

The Native English-Speaking Teacher as an Agent and a Professional: A Reflection on Current Research and Paths Forward

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Native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) occupy an often contested position within the Korean public school system; however, every year programs such as English Program in Korea (EPIK) continue to hire new NESTs from English-speaking countries. Despite the fact that NESTs have been working in Korean public schools for over two decades, research studies regarding the NEST and their lived experiences continue to be few in number, particularly those that explore their conceptualization of professionalism and agency. To the best of this researcher's knowledge, NEST-related literature also has yet to be synthesized in a comprehensive literature review. This integrative literature review is intended to help to fill this gap and to provide suggestions for future empirical research studies. This review analyzes eighteen empirical research studies and synthesizes current findings under the conceptual framework of the NEST as an agent and a professional. Findings assert that there are a number of barriers that may have a negative effect on NEST development as professionals and agents, with many of these barriers systemic and contextual in nature. This review concludes with implications for future research and suggestions for paths forward, which include not only potential topical areas for empirical research studies but also a suggestion for disseminating research so that it reaches a wider audience.

Keywords: native English-speaking teacher (NEST), professionalism, teacher agency, native-speakerism, English language teaching (ELT)

INTRODUCTION

Globalization and the resulting spread of English as the world's lingua franca has led to an increased demand for English language

educators. This demand has led to English speakers becoming a commodity in the global economy, particularly those who speak English “natively” (Jeon, 2020, p. 2). Korea has responded to this by creating government-sponsored schemes to hire native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) from a select seven countries that include Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States (Jeon, 2009). Hiring requirements for these programs often do not require teaching experience or specialized education – candidates usually only require a bachelor’s degree, which may be in a field unrelated to English education (Jeon, 2009). This has become a topic of contention, ranging from debates regarding what professional qualifications potential teachers should have, to discussion of discrimination based on race and nationality (Ruecker & Ives, 2015), to debates regarding the usefulness of NESTs in general (Han, 2005).

Additionally, Holliday’s (2005) seminal work regarding native-speakerism has led to questions regarding whether the NEST should have a place in Asian school systems. Native-speakerism as a concept is complex and far-reaching, but the term itself can be defined as a belief that NESTs “represent a ‘Western culture’ from which springs the ideals both of the English language and of English language teaching methodology” (Holliday, 2005, as cited in Holliday, 2006, p. 385). Despite these questions, many Asian countries continue to hire large numbers of NESTs. Korea specifically had plans to hire ninety new NESTs for Seoul public schools in 2019 (Ock, 2019, para. 1).

Yet, while NESTs may enjoy the prestige afforded to them by native-speakerism, their status as outsiders may lead to feelings of not belonging within their teaching communities, lack of agency, and confusion about their status as teaching professionals (Sim, 2014; Yim & Ahn, 2018). Though the number of NESTs also continues to grow in Korea, research studies focusing explicitly on their lived experiences, particularly in regard to professionalism and agency,¹ are few in number (Ellis, 2016; Sim, 2014; Yim & Ahn, 2018) and data is rarely drawn from the NEST themselves (Copland et al., 2019). This points to a need for more research that focuses on the NEST, despite their contested position in the Korean education system. Numerous calls for improved research exist in multiple papers across the field of TESOL, but to the best of my knowledge, existing literature regarding the NEST in Korea has yet to be synthesized in a comprehensive literature review. The intention of this integrative literature review is therefore to synthesize

existing literature and to identify directions that future studies may take. This is conducted through the lens of the NEST as an agent and a professional.²

THE KOREAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

While the Korean education system is not the focus of this literature review, it is important to understand how the system is structured and the role that the NEST is intended to fulfill within this structure. Despite the fact that recent literature contests the inherent value and possibility of speaking English “just like a native speaker,” many Koreans continue to seek native-like mastery of the language (Ahn, 2014). This has had a number of effects on language education and society at large. English proficiency has become a marker of social class, and distrust of public school language education has led to a two-tier education system in which the “best” English language education is a commodity accessible only to the elite (Piller & Cho, 2013).

In turn, this led to reform in public school English language education, namely in the form of shifting from the grammar-translation method to more communicative teaching methods (Ahn, 2010, p. 239). This shift to communicative language teaching coincided with the placement of more NESTs in Korean public schools. The official government plan included the placement of at least one NEST in every public school (Jeon, 2009, p. 235). The rationale of this plan was to provide students with more English input, to create a more authentic language-learning environment, and to help foster “greater cultural understanding” (Jeon, 2009, p. 235).

