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NNESTs v.s. NESTs: Why Domestic English Teachers Should Not Worry about Their Foreign Counterparts

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Abstract: Not few renowned English courses have hired foreign English teachers to gain more learners, so do formal schools or universities. Some of the teachers are hired professionally, and some are volunteers as a part of an agreement between the institution and a non-profit organization to teach in developing countries. The presence of foreign English teachers or commonly known as NESTs (Native English-Speaking Teachers) in many Indonesian educational institutions is inevitable. Yet, so many pros and cons have shadowed their existence in ELT classes. Some people problematize their being overpaid and other question their educational background or teaching experience despite their being native. This phenomenon has created a gap between NESTs and their domestic counterparts. What are they supposed to think? Should domestic English teachers or known as NNESTs (Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers) be worried about this phenomenon? This paper tries to evaluate this phenomenon from several different points of view, especially with regards to the current status of English as a global language.

Key words: English as a global language, Indonesian ELT context, NESTs, NNESTs

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, either in formal or informal educational institutions in Indonesia, the presence of foreign English teachers is unavoidable. Most learners who are taught by them must feel delighted and enthusiastic, so does the board of the institution who hires them. The reason may be political, which is to promote the institution in order to attract more customers. But how about the fellow teachers, who happen to be non-native English speakers? What do they perceive about their foreign counterparts who work among them in the same institution?

In the scope of TESOL (Teaching English for Speakers of Other Languages) like in Indonesia where English only serves as a foreign language, the dichotomy between the domestic English teachers or NNESTs (Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers) and NESTs (Native English-Speaking Teachers) is so obvious. This paper dissects this dichotomy by addressing the Indonesian ELT context and its NNESTs, in particular, by referring to a range of literatures proposed by many scholars.

2. NESTs AND NNESTs

2.1 The Dichotomy: A Subject to Debate

NESTs and NNESTs are "two different species" (Medgyes, 1994; 2001: p. 434), who by natural only belong to just one category. This see-through dichotomy makes defining NESTs and NNESTs problematic. The term native speaker itself has been a subject to debate by many scholars, especially when associated to the current status of English.

Cook (1999) states that a native speaker is a monolingual person who still speaks the language learned in childhood, while McKay (2002) points out that in the case of NESTs, English must be the first language that is learned. Perhaps, Davies' (1991) definition that a native English speaker is anyone born in any English speaking country is probably the most obvious feature a NEST has. Nevertheless, Medgyes (2001) challenges this definition by arguing that the 'native speakers' (Holliday, 2005) of some people who were born in a country where English becomes their mother tongue but then moved to another country where these people no longer used English as their first language can no longer be fully accepted.

Even using Kachru's (1985) three concentric circles that separate English and non-English speaking countries based on the classification whether those countries were never colonized, were the colonies, or the colonizers does not really help legitimizing the native speakers' of people who are addressed

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as native English speakers just because of their place of birth.

Meanwhile, to define NNESTs is also not undebatable. According to Medgyes (2001: p. 433), NNESTs are teachers who use English as either a second or a foreign language, work in an EFL environment, teach learners who are monolingual, and speak the same native language as their learners.

Even so, the encounter between NESTs and NNESTs in a global context that has created a binary opposition often brings about disparities that outweigh NESTs more than NNESTs in their workplace. Then, what is the need to scrutinize these issues? Why should NNESTs, especially, be aware of this dichotomy? But at the same time, why shouldn't they be worried of the NESTs working in the same roof with them?

Stereotyping ELT teachers either as NESTs or NNESTs is now deemed discriminatory, argued by Medgyes (2001). Despite its controversy, NESTs often receive more benefits of their whereabouts as being the native speakers of English, which will be explained further in the next part.

3 NESTs

3.1 What Privileges They Have and How NNESTs Should React

The existence of native English speakers in Indonesian ELT classes has mushroomed in the past two or three decades. These people mostly come from countries where English is their first language such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, or Australia. Only some are from countries where English serves as a second language like South Africa, India, the Philippines, and so on.

