

The Experiences of Non-native English-speakers and Native English-speakers teaching in China

Bachelor's thesis
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English
April 2020

1 ABSTRACT

Tiedekunta – Faculty Humanistis-yhteiskuntatieteellinen tiedekunta	Laitos – Department Kieli- ja viestintätieteiden laitos
Tekijä – Author Alma Luokkanen	
Työn nimi – Title The Experiences of Non-native English-speakers and Native English-speakers teaching in China	
Oppiaine – Subject Englanti	Työn laji – Level Kandidaatin tutkielma
Aika – Month and year 2020	Sivumäärä – Number of pages
Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Tämän kandidaatintutkielman tarkoituksena on tutkia Kiinassa englannin kieltä opettavien syntyperäisten englannin puhujien sekä muiden vierasmaalaisten opetuskokemuksia. Se tutkii myös, mitä eroja opettajien opetusmetodeissa on, mitä heiltä vaadittiin päästäkseen töihin, ja miten heitä kohdeltiin Kiinassa. Englannin kielen opetuksen suosion kasvaessa kovaa vauhtia, tarkoituksenani on tutkia, miten tämä vaikuttaa vieraskielisiin englannin kielen opettajiin sekä sitä myötä opetusalaan.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen viitekehyksenä käytettiin aiheesta tehtyjä ulkomaisia tutkimuksia sekä Kiinasta että muualta. Taustatutkimusta ei ole riittävästi tarjolla viime vuosista, joten on tarpeellista saada sekä uutta tietoa tilanteesta, että tarkastella opettajien omia kokemuksia.</p> <p>Kyselytutkimukseen osallistui 12 opettajaa, joilla oli kokemusta englannin kielen opetuksesta Kiinassa. Aineisto kerättiin kyselylomakkeella, joka koostui 16 kysymyksestä, ja siihen kuului sekä avoimia, että monivalintakysymyksiä.</p> <p>Tulosten mukaan opettajien kokemukset vaihtelivat riippuen, olivatko he englannin syntyperäisiä puhujia vai eivät. Muilta, kuin syntyperäisiltä puhujilta vaadittiin korkeampaa koulutusta ja enemmän työkokemusta, mutta heidän oli silti vaikeampaa saada töitä. Myös opettajien ulkonäkö ja ihonväri osoittautui merkittäväksi tekijäksi hakuprosessissa. Useat opettajat kokivat myös kulttuurisia haasteita, sekä toivoivat muutosta käytettyihin opetusmenetelmiin sekä Kiinan opetusalaan.</p>	
Asiasanat – Keywords English teaching in China, NEST, non-NEST, SLA, EFL, ELT, ESL	
Säilytyspaikka – Depository	
Muita tietoja – Additional information	

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3 INTRODUCTION

Teaching English has become a necessity in today's globalized world. This has affected the field of English education and in consequence, learning English has become a marketing tool for schools and different companies in many countries. The focus in this study is in China, where the competition for success can be challenging for students, their parents, teachers, administrating staff and schools. As Guo and Beckett (2012, cited in Sung & Pederson 2012: 56) argue, nowadays English in China is seen as a way to succeed at universities and at work, the rising demand of English learning has led to the field of education becoming a blooming business opportunity. Naturally, teachers are badly needed as the number of learners increases. Guo and Beckett continue (2012, cited in Sung & Pederson 2012: 60) that this has led to many schools and training centres looking for work force outside of China. As I will explain in more detail in the study, the admiration for native English-speakers and white people has increased in China as it grows to globalize. Guo and Beckett (2012, cited in Sung & Pederson 2012: 63) also support this, and state that teachers with native English-speaking skills and Caucasian looks are appreciated and preferred when compared to Chinese or other non-native English-speaking teachers.

In my study I will focus on the experiences of both native and non-native English-speakers teaching in China. From now on and throughout my study, I will refer to them as NESTs (native English-speaking teachers) and non-NESTs (non-native English-speaking teachers).

The aim of my study is to discover if their experiences vary from one another, and if, how. Thus, my research question is the following:

- How do the teaching experiences differ for native and non-native teachers of English in China?

I am expecting the teaching experience of non-NESTs to differ from NESTs, and my goal is to discover how, and why it is happening. I expect that NESTs are preferred by private schools and they are overall hired more often, whereas non-NESTs are not hired in most schools and they may be discriminated in different ways. It is easy for anyone to quickly find ads from companies that hire English teachers to China and see the differences in what they offer to NESTs compared to non-NESTs, if they even hire non-NESTs in the first place (see Appendix 2). As the preferment of NESTs is not hidden in any way, I expect the participants in my study experienced some differences during their teaching experience as well. To discover whether the recent teaching experiences of my participants are connected to the

previous studies made on the subject, I compared the results of the participants in my questionnaire to the existing research. There were some unexpected results from my data as well, as racism was one of the themes that rose from the data even though I did not ask about it. I believe it is important to create research in this field to keep informed about the current situation in China and elsewhere, and ultimately to aim to correct the discrimination within the field. There has been research made on the subject around Asia, but I think it is important to generate these studies until they convince the schools, businesses and parents. I propose that with enough information, even the schools and their clients can benefit from it and eventually even change their school policies to benefit the teachers, students and most importantly, their learning process. I will focus on the teaching industry of China because it is one of the countries with the most influence in the world, and the policies made there might affect other countries as well. Changes within the field of education in China are relevant worldwide, as it continues to grow as an economy and a global leader. In the background section I will open some of the history of China, reasons behind the system nowadays and in result how they affect the current field of education.

To discover the situation within the education field from the perspective of foreign teachers, I collected data from people who had personal experience teaching in China. I collected my data by a questionnaire filled in by 12 participants. The questionnaire can be found in total in Appendix 1. In the findings and discussion section I will review the answers of the participants and compare them to each other and to the previous research. Compared to the theoretical background, I am expecting there to be many similarities, but most likely some differences as well, as most of the previous research done and used as a source here has not been made in recent years. I suggest that recent research has been lacking since the previous research results have not affected the discrimination of non-NESTs despite their results. Next, I will continue by presenting the literature review made by some of the leading researchers in the field.

