

# CULTURAL SENSITIVITY AND TEACHING COMPETENCE: EXAMINING THAI STUDENTS' SATISFACTION WITH NON-NATIVE ENGLISH-SPEAKING TEACHERS

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## ABSTRACT

**Aim.** Despite the growing presence of non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, little is known about how their teaching impacts student satisfaction, motivation, and confidence. While much of the existing research focuses on comparisons between native and non-native teachers, this study shifts the focus to how Thai students perceive NNESTs' teaching competence, communication skills, English proficiency, and pedagogical strategies. It also explores how these perceptions influence students' engagement and willingness to use English.

**Method.** This qualitative study was conducted at an autonomous university in southern Thailand, where students were randomly assigned to either native or non-native English-speaking teachers. A phenomenological approach was used to examine the experiences of 432 second-year students who had been taught by NNESTs for at least one full academic year. Reflective essays were collected, allowing students to share their insights on classroom interactions, teaching methods, and overall satisfaction. Data was analysed thematically to identify key patterns in student experiences.

**Results.** Students valued NNESTs for their structured lessons, clear explanations, encouragement, and ability to relate to the challenges of learning English. Most students felt that NNESTs' cultural insights and supportive teaching styles created an engaging and comfortable learning environment. However, some students struggled with fast-paced instruction, accent variations, and repetitive teaching approaches, which occasionally made learning difficult. Effective NNESTs were those who adapted their teaching methods, provided constructive feedback, and fostered a classroom atmosphere where students felt comfortable making mistakes.

**Conclusion.** The findings indicate that students place greater emphasis on teaching quality and cultural sensitivity than on native-speaker status, which points to the importance of professional development programmes that strengthen NNESTs' instructional flexibility and communicative competence.

**Keywords:** teaching competence, native and non-native English teachers, motivation, learning outcomes

## INTRODUCTION

Non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) have long been at the centre of debates in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education. Early perspectives often reinforced “native-speakerism,” presenting native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) as ideal due to their linguistic fluency and presumed pedagogical superiority (Medgyes, 1992). Nevertheless, this view has been increasingly challenged by research that identifies NNESTs' strengths, such as their lived experience as language learners and their ability to anticipate students' difficulties (Colmenero & Lasagabaster, 2023; Llurda & Calvet-Terré, 2024). Despite these findings, student perceptions of NNESTs remain inconsistent and context-dependent, shaped by variables such as communication style, teaching competence, English proficiency, and instructional strategies (Butler, 2007; Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2014).

Past studies have compared the general attributes of NNESTs and NESTs, but detailed investigation into the specific qualities of NNESTs that affect students' learning experiences remains scant. Research often focuses on general preferences for teacher types rather than exploring the deeper causes of student satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Deng, 2024). Moreover, despite the recognised importance of teacher competence

and language proficiency in effective instruction, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding of how these elements impact students' motivation and confidence in English learning environments, particularly in regions like Asia where NNESTs are predominantly employed (Bing et al., 2023; Zhang & Zhang, 2021).

In Thailand, where English proficiency is vital for career advancement and global communication, students often face challenges in fluency and confidence, exacerbated by a grammar-focused education system that rarely provides opportunities for practical language use (Hayes, 2010; Ulla, 2018). Most English instructors in Thailand are NNESTs, and despite concerns regarding their pronunciation and fluency, studies indicate that students place higher value on teachers' pedagogical skills and cultural sensitivity than on their native or non-native status (Boonsuk, 2016; Moussu, 2010). This study, therefore, aims to bridge the gap in understanding how Thai students perceive the effectiveness of NNESTs and how these perceptions influence their engagement and confidence in learning English. Rather than perpetuating simplistic native vs. non-native distinctions, this research focuses on identifying specific teacher attributes that either facilitate or impede student engagement in the EFL context. The following research questions guide the study:

