



Bridging Authenticity and Empathy: Learner Perceptions and Perceived Impacts of NEST vs. NNEST YouTube Instruction

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026-06-18 Revised: 2026-09-03 Accepted: 2026-09-05 Keywords: <i>Affective Filter;</i> <i>Comment Analysis;</i> <i>NNEST/NEST;</i> <i>Autonomous Learning;</i> <i>YouTube</i> DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v14i1.11317 Corresponding Author: Murni Mahmud murnimahmud@unm.ac.id Universitas Negeri Makassar	<i>This qualitative study addresses the limited attention given to learner-generated digital discourse in research on Native English-Speaking Teachers (NESTs) and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers (NNESTs), particularly in autonomous English learning on YouTube. It investigates how learners perceive NEST and NNEST English-speaking instruction and the instructional impacts they attribute to each teacher type. Rather than focusing on on-screen teaching strategies, the study examines viewer comments as evidence of learner reception and triangulates these perceptions with semi-structured interviews with the content creators. The data comprised comments from six English-speaking instructional videos, three produced by NESTs and three by NNESTs. Thematic content analysis revealed distinct yet complementary patterns of learner perception. NEST-related comments were dominated by linguistic authority and admiration, with viewers valuing native-speaker models for phonetic accuracy, linguistic authenticity, and sociolinguistic exposure. In contrast, NNEST-related comments emphasized relatability and comprehensibility, with viewers valuing teachers who provided accessible models, emotional connection, and reassurance that contributed to reduced speaking anxiety. Interpreted through Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis and Medgyes' framework on NESTs and NNESTs, the findings suggest that perceived authenticity and affective accessibility represent complementary dimensions of instructional value in digital EFL learning. Interview data further indicated that creators' discourse adjustments were broadly consistent with learners' perceived pedagogical and affective needs. The study contributes to digital language pedagogy by demonstrating that effective YouTube-based English instruction need not be defined by native-speaker status alone, but can emerge through complementary forms of</i>

linguistic authenticity, relatability, and empathy. These findings also have implications for teacher education, highlighting the need to prepare both NESTs and NNESTs to address learners' linguistic, affective, and communicative needs in autonomous digital learning environments.

1. Introduction

The expansion of digital technologies has transformed language learning from predominantly classroom-based instruction into increasingly flexible and self-directed learning environments. Among these environments, YouTube has become an important space for informal English learning, providing learners with access to instructional videos, diverse linguistic input, and opportunities to engage with English beyond formal educational settings (Greeves et al., 2024; Nonthamand, 2024). Previous research has established that digital and social media platforms can facilitate autonomous language learning by allowing learners to access resources according to their individual needs, interests, and learning pace (Mahmud, 2018; Mahmud et al., 2022).

Recent research specifically examining YouTube has further highlighted its potential to support autonomous English learning by providing flexible access to learning materials and enabling learners to regulate their own engagement with instructional content (Daeli & Santosa, 2025). In addition, research on YouTube-based language learning has demonstrated that learner engagement may involve behavioral, emotional, social, and cognitive dimensions, suggesting that the value of digital video learning extends beyond the passive consumption of instructional content (Feng & Guo, 2025). However, access to digital resources alone does not explain how learners experience or evaluate instruction. In asynchronous environments, learners must independently interpret instructional input, assess its relevance, and regulate their engagement with limited immediate interpersonal support. Consequently, understanding learner reception is essential to examining the pedagogical value of YouTube-based English instruction.

This learner-reception perspective is particularly relevant because YouTube is not merely a repository of instructional videos. Its interactive affordances allow viewers to respond publicly to content, exchange experiences, ask questions, evaluate instructional practices, and express emotional reactions. The comment section can therefore be understood as a form of learner-generated digital discourse through which engaged viewers articulate how they interpret and experience language instruction. Recent research has begun to demonstrate the analytical value of such discourse. Park and Park (2025), for example, examined YouTube comments in informal English learning and identified a range of emotional and evaluative responses, highlighting the potential of comments to reveal learner engagement and affective experiences in digital learning environments.

