

Native English Speaker Teachers (NESTs) versus Non Native English Speaker Teachers (NNESTs) in TESOL

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Introduction

There is an open debate whether native speaker teachers or non native speakers teach better. There are complex explanations behind this debate. However, much current studies indicate that both have advantages in their own ways. It is indeed unnecessary to draw a demarcation line between NESTs and NNESTs in the TESOL field (Phothongsunan & Suwanarak 2008) as different varieties of English are getting more recognised (Kachru and Nelson, cited in Liu 1999; Kachru, 2005; Braine, 2010). In this paper, I will discuss the advantages of NNESTs and NESTs professional, followed by the suggestions for NNEST. Prior to this, I elaborate my teaching context in which I try to engage my own experience as both students and NNESTs in each discussion as a reflection.

Particular English Teaching Context

The teaching context in this case is restricted to the place where I was doing bachelor at Faculty of Letters, the University of Jember from 2000-2004, at Indonesia-Australia Language Foundation (IALF) Bali March-September 2008 and at the University of Sydney March 2009-June 2010, for my Master Degree. In the University of Jember I was taught by NNS while at IALF Bali and the University of Sydney I was taught by NS, and my present status as NNS as well.

Advantages of NNESTs

The advantages of being taught by NNS are the fact that both teachers and students share the same culture, they better explain grammatical rules, serves as the role model for successful language learners (Braine, 2010; Medgyes, 1992).

The fact that teachers are from the same background provides benefit. This is because the teacher can explain English using student's first language in the case when students encounter problems. e.g. in my bachelor, my teacher associated the word 'rather' with 'rada' as these words have similar meaning. This explanation made the comprehension easier. In my teaching context last semester, teaching *Introduction to Linguistics* I tried to incorporate LA Light advertisement "Rumput gue lebih hijau dari rumput loe" to introduce the concept of Halliday's concept of *register (field, tenor and mode)* and the concept of *intertextuality* through the description Andrea Hirata, his biography, his works and what other people wrote about him. These seem provide a clearer picture of those notions compared through teaching only with reference to a book.

Having teacher from the same background may also create a closer rapport. Liu (1999) reported that one of NNESTs in his research was Korean American. In his research, he found that teacher's emphasis on his Korean, this created a rapport with Asian students.

Other advantage of having NNESTs in the classroom is that they often can teach grammar better. This might correspond to the idea that NNESTs may be able to predict student's difficulties in learning the rules of language as they might have similar experience. Aurbach 1993 (cited in Liu 1999: 99) argues that "it is not just the experience as a language learner, but the experience of sharing struggles as a new comer that is critical". In this context, I usually share my learning experience of learning English, e.g., the habit of reading out-loud to improve pronunciation, the strategies to face TOEFL test, the tips to write concisely in an essay etc.

NNESTs may also serve as the role model for successful language learners who can share the learning strategies. This is also underlined by Medgyes (1992) who states that "teachers can serve as imitable models of the successful learner of English" and Lagabaster and Siera (2005 cited in Watson Todd and Pojanapunya 2009) who state that in *learning strategies*, NNESTs were perceived to be strong (student's attitude toward NNESTs). This may not happen for NESTs as they learn the language for 'granted'. The strategies to handle TOEFL test, improve pronunciation, put the ideas succinctly in *Writing course* may also correspond to this.

Advantages for NESTs

Being a native teacher provides at least three advantages in general; they have better proficiency, better at explaining cultural issues in the target language, and are more flexible for topic changes.

It is no doubt that learning first language is done automatically for native speakers. This helps them teach communicative skill easily. Arva and Medgyes (1992) said that NESTs are excellent in a spontaneous language use in various settings Therefore they are appropriate for teaching conversation, pronunciation and serve as the role model for students in these areas. This may describe IALF and other language courses teaching context in which native speakers are assigned to teach conversation. Lagabaster and Siera (2005 cited in Watson Todd and Pojanapunya 2009) described that students expressed strongest preference to be taught by NESTs than NNESTs especially in pronunciation areas.

Teaching first language also makes easy for NESTs to teach cultural issues as language is social practice. Therefore teaching language means that teaching culture itself (Cramsch 1993). In accordance with this, NESTs are most likely be able to teach English along with the *embedded values* such as idiomatic expressions, slang words, what to ask and what not to ask to native speakers.

Another positive thing that NESTs teachers could give to students is that they can flexibly change the topic in the classroom. This is reasonable as their language proficiency is unquestionable (Arva and Medgyes, 2000). Moreover, NNESTs also argued that "any

NEST's stock of colloquial expressions, idioms, and phrasal verbs was comparably richer than any non NEST's so they can answer any questions'' (Arva and Medgyes, 2000). This would benefit classroom especially when students get bored with the topic in the book. In my experience at IALF Bali, NESTs most of the time were able to answer student's questions. This might also be due to the teacher's background at IALF in which they are usually Master graduate and have long experience in teaching not like those of 'young and inexperienced native teachers in the case of Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET), English Program in Korea (EPIK) as the examples etc (Braine, 2010).