4 BACKGROUND

4.1 TRAJECTORY OF ENGLISH EDUCATION IN CHINA

The course of English education in China has changed majorly in the last few decades. As Guo and Beckett (2012, cited in Sung & Pederson 2012: 55) state, since its open-door policy in 1978, China began a transformation from planned economy to market economy, for which English became an essential requirement. Guo and Beckett continue further that such an emphasis on English resulted in various English language curricular reforms, which were strongly influenced by the forces of economic globalization. I suggest that the leading example of China and the blooming business world there has affected the rest of Asia as well. As countries in East Asia and Southeast Asia compete with who has the most competent international work force or the newest technology achievements, English has become an acquired skill for a modern employee or a business to have. Hu and Adams (2012, cited in Leung and Ruan 2012: 1) argue that the status of English, at times a sensitive issue in China, has been closely tied to the historical and political environment since its initial introduction into the country. It is important to view the situation from China's perspective, as it carries so much influence for other countries.

Guo and Beckett (2012, cited in Sung & Pederson 2012: 56) and Hu and Adams (2012, cited in Leung and Ruan 2012) both claim that the spread of English in China has increased, affecting education at all levels. They explain further that English was introduced to primary schools as a compulsory subject in 2001, and recently China has even issued a historic policy calling for the use of English as the medium of instruction in many universities for certain subjects such as information technology, biotechnology, new material technology, finance, economics, and law. They also claim that English has become a requirement for decent employment, social status, and financial security in China, reflecting the assumptions of linguistic instrumentalism by individuals, and the reform was in response to the rapid development of information technology and economic globalization, as well as to China's rapid social, political, and economic development.

As a further development, the teaching field has turned into a competitive business in China. Guo and Beckett (2012, cited in Sung & Pederson 2012: 60) claim that as English spreads to various corners of the world, the demand for native English-speaker teachers from the major English-speaking countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom, Canada and the United

States is increasing. Guo and Beckett (2012, cited in Sung & Pederson 2012: 62) also claim that China is becoming the largest market for English language teaching in the world, and the teachers are more than needed. Consequently, as Guo and Beckett (2012, cited in Sung and Pederson 2012: 62) continue, private schools, public schools and even universities hire NESTs to quench the thirst of the customers demanding native speakers. However, many of these experts or teachers have no training in teaching English. Guo and Beckett (2012, cited in Sung & Pederson 2012: 62) argue that they still receive better treatment and status in institutions than local English teachers or Chinese speakers. As this has been the reality of the teaching field roughly through the 21st century, the purpose of this study is to discover and discuss the situation today. However, Qiang and Wolff (2009: 4) argue that to go deep into the topic, the problem does not lie with the foreign teachers, it lies with the Chinese recruiting process. To understand the recruiting processes, it is important to understand the cultural differences in China compared to the western world. For example, I suggest that since the one-child-policy, the pressure to find success for the family's only child has increased, and because of the millions and millions of people in China, it is hard for one person to stand out, adding to the pressure of parents and students. Furthermore, it appears that if the public believes a good English-speaker is a white English native, they are willing to pay more money for one to teach their child.

Guo and Beckett (2012, cited in Sung & Pederson 2012: 60) support this theory further by explaining that those who cannot afford the expensive services of native-speaker teachers resort to the service of non-native speakers with a high proficiency of English, which on the other hand create the misconception that teaching English is better carried out by native speakers. Guo and Beckett reveal that this influences not only recruitment practices, but also the perceptions of non-native English-speaking teachers and, by extension, non-native English-speaking students, who internalize the misconception of the idealised speaker of English. They claim that such misconception and internalization often result in the formation of linguistic and racist attitudes.

Feng (2011: 135-136) tells us that for a long time in China, teaching was dominated by a teacher-centered, book-centered method, but with a new curriculum reform introduced in the late 90's (ECS), the focus turned to the student's overall language use. Qiang and Wolff (2009: 3) think that possibly as a response to this reform, it is believed that if a foreign (native) teacher of English is in the classroom for 90 minutes each week, somehow that creates an English-speaking environment and implements the communicative approach and

furthermore a communicative language use for the student. Even though it is important to create a learning context where the student can experience the real-life use of the target language, I have to agree with Qiang and Wolff (2009: 3), when they argue that the second language acquisition in this case is misinterpreted or misapplied, as it seems that the schools believe that 90 minutes a week of hearing a NEST speak English would create a valid English-speaking environment.

Medgyes (2017: 73) argues that to conclude the trajectory of the English education, today, ELT should not be regarded primarily as an educational mission – it is a huge industry regulated by the strict laws of market economy. This applies not only to China, but other countries with a low level of English speakers as well. The industry of language learning and teaching nowadays seems to be regulated by private businesses who appear to just care about a good public image and making as much profit as possible. Medgyes (2017: 79) concludes that many commercial language schools have relatively well-defined hiring practices, partly because their customers arrive with fairly predictable expectations. Finally, Tatar and Yildiz (2010, cited in Mahboob 2010: 114) support the claims made above, and indicate that as the demand for English language centres around the world grows, the demand and competition for students has led administrators to exploit the common misperception that native speakers are better teachers than non-native speakers. For the companies, simply the presence of a NEST in school has proven itself as an important marketing tool.

4.2 THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN NESTS AND NON-NESTS TEACHING BEHAVIOUR

In this chapter, I will present some of the previous research done on the subject of English education today and define what makes a good teacher based on my background materials, as it is relevant to compare NESTs and non-NESTs and their qualities as teachers. There has been research (e.g. Medgyes' studies in 2000, 2005, Mahboob 2010, Guo & Beckett 2012) made on the subject of the NESTs vs. non-NESTs issue, and most of them follow the same guidelines; non-NESTs are required more education and experience than NESTs, but as it is clear from the previous section, NESTs are appreciated more in the language businesses. This is a widely agreed issue in the situation where the number of teachers needed outnumber the amount of good, qualified teachers available and it seems that private companies can create the rules. The literature on non-NESTs has not long ago just started to question the privilege of native speakers. For example, Medgyes' research in the 80's still noted that non-NESTs

lack in comparison to NESTs, but his recent research has clearly shown otherwise, and nowadays he is an out speaker for non-NESTs.

