the information in the consent form that was provided by Thai NNESTs in their classes.

Phase 2 involved the implementation of focus group interviews to gain further insights into the perspectives of students and Thai NNESTs regarding ways to optimize students' learning experiences in the types of English courses in which they least preferred to have Thai EFL instructors.

The interviews were conducted via three Zoom meetings: group 1 with eight student participants, group 2 with eight student participants, and group 3 with six teacher participants. Each session lasted approximately one and a half hours, resulting in a total of 4 hours and 30 minutes of interview data. Consent was obtained by having students read the information in the consent form and provided their consent via email. After the focus group sessions, the researchers prepared data for analysis by converting audio into text and then reading through the transcriptions, from which some irrelevant information was removed before coding the data.

To ensure that student participants responded freely, the researchers informed them that their participation in either phase would have no bearing on their course grades and their identities would be kept confidential. Teacher participants were also informed that their identities would be kept confidential.

Data analysis

To examine the questionnaires regarding the types of English skill-based courses that Thai students most and least preferred to study with Thai NNESTs, as well as the teacher attributes they desired, content analysis was employed. The data were separately coded and cross-checked by two coders to establish inter-rater reliability, which had a 90% agreement rate, indicating a high level of consistency. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion. After the identification of recurring patterns and themes within the responses, commonalities in the students' preferences were evident.

For the second research question, concerning content or skills learned from Thai instructors and potential solutions to problematic aspects of learning, we thematically analyzed the data gathered from the transcriptions of the three focus group interview sessions (Creswell, 2015) to gain insights into participants' perceptions, concerns, and suggestions for maximizing students' learning experiences with Thai NNESTs. This analysis involved a comprehensive coding process for both student and teacher interview datasets by two raters. Cross-checks of the results of the two coders showed an inter-rater reliability of 85%. Disagreements were resolved through discussion until both researchers reached consensus on all categories. The themes that emerged from the teacher group were compared with those of the student groups to gain valuable insights and recommendations for addressing discrepancies and cultivating an environment conducive to maximizing student learning potential with Thai NNESTs.

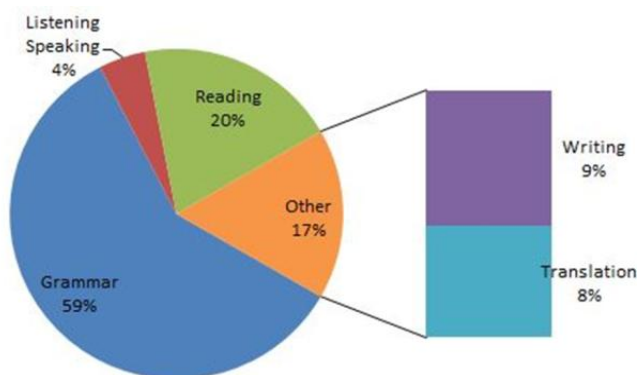
Results

First Research Question

The first research question concerned the English skill-based courses that Thai students most and least preferred to take with Thai NNESTs. From 63 student questionnaire responses provided by mixed-major students, the results are as follows.

Figure 1

English Skill-Based Courses for which Participants Most Preferred to Study with Thai NNESTs



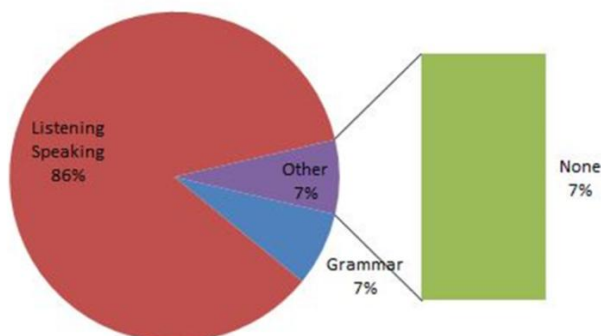
The English skill-based courses that students expressed the greatest interest in taking with Thai NNESTs predominantly include Grammar, which comprises 59% of all responses, followed by Reading (20%) and Writing/Translation (17%). In contrast, only 4% of responses indicated a preference among Thai EFL students for studying Speaking and Listening with Thai NNESTs. The primary motivations behind their preference for studying English grammar with Thai NNESTs are elucidated in the following excerpt shared by participant S1. Eighteen other students expressed similar motivations.

