

NNESTs' Anxieties and Insecurities: Self-perceptions of their Communicative Limitations

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Teacher at the beginning of the school year



Teacher at the end of the school year



Teaching tends to involve a number of emotional experiences that can vary from joy to rage (Hargreaves, 1998).

The emotional nature of teaching might be associated with burnout, job dissatisfaction, health symptoms, and high rates of leaving schools (Schutz & Zembylas, 2009).

Research on teachers' emotions is crucial to improve teachers' lives as well as provide teachers' instructional guidance, influencing student learning and overall instructional quality (Frenzel, Goetz, Stephens, & Jacob, 2009).

Most studies on teacher emotions; in general education contexts, lacking research within the English language learning context (Cowie, 2011).

Affective domain focusing on language teachers' perspectives--- This insight provides teachers with understanding their attitudes toward students; influence how they teach to promote more effective language learning and teaching environments (Schutz & Lee, 2014).

Non-native speakers are becoming the majority (80%) of English teachers worldwide (e.g., Braine, 2010) --- This trend has encouraged researchers to realize issues associated with NNESTs and generated more research efforts (Selvi, 2014); however, there has been little attention to their affective experiences.

Teachers' self-perceptions about themselves affect the way they teach; significant to examine how they perceive themselves as professionals (Richards & Lockhart, 1994).

NNESTs experience anxieties, insecurities, or the sense of inferiority because of their self-perceived inadequate language proficiency (e.g., Horwitz, 1996; Medgyes, 1999; Mousavi, 2007; Reves & Medgyes, 1994; Takahashi, 2014).

Constant realization of their communicative limitations seems to be the strongest factor influencing NNESTs' self-perception and teaching behaviors (Reves & Medgyes, 1994).

Research Questions

1. What are the self-perceived English proficiency levels of NNESTs in Korea?
2. What are the anxieties or insecurities issues that NNESTs experience derived from their self-perceptions of their communicative limitations?
3. What kinds of strategies do NNESTs use to alleviate anxieties or feelings of insecurities?

Method

Participants

20 NNESTs (age $M = 33.75$, 100% female)

: 16 master students in TESOL, 4 graduates
average 7.30 years teaching experience

12, English-speaking country for average 6.42 years

Measures

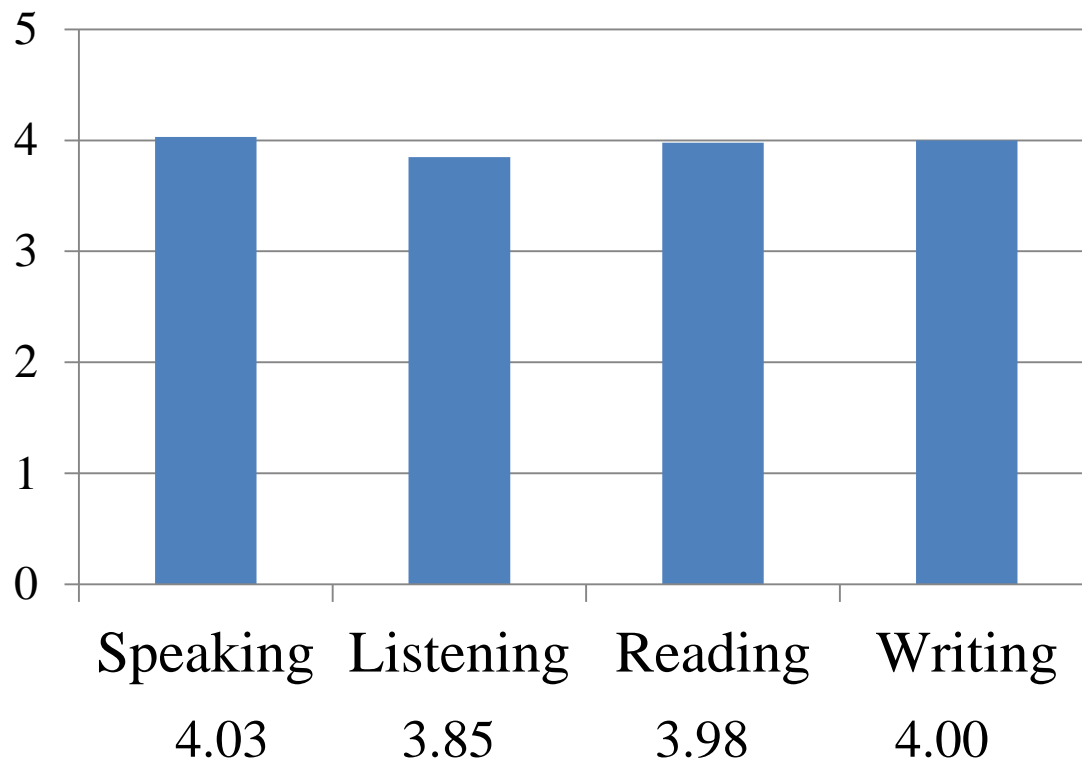
- **Background questionnaire:** gender, age, educational background, experiences of staying in an English-speaking country, teaching experience, and workplaces
- **Self-perceived English proficiency scale**
Chacon (2005), 12 items,
speaking/listening/reading/writing

