

CAREER AND CHALLENGES OF FOREIGN ENGLISH PRESCHOOL TEACHERS IN HANOI, VIETNAM

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Abstract: This study has explored the career and challenges of foreign English teachers in early childhood education programs in Hanoi, Vietnam. The mixed-method research was conducted in a qualitative-quantitative approach and a thematic analysis to investigate teaching career perceptions and experiences. A convenient sample of 50 mixed-nationalities native and non-native English speaking EFL teachers in private international and bilingual preschools in several districts in Hanoi. Data collected were adapted questionnaires and a semi-structured interview. The following statistical tools were used; frequency, percentage, weighted mean, standard deviation, Spearman Rho correlation, and an Anova test. The study demonstrates that NESTs perceived themselves to have more job opportunities while NNESTs believed they are more empathetic and can better anticipate language difficulties than their NESTs counterparts. Additionally, while the three perceived factors from teachers, students, and schools' characteristics are essential in holding onto their teaching career, the school factor was deemed the most critical. Both group respondents handled subjects other than English correlated with the student factors, whereas NESTs' first language and NNESTs' teaching experience affected school aspects. The teachers' demographic profile played a considerable role in influencing perceived factors in their teaching careers. Overall, NESTs and NNESTs identified cultural differences, language barriers, racism, and parental pressures as critical challenges they have faced in their career. Based on the study's findings, an action plan was formulated and is recommended for approval and implementation.

Keywords: Foreign English Teachers, Early Childhood Education, NESTs and NNEST's, EFL teaching

1. Introduction

The English language is widely employed in a variety of international fields. Raja et al. (2021) emphasized that English language has rapidly spread across the globe and is now used for a wide range of purposes and its status as a national/foreign language has shifted to that of an international language. In addition, it has been referred to as the global lingua franca and the international language (Sifakis & Tsantila, 2018; Galloway & Numajiri, 2020). As a result, it has become a fundamental topic of a language course in many educational institutions across the globe (Zoghbor, 2018). Many researchers in the field of English language education around the world have become aware of the changing role of English and are interested in learning more about it (Lee & Hsieh, 2018; Tajeddin et al., 2020). Despite the increasing awareness, however, real practical changes in the classroom and curricula are rarely found (Ke, 2019; Kiyak, 2021).

In teaching the English language (ELT), native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) are mainly viewed as ideal teachers because of their socio-linguistical English proficiency. For instance, non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) are seen to be competent in teaching English, despite the fact that English is not their mother tongue (Huang, 2019). Moreover, scholars have debated the differentiation and discrimination of NESTs and NNESTs, but the literature does not go into detail about their career considerations and problems as EFL instructors to preschool children (Alshammari, 2020). Specifically, it is critical to investigate the particular teacher's viewpoint, attitude, and experience in their profession in light of numerous teaching-related issues (Boldrini & Aprea, 2019). In addition, their self-concepts as EFL teachers and how their origins influence perceptual aspects are crucial to the difficulties they face while teaching English to preschoolers (Gacia-Ponce, 2020).

Since 1986, when Vietnam substantially reorganized its economy and opened its doors to the rest of the world, there has been a significant increase of interest in English language study (Nguyen, 2020). The time was known as I Mi, which means "innovation" in English (Baark, 2020). The economic expansion and expansion of international business have increased the need for English communicative proficiency, which is seen as a prerequisite for attaining competitive professions. English is a required subject in formal education and one of the six core topics required for the National Secondary School Examination Qualification (Abbas, 2020). The number of international schools and university collaborations has expanded dramatically, yet Vietnamese instructors lack English teaching credentials and training. Foreign English instructors, both NESTs and NNESTs, are in high demand to teach in kindergartens, private elementary and secondary schools, and private English centers (Soheili-Mehr, 2018).

Language development is crucial in early schooling because children are more responsive to second language acquisition (Hartshorn et al., 2018). Numerous youngsters have acquired confidence in speaking English, highlighting the importance of appropriate pronunciation and accents in the development of language and cognitive abilities (Alghonaim, 2019). Furthermore, the introduction to English language teaching earlier than in primary schools in Vietnam has also led to the incorporation of English language learning into preschools and rising establishments of bilingual or international preschools. English education programs were introduced as early as preschool in significant cities like Ha Noi, Da Nang, and HCM City. According to local educational departments, it was reported that at least 2,944 teachers, including foreigners and those who studied English at university, teach English to children at kindergartens (Vietnam.net 2007).