- How do Thai students perceive the teaching competence, communication skills, English proficiency, and pedagogical skills of non-native English-speaking teachers, and how do these perceptions influence their overall satisfaction with their learning experience?
- In what ways does students' satisfaction with non-native English-speaking teachers influence their motivation and confidence in learning English?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Learner Satisfaction in EFL Education

Learner satisfaction has long been recognised as a critical measure of educational effectiveness, reflecting students' experiences with course structure, content delivery, and instructional quality (Sherry et al., 1998). Studies from diverse educational contexts, including Spain (Esteban & del Cerro, 2020), China (Yin et al., 2016), and Romania (Roman, 2014), have identified that students' subjective perceptions significantly influence their engagement and learning outcomes. Empirical research further confirms that high-quality teaching positively correlates with student satisfaction, which, in turn, impacts academic performance and motivation (Suwarni et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2015).

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, learner satisfaction is often examined in the context of teacher effectiveness. However, much of this research tends to frame satisfaction within a binary comparison of native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs), rather than exploring the specific

attributes that contribute to student engagement and success. Lazgin Barany and Zirak T. I. Zebari (2018) found that Kurdish EFL students preferred NESTs for language fluency and pronunciation but favoured NNESTs for grammatical instruction. Also, Tomoyo Okuda (2019) reported that Japanese students' tutor preferences extended beyond linguistic ability to include goal alignment and instructional strategies. These findings challenge the oversimplified native vs. non-native dichotomy and emphasise the need for a more nuanced examination of teacher attributes in shaping learner satisfaction.

### **Students' Perceptions of Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers**

The efficacy of non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) in English as a Foreign Language instruction remains a contentious topic among educators and researchers. Historically, native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) were deemed superior due to their linguistic authenticity and mastery of pronunciation and fluency (Kelch & Santana-Williamson, 2002; Medgyes, 1992). Yet, recent studies indicate that students' attitudes towards NNESTs are shaped by a complex interplay of factors and vary widely across different contexts (Deng et al., 2023; Qiu & Fang, 2019). Research by Fathor Rasyid et al. (2023) suggests that student perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs are converging, while other studies stress distinct advantages of each group. Students value NESTs for their dynamic teaching approaches and fluency, yet they favour NNESTs for their grammatical precision and empathetic understanding of the language learning process (Sung, 2014).

Student perceptions evolve from various elements including communication skills, pedagogical strategies, cross-cultural insights, and classroom dynamics (Bing et al., 2023; Xu & Xiao, 2023). Studies show that students respond positively to NNESTs who foster interactive learning environments and adapt their teaching to accommodate varying proficiency levels. Nevertheless, students can become disenchanted due to accent diversity and unfamiliar communication styles (Tsang, 2020). In Thailand, for instance, students exhibit ambivalent responses to NNESTs, as English is learned as a foreign language within their educational system. Although they appreciate structured lessons and clear explanations, they struggle with accent variations and the comprehension of both foreign and Thai-accented English (Phothongsunan & Suwanarak, 2008). These divergent student perspectives underscore the importance of assessing English language educators based on their pedagogical competencies rather than their native or non-native status.

### **Cultural Sensitivity and Teaching Competence**

Teaching competence is a key determinant of student satisfaction in EFL classrooms. Studies indicate that NNESTs' effectiveness is often assessed based on their ability to organise lessons, provide clear explanations, and engage students in meaningful learning

activities (Bing et al., 2023). A well-structured lesson plan, combined with an adaptive and student-centred approach, enhances engagement and knowledge retention (Zhang & Zhang, 2021). Nevertheless, NNESTs face challenges when their pacing is too fast or when their teaching methods become repetitive, leading to decreased student interest.

Cultural sensitivity is another critical factor influencing students' perceptions of NNESTs. Research suggests that incorporating cultural elements into language instruction enhances student engagement and deepens their understanding of the target language (Deng et al., 2023). In Thailand, NNESTs often provide valuable cultural exposure, which students appreciate as it broadens their perspective and makes learning more meaningful (Boonsuk, 2016). Nonetheless, teachers who lack intercultural competence may struggle to create an inclusive classroom environment, limiting students' ability to relate to the language in real-world contexts.

