

## Views on the Roles of Non-Native English Speaker Teachers Compared to Their Native Counterparts: Indonesian Context

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### ABSTRACT

*The presence of Native English Speaker Teachers (NESTs) in a number of English courses, formal schools and universities has sparked debates among Non-Native English Speaker Teachers (NNESTs) in Indonesia. Some practitioners believe that the involvement of NESTs in education institutions brings about more benefits to their students and institutions than solely hiring NNESTs. However, some others believe that NNESTs are not less superior to their NEST counterparts. This study evaluated these beliefs by looking at the concerns about NNESTs compared to NESTs in the context of Indonesia. The data in this study were obtained from a number of related literatures. Supporting data were obtained through participant observation during the authors' training in education institutions that involved NESTs and by finding out the views of a university chairman who earned his masters and doctorate degrees in an English Speaking country. Besides, data were collected through an interview with three Australian university graduates who were taught by NNESTs in their secondary (junior and senior high schools) education and trained by NESTs prior to their departure to Australia for pursuing their masters degrees. In the final part, the results of this research indicate that NNESTs still deserve to have the same opportunity as NESTs. The findings, however, also suggest that the contexts in which NESTs and NNESTs are most effective differ.*

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### 1. Introduction

The spread of English in the world has penetrated all countries. Indonesia is one of those countries which incorporate English as one of the compulsory subjects to be learnt by all students ranging from secondary up to tertiary education levels (Suharjati, 2015). Its significance, despite its status as a foreign language, has been acknowledged in Indonesia since independence (Mu'in, 2019). It is present almost everywhere, including rural areas, not only as a subject at school but also as one of the languages used on food packages, T-shirts, manuals, and, of course, on the internet (Jazadi, 2008; Sari, 2018). More importantly, it is one of the employment requirements of the majority of companies. This has led to a huge demand for English language instruction, especially with Native English Speaker Teachers (NESTs), who are considered the "owners" of the language. This demand derives from the perception that Non-Native English Speaker Teachers (NNESTs) are inferior as they may frequently use the first language (L1) in teaching which may hinder the objective of learning a foreign language, model non-standard pronunciation, and may not be able to create a learning environment as effectively as NESTs.

Cook (1999) defines NESTs as those who were born in English speaking countries and acquired English since they were in childhood (as cited in Gurkan & Yuksel, 2012, Alseweed, 2012). Native English speakers belong to the "inner circle" of English; countries which use English as the first language, such as UK, US, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia (Kachru as cited in Solihin, 2012; Dita, 2009). Meanwhile, NNESTs constitute those who were born in the "outer circle"; including those from some 55 ex-British colonial countries, such as India and Singapore where English functions as their Second Language (ESL) and those who were born in the "expanding circle"; incorporating countries which acknowledge the essence of English, such as Indonesia, China, Russia, and Vietnam in which English acts as their Foreign Language (EFL) (Tajeddin & Pakzadian, 2020; Xiaoqiong & Xianxing, 2011).

In Indonesia, in this case, there have been numerous NESTs employed in many education institutions. Debates regarding who are better employed (whether NESTs or NNESTs) in education institutions in Indonesia are always heard. Therefore, a fair investigation has been carried out in this study.

## 2. Method

In conducting this research, qualitative method was applied. To collect the data, the researchers analyzed several literatures and employed a participant observation as well as a semi-structured interview. Concerns regarding NNESTs were obtained from the literatures. Participant observation is observing the field by being part of the community (Cresswell, 2009; Sugiyono, 2010). This observation was done when the authors were students in English education institutions that employed NESTs. Semi-structured interview is an interview that is guided by some main questions that are then developed in accordance with the responses given by the interviewees (Moleong, 2004). The interviewed participants consisted of a university chairman and three graduates of Australian universities who were trained by NESTs before they departed to Australia. The sampling method was purposive where the participants were selected by considering their being taught by both NNESTs and NESTs in different education levels (NNESTs during their secondary and undergraduate study and NESTs during their masters or doctorate study). The techniques of data analysis followed the ones proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994). They were data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

