

Challenges faced by Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers (NNESTs) in selected foreign classrooms in Macau

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Abstract: This research delves into the Challenges faced by Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers (NNESTs) in Selected Foreign Classrooms in Macau of Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers (NNESTs) in multicultural classrooms in Macau, highlighting the linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical challenges they face. Employing a qualitative Transcendental phenomenological design, the study investigated the adaptive strategies NNESTs use to cope with these challenges, such as instructional adjustments, culturally responsive teaching, and institutional support systems. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with NNESTs working in secondary schools, ensuring a representative diversity of experiences. Results indicated that NNESTs are confronted with ongoing challenges including language proficiency prejudices, cultural misconceptions, and institutional demands often at odds with student learning. Yet, participants showed resilience in incorporating scaffolding strategies, translanguaging practice, and peer support to construct inclusive learning contexts. Additionally, professional development opportunities and mentoring networks were found to be essential in facilitating NNESTs' adjustment and professional development. This research emphasizes the necessity of stronger institutional policies to facilitate NNESTs in overcoming pedagogical issues while ensuring cultural inclusivity in English-medium instruction (EMI) classrooms.

Keywords: Multicultural classrooms, Challenges, Cultural and linguistic barriers, Professional practice

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INTRODUCTION

NNESTs face challenges rooted in perceptions of linguistic inferiority and discrimination compared to native English-speaking teachers (NETs) (Orian et al., 2023). Despite their qualifications and unique insights into language acquisition, NNESTs are often undervalued in educational institutions (Dewaele & Leung, 2022). This global issue of inequality underscores the need to reassess the strengths and support systems for NNESTs to enhance their professional contributions.

In Macau, the linguistic landscape reflects its complex history, balancing Cantonese, Mandarin, and Portuguese, alongside a growing emphasis on English for education, business, and tourism (Boota & Moody, 2020). NNESTs working within this multilingual framework face added difficulties, such as adapting to language policies that prioritize English proficiency without sufficient professional support (Vong & Wu, 2019). These policies are further compounded by societal perceptions and regulatory constraints that politicize language education.

At the classroom level in Macau, NNESTs encounter linguistic barriers, cultural mismatches, and pedagogical challenges. These include mixed-ability classes where students' English proficiency varies widely, cultural misunderstandings that hinder communication, and the need for innovative teaching strategies to engage diverse learners (Moody, 2021; Quaidy et

al., 2023). Additionally, co-teaching with NETs highlights the disparity in roles and expectations, often leaving NNESTs feeling undervalued (Kesevan, 2016).

While studies have explored challenges in language education, there remains a significant gap in research specifically addressing the lived experiences of NNESTs in Macau (Cheng & Zhang, 2022; Peng & Kang, 2022). Furthermore, the unique interplay of Macau's multilingual education system and its sociopolitical context requires targeted studies to inform evidence-based interventions. Addressing these gaps is urgent, as the success of NNESTs directly impacts student outcomes and the broader goal of fostering English proficiency in Macau.

The findings of this study will be shared through academic journals, educational policy briefings, and professional development workshops targeting policymakers, educational leaders, and NNESTs. These platforms will ensure the dissemination of practical recommendations to improve support systems, teaching practices, and collaboration among NNESTs and NETs.

This research aims to explore the linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical experiences of NNESTs in Macau, identify their strategies for overcoming challenges, and provide actionable recommendations to enhance their professional development and support system.

Statement of the problem

Generally, this study explored the challenges faced by Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers (NNESTs) in selected foreign classrooms in Macau.

More specifically, this sought answers to the following research questions:

- 1) What are the lived experiences of NNESTs teaching in multicultural classrooms in Macau?
- 2) What challenges do NNESTs encounter in relation to language, culture, and pedagogy in Macau's educational context?
- 3) How do NNESTs navigate and address the cultural and linguistic barriers they face in their professional practice?

METHODOLOGY

Protocol Type

The research study employed a qualitative research design, specifically transcendental phenomenology, to explore the challenges faced by Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers (NNESTs) in selected foreign classrooms in Macau.

Search Strategy

While a typical "search strategy" applies more commonly to systematic reviews, in qualitative studies this can be interpreted as the method for identifying and selecting participants and the setting of the study:

- 1) The study was conducted at selected foreign secondary classrooms in Macau in partnership with Pui Ching Middle School.
- 2) Participants were selected through purposive sampling, ensuring that only Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers fitting specific inclusion criteria were invited to participate.