Their findings suggest that YouTube comments can function as more than reactionary responses to video content; they can provide situated evidence of how learners construct meanings around language learning, linguistic proficiency, and interaction with online learning resources. Nevertheless, YouTube comments should not be treated as statistically representative of all viewers. Rather, they constitute naturally occurring digital discourse through which some engaged viewers publicly articulate their perceptions, emotional responses, and perceived learning experiences within the environment in which the learning interaction occurs (Park & Park, 2025).

Within this digital learning context, the longstanding debate surrounding Native English-Speaking Teachers (NESTs) and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers (NNESTs) acquires renewed significance. Research on NESTs and NNESTs has historically been

shaped by native-speakerism, an ideology that privileges native speakers as inherently superior linguistic models and positions native-speaker competence as an idealized standard for English learning (Jenkins, 2007; Kirkpatrick, 2010; Medgyes, 2017). Such assumptions may influence how learners evaluate teachers' linguistic authority, pronunciation, authenticity, and pedagogical credibility.

At the same time, NNESTs may offer distinctive advantages arising from shared linguistic and educational experiences, including greater awareness of learners' difficulties, comprehensibility, and the ability to draw upon their own experiences as language learners. The distinction between NESTs and NNESTs therefore should not be reduced to a binary hierarchy of linguistic superiority and inferiority. Instead, teacher identity may shape different forms of perceived instructional value depending on learners' linguistic, pedagogical, and affective needs. Recent scholarship further demonstrates that NEST identity is complex and relational rather than fixed. Garton et al. (2025), for instance, show that NEST and local English teacher identities are constructed through processes of self-positioning and the positioning of others, highlighting the importance of how teacher identities are perceived and negotiated within educational contexts.

The relevance of teacher identity in digital learning extends beyond perceptions of linguistic authority. In autonomous learning environments, learners encounter instructional content without the continuous interpersonal support available in conventional classrooms. Teacher identity may therefore intersect with affective factors such as confidence, anxiety, relatability, and emotional comfort. From the perspective of Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, affective variables such as anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence may influence learners' ability to engage with comprehensible input.

In this regard, learners' perceptions of a teacher may contribute to whether instructional input is experienced as approachable, intimidating, motivating, or reassuring. Considered alongside Medgyes' framework on NESTs and NNESTs, this perspective suggests that native and non-native teachers may be perceived as offering different but potentially complementary forms of pedagogical value. NESTs may be perceived as providing linguistic authenticity, pronunciation models, and sociolinguistic exposure, whereas NNESTs may be perceived as providing greater relatability, comprehensibility, and emotional accessibility. Such perceptions may be particularly salient in autonomous digital learning, where learners have considerable control over which teachers they watch, how they engage with instructional materials, and whether they continue using particular learning resources.

The interaction between digital learning, learner engagement, and affective experience is supported by recent research on YouTube-mediated language learning. Feng and Guo (2025), for example, found that engagement with YouTube-based English learning can involve behavioral, emotional, social, and cognitive dimensions, with affective and social engagement contributing to learners' participation and communicative development. These findings reinforce the importance of examining learner responses not simply as indicators of satisfaction but as expressions of how learners interpret the linguistic, social, and affective affordances of digital instruction. In the context of NEST and NNEST instruction, such responses may reveal why learners value different teacher characteristics and how perceptions of authenticity, comprehensibility, relatability, or empathy may influence their reported learning experiences. Thus, an examination of learner-generated discourse can provide a complementary perspective to analyses that focus primarily on the instructional performance or pedagogical strategies of digital teachers.

