



An Analysis of Chinese Universities Students' Attitudes towards Native and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers (NESTs/NNESTs)

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Abstract

This study aims to do further investigation on Chinese universities students' attitudes towards native and non-native English speaking-teachers. It mainly studies two major researches on the topic with at least 368 participants from China (mainly) and Hungary. The study critically reviews the two studies and finds out that the fact about NESTs is unsatisfactory. It requires much improvement because of inexperienced NESTs, lack of responsibility, cultural unfamiliarity, and inability to provide opportunity for students to practice. However, it is inevitable that NESTs are considered better at English proficiency and that they are student-friendly teachers. In another study, students changed their preference over NESTs vs NNESTs because they believe that NESTs help maintaining their motivation to communicate in English. However, they might prefer NNESTs for cultural and linguistic (e.g. grammar explanation) competences. Thus, this study offers recommendations for improvement in the context. The recommendations include course on English proficiency, cultural competence, teaching skill, certification, and communication-focused concept of English materials.

Key Words: *Native Speaker, Attitudes, English Teacher*

Analisa Perilaku Pelajar di Tiongkok tentang Guru Bahasa Inggris yang Merupakan Penutur Asli dan Bukan Penutur Asli Bahasa Inggris

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk melakukan investigasi yang lebih mendalam tentang perilaku pelajar di Tiongkok mengenai guru bahasa Inggris yang merupakan penutur asli dan bukan penutur asli bahasa Inggris. Pada dasarnya penelitian ini mengkaji dua studi empiris mengenai topik ini yang setidaknya melibatkan 368 orang partisipan dari Tiongkok dan Hungaria (sebagai perbandingan). Artikel ini mengkaji dengan kritis dua studi awal dan menemukan bahwa fakta mengenai perilaku pelajar terhadap guru yang merupakan penutur asli dan bukan penutur asli tidak memuaskan. Penelitian ini (dalam konteks di Tiongkok) mengungkapkan bahwa terdapat banyak langkah pengembangan dan peningkatan yang harus dilakukan karena beberapa hal seperti penutur asli yang

tidak berpengalaman, kurangnya tanggung jawab, ketidak-pahaman budaya, dan ketidakmampuan untuk memberikan kesempatan praktek bagi para pelajar. Namun demikian harus diakui bahwa penutur asli memang memiliki beberapa kelebihan seperti kemampuan bahasa Inggris yang lebih baik dan keramahan sebagai seorang guru. Pada studi lainnya, penelitian ini menemukan bahwa tendensi pelajar lebih menyukai guru penutur asli disebabkan oleh aspek motivasi yang muncul selama proses belajar. Namun demikian, untuk hal kompetensi budaya dan bahasa komunikasi mereka tetap cenderung lebih memilih guru yang bukan penutur asli. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini merekomendasikan beberapa hal untuk ditingkatkan bagi kedua pihak seperti pelatihan dalam kelas bahasa Inggris tambahan, pengetahuan budaya, kemampuan mengajar, sertifikasi, dan konsep bahasa Inggris yang terfokus pada fungsi komunikasinya.

Kata Kunci: *Penutur Asli, Perilaku, Guru Bahasa Inggris*

1. INTRODUCTION

In China, around 350 to 400 million people are learning English (Xu, 2010; Wei & Su, 2012) which makes it the largest market of English Language Teaching (ELT) industry in the world. Together with the globalization and firm economic development which attract the interaction between China and other nations globally, the shift of English as Foreign Language (EFL) to English as Lingua Franca (ELF) in Chinese context is inevitable. Chang (2006) states that China's authority has worked to promote English even more in relation to its power and role in the global context. English is believed to be able to help excelling the process of China's development in the globalization by allowing it to participate in political, economic, and cultural activities at the international level (Zheng, 2014).