Moreover, high-quality kindergartens and recruiters prefer hiring NESTs over NNESTs. Demands for English teachers from English native speaking countries are imperative (Alhajji, 2020). However, the native English teachers' qualifications and high remuneration packages drove employers to seek alternatives to employ non-native English teachers, particularly teachers from the Philippines who have proper qualifications but slightly lower salary requirements. Foreign English teachers in Vietnam have different employment conditions (Ulla, 2018). While recognized international and private bilingual schools have established reasonable recruiting requirements for English preschool teachers, certain English centers and public schools lack a fair recruitment policy. In Vietnam, however, English as a foreign language (EFL) instructors encountered significant obstacles. Nevertheless, a number of studies have emphasized issues, differences, and students' views of the influence of instructors' nativeness and non-nativeness on the quality of English Education in Vietnam (Nguyen, 2017). Insufficient study has been conducted on the perceived causes and problems English foreign teachers face in their careers in Vietnamese preschools. The purpose of this research is to explore the attitudes and perspectives of NESTs and NNESTs on their teaching careers by identifying the many determinants and obstacles that impact their work. The research investigated the perceived elements from school, instructors, and students that impact their professions, as well as the other factors that contribute to these variances. The research also investigated the teachers' perceptions of themselves as EFL instructors, as well as the obstacles they faced that affected their choice to continue in or quit the teaching profession.

The researcher, who has been an English teacher in Vietnam for 12 years, has witnessed the influx of native and non-native English teachers in Vietnam. Demands for English teachers have been growing but with public and private schools' evident preference for employing native speakers. However, the shortage of qualified native English-speaking teachers and higher remuneration packages propelled schools and centers to hire qualified non-native English-speaking teachers in countries like the Philippines. This study is particularly relevant since there has been a growing interest in the quality of English education through the teacher's native background preference. From a non-native English teacher's perspective, the researcher aspires to investigate the individual teacher's perceptions of their native background, the factors, and challenges about their overall English teaching career experience in Vietnam at present and in the future. The findings of this study delivered the formulation of an action plan.

2. Purpose of the Study

This research study determined the careers and the challenges of the native and non-native English-speaking teachers working in private bilingual and international preschools in Hanoi, Vietnam. The factors holding on to their teaching career as English Foreign Language in terms of teachers, student and school were considered. Significant relationship between the demographic profile of the respondent groups and their perceived factors in their teaching career were also considered in the main problem.

3. Research Methodology

This study made use of a mixed-method type of research. Some parts of the questionnaire were adapted from Ezberci (2005), Coşkun's (2001), and Medyes (1992). The questionnaire sample a relatively large population (Brown, 2001) of foreign English preschool teachers in Hanoi. Moreover, interviews were used to understand

better the participants' perceptions (Brown, 2001). The semi-structured interviews were utilized with volunteer participants to help interpret the items in the questionnaire clearly and navigate the research. The data gathered from this research was essential in finding out the characteristics, frequencies, trends, and correlations that exist among the respondents.

This study was done in Hanoi, Vietnam's capital city, in the school year 2020-2021. Hanoi is in the north of Vietnam, covering 3,358.6 km² (1,296.8 sq mi). It consists of 12 urban districts, one district-leveled town, and 17 rural districts. The study covered eight preschools located in six urban communities in Hanoi. In this study, 50 native and non-native English-speaking teachers from inner-circle and expanding-circle countries participated. For data gathering, a survey questionnaire was developed based on several frameworks from Ezberci (2005), Coşkuner (2001), Brown (2001), and Medyes (1992) regarding NESTs and NNESTs career and challenges perception. The survey instrument included five-choice sections for a quantitative survey and one open-ended section for the qualitative interview. For the quantitative study, the questionnaire was divided into five sections.

The first section asked respondents to select appropriate responses about their demographic profile. The second section asked respondents to identify their agreement on the ten essential attributes of a good English language teacher. The succeeding four areas used the even 4-point Likert scale asking participants to agree or disagree on the factors related to their career perception.

In contrast, the third section asked them to rate the students' characteristics that affect their career decisions, motivation, and satisfaction. In the fourth section, respondents agreed or disagreed on the ten school characteristics that make them leave or stay in teaching. In the fifth section, participants answered their perceptions of how they see themselves and the other group of respondents as EFL teachers. The last section was the interview section. 23 Participants answered five open-ended questions that were unstructured, structured, and probing to get the in-depth information to clarify both groups' responses to the challenges they have faced in their careers in Vietnam.

