

## QUESTIONING THE DOMINANCE OF NATIVE-ENGLISH TEACHERS IN ELT PROFESSION

**Tahan HJ Sihombing\***  
Institut Teknologi Del, Indonesia  
*hjuardi@gmail.com*

\*Corresponding author

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36841/pioneer.v14i1.1680>

Received : April 28, 2022

Revised : June 11, 2022

Accepted : June 11, 2022

Published : June 30, 2022

**Abstract:** It is often assumed that native-English teachers are the best teachers in the teaching of English. This results in the preference towards native-English teachers and the isolation of non-native English teachers when it comes to English teaching profession. This assumption should not be perpetuated. English teaching researches have shown that native-English teachers are not always the ideal teachers in the teaching of English. The findings of the researches state that non-native English teachers have more advantages compared to the native ones especially in the context of English as an international language where English can no longer be associated with only English-speaking countries. This paper discusses the issue of the preference towards native-English teachers and the isolation of non-native English teachers.

**Keywords:** *English as an international language, English language teaching, Native English teachers, non-native English teachers*

### INTRODUCTION

It is often claimed that native-English teachers are the ideal teachers in teaching English. As a result, native English teachers have been always preferred for English Language Teaching (ELT) profession and non-native English teachers seem to be isolated. Even the non-native English teachers themselves show lack of self-confidence as English teachers and feel inferior because of the traditional dichotomy of native and non-native English teachers positioning non-native ones as “defective communicator” (Firth and Wagner 1997, cited in Selvi, 2014). Some may argue that recently this issue is not worth discussing anymore since it has been around for a long time and they might think that there are no longer discriminations towards the non-native ones. However, this perspective cannot be perpetuated yet. It has to be noted that not long time ago or in 2019, non-native English teachers remained to be viewed inferior to the native ones in terms of linguistics and pedagogical aspects and often underwent concealed discriminations such as receiving a lower pay package and a heavier teaching load (Floris & Renandya, 2020). This paper will argue that, in the context of teaching English as an international language, non-native English teachers have more

advantages than native English teachers. This paper will first highlight the English language teaching fallacies that make native English teachers are dominant than non-native ones in ELT profession. This will be followed by strengths and weaknesses of native and non-native English teachers. Finally, some conclusions will be drawn.

## **DISCUSSION**

Assuming that the goal of English learners in outer and expanding circle countries to study English is to be able to communicate with people from inner circle countries is one of the fallacies in English language teaching (Matsuda, 2019). When this fallacy is perpetuated, the assumption that native English speakers are the ideal teachers to teach English will be justified. Native English teachers are perceived to have the knowledge of their own culture, standard and non-stand form of English and they can use idiomatic expression fluently and this knowledge will be useful for the learners whose purpose is to communicate with the native speakers. However, it cannot be denied that more and more people from outer and expanding countries are now learning English so that they can use the language among themselves. For example, a survey of destination of exchange students from China Three Gorges University showed that from 2006 to 2011, the majority of the students (more than 94.7%) went to study in expanding countries (South Korea, Austria, Denmark, Franca) while only 5,3 % went to America (Xiaoqiong & Xianxing, 2011). In this sense, native English teachers with their strengths are no longer ideal teachers in the outer and expanding circle countries. Another fact can be seen Indonesia where over the years, the number of international students in Indonesia has been increasing (Nurbatra, 2018) . In addition, according to the data by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, that in 2019, Japan, Germany, and France were in the top ten countries with the most Chinese students (Juawai.Asia, 2022).

Another fallacy regarding English language teaching is that native speaker model is regarded as the only appropriate model for learners of English. As a result, native English teachers have been perceived as the ideal teachers to teach this model, particularly in East and Southeast Asia (Kirkpatrick, 2010). This leads to a discrimination between native English teachers and non-native English teachers. Native English teachers have been sometimes preferred in employment (Clark & Paran, 2007). Even highly qualified non-native English teacher's teaching applications have been often rejected (Medgyes, 2001). The claim that native speaker model is the only ideal model for English learners cannot be justified as there

is no empirical evidence for this. English norms from the inner circle is no longer significantly used as a model (Kachru, 1992). The existence of local emerging Englishes such as Indian English, African English, and Singlish proves that English does not have to refer to native speaker model. In fact, the educated model of these English varieties has been applied in the classroom to create interactive classroom (Xiaoqiong & Xianxing, 2011). Furthermore, it has been suggested that, in learning English as international language, there is no need to learn norms of native speaker when the goal of learning English is to enable the learners to express their own cultures and identities (Schneider, 2007). At this point, native English teachers with their English model are no longer relevant to teach English in international context.