In his study, Medgyes (2017: 63) created a survey about the differences seen in teaching behaviour between NESTs and non-NESTs. The participants who said they saw a difference between the two, had to identify those differences. The participants in his study identified the NESTs strengths as following; NESTs

- speak better English
- use real language
- use English more confidently
- adopt a more flexible approach
- are more innovative
- teach items in context
- use a variety of materials
- tolerate errors
- set fewer tests
- assign less homework
- supply more cultural information

I suggest that these qualities are individual and established by the teacher's personal learning experience of languages. For example, a non-NEST can assign more homework and focus on certain teaching methods, because they felt that these methods helped them learn the language. I firmly believe that a non-NEST can use real and confident English as well, depending on their experiences as a learner of English. For example, a non-native living abroad can learn to use English as proficiently as a native. I also believe that assigning more tests and homework or being more creative can be just about the difference of generation, as it seems that NESTs tend to be younger than non-NESTs (possibly due to the fact that non-NESTs are required a higher education). The participants in the study felt that NESTs tend to focus on; meaning, language in use and colloquial register, whereas non-NESTs focus more on accuracy, grammar, vocabulary, and written skills. It is important to note that the results of Medgyes' study were purely about how the participants felt about the NESTs' and non-NESTs' qualities, not about statistical facts.

To continue a bit further on the positive aspects of NESTs, Mullock (2010, cited in Mahboob 2010: 93) interprets that there are a number of areas noted by researchers (e.g. Lasagabaster &

Manuel-Sierra 2005: 232) as areas which non-NESTs were not as well positioned as NESTs to deal with; pronunciation, as most do not possess “the original English accent”, limited vocabulary (especially colloquialism and slang), limited target language cultural knowledge, speaking and listening skills. Medgyes (2017: 39) warns that a non-NESTs should indeed be sensitive to pronunciation, and any other aspects of language proficiency, as errors may be passed down. Mullock (2010, cited in Mahboob 2010: 93) argues further that by virtue of coming from an English-speaking country, NESTs are able to provide more information about its culture. I do not agree with this comment, as it is common for non-NESTs to travel and live in countries of English speakers, and with modern technology and globalized social media the limits of different cultures become more indistinct and it is possible for anyone to learn about different cultures.

Medgyes (2017: 62) suspects that individual teaching style is largely determined by whether a teacher happens to be a native or a non-native speaker. Based on the results of his survey, the teaching styles vary between NESTs and non-NESTs, but it is a different question whether a certain teaching style would be better for the learner, and the discussion is ongoing in the field of education (e.g. fluency vs. accuracy debate). It is noteworthy however, that the more the English language spreads and diversifies in the world, the less it will remain the privilege of NESTs, and some non-natives are nearly as accomplished users of English as natives. On the other hand, Medgyes (2017: 66: 84) argues that a native can also relate to a student’s problems with language use, and counterbalance some of their other drawbacks, if they are learning or are successful learners of a second language themselves. It should be obvious that some of the qualities mentioned in Medgyes’ study are assumptions or generalisations made by the participants of the study, and as he just mentioned above, an individual teacher can achieve excellence whether they are a NEST or a non-NEST.

However, as the strengths of NESTs have been discussed above, the teaching behaviour of non-NESTs needs to be observed as well. Having learned English as a foreign or a second language themselves, bilingual teachers can share their first-hand experience with their students that a native speaker who has not gone through the same process of learning a second language does not have. Guo and Beckett (2012, cited in Sung & Pederson 2012: 65) defend that non-NESTs can be sensitive to the ideological and logical differences that their students experience. According to Medgyes (2017: 54), a good non-NEST can:

- provide a good learner model for imitation
- teach language learning strategies more effectively

- supply learners with more information about the English language
- better anticipate and prevent language difficulties
- be more empathetic to the needs and problems of learners
- make use of the learner's mother tongue

Mullock (2010, cited in Mahboob 2010: 93) claims that because they have had the experience of learning English as a second language, non-NESTs are in a better position to understand and empathize with the problems their students may face. Medgyes (2012: 66) argues further that linguistic and cultural awareness can help non-NESTs anticipate students' difficulties. He continues that it is noteworthy that there are huge differences between non-NESTs, too, in terms of success with English. On the other hand, I suggest that Medgyes' statement agrees with native speakers as well, as the English accents or vocabulary may vary greatly between different English-speaking countries. According to Medgyes (2017: 57), success depends on several factors, such as: background, motivation, age, intelligence, aptitude, level of education and knowledge of other foreign languages.

4.3 QUALIFIED TEACHING?

As discussed in the previous section, NESTs and non-NESTs both have their strengths and weaknesses. The issue within the teaching field today is that it looks like NESTs are viewed as better teachers despite not having any education or a degree in the field. Non-qualified NESTs are preferred over qualified and experienced non-NESTs because of the public image of the company. "In my experience, too, many language schools advertise themselves as employing native English speakers only, because NESTs are 'better public relations items' and have 'a better business draw'", a participant in Medgyes' (2017: 78) study pointed out. Guo and Beckett (2012, cited in Sung & Pederson 2012: 62) argue that despite scientific evidence that "native-speakerness" does not equal good teaching and research which does not suggest that all students prefer native speakers, there is still a prevalent misconception that English is the native language of white people and that it is better taught by them. However, Qiang & Wolff (5: 2009) argue that there is an unfounded belief in China that anyone who can speak English can teach English. The misconceptions that the schools, administrators, parents, and students may have, have created an atmosphere where NESTs are wanted in every school for the schools to be able to advertise native speaking teachers. NESTs are hired no matter the cost as it brings in the customers, which, once more, may create an unfortunate situation, where money overcomes qualified education. Mullock (2010, cited in Mahboob

2010: 93) writes that this problem was noted by some researchers (Barratt & Kontra, 2000, cited in Lasagabaster & Manuel-Sierra 2005) when they proposed that in some teaching contexts, the NESTs that are employed lack experience, teaching competence and professionalism, and appropriate qualifications. Nevertheless, Medgyes (2017: 71) claims that there are thousands of unqualified or underqualified native speakers teaching English in all corners of the world. Guo and Beckett (2012, cited in Sung & Pederson 2012: 63) argue that this consequently affects non-NESTs, as they become constructed as less authentic, knowledgeable, or legitimate.