Response to language education reforms in the public school system has been mixed, and as a result, the implementation of these reforms has been inconsistent. Reasons for these inconsistencies include institutional constraints such as large classroom sizes, classroom management needs, existing norms for learners (including learning styles and language use), lesson goals, teaching methods, and teaching to tests (Ahn, 2010, p. 243). Every Korean student who wishes to attend university must take a high-stakes entrance exam known as the *Suneung*, which assesses English grammatical knowledge and reading comprehension, but not productive skills (Kim, E.-J., 2010, p. 226). As such, the *Suneung* strongly influences the choice of language pedagogy and learning

strategies used in secondary education, though the exam arguably affects the entire education system due to the fact that many Korean students start preparing for the *Suneung* before they start elementary school (Moodie & Nam, 2015, p. 64). This creates added pressure for teachers, and results in a teaching culture in which what is learned in teacher education coursework differs from actual classroom practices (Ahn, 2010, p. 239). Additionally, teachers' past history as learners may be "in conflict with the new curriculum" (Kim, E.-J., 2010, p. 234), or teachers who began their careers prior to reform may not feel that they have adequate teacher education or language proficiency to achieve the goals of the new curriculum (Kim, E.-J., 2010, p. 232). Some teachers cite their unchanged teaching activity as being due to a lack of a supportive community that may help scaffold learning and/or teaching; rather, the community supports exam-based learning (Kim, E.-J., 2010, p. 236). Further, the Ministry of Education appears to ignore the "broader macro-structures that shape the nature of activity within the context of 'real' English language classrooms in 'real' schools," which some attribute to curricular reforms not meeting initial expectations (Ahn, 2010, p. 253).

It is important to become familiar with current language education practice and the status of reform because this all arguably has a direct effect on the NEST. These effects include not only their role within the system, but also their overall utilization. Like the implementation of CLT or the Teaching English through English (TEE) policy, despite the fact that the government continues to make large investments in employing NESTs, the government has provided little guidance on how to utilize these teachers and few resources are provided to ensure that they are properly utilized (Moodie & Nam, 2016, p. 85). Additionally, the inexperience of many NESTs is "in conflict with program goals of improving teaching methods and developing materials" (Moodie & Nam, 2016, p. 82). Though the focus should be on hiring experienced NESTs, many Korean schools instead hire these teachers on the basis of easy access and cost effectiveness, which creates a conundrum of "cheap" teachers resulting in "cheap" outcomes (Han, 2005, p. 253).

The Role of the NEST in Korean Schools

In order to work in a Korean public school, prospective NESTs may apply to the English Program in Korea (EPIK), a government-sponsored

program that covers large parts of the country³ (Jeon, 2009, p. 236). The most basic requirement for the EPIK program is that potential candidates hold a bachelor's degree and citizenship from one of seven countries⁴ (Jeon, 2009, p. 236). EPIK has developed more stringent hiring qualifications in recent years, including the requirement for candidates to have either an education degree, past teaching experience, or a TEFL/TESOL/CELTA certificate (English Program in Korea, 2013b, Table 1). Those who have higher qualifications command a higher salary (English Program in Korea, 2013b, Table 1).

In most public schools, NESTs are required to team-teach with a local Korean teacher (Jeon, 2020, p. 9). The role that each teacher takes is highly dependent on context as well as the dynamic between the NEST and the Korean co-teacher. In some co-teaching relationships, the co-teacher may take more of a background role where they support the NEST's teaching (Kim, M., 2010), while in other co-teaching relationships, the co-teacher may take more of a central role while the NEST acts as an assistant teacher (Yim & Ahn, 2018). The role that the co-teacher takes can often be attributed to their own teaching beliefs and teaching context (Carless, 2006; Kim, M., 2010). Some school administrators may ask Korean co-teachers not to use English in the NEST's classroom (Yim & Ahn, 2018, p. 217), some co-teachers may not be able to afford additional responsibility on top of their busy schedule (Sim, 2014, p. 132), and others may be less interested in team-teaching due to low English proficiency (Jeon, 2009, p. 238). The relationship that they have with their co-teacher arguably has a profound effect on the NEST. Co-teachers often help NESTs adapt to their school, help NESTs to grow as professionals (Lee & Chowdhury, 2018), take care of the NEST's affairs (both within the school and often outside of the school), and may act as direct supervisors who have an effect on the NEST's continued employment at the school (Sim, 2014; Yim & Ahn, 2018).