### **Communication Skills and English Proficiency**

Effective communication is crucial in language teaching, and NNESTs are often evaluated based on their ability to convey concepts clearly and interact with students in a supportive manner. Research shows that NNESTs offer clear explanations, encouragement, and constructive feedback positively influence students' confidence and motivation (Jumsai Na Ayudhya, 2021). Yet, inconsistencies in pronunciation and varying accents can sometimes pose communication barriers (Tsang, 2020). Students who struggle to adapt to different accents may experience difficulties in understanding instructions, which can hinder learning (Fuangkarn & Rimkeeratikul, 2020).

English proficiency remains a significant concern for students when assessing NNESTs' effectiveness. Although many NNESTs demonstrate strong fluency and pronunciation, some struggle to comprehend Thai-accented English, leading to occasional miscommunications (Phothongsunan & Suwanarak, 2008). This aligns with findings from other EFL contexts, where students report feeling less confident when their teachers have difficulties understanding their speech (Adara, 2019). Despite these challenges, NNESTs' ability to model correct pronunciation and provide engaging instruction is generally well-received by students.

### **Impact of NNEST Satisfaction on Student Motivation and Confidence**

Some studies have examined the link between teacher satisfaction and student motivation in EFL learning. Although teacher competence and communication skills are well-established factors in student engagement, research suggests that cultural sensitivity, relatability, and encouragement also play vital roles (Jang & Wood, 2019; Pae, 2017).

In Thailand, students report feeling more confident and motivated when their teachers provide supportive feedback and foster an inclusive learning environment (Imsa-ard, 2020).

Research from other EFL contexts reinforces these findings. In Indonesia, for instance, students respond positively to NNESTs who incorporate cultural knowledge and empathy into their lessons (Kirkpatrick, 2010). Similarly, studies from Korea indicate that students initially exhibit lower confidence in NNEST-led classes but develop greater motivation and engagement over time (Jang & Wood, 2019). These findings suggest that NNESTs are essential in boosting student motivation, particularly when they emphasise encouragement and create a safe space for language practice.

The relationship between learner satisfaction and motivation remains complex. Some studies suggest that NNESTs' teaching competence directly influences motivation (Zhang & Zhang, 2021), but others argue that satisfaction with specific teaching attributes – such as pronunciation clarity and instructional adaptability – has a more significant impact (Javadi, 2020). In Thailand, research has shown that students' willingness to communicate in English increases when they feel understood and supported by their instructors (Ng & Tajoda-Edwards, 2015). However, some studies suggest that teacher nativeness alone does not significantly affect learning outcomes, emphasising instead the importance of pedagogical expertise and classroom engagement strategies (Al-Nawrasy, 2013; Elyas & Alghofaili, 2019).

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design and Context

This study utilised a qualitative research design to delve into the satisfaction levels of Thai students with non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) within an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) framework. Employing a phenomenological approach, the research aimed to deeply understand students' lived experiences and perceptions of NNESTs, with a particular focus on teaching competence, communication skills, English proficiency, and pedagogical strategies (Stolz, 2023). Such a method facilitated a comprehensive exploration of how students interpret their interactions with NNESTs, building upon existing literature on student satisfaction and the dynamics of language learning in varied educational contexts.

The empirical data for this investigation were gathered at an autonomous university in southern Thailand, which employs a diverse faculty from countries such as Indonesia, India, Bhutan, the USA, the UK, and the Philippines, all delivering general English courses. The university's policy of randomly assigning teachers ensured that students experienced a range of teaching styles, without a predetermined allocation to either native or non-native English-speaking instructors. The study focused on second-year students who had been taught by NNESTs for at least one full academic year, covering

three consecutive terms. Ethical considerations were meticulously adhered to, with the university's ethics committee granting approval (Approval No. WUEC-23-331-01) and all participants providing informed consent prior to their inclusion in the study.

