

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF NON-NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKER TEACHERS IN THE CONTEXT OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE**

Lutfi Ashar Mauludin  
Master of Arts  
The Ohio State University

### **Abstrak**

Guru penutur asli Bahasa Inggris dan non-penutur asli Bahasa Inggris masing-masing memiliki kelebihan dan kekurangan. Namun, bagi siswa yang mempelajari Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa asing, guru non-penutur asli memiliki kelebihan. Setidaknya, ada empat faktor kelebihan yang hanya bisa di kuasai oleh guru non-penutur asli, yaitu pengetahuan dasar, komunikasi yang efektif, pemahaman kesulitan dan kebutuhan siswa, serta pengaruh multi-budaya dan keanekaragaman. Berdasarkan faktor-faktor tersebut, bisa disimpulkan bahwa guru non-penutur asli memiliki peran yang lebih penting dalam meningkatkan kemampuan ber-Bahasa Inggris siswa.

*Keywords: NESTs, NNESTs, EFL, Learning*

### **I. Introduction**

It is well known that the status of native speakers of English in English language learning has been widely recognized. Having native-English-speaking teachers (NESTs) is considered to be prestigious, and many schools proudly hire them to advertise the school as well as improve the quality. In some Asian countries, such Korea and Japan, the tendency to choose NESTs as English instructor in formal education is quite high. In Korea, for example, public schools hire NESTs under the English Program in Korea (EPIK) to improve the communicative abilities of the students (Kasai, Lee, & Kim, 2011). This also happens in Japan where public schools hire NESTs through the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) program. The assumption that having NESTs is one of the main factors to acquire English successfully is one of the main reason. This assumption brings us to the discussion of whether NESTs are the best choice to teach English in foreign language setting.

In today's context, the globalization and internationalization of English in most level of education is considered as the major need to improve the quality of education. The social and economy factor pushed the decision maker to include English as one of the major subjects to be included in formal education. In countries that English is a foreign language, this is a challenge.

The challenge is mostly because English is not language that is spoken in daily conversation. Therefore, the students who learn English will find it difficult to apply it in real life. When they need to speak the language that unfamiliar with, they will find many impediments and obstructions. Furthermore, the gaps between the native language, which is Bahasa Indonesia and the target language, English is very big. This can be considered another challenge for them.

However, it should be noticed that the fact shows the number of nonnative speakers of English is greater than native speakers (Moussu & Llurda, 2008). Therefore, the number of people who want to learn English or the number of nonnative students that learn English are also greater than the native ones. That means the number of Non-Native English Speaker Teachers (NNESTs) are also greater than the native one. This brings the notion that not all the English education in foreign country can be taught by NESTs. This fact leads the discussion about the qualification of NNESTs as an English teacher. Are they good enough? Are they acceptable to teach English? These questions leads the argument of whether NNESTs are as good as NESTs or whether NESTs are necessarily better teachers than NNESTs.

Some researches to investigate the qualification and the role of NNESTs in English education has showed several facts that may change the current assumption. Although, having NESTs in English language learning is considered popular, there is no sufficient evidence that shows NESTs are better teachers (Ma, 2012). Some studies show the importance of NNESTs in helping students master and acquire English better than NESTs. Some points have been investigated to find out the factors that influence students' achievement in learning language. They are knowledge of the subject, effective communication, understanding students' difficulties/needs, and the influence of multiculturalism and diversity.

## **II. Knowledge of the Subject**

One of the main advantages of being NESTs is the value of being a linguistic model. Since English is their mother tongue, they are considered to have good English competency (Ma, 2012) NESTs can perform accurate pronunciation and accurate grammar which are a very good source for language model. In Ma's study, some students commented that learning pronunciation with NESTs was regarded as learning 'real' pronunciation. That means students felt that they can learn from the main resource. Furthermore, the studies also reported that NESTs have the ability to sense grammar contextually. This helps students to

learn grammar in context, not only in theory. For high level students, this is very helpful since it is more practical. Barrat & Kontra (2000) add that beside authentic pronunciation and grammar, NESTs bring a wide-range of vocabulary and critical information on how to use it which makes them valuable resources in learning English.

