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To stay or leave: a multiple-case study of the retention of native English-speaking teachers in Taiwan

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Abstract
The spread of English as a global language has contributed to the trend of recruiting native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) through government-funded schemes around the world, particularly in East Asia. In Taiwan, the NEST scheme has been recently expanded because of the national policy for a bilingual Taiwan in 2030. However, the NEST scheme in Taiwan has the strictest selection criteria and the least attractive incentives in the region. As these unfavorable conditions could affect the recruitment and effectiveness of the NEST scheme, this study explored the advantages and challenges perceived by NEST participants through in-depth interviews with 24 NESTs working in Taiwanese public schools to identify the factors that could influence their attrition and retention. It was found that most advantages were associated with the participants' schools, such as the provision of resources and a sense of achievement, rather than from outside the schools. However, most of the perceived challenges also occurred inside the schools, such as the lack of collaboration with colleagues and class sizes. These findings suggested that the issues and agendas at the participating schools had the greatest influence on NEST decisions to stay or leave Taiwan. The implications for policymakers and school leaders are discussed and relevant suggestions are made.

Keywords Native English-speaking teachers · Teacher attrition · Teacher retention · Taiwan

Introduction

The spread of English as a global language has led to an increased demand for native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) around the world, which is higher in East Asia than in other areas in the world because most East Asian countries belong to the expanding outer circle (Kachru, 1992). While the countries in the expanding circle do not usually use English for daily communication, they need English for international communication and associate knowledge of English with international competitiveness. Consequently, many East Asian governments have launched various NEST schemes to improve the English proficiency of their young people and promote cultural exchanges. Compared with the other NEST schemes in East Asia, the scheme in Taiwan is the newest; however, it has recently been expanded by the Taiwanese government as part of Taiwan's new policy to become a bilingual nation by 2030.

Of all the East Asian NEST schemes, Taiwan has the strictest recruitment regulations and the least attractive incentives (Wang & Lin, 2013). As these unfavorable conditions could significantly affect NEST' attrition and retention and harm the effectiveness of the scheme, this study sought to determine the possible factors affecting NEST attrition and retention in Taiwan to provide guidance to policymakers and schools, increase NEST retention rates, improve NEST scheme effectiveness, and more importantly help fulfill the government's aim to have a bilingual Taiwan by 2030.

Literature review

Global demand for NESTs and the various NEST schemes

The English language has become the language used in most, if not all, aspects of the global world, which has increased the global demand for English teachers (Copland et al., 2016). In response to this demand, many countries

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have been recruiting NESTs through official government programs, such as NEST schemes. The demand for NESTs has often been related to native-speakerism, which is a widely spread ideology in global English learning contexts and some employment policies (Fithriani, 2018; Holliday, 2006). Although the necessity of native-speakerism is still being debated (Copland et al., 2016), the strengths of using NESTs for language teaching have been widely acknowledged (Barratt & Kontra, 2000; Lasagabaster & Manuel, 2005; Selvi, 2014). Consequently, many NEST schemes have been established, such as Australian Volunteers International (AVI), British Council English Language Assistants, Cuso International, Fulbright English Teaching Assistants (ETA), the Peace Corps, and Volunteer Service Overseas (VSO). As highlighted in Copland et al.'s (2016) comprehensive review, these schemes operate in many locations and have different NEST requirements. For example, AVI operates in countries across Africa, Asia, the Pacific, the Middle East, Latin America, and the Caribbean, the British Council English Language Assistants program operates in Asia, Europe, Latin America, and North America, Cuso International focuses on countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean, ETA operates in around 70 countries, and especially in areas where NESTs are lacking, the Peace Corps operates in over 70 countries, and the VSO has a presence in over 30 countries. The purposes of these NEST schemes vary, however, which means that the NEST requirements also vary. For example, as AVI, Cuso International, VSO, and the Peace Corps provide voluntary or charitable services, the teachers employed by these schemes only need a teaching qualification and some teaching experience. However, the British Council English Language Assistants and ETA provide cultural and international exchange services, which means the teachers normally need high-quality language proficiency in English and a certain level of proficiency in the host country's language.

There are also four country-specific NEST schemes in East Asia (Copland et al., 2016; Jeon, 2020; Keaney, 2016), one of the first of which was the Japanese Exchange and Teaching (JET) program, which has been operating since 1987. One of the goals of JET is to encourage international exchange by recruiting foreign language speakers into local communities, with the participants coming from 57 countries, including English-speaking and non-English-speaking countries. The majority of JET participants are employed as assistant language teachers (ALT), who team-teach with local Japanese English teachers. The ALTs also assist local language teachers with their language classes, teaching materials, and extracurricular activities. Because international exchanges are the main JET program goals, the program does not require teachers to have any teaching experience or teaching English as a Foreign Language qualifications; however, they do need to have at least a bachelor's degree and be interested in Japanese culture. The English Program in Korea (EPIK), which was established as a "a policy response to globalization" (Jeon, 2020, p. 163), has been recruiting NESTs since 1995 to promote English communication skills, cultural exchange, and innovative teaching methods for Koreans. Similar to the ALTs in JET, the EPIK participants collaborate with the local English teachers for language instruction and in developing teaching materials. However, all EPIK teachers must be from English-speaking countries; Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, the USA, or South Africa. Different EPIK teaching position levels have different teaching experience and qualification requirements, with the lowest qualification required being a bachelor's degree.

The Native-speaking English Teacher (NET) scheme in Hong Kong began operations in 1997 to enhance English learning and teaching. NET scheme applicants need a bachelor's degree, a teacher training qualification, and English language teaching certificates (Jeon, 2020). Similar to the NESTs in other schemes, the Hong Kong NETs are expected to team-teach with the local English teachers to create authenticity for students in the English learning environment and promote the local English teachers' professional development.

The NEST scheme in Taiwan

Compared to the three other East Asian NEST schemes, the Taiwan Foreign English Teacher Program (TFETP) is relatively young. The TFETP is sponsored by the Taiwan Ministry of Education to assist in the government's policy aim of having a bilingual nation by 2030. The Foreign English Teachers Program (FET) had been recruiting NESTs for remote schools in Taiwan since 2004; however, this was expanded to the TFETP in 2021. Similar to EPIK and NET, the main TFETP goal is to recruit NESTs to improve the language abilities of public elementary and secondary school students nationwide. As the NESTs are expected to closely collaborate with local English teachers for curriculum development, team-teaching, and professional development, the teachers must come from countries in which English is the official or common language, must have at least a bachelor's degree from universities or colleges certified by the Ministry of Education, and must have state-issued teaching licenses or certificates. Compared to other NEST schemes in East Asia, the TFETP teacher eligibility is the most strict. Wang and Lin (2013) concluded that even though the Taiwanese English teacher selection criteria were stricter than the JET, EPIK, and NET schemes, the salary was low. Some scholars (Wang L, 2017; Wang S, 2017) also found that the NEST recruitment and contract renewal regulations in Taiwan were complicated, which made the recruitment process more

time-consuming. Therefore, it is possible that these factors could affect the NEST attrition and retention rates in Taiwan.

