

A Qualitative Study Examining Macao's Parents' Attitude towards Native and Non-native English-speaking Teachers for Private Online Synchronous One-on-one English Lessons

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ABSTRACT

In terms of English learning, whether native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) surpass non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) or vice versa has been a heated topic. These two types of teachers have their own respective benefits and drawbacks with respect to English teaching. Most of the current related studies are on the traditional educational classroom setting in both secondary school and higher education. However, the study of the virtual learning platform as a method of teaching English is rare. This research displays valuable significance in identifying whether parents in Macao have a preference towards NESTs and NNESTs before they purchase the online synchronous one-on-one English lessons for their children. This qualitative study, after two participants were interviewed, concludes that they both prefer NESTs due to their authentic accent and pronunciation and believe it is more suitable in such a speaking-and-listening oriented online lesson. Price is not the prioritized factor to consider. They are generally satisfied with the teaching style of the online NESTs but it is also important to take note of the teaching approach conducted in the online lessons towards children, to ensure that it holds their interest appropriately.

1. Introduction

Online learning has been an increasingly popular choice in the field of education as it offers flexibility and other advantages for both teachers and students. English online learning has been popular in recent years. English online learning with synchronous one-on-one English lessons has its unique advantages: in cities where either NESTs or NNESTs are rare, students can make good use of the Internet to connect online English teachers from all over the world, widening their choice of teachers and competitive prices of lessons. In such a virtual setting,

when it comes to private online synchronous one-on-one English lessons, whether to choose between NESTs and NNESTs is an interesting issue. In regular English lessons in a physical secondary school classroom setting, students cannot choose their English teachers themselves as English teachers are assigned to different classes. Only students in higher education stage may be able to choose their English teachers when it comes to elective English lessons. However, due to the flexibility and principle of demand and supply, learners can choose their own English teachers between NESTs and NNESTs in terms of their own needs in private online synchronous one-on-one Eng-

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lish lessons when purchasing their lessons.

With regards to choosing a teacher for a young child who may not be qualified to choose for themselves, their parents then play an important role in helping them with choosing the online English teacher and pay the respective fees for purchasing the online lessons. To some extent whether parents know how to choose the teachers between NESTs and NNESTs could be very interesting and their understanding as well as selection between the two groups of teachers may affect the learning progress and outcomes of their kids. This paper will explore this for further discussion and make suggestions on this topic.

2. Literature Review

With the development of technology, online learning is getting more and more popular. It was also pointed out that technology helps with the transition towards completely-distant courses ^[1]. Some studies show the advantages of online learning. It was found in the study ^[2] that learning results of online learners were as good as or even better than traditional learners no matter what their background characters were and that the learners were substantially satisfied with online learning. Online learning can help to improve not only education and training but also the quality of learning and teaching ^[3]. In another study ^[4], three main advantages to online learning were mentioned: 1) learners can choose their own studying place; 2) learners can organize their own personal learning agenda, rather than having the lesson on a particular day at a particular time; 3) learners can set their own individual pace of study without being interrupted by slow learners or vice-versa. It was mentioned that learner independence is a main input to success in online learning surroundings in which learners have their responsibility for their own learning ^[5]. It was found in another study that in formal remote education, there is great potential for wide access to higher education and enhancing the variety of pupils' population since remote technologies offer chances to learn without regional and time limitation ^[6]. It was stated that an online learning ought to have numerous features: a space for information; interaction based on education; diverse forms from words to 3D worlds; combines technologies and different teaching approaches; supports for remote learning; an online environment overlap with traditional surroundings ^[7]. However, there are also disadvantages for online learning. It is mentioned in another study that online learning has no teachers nearby in reality for face-to-face interaction and no peers who can help for immediate reminders about assignments ^[8]. This may lead to distraction in lessons.