At this point, the function and role of English is a lot more than just a subject, it is a tool to bridge the communication between China

and other nations. As a prove of the shift from EFL to ELF, Zheng's (2013) study shows that there is an extensive ELF interaction taking place during Beijing Olympic Games as the volunteer in the event revealed. Furthermore, the growth of schools employing English as Medium of Instruction (EMI) had doubled from 260 in 2003 to 500 in 2010 and is believed to keep increasing (Hu & Alsagoff, 2010). With the increased demand of English as a significant skill in China, the lack of teachers available, and the widespread of the native speakers' fallacy, there were 150,000 native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) employed in 2006 with annual increase of 100,000 as cited in the China TEFL Network (CTN) website (China TEFL Network, 2015).

The growing ELF field in China is faced with the barrier that there is such strong attachment to native-English speaker model. It is commonly believed that the reaction and acceptance of the students toward the teachers do

influence the quality of learning process (Mukhaiyar, Refnaldi & Mairi, 2017; Shalawati & Hadijah, 2018). It is proven in Chinese ELT context by the over representativeness of native speaker norms in teaching materials where British & American English dominate the contents. In addition, exam oriented culture in education such as the presence of College English Test (CET) which requires students to pass the test as their graduation requirement, has also helped maintaining the endurance of native norms attachment (Galloway & Rose, 2015). Further, teacher recruitment process is also problematic by truth, that there is strong preference for NESTs over NNESTs.

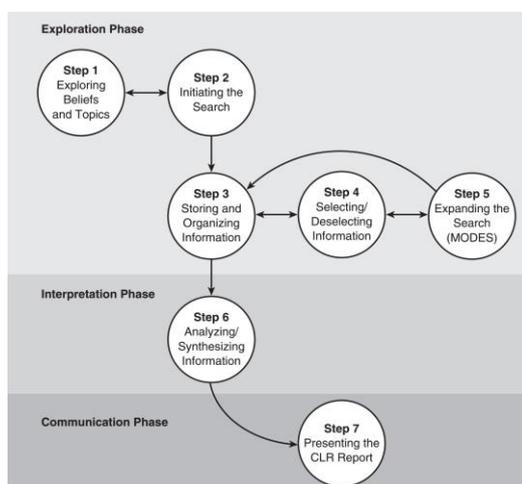
In the CTN website (2015), as an organization recruiting English teachers nationwide in China, it explicitly states that the teaching experience and qualification are preferred but not a must as long as the candidates are native speakers of English. The remaining question is ‘who are these NESTs?’ and ‘are they better teachers compared to NNESTs?’. These aforementioned facts about ELT in China have exposed that the current and long rooted attachment to native norm is no longer relevant in Chinese ELT. This phenomenon then has drawn more attention for further research on ELF area (Jenkins, 2009; Seidlhofer, 2011). Therefore, this paper discusses the studies of the attitudes toward teachers’ nativeness and draws some recommendations to minimize such attachment, because the focus should be in teaching skills

and quality instead of the nativeness of the teachers.

2. METHOD

This study employs a Comprehensive Literature Review (CLR) or systematic literature review method. It chooses a set of strategies and steps in data identification, transmission, meaning-making, recording and understanding. Onwuegbuzie, Leech, and Collins (2011) and Cresswell (2002) propose that literature review is considered as equivalent to other research study. Literature review method collects the data and analyzes the data in a richer way and through the four common phases including conceptualization of the study, research planning, implementation, and findings dissemination. In 2010 Onwuegbuzie, Collins, et al. presented a new concept in literature review as one of the most comprehensive method. It includes a combination of findings stemming from quantitative research studies and the same from qualitative studies. Further, it strengthens the whole concept of the study through more critical review of more recent literatures and more data.