Interview: semi-structured, 15~30 mins

- (1) It is common for NNESTs to experience anxieties or insecurities while teaching English. What might be the main reasons for that?
- (2) As an NNEST, tell me about the situations that you have felt anxieties, insecurities, or inferiority complex.
- (3) What kinds of strategies have you tried to reduce anxieties or feelings of insecurities?

Results

- **Self-perceived English proficiency levels**



Anxieties or insecurities issues for NNESTs due to their self-perceived lack of communication skills

- Students
- Colleagues
- Other potential reasons

√ *From students* 12 participants

-when they teach a high advanced class where most of the students had lived in an English-speaking country;

-when students who are more fluent in English than teachers criticize teachers' communication mistakes in front of whole class;

-when they feel they are being judged by the students especially in an advanced level class;

-when students ask culture-related questions, some teachers are not confident in answering them

-when adults students have more background knowledge in certain contents than teachers, sometimes teachers do not know the words students know

“...when I made mistakes, for example, when I made a mistake in pronunciation, some students were picking me on, saying “Teacher, you are wrong in pronouncing that word.” Then I got so embarrassed... I felt like I was being judged by my students, and worried what if my students looked down on me because of this situation...”

√ *From colleagues* 5 participants

- when they have to communicate in English in front of other NNESTs possessing higher proficiency levels than themselves;
- in the conversation with NESTs, they are worried about looking stupid because of their lack of communication skills although the contents might be good;
- when NESTs criticize NNESTs' English mistakes



“...I become self-conscious and kind of... nervous, when I have a conversation with a native English teacher... umm...maybe my contents about what I’m going to say might be good, but I think my proficiency level is not high enough to completely explain the contents. I’m anxious, thinking what if I look kind of stupid to native English teachers...”

√ *Other potential reasons*

- when they are not sure whether they are doing a good job in class or not;
- when students look bored with their class;
- when the class is going differently than teachers expected;
- when students do not follow what teachers prepared;
- when they are not sure if their students understand what teachers are teaching;
- when they think about how parents' feedback about their class will be



Strategies to manage anxieties or insecurities

- Keeping self-confidence
- Preparing classes thoroughly
- Utilizing other sources
- Improving English proficiency
- Self-supported group

√ *Keeping self-confidence* more than half the participants

-acknowledged their strengths as well as limitations

-thought they could understand students well and empathize with difficulties in learning a foreign language because they share the linguistic and cultural aspects

-natural for them not to be as fluent as native speakers

-they did not think that they have to feel inferiority complex only because they are not perfect in English, encouraging themselves to keep self-confidence

-mentioned that they are professionally trained English teachers, so it is important to try to be confident as teachers and not to be intimidated, despite some students who are more fluent in speaking English than teachers

“...I think it is very important for us, NNESTs, to keep self-confidence in our teaching. I don't think we could be exactly the same as NESTs, for example, in speaking but we do have other assets that NESTs don't possess. So, if we are confident in ourselves as an English teacher, we would not be so anxious or nervous just because of our lack of communication skills.”

√ *Thorough Class preparation* 12 participants

-spend more preparation time particularly for the more advanced level class than other classes.

-make a lot of effort to select topics or contents so that they can lead a class more effectively and smoothly.