Extrinsic and Intrinsic Challenges of NNESTs

Extrinsic Challenges of NNESTs

The NNESTs both in the outer circle and the expanding circle have been disadvantaged of 'political English'. Braine (2010) outlines some challenges of NNESTs in the TESOL professionals such as; hiring practices (US, UK cases), 'native speaker fallacy (the idea that only native speakers can be good language teachers (Philipson, 1992 in Mahboob in www.moussu.net/nnest/articles/Mahboob.pdf)', 'Indigenous English teacher's unawareness of the rise NNESTs movement and the respect that NNESTs gained in ESL context', e.g. in Asian contexts (p.74), and student's correcting mistakes and parents' grade for teachers (Mousavi, 2007).

In the US setting, Mahboob et al (2004 cited in Braine 2010) reported that most of the NNESTs were hired as part timer, reaching only 7.9% of the total 1,425 teachers and the native speaker status was an important criterion accordingly. Similar study by Clark and Paran (2007 cited in Braine 2010) in the United Kingdom under the topic '' the employability of non-native teachers of EFL'', the study shows that the 73,9% among of the total 90 surveyed administrators judged that the 'native speaker criterion' is to be either moderately or very important (p.86). In these examples it clearly can be seen that the discrimination over the NNESTs is still high. This may also be the case in Asian contexts (China, Japan, Hongkong, Korea, Taiwan) especially in the affluent countries where they are able to pay 'higher' salary for NESTs. This might also appear in the developing country (Indonesia) but merely for some institutions, such as EF, and may be international schools.

In many Asian countries, as Braine (2010) reported, NNESTs should face a number of discriminations. They are considered less competent than NESTs. Further, he cited, an anecdotal example in which Ozgur Parlak, Caucasian teacher from Turkey was hired to teach English in Thailand just because his physical performance resembles to those of native speaker not because of his language competence. Another phenomenon is the case of teachers from resource poor countries were not aware of the existence of NNESTs current movement in the world, even the case when some of them teach NS students in English speaking countries. This might still prevail the assumption that NESTs is always superior to NNESTs. On par income offered by the growing number of English courses, Schools especially in high income Asian countries such as Japan, Hongkong, Taiwan, Korea attracts NESTs to do teaching work in the continent, Native English Teacher (NET) scheme in Hongkong, Japan

Exchange and Teaching (JET), English Program in Korea (EPIK) as the examples. This inevitably strikes challenges for the local teachers (Braine, 2010).

Another extrinsic challenge faced by NNESTs is the fact that most of conferences in TESOL related area tend to be dominated by NESTs. This as Braine (2010) claimed 'not only perpetuates native speaker fallacy but also ironic because the theories and pedagogies expounded by "travelling key note speakers" are irrelevant in EFL context' (p.88). This is not only in Hongkong, Japan, Korea but also in the conferences held by the Minister of South East Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) which the country members include Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand etc. This indicates heavy reliance on those NESTs. This phenomenon seems to be undeniable fact for Indonesian context. The Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language in Indonesia (TEFLIN) conference seems to underline this fact.

Slightly different to Braine (2010), Mousavi (2007) reported the case of 8 Native teachers from language centres at UK universities and 8 Non Native teachers enrolled in MA TESOL at 2 UK Universities in relation to the challenges above. Accordingly, student's correcting teacher's mistakes make the teacher stress and the evaluation from the parents in Hongkong to teachers (whether they achieve a 'good grade', a good teacher or not) make the teacher stress too.

Intrinsic Challenges of NNESTs

Apart from the external aspects, NNESTs should also face the problems of their own. Braine (2010) reports that the occasional English use, the fear of losing proficiency if teaching in the school where NNESTs are dominant, lack of commitment of English for NNESTs and graduate student, un-qualified teachers (Hongkong case), never read English newspaper and reading for pleasure, the anxiety of their own accent (inferiority complex) and lack of confident, unfamiliarity with materials (Mousavi, 2007).

As Braine (2010) reports that most graduate students in Hongkong use English merely for academic reading and writing, consultation to non-Chinese supervisor and rarely for reading English Newspaper, Watching English TV programs, etc, the cases which can facilitate their English. This might indicate the lack of commitment of them. Not surprising therefore these affect their competence. When given English Proficiency Assessment Test (2001) by government to make sure that all English teachers gain *minimum proficiency* to teach English, many of them failed. The lack of commitment for English seems to occur (in many cases) in our teaching context, in which English is mostly used inside classroom, and less used outside the classroom. But, it is (hardly) can be found that our government the minimum proficiency test such as that of in Hongkong.