Guo and Beckett (2012, cited in Sung & Pederson 2012: 63) found that when advertising work to non-NESTs, the adverts are often used to hide institutional racism that discriminates against people based on phenotypical features such as skin colour, eye shape and facial features and promotes western hegemony. They claim that the adverts often seek Caucasian and/or attractive teachers. This is an issue closely related to the issue with NESTs and it links directly with the way an ideal English teacher or a western person is presented by the schools or in the media. As China has opened its borders relatively recently, and as many Chinese do not get to see people from other ethnic groups often, the image that is offered by the media is largely accepted.

To conclude the above mentioned, a good teacher can be a NEST or a non-NEST, and it goes without saying that their looks do not influence their teaching skills. As seen in the previous section (4.2), the different qualities of NESTs and non-NESTs are also relatively clear. However, defining a good teacher is more complicated, and the qualities of a successful teacher cannot be directly drawn to either a NEST or a non-NEST. Medgyes (2017: 61) explains his views of the qualities of a good language teacher in his study:

A language teacher's expertise consists of three components:

- language proficiency
- language awareness
- pedagogic skills.

While language proficiency implies skills in the target language, language awareness involves explicit knowledge about the language, which does not necessarily assume a high level of language proficiency. In their role as an instructor, the teacher exhibits varying degrees of pedagogic skills.

Further on, Fernstermacher and Richardson (2005) observe that a person can be a good teacher in one context and mediocre in another one. I agree that hardly anyone can be skilled at everything but having a proper degree in education helps with pedagogical issues and professionalism, as the education can be aimed at the aspects the individual is mediocre at. Fernstermacher and Richardson (2005: 191) continue about what makes good teaching versus successful teaching. Good teaching involves teaching the subject matter adequately and completely with age appropriate methods undertaken with the intention of enhancing the learner's competence with respect to the content. Successful teaching, on the other hand, is teaching that produces the intended learning of what the teacher is engaged in teaching. Mullock (2010, cited in Mahboob 2010: 89) on the other hand claims that good teaching does not always entail successful teaching and vice versa, but a high-quality teacher is proficient in both dimensions. She continues to argue that quality teachers possess superior content knowledge and superior pedagogical knowledge. I suggest that it is rare to possess pedagogical knowledge unless one has studied and gotten appropriate knowledge about teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), and with that knowledge how to deal with different students and how contents of language are viewed from a foreign language perspective. Once more, this supports my previous statements that the preferment of uneducated NESTs is unnecessary and has no basis in the EFL world.

The qualities of a good teacher mentioned above are skills that both NESTs and non-NESTs can acquire with proper education and experience in both learning and teaching the language. As discussed above, non-NESTs in China usually have more experience and a higher education, they are therefore more likely to have the qualities mentioned above than an unqualified NEST, who only acquires language proficiency. Language awareness and pedagogic skills are qualities that can be something one acquires during their teaching education or even when learning a foreign language, which is often unfamiliar to NESTs. However, despite the proven qualities of a good non-NEST mentioned above, unfortunately, NESTs are still seen as more valuable for the private companies than non-NESTs and local teachers. However, to conclude this chapter, Guo and Beckett (2012, cited in Sung & Pederson 2012: 63) argue that non-NESTs' otherness is an asset, not a liability. I believe that qualities such as language awareness, being a language learner model themselves, using the students' mother tongue or providing empathy for the students' difficulties of language learning, non-NESTness should be used as a strength in teaching.

5 DATA AND METHODS

5.1 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSING

To discover the differences between NESTs' and non-NESTs' experiences in China, I collected my data using a questionnaire form. I found this method suitable, as it was relatively the fastest and easiest way to receive answers to my questions from all around the world and the participants could answer anonymously online. I explained my responsible conduct of research, the anonymity and privacy that the participants will obtain after answering the questionnaire, and that my study will be published by the University of Jyväskylä during the spring of 2020.

I organized an online questionnaire through Google Forms, and I advertised through Facebook and some of my personal contacts. The questionnaire was open for one month, and it had altogether 12 participants, of which 3 were non-NESTs and 9 were NESTs. All open-ended answers are in a written down form. Many answers contained spelling mistakes. I will not correct the spelling mistakes but repeat the answers in the findings and discussion section as they were written down by the participant. Some of the questions were misunderstood or misread by the participant, and I will not present them in my study. My study could have been improved with more non-NEST or local Chinese representation to receive more trustworthy results, but it connects to the fact that as NESTs are hired more in China, it is harder to find non-NESTs to participate. It may even reveal something about actual numbers of NESTs versus non-NESTs in China.

I will compare theoretical background information to the results I got. I presented multiple-choice questions as well as open-ended questions in my questionnaire. Most of the answers that I will be discussing in this study are qualitative. I will analyse the qualitative answers by using the guidelines of content analysis, and by separating the NESTs answers from the non-NESTs. Julien (2012, cited in Given 2012) summarises content analysis as the following: content analysis is the intellectual process of categorizing qualitative textual data into clusters of similar entities, or conceptual categories, to identify consistent patterns and relationships between variables or themes, and it is a way of reducing data and making sense of them. There were reoccurring themes throughout the data such as the preferential treatment of NESTs, racism and focus on the teachers' appearances and the business side of the school.

Cultural differences were also mentioned having an influence on teaching. Next, I will present some statistics of my participants.