Despite growing interest in YouTube as a language-learning environment, several issues remain insufficiently examined. Existing research has established YouTube's potential for autonomous English learning (Daelli & Santosa, 2025), demonstrated the

multidimensional nature of learner engagement in YouTube-mediated language learning (Feng & Guo, 2025), and begun to examine YouTube comments as sources of emotional and evaluative learner discourse (Park & Park, 2025). However, these strands of research have largely been examined separately. Less attention has been given to how learners construct perceptions of NEST and NNEST instruction through naturally occurring digital discourse, particularly with regard to the relationship between perceived linguistic authenticity, affective accessibility, and instructional impact.

Moreover, learner responses and content creators' perspectives are rarely examined together. Research on teacher identity has demonstrated that NEST identities are shaped through processes of positioning and perception (Garton et al., 2025), but this insight has largely been developed in institutional or face-to-face contexts rather than in asynchronous digital environments where learners independently select and respond to instructional content. Consequently, there remains a need for research that connects learners' spontaneous digital responses with content creators' accounts of their instructional intentions.

The present study addresses this gap by examining viewer responses to English-speaking instruction produced by NESTs and NNESTs on YouTube and triangulating learner-generated comments with semi-structured interviews with the content creators. The study is guided by two research questions: (1) How do viewers respond to and perceive speaking instruction videos by NESTs and NNESTs in YouTube comment sections? and (2) What are the perceived impacts of these videos on viewers' speaking development and affective states, as cross-examined through the content creators' instructional intentions? Rather than treating YouTube comments as statistically representative measures of learning outcomes, this study approaches them as naturally occurring and situated evidence of learner reception and perceived learning experiences. The analysis therefore focuses on what learners publicly articulate about linguistic authenticity, linguistic authority, comprehensibility, relatability, confidence, anxiety, and perceived instructional value.

Conceptually, the study positions NEST and NNEST teacher identity as an important dimension of learner reception in autonomous digital EFL learning. Teacher identity may shape learners' perceptions of linguistic authenticity and pedagogical accessibility, which are reflected in linguistic and affective responses expressed through digital discourse. These perceptions may subsequently be associated with perceived instructional impacts, including perceived development in speaking and changes in confidence or anxiety. Creator interviews provide a complementary perspective by clarifying the instructional intentions and discourse adjustments underlying the learner responses. This conceptualization does not assume that NEST or NNEST status directly determines learning outcomes. Instead, it recognizes that learners may attribute different forms of instructional value to different teacher identities and that these perceived strengths may complement one another within autonomous digital learning environments.

Accordingly, the distinctive contribution of this study lies in connecting naturally occurring learner-generated discourse with content creators' accounts of their instructional intentions. By shifting analytical attention from teacher performance alone to learner reception, the study contributes to current discussions in Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), Second Language Acquisition (SLA), and digital language pedagogy. It proposes that the value of NEST and NNEST instruction in digital environments should not be evaluated solely according to native-speaker status, but also according to how learners perceive linguistic authenticity, comprehensibility, relatability, and affective support. In doing so, the study highlights the distinct yet complementary roles that NESTs

and NNESTs may play in supporting autonomous EFL learning and provides implications for digital language pedagogy and teacher education.

2. Method

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative research design, specifically employing thematic content analysis within a computer-mediated communication (CMC) framework to investigate independent learning dynamics in digital spaces (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Miles et al., 2014). Rather than utilizing experimental interventions or rigid quantitative metrics, this design allows for a naturalistic examination of spontaneous user expressions and self-directed learning behaviors in an asynchronous online environment. The research subjects and corresponding textual data corpus were purposively selected from two sources to capture a multi-dimensional perspective of digital instruction.

The primary data source consists of public user comments from six instructional English speaking skills videos hosted on YouTube. To ensure a balanced comparison, three videos were selected from a Native English-Speaking Teacher (NEST) channel hosted by Ms. L (United Kingdom), and three videos were selected from a Non-Native English-Speaking Teacher (NNEST) channel hosted by Ms. NF (Indonesia). The secondary data source consists of a semi-structured virtual interview with the NNEST content creator, Ms. NF, which was used to triangulate viewer responses with the creator's pedagogical intentions.