## Participants

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that they had sufficient exposure to NNEST instruction. Initially, an online screening survey was distributed via Google Forms, with access provided through a QR code or direct link. Students who met the selection criteria were invited to participate in the study. A total of 432 second-year students consented to participate, representing a diverse range of academic disciplines, including Public Health, Political Science, and Engineering and Technology.

The participant sample reflected the broader student demographic of the university. Gender distribution was slightly imbalanced, with 75.7% female, 22.9% male, and 1.4% identifying as "Other." The age range of participants was between 18 and 23 years, with a mean age of 19.54 years ( $SD = 0.814$ ). The diversity of disciplines and demographic characteristics provided a comprehensive representation of student experiences with NNEST instruction.

## Data Collection

The primary data source for this study was students' reflective essays, which provided insight into their experiences and perceptions of NNESTs. Participants were given detailed instructions via the Google Form, encouraging them to reflect on key aspects of their learning experience, including teaching methods, interactions with NNESTs, and their overall satisfaction. Students were specifically prompted to discuss how NNESTs influenced their motivation, confidence, and academic performance in English language learning. Previous studies have used this type of instrument, which suggests the appropriateness for collecting qualitative data (e.g., Apridayani et al., 2023; Waluyo & Kusumastuti, 2024).

To accommodate students' linguistic preferences and ensure the richness of responses, they were allowed to write in either Thai or English. Essays were required to be a minimum of 100 words to encourage depth and reflection. Confidentiality was emphasised throughout the process, and students were reassured that their responses were not subject to assessment but valued for research purposes.

A total of 28,232 words of qualitative data were collected from the reflective essays. Each submission was assigned a unique identifier (e.g., S001, S002) to maintain participant anonymity while allowing for accurate tracking during data analysis.

## Data Analysis

Data were analysed using a thematic analysis approach following Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines. The process began with multiple readings of the reflective essays to gain a holistic understanding of students' perceptions. The initial phase involved open coding, where meaningful segments of data related to the study's objectives were identified and labelled. Codes were then systematically refined and grouped into broader categories based on recurring patterns. These categories were further consolidated into key themes representing students' satisfaction with NNESTs.

To ensure the credibility of the findings, peer debriefing was conducted, and emerging themes were cross-validated against the raw data. Moreover, themes were examined in relation to the study's conceptual framework, ensuring alignment with existing literature on teacher competence and student motivation. Student satisfaction was assessed across four key dimensions:

- Teaching Competence (TC) – the clarity, organisation, and effectiveness of lesson delivery.
- Communication Skills (CS) – the ability to explain concepts clearly, engage students, and foster confidence.
- English Proficiency and Knowledge (EPK) – the impact of the teacher's language proficiency on students' learning.
- Pedagogical Skills (PS) – the variety and effectiveness of teaching methods employed.

## RESULTS

### Thai Students' Perceptions of Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers' (NNESTs)

**Table 1**  
*Summary of Student Perceptions of NNESTs*

Dimension	What Students Appreciate	Challenges
Teaching Competence (STC)	Well-structured lessons, cultural exposure	Some lessons are too fast paced
Communication Skills (SCS)	Clear explanations, supportive teachers	Accent variation and inconsistent communication styles
English Proficiency (SEPK)	Strong fluency, correct pronunciation, motivational impact	Some teachers struggle to understand Thai-accented English
Pedagogical Skills (SPS)	Engaging activities, diverse teaching strategies	Some lessons feel repetitive

*Source.* Own research.



As presented in Table 1, the analysis revealed that students' satisfaction with non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) significantly influenced their motivation and confidence in learning English. While students generally reported positive experiences, they also identified specific challenges that impacted their learning. The following sections discuss four key themes—Teaching Competence (TC), Communication Skills (CS), English Proficiency and Knowledge (EPK), and Pedagogical Skills (PS)—by presenting both benefits and concerns as reflected in students' responses.