NEST retention and attrition

Teacher turnover is important because it influences student learning outcomes, teacher replacement costs, and teacher training investment (Nguyen et al., 2020). For NESTs, however, the issue of retention and attrition may be more complicated. As suggested, the NEST recruitment costs are much higher than the local English teacher recruitment costs because of the need for overseas recruitment, high salaries, airfare allowances, housing allowances, etc. NESTs also need personnel to assist them with communication, accommodation, and traffic issues when they arrive at their destinations (Wang L, 2017; Wang S, 2017). Because of the substantial resources and NEST costs, local governments normally provide better remuneration and benefits in their NEST schemes, hoping to retain these foreign English teachers in their countries (Chu & Morrison, 2011).

Nguyen et al. (2020) proposed an expanded theoretical framework to explain the reasons teachers choose to stay or leave their foreign teaching positions, which suggested that teacher turnover could be attributed to three main factors: personal factors associated with teacher characteristics and teacher qualifications, such as age and gender, standard school certification factors, such as work environments, school organization characteristics (e.g., work environment and teacher collaboration), school resources, student body characteristics, and relational demography; and external/ policy factors connected with the environments outside schools, such as accountability (e.g., teacher evaluation policies, teacher effectiveness, and principal effectiveness) and workforce conditions (e.g., retention bonuses, salary, and union). Nguyen et al. (2020) argued that although all three factors influenced teacher retention and attrition, the external/ policy factors could also indirectly influence teacher turnover through their effects on the other two factors, that is, external conditions, such as policies and salary, may affect teachers and schools, which could affect retention and attrition. For example, Nguyen et al. (2020) stated that salaries or teacher evaluation policies could influence school choice and the work environment. This framework also indicated that personal factors and school factors could have mutual influences, which highlighted the importance of congruence between teachers and their assigned schools.

This theoretical framework could assist researchers in better determining the reasons for NESTs to stay or leave their teaching positions. Many studies (Chu & Morrison, 2011; Dos Santos, 2019; Lin & Wang, 2016; Thornburn, 2016; Wang L, 2017; Wang S, 2017; Yang et al., 2018; Yim & Hwan, 2019) have already found that school factors and external factors influenced NEST retention and attrition. For example, Yang et al. (2018) and Yim and Hwan (2019) found that the NESTs' relationship with the local English teachers was an important factor because interactions with colleagues and support in the work environment were associated with school commitment. Dos Santos (2019) found that both school factors and external factors influenced the turnover intentions of NESTs in Fiji, found that the most significant school factor advantages and challenges were respectively students and parent respect and poor management and leadership, and the most significant external factor advantages and challenges were respectively the simple living style and sense of community and the limited social network outside the schools. Similarly, Thornburn (2016) explored the turnover intentions of 278 English teachers in China and found that they were related to both school and external factors. It was found that teachers decided to stay because of better career opportunities, growth, and teaching enjoyment, and decided to leave because of dissatisfaction with school policies and a poor relationship with school supervisors. The study also found that living in another country was a reason for both staying in and leaving China. NESTs may have various reactions to their new living environments, as adapting to a new culture can be challenging for many NESTs. For example, Chu and Morrison (2011) found that NESTs living in Hong Kong experienced cultural differences and culture shock, which could result in isolation and turnover intentions.

Lin and Wang (2016) interviewed six native English teachers working in Taiwan public schools and found that the school factors had significant effects on their job satisfaction (Wang L, 2017; Wang S, 2017). The NESTs job satisfaction came from the students' appreciation for learning, the support from colleagues, and the autonomy and flexibility they were given. However, the teachers also had several school factor challenges, such as insufficient time for discussion with local English teachers, a heavy teaching load, an obedient public school culture, low school administration efficiency, large student populations, a wide range of English proficiency, language barriers due to the low English proficiency of the school leaders and some local English teachers, and the lack of understanding of the students' native language (i.e., Chinese), all of which could contribute to NEST attrition. Similarly, Wang L (2017) and Wang S (2017) found that the turnover intentions of foreign English teachers in Taiwan were more influenced by their job satisfaction from school factors, such as the relationship with other teachers, autonomy, professional growth, and teaching enjoyment, than personal factors, such as gender or age.

These previous studies indicated that NEST retention and attrition were more related to school and external factors than personal factors, and also revealed that external factors, such as social community networking, adaptation to a new culture, and living environments played important roles.

Overall, previous studies have found that even though the factors associated with NEST attrition and retention are complex, understanding them is important to NEST scheme effectiveness. Of the four main NEST schemes in East Asia, the recruitment criteria and contract renewal processes in Taiwan are the strictest and the salary and benefits are the least attractive (Wang & Lin, 2013). These unfavorable conditions could decrease the NESTs' motivation to teach English in Taiwan and also increase the difficulty in retaining them. Therefore, this study sought to determine the reasons why English language teachers choose to stay or leave the NEST scheme in Taiwan based on their perceived advantages and challenges. The findings from this study could provide valuable guidance for the government and policymakers in recruiting and retaining more experienced NESTs in Taiwan, which would improve the effectiveness of the NEST scheme and assist in meeting Taiwan's aims to be a bilingual nation.

Therefore, the specific research questions for this study were as follows.

1. What do NESTs perceive to be the advantages of teaching English in Taiwan and how do these improve retention?
2. What do NESTs perceive to be challenges in teaching English in Taiwan and why would these cause attrition?