5.2 PARTICIPANTS

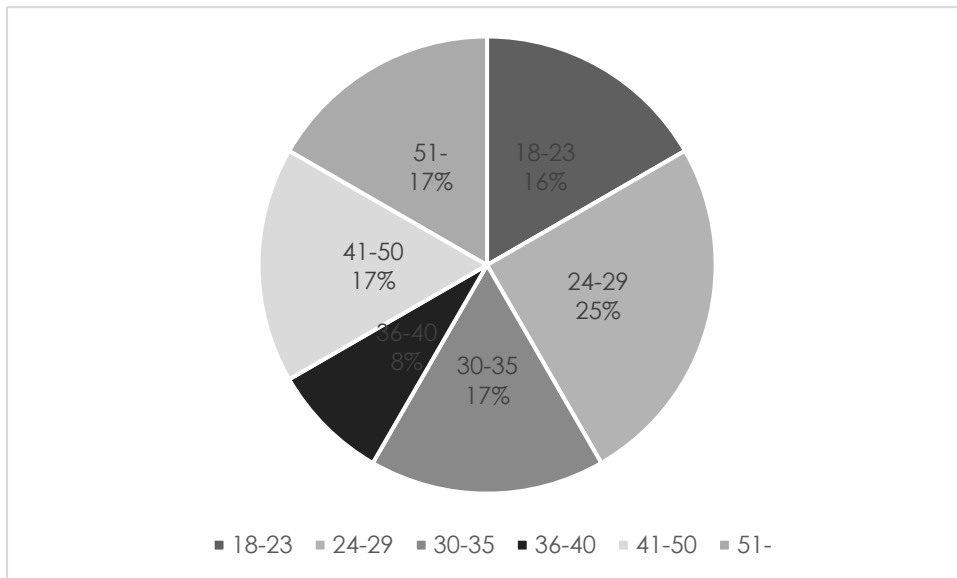
Out of the 12 participants 7 (58.3%) were male, and 5 (41.7%) female. All participants taught in China within the last 6 years, and some were still currently teaching.

As seen below (Figure 1), the results show that the participants come from nine different nationalities and six of the countries are the home of native English speakers: the United States, the United Kingdom, South Africa, Ireland, Canada and Australia. Nine (75%) out of 12 participants responded to being native speakers of English, which correlates with the answers given in Figure 1, where eight participants recognized their home country as an English-speaking country. In addition, the participant with the unclear home country recognized being a native speaker as well.

Figure 1. Home country of the participants

Home country	Number of participants
United States	2
United Kingdom	2
South Africa	1
Canada	1
Ireland	1
Australia	1
China	1
Finland	1
Indonesia	1
Unknown	1

Figure 2. Participants' age



The non-NESTs in this study were all above 40 years old. This can be explained with the fact that non-NESTs are required more merits such as higher education, specializing, teaching experience or recommendations, which may take longer to obtain. As seen above, five out of the 12 participants were under 30 years old and they were all NESTs. Surprisingly, the amount of 18-23 years olds was quite high, considering that they probably do not have a lot of other work experience outside of teaching either. I will continue to analyse the answers in the next chapter.

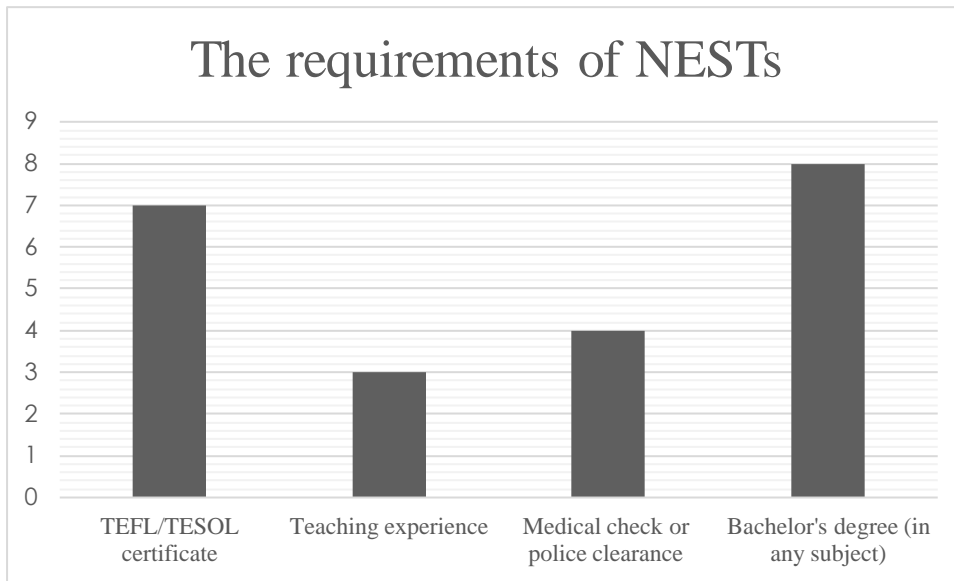
6 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings and analysis of my research are largely based on the open-ended questions, but I will discuss the findings of the multiple-choice questions presented in the previous section as well. The open-ended questions are about how each participant personally found their teaching experience and how their place of work treated teachers based on whether they were NESTs or non-NESTs. All questions can be found in Appendix 1. To protect the participants' privacy, a single participant is not linked to multiple answers and each answer is marked with an individual number. The answers followed a clear consistency of the non-NESTs being required more merits than the NESTs. The results can be linked to the previous research done in the subject. While presenting the open-ended answers, I will mark down which answers were given by non-NESTs.

6.1 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE PARTICIPANTS

This section discusses the differences between the non-NESTs and NESTs in my study. Their backgrounds, their places of work and the requirements that they were asked for to work in China. This section is for the factual information about the participants, as it connects to their personal teaching experiences that I will present later in this chapter. As mentioned above, the age distribution (Figure 2) can possibly be explained with the higher requirements that non-NESTs are demanded of, whereas it is possible for NESTs to arrive in China after just high school studies. Most NESTs in my data were still required a TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) certificate, except for the US citizens participating in this study. TEFL or TESOL certificate is at minimum a 100-hour teaching course that is available online (www.teflcourse.net: international TEFL and TESOL training). Qiang and Wolff (2007: 254-255) present the law about foreign teachers' requirements in China that says: "a foreigner should hold at least a bachelor's degree and two years of experience". But because the law does not demand anything, it has been interpreted in each region differently. Hence, the TEFL certificate, background check and medical exam can be requirements of a single region demanding them from the schools.