Role of the Researcher

I am brought to this research by my own experience as a NEST working within the Korean public school system. I worked at two different elementary schools in the early to mid-2010s. When I started at my first position in Korea, my qualifications consisted of a newly minted bachelor of arts degree unrelated to education or English

language, and a TEFL certificate that I attained through a short online program. Throughout my four-year sojourn, I struggled with feelings of “authenticity” regarding my status as a teacher, particularly as I felt that my professionalism was questioned by local teachers at my schools. I was keenly aware that I was replaceable, that I was not seen as a real teacher by many of my colleagues, that my students did not see me as a real teacher, and that despite the fact that I put in my best effort and did my job well, many saw me as underqualified. This, along with my interest in English as a lingua franca (ELF), native-speakerism, and the status of English in South Korea, led to research interests regarding NEST’s lived experiences and the effect that experiences in their roles have on their overall sense of professionalism and agency as a teacher.

With this in mind, I have been careful to not allow my own experience as a NEST affect my interpretations of my data. It is inevitable that my interpretation has been shaped by my own experiences, but I believe that my experience as a NEST has given me valuable insight that has aided my analysis more than it has harmed the overall validity of my review.

METHODOLOGY

Initial Review of the Literature

I first conducted an initial review of the literature in order to arrive at potential themes or areas of interest within the field as well as to look for any pre-existing literature reviews that synthesize current findings, identify deficiencies in current research, or offer suggestions for future research. This initial review of the literature, which included Jeon (2009), Han (2005), Sim (2014) and Yim and Ahn (2018), provided enough information to arrive at a conceptual framework that helped to inform a later, more in-depth review of the literature. This initial review of the literature did not reveal any existing literature reviews that synthesize studies specifically concerning NESTs, though a later search led to the discovery of Moodie and Nam (2016), which synthesizes recent research regarding English teaching in South Korea. The references section of Moodie and Nam was a helpful resource and their literature review overall helped me conceptualize how I would perform my own review of the literature.

The apparent lack of synthesis of existing studies directly related to the NEST, along with the fact that research related to NESTs continues to be highly relevant to Korean contexts, led to my decision to conduct an integrative literature review. An integrative literature review is intended to address “new or emerging topics that would benefit from a holistic conceptualization and synthesis of the literature to date,” with “knowledge from the literature synthesized into a model or conceptual framework that offers a new perspective on the topic” (Torraco, 2005, p. 357). I conceived of a conceptual framework regarding the NEST as an agent and a professional, and conducted the review under the theory that while the NEST may benefit from native-speakerism, they often face isolation within their teaching communities and lack agency, and their status as teaching professionals is often questioned (Sim, 2014; Yim & Ahn, 2018).

Search Keywords and Emerging Themes

While there is a wealth of information regarding English language teaching in Korea, there do not seem to be so many studies regarding NESTs specifically; therefore, the literature search was expanded to include NESTs teaching in other areas of Asia. To narrow the scope of the literature search, the following keywords and search terms were used: “native English-speaking teachers in Korea,” “English language teaching in South Korea,” “native-speakerism,” “native English-speaking teachers in Asia,” “professional English teacher Korea,” and “English program in Korea.” Some of these search terms may seem broad, however, given the limited scope of papers specifically regarding NESTs working in Korea, broad search terms seemed necessary in order to capture a larger number of articles. My intention was to keep information manageable regarding the “native English-speaking teachers in Asia” keyword, therefore I initially decided to include only studies conducted with NESTs teaching in Hong Kong. The goals of Hong Kong’s NEST program are similar to the goals of Korea’s – both aim to hire NESTs to enhance public school English language education, albeit have different hiring requirements⁵ and both NEST programs are equally contested (Carless, 2006; Jeon, 2020). After my initial analysis of the data, I thought that my interpretations would be better informed if I included papers from other locales; therefore, I made the decision to also include some papers that analyzed NESTs’ teaching experiences in Japan. NESTs working in

public schools in Japan and Korea are both required to team-teach with a local teacher, which creates a similar teaching context – additionally, the programs have similar hiring requirements (Jeon, 2020).

My review included papers published in the last twenty years. I chose to disregard papers older than this in order to ensure that the data collected was as relevant to the current NEST experience as possible. I initially searched the library databases of two large Canadian universities, then expanded my search of the databases to include Google Scholar and ERIC. My initial search keywords led to twenty empirical research studies and one literature review. In order to find more relevant papers to inform thematic analysis, I looked at the references section of these articles and was able to find another ten empirical research studies. I later participated in a writing consultation with one of my graduate school professors, who suggested additional readings. This led to the discovery of six additional articles.

The abstracts of the empirical studies were then evaluated according to topical relevancy. Those papers that did not fit the scope of my conceptual framework were eliminated. The studies that appeared to fit these parameters were read in full, and details regarding the study (including its methodology, sample size, and main findings) were recorded in a literature review organized grid system (Crossman, 2019). I also made notes regarding the studies in a separate research journal, organizing the notes according to emerging themes. After I read the studies in full, I then read over my literature grid and eliminated papers that were irrelevant to my main research topic, had unclear methodology, or relied heavily upon research published beyond the last twenty years. After completing this process of elimination, eighteen papers remained for data analysis. (See Appendix A for a list of these studies.)

