

ELT IN INDONESIAN CONTEXT: WHICH ONE IS BETTER? NESTs OR NNESTs

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Abstract

Teachers are unquestionably a vital factor in the field of education and English teaching is no exception. Good teachers of English language must acquire, at minimum, three main skills: linguistic, pedagogic and cultural skills. In Indonesia, nowadays, many schools and universities not only employ non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs) who are of course Indonesian, but also native English speaking teachers (NESTs). This condition draws pros and cons and therefore it is important to know more deeply about the two kinds of teachers. This paper attempts to discuss the strength and weaknesses of both teachers. This discussion concludes that for ELT in Indonesian context, NNESTs should be prioritized more than NESTs.

Keywords: *teachers, ELT, NNESTs, NESTs*

Abstrak

Guru adalah faktor penting di bidang pengajaran, termasuk pengajaran bahasa Inggris. Guru bahasa Inggris yang baik harus memiliki minimal tiga keterampilan, yaitu keterampilan linguistik, pedagogik, dan kultural. Saat ini, di Indonesia terdapat banyak sekolah dan perguruan tinggi tidak hanya memperkerjakan guru bahasa Inggris yang bahasa aslinya bukan bahasa Inggris (NNESTs), tetapi juga guru bahasa Inggris penutur asli bahasa Inggris (NESTs). Keadaan ini memunculkan pro dan kontra dan oleh karena itu penting untuk mendalami kedua jenis guru ini. Artikel ini berusaha untuk melihat bahwa NNESTs lebih baik daripada NESTs. Kesimpulannya, dalam konteks ELT di Indonesia, NNESTs seharusnya lebih diprioritaskan daripada NESTs.

Kata kunci: *guru, pengajaran bahasa Inggris, NNESTs, NESTs*

INTRODUCTION

English is a global language. English language proficiency plays a significant role to professionals at both the national and international levels.¹ “Learning English language is one of science that should be learnt to all the people.”² There are approximately 750 million people speaking English as a foreign language³. As the fast-spreading usage of English occurs, people are getting more interconnected around the world. In Indonesia, English plays a special place since it is taught from primary until higher education. In the policy of the ministry of National Education, English subjects are directed to develop these skills so that graduates are able to communicate and discourse in English at a certain literacy level⁴.

Because of abundant effect of English in almost all aspects of life, the quantity of English learners inclines day by day. As a consequence, the teachers employed to teach English are not only native English speaker teachers (NESTs) but also non-native English speaker teachers (NNESTs). Due to this phenomenon, an increasing number of researches have been accomplished by many scholars (Sung⁵; Moussu & Llurda⁶;

¹ Rajprasit, K., Pratoomrat, P., Wang, T., Kulsiri, W., & Hemchua, S. (2014). Use of the English language prior to and during employment: Experiences and needs of Thai novice engineers. (*Global Journal of Engineering Education*, 16(1), 27–33).

² Suhono Suhono, “SURFACE STRATEGY TAXONOMY ON THE EFL STUDENTS’ COMPOSITION A STUDY OF ERROR ANALYSIS,” *Iqra’: Jurnal Kajian Ilmu Pendidikan* 1, no. 2 (2017): 1–30.

³ Taken from <http://www.britishcouncil.org>, accessed on June 12, 2017.

⁴ The ministry of National education, 2006.

⁵ Sung, M., C., *CNative of non-native? Exploring Hong Kong students’ perspectives*. Papers from the Lancaster University Postgraduate Conference in Linguistics & Language Teaching. . 2010.

⁶ Moussu, L. & Llurda, E. Non-native English-speaking language teachers: History and research. *Language Teaching*. 41:3. (Cambridge University Press. 2008)

Meadows & Muramatsu⁷). Some researches even present extensive debate on whether NESTs or NNESTs teach better.

Even though a majority of English language teachers are nonnative speakers of the language, as Mahboob et al. perceive, “they have been treated as step-children”⁸. Meaning to say, the English language teachers whose native language is not English are repeatedly seen worse than those whose native language is English. This statement is not fully correct since there are many NNESTs who show really good competence both in linguistic and pedagogic skills. However, it should be admitted that still, many Indonesians who teach English are really necessary to enhance their competencies in order to be able to compete with everyone coming from different countries to teach English in Indonesia.