### *Teaching Competence (TC)*

Sixty-nine students praised NNESTs for their structured and goal-oriented lesson delivery. They valued the clarity of instruction and the ability to follow well-organised content, which supported their learning. As one student noted, “The teaching content aligns with the objectives” (S2). Others emphasised the supportive learning atmosphere created by NNESTs, which fostered greater engagement and comfort: “Very good, can teach, understand students, and adapt to different students. This makes learning more enjoyable and easier” (S11). Students also appreciated the cultural perspectives that NNESTs brought into the classroom, viewing this as an enriching element of their language learning experience. One student commented, “Having foreign or non-native speakers as English teachers is excellent. It not only helps students learn the language but also exposes them to the teachers' cultures and traditions” (S384). Another highlighted the interpersonal qualities of NNESTs: “I think foreign English teachers are kinder than Thai teachers. They teach well, understand, and give good advice” (S12). These reflections suggest that students view teaching competence as a combination of instructional clarity, personal connection, and cultural integration.

However, 42 students reported challenges related to instructional pacing. Some teachers were perceived as teaching too quickly, which hindered students' ability to follow the content. One student observed, “The teacher covers the content well, but sometimes they teach a bit too quickly, making it challenging for some students to keep up” (S381). Others recommended adjusting delivery speed and vocabulary complexity to suit learners' proficiency levels: “Foreign teachers should speak or teach more slowly and use easy-to-understand words because sometimes it's hard to understand the tasks or what the teacher is saying” (S32). This suggests a need for greater sensitivity to pacing and language complexity in mixed-level classrooms.

### *Communication Skills (CS)*

Seventy-one students highlighted NNESTs' clear explanations, encouraging demeanour, and accessibility as key strengths. They expressed increased confidence in speaking English due to supportive teacher interactions. One student shared, “I feel that the teachers are genuine and connect with every student. They provide excellent

guidance, and they make me confident in speaking English, even when I make mistakes” (S421). Others emphasised how friendly and engaging teaching styles helped maintain interest: “Teachers are good, easy to understand, friendly, and get along well with students. They have teaching skills to make students interested in learning” (S21). The availability of teachers outside class also contributed to students’ satisfaction. Several mentioned being able to contact teachers for help or clarification, which enhanced their learning experience: “I love studying in English class with English teachers. The teachers also take good care of and engage with students. If any problems occur, students can text their teachers to discuss and resolve them” (S8).

Despite these positive perceptions, 48 students reported difficulties with accent variation and inconsistent communication styles, particularly when teachers changed frequently. One student expressed, “Frequent changes of teachers with varying accents can be challenging for me. Exposure to different accents is beneficial, but consistency in the teaching staff’s communication style would help some of us adapt more smoothly” (S391). Others struggled to understand unfamiliar accents: “Sometimes, due to accents, it’s hard to hear the teacher clearly, but it’s not bad” (S137). These responses show that although exposure to diverse accents can enhance listening skills, some students require more consistent and accessible communication styles to build confidence and comprehension.

### ***English Proficiency and Knowledge (EPK)***

Fifty-eight students acknowledged NNESTs’ strong command of English, accurate pronunciation, and motivational impact. Teachers were seen as competent language models who inspired students to improve their fluency. As one student remarked, “Learning English with a teacher feels great. I hear the correct accent and find the teacher very engaging. Their proficiency in the language is evident, and it inspires us to strive for fluency” (S411). Students also valued NNESTs’ grammatical expertise and their ability to explain concepts clearly: “The foreign teachers who teach at our university are teachers who are knowledgeable and capable in terms of teaching quality and transferring knowledge to students” (S51). Another added, “The teacher teaches well and explains in detail. If I don’t understand, the teacher is always willing to explain it again” (S126).

Nonetheless, 39 students identified difficulties when NNESTs had trouble understanding Thai-accented English, leading to miscommunication and frustration. One student noted, “Some teachers don’t always understand when students speak with a Thai accent, which sometimes leads to misunderstandings” (S388). Another reported feeling discouraged from speaking: “There were times when my teacher misinterpreted what I was saying because of my pronunciation, which made me nervous to speak up” (S102). These challenges point to a need for more targeted training in understanding local pronunciation to foster smoother communication and reduce anxiety.