4. Results and Discussions

Regarding the respondents' demographic profiles, most of the two respondents were between the ages of 30-49 years old at 80% and mainly females and single at 70% and 74%, respectively. 64% of the total population held a Bachelor's degree with two main concentrations in Early Childhood Education and English. 92% speak English as their first language in the NESTs group, while 82% of NNESTs speak languages in the Philippines. Regarding their overall teaching experience in English, 34% from both groups had four years and below, and 36% had 5-9 years.

Meanwhile, 56% in both groups had 0-4 years of service, and 32% had 5-9 years of English teaching experience in Vietnam. Apart from teaching English, an average of 60% of NESTs and NNESTs groups taught Science.

Based on the findings in the table above, NESTs' priorities are supported by some studies that indicate classroom management and well-organized and planned training environments are critical. They promote self-regulation early, reduce undesirable behaviors, increase interest in learning, encourage students to be more productive, and positively affect school achievement.

Table 1. Teacher Characteristics

Teacher Characteristics	Nest Group		Non-Nest Group	
	Mean	Descriptive Value	Mean	Descriptive Value
Teaching Certification	3.28	SA	3.64	SA
Teaching Experience	3.56	SA	3.68	SA
Language Knowledge and Awareness	3.80	SA	3.76	SA
Being a Native English speaker	2.64	A	1.8	LA
Classroom Management and Organization	3.88	SA	3.68	SA
Learning and Teaching Knowledge	3.80	SA	3.8	SA
Personal Characteristics	3.88	SA	3.68	SA
Assessment Knowledge	3.48	SA	3.56	SA
Strong Work Ethics	3.64	SA	3.72	SA
Collegiality (Friendly and Cooperative Attitude)	3.36	SA	3.8	SA
Average Mean	3.53	SA	3.51	SA

(Güven-Denizel & Cevher, 2005; Trawick-Smith et.al , 2016). Another critical item rated the highest by NESTs is personal characteristics. This choice by NESTs signifies that for them being effective comes from not only knowledge and skills but, essentially, their unique features. As Cantor (1990) suggests having both knowledge and skills, but without a personality, there will be no significant impact. It is also true of NESTs and NNETs. Each preschool teacher defines good personal characteristics differently. Several studies identify some of the critical elements early childhood teachers need to excel in their job. Still, individual attributes are ingrained in feelings and beliefs, so it is hard to observe them directly or assess them by traditional means (Ostorga 2003). Meanwhile, for NNETs, learning and teaching knowledge and collegiality were the items they strongly agreed as the most important. Both got a mean of 3.8, while NESTs rated the same with one item on learning and Teaching Knowledge. Their mean is lower than the item on collegiality, which is 3.36. This difference in ranking may reflect the different levels of exposure and teacher training NNETs had with NESTS. The high rating given by NNETs to Learning and teaching knowledge reflects that NNETs value pedagogical knowledge as the most crucial factor of being a successful English teacher in the preschool field. It can be inferred that NNETs understood that while there are several vital components of being a competent teacher, they see the mastery of pedagogical knowledge as the most important. It conforms with some studies stating that for an educator to be professional and skilled, teachers must first be adept in pedagogical knowledge (Dwyer & Schachter, 2019).

As expressed from the data in table 2, both groups have an average mean of agreement. However, NESTs were in a solid understanding of most of the choices listed. Specifically, both groups rated children's positive interaction with the teacher as the highest, with a mean score of 3.76.

Table 2. Student Characteristics

Student Characteristics	Nest Group		Non-Nest Group	
	Mean	Descriptive Value	Mean	Descriptive Value
Children's positive interaction with the teacher	3.76	SA	3.76	SA
Children's positive attitude towards learning the English language	3.64	SA	3.72	SA
Children's Personality Traits	3.56	SA	3.52	SA
Children's less Disruptive Behavior	2.64	A	3.28	SA
Children's Engagement and Motivation	3.48	SA	3.68	SA
Children's High English Level	2.16	LA	2.44	LA
Children's High Ability/Agility in Learning	2.40	LA	3.00	A
Children's Punctuality and Regular Attendance	2.92	A	3.24	A
High Parent Involvement and Support	3.36	A	3.36	SA
Effective Communication with the Parents	3.52	SA	3.28	SA
Average Mean	3.14	A	3.33	SA