The data collection process was governed by purposive sampling and predetermined inclusion criteria. All six videos were published within the last five years, had more than 50,000 views, and contained active viewer engagement in the comment section. Approximately 350 relevant viewer comments, ranging from 50 to 70 comments per video, were manually collected from the publicly accessible comment sections. Comments that were spam, repetitive emoji-only responses, or unrelated to the instructional content were excluded. The sample was considered thematically sufficient when additional comments no longer generated substantially new codes or thematic patterns, with later comments primarily confirming recurring categories. Thus, the 350 comments were considered sufficient for the qualitative purpose of identifying recurring patterns rather than for statistical representation.

The instrument development was designed as a flexible sensitizing framework rather than a rigid coding template. The analysis was informed by Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis and Medgyes' NEST/NNEST framework while allowing themes to emerge inductively from the data. A semi-structured interview guide was used to explore the creator's awareness of learner anxiety, speech accommodation, comprehensibility, relatability, and instructional design.

The data analysis followed the iterative stages of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification proposed by Miles et al. (2014). The 350 comments and interview transcript were initially coded inductively and then grouped into broader thematic categories, including Relatability, Comprehensibility, Anxiety Reduction, and Linguistic Authority. The emerging themes were repeatedly compared with the original data to maintain consistency throughout the analysis. An audit trail was maintained to document coding decisions and theme development, while peer debriefing was used to challenge emerging interpretations. Member checking was conducted for the interview data to ensure accurate representation of the participant's views.

The researcher initially attempted to interview both content creators. The NEST creator was contacted several times but did not respond during the data-collection period; therefore, the NEST creator was not intentionally excluded. The NNEST creator participated

in the semi-structured interview, which was used as contextual triangulation rather than as a balanced representation of both teacher groups.

Regarding ethical considerations, the YouTube comments were publicly available and were used without direct interaction with commenters. Usernames and other potentially identifying information were excluded from the research dataset. The interview participant provided informed consent before the interview, and the interview data were used solely for research purposes.

3. Result

Thematic Distribution of Viewer Comments

The thematic analysis of 350 viewer comments identified different patterns in learners' perceptions of NNEST and NEST instruction. Comments on Ms. NF's channel predominantly reflected relatability, comprehensibility, motivation, confidence, and accessibility, whereas comments on Ms. L's channel more frequently emphasized linguistic precision, naturalness, and perceived language improvement. Because individual comments could express more than one perception, a single comment was allowed to receive multiple codes where appropriate.

Table 1. Thematic Patterns in YouTube Viewer Comments

Educator	Major Perceptions	Representative Codes	Representative Indicator
NNEST (Ms. NF)	Relatability and socio-affective support	REL-ID, EMP-CON, VAL-EXP, PSY-SHFT	"I have the same problem... I'm afraid the foreign didn't understand."
	Comprehensibility and accessibility	COMP-EAS, ACC-STR	"I understood all your speech despite I learn English only 2 month."
	Motivation and confidence	MOT-STR, CONF-BLD, STR-ADP	"Your video makes me more confident to speak English."
NEST (Ms. L)	Linguistic authority and precision	AUTH-COR, CLR-PRE, LNG-NUA	"I've said 'according to me' so many times... You're a lifesaver."
	Naturalness and admiration	ADM-NAT, SOPH-ADV	"The confidence of an international news anchor... Chef's kiss."
	Perceived learning improvement	SKL-IMP, PRF-GAIN, LT-IMP	"Not only i have improved my pronunciation but also learned a couple of new words."

Viewer Perceptions of NNEST Instruction

Comments on Ms. NF's channel primarily reflected learners' perceptions of relatability, accessibility, and emotional support. Relatability was evident when viewers connected their own difficulties with the teacher's experiences as a non-native English learner. For example, @gabrieltrisunu9988 stated, *"I have the same problem... I'm afraid the foreign didn't understand."* Similarly, @elisabethelya5866 described Ms. NF's tutoring style as natural and sincere, reflecting the perception of empathy and personal connection.