English grammar is complicated. Thai NNESTs can explain it more clearly than native English speakers because they can explain in Thai if students don't really understand the lessons. S1

Conversely, Question B in the questionnaire elicited the courses in which the students least wanted to have Thai instructors.

Figure 2

English Skill-Based Courses for which Participants Least Preferred to Study with Thai NNESTs



A large majority of respondents (86%) identified Listening-Speaking as the English skill-based course that they least preferred to be taught by Thai NNESTs. This result confirms the pattern found in previous studies of Thai students' preference for NESTs in oral skills courses. Their reasons for not wanting to take oral-skill courses with Thai NNESTs can be categorized into two main factors. The first was the perceived disadvantages of Thai NNESTs in terms of English pronunciation and vocabulary, as evidenced by the following excerpts:

Accent & Pronunciation

Listening is really important for developing skills. The accent matters too. Most Thai instructors (not all) don't focus much on their accent, and it sometimes confuses students. Native English speakers pronounce words more accurately. S8

Vocabulary

Native speakers have advantages in both pronunciation and vocab or expressions, which are an important part of speaking skill. It doesn't mean learning speaking skill with Thai instructors is bad, but learning it from people who grow up with it must be better. S57

Another factor contributing to their reluctance to enroll in courses with Thai NNESTs is related to negative attitudes and teaching practices observed among these instructors. Several examples of students' responses are provided below:

Negative attitudes

They constantly find faults and criticize when students make grammar and pronunciation mistakes. So that makes students uncomfortable to speak. S14

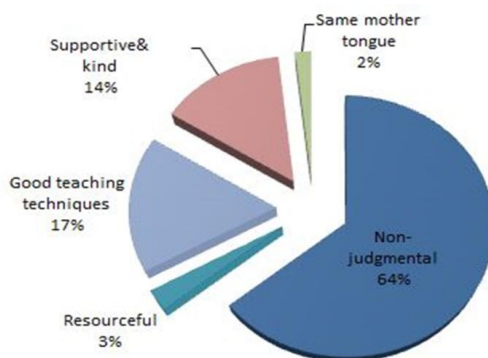
Finally, as articulated in the following excerpt, they were apprehensive about the absence of an immersive English-speaking environment in courses taught by Thai instructors:

Learning with foreign teachers puts me in an environment where I have to communicate only in English. When I have a Thai teacher I don't really try to speak English. To improve your listening and speaking skills in English, you should be in an environment where speaking only English is enforced. S38

In addition to identifying the most and least favored English skill-based courses taught by Thai NNESTs, the students also described the types of instructor attitudes, characteristics, and qualifications they deemed beneficial for enhancing their English proficiency.

Figure 3

Students' Preferred Attributes for English Instructors



Students prioritized traits in their instructors such as being non-judgmental, understanding, empathic, and open-minded. Furthermore, they valued instructors who were supportive and kind, pedagogically proficient, and resourceful, which were crucial in motivating students to engage in English language learning. They also mentioned the importance of possessing a profound understanding of the subject matter and a mastery of English. Additionally, some participants perceived a shared mother tongue between instructors and students as conducive to their learning process.

Second Research Question

Student participants' views

The second research question, which concerned the attitudes, characteristics, and/or qualifications of Thai EFL instructors that students desired, was addressed by Question A posed in the students' focus groups: *"Based on your experience of learning English listening and speaking with Thai instructors, what do you like about their teaching? What strategies or activities did they use that you found effective?"* As shown in Table 1, three main themes emerged from this data analysis.