However, it should be noticed that being a good linguistic model is not enough to educate learners. The most important thing is the method. How good your ability is, if you cannot your transfer, it will be useless. Talking about language proficiency of NNESTs, though many people may underestimate but some studies show that NNESTs can perform English as good as NESTs.

Being a good linguistic model is not limited with being able to speak specific language fluently. In learning English, there are a lot of factors that influence the students learning process, therefore it is a complicated matter. One of the main factors is the experience. NNESTs have the experience of being students that make them have better insight of learning English. They learned English through several steps and they are experienced in dealing with problems and gaps in learning the language. By knowing this, the NNESTs can be a perfect example of successful language learners. Thus, the students can learn the strategy and motivation in learning the target language by looking at the way NNESTs learn the language.

According to their study in one of the universities in Hong Kong, Ling and Braine (2007) mentioned that NNESTs have similar language proficiency with NESTs. They are also considered being unable to achieve native speaker competence. However, in reality, some NNESTs have very high English proficiency levels. Surprisingly, in terms of pedagogical skill of English knowledge and grammar, NNESTs perform better. These are some advantages that NNESTs have over the NESTs. NNESTs are able to create and prepare materials according to curriculum and students' needs. They also know the structure of materials that are suitable with the students' competence. They are knowledgeable because they know the culture and the condition of the students.

The subject of English is not simply the subject of grammar or variety of vocabulary, but also the way the subject is explained or conveyed to the students. The nonnative students mostly are unfamiliar with a lot of things related with the target language. Some of them even are not motivated to learn the language since they only learn the language because it is a requirement, not because they need it. Therefore, the understanding of this challenge and the students' difficulties is very important. Being engaged with the condition and the culture of

the students, NNESTs can plan a variety of lessons and materials that suitable with their condition and their need, especially for the unmotivated ones.

Having proficiency in English is very important, but the proficiency to teach the language effectively is important as well. The challenges in teaching the language in a foreign language setting are complicated and it needs time to find the solution. NNESTs have upper hand in this case since NNESTs share a lot of similarities with the students. By sharing the same culture and experience, the NNESTs can effectively motivate and support the students' need in learning the target language.

This actually shows that in a foreign language setting, having a good proficiency of English is not sufficient. The social culture that involves around the students is considered to be important. In fact, it is one of the most important thing because the culture of first language and the target language is totally different. NESTs who has no experience or familiarity with the students' culture will find it difficult. Or even, the students will find it difficult to adjust the culture of NESTs since it is a foreign culture. This factor influences the students' achievement a lot. Thus, understanding the knowledge of the culture, and the knowledge of students' level of ability are also important.

Furthermore, in terms of grammar knowledge, NESTs may have better understanding based on the native intuition; however, they may not have metalanguage for explaining grammatical rules (Ma, 2012). Since NESTs acquire language without teaching and learning process, they understand grammar as part of communication in a contextual situation. It is difficult for students to understand NESTs' way of thinking in learning grammar. On the other hand, some studies show that NNESTs are more competent in teaching grammar (Kasai et al., 2011; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2002; Ma, 2012; Moussu, 2010). This is because they can differentiate the meaning in both languages, so they can find ways to make students understand the concept. Therefore, in teaching grammar, NNESTs have better concept and ways of thinking than NESTs since NNESTs can show the process of learning grammar from L1 perspectives. This is an important point since grammar is one of the main problems that is faced by the students. By understanding the perspectives from learners' point of view, the teachers can find solution to overcome students' difficulties.

It is important to have a good role model in learning English such as NESTs. However, it is also important to point out that having linguistic competence is not enough to become a good teacher (Ma, 2012). In teaching EFL, the most important thing is not which one is more qualified between the NESTs or NNESTs based on their proficiency, but

professionalism (Liu, 1999). The ESL or EFL teachers need to have adequate professional training to teach EFL. The emphasis is in the professional matters.

