

# NEST or NNEST: Does It Matter in Pronunciation Teaching?

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**NEST:** Native English Speaking Teacher

**NNEST or Non-NEST:** Nonnative English Speaking Teacher

## Points of agreement among researchers on NNEST issues:

- At least 80% of EFL/ESL teachers in the world today are NNESTs, most teaching in EFL contexts in countries where English is not the main language in general use.
- NESTs and NNESTs tend to differ in their teaching behavior and styles.
- Each group has potential advantages and disadvantages in teaching English.
- Most importantly, both groups can be skillful, effective English teachers. (Medgyes 2001)

**But what about teaching pronunciation?**

**What qualities, knowledge, or skills do effective pronunciation teachers need to have?**

## Research about NESTs and NNESTs as it applies to pronunciation

**Bear in mind:**

- Most research has been based on surveys of teachers' perceptions of how the two groups teach, not on observations of actual classroom behavior.
- These are generalizations that describe overall tendencies, and they do not fit every teacher in each group. Many, many other factors also influence how we teach.

## General Characteristics of NESTs and NNESTs in teaching pronunciation

Native English Speaking Teachers (NESTs)	Nonnative English Speaking Teachers (NNESTs)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Can be good pronunciation models; English is their L1.</li><li>▪ Have an intuitive feeling for how the language sounds.</li><li>▪ May not have conscious knowledge about how the sound system works.</li><li>▪ May not understand or be empathetic to learners' needs and problems because they haven't been English learners.</li><li>▪ May have unrealistically high expectations about what students can do and how fast they can learn.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Can be good learner models; they've been there.</li><li>▪ Their own experience as learners helps them understand and predict students' problems.</li><li>▪ May have more conscious knowledge about language (though perhaps more about grammar than pronunciation).</li><li>▪ Often have more realistic expectations of what students can do and how long it will take them to reach learning goals.</li><li>▪ Their own pronunciation may not conform to the target model. They may lack intuitive knowledge about sounds.</li></ul>

## **What comments or experiences would you like to share about NESTs and NNESTs in pronunciation teaching?**

### **Recommendations for NNESTs as pronunciation teachers**

- Understand and make use of your strengths as a NNEST. Be a good role model for your students.
- Develop your understanding of how pronunciation works and your skill in teaching it.
- Don't forget what it's like to be a beginner.
- If some aspects of your own pronunciation cause problems in intelligibility, work on improving them.

### **Recommendations for NESTs as pronunciation teachers**

- Intuition is not enough. Back up your instincts with solid knowledge about phonology and pronunciation.
- Learn from students' mistakes and misunderstandings. Build your ability to predict their problems.
- Know your own pronunciation. If there are any "quirks," you need to know what they are.
- Learn a new language. The experience will help you understand your students' challenges.

### **Recommendations for all pronunciation teachers**

- Build up your arsenal of ideas on how to teach pronunciation from as many sources as you can.
- Remember that you are not alone. Share your knowledge and experience with others and learn from them in return, and everyone will benefit.

## **In conclusion:**

NEST or NNEST: It *does* matter in pronunciation teaching, but not in the way that was once assumed. Both NESTs and NNESTs can become skilled, effective pronunciation teachers. Everyone has strengths, and everyone has challenges to overcome. With preparation and experience, we can all do it!

## **For further reading**

Braine, G. (Ed.) (1999). *Non-native Educators in English Language Teaching*. New York: Routledge.

Braine, G. (2010). *Nonnative Speaker English Teachers: Research, Pedagogy, and Professional Growth*. New York: Routledge.

De Oliveira, L. C. (2011). Strategies for Nonnative-English-Speaking Teachers' Continued Development as Professionals. *TESOL Journal* 2.2, June 2011.

Mahboob, A. (Ed.) (2010). *The NNEST Lens: Non Native English Speakers in TESOL*. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Medgyes, P. (1992). Native or non-native: Who's Worth More? *ELT Journal* Volume 46/4. Oxford University Press.

Medgyes, P. (2001). When the Teacher is a Non- Native Speaker. In *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language, Third Edition*. Celce-Murcia, M. (Ed.). Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

## **This is my website with more information and resources on teaching pronunciation:**

<http://teachingpronunciation.weebly.com>