As I continued to read and take notes, common themes and commentary began to emerge. These themes and related commentary included the Korean education system (both the public and the private sector), NEST teacher education, native-speakerism, professionalism, agency, community, team-teaching and cultural competence. I then decided to conduct further analysis based on the principles of thematic analysis, which is a theoretically flexible method for identifying and analyzing patterns in qualitative data (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Thematic analysis was guided by Clarke and Braun (2013), Maxwell (2005), and Swain (2018).

This literature review had a few limitations. The studies reviewed

overwhelmingly followed a qualitative methodology, with few utilizing mixed-methods or quantitative data. Many of the studies relied upon interviews and reported experiences rather than observation, which may create concerns for reliability and validity. I was limited in the databases that I was able to search, and my access to Korean databases and journals was restricted. This review is also limited to those studies published in English; it is possible that sources published in Korean may have additional relevant data to offer. Further, though the focus was a Korean context, there is a limited number of existing studies that specifically focus on a Korean context. I attempted to overcome this by including studies that focus on other relevant contexts (Hong Kong and Japan), though this may have introduced some unreliable interpretations of the data.

DISCUSSION

The NEST's Professional Identity

In the Korean context, one of the most easily identifiable barriers to the NEST's professional identity is lack of proper training for those without teaching experience and without a teaching certificate (Jeon, 2020, p. 9). Those who lack these qualifications often face conflict from local teachers and administrators as well as students. From local teachers and administrators, conflict often ensues because the NEST is unable to meet the expectations of local teachers when they inevitably struggle to fulfill their teaching role (Jeon, 2020, p. 9), while conflict may ensue between NESTs and students because students do not perceive NESTs as legitimate teachers (Han, 2005; Jeon, 2009; Lee & Chowdhury, 2018). Yet, the inherent irony of the Korean context is that even teachers who have past teaching experience and training may have a similar experience. One reason for this is the fact that practices in the Korean education system often contradict what teachers have learned and practiced in other contexts (Lee & Chowdhury, 2018; Yim & Ahn, 2018). Thus, like the inexperienced NEST, even those who are considered experienced teachers may rely heavily upon their co-teachers to develop their teaching style and instructional pace (Yim & Ahn, 2018, p. 132). Research suggests that it may be beneficial for experienced teachers to also receive formal training and professional development in

order to adapt their professional practices specifically to a Korean context (Lee & Chowdhury, 2018, p. 98).

Aside from teaching experience, perceived illegitimacy of the NEST may be attributed to the role that each teacher takes within the classroom. The task of classroom management and responsibility for students' academic success usually falls upon the local co-teacher, while NESTs are generally responsible for incorporating CLT in the classroom (Lee & Chowdhury, 2018, p. 97). These CLT-based tasks involve engaging learners with games, promoting learning strategies that build relationships between teacher and student, and improving students' confidence when interacting with native speakers (Lee & Chowdhury, 2018, p. 97). This creates a dichotomy of "serious teacher" versus "fun teacher," with the co-teacher often taking the former role and the NEST being relegated to the latter (p. 98). While the "fun teacher" role may seem positive, in reality it may make it more difficult for NESTs to gain their students' respect (p. 98). This is true for other contexts in Asia – Robert Kiczowski, a scholar who formerly taught in Japan, posits in a duo-ethnography that "[in Japan] foreigners are just for communication practice, or entertainment," while Japanese teachers teach "actual English" (Lowe & Kiczowski, 2016, p. 9).

With this in mind, while it is tempting to blame the NEST and their shortcomings as teachers for the obstacles that they face regarding professionalism, there are clear systemic issues that exacerbate the problem. One inherent issue is the fact that public school teaching programs for NESTs have low eligibility requirements, along with lower salaries in comparison to other NEST schemes in Asia (Jeon, 2020, p. 9). Another issue is that the official title of NESTs working within the EPIK program is "assistant language teacher," which semantically leads to questions about their perceived professionalism (Jeon, 2020; Yim & Ahn, 2018). Additionally, NESTs are often underutilized, which leads to both the native teachers themselves and other program stakeholders thinking that they are overpaid for what they do (Jeon, 2009; Han, 2005). Further, there is no upward mobility for NESTs within the school system (Yim & Ahn, 2018). This not only offers little to motivate experienced teachers to seek employment in Korea, but also offers little incentivization for those working within the system to develop effective professional practices.