In Indonesia, because of the expertness in English, NESTs are generally assumed as a better teacher of English. This is based on the fact that NESTs are the speaker whose native language is English so that they are fluent in speaking English. As a matter of fact, many schools, particularly in big cities, hire native speakers to be involved in English teaching. However, are the ideal teachers only determined from their mastery of a language or good pronunciation? Are native speakers really necessary?

In spite of the assumption that native speaker is the best English teacher; I am trying to convince that for English

⁷ Meadows, B & Muramatsu, Y. 2007 *Native speaker or non-native speaker teacher?: A report of student preferences in four different foreign language classrooms*. (Arizona: Arizona Working Papers in SLA & Teaching. 2007) p. 95- 104.

⁸ Mahboob, A., Uhrig, K., Hartford, B., & Newman, K. 2004. *Children of a lesser English: Nonnative English speakers as ESL teachers in English language programs in the United States*. In L. D. Kamhi-Stein (Ed.), *The State of the Non-Native Teachers in the United States*. (Michigan: University of Michigan Press. 2004.)

Language Teaching (ELT) in Indonesia, the students to learn English do not always need English speaking teachers. By deeply looking at some previous studies related this issue, this review paper attempts to convey some points of view on which NNESTs (native Indonesian teachers) are considered better than NESTs. However, this writing is not intended to deny the role of NESTs in Indonesian ELT. In the end of this paper, I, based on my experience of being taught by NESTs and NNESTs, assumed that both of them could take benefit each other to create the quality of English language teaching.

Native Indonesian Speakers: Are they Professional?

In the regard with the teachers' professionalism in Indonesia, the article 39, paragraph (2) of Law Number 20 Year 2003 regarding National Education System states that educators are professionals. The position of teachers and lecturers as professionals aims to implement the national education system and realize the goals of national education, namely the development of potential learners in order to become human beings who believe and pious to God Almighty, noble, healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent, as well as being a democratic and responsible citizen. This act is the legal foundation that the teacher in Indonesia has the equal position with other profession.

The question about whether Indonesian teachers deserve to teach English professionally arises because it is still often found that in many areas in Indonesia, the teachers of English are not yet well prepared so that the quality of the students' achievement does not yet meet the requirement. Many teachers need to have better training especially in term of linguistic skill.

If the standard of professionalism of teachers of English only depends on the fluency of English language, the NESTs must be more credible and more professionals because, according to Selvi, they are equipped with a genetically

endowed capacity to teach the language. Whereas, NNESTs are often perceived as the imitators of the language they are trying to learn⁹. Meaning to say, stating that nonnative speakers, in this case the native Indonesians, cannot be the professional teachers of English is not true. If there is something that makes NNESTs difficult to meet the requirement of being good teachers, what to do is improving their capability, not ignoring their role in the development of ELT in this country.

Why are NNESTs still often considered less professional than NESTs? This perceptions and attitudes towards nonnative speakers must be seen from different perspective in the context of EFL in Indonesia. Matsuda says, "... I cannot emphasize enough that the language background is only one of many factors that define who we are as professionals".¹⁰ In other words, to judge professionals in regards to their native languages alone is not wise enough. In Indonesia, there are many higher education institutions providing the departments of ELT where the students are trained to be good teachers of English.

However, many teachers of English in Indonesia must be trained due to their lack of quality. The results of World Bank Indonesia (2011) and Kompas (2012) research, provide surprising data that the quantity of teachers is not proportional to the quality of teachers. Quantity is considered excessive while quality is still below standard. This fact is very sad indeed.¹¹ As

⁹ Selvi, A. 2010 All teachers are equal, but some teachers are more equal than others: trend analysis of Job advertisements in English language teaching. (*WATESOL NNEST Caucus Annual Review*, 2010) 1:156-181.

¹⁰ Cited from Nuria, V., Ulate (2011). Insights towards native and nonnative ELT educators. *Bellaterra Journal of Teaching and Learning Language & Literature*. Vol 4 (1). 56-79.