## 3. Result and Discussion

### 3.1 The Concerns Commonly Arising about NNESTs When Compared to NESTs

#### NNESTs Often Use Their L1 in Class

Table 1. Summary of Concern 1

Concerns	Reasons (literature)	Participant Views
NNESTs Often Use Their L1 in Class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Always resorting to L1 when facing difficulties in teaching may become a hindrance for students in learning their target language.</li> <li>NNESTs use L1 to explain vocabulary and grammar or when interpreting English, with which they tend to make errors.</li> <li>NNESTs lack sufficient knowledge of vocabulary context and correct use.</li> </ul> <p>(Beare, 2016; Medgyes as cited in Merino, 1997).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>L1 may actually play a determining role in helping EFL students learn English.</li> <li>Explanations of vocabulary and grammatical concepts in L1 may speed up the learning process.</li> <li>Translating vocabulary items is a lot easier and more time-efficient in L1, especially for beginners.</li> <li>Using L1 is not a problem because difficult concepts can be explained in the students' mother tongue.</li> </ul>

In the table above, it can be understood that from the literature, it was found that some commentators doubt NNESTs because of the use of L1 in teaching. It is believed that they often use their L1 to explain vocabulary and grammar or even when interpreting English as their target language, with which they tend to make errors (Medgyes as cited in Merino, 1997). Beare (2016) asserts that always resorting to L1 when facing difficulties in teaching may also become a hindrance for students in learning their target language.

Secondly, it is claimed that NNESTs lack sufficient knowledge of vocabulary and its correct use. Vocabulary needs to be taught to students according to the contexts or its cultural meanings and only the NESTs are believed to know best the contexts of the words they use for teaching. Reves and Medgyes' survey of 216 EFL/ESL instructors found that 84% of NNESTs were not sophisticated in their use of English words. They asserted that those NNESTs might think they understand English, but actually, they did not (as cited in Merino, 1997). This finding indicates that the vocabulary of the surveyed NNESTs was not good enough to be used for teaching.

However, in relation to the first reason, all of the participants of this study viewed that L1 may actually play a determining role in helping EFL students learn English. This is because providing the explanations of vocabulary and

grammatical concepts in the L1 of the students' may speed up the learning process. One of the participants gave an example. He said that an Indonesian student may find it difficult to understand the grammatical rules of a noun phrase, but after being taught about how they differ from his L1, it will probably be easier for him to internalize those rules. Moreover, the participants believed that translating vocabulary items is a lot easier and more time-efficient when L1 is used especially if the learners are beginners. These views are also supported by the view of Beare (2016). Merino (1997) interviewed many language instructors and professors from 4 different universities in 3 different countries. He found that NNESTs are far stricter with the spelling and the grammar errors made by their students compared to NESTs who tend to focus more on fluency and communication. This implies that NNESTs are quite careful when teaching vocabulary and grammar.

Hoffman (2016) adds that NNESTs learn English based on rules, such as grammar and morphology, which may result in careful control in their English usage. Thus, while it may be true in some Non-English Speaking Countries (NESC)s that a few NNESTs use L1 as a result of their linguistic deficiency, a great number of them consider that L1 functions as a connecting bridge rather than an obstacle in teaching English. All of the participants (P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5) in this research all agree with this belief. For example:

*".....using L1 is not a problem because difficult concept can be explained in the students' mother tongue" (P1).*

*P3 said, "sometimes, it is not easy to directly understand words or sentence in English. We need some kind of explanation in our mother tongue".*

### 3.2 NNESTs May not Model Standard Pronunciation

**Table 2.** Summary of Concern 2

Concern	Reasons (literature)	Participant Views
<b>NNESTs May not Model Standard Pronunciation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NNESTs may not be able to teach a standard model of pronunciation.</li> <li>• Foreign accents of NNESTs can always be noticed.</li> <li>• A strange accent is hard to be understood by other people, especially foreign counterparts.</li> <li>• When that accent is transferred to students, the same poor quality of pronunciation may be produced.</li> </ul> <p>(Medgyes as cited in Merino, 1997; Walkinshaw, 2012)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good pronunciation of English does not mean always sound like British or American.</li> <li>• "We don't know which pronunciation is standard. What we have is intelligibility".</li> <li>• "Pronunciation can be learnt and trained" in order to sound close to or like natives.</li> </ul>

From the table above, it can be noticed that from the literature it was found that some commentators believe that NNESTs may not be able to teach a standard model of pronunciation. Walkinshaw (2012) conducted a study which tried to find out students' view of ideal pronunciation. The result shows that the majority of them viewed NESTs' as an ideal model. Medgyes claims pronunciation is one area of difficulties that almost all NNESTs struggle with, despite the efforts made to imitate the accents of natives, foreign accents of NNESTs can always be noticed (as cited in Merino, 1997). Additionally, a strange accent is hard to be understood by other people, especially foreign counterparts. Consequently, when that accent is transferred to students, the same poor quality of pronunciation may be produced. This is probably true. The data from the observation showed that most of us in the class still got our pronunciation corrected by our NESTs.