The next fallacy in English language teaching is that all native speakers can go on to teach in the outer and expanding circles (Xiaoqiong & Xianxing, 2011). Again, this fallacy positions native speakers as superior teachers compared to qualified non-native English teachers. In fact, native speakers, even without certificate degrees in teaching, are frequently recruited in some schools in expanding and outer circle countries. For example, English native speakers with US high school graduates are allowed to teach in some remote provinces in China (Qiang and Wolff, 2003a, cited in Jeon & Lee, 2006). In Taiwan, previous teaching experience and ESL certificates are not required to become teachers in most elementary and kinder-garden schools (Jeon & Lee, 2006). It can be seen from these examples, without strict recruitment process, the native speakers have considered able to teach in English. However, in reality, often these native speakers don't know how to teach and have very little knowledge of Asian culture (Xiaoqiong & Xianxing, 2011).

Despite the fallacies regarding English native teachers above, some researchers claim that native-English teacher have some strengths. Braine (2013) argues that native speaker teachers speak more fluently than non-native teachers and own sociolinguistic competence in which they know how to use English appropriately in different context as they have the knowledge of culture and communication rule and strategies of their own country. It may be true that these strengths can improve their teaching performance. Indeed, Benke & Medgyes (2005) in their study investigating learners' perspective on native English teachers describe that native speaker teachers effortlessly use their language in the classroom, focus more on speaking skills, and provide the students with amount of cultural information. In addition, It is argued that teaching pronunciation, vocabulary, and intonation, will be the strengths of native English teachers if compared to non-native ones. Some research findings seem to be in

line with this argument. (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005) explored 76 English learners' perception of native English teachers at a university in Spain. They found that the participants preferred native teachers in terms of pronunciation, speaking and listening but not on grammar knowledge as the participants argued the native teacher sometimes did not have knowledge to teach it. In addition, Wu & Ke (2009) investigated how 107 Taiwanese university students perceived native English teachers. They found that these participants prefer these teachers as a pronunciation model instead of a language educator. Furthermore, Walkinshaw & Oanh (2014) studied 100 English learners from Japan and Vietnam who have been taught by both native and non-native English teachers were asked regarding the advantages and disadvantages of learning English from native and non-native English teachers. With regard to native speaker teachers' advantages, most participants agreed that they could improve their pronunciation from these teachers as they could imitate the way the teachers spoke. In addition, the participants said that they could learn the teacher's cultures. However, almost half of the Vietnamese participants reported that the native teachers were not familiar with learner's culture and they said some misunderstandings and miscommunications occurred due to their different communication styles and values.

From the research findings concerning the strengths of native-English teachers discussed above, it seems that pronunciation model and teaching pronunciation become the biggest merits of native-English teachers. However, other research findings show that native-English teacher are not always good at teaching pronunciation. A study by Benke & Medgyes (2005) investigating 422 English learners from many different institutions in Hungaria found that even though native teachers were regarded as good model for imitation, their speech were sometimes difficult to understand and this sometimes impeded learning process in the classroom. (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005) found that even though learners admitted that they were motivated to listen to native teachers' pronunciation, these learners also reported that these teachers frequently were not successful in correcting students' own pronunciation. In addition to these research findings, it has been suggested that non-native English users do not need to pronounce words like what native speakers do as long as the interlocutors understand the meaning of the words. Jenkins (1998) argues that in the use of English as international language, the final goal of teaching pronunciation is no longer the acquisition of native-like accent. Instead, most English learners are now focusing on how they to convey their meaning of their utterances successfully regardless whether their pronunciation is native-like or not. In this sense, native teacher's strength concerning pronunciation might be useful only when

English learners want to speak like them. In other words, native teacher's superiority over non-native ones in teaching pronunciation in the context of EIL cannot be justified.