### ***Pedagogical Skills (PS)***

Sixty-one students praised NNESTs for using varied teaching strategies, interactive activities, and flexible approaches. Teachers who incorporated engaging techniques and group tasks were perceived as making lessons more enjoyable and confidence-boosting. One student shared, “Some students enjoy different teaching approaches and various activities in class. These innovative pedagogical methods enhance our learning experience and make classes more enjoyable” (S386). Another appreciated the teachers’ adaptability and support: “Teachers are adaptable to students, do not pressure students when they are unable to communicate, and are very kind” (S119). Students also emphasised that interactive environments, such as group discussions and presentations, promoted active learning: “The teacher creates an engaging atmosphere with group discussions, presentations, and interactive learning activities that help improve our confidence” (S280).

Notwithstanding these strengths, 38 students expressed concerns about repetitive lessons and a lack of instructional variety. One student remarked, “I feel that some lessons are repeated too often, and it can get a little boring” (S398). Another suggested, “While the teacher is great, I sometimes wish they would incorporate new methods instead of using the same approach every lesson” (S399). These comments indicate that NNESTs were effective in fostering engagement, but further innovation in teaching methods could enhance student interest and prevent monotony.

## **Impact of NNEST Satisfaction on Student Motivation and Confidence**

Students’ satisfaction with non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) emerged as a key factor influencing their motivation and confidence in learning and using English. Thematic analysis of students’ responses revealed six major themes through which NNESTs positively contributed to learners’ willingness to engage with the language. These themes reflect not only instructional effectiveness but also emotional and psychological dimensions of the learning experience. Table 2 provides a summary of the identified themes, which are discussed in detail below.

**Table 2**

*Summary of how NNEST satisfaction influences student motivation & confidence*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>How It Motivates and Builds Confidence</b>
Effective Communication	Clear explanations make English less intimidating.
Cultural Sensitivity and Awareness	Learning about culture makes English more meaningful.
Relatability and Empathy	Teachers who understand students’ struggles create a safe space.

Theme	How It Motivates and Builds Confidence
Pronunciation and Accent	Clear pronunciation helps students feel confident speaking.
Adaptability and Pedagogical Skills	Adjusting teaching styles keeps students engaged.
Encouragement and Motivation	Positive feedback builds confidence and willingness to use English.

*Source.* Own research.

### ***Effective Communication***

Clear and structured communication was consistently cited as a strong motivator, with 98 students emphasising that NNESTs' ability to simplify complex content made English more approachable. Students highlighted how well-explained grammar and vocabulary reduced anxiety and built confidence in using the language. One student expressed, "Having an instructor who can break down complex grammar rules into simple explanations is invaluable. It makes English less daunting" (S13). Another added, "When an instructor can communicate well, it boosts my confidence to speak and write in English. It's like they're unlocking the language for me" (S38). For those with speaking anxiety, clear communication created a safe space for practice: "Good communication helps me feel less nervous about using English. It makes me want to practice more" (S381). These insights accentuate the central role of accessible communication in fostering student motivation, particularly for learners struggling with self-confidence.

### ***Cultural Sensitivity and Awareness***

Eighty-two students reported that NNESTs' integration of cultural content into language lessons increased the relevance and richness of their learning experience. By linking language with global perspectives, teachers helped students view English as more than an academic requirement. One student reflected, "Learning about cultural customs and traditions alongside language enriches my understanding of English. It is like a window into different worlds" (S72). Another recalled, "My instructor once shared a fascinating story about a cultural celebration in an English-speaking country. It stuck with me and made the language feel more real" (S17). These responses indicate that culturally embedded instruction deepens student engagement and enhances motivation by connecting language learning with real-world meaning.

### ***Relatability and Empathy***

Seventy-four students emphasised NNESTs' empathy and relatability as powerful motivational drivers. Many students appreciated having teachers who had also experienced learning English, which helped build a sense of trust and mutual understanding.