Methods

To investigate the NEST attrition and retention factors in Taiwan, a multiple-case study approach was adopted. Baxter and Jack (2008) claimed that a multiple case design was required when a study included more than one case as this approach could assist researchers to "analyze within each setting and across settings" and "understand the similarities and differences between the cases" (p. 550). As this study attempted to explore the factors that caused NEST attrition and retention in Taiwan and because the NESTs worked at different schools, taking a multiple-case study approach allowed for an investigation of each NEST's thoughts based on their specific school settings and an assessment of the NESTs' thoughts across the different school settings. In this way, it was possible to identify common factors and unique or specific factors. Although this approach was time-consuming, it provided robust and reliable evidence (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Participants

The participants in this study were 24 NESTs teaching English in public schools in New Taipei City, Taiwan, all of whom had been recruited through the NEST scheme administrated by the Taiwan government. NESTs from New Taipei City were chosen for two reasons. First, New Taipei City was the first city to recruit NESTs under the FET program and had the highest number of NESTs in Taiwan in 2021 (Education Department, New Taipei City Government, 2021; Lin & Wang, 2016), and second, New Taipei City is more representative of Taiwan than the other 21 administrative zones in the country as it has the highest city population in Taiwan and has an unequal population distribution, including metropolitan areas and remote mountain areas. This unequal population distribution has caused considerable economic development and educational resource gaps between these areas. All participants came from native English-speaking countries; 17 teachers from the USA, two from Canada, two from South Africa, two from England, and one from Australia. The teaching experiences ranged from one year to 23 years, with seven having teaching experiences of more than ten years. Most participants had teaching experience in other countries such as the USA, Korea, Japan, and South Africa before coming to Taiwan. The participant information and the participating public schools are shown in Table 1.

Data collection

The lead researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with the 24 participants to explore the factors that could cause their attrition and retention. There were 21 schools, with three schools employing two each of the 24 participants. Before the interviews, participants provided consent forms. The lead researcher explained the purpose of the study and the expected outcomes, informed them that their data would be fully protected, and they could choose to withdraw from the study at any time, even after the interviews. The interview questions were developed based on relevant literature and an analysis of relevant documents, such as policy documents and statistical data from the Taiwan Ministry of Education and the Education Department in the New Taipei City Government. The interview questions covered three major aspects; the participants' background, the relationship with local English teachers, and teaching experience in Taiwan. The interviews were conducted in English by the lead researcher at the participants' schools, each of which was 30–40 min and was recorded using a digital voice recorder. The recorded interview data were then transcribed verbatim for further analysis. To ensure trustworthiness, the interview transcriptions were read and examined by the participating interviewees to ensure the content was correct. The lead researcher also observed one or two of the NESTs' classes to understand their teaching styles, classroom management, and relationship with the local English teachers and students. The lead researcher also participated in the professional development activities and the lesson preparation meetings

Table 1 Information on participants and schools

NEST	Nationality	Years of teaching	Previous teaching experience in other countries	ESL training	District of hosting schools	Number of students at hosting schools*	Number of classes at hosting schools*
1A-1	USA	3	USA	No	Xindian	1824	51
1B-1	USA	N/A	USA, Japan	Yes	Banqiao	2267	60
1C-1	USA	3.5	Korea	No	Sanchong**	2222	86
1C-2	USA	23	USA, Korea	Yes	Sanchong**	2222	86
1D-1	Australia	3	Japan, Australia	Yes	Yonghe	2213	85
1E-1	USA	10	Japan, South America, China	Yes	Yonghe	2095	68
1F-1	USA	4 (1 year in Taiwan)	Bahrain	Yes	Banqiao	1380	55
A-1	Canada	14 (8 years in Taiwan)	Korea	Yes	Taishan	1365	53
B-1	USA	13	Korea, USA	No	Zhonghe**	656	34
B-2	USA	6 (4 years in Taiwan)	USA	Yes	Zhonghe**	656	34
C-1	USA	2 years in Taiwan	USA	No	Xindian	899	39
D-1	USA	10 (5 years in Taiwan)	USA, Korea	No	Tucheng	1589	63
E-1	Canada	4	Canada	Yes	Sanchong	1829	51
F-1	South Africa	11 years	South Africa, Korea	Yes	Yonghe**	2844	103
F-2	USA	15	USA	No	Yonghe**	2844	103
G-1	USA	1	No	No	Zhonghe	1979	54
H-1	USA	4	No	No	Zhonghe	928	39
I-1	South Africa	4 (3 years in Taiwan)	South Africa	No	Xinzhuang	1992	66
J-1	USA	6	Korea, Czech, Albania	No	Shulin	655	21
K-1	England	12 (2 years in Taiwan)	Korea, England	No	Sanxia	689	18
L-1	England	8 years (2 years in Taiwan)	England, Italy, China, Japan	Yes	Yingge	369	16
M-1	USA	17 (2 years in Taiwan)	Korea	Yes	Xinzhuang	1458	55
N-1	USA	3	No	No	Xinzhuang	1906	72
O-1	USA	4	Korea	No	Tamsui	1605	59

*Data were from the Department of Statistics, Ministry of Education, Taiwan

**Two NESTs were from the same school

at the schools to clarify the NESTs' interview data and gain deep insights.

Data analysis

In this study, each NEST was considered a single case in their school setting. As each school setting had its own characteristics, even the NESTs working in the same school may not necessarily have had the same experiences and perceptions. Therefore, each participant's responses were analyzed based on their school setting and all cases compared to determine the similarities and differences in the factors associated with the participants' attrition and retention. The interview data were encoded by three coders who had qualitative data coding experience, each of whom first worked independently to generate their own codes. These codes were discussed later to ensure reliability. The NEST attrition and retention factor codes came from two sources; relevant literature and the coders' repeated reading and interpretation of the data. After the preliminary encoding, similar codes were integrated and new codes were generated, with all codes being subject to revision during the encoding process. The attrition and retention factors were analyzed and grouped into external and internal aspects, each of which included an environmental category, which referred to non-interactive contexts, and an interaction category, which focused on the interpersonal interactions with other people. These two categories were then further divided into different sub-categories; the environmental category comprised the living environment, regional characteristics, and the NEST scheme policy outside the schools, and the school environment, student features, and work duties and conditions inside the schools and the interaction category comprised the participants' interactions with local people and other NESTs outside the schools and their relationships with colleagues inside the schools. Of the sub-categories, only the school environment, student features, and work duties were further divided. As these three sub-categories were found to be strongly connected

and sometimes difficult to differentiate, they were specifically defined as follows. The school environment referred to the general school contexts, which varied because of the different school characteristics, such as location, resources, atmosphere, and assistance, the student features focused on the potential student factors that could influence teaching practice, such as student attitudes, proficiency levels, and the number of students in the classes, and the work duties and conditions were focused on the benefits and challenges and regular work duties, such as work stability and workload. The relationships between the aspects, categories and sub-categories are presented in Appendices A and B. The analysis of these factors was based on the participants' perceived challenges and positive teaching experiences, which were seen as important indicators of their intentions to stay or leave (Howard et al., 2016). In addition to the qualitative interview data analysis, the numbers and percentages for each factor coded from the data were calculated for the quantitative analysis to reveal the general patterns in the participants' perceptions.