Table 1

Students' Responses to the First Question

Main themes	Detailed comments
1. Thai teachers' accents	1.1. A near-native English accent is preferred. 1.2. If not near-native, the teacher's accent should at least be easily understandable. 1.3. The speaking fluency and accuracy of Thai teachers can serve as role models for students. The teacher's speaking skills can inspire them to keep practicing.
2. Effective techniques	2.1. Interesting and entertaining media are used, including video clips, movie clips, songs, and authentic materials. 2.2. Conversations are started with simple phrases or small talk. 2.3. Students participate in role-plays, preferably with partners or group members of their own choice. 2.4. Teachers and students have two-way communication and collaboratively decide on the topic or content of the lesson. 2.5. Learning activities promote involvement and interactions among students. 2.6. Online dictionaries may be used during class. 2.7. Students are engaged in active learning.
3. Desirable teacher characteristics	3.1. Teachers do not criticize students' pronunciation or reprimand them for making errors. 3.2. They show sympathy for learners. 3.3. They are flexible. 3.4. They provide a safe zone. 3.5. They are energetic. 3.6. They praise students when they do well and show support. 3.7. They listen to students' problems, worries, and needs. 3.8. They don't mix codes- or code-switch between Thai and English. 3.9. They accept all students' personality attributes, such as introverts and extroverts.

One participant was impressed by the digital literacy demonstrated by teachers who integrated AI tools and other technologies into their instruction, making class activities much more enjoyable and engaging. For example, in the focus group interview, Student 5 (SF5) shared the following:

Given that university and high school students are predominantly from Generation Z or a more recent cohort, most have grown up as digital natives. As a result, they often feel more at ease and engaged when teachers integrate technology into lessons, particularly to facilitate ongoing practice in speaking English. SF5

Question B posed in the student focus groups was, “Conversely, what aspects of teaching did you not like? What strategies or activities did they use that you did not find effective?” Three themes emerged, as summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Students’ Responses to the Second Question

Main themes	Detailed comments
1. Ineffective teaching practices	1.1. Thai teachers adhere strictly to the textbook content. 1.2. They have no time for preparation due to an excessive workload. 1.3. They do not vary their teaching styles, making lessons predictable and boring. 1.4. They teach conversation that is impractical and inapplicable in daily life. 1.5. They interrupt students while they are presenting. 1.6. They provide too few examples. 1.7. They allow inadequate time for discussion.
2. Overly strict grading practices	2.1. Thai teachers are overly meticulous when giving grades. 2.2. They deduct points for seemingly unnecessary or trivial grammatical errors, which may lead to unfair results. 2.3. They teach material that does not appear on the exam, leading to unfair grades.
3. Negative in-class feedback	3.1 Thai teachers give immediate feedback, which, whether positive or negative, embarrasses students. 3.2. They often give negative feedback without providing a solution. 3.3. Negative feedback should be given individually.

Question C concerned how students should deal with the unavoidable necessity of taking a speaking course from a Thai instructor in order to benefit the most from it. Two themes emerged as shown in Table 3.

Table 3*Students' Responses to the Third Question*

Main themes	Detailed comments
1. Come to terms with teachers' non-native accents	1.1. Students should accept and embrace the diversity of English accents. Communication should be considered effective as long as the teacher's speech is comprehensible. 1.2. Students should accept teachers' pronunciation, despite their non-native accent.
2. Communicate and collaborate with teachers	2.1. Students should discuss with classmates how to approach any problems with their teacher. 2.2. They should communicate or consult with their teacher directly. 2.3. Students should provide constructive feedback to the teacher on the teacher evaluation form at the end of the semester.

The majority of student participants interviewed articulated their willingness to acknowledge and respect the diversity of English accents and embrace the Thai-English accent as part of Global Englishes. They expressed their intention to engage in collaborative efforts with their Thai instructors, emphasizing the importance of mutual understanding and empathy. Furthermore, students recognized the efficacy of teaching methodologies employed by Thai instructors, which were comparable to those of NESTs. When students had issues with their teachers or felt resentment in class, they intended to keep communications open with their teachers.

Teacher participants' views

To ensure that perspectives from both groups of stakeholders were considered, we also conducted a focus group interview with six Thai instructors. To compare their views with those of the student participants, we slightly modified the questions to fit the teaching experiences of Thai NNESTs.