Here it is important to note that this is not a problem unique to the Korean context. NESTs in Hong Kong and Japan also report a lack of

upward mobility as a barrier to professionalism and report that they are often not treated as professionals, which may lead to frustration and demotivation, and ultimately to them leaving the profession (Geluso, 2013; Moorhouse, 2017). This is one of the plights of NEST systems. NESTs are perceived differently from local teachers for a number of reasons, including an assumption that they will only be at their schools for a short time (Jeon, 2009; Kim, M., 2010), yet little has been done to help retain experienced teachers, which perpetuates the cycle of hiring inexperienced teachers to fill empty roles. Further, few opportunities are provided for professional development – one participant in Sim (2014) cited feeling that all responsibilities for professional development fall upon individual NESTs and their co-teachers, which indicates a lack of systematic support (p. 132). This is corroborated by Lee and Chowdhury (2018) in which one participant (a local teacher) posited that the role of the co-teacher is “crucial” because NESTs may see little improvement in their teaching practice if their co-teacher does not act as a mentor (p. 90).

The NEST’s Development of Agency and Community

One of the most common reoccurring themes in the literature is reports of the NEST’s isolation from teaching communities within their schools (Erling, 2017; Jeon, 2009, 2020; Kim, 2011; Yim & Ahn, 2018). This finding has been corroborated by studies conducted with NESTs in Hong Kong (Chu & Morrison, 2011; Moorhouse, 2017; Trent, 2012). In Kim (2011), participants reported this sense of isolation as something positive. NESTs in this study posited that the separation between Korean faculty and themselves had a positive effect on their sense of community and overall development of agency as autonomous teachers (p. 135). In most other studies, however, isolation has been reported as a negative experience for the NEST because it often leads to increased feelings of powerlessness and may negatively affect agency. There are two possible reasons for this: One, participants in Kim’s study taught as part of a faculty of NESTs in a university setting, while many working in public school systems are the only NEST working at their school (Moorhouse, 2017; Yim & Ahn, 2018); two, participants in Kim’s study were given more autonomy in their teaching, with the freedom to teach alone, to design their own syllabi, and to implement their own lessons (p. 134). This is in direct contrast to some public school contexts where the NEST

is forced to teach to the textbook and may not even know the curriculum requirements that their co-teachers follow (Jeon, 2009, p. 238).

While some NESTs may eventually embrace this sense of isolation and find agency in other aspects of their roles (Yim & Ahn, 2018), Erling (2017) pointed out that NESTs are often framed “in an active position of maintaining distance from colleagues in foreign countries,” despite the fact that it often may not be of their own choice or doing (p. 96). NESTs may often feel not expected or not welcomed to socialize or work with their Korean colleagues (Erling, 2017, p. 96) and may feel that this “othering” or disconnectedness is imposed upon them (Jeon, 2009, p. 239). This isolation is further enforced in teaching contexts where the NEST’s class is disconnected from the regular curriculum, particularly at the secondary level, where there is pressure to teach according to the *Suneung* (Jeon, 2009, p. 238). The NEST’s instruction often does not have a direct effect on students’ grades, the NEST is rarely given responsibility regarding student assessment (Kim, M., 2010, p. 197), and the NEST often takes a limited role in classroom management (Lee & Chowdhury, 2018, p. 90), which often leads to students not taking NEST-led classes as seriously. In turn, this may lead to less perceived legitimacy of the NEST and increased classroom management issues (Jeon, 2009; Kim, M., 2010).

One effect on NEST agency that has been put forth by recent literature is native-speakerism, specifically as it is experienced by NESTs working in non-Western contexts. Traditionally, the discourse assumes that the native speaker is privileged and powerful (Holliday, 2006), which ignores the reality of those working in Asia. For NESTs working in Asian contexts, native-speakerism is often a “double-edged sword” that may help them become an English teacher without much training or experience (Yim & Ahn, 2018, p. 218) but often leads to their position being challenged by co-teachers and students (Geluso, 2013; Lowe & Kiczkowiak, 2016; Yim & Ahn, 2018). NESTs seem to gain ideological legitimacy due to native-speakerism but often face imposed teacher identities that they do not actively construct. One of these identities is “just another expat native speaker” (Lowe & Kiczkowiak, 2016, p. 10), while another “pre-determined construct” is “that of a language verifier or linguistics model but seldom a ‘teacher’” (Geluso, 2013, p. 97). NESTs “are also stuck with an image of being free-riders” (Sim, 2014, p. 221) or “back-packing” teachers, which suggests that they are not serious about teaching English or about integrating into local