Results

Advantages of working in Taiwan as perceived by the NESTs

The perceived advantages of working in Taiwan were categorized on different levels. The number of advantages in each category and their percentages are shown in Table 2 from two main aspects; inside the schools and outside the schools. The perceived advantage percentage from inside the schools (57.35%) was much higher than the perceived advantage percentage outside the schools (42.65%), which suggested that the reasons these NESTs enjoyed working in Taiwan were more related to what was happening inside their schools. As discussed in the data analysis section, each aspect was divided into an interaction category (interpersonal interaction with their colleagues at schools and their interaction with people outside the schools) and an environmental category (the living environment outside the schools and the working environment at the schools). These two categories were further divided into different sub-categories based on the responses. The following section gives the results of responses to the outside and inside school aspects.

Advantages of working in Taiwan outside the schools

The environmental category advantage percentage (26.47%) was higher than the interaction category advantage percentage (16.18%). Based on the responses, the environmental category was further divided into living environment, regional characteristics, and the NEST scheme policy. The living environment and regional characteristics were found to be the two main advantages. Around 11.76% of the advantages were related to the living environment outside the schools, and especially the living convenience and medical care, with NEST-B-2 stating that the traffic in New Taipei City was convenient:

> It (the city) is very convenient to my home and one of the nice things about New Taipei City is that we have the MRT (*Mass Rapid Transit*), the TRA (*Taiwan Railways Administration*), and the HSR (*High-Speed Rail*). So, it's easy for us to get around and visit other parts of the island.

The NESTs also reported that they were attracted by the regional characteristics (10.29%) in Taiwan, such as the climate and ease of traveling. NEST-G-1 said; "I love the weather. It's very conducive to a smile every day. I love scuba diving so Taiwan is a big drop for me. Cause I can scuba dive here." NEST-1A-1 said, "We get vacation time, so we get more opportunity to explore Taiwan and southeast Asia. Taiwan itself is a travel hub for southeast Asia."

The discussion on the NEST scheme policy included the advantages associated with the policy aspects of the NEST scheme outside the schools. For example, two NESTs said that they were satisfied with the professional training, and NEST-M-1 also said that they liked the support from the program's policies:

> People are very supportive of native English speakers because we have come from our countries to come over and teach English. Also, if there's any problem at the school, the program is very willing to try to figure out what the problem is. They (the program officers) go over it many times. They'll find you a new position if it really doesn't work.

The interaction category advantages were further divided into social connections, interaction with other NESTs, and interactions with local people. The NESTs saw these three sub-categories as support systems for their lives outside the schools. NESTs reported that intimate and family relationship social connections in Taiwan enhanced their wiliness to stay. For example, NEST-B-1 stated that "I have my girlfriend here. So, we're planning to get married, so I'll be here a while and that's the biggest benefit." NEST-E-1 and NEST-H-1 stated that they had Taiwanese friends and spent time with them, and another four NESTs stated that they had close relationships with the NESTs from other schools in their social communities. These social communities were important because the NESTs could share their work experiences at the different schools and gain support from each other. NEST-H-1 said that "There are several friends working on different programs. There is a community among

Table 2 Advantages of teaching English as perceived by the NESTs in Taiwan

Outside school						Inside school									
Environment			Interaction			Environment									Interaction
Living environment	Regional characteristics	The NEST scheme policy	Social connection	Other NESTs	Other local people	School environment			Student features		Work duties and conditions				Good relationships with the school teachers
						Sufficient assistance from schools	Sufficient school resource	Good school atmosphere	Students' high English proficiency level	Students' good attitude	Flexibility	Steady work	Sense of achievement	Little stress	Less workload	
B-1 B-2 F-2 G-1 I-1 K-1 L-1 N-1	1A-1 D-1 G-1 H-1 I-1 K-1 L-1	M-1 N-1 K-1	B-1 B-2 D-1 E-1 K-1	B-2 C-1 H-1 I-1	E-1 H-1	1D-1 I-1	1D-1	A-1 M-1	1B-1 1D-1	1B-1 D-1 E-1 K-1 L-1	G-1	B-2 D-1	1A-1 1C-2 H-1	I-1 K-1	A-1 F-1	1A-1 1B-1 1C-2 1D-1 1F-1 A-1 B-2 C-1 D-1 G-1 H-1 I-1 K-1 L-1 M-1 N-1 O-1
N = 8 (11.76%)	*N* = 7 (10.29%)	*N* = 3 (4.41%)	*N* = 5 (7.35%)	*N* = 4 (5.88%)	*N* = 2 (2.94%)	*N* = 2 (2.94%)	*N* = 1 (1.47%)	*N* = 2 (2.94%)	*N* = 2 (2.94%)	*N* = 5 (7.35 %)	*N* = 1 (1.47 %)	*N* = 2 (2.94 %)	*N* = 3 (4.41 %)	*N* = 2 (2.94%)	*N* = 2 (2.94 %)	*N* = 17 (26.15%)
						N = 5 (7.35%)			*N* = 7 (10.29%)		*N* = 10 (14.71%)					
N = 18 (26.47%)			*N* = 11 (16.18%)			*N* = 22 (32.35%)										*N* = 17 (25.00%)
N = 29 (42.65%)						*N* = 39 (57.35%)										

foreign English teachers." NEST-I-1 also shared a similar experience:

> I have a lot of South African friends and they are not in the program…I communicate with them and I interact with them. Most of the others are at cram schools, so our experiences are different but we share and we discuss things, but then again, like on the weekends, we tend to put work aside and just relax and enjoy each other's company.

Advantages of working in Taiwan inside the schools

The environment category percentage (32.35%) was higher than the interaction category percentage (25.00%). The environment category included the school environment, student features, and work duties and conditions. The percentage for the work duties and conditions was the highest (14.71%), followed by the student features (10.29%), and the school environment (7.35%). The work duties and conditions focused on the advantages and job benefits of the work duties. Three NESTs specifically mentioned that the work brought them a sense of achievement. NEST1-A-1 stated that "Because we're not just dealing with the kids who might have more affluent parents, we're dealing with all of the kids and we are giving them that opportunity to learn English from a foreigner." NEST-G-1 also reported that "It's definitely the most rewarding job I've ever had in my life."