Question A of the teacher interview, which was based on our finding that most students preferred to learn English speaking skills with native English teachers, was "*What is your opinion on the students' questionnaire findings, which indicated a preference for learning English listening and speaking with a NEST? How would you respond to this student viewpoint?*" Two themes emerged from our analysis of their responses, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4*Teacher Participants' Responses to the First Question*

Main themes	Detailed comments
1. Thai teachers should acknowledge students' preference for native English instructors in English speaking courses.	1.1 Thai NNESTs should not lament their unpopularity among students but remain positive and do their best to progress in their teaching careers. 1.2. They should change students' mindset about English learning goals and teach them principles from acquisition theory. For example: - Emphasize that fluency and accuracy are more important than grammar. - Explain that achieving a native accent is not the primary goal of learning English today. - Clarify the concepts of pronunciation and accent and emphasize the importance of aiming for comprehensibility rather than perfection of a certain English variant.
2. Thai teachers should embrace this situation as an opportunity for self-reflection and improvement of their in-class performance.	2.1. Thai NNESTs should incorporate authentic sources into the classroom, such as YouTube, podcasts, and TED Talks to provide models of pronunciation. 2.2. They should enhance the learning environment by providing engaging activities and opportunities for interaction. 2.3. They should attend or organize workshops on innovative approaches, such as function-based teaching approaches. 2.4. They should speak English naturally in class. 2.5. They should establish clear course objectives. 2.6. They should assist students in reducing their anxiety. 2.7. They should support struggling learners. 2.8. They should prioritize students' fluency over correct grammar.

To elicit the teacher participants' perceptions of the characteristics of Thai NNESTs who teach English speaking effectively, Question B of their focus group interview was, "What instructor attributes do you believe are most conducive to enhancing students' listening and speaking skills?" The findings are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5*Teacher Participants' Responses to the Second Question*

Main Themes	Details
1. Effective Thai teachers are lively.	1.1. Thai NNESTs should be energetic and attuned to the classroom atmosphere. For instance, as students often feel tired during afternoon classes, teachers should engage them in lively discussions and incorporate activities they enjoy.
2. Effective Thai teachers maintain a friendly, positive attitude.	2.1. Thai NNESTs should avoid intimidating or discouraging students with heavy or direct criticism. 2.2. They should communicate with students in a friendly manner. 2.3 They should accept and respect students' opinions.
3. Effective Thai teachers focus on students' learning rather than their own performance and protection of their egos.	3.1. Thai NNESTs should accept students' negative feedback on their teaching approach and demonstrate willingness to improve. 3.2. They should acknowledge their own limited proficiency in pronunciation. When they are unsure about the correct pronunciation of certain words, they should collaborate with their students to find the correct pronunciation by suggesting useful resources. 3.3. They should acknowledge their own pronunciation mistakes and view them as valuable learning opportunities, being prepared to learn alongside their students.
4. Effective Thai teachers are understanding, supportive, compassionate, and flexible.	4.1. Thai NNESTs should offer supportive words and praise to students who feel insecure and lack confidence, especially when they are making presentations.

Question C of the teachers' focus group interview was "What teaching strategies do you employ to promote effective learning in a listening and speaking class?" Their responses are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6*Teacher Participants' Responses to the Third Question*

Themes	Audiovisual/ Teaching tools
1. Materials	1.1. Thai NNESTs should use additional materials beyond the textbook, including - Authentic materials - Short films that evoke curiosity and surprise - TED Talks, YouTube clips, and reels 1.2. Teachers should use materials suitable for the class level
2. Teaching approaches and techniques	2.1. Thai NNESTs should be aware of their teaching pace and slow down for slower learners. 2.2. They should promote self-regulation strategies.