As one student stated, “An instructor who’s been where I am now understands my struggles and fears. It makes the learning process less intimidating” (S23). Sharing personal stories of language learning allowed NNESTs to humanise the learning process, offering encouragement through lived experience: “My instructor shared stories of their own language learning challenges, and it gave me hope that I could overcome them too” (S49). The value of empathetic teaching in reducing learner anxiety and encouraging risk-taking is reflected in these comments.

### ***Pronunciation and Accent***

For 112 students, the clarity of their instructors’ pronunciation significantly affected their confidence in speaking English. A clear and comprehensible accent served as a reliable model for students to emulate. One remarked, “A clear accent helps me grasp the correct pronunciation, which is crucial for effective communication” (S101), while another noted, “My instructor’s neutral accent makes me feel more confident about my own pronunciation. It’s like having a role model to follow” (S118). However, students also acknowledged the long-term benefit of encountering various English accents, especially in preparing for global communication: “Listening to different accents helps me adapt when speaking with foreigners, which makes me feel more prepared” (S391). Even though accent clarity supports immediate confidence, diverse accent exposure seems to build adaptability and listening competence.

### ***Adaptability and Pedagogical Skills***

Eighty-nine students described adaptable teaching styles and interactive pedagogical strategies as key motivators. Students responded positively when instructors adjusted lesson content, pace, and difficulty to match learner needs. One student shared, “When my instructor adjusts the pace and difficulty according to our progress, it keeps the class engaging and productive” (S83). Interactive techniques, such as group discussions and hands-on activities, also contributed to increased motivation: “Teachers who use interactive activities like discussions and group work make learning fun and interesting” (S386). The importance of student-centered instruction in maintaining attention and enthusiasm, particularly in mixed-ability classrooms is pointed out by these students.

### ***Encouragement and Motivation***

Finally, 106 students identified teacher encouragement as a crucial element in boosting motivation and building confidence. Supportive feedback, recognition of progress, and expressions of belief in students’ potential played a significant role in helping learners overcome their fear of making mistakes. One student shared, “When my instructor believes in my potential and encourages me, it motivates me to work harder and take

risks in using English” (S124). Praise and feedback had a notable emotional impact, as another student described: “My instructor’s positive feedback on my improvement has boosted my confidence in speaking English. It’s like having a cheerleader in class” (S136). For some, this encouragement fostered resilience: “A teacher’s encouragement helps me push through difficulties in learning English. It makes me want to keep trying” (S258). These responses illustrate how emotional support from teachers can be as influential as instructional methods in sustaining learner engagement.

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATION

The findings of this study accentuate the multifaceted nature of Thai students’ satisfaction with NNESTs, particularly in relation to teaching competence, communication skills, English proficiency, and pedagogical approaches. Overall, students demonstrated high regard for NNESTs’ structured lesson planning, cultural inclusivity, and ability to foster an engaging and supportive classroom environment. However, challenges such as fast-paced instruction, accent variation, and difficulties in understanding nonnative or Thai-accented English were also identified. These findings align with previous studies that challenge the traditional preference for native English-speaking teachers (Medgyes, 1992; Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2014) by demonstrating that NNESTs offer unique advantages that enhance student engagement and motivation (Colmenero & Lasagabaster, 2023; Llurda & Calvet-Terré, 2024). Importantly, this study contributes to existing literature by providing a nuanced examination of how specific teacher attributes, rather than nativeness, shape student satisfaction and language learning outcomes.

One of the key findings of this study was the fundamental role of effective communication in fostering student confidence and motivation. Students overwhelmingly appreciated NNESTs’ ability to simplify complex grammatical structures, provide clear explanations, and maintain an encouraging learning atmosphere. This is consistent with research by Jianhua Zhang and Lawrence Jun Zhang (2021), who argue that students’ perceptions of teacher competence are directly linked to their willingness to communicate in English. Moreover, NNESTs’ relatability as former language learners was highlighted as a crucial factor in creating a low anxiety learning environment, a finding that echoes previous studies in various EFL contexts (Bing et al., 2023; Sung, 2014). However, while effective communication was frequently cited as a strength, some students found inconsistent teaching styles and accent variations challenging, particularly when teachers changed frequently. This issue is supported by Art Tsang (2020), who found that students require greater stability in teacher communication styles to develop stronger listening comprehension skills. Addressing this concern requires universities to consider strategies for ensuring more consistent exposure to specific English accents and communication styles throughout a student’s academic journey.