¹¹ Yuli Christina Yoedo. (2012). *Peningkatan Kualitas Guru Bahasa Inggris di Sekolah Dasar..* (Cited from https://mafiadoc.com/1-pengajaran-bahasa-inggris-di-sekolah-dasar-library-um_59d61e481723dd29c81ab7db.html on October 12, 2017.)

a consequence, the next important thing is to do is improving their teaching competence.

Why are NNESTs Better than NESTs?

No one is perfect, and English Indonesian teachers are no exception. They also have some shortcomings on their competence. However, through the following discussion I draw some of their strengths which equip them to be better than their native English colleagues.

The Importance of Local Culture Understanding

First of all, NESTs' culture is different from the students. In fact, culture is unavoidable part to support the effectiveness of classroom activities. According to Choundury states that it's very clear from the above discussion that culture and language are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture'. If any one of them is separated the other remains incomplete¹².

It is true that in an EFL or ESL class room the students should be taught English with the culture associated with it so that the students can acquire the target language with cultural background and correspond in real life situations. However, Braine¹³ dan Brown¹⁴ state that the same cultural background of both the teachers and the students is one of key concepts of foreign language teaching and learning. This means that a good English teacher should know the students' culture. Since Indonesian is very diverse, culture understanding is a compulsory aspect to involve in instructional activities,

¹² Cired from Rahim, U., C. (2014). The role of culture in teaching and learning of English as a foreign language. *Express, an International Journal of Multi Disciplinary Research*, Vol. 1, Issue 4, April 2014.

¹³ Braine, G. *Non-native speaker English teachers*. (New York: Routledge. 2010.)

¹⁴ Cited from Brown, H.D. *Teaching by principles*. 2nd. (Englewood Cliff, N.J.: Prentice Hall. 2001.)

including English language teaching. Local culture in English language teaching enables students to learn English skills well because students are asked to discuss or describe something they know very well. The result of a study by Nurlia and Arini revealed that that bringing local culture in English language teaching produced better achievement of the students' writing skill.¹⁵ In other words, although English is a foreign language containing foreign culture, incorporating local culture values is useful when teaching this language.

Unfortunately, most of NESTs in Indonesia do not meet this requirement.¹⁶ They cannot incorporate local culture and the target language culture. Consequently, the students often find the NESTs' explanation demanding to understand. Unlike native English speaker, an Indonesian speaking teacher will be able to correlate an English culture with local culture. To illustrate this point, an Indonesian teacher can explain "*killing two birds with one stone*" by translating it into Indonesian proverb "*sekali mending, dua tiga pulau terlampaui*". Also "*no pain, no gain*" with "*bersakit-sakit dahulu, bersenang-senang kemudian*". An NEST with very little understanding on Indonesian culture very possibly faces difficulties in delivering the real meaning of the two proverbs.

The same cultural background of NNESTs also interests the students' desire to study with them. The NNESTs' nativeness based on the survey conducted by Cheung & Braine does not give any problem.¹⁷ More importantly, they are more

¹⁵ Ratna Nurlia and Fitri Arini, "Effect of Bringing Local Culture in English Language Teaching on Students' Writing Achievement," *The 4th International Conference on Language, Society and Culture in Asian Contexts, KnE Social Sciences*, 2017 187–194

¹⁶ Arntsen, T. 2013. *ESL Controversy: Native Speaker vs non-native speaker*. busyteacher.org. Retrieved on December 20, 2013.

¹⁷ Cheung, Y. L. & Braine, G. (2007). The attitudes of university students towards non-native speaker English teachers in Hong Kong. *RELJ Journal*, 38, 257

capable of designing materials which can meet their needs. According to Brody, the teaching materials should also embrace social and cultural values¹⁸. This is because the material which is relevant and close to students' culture can attract them to learn because they will perceive it useful for their real lives. This kind of material is more potentially created by NNESTs than NESTs. On the contrary, the students are more difficultly to accept and understand the material if it looks unfamiliar with them.