- 2.3. They should recommend useful digital tools and resources such as Duolingo.
 - 2.4. They should use task-based activities, such as information-gap exercises, which have proved successful in promoting student engagement in spoken tasks.
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Comparison of the Results among the Three Groups of Participants: Students from Several Majors, English-Major Students, and Thai Teachers of English

Following is a cross-group comparison of the results from each of the three overlapping interview questions:

1. What are the characteristics of Thai NNEST teachers who are effective teachers of English speaking skills?

All groups mentioned general positive characteristics and attitudes and emphasized the effective dispositions of ideal teachers, such as being supportive, resourceful, open-minded, sympathetic, flexible, and understanding. Students from both groups particularly favored teachers who are non-judgmental of learners' English speaking skills. Some English-major students stated that teachers should not code-switch between English and Thai in speaking classes. The teacher participants suggested that selflessness or having less ego was a desirable quality in teachers.

2. What are the characteristics of Thai NNESTs who are ineffective teachers of English speaking skills?

All groups agreed that a teacher's negative attitudes and detrimental behaviors such as inadequately preparing lessons, interrupting students during presentations, and providing negative feedback in public contribute to ineffective classes. Both groups of students emphasized the importance of the teacher's English accent, stating a preference for Thai teachers with a native or near-native English accent. However, English-major students expressed a more open mindset on this issue, saying they didn't mind a Thai accent as long as the teacher's English speech was comprehensible. For their part, the teacher participants acknowledged students' preference for a native English accent and committed to improving their speaking and pronunciation skills. The teacher group also stressed the importance of educating students about speaking goals, prioritizing comprehensibility over achieving a native accent. The area in which the teacher participants' and students' opinions diverged concerned the grading system. While teachers were largely unaware

of any issues with grading, many students expressed concerns that grading practices seemed unfair, such as unreasonable deductions of marks and inconsistencies. Additionally, several students reported distressing experiences of being humiliated in class when their teachers judged or criticized their work or presentations in front of their peers. In this regard, the teachers appeared to believe that providing immediate feedback was appropriate.

3. What teaching techniques are effective?

This comparison was between only the English-major students and the teacher participants, as students with other majors were not asked this question. Both groups mentioned the use of social media, audiovisual tools, authentic materials, pair/group work, role-play, and interactive activities as positive teaching techniques. The key difference is that while students primarily focused on teacher-student interactions within the classroom, teachers aimed not only to promote student engagement but also to support learner autonomy. Specifically, teachers aspired to guide students in developing self-regulation of their learning processes.

Discussion

The first research question explored which English skill-based courses Thai students most and least preferred to take with NNESTs, as well as the teacher qualities they believed enhanced their language skill development. Previous studies (Apiruangrit, 2018; Jindapitak & Teo, 2013; Jitpaiboon et al., 2025; Kanoksilapatham, 2013; Sahatsathatsana, 2017) consistently indicate that Thai students generally prefer English classes taught by NESTs. Jitpaiboon et al. (2025, p. 103) report that English-major students have a better understanding of what constitutes NESTs as opposed to NNESTs although some still “exhibit biases, perceiving individuals with a standard accent as NESTs” — that is, conflating accent with native-speaker status regardless of the speaker's actual background. Our research supports them and adds further insights by identifying English listening-speaking courses with Thai NNESTs as their least preferred English skill-based course. Interestingly, grammar courses remain the most preferable if they have to learn from Thai instructors. The claim that Thai students generally prefer NESTs over Thai NNESTs, then, warrants modification. Our findings suggest that while Thai college students prefer NESTs over Thai NNESTs for listening-speaking courses, in other courses, such as grammar or translation, they recognize that NNESTs offer the advantage of a shared mother tongue with their students. Therefore, in this study, we considered it

crucial to focus on the challenges specific to English listening-speaking courses taught by Thai NNESTs. Thus, the responses from students in Phase 1 led us to further investigate in Phase 2 what they and their instructors could do to create a classroom environment conducive to learning, even in the English course the students least preferred to be taught by Thai NNESTs.