In Indonesia, these native English speakers teaching either in secondary or tertiary levels of education have various backgrounds. Some are professional English teachers who have got degrees in ELT, some are simply native speakers of English despite their educational background or teaching experience. As stated by Kramsch (1998: p. 79), NESTs:

> *"have traditionally enjoyed a natural prestige as language teachers, because they are seen as not only embodying the 'authentic' use of the language, but as representing its original cultural contexts as well."*

It is not too much to say that even when NESTs has neither teaching experience nor relevant educational background, they still carry "stereotypical features" (Kramsch, 1998: 80) that make them unusually capable of teaching English in whatever circumstances they face. However, some difficulties are sometimes faced by these NESTs when handling the class due to different "linguistic, cultural and personal backgrounds" (Medgyes, 2001, p. 438). This is actually an advantageous situation for NNESTs, which will be discussed later.

As mentioned earlier, there is no doubt that many ELT learners feel more enthusiastic to be taught by a native speaker of English. For them, it is sort of free ticket since they do not need to travel abroad in order to have real conversations with the natives. Being taught by NESTs also gives the learners a pleasure because being able to practice the language they are learning with people who are the native speakers of the language creates a particular sense that they seldom have with their local teachers. Naturally, this often makes NESTs more preferable by the learners than their domestic counterparts. Any institution hiring NESTs knows well that doing so may lure more learners to enroll. Yet, this "manifestation of a business approach in the age of neoliberalism" (Mahboob & Golden, 2013; Selvi, 2010, 2014) has been largely critized due to exploitation.

Another privilege is that financially, NESTs are often paid more than their NNESTs, and sometimes they are provided with facilities the NNESTs seldom get. Shin's (2004) study reveals that NESTs are paid higher salaries albeit no qualification to teach, whereas NNESTs need to have a certificate in teaching and even with advanced qualifications, they still receive a lower salary. It is probably the most sensitive issue the NNESTs can have, given the fact that teachers in Indonesia cannot earn satisfactorily only by working as teachers.

Even though the NESTs' presence seems to give a lot of advantages for the school, it creates a noticeable space among other

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teachers, particularly the non-native ones. Nonetheless, despite all this fuss, NNESTs should be able to respond this wisely. They might be different from the NESTs in many ways, but they have to realize that they actually own some strength, too.

4 NNESTs

4.1 Stop Saying "My English is Bad"

The more people in the world learn English, the more varieties of English exist, which has given birth to the term World Englishes that refers to "indigenous, nativised varieties that have developed around the world and that reflect the cultural and pragmatic norms of their speakers" (Kirkpatrick, 2007: p. 3). The growth of English varieties has resulted in many shifts and changes in the global ELT scope, which also gives impacts to the dichotomy between NESTs and NNESTs.

As English is widely used in various international communications, learning English becomes inescapable. The number of non-native English learners has been growing rapidly since then. In turns, the number of NNESTs in the world surpasses the NESTs (Medgyes, 2001). This fact should be able to empower NNESTs to be more confident in teaching English and to ensure themselves that they are as capable as their native counterparts. In Indonesia, either ELT teachers or learners are often found saying, "Sorry, my English is bad." This must no longer exist anymore.

The current state of English also benefits NNESTs as bilinguals in certain ways, with regards to the current ELT pedagogies that are more suitable for them. The use of English as the *lingua franca*, a language used by people who do not speak the same first language (Kirkpatrick, 2007), such as English; has affected the development of ELT practices worldwide. It helps ELT industries grow rapidly and steadily since everyone in the world feels the need to learn it.

As English has transformed into a global language (Crystal, 2003) where many countries either make it their official language in government, the media, and the educational system or as a priority in the countries' foreign-language teaching even if it has no official status, there are some shifts in ELT pedagogies that the NNESTs in Indonesia should acknowledge. However, not many local English teachers in Indonesia are aware of the current state of English and its consequences in global ELT context.