However, three of the participants said that good pronunciation of English does not mean always sound like British or American. This is in the same vain as Arntsen's view (2007). They said that if the NNESTs and students are Indonesian, then an Indonesian accent is acceptable as long as the pronunciation of the words is correct. Even if NESTs from two different English speaking countries are employed in the same school, they may not sound fully American or fully British (Arntsen, 2007). Arntsen further adds that some Non-NESTs may have near native pronunciation, such as those from the Netherlands (see also Gurkan & Yuksel, 2012). Gurkan and Yuksel (2012) conducted a study which was aimed at finding EFL students' perception towards their NESTs and NNESTs. The findings from the "the comprehensibility" item which

mainly involved pronunciation prove that more than half of the participants (58%) of the study perceived that it is easier to understand their NNESTs teachers compared to their NESTs. Taking those findings into consideration, NNESTs may have better ability in making EFL or ESL students understand lessons more easily. This finding supports what the participants believed.

Participant 2 commented that studying with her NNEST teacher during her senior high school was easier compared to studying in a course she attended when a NEST came to teach. This was probably because of the pronunciation that she was not familiar with. Similarly, the university chairman said, “We don’t know which pronunciation is standard. What we have is intelligibility”. This means that as long as we are intelligible, it is not a problem if we sound not exactly like an American, a British, or an Australian. Participant 3 believed that pronunciation can be trained. Some children when taken to intensive training for some specific accent, they can sound like natives, for example those studying in English Village in Pare or those in international schools have indicated the accents of their trainers who are mostly natives (Pratiwi, Atmowardoyo, & Salija, 2020; Tanu, 2010).

### 3.3 NNESTs May not Create an Effective Learning Environment

Table 3. Summary of Concern 3

Concern	Reasons (literature)	Participant Views
<b>NNESTs May not Create an effective Learning Environment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NNESTs may not fully and properly immerse their EFL students into full English, but NESTs can.</li> <li>• NESTs may apply more flexible and innovative approaches in teaching, but NNESTs may implement a guided or “bookish approach”. (Medyes, 2006; Medgyes as cited in Cakir, 2013; Medgyes as cited in Merino, 1997)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NNESTs have already experienced the atmosphere of being language learners.</li> <li>• NNESTs are the living example of successful language learners that their students may learn from.</li> <li>• Being a NEST only is “not enough” to be a good teacher.</li> </ul>

From the literature, another argument raised against NNESTs is that they may not be able to create an effective learning environment as effectively as their native counterparts. Medgyes asserts that only a small percentage of them may pass the ability of natives in setting an effective teaching method (as cited in Merino, 1997). It is believed that NESTs may fully and properly immerse their EFL students into full English. Medgyes (2001) insists that they may apply more flexible and innovative approaches in teaching while NNESTs may implement a guided or “bookish approach” (as cited in Cakir, 2013). This means that NNESTs or local teachers tend to provide controlled activities to their students, whereas NESTs can probably teach their students with creative activities in studying English (Medyes, 2006). The research conducted by Rizky (2013) showed that most of the students taught by NESTs were more motivated and curious to learn English.

However, the participants in this study believed that it is not necessarily true that NNESTs are not able to set an effective learning environment. In fact, according to them, the opposite may be true in the EFL context as NNESTs have already experienced the atmosphere of being language learners and they are the living examples of successful language learners that their students may learn from. This view is also supported by the point of view Ezberci (2005) and Mount (2002). Moreover, being a NEST is “not enough” to be a good teacher (Crystal as cited in Oxford University Press, 2014). In many non-English speaking countries, educational institutions may offer immersion programs taught by NESTs, without consideration of their educational backgrounds and qualifications. It appears that being “the owners of English” and therefore great teachers still seems to be strongly held (Kiczowski, as cited in Oxford University Press, 2014). According to Arnsten (2007), such immersion programs may be positive, but can be very frustrating for the students, especially if they are beginners and the teacher is not qualified. The findings of Novianti’s (2018) research indicate that 76% of the students treated as the respondents were still unconfident with their English although they had been taught by NESTs.

Clearly, it is not being NESTs that determines effective learning environment, but experience and qualification. Indeed, in many instances, according to the university chairman, qualified NNESTs are clearly the better teachers.