Figure 3. The requirements of NESTs



As presented in the previous chapter, the requirements needed varied between NESTs and non-NESTs consistently. None of the NESTs needed a higher degree than a bachelor's degree or a four-year degree. All non-NESTs were required to have at least a master's degree to teach. As it is visible from Figure 3 above, out of the nine NESTs no one was required the same as the non-NESTs were. NESTs did not need a degree specialized in education, and most were not required to have any teaching experience. Even though most were required a TEFL/TESOL certificate, a 100-hour course intake cannot summarize things that are studied during a master's degree in university. The only thing that came up as fairly equal in this study, was the monitoring done to all foreign teachers. 11 out of the 12 participants responded that their teaching was regularly monitored. The monitoring happened by observation in the classroom, and it was done by administration, other (local) teachers or parents. Sometimes they followed the students' grades and learning as an assessment. Although one US citizen replied by a "Hahahaha", when asked about the monitoring, which I am guessing means that monitoring was not done in any way. This participant taught at a private school and at a training academy and was not required anything other than an American passport to teach, which leads me to speculate the level of teaching at these places.

Furthermore, six (50%) of the participants responded to having previous teaching experience before teaching in China and equally six did not have any experience. Five of the non-experienced teachers were native speakers, and one was a non-native starting their teaching career. It is noteworthy that neither of the participants from the US had any teaching experience. Based on these results, US citizens seem to be the most valued native employees

and they are not required a lot to work as teachers. Most of the NESTs taught in private schools or training centres, and 2 out of the 3 non-NESTs taught in public schools (Figure 4). Some taught in multiple places. As stated in the background section, Guo & Beckett (cited in Sung & Pederson: 2012: 60) claim that the expensive private schools mostly pick NESTs to teach in them, since they have a reputation of being ‘better, more expensive teachers of English’. However, one non-NEST in my data was teaching in a private school and at a university. She was required to have a master’s degree, teaching experience and references. This non-NEST comes from Finland, and according to her, the Finnish education system is highly valued at her workplace, which allowed her the opportunity of teaching there. It seems to me that the Finnish education system is highly valued across the world, and it is possible that the “non-nativeness” of the teacher may not be such a negative factor if they are from a so-called reputable country (i.e. high gross domestic product).

Figure 4. Participants’ location of work

Location of work	Number of participants
Private school	7 (1 non-NEST)
Public school	3 (2 non-NESTs)
Training centers/training schools	3
Private classes of a public school	1
University	1 (1 non-NEST)

6.2 TEACHING METHODS

As mentioned before, there are some differences with NESTs’ and non-NESTs’ teaching methods. According to the background section, the biggest difference is the perspective they have as a teacher and as a learner of foreign languages. The participants in my study partly agreed with these descriptions, but most felt that a non-NEST can be as capable as a NEST. Many of the NEST participants worked together with local Chinese teachers. I believe that they were paired by the school because the NESTs were not qualified teachers, as oppose to their Chinese colleagues. Next, I will present some of the participants’ answers related to teaching methods.

(1) I noticed there were common errors in pronunciation and usage that were passed from NNES teachers to their students.

(2) Some very Accents or some ask what a word means. But Im from Ireland and I also have a strong accent and sometimes I dont know what a word means.

(3) The teaching styles of each teacher are different one from another, regardless English is there first language or not. ...Although the teaching methods are different, but the syllabus and curriculum are similar guidelines for all the teachers to develop their lesson plans. (non-NEST)

A few participants said that they felt a NEST had handled pronunciation or creativity in lesson planning better, whereas others felt like even them as a native speaker can easily make mistakes with pronunciation. Medgyes (2017) mentions these qualities as NESTs' strengths in the background section. However, there were not any big differences seen between the foreign teachers and the results of the study partly disagree with Medgyes' research about the assumed qualities of NESTs and non-NESTs. As answer 3 mentioned, even though the teaching methods might vary, the school gives certain guidelines for the teachers to follow. The participants pointed out that perhaps the biggest difference was between the teaching methods of local and foreign teachers. This can be partly explained by the cultural differences between China and the western world. As mentioned in the background section by Feng (2011: 135-136), the change from the teacher-centered, book-centered teaching method is still relatively new, and most likely still affects the teaching methods of Chinese teachers. Sometimes the Chinese teachers' salary can be connected to how well their students do in their final exams, so it makes sense that the teaching may be focused only on the issues dealt in the exam instead of pronunciation or creative lessons. Moreover, five out of the nine NESTs responded to having only native-speaking foreigners teaching in their school, which supports the theoretical background and the fact that schools – especially private schools – hire only NESTs. Based on the answers of the questionnaire, the participants could not rule out either NESTs or non-NESTs as poor teachers based on their teaching methods.

Medgyes (84: 2017) claims that in an ideal school, there should be a good balance of NESTs and non-NESTs, who complement each other in their strengths and weaknesses. One of the participants mentioned working together with their Chinese colleagues and receiving a lot of help from them. However, sometimes the NEST is only in the classroom providing the speaking and listening scenario in order to create “a real-life context” for the students. So, with the aim of creating a diverse learning environment for the student, it would be important

for the NESTs to be qualified teachers as well, so the teaching is collaborative and balanced. This co-operation between NESTs and non-NESTs could ensure that the student receives both the positive sides of a NEST and a non-NEST.

6.3 TREATMENT

For the discussion about the differences between the treatment of NESTs and non-NESTs I asked the following: “If your school had any non-native English-speaking teachers, did you notice a difference by the way they were TREATED by students, school or parents compared to native English-speakers? (and if you are a non-native speaker of English, did you notice a difference)”. It is important to look into the first-hand experiences of the participants to clarify how it may differ not only between NESTs and non-NESTs, but also between the theoretical background and personal experiences of the teachers.

(4) Our school did not accept any non native teachers, except local chinese teachers. The local chinese teachers were required to have done more training and be actually qualified teachers.

(5) Overall, the kids were better behaved with the chinese teachers and had more respect for them! The local teachers had a much harder time at parent teacher conferences because the parents asked them many questions, but usually didnt ask the foreign teachers much. The local teachers were paid less (i think) and had much stricter conditions such as a much longer probation period, despite being better qualified.

(6) Absolutely. Both management and parents had far less respect if they even suspected the hint of an accent that was anything other than native. Native speakers receive far more preferential treatment.