The Students' Mother Tongue

Indonesia is the one country which has the most different local languages. The data in the ministry of education and culture shows that there are 546 languages exist in Indonesia¹⁹. Thus, Indonesian people commonly can speak at least two languages, namely *Bahasa Indonesia* and their local language. Related to English teaching in Indonesia, knowing the students' mother tongue plays an essential role. It helps the teachers communicate with the students well during teaching and learning process.

Even though it generally seems unarguable that English teacher should consistently speak English in the whole classroom activities, in Indonesia, full English explanation brings about the students' confusion. As far as I am concerned, although this is a good rule for teaching a language, this approach can be exasperating especially for older or beginner students. If this strategy is forced to the students, it will negatively affect the students' willingness to learn. At worse, the students might feel uncomfortable and tend to escape the class.

¹⁸ Brody, J. *A linguistic anthropological perspective on language and culture in the second language curriculum*. In: Lange, D.L. & Michael Paige, R. (eds.). *Culture as the core-perspective on culture in second language learning*. (Greenwich, Connecticut: Information Age Publishing, 2003.)

¹⁹ Taken from the official website of kemendikbud, 2012.

What can we expect from the English class which makes the learners bored, even stressed?

NESTs are, for sure, able to speak English in the entire instructional activities; however, they cannot communicate with the students effectively due to their lack of knowledge on students' language. As a result, they may not be able to vividly convey more complicated ideas and structures like grammar or idioms to students. When the students find something complex in their materials, NESTs also face rigor on how to encounter this problem.

To differ from NESTs, NNESTs are inherently more perceptive to language difficulties than NESTs, they, according to Liu²⁰ and Pacek²¹, can anticipate the students' problems. The more the teachers are aware of the pupil's obstacles, the more easily they formulate the solution. For instance, if a word is tricky to explain in English, the teachers can translate it into Bahasa Indonesia. Wahyudi²² made an example from his real experience of being taught English by Indonesian teachers. His teacher associated the word "rather" with Javanese word "rada" as these words have similar meaning. This teaching strategies made the learners feel very familiar and perceived that English was not far from their culture and therefore easy to learn.

The same native language of teachers and students is also very beneficial for always protecting the national values; for example Javanese teachers teach Javanese students. While decreasing preference of people's, especially the youth, using

²⁰ Liu, J. Nonnative *English Speaking Professionals in TESOL*. TESOL Quarterly, 33, 1, 1999.85-102.

²¹ Pacek, Dorota. 'Personality not Nationality': Foreign Students' Perceptions of a Non-Native Speaker Lecturer of English at a British University. E. Lurda (ed). Non-native language teachers. Perceptions, challenges and contributions to the profession, (2005). 243-262.

²² Wahyudi, R. *Native English speaker teachers (nests) versus non native English speaker teachers (NNESTs) in TESOL*. The 4 NELTAL Conference, March 31, 2012. (The State University of Malang. 2012.)

bahasa Indonesia in daily activities, Indonesian teachers can take a part in taking care of bahasa Indonesia as national language. Meaning to say, learning foreign language shouldn't decline the nationalism of the learners, particularly in term of using national language. Moreover, in the today's context where there is a hot issue that our country is struggling to strengthen the nationalism of Indonesian citizens themselves.

Teacher's Training and Education

Being a teacher is not an easy thing. This profession obligates its performer to fulfill both academic and administrative requirement. Hence, teacher training and education are greatly urgent. Allen states that teacher training and education program evidently plays an important role in teachers' improvement.²³ Angrist and Lavy show particularly strong effects of teacher training on students' achievement²⁴. Meaning to say, observable teacher characteristics such as education and experience produce their higher pedagogic performance.

Compared to NNESTs, most NESTs teaching in Indonesia are less trained and not enough experienced. NESTs also do not teach English by choice so that they are rarely passionate or motivated to teach. Most of them teach English because they live in Indonesia for some reasons such as getting married to Indonesian, being involved in a project not related to English teaching or just visiting Indonesia for holiday. Thus, to believe that just because NESTs speaks English fluently they can teach it successfully is unwise. They are able to speak the language but elucidating it is an entirely different matter.