communities (Copland et al., 2019, p. 6). This is not only damaging to credentialed, long-term NESTs within the community but also further negates the NEST's teacher identity (Sim, 2014, p. 221). While there are undeniably some teachers who fit these profiles, there are others who have made or intend to make teaching EFL or ESL a career (Copland et al., 2019; Ellis, 2016; Jeon, 2009). Thus, while the focus of the discourse is often on the non-native English-speaking teacher (NNEST), who is assumed to be looked down upon as a deficient English speaker and assumed to face powerlessness (Moussu, 2010), in the context of the Asian public school, the situation is often the opposite. Instead, local English teachers are given the power to decide whether to team teach and to tell NESTs what they can and cannot do, while these choices are not usually available to NESTs, despite their status as more "powerful" speakers of English (Copland et al., 2019, p. 18). Native speakers may have "an authentic voice but not an authoritative voice," (Lowe & Kiczkowiak, 2016, p. 10). NESTs' "authentic voices" may open up teaching positions for them, but their positions "are often peripheral and serve to marginalize the teacher in relation to the larger learning community or school" (Geluso, 2013, p. 97).

Another factor that may have a negative effect on some NESTs' agency is the monolingual native speaker fallacy.⁶ This fallacy may lead to the assumption that NESTs will speak English only (Copland et al., 2019, p. 17) and the assumption that NESTs lack an understanding of Korean language and culture, or possibly even view Korean culture as "beneath" them (Han, 2005, p. 206). While there are NESTs who may fit this profile, assumptions such as these "strip" the NEST of their individual identity (Geluso, 2013, p. 99) in favor of a general group identity that may not be entirely fair nor true. This serves as yet another means of "[projecting] previously formed opinions about their countrymen upon [NESTs] before individuals have had a chance to present themselves on their own terms" (Geluso, 2013, p. 99). Further, the fallacy of the monolingual language classroom may cause NESTs to be unable to share their bilingualism with the class (Copland et al., 2019, p. 12). Previous research has shown that some NESTs believe that speaking the local language is highly important (Carless, 2006, p. 346). In Copland et al. (2019), most of the participants spoke the language of their host country to some degree (p. 16). Ellis (2016) cited her previous research, which found that many teachers had decided upon a career in TESOL "because they identified as a language person, a language lover,

or a keen language learner” (Ellis, 2004, as cited in Ellis, 2016, p. 598). However, their other languages either atrophied during their career due to demands to use only English in the classroom (p. 598), or their other-language repertoire became “largely invisible” (p. 622). Ellis also posited that “practices that draw on linguistic identity as pedagogy are not a normal part of the discourse among TESOL professionals,” which may in turn perpetuate the monolingual native speaker fallacy and also affect the agentic action of bilingual NESTs (p. 622).

Copland et al. (2019) questioned the popular belief that NESTs often act with insensitivity or cultural incompetence, given the fact that the local English teachers they interviewed for their study did not report resentment towards NESTs (p. 19). Their data showed that NESTs “can also be sensitive, interculturally aware, adaptable, and often able to work within and adapt to local norms, though this may take time” (p. 19). However, the researchers claimed that they were not suggesting that this is true for all NESTs but that “the picture is more complex” than what has traditionally been suggested by the literature.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Most of the Korean context-based studies that I reviewed have centered around NESTs working in public schools. Two articles were an exception, as these examined NEST contexts at a private academy (Erling, 2017) and at a university (Kim, 2011). The focus of this review and preceding arguments therefore centers upon the NEST working in the public school system.

Thus, analysis of the literature leads to a number of reasonable conclusions regarding NESTs’ experience working in public schools. The literature identifies a number of clear professional barriers for the NEST, including systemic issues such as a role that is subject to interpretation, depending on school administration and the NEST’s co-teacher; underutilization in the classroom; lack of adequate professional development for experienced NESTs and lack of proper training for unexperienced NESTs; lack of incentives to improve NEST retention; and lack of involvement within curriculum planning and/or classroom management, which may lead to students not seeing NESTs as “real” teachers. With regard to agency specifically, barriers for NESTs include isolation from the teaching community within their school, powerlessness

in their roles, native-speakerism, and the monolingual native speaker fallacy. These barriers have been well identified, but the next question is “Where should research go from here?”

Deficiencies in the research have been well-documented throughout the literature. The biggest issue is the fact that many studies regarding the NEST, particularly in the Korean context, are often not conducted from the point of view of NESTs themselves but rather based on the opinions of local teachers or learners. This has resulted in a body of literature that overwhelmingly portrays the NEST as an inexperienced, unqualified, monolingual teacher (Copland et al., 2019; Erling, 2017). A lack of focus on the NEST and their lived experiences is undoubtedly due to the overall debate regarding native-speakerism and whether native speakers have a place in foreign education systems. Instead, literature has pivoted to the NNEST, and rightfully so. However, justifying this focus with the vilification of NESTs ignores the reality of NESTs who would be considered immigrants in any other context, who are bilingual, bicultural, and “consider the country in which they work home” (Copland et al., 2019, p. 21).