Also, based on the NEST scheme contract in Taiwan, a few teachers mentioned that their work at the public schools was steady and had good benefits. NEST-B-2 said, "It's a steady job with people that I get along with, whose company I enjoy, with students that I love." NEST-K-1 also said "But just less work in Taiwan as a teacher. I think it's much easier. There's less pressure. Like in England I will be working until ten every night and on the weekend. There's much less pressure."

The student features focused on the student factors that positively influenced the NESTs' teaching practice in the classrooms. Five NESTs appreciated the student learning attitudes in the class. NEST1B-1 reported that "The best thing is that everyone is just so supportive and nice and understanding and the students are really well behaved." NEST-E-1 also had a similar opinion about the students' better learning attitude compared with students in North America:

> Good things? I think the students are a pleasure to teach compared to working in North America, [where] students could be a little bit naughty. Students here are usually quite well behaved, and I think they're excited to have a foreign teacher as well, so they're usually quite eager to come to my class. The students are very friendly and they come after class to have lunch with me.

The school environment focused on the general school contexts in which these NESTs were assigned to teach, such as the resources and assistance. NEST1D-1 was satisfied with the school resources and said that "I got my room, I got a computer here in my staff room, I have a projector, and they let me print, photocopy, and illuminate as many things as I want. If I need resources, they refund me the resources." The school also provided necessary professional development for NEST1D-1, who said that "We did the training two years ago, and it was really good, I learned lots of game activities, I used all of them actually. And I'd love to have more of that kind of training."

The interaction category focused on the NESTs' relationships with the other teachers at school. As revealed, 26.15% of the advantages perceived by NESTs belonged to this category, which was the highest of all the reasons. Most NESTs (17 out of the 24 participants) believed that their good relationships with their colleagues were the main reason why they enjoyed teaching English in Taiwan. NEST-D-1 shared their feelings about the positive relationships with their colleagues:

> I feel like all the support that I would need is totally provided. The director or teachers from the school offices will talk with me and let me know what is expected of me. So, I think everything is very easy.

NEST perceptions of the challenges of working in Taiwan

There were varied opinions regarding the challenges of teaching in Taiwan. The NESTs' responses were analyzed and grouped into outside school and inside school aspects, environmental and interaction categories, and several related sub-categories. As shown in Table 3, the NESTs' challenge percentage inside the schools (77.97%) was much higher than that outside the schools (27.03%). The following examines the outside and inside school challenges.

Challenges of working in Taiwan outside the schools

The NESTs perceived a greater number of environmental challenges (18.64%), which included the living environment, regional characteristics, and the NESTs scheme policy than interaction challenges (3.39%) outside the schools. For example, NEST-G-1 complained about the bus schedules, NEST-N-1 had problems in finding shops, four NESTs were not used to the food or weather in Taiwan, NEST-F-2 said "The other challenge is that I really don't like Taiwanese food. I don't like the seasoning or the sauce," and NEST-B-1 found the weather in Taiwan a challenge:

Table 3 Challenges of teaching English as perceived by the NESTs in Taiwan

Outside school				Inside school												
Environment			Interaction	Environment										Interaction		
Living environment	Regional characteristics	The NEST scheme policy	Language barrier	School environment				Student features			Work duties and conditions				Social connection	Communicating language	Collaboration issues with other school teachers
				Inconvenient school locations	Insufficient assistance from schools	Insufficient school resource	Bad school atmosphere	Students' bad attitude	Students' low or various English proficiency level	Large number of students	Different work styles	Long work hours	Frustrating workplace	Extra workload			
G-1 N-1	1E -1 B-1 B-2 F-2	1F-1 A-1 D-1 E-1 J-1	H-1 N-1	1C-1 1E-1 1F-1 A-1 J-1 M-1	1D-1 B-2 E-1 G-1 J-1 K-1	H-1	K-1	O-1 N-1	O-1 N-1	1A-1 1F-1 E-1 O-1	B-2 G-1	J-1	J-1	1E-1	1A-1 1F-1 E-1	1C-1 1C-2 1E-1 A-1 F-2 I-1	1A-1 1C-2 1D-1 1F-1 A-1 E-1 G-1 H-1 M-1 N-1
N = 2 (3.39%)	*N* = 4 (6.78%)	*N* = 5 (8.47%)	*N* = 2 (3.39%)	*N* = 6 (10.17%)	*N* = 6 (10.17%)	*N* = 1 (1.69 %)	*N* = 1 (1.69 %)	*N* = 2 (3.39 %)	*N* = 2 (3.39 %)	*N* = 4 (6.78 %)	*N* = 2 (3.39 %)	*N* = 1 (1.69 %)	*N* = 1 (1.69 %)	*N* = 1 (1.69 %)	*N* = 3 (5.08%)	*N* = 6 (10.17%)	*N* = 10 (16.95%)
				N = 14 (23.73%)				*N* = 8 (13.56%)			*N* = 5 (8.47%)						
N = 11 (18.64%)			*N* = 2 (3.39%)	*N* = 27 (45.76%)											*N* = 19 (32.20%)		
N = 13 (22.03%)				*N* = 46 (77.97%)													

> It (the weather) was terrible. I know it is like those strangest things to complain about, but to me it was the worst, the weather. But now I'm used to it. So, when people said this [year] is hotter than last year, I don't believe them because I think it's a lot cooler than last year. I think my body is just used to it.

Five NESTs were not satisfied with the foreign English teacher scheme policy in Taiwan, with NEST1-F-1 suggesting that teachers' needs should be dealt with better by the authorities:

> They (the scheme officers) don't know what their (the NESTs') teaching needs are because they are probably not asking them.

Two NESTs had problems interacting with the locals outside the schools, with these problems being because of language barriers, as commented on by NEST-N-1:

> I think living in New Taipei City, I did have some challenges with making doctor's appointments. Those people who schedule doctor's appointments, I think they're aggressive. And I can't read Chinese. It's really hard for me.

Challenges of working in Taiwan inside the schools

Most NEST challenges perceived were environmental (45.76%) and interactional (32.20%) at the schools. NESTs reported that most challenges were in the school environment (23.73%), followed by the student features (13.56%), and work duties and conditions (8.47%). The teachers were least satisfied with the school locations and the school assistance. NEST-M-1 shared concerns about the school location and claimed that resources were not easily accessible in remote areas:

> I found that New Taipei City can be really spread out. So, sometimes you are far away from resources. With the MRT now, it's not hard for me to get to anything in the city. But when I was in Sanxia District before, I couldn't go to the Mandarin class because it was a thirty-minute drive to the MRT, and then another MRT ride into the city to do the class.