It can be understood that both groups strongly believe in the importance of this factor. It could be a determining factor they can easily control or change to make their classroom experience positive. Their priority is to feel good about their job by having happier, healthier, more confident, and motivated children. Studies point out that teacher-children interaction is crucial in determining how children develop. (Curby and Brock 2013). Nurturing relationships and interactions are one of the most valuable skills an ECE professional can develop. In classroom settings, teachers are seen as guides of the social environment, facilitating children's positive social interactions (Farmer et al., 2011). All interactions a teacher has with children can affect children's physical, mental and emotional development. Interactions that are positive, intentional, and reciprocal support children's progressive outcomes. It goes both ways, as teachers will benefit from this, and teaching will have a more satisfying, rewarding, and less stressful teaching experience.

Moreover, most NESTs and NNESTs chose children's high English level as the least important in determining whether their teaching job is worthwhile. It simply implies that both groups regarded this factor as less significant because it is their job to enhance the children's ability as a teacher. Teachers want to be part of the children's learning development and how they can successfully reach milestones after milestones in their learning growth and development. It is more rewarding to see growth and struggles in learning. It can be supported by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) report. It showed five critical dimensions of the Early Years teacher's role (Phillips and Scrinzi): teaching to enhance development and learning and planning curriculum to achieve essential goals. Do teachers need to ask critical questions such as What should children know? What do the children already know? Which specific learning outcomes are you trying to address? These questions all point to children's cognitive and language learning as a process. Although most teachers will agree that having a lesser language barrier reduces strain and frustrations in

communicating with children who are good English speakers in preschools, it does not imply that their job is distressing and discouraging. An actual test of the teachers' competence is to see the children's achievement in their learning. Teachers can adapt different teaching strategies to improve the English level and the overall learning ability of the children.

Table 3. School Characteristics

School Characteristics	Nest Group		Non-Nest Group	
	Mean	Descriptive Value	Mean	Descriptive Value
Effective School Leadership	3.96	SA	3.84	SA
Positive Attitude of the Administrator	3.96	SA	3.84	SA
Better Institutional Facilities	3.72	SA	3.60	SA
Supportive Learning Environment	3.96	SA	3.80	SA
More Institutional Support for Professional Growth	3.72	SA	3.68	SA
High Level of Collaboration and Communication	3.68	SA	3.68	SA
Manageable and Reasonable Workload	3.92	SA	3.64	SA
Fair Compensation and Benefits	3.92	SA	3.80	SA
Teacher Empowerment and Equity	3.60	SA	3.80	SA
High Level of Family and Community Involvement	3.44	SA	3.64	SA
Average Mean	3.79	SA	3.73	SA

As shown from the data in this table, both NESTs and NNESTs respondents had an average result of "strongly agree." They all had a very positive approval of all the school characteristics listed. In particular, the two highest-rated school factors were effective school leadership and the positive attitude of the administrator, having a mean approval of 3.96 from NESTs and 3.84 from the NNESTs respondents. It can be roughly analyzed that all teachers strongly agreed that the behaviors and priorities of the principals and school administrators could heavily influence how they perceive their career in teaching. It can be a crucial factor in making them leave or stay in the job. It aligned with a research report that pointed out that most school variables do not have significant effects on learning but, when combined, can reach critical mass in which the principal has a crucial role in creating under such conditions. Many believe that students' outcomes can be significantly attributed to classroom instruction or the teachers' competence in teaching and learning. As Louis et al. (2010) concurred, leadership is after classroom instruction among all school-related factors contributing to students' learning. However, leadership can influence student learning mainly because it solidifies professional community and teachers' engagement, promoting effective teaching practices related to student achievement" (Louis et al., 2010, p. 10). It is noteworthy to discuss that for NESTs, respondents rated the three factors the highest; effective leadership, positive attitude of the administrators, and a supportive learning environment are all related components to the tasks and roles of the school leaders. These factors have the same approval from the NNESTs except for the facet of a 'supportive learning environment.' It implies that the respondents in this study strongly felt that what can greatly inspire, motivate and foster them in their careers and

vice versa is how the school leaders treat them. Research identifies at least two significant components of school leadership that strengthen teachers' decisions about whether and where to stay in the profession. These include administrator support and leadership style. Research suggests that support from school heads can have more impact than teachers' workload in deciding whether to remain or leave a school. Sutchet et al. (2017). School leadership and support are among the most crucial factors in teachers' decisions to stay or leave their teaching careers, Sutchet et al. (2017). Teachers often pick out the quality of administrative support as more important to their decision than salaries. Overall, it can be implied that the ten school factors included in the table are areas in which the principals play a central role.