Again, as English grows into many different varieties and is taught in many different cultural contexts, the ownership of English can no longer be claimed and monopolized by certain countries, like native English speaking countries, for instance. In the end, many different schemes of ELT practices like TEIL (Teaching English as an International Language), TELF (Teaching English as a *Lingua Franca*, or TEGCOM (Teaching English for Glocalized Communication) have emerged.

In the case of TEIL, for instance, NNESTS are not supposed to feel insecure with their own language proficiency. The term 'international' in EIL means more than just a language being learned and used worldwide. TEIL practices carry a big deal of paradigm which attempts to enable the learners to maintain their culture and express their own identity when using English, in a global sense of EIL. In a local sense, English "becomes embedded in the culture of the country in which is it used" (McKay, 2002: p. 12). In addition, as English is now denationalized, Shin (2004: p. 73) argues that English learners "do not have to internalize the ideas and behaviors of the target culture," the culture possessed by the native speakers of English.

In line with the aforementioned argument about the current status of English, however, not few English teachers in Indonesia are indifferent with this issue, partly because they don't know or they already have fixed views on English and English teaching, by worshipping Standard English and even nativespeakerism. Some do that because they still think that learning English demand learning a sole culture, the culture of native speakers of English.

That is why domestic English teachers should stop apologizing and saying their English is bad just because English is not their first language. When the NNESTs feel confident with their English, so will the learners. Additionally, as asserted by

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Rajagopalan, (1999, as cited in Llurda, 2004), NNESTs should not feel ashamed of doing their job, instead, they should constantly maintain multicultural and critical perspectives in their ELT process.

4.2 The Perks of Being NNESTs

Compared to NESTs, the NNESTs are in reality considered better than their foreign counterparts (Medgyes, 1992; 1994: p. 346-7; McKay, 2002: p. 44) in many samples of TESOL classes. Medgyes confirms this by hodling a survey on around 220 NESTs and NNESTs who worked in ten different nations. The results of his study surprisingly corroborate the values NNESTs actually have, especially when they are dealing with non-native English learners.

Firstly, only NNESTs can serve as imitable models of the successful learner of English, because they are the living samples for their learners of how non-native English learners are capable of mastering the language. Secondly, NNESTs can teach learning strategies more effectively since they have been through the same learning experiences as non-natives. Many Indonesian NNESTs seldom realize that they are actually the appropriate model for their own learners since they have become learners of English for approximately more than ten years, who have also been struggling to master English by utilizing a great variety of learning strategies that they can pass down to their learners.

Thirdly, NNESTs can provide learners with more information about the English language. This is probably because they possess more knowledge of English during the learning process than NESTs, although NEST might have better intuitions on what is right and wrong in language use. This is exactly what the learners need, the need to acknowledge the process of learning, not only the language use. Next, NNESTs are more able to anticipate language difficulties, especially those dealing with cross-cultural difficulties.

Then, NNESTs can be more empathetic to the needs and problems of their learners because they know exactly what the real situations prevailing in the learners' context. Last but not least, only NNESTs can benefit from sharing the learners' mother tongue, mostly because the NESTs might not be able to reach the learners through the learners' first language.

The findings above have proven why NNESTs are not less capable than the NESTs and they can be the right model for their learners, who are also non-native speakers of English. In this case, NNESTs are proven to possess some privileges they rarely realize, that are beneficial for themselves as well as for their learners during their teaching and learning processes.

5 CONCLUSION

With the growing number of non-native English speakers around the world, non-native norms of English have multiplied abundantly. It results in adopting and accepting the many varieties of Englishes from which, as remarked by Lowenberg (as cited in Matsuda, 2012: p. 85), "these linguistic innovations and modifications are so widespread that many have become de facto local norms for Standard English usage.

As the fixed definition of Standard English has been redefined, we need to consider not to lean on too much on it and start to empower our being non-native English speakers or even NNESTs to enable us in making use of the language to actively participate in a variety of international and multicultural communications instead.

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