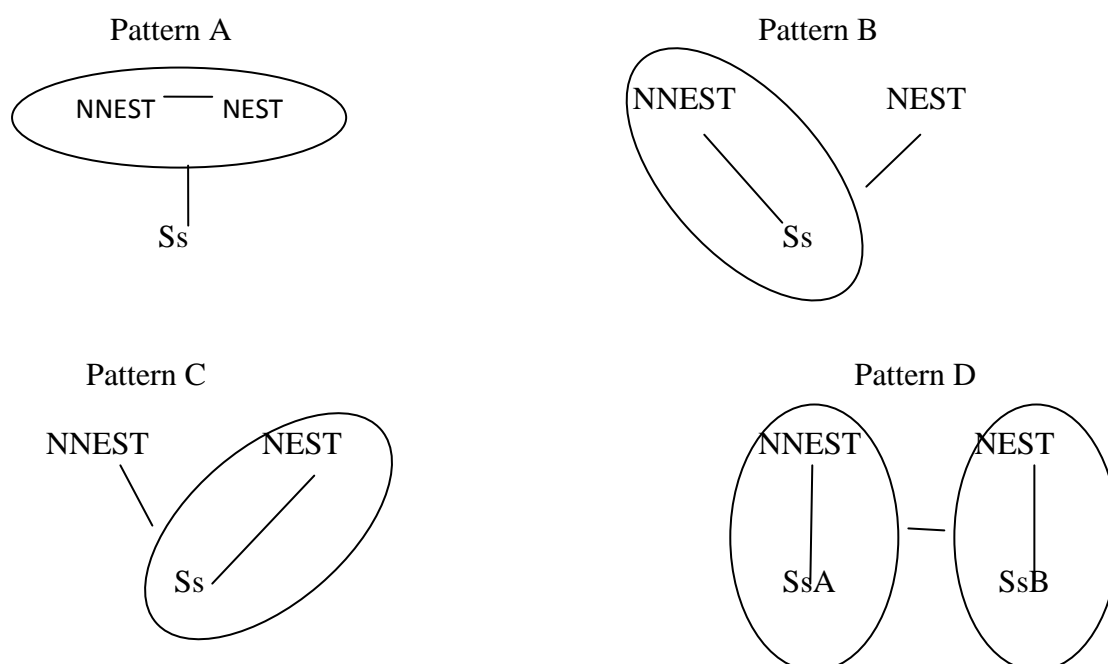
The last aspect considered as intrinsic is the NNESTs' being not confident upon their own accent and high appreciation of NS accent (Jenkin 2005 cited in Braine, 2010). Similar to this, Rajagopalan (2005 cited in Braine, 2010) reported that 400 NNESTs in Brazil "were worried about being underprepared, undervalued in their profession, handicapped in career advancement, and treated as "second class citizen" in the workplace" (p. 79). Rajagopalan

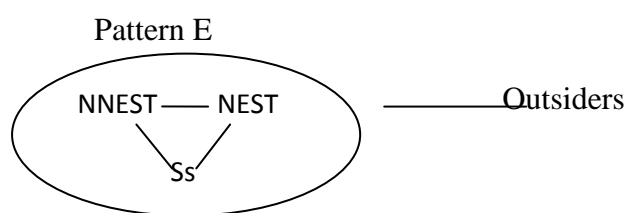
ends up by arousing NNESTs to wake up and nothing to lose, and get away from the inferiority complex feeling. Even though it is not necessarily the case, high appreciation of NS accent exists for teachers and students in Indonesian schools, at least in my experience as a student.

In line with the above phenomenon, Mousavi (2007) mentioned that the respondents in his research confessed that the teachers are not confident talking to native speaker teachers working in the same school, and that would end up with not confident to talk to young learners. The unfamiliarity with the new texts stressed the teachers as they get difficulties in explaining to students and they do not have time to prepare for them. Regarding the NEST just the 'same' as us (NNEST) seems to be important so that the worry about accent while talking to native speaker could be managed. In the case of unfamiliarity with the texts should not a big problem because we may utilise internet to help us understand about them.

Suggestions for NNESTs in Indonesia

Having observed the advantages that NNESTs have and also the constraints they may encounter, it might be better for them to cooperate with NESTs as a team learning and teaching in that they can learn from each other along with students (Tajino & Tajino, 2000; Braine, 2010) as *the more important is not about the dichotomy between them but 'teacher's knowledge, training in ELT and expertise'* (Phothongsunan & Suwanarak 2008, p.27) and *the fact that the ideal NNESTs are the ones who have achieved 'near native proficiency' and the ideal NESTs are those who have achieved a high degree of proficiency in learner's mother tongue* (Medgyes 1994 cited in Moussu 2006, p.22). In their proposal (Tajino & Tajino, 2000) suggest that NNESTs and NESTs teach collaboratively in the classroom, moreover this collaboration involves students in the teaching and learning process (Tajino & Tajino, 2000). The following is the five interaction patterns suggested.