Many NESTs also complained that their schools did not provide sufficient assistance, such as technical help and professional development opportunities. The following excerpts from NEST-B-2 and NEST-K-1 are illustrative of these findings:

> At the scheduled time, and when I walked in there, I didn't have a clear idea as to whether the computer was going to work or what the environment was like or what the table was set up for, or anything like that.

> I didn't have any opportunity to create anchor charts or any instructional materials to put around the room. In England, I used to get good training every week. We had a staff meeting. So, my criticism really is… I don't get enough what I call "good training." Really, like, professional development. I have to do that myself a lot.

As regards student features, four NESTs felt that the large number of students in the class was very challenging. NEST1-A-1 stated that "The most difficult part in my current job is the fact that I work with such large classes. But that's actually quite difficult because there's not a lot of time for one on one time." NEST-E-1 also mentioned that "I guess class size was the first shock because class sizes are large here compared to Canada. 40 students is a lot." The large class sizes in Taiwan also reflected another English teaching issue; the students' varied English language proficiency levels. NEST-O-1 highlighted this difficulty at work:

> They (the students) had learned some vocabulary that amazed me…and then they don't know other words that I feel are used in conversations a lot…So, trying to figure out what their level is can be kind of difficult. So, I think the biggest challenge for me is being able to correctly find that level and teaching to that level.

The participants had several challenges with their work duties and conditions, such as the different work styles, the extra workload, and the long work hours. NEST1-E-1 stated that "Too much homework to check and read, some of which is from the other local teacher's assignment." NEST-G-1 also complained that "The other thing is that I found that a lot of stuff can be very last minute or poorly planned, and I'm not used to it."

Several NESTs reported that they encountered challenges while interacting with the other teachers. Almost half the NESTs (ten out of 24 participants) indicated that collaboration with their colleagues was the biggest challenge. This challenge also had the highest percentage (16.95%). NEST-H-1, for example, complained that their co-teacher was unqualified:

> [The challenge is] working with a teacher who doesn't know what teaching is. For example, some (local teachers) set the tone of their classes and there is no management. The 8th-grade students get cracked down on. You (local teachers) are not helping to keep these students quiet, so they yell after the minute I walk in the class.

As well as being dissatisfied with their co-teachers, some NESTs admitted that their team-teaching did not go well. NEST1D-1 shared their experience of the poor collaboration with their co-teacher:

> I think the current teaching strategy doesn't work. The whole plan is that we work together; I teach half and they (the co-teachers) teach half. It doesn't work, and it's kind of a waste of time. You have foreign and native speakers, why give half of the lesson time to local teachers when you can use all the lesson time to help students with their speaking and listening?

NEST-A-1 mentioned that their teaching efforts were not valued by the local English teachers, which causes frustration in their collaborative relationships:

> It's frustrating to know that all the English teachers thought that my class was kind of a waste of time. Even still some of the teachers that I have talked to in the past three years while we have been doing this style of teaching, some think my classes are kind of just like fun party time and are not really important.

These challenges were also observed in their communication with local teachers. Six NESTs claimed that they had problems communicating with their school colleagues due to language barriers or the local teachers' anxiety in speaking with the NESTs, as NEST-A-1 shared:

> Being the only foreigner here, a lot of teachers in this school are nervous to speak to me because they think I will say some things in English that they won't understand. So even if I have been here for a long time, a lot of teachers never speak to me. So, I officially have an office upstairs on the third floor, and I can walk into the office and have zero people talk to me all day.

These difficulties in interacting with school colleagues and insufficient social connections could result in feelings of isolation; for example, three NESTs commented that they lacked a sense of belonging at their schools. NEST1-A-1 stated that "Last year, I was more viewed as just something that needed to be added in or something that needed to be used at the school." NEST-1-F-1 also shared their feeling of being isolated from the school community:

> Isolation has been the big one [challenge]. We have our monthly meetings but that's really the only time that I see some other teachers because we're so far away from each other …. And that's very isolating especially when all your other co-teachers are locals and they have their own lives and they don't really speak English very well. It gets to be a lonely existence sometimes; it really does.

Discussion

The comparison between the perceived advantages and challenges of working in Taiwan by NESTs gave insights into the influential factors affecting attrition and retention. As previously discussed, Nguyen et al.'s (2020) theoretical framework attributed general teacher turnover intentions to school factors, external factors, and personal factors, and previous studies have found that NEST turnover intentions were more influenced by school factors and external factors than personal factors (Chu & Morrison, 2011; Dos Santos, 2019; Lin & Wang, 2016; Thornburn, 2016; Wang L, 2017; Wang S, 2017; Yang et al., 2018; Yim & Hwan, 2019). Similarly, this study found that the NESTs in Taiwan perceived both advantages and challenges inside and outside their schools, both of which influenced their decisions to stay or leave, with most factors being school factors, that is, the issues and agendas inside the schools were found to be the most significant influences on the NESTs' decisions to stay or leave Taiwan.

One of the main school challenges was related to the interactions between the NESTs and the local English teachers at their schools. Specifically, most NESTs claimed that they had good relationships with the other teachers, but communication and collaboration with their colleagues were the main challenges at work. In particular, many NESTs had difficulties collaborating with the local English teachers, and their efforts were underestimated and less recognized by their colleagues, which gave them a limited sense of belonging to the school communities. These findings echoed the evidence and observation in previous studies (Jeon, 2020; Lin & Wang, 2016; Yim & Hwan, 2019). For example, Lin and Wang (2016) found that the local teachers' limited English proficiency resulted in a language barrier with the NESTs in Taiwan, and Yim and Hwan (2019) also found that the language barrier was a factor for the limited interactions between the NESTs and the local English teachers. Therefore, NEST host schools need to provide more language-friendly environments in which local teachers feel free to speak English for communication. Such an environment could be promoted by holding English workshops, providing incentives for local teachers to take English lessons, and encouraging NEST and local teacher interactions in the school communities. It was also found that the professional relationships between the NESTs and the local English teachers could either promote or debilitate their social connections (Yim & Hwan, 2019). Therefore, host schools need to strengthen the interpersonal support and relationships between the NESTs and the local teachers to foster the NEST commitment to stay (Yang et al., 2018), which could lead to higher teacher retention rates and better NEST scheme effectiveness.