To strengthen the arguments against the superiority of native English teachers, there have been claims of some scholars advocating the advantages of non-native English teachers. Medgyes (2001) argues that there are some merits of non-native English teachers. First, they can teach language learning strategies more effectively. As successful language learners, these teachers are believed to have applied language learning strategies during their learning. In this case, these teachers can share their great experience to their students so that learners can also make use of it. Also, these teachers can assist the learners to find suitable strategies that work for them. Second, they can provide learners with more information about the English language. Non-native English teachers, during their learning process, have obtained a great deal of knowledge about English and they learn it consciously. As for the native-ones, they just know how to speak it and to write it but might not be able to explain how the language works. Third, they are believed to be more able to anticipate language difficulties of the learners. This might be due to the teachers' familiarity with the student's background. Fourth, non-native English teachers can be more empathetic to the needs and problems of their learners. These teachers, during their learning process, might also have had some problems but they knew how to solve them. With this experience, they can feel what their learners feel when the learners face problems. As a result, they possibly have ways to boost the student's motivation in learning the language. The last, it is argued that only non-native English teachers can benefit from sharing the learners' mother tongue. It has been suggested that L1 can be a great resource in L2 classroom to facilitate the learning process. For example, learners can explain difficult materials to the students when necessary. Kramsch (1997 cited in Lurda, 2004, p.318) argues that non-native English teachers are "endowed with the privilege of bilingualism". In other words, these teachers have the ability how to express their own culture and identity in English. As it has been proposed that, in the context of English as international language, learners' goals of learning English is expressing themselves in English (Lurda, 2004), this privilege will be more salient in English language teaching professions.

In addition to the claims adhering non-native English teacher's advantages above, some research findings also have advocated the merits of non-native English teachers. (Mahboob, 2003) investigated the status of non-native English-speaking teachers in TESOL in the United States. This study found that there was only a small number of non-native

teachers teaching ESL in the United States even though there were a big number of graduates of applied linguistics and TESOL programs who were English non-native speakers. Based on the questionnaire, TESOL program administrators said that they preferred native speakers due to the demand of the students wanting native speaker teachers. On the other hand, the students, who were also the participants of the study, reported that they did not necessarily prefer native speakers to non-native speakers as their teachers. Furthermore, the study found that non-native English teachers' teaching methodology, emotional support, and valuable experiences as English successful learners were useful for the students. Benke & Medgyes (2005) in Hungary, found that non-native English teacher comprehensively designed their lesson, prepared learners well to take exams, and kept checking the learner's error. Hungarian learners also preferred non-native English teachers because they could explain complex grammar very well as they could use the L1 if necessary. Non-native English teachers were also found to be sympathetic regarding learners' problem in studying English. Ling & Braine (2007) examined 420 Hongkong students' attitudes towards non-native English teachers. This study found that these participants perceived non-native teachers as effective teachers in teaching English which was comparable to native-ones. Ma (2012) investigated non-native English teacher's perception on the strengths and weaknesses of native and non-native English teachers. This study found that pedagogical aspects were perceived as the main strengths of non-native English teachers. It was indicated that non-native English teachers understood student's need, learning difficulties, and language abilities. However, some of these non-native teachers felt unconfident concerning their pronunciation which was not like native-speakers. Again, this pronunciation issue cannot be regarded as a weakness of non-native teachers as there is no need to have native speaker's pronunciation in the use of English as international language and there is no reason for them to be unconfident.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the dominance of native English speaker teachers over non-native English teachers in ELT profession is caused by wrong assumptions about English language teaching. First, it is assumed that the goal of English is to communicate with the native speakers. Second, native speakers are regarded as the only good model for learning English. Third, it is assumed that all native speakers can teach English. On one hand, some of the research findings found that native-English teachers are still preferred by some students because they can be a pronunciation model for the students. On the other hand, some research

findings also found that they cannot teach pronunciation effectively and for some students and their pronunciation are sometimes difficult to understand. In addition, it has been suggested that intelligibility is much more important than native-like pronunciation in the context of English as international language. As for non-native speaker teachers, they have been found to be more appropriate to teach English due to their endowed multilingual competence, their understanding of learners' needs and difficulties, and great experiences as successful learners of English. Thus, native speaker teachers cannot be regarded as ideal English teachers since non-native English teachers have more strengths than the native ones in teaching English as an international language.