One of the problems dealing with NESTs is the tendency to hire them because of their language proficiency only. Most schools or institutions in foreign country hire NESTs mostly because they speak English and they come from English speaking country. Most of them usually do not come from the field of education. This is actually a problem. Teaching English is not merely transferring word by word or introducing several expressions. It deals with transferring the knowledge from person to people. The way they transfer the knowledge can vary in terms of its success since the students are vary. The students have different language skills and experience as well as level of understanding. Those are the factors that are considered in the field of education. For someone who do not learn from the field of education, they cannot perform comprehensively in the teaching and learning process.

Therefore, if we look at teaching process of English in foreign language setting, the real role model that can be followed by students is the model who has achieved the knowledge through several stages. Thus, he/she can transfer his/her experience and his/her strategies to the students (Alseweed, 2012). In other words, teachers should be good learner models. By being learner models, teachers can share their knowledge of acquiring language, so students can follow their steps to accomplish the same objectives. It also should be emphasized that experience is more important than native language background (Moussu & Llurda, 2008). By having experience, teachers can develop language awareness that can be useful to provide linguistic information about the language to the students. So, the knowledge of English and the knowledge of how to acquire English are equally important. Those elements only can be performed by NNESTs.

### **III. Effective Communication**

According to some studies, NESTs have the ability to facilitate learning English in terms of pronunciation & speaking/listening skill (Lasagabaster, & Sierra, 2002; Ma, 2012). In Ma's study, she found that NESTs were able to improve English fluency since they could create an authentic English-speaking environment. In that situation, students were forced to communicate in English (Barrat & Kontra, 2000). Students can learn pronunciation directly from the authentic source. That way, students can learn English effectively and efficiently since they practice it in a real situation. Teachers and students can have effective communication while discussing the materials as well as practicing their fluency. In other words, NESTs are competent in teaching conversational/oral skills (Kasai et al., 2011;

Lasagabaster, & Sierra, 2002; Moussu, 2010). Furthermore, NESTs also help students to improve their listening skills (Ma, 2012). In the process of communication with NESTs, students are forced to listen to English all the time. As a result, the students become familiar with the pronunciation and the accent of English.

On the other hand, if NESTs can provide effective communication by creating an English-speaking environment to improve students' speaking skills, NNESTs can provide the use of L1 as an easy communication (Ling, & Brain, 2007; Ma, 2012). The use of students' L1 has some benefits. According to Ma (2012) there are two benefits of L1 use. First, it could help the students to improve their understanding in lessons. Especially for beginners or those who have limited vocabulary, the use of L1 is very important to help them understand the basic knowledge. Second, it could help facilitating communication between teachers and students. Students can ask questions without being worried about using English. If students do not understand the problem, teachers can explain it using students' L1 (Ling & Brain, 2007). Furthermore, the students also can communicate with the teacher easily without anxiety. They can practice their English without anxiety since they share the same language and experience. Some students who have limited English feel much more relaxed with NNESTs.

Viewing the advantages of both NESTs and NNESTs in providing effective communication, I can say that NNESTs have more advantages since NNESTs can provide effective communication for both high and low level students. Meanwhile, NESTs can only create an effective communication with high level students. For low level students, this situation will make them anxious and depressed. In her study, Ma (2012) states that some students felt anxious when meeting NESTs. That is because some of them think about the high expectations that come from NESTs. Some students also have difficulty in understanding materials because of rapid speech and difficult vocabulary. When they want to ask questions, they find it difficult since they have limited vocabulary. It also causes anxiety.

In some cases, NNESTs' linguistic competence is more appropriate to be used for learners since they share the same linguistic background. If NESTs can create an authentic English-speaking environment that probably can only be enjoyed by motivated or high level students, NNESTs can create an environment that can be enjoyed by all level of students. For high level students, NNESTs can provide all English communication, and for lower students, NNESTs can help them by using L1 to improve their understanding. Thus, NNESTs can provide effective communication for both high and low level students.

#### **IV. Understanding Students' Need/Difficulty**

There are some studies that show the ability of NESTs to understand the students' difficulties/needs by creating a comfortable classroom atmosphere, the use of an activity approach, and less text-book bound teaching (Ma, 2012). NESTs typically can make a "fun" learning environment by doing several activities such as storytelling, making jokes, or sharing experiences. Some of them also use games and activities to attract students' attention. Most of the games are also used to enhance students understanding in lessons. NESTs also create more flexible and innovative lessons by focusing on the development of oral skills and vocabulary (Kasai et al., 2011).