Table 4. Significant Difference (*NEST Profile and Teacher Characteristics*)

Test of Significant Relationship on Nest Demographic Profile and Teacher Characteristic (N=25)					
Demographic Profile	Test Statistics	Computed Value	Df	p-value	Decision
Age	Pearson r	0.39	23	0.052>0.05	Failed to Reject the Null
Gender	Pearson r	-0.16	23	0.45>0.05	Failed to Reject the Null
Marital Status	Pearson r	0.12	23	0.58>0.05	Failed to Reject the Null
Highest Educational	Spearman Rho	0.06	23	0.77>0.05	Failed to Reject the Null
Field of Specialization	Pearson r	-0.36	23	0.07>0.05	Failed to Reject the Null
Years of Teaching	Spearman Rho	-0.15	23	0.48>0.05	Failed to Reject the Null
Years of Teaching in Vietnam	Spearman Rho	0.03	23	0.90>0.05	Failed to Reject the Null

As expressed from the data results in Table 4, the test had not identified any significant relationships between the NESTs' listed profile and all the variables in the teachers' characteristics. The p-value is bigger than the significance level set at 0.05; the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. We may conclude that the personal demographic characteristics of the teachers did not produce significant combined effects on the perceived factors on teachers' characteristics. The items listed in the teachers' characteristics include pedagogical, professional, social, and personal competencies essential to becoming an EFL teacher. It can be inferred that all aspects covered are generally important regardless of the teachers' background characteristics. The findings indicate that essential elements in English language teaching should have a standard pedagogical framework for successful language teaching. It suggests that teachers' perceptions of effective teaching are unduly affected by their diverse backgrounds. However, caution should be considered when making inferences about this finding because of the low number of respondents in the subgroup. The alignment of perceptions shows the respondents' agreement, and it supports the validation of the essential qualities of a good language teacher from the items. The consensus from the respondents in the study suggests the existence of a pedagogical standard listed from the teachers' characteristics variables for effective teaching that teachers support. Such a standard of the essential factors for being an effective teacher may be reflected in

Stronge's (2007) framework. It provided the structural backdrop for studying the most important qualities of a language teacher, particularly teachers in general. Results indicated that respondents believe all qualities and indicators play a significant role with minimal variation in ratings (Williams, 2008). Because qualities of adequate overlap in several frameworks, and other core foundations may also be determinants of standards for effective teaching (Marzano, 2007).

Table 5. Significant Difference (*NEST Profile and Student Characteristics*)

Test of Significant Relationship on Nest Demographic Profile and Student Characteristic (N=25)					
Demographic Profile	Test Statistics	Computed Value	Df	p-value	Decision
Age	Pearson r	0.08	23	0.69>0.05	Failed to Reject the Null
Gender	Pearson r	-0.43	23	0.03<0.05	Reject the Null
Marital Status	Pearson r	-0.03	23	0.86>0.05	Failed to Reject the Null
Highest Educational	Spearman Rho	-0.16	23	0.43>0.05	Failed to Reject the Null
Field of Specialization	Pearson r	-0.18	23	0.39>0.05	Failed to Reject the Null
First Language	Pearson r	-0.08	23	0.69>0.05	Failed to Reject the Null
Years of Teaching	Spearman Rho	-0.24	23	0.24>0.05	Failed to Reject the Null
Years of Teaching in Vietnam	Spearman Rho	-0.03	23	0.89>0.05	Failed to Reject the Null
Subject Taught	Pearson r	0.43	23	0.03<0.05	Reject the Null