3. Native and Non-native English-speaking Teachers (NESTs and NNESTs)

Images of NESTs have frequently been used on printed or electronic advertisements to attract students in the field of English learning. It was particularly noted that many websites of language centers in mainland China, Japan, Thailand, etc often describe their ideal teachers as white and energetic native speakers from an English-speaking country ^[9]. There has often been the stereotype that NESTs generally surpass NNESTs. With the increasing number of NNESTs in the world ^[10], studies appear more interested in their differences in terms of teaching outcomes, and there has been much useful data gleaned from such studies ^[11]. It is a commonly held belief that NESTs help with the English improvement.

3 classifications of important teaching factors for language proficiency were suggested: general teaching approach, their use of English, and specific language-teaching approaches ^[12]. It was noted that students developed a positive attitude towards native speakers of the language, regardless of whether or not the teacher themselves was a native, so long as the tutor encouraged open-mindedness and was enthusiastic in the target language ^[13].

It was mentioned that it was common for many to feel that teachers with non-native accents were less qualified and therefore less effective. This could possibly be a reason for employment prejudice in this sector, despite the reasoning not necessarily being true ^[14].

According to a study ^[15], detailed features advantages and disadvantages of NNESTs were well mentioned. NNESTs tend to be able to use students' mother tongue in teaching; their pedagogical skills are effective; they are knowledgeable in English language; they have positive personality traits. However, the drawbacks of NNESTs are they are too examination-oriented; they over-correct students' work; some of them have limited use of English ability.

4. Private Online Synchronous One-on-one English Lessons as for NESTs and NNESTs

On the Internet, there are now a variety of synchronous one-on-one English lessons from which to choose and purchase, as it is a newly growing and prosperous business. Prices of lessons conducted by different teachers in terms of their experiences and backgrounds are diverse. Based on a simple overview, English teachers whose online profiles are American or British are the most expensive, having English as their first language; comparatively, English teachers from the Philippines or other Asian regions such as China, Korea, Japan are comparatively cheaper, having

English as their second language. Regardless of whether their level of experience with English affects the price, nationality seems to be prioritized. The difference in cost may lead to assumption that NESTs are better in teaching English. This is similar to the conditions of the traditional physical in-person English tutorial. For example, a study^[16] illustrated that NESTs are paid more than NNESTs, when two of the groups have similar qualifications in China. Besides payment, it also appears that NESTs are respected more highly by students and parents^[17].

Research questions

(1) Before you purchased the online synchronous one-on-one English lessons for your children, what considerations for the selection between NESTs and NNESTs did you take into account?

(2) After you observed the lessons with your children's feedback, were there any part of the selected online teacher (NNESTs or NNESTs) which satisfied or dissatisfied you?

2 interviewees were selected and interviewed via a semi-structure interview. The first interviewee (Interviewee 1) is a mother aged 43. She helped purchase a large number of online synchronous one-on-one English lessons for her daughter. This mother has a secondary school degree in Macao then without furthering her higher education, having worked as a tour guide in the tourism industry and is now a housewife. She describes her English ability as "so-so" or even less than intermediate. The second interviewee (Interviewee 2) is a mother 1 year younger than the interviewee 1, having bought a series of online lessons for her son. For educational and working experiences, she did not attend higher education after she graduated from high school in Macao. She worked as casino manager and is also now a housewife. She describes her English level as around intermediate.

5. Analysis and Results

Price

Interviewee 1 (excerpt): I didn't put fees into consideration when it came to choosing an online English teacher. I believe that NESTs are the better choice.

Interviewee 2 (excerpt): Although the fees for NESTs' lessons is higher, I still chose NESTs for my son as long as I could afford it.

From both of the interviewees, they were both willing to purchase the most appropriate lessons for their children as they saw fit. Hence, prices were not in their consideration for choosing English online teachers. It can be inferred that their responses imply the fees going along

with NESTs' online lesson seems reasonable, which is also leading to another unfair condition in the market. It was mentioned that in recent years a major challenge for employment for NNESTs has been the import of NESTs to high income Asian countries such as Japan, Hong Kong and Korea^[18]. The thought is that NESTs are the better ideal models^[19]. The sweep could gradually seep into the online English learning market. Hence, compared with NESTs, NNESTs may not have the ability to bargain as for receiving higher fees due to the stereotype that NESTs are better teachers.