While students of both groups similarly mentioned undesirable characteristics of some Thai NNESTs, such as negative attitudes and behaviors, as reported in the findings section, the two groups differed in their degree of tolerance for the NNESTs' Thai-English accents. Whereas English-major students expressed being more tolerant and flexible, perhaps due to their greater exposure to the concept of World Englishes and their variations, students of other majors tended to reject Thai-accented spoken English. The in-depth focus group discussions also revealed other reasons for their concerns about Thai instructors, such as ineffective teaching methods and negative attitudes towards students. Thus, it is important to keep in mind that students' unfavorable attitudes towards Thai instructors and hesitation to enroll in their listening-speaking courses may not be solely or even primarily due to the NNESTs' Thai-English accent but rather stem from other aspects of their pedagogical or linguistic proficiency. The findings echoed recent studies in which it was reported that students prioritized the teacher's attributes over their accent (Aslan & Thompson, 2016; Jain, 2022; Savova & Azarnoosh, 2024; Waelateh et al. 2019).

In light of these findings, while a strong Thai-English accent may remain a concern for some learners, it need not be viewed as a deficiency. Rather, Thai NNESTs should focus attention on three key factors influencing the instructor–student relationship that emerged in this study: language knowledge and skills, attitude and personality, and teaching methods. At the same time, institutional support is essential in reinforcing instructors' confidence—for example, through professional development and awareness-raising initiatives that promote the value of diverse English accents and help students develop more inclusive perspectives toward English use.

Language knowledge and skills: To compensate for students' perceptions of the superiority of NESTs, which are evident in their comments mentioning NNESTs' incomprehensible English speech and limited vocabulary, Thai NNESTs must demonstrate mastery of the complexities of English grammar, surpassing even the explicit knowledge of native speakers. Acknowledgement of the particular pedagogical strengths of NESTs and NNESTs (Medgyes, 1994; Mede et al., 2024) can increase NNESTs' self-esteem. Pointing out that NNESTs and NESTs possess complementary strengths in teaching English speaking, Mede et al. (2024) recommended ways to enhance the professional competence and skills of both groups in areas in which either group may fall short, such as the provision of platforms for NESTs and NNESTs to

brainstorm teaching ideas together, peer observation, team teaching, and collaborative action research. Savova and Azarnoosh (2024) highlighted the value of in-class activities such as engaging students in discussions about their preferred speaker role models and how they perceive themselves within an imagined community. As Faez (2018) observed, to achieve competence, a teacher, whether NEST or NNEST, “never stops learning how to grow as a teacher” (p. 5). The findings of this study underscore that students respect and accept teachers whom they perceive as competent and focused on their learning, regardless of the teacher’s English accent, which is not their primary criterion for evaluation.

Attitude and Personality: In both the students’ questionnaire responses and their focus group interviews, “empathy” emerged as a key term. Instructors who exhibit empathy towards students tend to foster good relationships with them, making the learning environment much more pleasant and productive. Paulhus et al. (2002) discussed shyness among East-Asian students. In our experience, Thai students also exhibit these characteristics. Providing feedback on their performance in front of classmates is something that all instructors should handle with care.

Teaching Methods: Instructors should incorporate activities that showcase their versatility as actors, entertainers, and facilitators as well as stay updated with the latest teaching technologies. Most instructors agreed that students should be explicitly informed about the misconception of achieving native-like pronunciation and encouraged to prioritize intelligibility and comprehensibility over imitating native accents (Derwing & Munro, 2015, p. 9).

While the opinions of the students were largely aligned with those of the instructors, there was a clear difference between the responses to the student participant questionnaires, which represented a broad range of majors, and those given by the English major group in their focus interview. Students from different majors reported enduring listening-speaking taught by Thai instructors, whereas English-major students did not complain. The former group’s unpleasant memories of learning English in high school underscore the need for high-school English teachers to improve their knowledge of English, their attitudes toward learners, and their instructional methods.