Based on the findings in Table 5, it is revealed that among the items from the NESTs' profile, the subjects taught apart from English and gender showed a lesser p-value when tested at a 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. It suggests that the subjects taught by the NESTs other than English, like Science, Maths, PE, and Arts, had an effect to some degree on the perceived students' factors. It can be explained that non-English classes directly correlate to the students' characteristics and that NEST may have different attitudes regarding the relationship shown. For example, those who have taught Science may have a less favorable view of the teaching of the struggling students. It may be due to the student's level of English, overall attitude, and motivation. Science can be a challenging subject to teach in English due to its complex vocabulary. Science is a highly communicative branch of knowledge, where language is essential for collaborative scientific discourse. Complex language codes are used in Science. It is the same in a study that pointed out that in making hypotheses and inferences, questioning, paraphrasing, or making explanations in scientific discourse (Laplante, 1997), students who are learning English as a new language, especially younger students, often struggle to understand the meaning of the discourse in science. (Dale & Cuevas, 1992). Furthermore, gender is another factor that yielded a lesser p-value. Among students' characteristics, some language learning studies identified that women might be more adept in language learning since they are more open to new structures in the target language and were more willing to eliminate the incorrect forms in their interlanguage (Ellis, 2012). It can be further analyzed from the table's result that

teachers may have more positive language assessments and interactions with female learners than male learners since girls may show a better attitude towards learning the English language. Teachers can sometimes be viewed to be gender-biased. However, other studies showed no evidence of the significant differences in overall language achievement between girls and boys in language learning. Related studies indicated that teachers' gender biases in elementary school influence the academic achievement gap in upper-level schools (Lavy and Sand 2015). Several studies concluded that teachers' positive and negative attention based on the students' gender might affect motivation, aspirations, performance, and learning outcomes. Similarly, the teacher's gender in preschool can be taken into consideration. Preschool institutions are generally a female-dominated learning environment. Female teachers make up most of the workforce in early childhood education, as child-rearing is often associated with motherly care and responsibilities. These are often closely linked with the standards of feminine behavior and accountability within gender roles, culturally and socially. It is particularly true at the pre-primary/elementary education level. The rest of the NESTs' demographic profiles showed that the null hypothesis was not rejected since all the p-values for all the indicators are greater than the 0.05 level of significance. Hence, there is no statistically significant relationship between the students' factors and the NESTs' profile except for the subjects taught and gender. The findings imply no bearing on the age, marital status, highest educational attainment, first language, and teaching experience on the perceived factors on students' characteristics. It means, for example, in terms of age, a young teacher may positively or negatively view students' overall learning attributes as the old teachers.

Table 6. Significant Difference (*NEST Profile and School Characteristics*)

Demographic Profile	Test Statistics	Computed Value	Df	p-value	Decision
Age	Pearson r	0.19	23	0.38>0.05	Failed to Reject the Null
Gender	Pearson r	0.00	23	0.99>0.05	Failed to Reject the Null
Marital Status	Pearson r	-0.21	23	0.31>0.05	Failed to Reject the Null
Highest Educational	Spearman Rho	-0.21	23	0.33>0.05	Failed to Reject the Null
Field of Specialization	Pearson r	-0.07	23	0.75>0.05	Failed to Reject the Null
Years of Teaching	Spearman Rho	-0.03	23	0.89>0.05	Failed to Reject the Null
Years of Teaching in Vietnam	Spearman Rho	-0.24	23	0.24>0.05	Failed to Reject the Null
Subject Taught	Pearson r	0.19	23	0.36>0.05	Failed to Reject the Null

Table 6 shows the data of NESTs' profile on their perceived factors from the school attributes. They investigated how the school determinants can impact the individual teachers' demographic profile. Data shown among profile characteristics from the NESTs group, only the first language had a result of having a clear consequential relationship with the school factor. The NEST respondents' first language showed a lesser p-value against a 0.05 level of significance.

Hence, rejecting the null hypothesis. It can be inferred that the effect was evident in terms of the relationship between the group's first language and the perceived factors on school. The NESTs group's choice of their career is related to their first language. These relevant items were to remain to teach in a school and find satisfaction with their job based on the school's characteristics especially having effective, supportive school administrators and having positive support. The EFL teaching profession considers teachers whose English is their first language as the gold standard teacher and is regarded as a priority for employment.