IMPLICATIONS

Many studies (including Copland et al., 2019; Houghton & Rivers, 2013; Lowe & Kiczowski, 2016) argue that the imposed dichotomy between NESTs and NNESTs is “dangerous” because it reinforces a distinction between teachers (Copland et al., 2019, p. 4) and creates the fallacy that NNESTs may be inherently more qualified to teach English “simply because they have learned it as a second language” (Copland et al., 2019, p. 8). Jeon (2009) stated that the “focus should shift from ‘Who is better’ to ‘Who knows and can teach what’ and ‘Who can reach what?’” (p. 201). More attention should be given to how all language teachers can contribute to a productive educational environment that focuses on learner needs and interests while developing cross-cultural understanding (Jeon, 2009, p. 201).

With this in mind, it is important to acknowledge the effects of native-speakerism on hiring decisions in Asian contexts. It is also important to critically examine why there is such a drive to hire native speakers, particularly those who fit the “image” of the native speaker, which is usually a person who is young and white (Ruecker & Ives,

2015). However, this does not render research regarding the NEST dangerous nor “useless,” particularly when one considers experienced NESTs who take the profession seriously.

Here are some potential avenues for future research:

1. What are the lived experiences of *experienced, qualified* NESTs working within the Korean public school system?
2. How can the NEST be better utilized within the school system?
3. What effects do native-speakerism have on the NEST working in the Korean public school system?
4. What are the lived experiences of multilingual, multicultural NESTs working within the school system?
5. Why did the NEST choose to become an English teacher in Korea?

The last potential area for research is a question that I admittedly ask based on my own reasons for taking my first job as a NEST – I took the job based on a genuine interest in Korean language and culture, which later morphed into a genuine love for language education. Based on my knowledge of fellow NESTs in my network, it is clear that I am not the only NEST who took their first teaching job for this reason; therefore, I think this area bears more exploration in the literature, even if to simply dispel the “back-packing teacher” myth.

While research currently points to a number of issues in English education at Korean public schools, this information seems to only reach interested researchers rather than individuals who are able to affect change within the education system. This leads to the question of how this information could be made more accessible. Participants in Ahn (2010) noted that the Ministry of Education seems to ignore the realities of “real” issues faced in “real” schools, but how can we encourage relevant stakeholders to acknowledge these issues?

The answer to how this information could be made more accessible to administrators and other relevant stakeholders in the Korean education system is complicated and likely would require further research to determine.

CONCLUSIONS

In their paper titled *Native English-Speaking Teachers in Cultures Other Than Their Own*, Barratt and Kontra (2000) suggested a number of implications that their research could have for EFL administrators, colleagues, and teacher educators, which included helpful advice such as “hire carefully,” “have orientations for new [NESTs],” “make language lessons available to [NESTs],” and “do not recommend unqualified students to be [NESTs working in EFL contexts].” While some of these suggestions have been utilized by the EPIK program, including the implementation of an orientation for NESTs and the implementation of some professional development (English Program in Korea, 2013a, para. 1–2), twenty years after the publication of Barratt and Kontra’s paper, a number of their suggestions have remained unaddressed by many EFL education systems. This points to an apparent disconnect between research and practice.

While the literature synthesized in this review is valuable research and knowledge to have, if the education systems to which the research is directed do not utilize findings of these studies, they serve to only remain in an echo chamber of academia. Thus, how can these findings be utilized? How do we ensure that these findings are well circulated so that they are easily utilized? There are a number of ways in which this can be achieved, but perhaps an important first step would be for the information to be disseminated in such a way that it is more accessible to relevant stakeholders. Perhaps what is needed is activism on the part of a team of researchers and teacher educators in order to enact change within the Korean education system that would lead to the improvement of NEST schemes and clarification of program goals. Once this has been accomplished, this could lead to new professional development programs for administrators, local English teachers, and NESTs alike regarding roles and expectations, utilization of the NEST in the classroom, cross-cultural adjustment, and other relevant topics. Rather than continuing to focus on the ineffectiveness of the NEST, energies would arguably be better spent on taking active measures that would help to ensure that the money spent on NEST schemes is not wasted on what is essentially ineffective language teaching. The issue in attempting such a feat would be finding individuals who not only would be able to but also would be willing to undertake a significant reformation of existing programs.