Eligibility Criteria

The inclusion criteria for participant selection included:

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- 1) Must be eight Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers (NNESTs) working in selected secondary schools in Macau.
- 2) Must be structured individual interview protocol whose first language is Not English, with responsibilities for teaching English-medium classrooms.
- 3) Must have a minimum of three years and up to eight or more years of teaching experience providing insights into the experiences of both novice and experienced educators.

Data Extraction

In this context, data extraction refers to how information was gathered and analyzed:

- 1) Data were collected via structured individual interview protocol using a researcher-made guide
- 2) Interviews focused on Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers (NNESTs) challenges, lived experiences, and navigate and address the cultural and linguistic barriers they face in their professional practice.
- 3) Moustakas' thematic analysis was used to extract key data, involving:
 - 3.1. Identifying significant statements
 - 3.2. Formulating meanings
 - 3.3. Clustering into 9 emergent themes
 - 3.4 Themes were drawn to reflect balance in diversity, proficiency in teaching, learner-based pedagogy and teamwork and mentorship.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Balancing linguistic and cultural expectations in multicultural classrooms

Balancing Linguistic and Cultural Expectations in Multicultural Classrooms, reveals that NNESTs navigate the dual challenges of language and cultural expectations in their classrooms. They often face biases assuming native speakers are superior, but through their multilingual background and cultural sensitivity, they foster inclusivity and break down language barriers. NNESTs continuously adapt their teaching methods, utilizing strategies like scaffolding and culturally relevant content to create an engaging and inclusive environment for all students.

Shaping teaching practices through cultural diversity

It explores how the diverse cultural backgrounds of students influence the teaching practices of NNESTs. By adapting to varying learning styles and integrating culturally relevant content, NNESTs promote a supportive, interactive classroom. Their ability to implement multilingual strategies such as code-switching and scaffolding ensures that lessons are accessible to students with different proficiency levels, enhancing engagement and fostering deeper understanding. NNESTs also serve as cultural mediators, using their experiences to create relatable lessons that bridge cultural and linguistic gaps.

Personal fulfillment and reward vs teaching challenges

Emphasizes the emotional and professional satisfaction that NNESTs derive from their teaching, particularly when seeing students overcome language barriers and gain confidence. However, these rewards are tempered by the challenges of managing linguistic diversity, cultural differences, and varying student participation. NNESTs also deal with cultural misunderstandings and differing classroom dynamics, such as varying participation levels based

on cultural norms. Despite these challenges, NNESTs find fulfillment in the progress of their students and the cultural exchange that occurs in their classrooms.

Overall, these findings underline the resilience of NNESTs in overcoming challenges, their ability to leverage their multilingual background, and the importance of institutional support in helping them succeed in multicultural teaching environments.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, several conclusions can be drawn regarding the experiences of Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers (NNESTs) in multicultural classrooms. One of the key challenges they face is balancing language proficiency with cultural expectations. They must work to overcome biases that favor native speakers, leveraging their multilingual backgrounds and cultural awareness to create inclusive learning environments where all students feel valued and supported.

NNESTs effectively adapt their teaching practices to accommodate the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of their students. They employ multilingual strategies such as code-switching and scaffolding, ensuring that lessons are accessible to students with varying levels of English proficiency. Additionally, they integrate culturally relevant content into their teaching, which enhances student engagement and deepens their understanding of the material.

Beyond their role as educators, NNESTs also serve as cultural mediators, bridging gaps between different cultures and languages in the classroom. Their own experiences as language learners allow them to empathize with students, fostering a supportive and relatable learning environment. This ability to connect with students on a deeper level helps them build trust and encourages language development in a more meaningful way.

Despite facing numerous challenges, NNESTs find significant emotional and professional fulfillment in witnessing their students' progress, particularly in overcoming language barriers. This sense of accomplishment serves as a strong motivator, reinforcing their dedication and commitment to teaching. However, they also encounter difficulties in managing classroom dynamics influenced by cultural differences, such as varying levels of student participation and engagement. To address these issues, they must constantly refine and adapt their teaching strategies.

The study highlights the critical role of institutional support in helping NNESTs navigate these challenges. Access to professional development programs, mentorship, and teaching resources is essential in equipping them with the tools they need to succeed in diverse educational settings. Support from institutions not only enhances their teaching effectiveness but also contributes to their professional growth and job satisfaction.

Ultimately, NNESTs demonstrate remarkable resilience in adapting to the complexities of multicultural classrooms. Their ability to remain flexible and responsive to the unique challenges posed by linguistic and cultural diversity is crucial in fostering inclusive, engaging, and effective learning environments. Their contributions underscore the importance of diversity in education and the value of non-native English-speaking teachers in shaping globally inclusive classrooms.

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