It could also mean that schools treat the NESTs group equally and favorably due to their background being English native speakers. As their first language is English, their status as native speakers give them an advantage of staying in a school. Likewise, they are presumably getting more favorable treatment from the schools. Some studies pointed out that the idea of native speakers as the ideal teachers of the English language persists in the ELT profession (cf. Wang, 2012). In Clark and Paran's (2007) study, it was found that most employers' employment decisions are based on native speakers. In English language teaching, 'native speakers' are perceived as being ideal language models and ideal teachers. Better proficiency, a natural feel for the language, better knowledge of the target culture, and correct pronunciation are the specific strengths of native English speakers (Medgyes, 1992; Rao, 2010). These studies directly imply that the perception of all native speakers, regardless of their pedagogical training and other personal and professional attributes, has all those qualities. Another implication would be, despite age, marital status, and educational attainment, as long the teacher's first language is English, the school factors matter, mostly likely receptively compared to non-native English-speaking teachers. Although there is no substantial evidence that the ideal teachers are native speakers, the NESTs' linguistic and pedagogical superiority can influence recruiters' hiring decisions. Native speakers are often used as a proficiency benchmark in job ads. Moreover, recruiters or schools consider 'native-like' fluency an essential hiring requirement (Moussu, 2006). Such use of 'native speakers' as the benchmark of proficiency can further support native speakerism by strengthening the idea that the ability of a 'native speaker' is positioned highly to indisputable authority and absolute supremacy.

Table 7. Significant Difference (Non-NEST Profile and Teacher Characteristics)

Demographic Profile	Test Statistics	Computed Value	Df	p-value	Decision
Age	Pearson r	-0.04	23	0.87>0.05	Failed to reject the null
Gender	Pearson r	-0.19	23	0.36>0.05	Failed to reject the null
Marital Status	Pearson r	0.02	23	0.94>0.05	Failed to reject the null
Highest Educational	Spearman Rho	0.08	23	0.71>0.05	Failed to reject the null
Field of Specialization	Pearson r	0.07	23	0.72>0.05	Failed to reject the null
Years of Teaching	Spearman Rho	-0.02	23	0.93>0.05	Failed to reject the null
Years of Teaching in Vietnam	Spearman Rho	-0.14	23	0.50>0.05	Failed to reject the null
Subject Taught	Pearson r	-0.35	23	0.09>0.05	Failed to reject the null

As expressed from the data results in Table 7, the test failed to reject the null between the NNESTs demographic profile and the teachers' listed attributes in assessing the most critical quality of an EF teacher. Our sample did not show sufficient evidence to conclude that the effect exists between the tested variables since the p-value of all the NNESTs' identified characteristics is greater than the significance level set at 0.05. This finding is concomitant with the result of the NEST group. The same agreement can be concluded from the two groups that the personal demographic characteristics of the teachers did not produce significant combined effects on the perceived factors on teachers' characteristics. The like-mindedness of NESTs and NNESTs groups in their perceptions of all the aspects covered in the essential qualities are generally substantial, notwithstanding the teacher's profile. It also implies that the NNESTs respondents were well-aware of the standards and qualifications necessary for the teaching profession. They believe that an effective teacher's characteristics are unduly affected by the teachers' diverse backgrounds. The alignment shows that the result supports the validation of the essential qualities of a good language teacher. It is consistent with a study that pointed out the existence of teachers' characteristics benchmarks are perceived the same by the teachers despite their diverse backgrounds. Research provides essential insights into the fact that identifying attributes in teaching has a long history. Beishuizen et al. (2001) have reported that "good teachers have been studied ever since Plato Socrates' teacher-student relationship" (p. 185). Overall, attributes inter-rated by the respondents' correspondents in this study align with the typical teacher characteristics of an ideal language teacher, such as practical knowledge, professional skills, interpersonal skills, and personal qualities. Brown (2001). Thus, teachers generally understand the typical teacher characteristics regardless of the profile.

Table 8. Significant Difference (Non-NEST Profile and Student Characteristics)

Test of Significant Relationship on Non-Nest Demographic Profile and Student Characteristic (N=25)					
Demographic Profile	Test Statistics	Computed Value	Df	p-value	Decision
Age	Pearson r	-0.03	23	0.89>0.05	Failed to reject the null
Gender	Pearson r	-0.17	23	0.41>0.05	Failed to reject the null
Marital Status	Pearson r	-0.02	23	0.91>0.05	Failed to reject the null
Highest Educational	Spearman Rho	0.273	23	0.19>0.05	Failed to reject the null
Field of Specialization	Pearson r	0.18	23	0.38>0.05	Failed to reject the null
Years of Teaching	Spearman Rho	0.063	23	0.77>0.05	Failed to reject the null
Years of Teaching in Vietnam	Spearman Rho	-0.073	23	0.73>0.05	Failed to reject the null
Subject Taught	Pearson r	-0.48	23	0.01<0.05	Reject the null