Comprehensibility and accessibility were also frequently represented. @zeroqwerty commented, *"I understood all your speech despite I learn English only 2 month,"* while @donynuransyah7024 noted that *"The way you explain the concept is very clear."* Other viewers linked the content to increased motivation and confidence, such as

@rowstars4033, who stated, *"Your video makes me more confident to speak English."* These comments indicate that learners perceived Ms. NF's instruction as understandable, supportive, and accessible.

Viewer Perceptions of NEST Instruction

In contrast, comments on Ms. L's channel emphasized linguistic precision, perceived authority, naturalness, and language development. The Linguistic Authority code was illustrated by @alluringdaisy, who wrote, *"I've said 'according to me' so many times... You're a lifesaver."* Similarly, @Stella_Del_Mattino highlighted the importance of linguistic nuance by commenting on an alternative expression presented in the lesson.

Viewers also expressed admiration for Ms. L's delivery and perceived naturalness. @MULUNGIJEMIMAH described her as having *"The confidence of an international news anchor,"* while other comments connected her instruction with improvements in pronunciation, vocabulary, and proficiency. For example, @nicholassilverio described the teacher's qualities as valuable to learners, and @ThidaTheintTheint associated the lessons with reaching B1 proficiency.

Comparison of NNEST and NEST Perceptions

The findings suggest a complementary pattern rather than a simple preference for one type of teacher. NNEST-related comments tended to foreground relatability, comprehensibility, accessibility, and confidence, reflecting learners' connection with a teacher who shares similar linguistic and learning experiences. NEST-related comments, meanwhile, more often emphasized linguistic authority, naturalness, precision, and perceived language development.

These patterns also indicate differences in the type of support learners perceived from the two sources. NNEST instruction was commonly associated with reducing psychological barriers and encouraging participation, while NEST instruction was associated with exposure to target-language models and linguistic refinement. These interpretations represent viewers' perceptions rather than inherent characteristics of native or non-native teachers.

Triangulation with the NNEST Interview

The interview with Ms. NF further supported the perceptions identified in the comments. She explained that her instructional approach draws on her experiences as both an English learner and teacher:

"I'm an Indonesian teaching English to Indonesians. I know how it feels to start from zero... I think that is one thing that I can really give: empathy."

Her comments also indicated that viewer feedback influenced her delivery. She explained that she had previously spoken quickly but adjusted her pace after viewers commented that it was too fast. This supports the interpretation that comprehensibility and learner accessibility were not only perceived by viewers but were also considered in the creator's instructional practice.

4. Discussion

Relatability, Empathy, and Learner Engagement in NNEST Instruction

The findings suggest that NNEST instruction on YouTube was particularly associated with relatability, comprehensibility, confidence, and emotional support. Viewers frequently connected Ms. NF's experiences as a non-native English learner with their own difficulties, indicating that her shared linguistic and learning background was perceived as a source of support. This finding is consistent with Medgyes' (1992, 2017) argument that NNESTs may possess particular pedagogical strengths derived from their own experience as language learners. It also resonates with Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, as learners' perceptions of reduced anxiety and increased confidence may create conditions that are more conducive to engagement with language input and speaking practice.

The interview data further support this interpretation. Ms. NF explicitly described her experience as an Indonesian English learner as a basis for understanding learners who are starting from the beginning and identified empathy as one of the contributions she could provide. Thus, the findings extend the NNEST literature by showing how a shared learner identity can be made visible and pedagogically meaningful in an asynchronous digital environment.

This pattern is also relevant to recent research on informal digital language learning. Rezai et al. (2024) emphasize that learners' personal experiences, attitudes, awareness, and digital engagement shape their participation in informal digital English learning. Similarly, research on digital communication activities has shown positive relationships between digitally mediated language learning, learner engagement, and willingness to communicate (2024). The present findings add a socio-affective dimension to this literature by suggesting that the perceived identity of the online instructor may also influence how accessible and psychologically supportive learners perceive digital instruction to be.