Figure 2.1 The Seven-Step Model for a Comprehensive Literature Review



3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Many experts have defined native speakers of a language in several ways. Rampton (1990) says that native English speakers have language expertise with two main criteria such as language affiliation and language inheritance. Davies (2004), points out that native speaker acquire language from childhood including the acquisition of grammatical intuition, capacity for fluent spontaneous discourse, and creative communicative range. Galloway & Rose (2015) relate the nativeness to Kachru's (1992) circles that not all native speakers are living in inner circle and not all people living in inner circle are native speakers. From these definitions, it can be understood that nativeness concerns on language acquisition and proficiency. However, the earlier has been criticized as native speakers' weakness and the later as a strength. Phillipson (1992) labels it as the

native speaker fallacy where the emphasis is put on the irrelevance of monolithic native speaker model in current ELT practice.

As the basis of discussion in this paper, there are two studies presented which discuss students' attitudes toward teachers' nativeness. Barrat and Kontra (2000) did a research on students' views about their experience with NESTs and NNESTs in Hungary and China. Similarly, Jin (2005) investigated undergraduate students' preference for either NESTs or NNESTs specifically in Chinese ELT context. The overall studies are summarized in the following table:

Table 1. Studies in Chinese students' attitude towards NESTs and NNESTs

Study	Participants	Method	Findings
Barratt & Kontra, 1996	China: 100 students, 54 teachers Hungary: 116 Students, 58 teachers	Document analysis: Free writing in English	NESTs is not enough. Much improvement needed: inexperienced, lack of responsibility, culturally unfamiliar, do not provide sufficient opportunity for students to practice. However, NESTs are considered better at English proficiency and student friendly teaching style
Jin, 2005	Chinese university students (age 19-22, no number of participants)	Pre-/post-questionnaires; interviews	Students changed their preference over NESTs vs NNESTs after the lecture. NESTs help maintaining their motivation to communicate in English. However, they might prefer NNESTs for cultural and linguistic (e.g. grammar explanation) demand

The findings of the two studies pinpoint that for being an English teacher, nativeness is not enough. There is something more than just being native speakers. It is

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about personal quality in teaching not nationality and it is about ‘what you know not who you are’ (Pacek, 2005; Rampton, 1990). The debate is on the fact that one’s fate to being native speaker of English does not justify that one can teach the language. A criticism has arisen stating that NESTs have lack of teaching professionalism (Pasternak & Bailey, 2004). On the other hand, despite NNESTs’ lack of proficiency compared to most NESTs, they have the experience of learning English as second language (L2) or foreign language (FL), in which such experience has exposed them to various elements related to L2 or FL acquisition. Therefore, there are two crucial points for both NESTs and NNESTs to pay attention to. The first is language proficiency which is related to the object of teaching and the second is local knowledge which refers to the understanding and comprehension of local education system, local language, and local culture. He and Li (2009) argue that local cultural and linguistic demands in ELT do exist which are some of the reasons why native English model cannot adequately express the content ideas specific to Chinese culture. Moreover, NESTs have difficulty in explaining complex grammatical items (Cook, 2005). These elements matter and play significant roles in the ELT practices.

However, the first study by Barrat & Kontra (2000) might have some limitations. Two main evaluation would be on the fact that the study was not originally designed as one study. They combine two studies which was first done by

Kontra in Hungary in 1993 and then Barrat duplicate the survey in China three years later in 1996. Despite similar characteristics of the participants in both studies, the time gap and researchers’ subjective intervention in the study is feasible as they were done by two different researchers in two different times. It is related to the issue of different status of English in ELT both in Hungary and China, whether they were equally relevant to be compared. Fielding (2004) argues that that the representation of data collection could be distorted and the reference to the context of the original data is blurred. In addition, the first study focuses only on NESTs, considering the perspectives on NNESTs would be able to provide richer data for more thorough analysis of the study.

3.1 Implications

Looking at the fact that there are around 300 to 400 million people learning English in China, inevitably, vast amount of English teachers needed. With such huge demand of English teachers and limited availability, it brings China’s ELT into a dilemma. China has to decide either to recruit more local teachers (NNESTs) of whether they are qualified or not, which would risk significantly the quality of ELT itself, or to import native teachers (NESTs) which does not guarantee that they are better than local teachers. However, NESTs do have advantage of their nativeness which is good English proficiency.