## REFERENCES

- Benke, E., & Medgyes, P. (2005). Differences in teaching behavior between native and nonnative teachers. In E. Lurda (Ed.), *Nonnative language teachers: perceptions, challenges and contributions to the profession* (pp. 195–215). Springer.
- Braine, G. (2013). *Non-native educators in English language teaching*. New York: Routledge.
- Clark, E., & Paran, A. (2007). The employability of non-native-speaker teachers of EFL: A UK survey. *System*, 35(4), 407–430. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2007.05.002>
- Floris, F. D., & Renandya, W. A. (2020). Promoting the Value of Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers. *PASAA*, 59, 1–19.
- Herman, H., Shara, A. M., Silalahi, T. F., Sherly, S., and Julyanthry, J. (2022). Teachers' Attitude towards Minimum Competency Assessment at Sultan Agung Senior High School in Pematangsiantar, Indonesia. *Journal of Curriculum and Teaching, Vol. 11, No. 2, PP. 01-14*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5430/jct.v11n2p1>
- Jenkins, J. (1998). Which pronunciation norms and models for English as an International Language? *ELT Journal*, 52(2), 119–126. <http://eltj.oxfordjournals.org/>
- Jeon, M., & Lee, J. (2006). Hiring native-speaking English teachers in East Asian countries. *English Today*, 22(4), 53–58. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266078406004093>
- Juawai.Asia. (2022). Top five study abroad destinations for 2022. *Juawai.Asia*.
- Kachru, B. (1992). *The other tongue: English across cultures* (1st ed.). University of Illinois Press.
- Kirkpatrick, A. (2010). *English as a lingua franca in ASEAN*. Hongkong University Press.

- Lasagabaster, D., & Sierra, J. M. (2005). What do students think about the pros and cons of having a native-speaker teacher? In L. E (Ed.), *Nonnative language teachers: perceptions, challenges and contributions to the profession* (pp. 217–242). Springer.
- Ling, C. Y., & Braine, G. (2007). The attitudes of university students towards non-native speakers English teachers in Hong Kong. *RELC Journal*, 38(3), 257–277. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688207085847>
- Llurda, E. (2004). Non-native-speaker teachers and English as an International Language. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 14(3), 314–323.
- Ma, L. P. F. (2012). Strengths and weaknesses of NESTs and NNESTs: Perceptions of NNESTs in Hong Kong. *Linguistics and Education*, 23(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2011.09.005>
- Mahboob, A. (2003). *Status of nonnative English-speaking teachers in the United States (unpublished doctoral dissertation)*. Indiana University.
- Matsuda, A. (2019). World Englishes in English language teaching: Kachru's six fallacies and the TEIL paradigm. *World Englishes*, 38(1–2), 144–154. <https://doi.org/10.1111/weng.12368>
- Medgyes, P. (2001). When the teacher is a non-native speaker. In Celce-Murcia (Ed.), *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (pp. 429–442). Heinle & Heinle.
- Nurbatra, L. H. (2018). International students in multicultural classrooms: a case study on the internationalization in Indonesian higher education. *PIONEER: Journal of Language and Literature*, 10(2), 95–113.
- Purba, R., Herman, H., Purba, A., Hutauruk, A. F., Silalahi, D. E., Julyanthry, J., and Grace, E., (2022). Improving teachers' competence through the implementation of the 21st century competencies in a post-covid-19 pandemic. *Jurnal Masyarakat Mandiri*, 6(2), PP. 1486-1497. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31764/jmm.v6i2.7340>
- Schneider, E. W. (2007). *Postcolonial English: Varieties around the world*. Cambridge Press.
- Selvi, A. F. (2014). Myths and Misconceptions About Nonnative English Speakers in the TESOL (NNEST) Movement. *TESOL Journal*, 5(3), 573–611. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.158>
- Walkinshaw, I., & Oanh, D. H. (2014). Native and non-native English language teachers: Student perceptions in Vietnam and Japan. *SAGE Open*, 4(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244014534451>
- Wu, K.-H., & Ke, C. (2009). English Language Teaching Haunting Native Speakerism? Students' Perceptions toward Native Speaking English Teachers in Taiwan. *English Language Teaching*, 2(3).
- Xiaoqiong, B. H., & Xianxing, J. (2011). Kachru's three concentric circles and English teaching fallacies in EFL and ESL contexts. *Changing English: Studies in Culture and Education*, 18(2), 219–228. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1358684X.2011.575254>