However, NNESTs also can understand students' difficulties/needs. In fact, they know better because of their previous experiences as English learners (Alseweed, 2012; Kasai, Et al, 2011). By having experience in the process of second or foreign language learning, NNESTs have better insights into the language learning process (Ling, & Braine, 2007). Teachers can share their problems and difficulties and offer effective learning strategies. They can also anticipate their learning difficulties and can be more empathetic have more empathy towards learners' needs (Ma, 2012). Furthermore, they can create structured methods and realistic learning goals to acquire language based on their own experience.

One of the most important thing that the NNESTs have and NESTs do not have is the ability to use the metalanguage to the students. In teaching grammar, for example, there are lot of differences between the first language and the target language. For beginner learners, this is the first big challenge. For those who do not speak English at all will find it really difficult to learn the structure of English without proper explanation. NNESTs actually have the special method to help the students. They use the metalanguage to explain some difficult words or difficult structure using their first language. This is very helpful to improve the students' basic understanding. Again, it should be remembered that learning English in foreign setting is totally different in native setting, so the explanation about basic knowledge of English is very significant. For beginner level, NNESTs are very helpful in this part.

The ability to create a fun and relaxed environment as well as creative classroom does not only belong to NESTs. NNESTs also can create fun and enjoyable classroom. The ability to create a fun and relaxed classroom is not determined by language background. Although there is no study to explain this, based on Ling & Braine's (2007) finding about students' perception of NNESTs, students think that their teachers are very good. They teach how to learn independent learning and provide structured material that is easy to follow. Alseweed (2012) also mentions that in his study students do not behave differently towards NESTs and

NNESTs' teaching styles. It can be assumed that in general, students do not have any problems with NNESTs' teaching styles.

Dealing with students' difficulties to accomplish objectives in language learning, NNESTs are better. Most of the studies agree that NNESTs can respond to the students' needs effectively (Alseweed, 2012; Kasai et al.; Ma, 2012). For example, NNESTs know the objectives better than NESTs. It is a fact that in most schools that teach English as Foreign Language, testing is the main objective. Unlike the NESTs who more focus on communicative language, NNESTs also provide materials that focus on passing the examination (Ma, 2012). Even though some students think that this is one of the NNESTs' shortcomings (Ling, & Braine, 2007), some students also think that it is important since it is their study objective (Ma, 2012). Moreover, NNESTs also provide a more structured approach to teaching grammar. They help students with grammar and vocabulary difficulty with the support of L1.

## **V. The influence of multiculturalism and diversity**

Canagarajah (1999) mentioned that almost 80% of English teachers around the world are NNESTs. This notion brings the factor of multiculturalism and diversity since most the teachers are from many different background and cultures. The definition of English language culture is abstract since, as previously mentioned that, the speakers of English come from a variety of background and cultures. Although it is clear that some of country of origin such as England, Australia, or United States speak English, but it cannot be single out that their culture are the same. Their culture are also totally different. So it is important to introduce the culture of the English.

With the huge number of NNESTs, the culture of learning English and the method of teaching English can be varied. There is no specific method of teaching English that can be successfully applied in any contexts. Each country has its own culture and differences as well as challenges. Therefore, teaching English in specific country also different. NESTs that do not understand the culture of nonnative students will create a big gap between the students. Although, the teacher may not recognize it, the students will suffer the most. They will find it a burden to learn about something that are not familiar with their culture. Therefore, NNESTs can actively promote the multiculturalism and diversity in terms of teaching method that are suitable with the culture of their students.

Seloni (2012) stated that it is important to recognize the role of NNESTs to improve the understanding of multiculturalism and diversity. NNESTs can help to give the classroom

opportunity to teach the students how to reconstruct and engage the culture of English learning. By having this education, the learner will understand that the language of English does not belong to a specific group. As a global language, it is important for the students to understand the concept of English as the language of the world that consists of many cultures, not only a specific culture. Therefore, by understanding this, the students will have a positive attitude toward the difference aspect of English that they may encounter.