Ss = students

SsA = Students in Group A

SsB = Students in Group B

In Pattern A, in this pattern NEST and NNEST cooperate to decide the lesson topic given in the classroom. It is the traditional form of team teaching where students merely serve as the ‘recipient’ in the classroom.

In Pattern B, the team consists of ‘NNEST and Ss’, students may prepare the topic with the help of NNEST and could initiate communication practice with NEST. In this way students teach NEST the topic of their culture and NEST could learn.

In Pattern C, NEST and students work together as a team. This enables students to communicate more with the NEST and learn more about linguistics and culture.

In Pattern D, half of the students work with the NEST and the other half with NNEST. This facilitates the students to have different kinds of intercultural experiences. E.g. they discuss about culture related topic e.g. breakfast both in student’s and teacher’s culture.

In Pattern E, all participants work together as a team to improve their communicative competence through interaction.

In similar context, Braine (2010) exemplifies both NNESTs and NESTs perform role play in the classroom so that students can make more sense about their learning (input) as they can directly observe what’s presented. This is much more a live learning compared to only learning from the book.

Conducting training for English teachers is another example of this cooperation e.g. In-Service Education Training (INSET) programmes would possibly enhance their professional development where the teachers are trained for their own research in their classroom such as making question, data collection and analysis and results. This was proved to have positive impacts to EFL teachers in Turkey despite some difficulties that they faced (Atay, 2008).

Another aspect that NNESTs could benefit from NESTs is that NNESTs can learn more on the command of English so that they could perform better in classroom communication (Medgyes, 1992). This may happen in the proposal by Tajino & Tajino (2000) above.

Last but not least is the possibility that NNESTs could learn more about the cultural issues of the target language. This would facilitate their classroom teaching activities as mentioned

previously that language is social practice (Cramsch, 1998) and both language and culture are mutually implicated (Atkinson, 1999). Aside from the above notion, the following issues on world's English are salient as these portrait the intersection of different varieties of Englishes and their effects on teaching for NESTs and NNESTs.

Current Proposals on Teaching Based on World's Englishes

The notion of World's Englishes is identical with Kachru's proposal, pluricentric model rather than monolithic (Kachru 2005; Cook 2003; Jenkins, 2006) about inner circle of English (American, Australian etc), outer circle, English colonies (Singaporean, Indian etc) and expanding circle (Chinese, Indonesian, etc). This advocates that different varieties of English are more and more accepted. Stemming from this idea, the notion of native speaker is becoming a complex issue.

In line with this complex issue Kumaravadivelu (1993; 33-42) proposed ten emerging strategies in second/foreign language teaching; maximize learning opportunities in which the teachers ought to create learning opportunities for learners and utilisers of opportunities created by the learners, facilitate negotiated interaction (the learners take an active role in initiating talk not just react and respond, minimise perceptual mismatch (sensitizing potential source of mismatch between teacher intention and learner interpretation), activate intuitive heuristics (one of ways by providing adequate textual data so that the learner can infer certain underlying grammatical rule), foster language awareness (about consciousness raising and input enhancement), contextualise linguistic input, integrate language skills, promote learner autonomy, raise cultural consciousness, ensure social relevance (the need to be sensitive about economic, societal, political and educational environment in which L2 learning and teaching take place).

Similar to the above proposal, a reflection of thirty year of teaching of Jack Richard (2002: 4) shows the following variables; English as a practical tool, English as a world commodity, English learning not necessarily linked to British and US cultural values, English teaching linked to national values, mother tongue influenced accent acceptable as well as native speaker accent, comprehensibility of language is the target.

Jenkins (2006) also proposed the idea of teaching in today's world Englishes issues. She elaborated that "there is a growing consensus among researchers on the importance of language awareness for teachers and teacher trainers and educators in all three circles" (Bolton, 2004; Canagarajah, 2005b; Seidlhofer, 2004 in Jenkins 2006; p.173). Furthermore it is explained that "teachers and their learners, it is widely agreed, need to learn not only (a variety of) English, but about Englishes, their similarities and differences, issues involved intelligibility, the strong link between language and identity, and so on (p.173)"

The above proposal and notions seem to be very enlightening, insightful and more democratic view of teaching as non-native culture is appreciated. Especially for Kumaravadivelu's (1993) ideas, those may serve a concrete example on the current need on teaching methods in the classroom practice rather than drawing the dichotomy between NESTs and NNESTs. (3088 words)

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