The English-language teaching situation is concerning at all levels of schooling, especially at the elementary level, where teachers are often required to teach English despite lacking expertise in the subject. Dhanasobhon (2007, p. 55) wrote, “It is common to find P.E. teachers teaching English in public elementary schools, and they hold the textbooks tightly, reading them page by page.” The DLTV depicts the lives of many high-school Thai NNESTs who have been working hard to demonstrate their professionalism in English

teaching. It is time for them to pursue not only pedagogical and skill competence but also attitudes and personalities conducive to a productive classroom setting.

Watson Todd and Pojanapunya's (2020) study, replicating their study from 2009, reaffirms Thai students' continuing preference for learning English with NESTs. Insuwan (2022, p. 371) reported, "...craving for Western civilization, the Thai middle-class struggle to escape the notion of rural backwardness and blackness. The struggle for social acceptance is evident in the large variety of skin whitening creams and cosmetics available in marketplaces, which reflect their desire to be white and the subjugation of top European colonialism." Our findings align with these previous studies, indicating that Thai NNESTs are not preferred by Thai students for teaching English speaking classes. The findings from this research also echo Pennycook's (2017, p. 158) ELT discourse, "Western is better." The fact that English-major students in this study seem to show more tolerance towards non-native English accents doesn't necessarily imply a decrease in the native-speakerism atmosphere in the Thai educational context. However, instead of deploring the stigma of being born a non-native English speaker, it is better to embrace the advantages of being a non-native teacher, as proposed by Medgyes (1994). NNESTs should inform their students of the benefits of shifting attention from the native speaker model to multicompetent language users (Cook, 1999).

Implications, Limitations, and Conclusion

The pedagogical recommendations for Thai instructors teaching English listening-speaking and pronunciation skills to Thai students fall into three categories: (1) language skill development, (2) attitude, and (3) teaching methods. To establish themselves as qualified instructors, Thai NNESTs should maintain motivation to enhance their English language proficiency, especially their English listening-speaking skills, surpassing those of their students. This level of commitment will demand considerable initiative on the part of NNESTs for reasons well described by Braine (2010):

...After more than four decades as an English teacher in Asia and North America, I am not optimistic about the English fluency of new English teachers. For many, despite the English language providing their livelihood, English only plays a minor role in their lives, more instrumental than integrative. Despite the concept of World Englishes gaining wide acceptance, many of these teachers see English as an alien tongue. Because the status quo has now become acceptable, there is little incentive for these teachers to change... (pp. 67-68)

While themselves resisting the appeal of complacency and continually striving for higher levels of English language proficiency, NNESTs, and indeed all instructors, should maintain a positive, understanding, flexible, less meticulous, and friendly attitude toward learners. Our results from the students' focus group indicate that students are very negatively affected by being embarrassed by their instructors in front of their peers. This finding is relevant not only to Thai instructors but also instructors from other backgrounds. We posit that, except where comparisons between NEST and NNEST perspectives or practices are unavoidable, the ideology underpinning this dichotomy should be discouraged.

We highly recommend that instructors utilize methods that portray them as both entertainers and facilitators. According to Sukavatee and Khlaisang (2023), in recent decades, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which promotes using the target language for authentic communications, has become the most popular research-based teaching method in Thai EFL contexts.

With regard to the limitations of this study, we acknowledge that our roles as both researchers and instructors of some of the student participants might have influenced their responses. Despite our encouragement for them to provide honest opinions, they may have felt intimidated by our presence, potentially leading to somewhat positive views. However, the candid questionnaire responses provided by the initial group of student participants suggest that they were confident that their opinions would not impact their final grades or overall lives.

Moreover, the interview questions for the Thai NNESTs in this study were developed based on students' responses regarding Thai teachers' classroom actions and activities. As a result, the data capture only certain aspects of Farrell's stages of self-reflection, primarily those related to teachers' consideration of what they should or should not do in class. Consequently, the findings reflect only a partial view of teachers' reflective practices. A more systematic and comprehensive application of reflective practices, grounded in Farrell's (2015) framework of critical competency, would likely lead to a clearer understanding of teachers' practices, regardless of their sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds. Ultimately, by integrating these insights into teacher-training programs, educators can be better equipped to navigate the realities of the EFL classroom with both empathy and substantive instruction.

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