It was also found that the school factor environment, such as the school environment, student features, and work duties and conditions, influenced the NEST turnover intentions. The NESTs claimed that most advantages were related to their work duties and conditions, followed by student features, and the school environment. However, most of the reported challenges were associated with the NESTs' school environment, followed by the student features, and work duties and conditions, that is, the work duties and conditions had the most advantages and the least challenges, whereas the school environment was the most challenging and the least satisfying. One reason the NESTs were satisfied with their work duties and conditions may have been because they were working at public schools and had job security as the work hours and workloads were clearly stated in their contracts. Two frequently identified challenges in the school environment were inconvenient school locations and insufficient assistance. As Nguyen et al. (2020) found, teachers who were highly satisfied with their environments and obtained the needed support from their schools tended to have lower attrition rates. Therefore, these two issues should be thoroughly considered by the schools and educational authorities to decrease NEST turnover rates; for example, increasing the transportation subsidy and enhancing school feedback mechanisms could be a good start.

The NESTs reported that the main student feature advantage was the students' good learning behavior, which was consistent with Lin and Wang's (2016) observation that many NESTs in Taiwan were satisfied with their students' appreciation of learning. When the NESTs had a high degree of satisfaction with the student behavior, they showed greater school commitment (Yang et al., 2018). Nevertheless, the NESTs also encountered various challenges because of the large class sizes and varied English proficiency levels, which were also reported by Lin and Wang (2016). Compared to the class sizes in other countries, the typical class sizes and student populations in Taiwan's public schools are relatively large. The large class sizes could also explain why the students' English proficiencies varied greatly. Therefore, assigning students to smaller, less differentiated English classes based on their proficiency levels could allow NESTs to spend more time on individual students and assist them in designing appropriate learning tasks for students based on their readiness.

In addition to these school factors, the NESTs also reported several external factors outside the school that could influence their retention and attrition. Compared to Nguyen et al.'s (2020) theoretical framework, a greater number of external factors were reported by the NESTs in this study in both the interaction and environmental categories. First, many NESTs reported that their interactions with the local people and other NESTs were an advantage to working in Taiwan. Having social connections with their intimates and families in Taiwan was also another reason why they decided to stay. This type of social networking outside the schools has also previously been found to be an important factor in NEST turnover intentions (Dos Santos, 2019). Second, the NESTs identified several advantages and challenges in their living environments, regional characteristics, and the NEST scheme policies, such as medical care, traffic, climate, and food. This finding was consistent with Thornburn's (2016) research that found that the ability to adapt to living in another country had a significant influence on NEST turnover intentions. Dos Santos (2019) also found that the simple living style and the sense of community were reasons NESTs chose to stay. Compared to general teachers, NESTs may need to make greater efforts to adapt to their new environment and culture. As Thornburn (2016) suggested, to overcome such challenges, host schools should assist NESTs to engage with the new culture by providing language lessons and assisting them with their housing. The NESTs also reported advantages and challenges with the NEST scheme policies, such as teacher training, teacher evaluations, and salary. Nguyen et al. (2020) argued that external factors may potentially affect teacher turnover intentions through their influences on the school factors. For example, the NEST scheme policies may have potential effects on the NESTs' work duties and school conditions because they were regulated in the contracts. The NESTs' relationships with the local English teachers may also be affected by the policy as team-teaching was an important part of the NEST scheme.

Despite the general tendencies reported by the NESTs in this study, there were some seemingly contradictory opinions about the same issues. For example, some NESTs enjoyed the weather in Taiwan, while others did not, which may have been because of personal preferences or school locations. As mentioned earlier, these public schools are located in New Taipei City, which has a wide geographical area from metropolitan areas to remote mountain areas, diversified weather patterns, and an unequal population distribution, which may also explain why many NESTs said they did not receive sufficient assistance or resources from their schools and others claimed that they did receive this support. Public schools in metropolitan areas often have more financial and educational resources than public schools in other areas. Therefore, these issues were the reasons for the discrepancies in the NESTs' opinions.