Linguistic Authenticity and Refinement in NEST Instruction

The NEST findings reveal a different set of perceived affordances. Viewers of Ms. L's content frequently emphasized linguistic precision, naturalness, pronunciation, and language improvement. Comments concerning expressions such as "*according to me*" demonstrate that learners valued the opportunity to identify and refine forms that may be grammatically understandable but less natural in particular contexts. In this sense, NEST instruction provided learners with a perceived model of target-language usage rather than simply a source of general English information.

This finding is consistent with recent research showing that learners continue to perceive NESTs as valuable for practical language use, although such perceptions are not uniformly positive or dependent solely on nativeness. A 2024 study of Chinese students, for example, found that NEST practices were positively perceived for practical language application but could also create challenges when pedagogical practices were culturally mismatched. Moreover, recent research on NESTs in online environments challenges the assumption that native teachers function simply as monolingual models. Zhang and Jiang (2024) found that an NEST on a Chinese social media platform used translanguaging and multimodal resources to construct a multilingual teacher identity.

These findings qualify the interpretation of authenticity in the present study. The perceived authenticity of Ms. L's instruction should not be understood as an inherent property of being a native speaker. Rather, it emerged from learners' perceptions of natural pronunciation, expressions, speech patterns, and sociolinguistic usage. This distinction is particularly important in light of continuing critiques of native-speakerism in EFL education. Recent work in Indonesia has shown that native-speaker models and Western

notions of authenticity can create tensions in local EFL pedagogy (2024), while more recent research continues to argue for teacher competence rather than native-speaker status as the central criterion for evaluating English teachers.

Beyond the NEST–NNEST Dichotomy: The Dual-Pole Complementary Synergy Framework

The comparative findings provide a basis for reconsidering the conventional opposition between NESTs and NNESTs. Rather than indicating that one teacher type is inherently more effective, the data suggest that learners perceived different affordances from the two instructional contexts. NNEST instruction was associated more strongly with relatability, accessibility, empathy, and confidence, whereas NEST instruction was associated with linguistic precision, naturalness, and perceived language development.

On this basis, the study proposes the Dual-Pole Complementary Synergy Framework. The framework conceptualizes NEST and NNEST instruction as two complementary resources within autonomous digital language learning. The NNEST pole represents empathy and accessibility, particularly through shared learning experiences, comprehensible delivery, and confidence support. The NEST pole represents perceived authenticity and linguistic refinement, particularly through exposure to natural language use, pronunciation, and sociolinguistic nuances.

This framework extends previous NEST–NNEST discussions by shifting the focus from the question of *which teacher is better* to the question of *what different pedagogical affordances learners perceive in each instructional context*. Such a perspective is consistent with recent research challenging native-speakerism and highlighting the complexity of learner perceptions. For example, recent studies have found that learner preferences may vary according to language skills, learning strategies, and instructional needs rather than simply according to teachers' native-speaker status. The framework therefore does not position NNESTs as substitutes for NESTs or vice versa; instead, it emphasizes the potential complementarity of empathy, accessibility, linguistic modeling, and refinement.

Figure 1. Dual-Pole Complementary Synergy Framework

Learner Affect (confidence, anxiety, motivation) → Empathy and Accessibility (NNEST) ↔ Authenticity and Linguistic Refinement (NEST) → Autonomous Learning Engagement and Perceived Learning Development

The framework should be interpreted as a conceptual model derived from the patterns identified in the present data, rather than as a causal model. The study does not demonstrate that learners necessarily progress from NNEST instruction to NEST instruction in a fixed sequence. Instead, learners may draw on different instructional resources according to their perceived needs, proficiency, and learning goals.

Pedagogical Implications and Transferability to Digital Platforms

The findings have implications for teacher education and digital language pedagogy. For NNESTs, teacher training can encourage the strategic use of shared learner experiences, explicit explanation of learning difficulties, comprehensible delivery, and empathy without positioning non-nativeness as a deficit. NNESTs can use their insider knowledge of local learners' difficulties to make speaking instruction more accessible while maintaining high linguistic standards.