“...For me, I spend more than enough time on preparing my lesson plans. Then I think I can cover even unexpected questions by my students. Also, I pay a special attention to choose topics so that my students would not become bored in my class. If I see my students having fun in my class, I wouldn't feel anxious even though, let's say, I can't answer some of their questions clearly.”

√ *Utilizing other sources* 7 teachers

-asked for help to NESTs to manage the situation that they encountered some unknown words or they cannot answer students' questions.

-it could be a good strategy to let students who have high English proficiency answer questions, instead of trying to answer all the questions themselves.

-it is important to have a thought that they can also learn from native colleagues or students.

√ *Improving English proficiency* 7 participants

- NNESTs should make a constant effort to improve their language abilities to cope with their anxieties
- recommended practicing English with some materials they are interested in
- taking English courses or making native foreign friends could be good ways
- recognized the significance of continuous learning and practicing English in their life time

√ *Self-supported group* 4 participants

-this group has been really helpful to reduce their anxieties or feelings of insecurities

-meet once a month, talk about things happened in class, share some strategies to handle unexpected situations causing their anxieties, and exchange their opinions after reading some English books

-simply talking with other teachers before or after class was very effective by gathering information about certain classes or students

√ *Other Strategies*

- think first before answering questions, speak slowly and clearly; allowed them to stay calm and reduce anxieties
- give students more opportunities to think and talk rather than teachers talk by providing activities
- sometimes it would be even better for them to say only really necessary things
- teachers' positive attitudes about learning English constantly can produce good rapport with students

Discussion

- Positive self-perceptions unlike the NNESTs in previous studies
 - NNESTs with higher qualifications might be confronted with fewer communication difficulties
 - the better trained NNESTs are, the more self-confident they would be in class (Reves & Medgyes, 1994)
 - positive self-perception is necessary for teachers, given that the way they perceive themselves impacts teachers' behaviors (Richards & Lockhart, 1994)

- NNESTs felt more anxious about their communication abilities not because of comparison with NESTs, but because of students who are more fluent than teachers; a new trend in literature, along the increasing number of students who have studied English abroad in Korea.
- The participants admitted that NNESTs could not be same as NESTs in English proficiency, but believed that they might have more advantages over NESTs in some aspects.

- Majority of participants admitted that answering students' unexpected questions generated a great deal of anxiety---This situation could test teachers' language skills; might feel being judged by students, causing them to feel insecure (Takahashi, 2014).
- Attitudes from students might often make teachers feel inadequacy and self-doubts as language teachers (Braine, 2004; Morita, 2004).

- Keeping self-confidence; an essential component for successful teaching, NNESTs' perception of inadequate communication skills could lead to lower communication efficacy and inefficient teaching strategies (Reves & Medgyes, 1994)
- To keep their self-efficacy, acknowledging both advantages and disadvantages as NNESTs “strategies of acknowledgement” was effective (Takahashi, 2014).

- Preparing lessons thoroughly; they will have fewer discipline problems (Reves & Medgyes, 1994), which can help them lead a class more smoothly.
- It is very important for them to improve their English proficiency continuously, believing that their diligent self-effort plays a key role to success in improving their English proficiency.
- Self-supported group; through discussion with colleagues, become more aware of what other abilities except only language knowledge they need to be more effective teachers.

Implications & Suggestions

- One of the first studies investigating anxieties or insecurities issues with NNESTs in Korea
- Fills an important gap in the current literature by focusing on NNESTs' emotional experiences
- Adopted a qualitative approach to integrate previous method focusing on non-empirical reflections to attend to issues on NNESTs

- To improve the NNESTs' proficiency, schools can promote an authentic native language environment.
- It is essential for the NNESTs to be aware of this relation; actively attend the training courses offered.
- It would be beneficial for NNESTs to acknowledge their advantages as language teachers to help them possess a more positive perception; guide NNESTs to alleviate anxieties or insecurities.

- Self-supported group was helpful to lower their anxieties or feelings of insecurities; it might be necessary for school authorities to recognize this issue and promote this kind of group.
- Limited participants; difficult to generalize the results; conduct more studies with more NNESTs possessing various professional backgrounds.

Thank you for your attention!

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