NNESTs can offer several pedagogical implications on the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991). First of all, NNESTs can create the dialogic space around multiethnic texts. This can help students to make a genuine multicultural and multilingual experience where the students do not only learn about the dominant setting of western world. Literacy can be a great advantage to be used as a tool to promote the multiculturalism. Through literacy, the students will not only learn the knowledge of language, but the social phenomena that happen around the language. The way of life, and the way the English speakers do are important part in understanding the use of English in daily life. The students also need to learn the global community with its real political and cultural complexities. English is used as international language which means it is a tool to unite global community. As an international language, it represented many cultures and background. Therefore, learning language is parallel with learning the culture.

Secondly, NNESTs can be seen as a model of multilingual and multicultural educators. They can show the diversity of English speakers, and emphasize that, although it is important to understand the homogenous culture of the target language of English, understanding the heterogeneous of global English is also necessary. The ones who can speak English well is not only the native speaker, but nonnative can also. By looking at the NNESTs as their model of language, the students will gain confidence and motivation that, you don't have to look like English person to be able to speak English.

Last but not least, the practice on multiple literacy in different culture can promote and develop creative learning for the students. As previously discussed, literature can be a great resource to learn English. Furthermore, it is also effective as media to learn the origin of English culture and other cultures. The use of literacy can be very effective to be used as creative tools to engage students in teaching and learning process. Therefore, through literacy, the students can learn both the structure of English knowledge and the culture of it equally.

## **VI. Conclusion**

It is not wise to generally say that NNESTs are better than NESTs and vice versa. Both NNESTs and NESTs are equally important in the development of English as Foreign language as well as English as Second language. However, it should be considered that in the foreign language setting, we cannot ignore several factors that can mostly help the students to achieve better improvement. Therefore, although some studies (Alseweed, 2012; Kasai et al., 2007; Ma, 2012) emphasized the equality existence of NESTs and NNESTs, I believe that in a foreign language context, NNESTs are better at helping students enhance their English competence. Having experience in learning and teaching situations, I believe that knowledge of how to acquire language, effective communication both in L1 and L2, understanding of students' needs and also the ability to introduce multiculturalism and diversity can only be provided effectively by NNESTs.

## **References**

- Alseweed, M.A. (2012). University students' perceptions of the influence of native and non-native teachers. *English Language Teaching*, 5(12), 42-53.
- Barratt, L., & Kontra, E. H. (2000). Native-English-speaking teachers in cultures other than their own. *TESOL Journal*, 9(3), 19-23.
- Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Canagarajah, S. (1999). Interrogating "native speaker fallacy": Nonlinguistic roots, non-pedagogical results. In G. Braine (Ed.), *Non-native educators in English language teaching* (pp. 77-92). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Kasai, M., Lee, J. A., & Kim, S. (2011). Secondary EFL students' perceptions of native and nonnative English-speaking teachers in Japan and Korea. *Asian EFL Journal*, 13(3), 272-300.
- Lasagabaster, D., & Sierra, J. M. (2002). University students' perceptions of native and non-native speaker teachers of English. *Language Awareness*, 11(2), 132-142.
- 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.
- Liu, J. (1999). Nonnative-English-Speaking Professionals in TESOL. *Tesol Quarterly*, 33(1), 85-102.
- Ma, L. P. F. (2012). Advantages and disadvantages of native-English-speaking teachers:

- Students perceptions in Hong Kong. *TESOL Quarterly*, 46(2), 280-305.
- Moussu, L. (2010). Influence of teacher-contact time and other variables on ESL students' attitudes towards native- and nonnative-English-speaking teachers. *TESOL Quarterly*, 44(4), 746-768.
- Moussu, L., & Llurda, E. (2008). Non-native English-speaking English language teachers: History and research. *Language Teaching*, 41(3), 315-348.
- Seloni, L. (2012). Going beyond the native-nonnative English speaker divide in college courses: The role of nonnative English-speaking educators in promoting critical multiculturalism. *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching*, 23(3), 129-155.