For NESTs, teacher training should emphasize the pedagogical use of authentic language exposure while avoiding the assumption that native-speaker status alone guarantees effective teaching. NESTs can maximize their value by highlighting pronunciation, natural expressions, sociolinguistic variation, and real-world language use while also adapting delivery to learners' proficiency and cultural expectations. This is particularly important because recent research indicates that digital language learning can support engagement, willingness to communicate, and other learning outcomes when activities are appropriately designed.

Although this study focuses on YouTube, the proposed framework may have relevance to other digital learning environments such as TikTok, Instagram, and MOOCs, where learners can independently select instructional content and interact with teachers or peers. Recent studies have demonstrated that Instagram-based language learning can support vocabulary development, engagement, self-esteem, and informal digital English learning. However, transferability should not be assumed. Different platforms afford different video lengths, interaction patterns, algorithms, and degrees of learner participation. Future research should therefore examine whether the complementary roles identified in this study are also evident across short-form video platforms and more structured online learning environments.

Overall, the findings suggest that the pedagogical value of NEST and NNEST instruction in digital environments lies less in native-speaker status itself than in the different forms of support and linguistic exposure that learners perceive. The Dual-Pole Complementary Synergy Framework consequently offers a way of understanding NEST and NNEST instruction as complementary resources for autonomous EFL learning rather than as competing or hierarchical teacher categories.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that digital interactions within YouTube comment sections mirror distinct psychological and cognitive needs met uniquely by NEST and NNEST educators, effectively dismantling the historical view of these two teacher profiles as competing hierarchies. The textual corpus proves that Native English-Speaking Teachers (NESTs) are widely acknowledged as the absolute linguistic authority sought out by autonomous digital learners to pursue grammatical accuracy, idiomatic expressions, and high-level accent refinement. Conversely, Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers (NNESTs) are validated as powerful, empathetic agents of pedagogical mediation.

Their personal learner histories and strategic linguistic accommodations successfully lower viewers' affective filters, cut through pervasive speaking anxiety, and provide highly accessible explanations rooted in shared learning struggles. When cross-examined with the creator's explicit intentions, it becomes clear that digital language learning is optimization driven; autonomous learners naturally navigate cyberspace to exploit the unique advantages of both educator profiles, treating them as a dual-pole complementary synergy that forms an ideal independent learning ecosystem.

However, several salient limitations must be acknowledged when generalizing these findings. Methodologically, this study is constrained by its small creator sample size, focusing on only two primary content channels (Ms. L and Ms. NF), which restricts the cross-cultural generalizability of the data across diverse NNEST backgrounds or other native dialects. Furthermore, the empirical data relies entirely on self-reported user perceptions and spontaneous sentiments within text comments rather than objective, longitudinal measurements of the viewers' actual oral proficiency gains. Finally, because the data extraction was confined to public comments, the study could not capture the silent

majority of digital learners ("lurkers") who consume the content but do not actively engage in textual interaction.

Based on these insights and limitations, specific recommendations are put forward for both educational practitioners and future researchers. For autonomous EFL learners, a sequential digital viewing strategy is highly recommended: leverage NNEST content in the initial phases of conceptual understanding and psychological confidence-building, then actively transition to NEST content to absorb sociolinguistic nuances and tackle real-world listening challenges. Educational content creators should also lean into their structural strengths; NNESTs are encouraged to embrace their shared-learner identity to cultivate safe spaces without academic insecurity, while NESTs should implement supportive visual scaffolding (such as clear on-screen keyword overlays) to remain accessible to lower-proficiency bands.

Crucially, for further studies, researchers are encouraged to expand upon this baseline by utilizing experimental or mixed-methods designs to quantitatively measure the exact correlation between digital viewing hours on specific channels and objective oral performance scores, thereby pushing the boundaries of digital language pedagogy even further.

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