²³ J. Scott Allen, "Adult Learning Theory & Leadership Development," *Leadership Review* 7 (2007): 26–37.

²⁴ Joshua D. Angrist & Victor Lavy, "Does teacher training affect pupil learning? Evidence from matched comparisons in Jerusalem public schools." *Journal of Labor Economics* 19(2): 2001.343-369

Without undergoing some training in classroom management and lessons in English grammar, someone cannot be effectual ESL teachers.

Indonesian teachers have gone through teacher training and education in university. Teacher training and education is unquestionably necessary to avoid the mismatch between teachers' educational background and the subject they teach. In teacher training, not only do they learn their major, but also classroom management, assessment and evaluation, and research. In line with this, Wati found that English teacher training program in Rokan Hulu District was significant in term of improving teachers' confidence and motivation²⁵. Furthermore, teacher training and education really give the teachers a big opportunity to enhance their knowledge and insight on English language itself. In comparison of teaching behavior, according to Medgyes, NNESTs are more insightful than NESTs. As a result, NNESTs supply more information about English language than do NESTs.

NNESTs, to make an example, are more knowledgeable about English grammar, which is very complicated rather than NESTs are. To master English, a speaker of other language cannot deny learning grammar. This is in compliance with Nelson & Greenbaum²⁶ who maintain that "grammar is the central component of language". Through grammar, the system of sounds or of written symbols is mediated with the system of meaning. Unfortunately, for most English learners in Indonesia, grammar is daunting. It remains complicated that it istaught in Indonesian language, let alone when it is deciphered fully in

25 Herlina Wati. The effectiveness of Indonesian English teachers training programs in improving confidence and motivation. International Journal of Instruction. www.e-iji.net. 2011.

²⁶ Nelson, G & Greenbaum Sidney. *An introduction to English grammar*. (Great Britain: Pearson Education Limited. 2002.)

English. As a consequence, the students will be getting harder to understand the grammar rules if they are taught by NESTs.

Teacher is a Model for Students

Teaching is not merely delivering materials to the students. Lumpkin declared that teachers serve as role models for telling the truth, respecting others, fulfilling the responsibility and so on²⁷. The students certainly respect the teachers who are able to implement what they teach in real activities. In contrast, they tend to be underestimated when their attitudes are not as same as their instructions. In connection with English teaching, teacher according to Harmer is a language model²⁸. In this case, NNESTs can be a valid learning source for the students because they themselves had undergone the ELT process.

Experience as an ESL learner, based on Mahboob's research on students' perceptions toward NESTs and NNESTs earned the highest number of positive comments²⁹. This finding clearly shows the significance of teachers' being model for the students. Medgyes, moreover, stated that language teacher can set two kinds of models namely language model and learner model. Here, NNESTs provide better learner models. NNESTs take advantages from their real experience on learning English to motivate their students. NNESTs, according to Cook³⁰ and

²⁷ Angela Lumpkin. *Teachers as Role Models Teaching Character and Moral Virtues*. JOLPRD. Vol 79, No. 2. . 2008pp. 45-49.

²⁸ Harmer, J. *The practice of English language teaching*. Mixed media product. 2007.

²⁹ Mahboob, A. Native or nonnative: What do students enrolled in an intensive English program think? In L. D. Kamhi–Stein (Ed.), *Learning and teaching from experience. Perspectives on nonnative English-speaking professionals* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press. 2004.) (pp. 121

³⁰ Cook, V. *Basing teaching on the L2 user*. In Llurda (ed.), *Non-native language teachers: Perceptions, challenges, and contributions to the profession*. (New York: Springer 2005.)

Lee³¹, can provide example of proficient English users. They can give authentic example for their students on how to be a good English learner after having already learned native language. Medgyes states, "teachers can serve as imitable models of the successful learner of English." The students, consequently, can imitate what their teacher does in learning and using English. Moreover, the Indonesian teachers could integrate the character values into their ELT classroom better³².