As shown in Table 8, results revealed that amongst NNESTs' demographic profile, only the subjects taught apart from English showed a lesser p-value when tested at a 0.05 level of significance, which rejected the null hypothesis. This result suggests that other

subjects taught have an extended effect on their perceived students' factor. It can be illustrated by NNEST assigned to teach another subject like Science or Math. It may influence differently teaching of the students depending on the students' English ability, overall attitude, and motivation for a specific subject since some subjects require higher communication discourses and complex vocabulary like making inferences, questioning, or making explanations in a speech (Laplane, 1997). Thus, preschool students will struggle to learn a new language used in content areas. However, students who have better physical, affective, and artistic inclinations may perform well in other subjects, and the teachers would find them less stressful to teach. Furthermore, the findings suggest no bearings on the rest of the listed items from the demographic profile factors. For example, an old married female native English-speaking teacher's attitude towards students' learning varies regardless of their background. This finding supports another study that indicated that teachers' perception of their jobs regarding leaving or staying in the teaching profession has nothing to do with the students' factors. The main reasons could be for opportunity aspects that they are not receiving in their current teaching job" (Walker et al., 2004, p. 36).

Table 9. Table 9. Significant Difference (Non-NEST Profile and School)

Demographic Profile	Test Statistics	Computed Value	Df	p-value	Decision
Age	Pearson r	0.08	23	0.71>0.05	Failed to reject the null
Gender	Pearson r	-0.17	23	0.41>0.05	Failed to reject the null
Marital Status	Pearson r	0.03	23	0.90>0.05	Failed to reject the null
Highest Educational	Spearman Rho	0.25	23	0.22>0.05	Failed to reject the null
Field of Specialization	Pearson r	0.14	23	0.51>0.05	Failed to reject the null
Years of Teaching	Spearman Rho	0.46	23	0.02<0.05	Reject the null
Years of Teaching in Vietnam	Spearman Rho	0.27	23	0.19>0.05	Failed to reject the null
Subject Taught	Pearson r	-0.26	23	0.21>0.05	Failed to reject the null

As manifested from the results in Table 9, among the demographic profiles of the NNESTs' respondents, the years of teaching and their relation to the school factor showed a correlation. The result indicated that the element on overall years of experience has a lesser p-value when tested at a 0.05 level of significance, which rejected the null hypothesis. It can be inferred that the NNESTs group's total teaching experience matters in how they perceive the school factors. For NNESTs, for example, those with long teaching experience may find better reasons to stay or leave the school depending on their overall experience with the school and administrators. Teachers who have ample teaching experience feel more confident and secure about their teaching competence and efficacy as a teacher. Therefore, they have better job opportunities or employment benefits than those less experienced. Likewise, schools also value and recognize their worth due to their length of teaching service despite their native background. In general, many parents, recruiters, and students initially prefer a NEST

to teach them English, but may have a different view once they have encountered an experienced NNESTs, Moussu (2006). Most students taught by a 'non-native speaker' commended their ability to teach and recommended others to have classes with a 'non-native speaker'. In addition, Walkinshaw and Duong (2012) pointed out that students consider qualifications, experience, pleasing personality, and understanding of students' cultures more critical than 'nativeness.' Similar findings were also highlighted by Kiczkowiak (2019). Finally, 'non-native speakers' are also often commended by students for their teaching skills (Santana et al., 2002; Mahboob, 2004).

5. Conclusions

The EFL industry continues to grow substantially as demands for English learning surge in many parts of the world, principally in Asia. Vietnam is among the nations with excessive extensive demand for English teachers. Hence, there is a growing interest for foreign English teachers to venture into a teaching career in the country. Whereas contemplating a promising and rewarding teaching career like an English preschool teacher in Vietnam can be appealing, foreign English teachers, NESTs, and NNESTs alike need to be wary of the intricacies involved in the job, including its opportunities, satisfactions, requirements, and challenges. The findings of this study helped examine further the NESTs and NNESTs' career perceptions and challenges who work as preschool EFL teachers across the globe. It extended a broader scope of the study to countries like Vietnam, and the careers and challenges of NESTs and NNESTs in EFL contexts will be better known and perceived. This study investigated the attitudes of foreign preschool English teachers who are NEST and NNEST concerning their perceived factors on the teacher, students, and school characteristics that affect their career and their own perceived strengths and weaknesses and the other group. The result essentially manifested that for both NESTs and non-NESTs, demographic profile played a considerable role in influencing the perceived factors of teacher, student, and school characteristics in their teaching career.

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