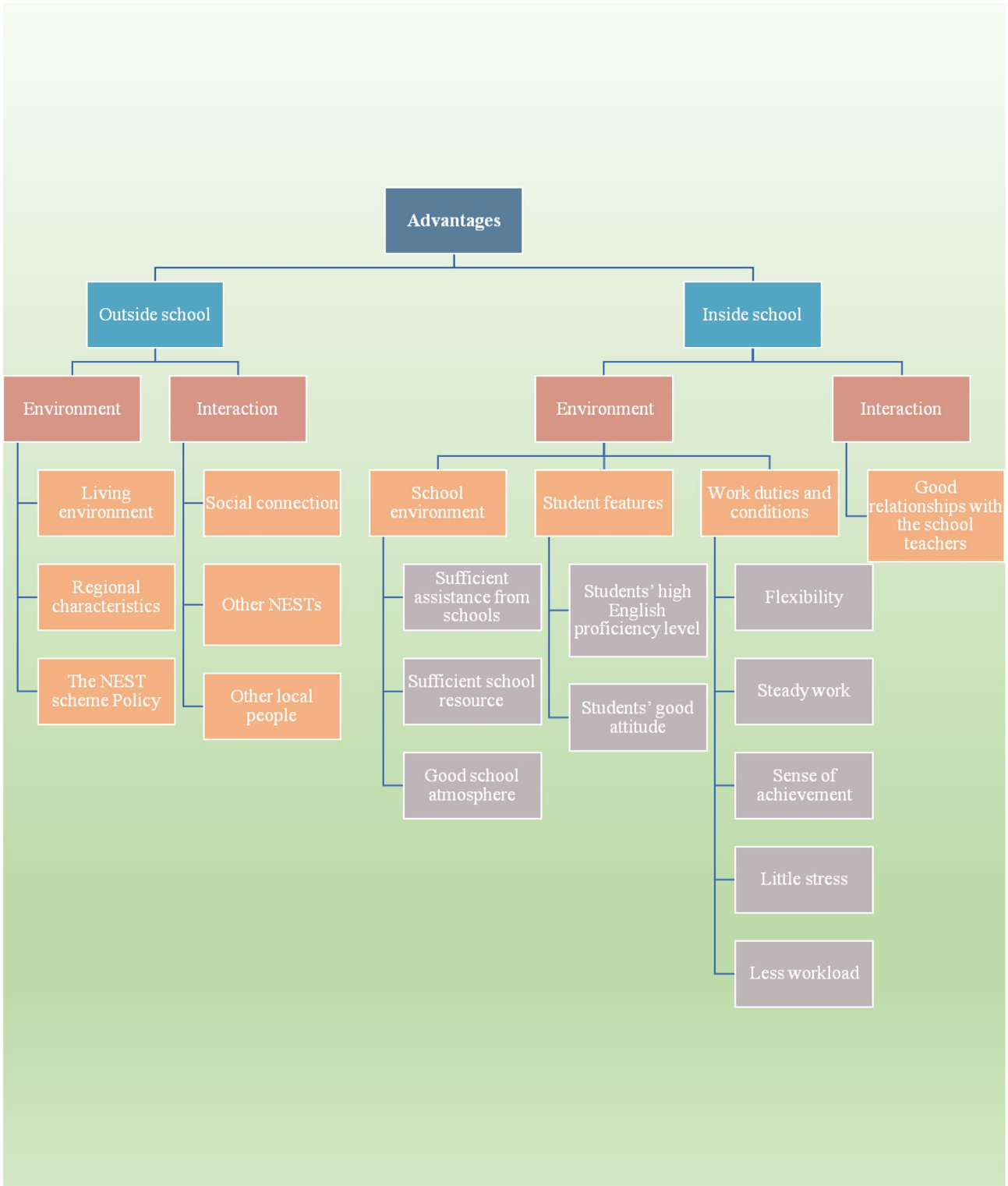
Conclusions

To identify the possible factors influencing NEST attrition and retention, this study explored the perceptions of NESTs of the advantages and challenges or working in Taiwan. It was found that most perceived advantages and challenges were related to issues and agendas inside the schools, for

which several suggestions are given. First, the government should conduct a need analysis on NEST reports to their schools, the results from which could give guidance to policymakers and schools to appropriately design NEST orientations and courses and to better prepare recruited NESTs for their upcoming tasks. Second, NEST host schools need to have more productive environments in which the NESTs and local teachers can engage in effective interactions and collaboration. The host schools should also strengthen the interpersonal support between the NESTs and local teachers to foster a school commitment to stay and a stronger sense of belonging. Third, the schools should develop a more personalized NEST feedback mechanism to identify and respond to any needed assistance, such as professional development. Lastly, competitive salaries and benefits, such as higher residence and transportation subsidies, should be provided to recruit and retain qualified NESTs. In future research, more teachers from other areas in Taiwan could be interviewed to gain a more integrated picture of the NEST attrition and retention factors. Quantitative data would also be useful to investigate the possible correlations between the identified factors and NEST turnover rates. To more deeply understand the NEST attrition and retention rates, the experiences of local English teachers and administrative staff could also be explored.

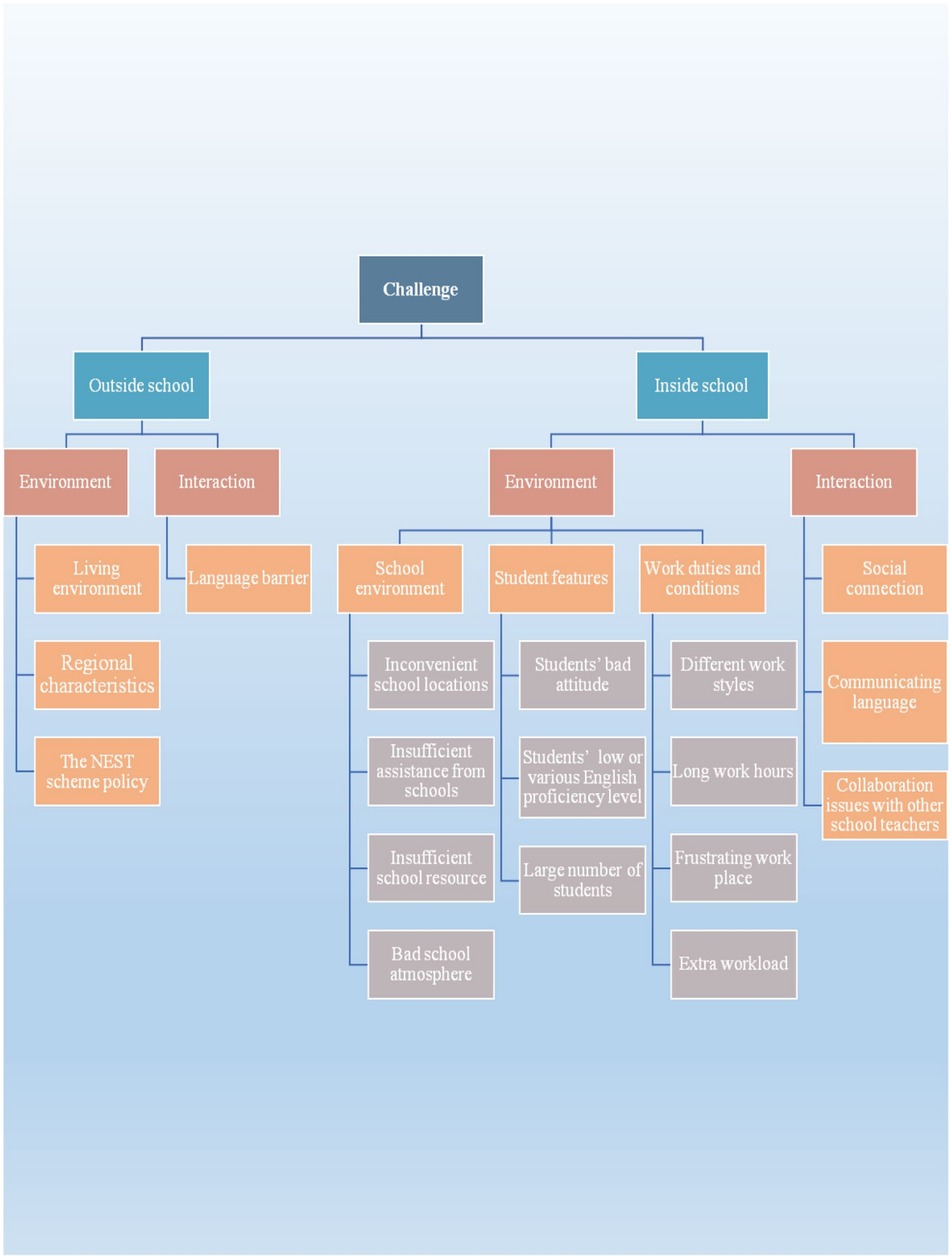
Appendix A

Hierarchical relationships of the advantages of working in Taiwan as perceived by the NESTs



Appendix B

Hierarchical relationships of the challenges of working in Taiwan as perceived by the NESTs



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