Unlike NNESTs, NESTs cannot be a role model of good language learners because they acquire English since they were born, not by learning it. While NNESTs can share the learning strategies as they themselves have already experienced, NESTs in fact cannot show the students the step-by-step ways of learning English as they learn the language for granted. As a consequence, they cannot fully motivate the students. For example, when the NESTs teach strategies to handle TOEFL test or help the students put their ideas concisely in writing course, they face difficulties to exemplify how to deal with those materials. This is in line with one of Medgyes' hypotheses that differ NNESTs from NESTs, namely the fact that NNESTs have teaching behavior that can be beneficial for their nonnative students.

In this case, George Braine, as the founder of the Nonnative Speaker Movement, states that NNESTs have the greatest asset, namely experience in learning English as the

31 Lee, I Can a nonnative English speaker be a good English teacher? *TESOL Matters*. . 2000

32 Azkia Muharom Albantani & Ahmad Madk, "*Integrating Character Education Values In Language Teaching: Why and How*," a paper presented in International Conference 2016. hlm. 08. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/309556734_INTEGRATING_CHARACTER_EDUCATION_VALUES_IN_LANGUAGE_TEACHING_WHY_AND_HOW, on August 27, 2017

second or foreign language³³. Relating to this view, Indonesian teachers of English have empathy with their students' difficulties and frustrations in English. Then, they are able to incorporate their own ESL learning styles into their teaching. Also, they have an ability to view English from the perspective of Indonesian students. Last but not least, they can relate English learning theories to their own learning of English.

The Availability of NNESTs in Indonesia

According to current estimates, about 80% of the English teachers worldwide are nonnative speakers of the language³⁴. In Indonesia, the university students enrolling the English teaching major always increase. An exceedingly growing number of English teacher candidates now pursuing bachelor degree in English teaching might contribute a bad impact, namely a problem of unemployment. Entailing native speakers to teach English will enhance unemployed people in Indonesia from the sector of education. Therefore, the role of NNESTs must be maximized to help reduce this crucial and intricate case.

Empowering Indonesian teachers in term of teaching quality, administration and salary is much better than employing native speakers, which is certainly very costly, to teach English. So, the big budget of education which is an amazingly big amount of 345,335 trillion rupiahs in 2013 (<http://www.setkab.go.id/>), should be directed to the Indonesian teachers' welfare, rather than non-Indonesian teachers. For the sake of the fifth pillars of Pancasila, I extremely propose that

³³ Sung, M., C., C. Nonnative speaker teachers of English: Challenges and prospects. An interview with George Braine. *The Language Teacher*, 36.2. 2012.23-25.

³⁴ Cited from George Braine. *Non-native speaker English teachers*. (New York: Routledge. 2010).

Indonesian teachers have more right to get benefit of this country's funding.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Both native and non-native English speaker teachers actually have the equal chance to be good English teacher. However, I, based on some above studies and my own experience of being taught by NESTs, believe that Indonesian students do not completely need to only entrust their ability to NESTs. In summing up, native Indonesianis more appropriate for English learners in Indonesia due to some greatly notable English teaching learning elements in Indonesia, namely local culture understanding, knowledge of students' mother tongue, teacher training experience and role model of good language learners. Also, the overwhelming number of English teachers and teacher candidates and nationalism protection also need to be considered.

The availability of good teachers of English is highly needed for the better development of ELT in Indonesia. As stated by Prof. Ali Syaukah, one of undeniable strategies of enhancing the quality of ELT in Indonesia is the teachers of English equipped with sufficient capability to use English language not only as the language of instruction but also as the means of communication in daily lives³⁵.

Then, because of non-native English teachers' essential position in English teaching in Indonesia and, to be honest, their deficiency, constructive attempts to enhance Indonesian teachers' English performance must be continuously and consistently undertaken so that their ability can counterbalance the NESTs' capability. Indonesian teachers must always be confident and believe that they have very big opportunity to be

³⁵ Cited from Prof. H. Ali Syaukah, M.A., Ph.D. *Pengajaran Bahasa Inggris di Indonesia*. the paper presented as the speech of Inauguration of Professor in State University of Malang, March 3, 2013

good English teachers. They, as a result, are intensely required to not only know the students' local culture and language but also immerse themselves into English language insight such as its real use, pronunciation, culture and other English features.

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