The participants bring out issues that they have noticed at their workplaces, and they feel that there are big differences in the treatment of NESTs and non-NESTs. As well as the preferential treatment of NESTs, participants mention that the local and other non-native teachers are paid less, and they are required more qualifications. As already brought up in the background section, parents can pay a lot of money for their child’s education, and in consequence, have demands from the school and many of the participants also felt that the parents could question the teachers more if they were not NESTs. A few participants mention that non-NESTs received far less respect by both parents and management if they suspected and a hint of an accent and their competency would be questioned more. However, non-NESTs in my study felt that the way they were treated may have been different from the one form NESTs, but the treatment was not necessarily bad. For example, one non-NEST mentioned that the only difference they saw was that NESTs were asked more language-

related questions by the students. It seems once more that the biggest difference in treatment the teachers receive is between NESTs and local Chinese teachers. To summarise this, non-NESTs do not necessarily receive 'bad' treatment, but NESTs surely receive preferential and better treatment.

One participant mentioned that western teachers were included in the ads or public events more. This links directly with the background section and proves with first-hand experience how NESTs are used for the company's benefit. As Tatar and Yildiz (2010, cited in Mahboob 2010: 114) confirm, the NESTs are a useful marketing tool for the company. Companies want to at least advertise that they have white westerners teaching in their school. On another note, I asked in the questionnaire how the participants' pay was constructed, and most said their salary was dependent on the qualifications that they had. However, few participants mentioned later on in the questionnaire that the local Chinese teachers or non-NESTs were possibly paid less, which agrees with the previous research made. The differences in salaries between NESTs and non-NESTs could be researched more in the future, as my study does not focus on the topic enough to provide any numbers or reliable results.

6.4 PARTICIPANTS' EXPERIENCE ON THE THINGS THAT COULD BE IMPROVED

The question about the negative aspects of teaching in China received the lengthiest answers of the questionnaire, and the participants felt like there were serious issues that could be enhanced in the future.

(7) ... The progress advisors (who did all the admin for classes and dealt with the parents) were under too much pressure and were very stressed. The company just cared about money, not about class quality, etc. So you were stuck with children with behaviour problems and couldn't do anything about it, or children who were at the wrong level but their parents didn't want to move them to an easier class, or have them repeat classes (because of "saving face")...

(8) The culture of saving face made it impossible to discuss improvements. The lies told to parents about achievable targets got in the way of effective and age appropriate teaching. Complaints from previous foreign teachers regarding the glaring errors in the curriculum were ignored, because the curriculum was written by Chinese people, so couldn't be wrong. Grandparents and parents believing themselves to be experts in teaching interfering and undermining the hard work of all the teachers. The Chinese teachers making things up rather than admit they don't know something... I had a hard time convincing people I was English because of the common practice of schools and academies claiming that people from Eastern Europe and west Asia are English.

A major negative aspect that was brought up by NESTs was the business side of the schools, and how the companies just care about money, not about the quality of education. According to Qiang and Wolff (2009: 25), this leads to the reduction of costs and hence, to the increase of student/teacher ratio. Many participants find the big class sizes a negative aspect. Smaller class sizes can be found in private, more expensive schools. The NESTs were overall more negative towards their work than non-NESTs, and when asked about the negative aspects of their experience, the non-NESTs had fewer and less serious issues to mention. Based on these and previous answers, it is likely that the non-NESTs' schools were more open-minded and respectful towards their teachers as they were willing to hire them in the first place.

NESTs complained more about the general issues with the schools, money, parents or administration, whereas non-NESTs only complained about the class sizes and facilities. This may lean directly to the fact that non-NESTs teach mostly at public schools, where they have less funding for things like the school facilities. Private schools seem to focus more on the financial side of things, and things mentioned by the participants such as lying to customers in order to please them, poor teaching or class quality, or a focus on the teacher's appearances seems to be done for the sake of profit and keeping the customer happy. This might suggest the reason why the teachers in private schools or training centres are unhappier. One NEST concluded the situation well: education is a big business in China, and unfortunately businessmen open schools to make money first, education second. Another issue that the participants mentioned was the culture of "saving face". It is a big focus in China and other Asian countries, affecting the teaching methods and day-to-day life in China. Usually it includes an idea that the other person maintains both their personal and family's honour and holds a good public image without experiencing any humiliation (such as academic failure). Next, I will present the answers that were related to racism that the participants had either seen or experienced themselves.

(9) The blatant racism exhibited by certain individuals within the company and public in general. I'm a white native speaker so I experienced little discrimination, however, even with my privileged state I still had to deal with some unnecessarily hostile people. I can't imagine what experience african or otherwise darker skinned people have.

(10)...China is superficial. Ive never seen a culture like it before. Ive been here 6 years, my girlfriend is chinese and she is ashamed of the racist behaviour by locals here sometimes. They only want white teachers or beautiful non white teachers. Its shallow and racist but thats the reality unfortunately. I am white by they way. Some Chinese people still cant understand that there are black people who are Irish too. Its unbelievable but thats how it is here.

Racism was one of the major themes that rose in my study, even though I did not ask any specific questions about it. As stated before, it is unfortunately one of the qualities that affect the treatment of teachers. One of the participants mentioned that despite the preferential treatment of natives, the non-Caucasian NESTs were still treated badly. China's culture is very different compared to western countries, and as it has opened its borders to the western world relatively recently, it may be still common practice to assume that all westerners are white. Many participants felt like aside from being a native or non-native English speaker, the colour of one's skin or attractiveness weighs a lot in the hiring process of foreigners. This complies with the previous research made by Guo & Beckett (2012) and discussed in the background section. It can be seen from the answers presented above (see answers 9 and 10).

6.4.1 Positive experiences

On the note that there are many things to improve within the education field in China, the participants felt like there were also good things that came with their experience.

(11) The good kids were very sweet, loving and fun...It was great to be immersed in another culture, especially one as different as china which takes a while to understand. The local teachers were very supportive and kind, they helped a lot with both school related issues and other things to do with living in china. The pay wasnt particularly high compared to western standards, but because the cost of living was cheap I could save money. I was able to travel to a few places in South East Asia and in China.