Factors to choose NESTs rather than NNESTs

Interviewee 1 (excerpt): I think NESTs have better pronunciation. Pronunciation is important. I want my kid to learn better pronunciation from them. Furthermore, NESTs can share the cultures of their countries with my kid.

Interviewee 2 (excerpt): A good and native pronunciation is what I value the most. NESTs are born and raised in their English-speaking countries. They have been exposed to the most authentic English language. I believe they are more able to provide my son with the appropriate speaking lessons with authentic pronunciation. No matter how hard NNESTs learn pronunciation, their accents are still different from those of NESTs. Where one is born and grows up matters with respect to accent and pronunciation.

From interviewee 1's response, it is also noticed that culture learning with English learning is important. The inferior understanding of NNESTs about foreign cultures were mentioned in certain studies^[20]. Oppositely, NESTs were familiar with their own culture of their English-speaking countries^[21]. In Chinese lessons in Macao, not only do students need to study Chinese language but also Chinese literature. The combination of both literature and linguistics aspects of a certain language helps the growth of learners' targeted language. That can also be applied in English lessons, either traditional or virtual classroom.

Similarly, pronunciation is what the interviewees focus mostly. They expect NESTs to have native English pronunciation. Due to numerous previous studies, pronunciation is the primary advantage for NESTs^[22]. The two interviewees left their education a long time ago and they may not be able to best judge if a certain NNESTs can produce pronunciation with a pure authentic English accent. The most direct way to ensure a teacher who has an authentic English accent is to choose those who are American or British.

Level of Satisfaction

Interviewee 1 (excerpt): I think the online NEST I chose for my daughter is good as she helps my daughter with improving her English, especially listening. I found the teaching approach of NESTs is very interactive, which made my kid be in love of English. Based on what I know, NESTs tend to use more lively or interactive methods in their lessons, while NNESTs often use traditional models with less interaction.

Interviewee 2 (excerpt): However, coins have two sides. I did try to find two NESTs to teach my son. The first one's teaching approach is very active and my son likes her a lot. I feel my son learned a lot from her. However, the second NEST is very quiet. He doesn't make my son feel as interested in learning English. These examples let me know that not all of the NESTs excel in teaching even if they both are NESTs. The approach they used is still also important. I am generally okay with the performance of NESTs.

In addition to pronunciation, it is crucial to also examine if the approach used in the online lessons for children is suitable. For example, storytelling in a second language classroom is known to be an understandable method of learning as it creates a pleasant learning environment. Stories ensure language is assimilated by children easily while holding their attention, and they are then able to apply language elements from the stories themselves^[23]. Children's attention of certain topics may not be as high as others so it is encouraged to use more interactive and interesting ways to attract their attention and further engage them.

It was found that NNESTs do not have innovative teaching styles^[24] while from another study^[25], it is found that NNESTs tend to be less interactive. From these two examples, it can imply that to some extent NESTs excel in using interactive approaches rather than NNESTs do in English teaching. As we may know, kids are easily distracted generally. Therefore, more in-depth interactive methods should be encouraged especially in a virtual lesson.

6. Conclusions

The two interviewees had no experience of, and did not even consider, having NNESTs teach their children English. The assumption that NESTs are better English teachers in online lessons is very present in their minds. From their comments, price is not a priority they put into account; instead, they care most for the accent and pronunciation NESTs have, and NESTs are guaranteed to have authentic accent. Regardless of the interviewees'

educational backgrounds, they still believe that choosing NESTs is a direct and ideal way of having their children follow for learning authentic pronunciation. As for the teaching style of NESTs, both interviewees find them to be generally okay. However, it is worthwhile to also pay attention to the teaching approach in online lessons. An interactive and interesting approach is still considered useful and applicable in online lessons especially for children, who may require further engagement in class. The limitation for this research is that only having two parents as interviewees may not be reliable to generalize all of the ideas and conditions. If there is further research, it is encouraged to have large-scale questionnaire responses and in-depth interviews. It would also be reasonable to choose parents of different educational and occupational backgrounds as well as financial conditions for interview for the potential difference existed.

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