The responses given by P1 said that she was taught by NESTs in her pre-departure training program. However, she felt more comfortable when learning with her NNESTs. The case was probably because the NESTs were not having much experience in teaching international students and not having the experience of being a student whose English is not his/her first language and studying in English speaking country. She said:

*"I felt more comfortable when learning with native Indonesian teachers. It's probably because aa..a.. they come to us to tell about the atmospheres when we are in our destined country".*

### 3.4 The Contexts in Which NESTs and NNESTs are Most Effective

Table 4. Most Effective Contexts for NESTs and NNESTs

Participant Views on the Effective Context for NESTs	Participant Views on the Effective Context for NNESTs	Observation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning with NESTs may boost students' motivation.</li> <li>• Students prepared for study in English Speaking countries should be taught by NESTs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As NNESTs outnumber NESTs, NNESTs should be accepted and embraced.</li> <li>• The beginner level students should be taught by NNESTs as difficult concepts in the target language can be explained based on their backgrounds.</li> <li>• Being a NEST only is "not enough" to be a good teacher. So both NNESTs and NESTs have similar opportunities.</li> <li>• Hiring NESTs may be costly than NNESTs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students were more motivated to practice difficult pronunciations when modeled by NESTs</li> <li>• Students had no chance to switch to their first language (speaking fully in English)</li> </ul>

According to three of the participants, as the number of non-native English speakers all around the world outnumbers that of natives, the teaching of English may only be feasibly done by non-natives. This is in line with Crystal's view (as cited in Oxford University Press, 2014). This view sounds possibly true as there are simply too many people wanting to learn English and not enough qualified native English speaker teachers, and the large number of qualified NNESTs needs to be accepted and embraced. All of the participants considered that students may benefit greatly from being taught by those teachers, especially at the beginner level, such as elementary and junior high schools as difficult concepts in the target language may be explained in accordance with their background knowledge. Moreover, it has also been argued that hiring NESTs in NESCs can be very costly as the salary given to those teachers tends to be much different compared to the amount received by NNESTs and this seems to be unfair as well (Amalia, 2016).

However, all of the participants believe that not employing NESTs at all either in the outer or expanding circles of English, especially Indonesia, may not be wise. This is because learning English directly from its source may boost the motivation of the students (Solihin, 2012). Additionally, there have been various programs in Indonesia, such as Australia Awards Scholarship (AAS) and Lembaga Pengelola Dana Pendidikan (LPDP) in Indonesia, which support and sponsor indigenous Indonesians to pursue their bachelors, masters, and doctorates in the English Speaking countries, such as the US, the UK, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand (IDP Education, 2022). Accordingly, learning and communicating directly with NESTs are deemed to be important prior to the commencement of their study in those English Speaking countries. Clearly, it may not always be true that NNESTs are less capable of teaching English to ESL or EFL students and have the same opportunity as NESTs.

The authors themselves observed how the NESTs taught the students in the institutions handling pre-departure training for students going to study in Australian Universities. The students became more motivated when they heard the example pronunciations of the words they thought difficult to pronounce. From the observation, it was also found that to speak fully in English, with the intention to immerse in the target language, NESTs are certainly a good choice. Almost all of the NESTs there commented that they were not allowed to use language other than English. When a concept was difficult to be understood, the NESTs tried to find words that were easily grasped by the students. This is in line with the result of the study conducted by Walkinshaw (2012).

The university chairman said that he experienced that when he was joining the pre-departure training program before he left for Australia. He had to use full English. No other languages were allowed to be used. This suggests that to get used to speaking fully and listening to or practicing the accents of native speakers, NESTs play a determining role.

#### 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, although many stakeholders believe that having natives as the English teachers of EFL or ESL students may promise fewer errors than NNESTs, a standard pronunciation model, and a more effective learning environment, the results of this study indicate that it may not always be appropriate to say that local English teachers are not able to provide them with good quality of English. Both types of teachers deserve to have the same treatments with some exceptions in the context to which they are best situated. Beginners should be taught by NNESTs as they can ask questions in their L1 if they face a difficult lesson which is certainly hard to be done with NESTs. Those students may understand their NNESTs more easily than understanding NESTs and may learn strategies of how to be successful language learners from those NNESTs. Meanwhile, EFL or ESL students who study in higher levels, such as those in tertiary education and those studying in institutions preparing them to study abroad, may be taught by NNESTs whose English is already in high level, or more preferably directly by NESTs. Further study that involves a larger scope is expected to be conducted as this study only included a small number of participants.

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