Another critical theme emerging from the data was the influence of cultural sensitivity on student engagement. Students expressed appreciation for NNESTs' ability to incorporate diverse cultural elements into their lessons, making English learning more meaningful and relevant. These findings align with Liwei Deng et al. (2023), who argue that culturally responsive teaching enhances student motivation by connecting language learning to real-world contexts. Moreover, students valued NNESTs' empathy and understanding of their struggles, reinforcing previous research that suggests students respond more positively to teachers who can relate to their experiences (Jumsai Na Ayudhya, 2021; Phothongsunan & Suwanarak, 2008). Nonetheless, while NNESTs' ability to integrate cultural awareness into lessons was seen as an asset, challenges persisted in terms of lesson pacing and repetition, with some students expressing frustration over the lack of instructional variety. This issue aligns with previous findings indicating that monotonous teaching methods can lead to disengagement, regardless of a teacher's language proficiency (Fuangkarn & Rimkeeratikul, 2020). Therefore, professional development programs for NNESTs should emphasise adaptive pedagogical strategies that balance structured instruction with innovative, student-centred learning activities.

Lastly, the study features the strong relationship between NNEST satisfaction and student motivation, reinforcing previous research on learner satisfaction as a predictor of academic engagement and achievement (Suwarni et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2015). The results demonstrate that when students feel supported, understood, and encouraged by their teachers, they are more likely to take risks in speaking English, engage actively in lessons, and persist through challenges. Especially, teacher encouragement and positive reinforcement emerged as critical motivators, with students frequently describing their teachers as "cheerleaders" who helped build their confidence. These findings align with studies by Pariwat Imsa-ard (2020) and Tae-II Pae (2017), which emphasise that constructive feedback plays a crucial role in shaping student willingness to participate in language learning. However, while students generally responded positively to NNESTs, concerns about pronunciation misunderstandings highlight the need for enhanced teacher training in recognising and interpreting students' accented English. Addressing this issue could further improve communication efficiency and create a more inclusive learning environment.

## CONCLUSION, LIMITATION, AND RECOMMENDATION

This study shows that Thai students value NNESTs for their structured lessons, clear explanations, cultural insights, and encouragement, which help build their confidence and motivation in learning English. However, challenges such as fast-paced instruction, accent variation, and repetitive teaching methods sometimes hinder engagement. These findings highlight that effective teaching depends on pedagogical skills and cultural awareness rather than a teacher's nativeness. A key limitation is the reliance on self-reported data, which, while insightful, reflects personal perceptions rather than measurable

learning outcomes. Additionally, since the study focused on one university, the findings may not fully apply to other EFL contexts. Future research should explore how NNEST instruction impacts long-term language development and how different teaching styles influence student progress. To improve NNEST effectiveness, universities should offer training on adjusting lesson pacing, understanding nonnative or Thai-accented English, and diversifying teaching strategies to keep students engaged.

### ETHICAL APPROVAL

This study was approved by the ethics committee in human research, Walailak University, Thailand (WUEC-23–331–01).

### AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The contributions of the authors are as follows: Henry E. Lemana II and Budi Waluyo conducted the investigation, while Crizjale V. Ahmad was responsible for the methodology and provided resources. Henry E. Lemana II and Budi Waluyo managed the project administration, and Budi Waluyo supervised the project. The original draft was written by Henry E. Lemana II and Budi Waluyo, with review and editing completed by Henry E. Lemana II and Crizjale V. Ahmad. The corresponding author is Budi Waluyo (budi.business.waluyo@gmail.com).

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