(12) The opportunity to teach in China is widely opened if you have higher degree, holding Master or Doctoral. You are not only having opportunity to teach English but you can also teach many other subjects in English related to you degree and using English as the Medium of Instruction. (non-NEST)

In summary, many participants appreciated the pay, cost of living, free time, getting to know Chinese students and learning about the Chinese culture. Some of the participants did also enjoy their teaching work and were pleased about their place of work. A difference can be seen in their answers. One of the NESTs recommended their work for another native speaker, whereas one of the non-NESTs recommended getting a higher degree which will open many doors for a (non-NEST) teacher in China.

7 CONCLUSION

As stated previously, in China, teaching has become a competitive business, and many businesses care about their image and money more than they care about the quality of education. Based on the answers from my questionnaire, the participants feel that their experience supports this theory. Apart from the typical qualities of a NEST and a non-NEST discussed in the background theory, the results from my data strongly support the background theory about the differences that NESTs and non-NESTs may experience in China. I studied the issue of NESTs versus non-NESTs in China with a questionnaire, collected the data and analysed the answers in the previous sections of my study. My study supports the earlier research and offers a fresh view of the situation from the end of 2010's within the field of English education in China.

My research question was “How do the teaching experiences differ for native and non-native speakers of English teaching in China?”

The answer to this question lies not only in the teacher's NESTness or non-NESTness, but also in their appearances, accents (and whether they can appear to be a native speaker or a “typical” westerner), respective schools and different regions that they work in. To summarise the findings and discussion chapter, NESTs are hired more likely to work at the more expensive private schools, they may be paid a higher salary, they are more likely not asked for degrees in education or any teaching experience, and it is highly possible that they can be used as a “prop” or a marketing tool for the companies. Even though every non-NEST in my study had to have more merits than a NEST to get a job, they were somewhat more happy with their places of work. Many of the NESTs had more negative things to mention than the non-NESTs. However, most of the participants had enjoyed their teaching experience at least to some extent. The negative aspects that they experienced were a lot to do with the restrictions made by the school, parents and the culture of ‘saving face’. They felt that the schools, the administration staff and the businessmen running them caused more problems by ignoring the suggestions from teachers and listening to the paying customers more (in other words parents or grandparents). Most participants felt that the English language learning system in China should be changed, at least to some extent.

Analysing the answers, the issue of racism and the preferment of white foreigners seemed to come up more than I expected. This was an unexpected result of the questionnaire, as I had not planned on focusing on this subject at all. Another interesting point that came up was that

the differences between local Chinese teachers and foreigners seem to vary more than the differences between NESTs and foreign non-NESTs. This was not researched a lot in the background theories, but it seems to be something that should be investigated more in the future. It is also important to remember that the requirements of individual schools and cities vary a lot.

All in all, to summarise the most important themes that rose from this study, the issues that the teachers raised in this study are mostly about the hiring processes and the money profiting schemes of the schools, and the teachers personally felt that racism and cultural differences brought up the most challenges. It seems that non-NESTs must make more effort and have more merits to obtain the same opportunities than a white native speaker. There are good opportunities and experiences to be had for both NESTs and non-NESTs in China, but there are certainly more options and regions to choose from for NESTs.

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9 APPENDIX 1: THE QUESTIONNAIRE

*Required

1. Home country *

2. Sex *

Tick all that apply.

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to answer
- Other:

3. Age *

Mark only one oval.

- 18-23
- 24-29
- 30-35
- 36-40
- 41-50
- 50-

4. Is English your native language? *

Tick all that apply.

- Yes
- No

5. Did you have any previous teaching experience before teaching in China? *

Tick all that apply.

- Yes
- No

6. When were you an English teacher in China?

7. How did you end up teaching in China? (did you apply or were you asked to work, where did the idea come from...)

8. Did you work with a private language school or with the public education system?

Tick all that apply.

- Private school
- Public school

- Other:

9. What previous requirements did the school ask from you?

10. Did your salary depend on the requirements they asked from you? If your salary was affected by something else, you can mention it as well.

11. How did the school monitor your teaching?

12. If your school had any non-native English-speaking teachers, did you notice any differences in their TEACHING METHODS compared to native English-speakers? (or if you are a non-native speaker of English, did you notice a difference)

13. If your school had any non-native English-speaking teachers, did you notice a difference by the way they were TREATED by students, school or parents compared to native English-speakers? (and if you are a non-native speaker of English, did you notice a difference)

14. What were the best things about teaching in China?

15. Were there any negative aspects or something that you wished could've been improved? If yes, what were they?

16. Anything else that you would like mention about your experience as an English teacher in China.

10 APPENDIX 2: ADVERTISING OF TEFL-JOBS

<https://www.englishfirst.com/teaching-english-in-china/> (2 April, 2020)

Picture below from the main page.

TEACH ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

- ESL stands for English as a Second Language. By teaching local students how to speak your native language, they'll learn how to be a global communicator, like yourself.

Picture below from the subheading “Teach English”.

IS IT FOR YOU?

Thinking about teaching English in China, but still aren't sure if it's for you?

EF English First hires people with a wide range of experience and backgrounds. As long as you meet the EF core requirements:

- you're a passport holder from the US, UK, Ireland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa
- have a Bachelor's degree (any major)
- have a TEFL (EF can sponsor you if you don't have one)



Source: <https://eslauthority.com/teach/china/requirements/> Teaching English in China: Everything you need to know. Pictures from subsection called “What are the Requirements to teach in China?” (2 April, 2020)

Native English Speaker

In our experience, this is the most enforced of all the requirements, but not for the reasons you'd think. It's usually the schools that insist their teachers be native English speakers due to the fact that the students and their parents demand it. If you're a good teacher then the work experience might not matter so much, but if you can't speak fluent English or have a thick accent, you will find it harder to get a job.

It is not, however, impossible, and if you fall into this category we don't suggest giving up hope – there are plenty of good (and bad) teachers in China that can't claim English as their native language.

Sex/Race/Gender

Unfortunately, there are still schools that prefer one sex, race, or gender over another. But before you go bemoaning what an injustice this is and vowing to teach in another country, I hope you'll take solace in knowing that is becoming less common and is usually to appease the parents. China is a big place and there are still some cities and neighborhoods where they think a teacher has to fit a certain profile. If you believe you are getting turned down because of the color of your skin or sex, please don't get too down and trust that there are plenty of welcoming schools out there.