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FOOTNOTES

- ¹ The meaning of the term *professionalism* is dependent upon individual interpretation, but for the purpose of this research, I take the stance that professionalism is something that individuals themselves practice, not something that other stakeholders expect them to practice or “imagines they are doing” (Evans, 2008, p. 27). In this context, *agency* refers “to the human capacity to act and make choices, [which] is constrained by some degree by the social constructs inherent to any given time and place” (Smolcic, 2010, p. 18). Agency is therefore not a static aspect of an individual’s identity but rather something that is constantly evolving, depending upon the social system in which that individual resides and/or works.
- ² This review assumes the definition of an *agent* as an individual who acts and makes choices, while a *professional* is assumed to be an individual who belongs to and/or ascribes to a professional practice. This is in accordance with the previously defined terms *professionalism* and *agency*.
- ³ It is important to note that while most of the research concerning NESTs in Korea centers on those employed by the EPIK program, EPIK does not cover all areas in Korea. Some provinces or municipalities elect to recruit their own NESTs, while others may be hired by their individual schools. The teaching situation as described by EPIK teachers arguably matches those teaching in public schools not covered by the program, however, this has yet to be corroborated by the literature. I merely assume this to be the case, based on my own personal experience as a NEST hired by my individual schools and not by the EPIK program.
- ⁴ These countries include Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States.
- ⁵ For most public school NEST programs in Korea, candidates are required to have a bachelor’s degree in any discipline, while “extra” credentials such as a TESOL certificate or teaching experience are not always required (Jeon, 2009). In contrast, Hong Kong’s NET program requires candidates to have teaching experience and/or teaching credentials (Carless, 2006; Jeon, 2020).
- ⁶ The concept of the monolingual native speaker fallacy was first introduced into the discourse by Phillipson (1992, as cited in Phillipson, 2016). It refers to the false ideology that the best teacher of English is a native speaker, and that the most effective English classes are those taught monolingually. While a monolingual approach to language teaching may seem “common-sense,” it “is invalid cognitively, linguistically, and pedagogically” (Phillipson, 2016, p. 86).

APPENDIX A

Key Literature

Author(s), Year, Journal	Search Keywords, Database
Ahn, Kyungja (2010) <i>Research on Second Language Teacher Education: A Sociocultural Perspective on Professional Development</i> (Book)	NESTs in Korea University Library
Carless, David (2006) <i>System</i>	NESTs in Korea University Library
Chu, Chau Kan, & Morrison, Keith (2011) <i>Educational Studies</i>	No search keywords. Reference was found in another study (Moorhouse, 2017). University Library
Copland, Fiona; Mann, Steve; & Garton, Sue (2019) <i>TESOL Quarterly</i>	English Program in Korea University Library
Ellis, Elizabeth (2016) <i>TESOL Quarterly</i>	No search keywords. Reference was found in another study (Copland et al., 2019). University Library
Erling, Elizabeth (2017) <i>Perspectives on Language and Globalization</i> (Book)	No search keywords. Reference was found in another study (Yim & Ahn, 2018). University Library
Geluso, Joe (2013) <i>Native Speakerism in Japan</i> (Book)	No search keywords. The book was recommended to the researcher. Google Scholar
Han, Song-Ae (2005) <i>Australian Journal of Education</i>	Korean learners' views of NESTs University Library
Jeon, Mihyon (2009) <i>Language, Culture, and Curriculum</i>	English Program in Korea University Library
Jeon, Mihyon (2020) <i>System</i>	NESTs in Korea University Library
Kim, Myonghee (2010) <i>English Teaching</i> (영어교육)	No search keywords. Reference was found in another study (Moodie & Nam, 2016). Google Scholar

Kim, Shinhye (2011) <i>English Teaching</i> (영어를 가르칩니다)	No search keywords. Reference was found in another study (Moodie & Nam, 2016). Google Scholar
Lee, Ke Hyang, & Chowdhury, Raqib (2018) <i>Korea TESOL Journal</i>	No search keywords. Paper was found while reviewing back issues of the <i>Korea TESOL Journal</i>
Lowe, Robert, & Kiczkowiak, Marek (2016) <i>Cogent Education</i>	Native Speakerism University Library
Moorhouse, Benjamin (2017) <i>Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language</i>	Professional English Teacher Korea University Library
Sim, Mikyung (2014) <i>Multicultural Education Review</i>	NESTs in Korea University Library
Trent, John (2012) <i>TESOL Quarterly</i>	No search keywords. Reference was found in another study (Moorhouse, 2017). University Library
Yim, Su Yon, & Ahn, Tae Youn (2018) <i>System</i>	NESTs in Korea University Library