The notion of NESTs has received many criticisms which one of them is that one’s nativeness does

not guarantee the ability to teach the language because language proficiency gained as L1 is different from teaching the language as L2 which is where the NNESTs benefitted through their L2 learning experience (Widdowson, 1994).

The first implication is the need for the authority, policy maker, and teacher educator to invest strategically on NNESTs compared to temporarily imported NESTs. In line with the demand of qualified English teachers that keeps growing in China, Jin (2005) states that providing education for local teachers is more important for China because they are great resources for China's ELT development but has been neglected. The practice of investing on native teachers gives China some disadvantages such as the costly practice, lack of sustainability because the imported NESTs keep coming and going, the emergence of unstoppable chain of needs to NESTs' presence in China, and the unjust issue where native speakers are benefited and considered superior over NESTs related to the big gap in salary regardless of their teaching qualification and experience. On the other hand, it is such a great investment in local English teachers who will serve China for a long term purpose. Further, it will also prove China's ELT contribution to the movement of the monolithic teaching form becomes more ELF friendly. One way to do this is through NNESTs education and upgrade for more successful ELT. Despite some criticisms to ELF, it will be able to introduce China-based ELF communication

strategies in the ELT classrooms, as teachers would have these features presented in the classroom during teaching practices. Consequently, it will indirectly help decreasing the attachment toward native norms of English and prepare the students for the real-world uses of English.

The second implication is to urge the reconceptualization of ideal English teachers understanding among NNESTs. It is important for the local teachers to be confident with themselves and understand that they are not inferior to native teachers (He & Miller, 2011; Kontra, 2000). The fact that each group has its own advantages and disadvantages for being native and non-native, both NESTs and NNESTs are actually on the same level, so what remains is the endeavour to upgrade what is missing. With this being understood and implemented, the debate will not be on whether one is native or not, but on one's ability and quality to teach English. Besides, it can also promote the NESTs and NNESTs collaboration where they can work together and help each other through shared strengths and weaknesses (Ma, 2012; Sung, 2014).

The third implication would be on teachers' side. The previous discussion and studies propose the notion that the most crucial part in ELT is again not on whether the teachers are native, non-native, foreigner, or local teachers, it is all about teachers' professionalism (Cook, 1999). Therefore, the urgency of raising awareness on local knowledge and sufficient teaching skills in regard to Chinese context

should be taken into account more seriously (Cook, 1999; Medgyes, 1994). The local knowledge includes the understanding of local education system, culture, and language. All of these corroborate together and influence the learning process of whether to succeed or not. For learners themselves, the new knowledge or lesson found in the classroom will be clarified and processed with the intervention of their previously existing background knowledge, processed through the way they usually (culture) process the information, and acquire a language in relation to their mother tongue or shared language. The professionalism concerns on how that teaching is not a series of knowledge but a set of skills which should be understood and implemented within decent actions of teaching in the classroom. If the focus is only on teachers' nativeness, then the output would merely lead the students to imitate their native teachers (Medgyes, 1994). It is not the original motivation of learning a language, which is for communication. Therefore, good teachers should be able to lead their students to have good understanding and help them transforming such understanding become proficiency and mastery.

3.2 Recommendations

Based on the implications, several recommendations are made to address such issues of compatibility. First, I propose that there is a change in labelling native teachers because it sets the bar for language ownership which only belongs to the native speakers. In

reference to ELF perspective concerning the communication function and motivation of learning English, it seems to be more representative to call it foreign teachers or multilingual English teachers. These new notions might include English speakers from outer or even expanding circles (Kachru, 1992). This label eliminates the idea of English ownership on NNESTs, instead it opens possibilities to introduce the variety of English and strategies in the way it is used as a tool of communication and interaction among ELF users (Mairi, 2016). Kirkpatrick (2009) states that multilingual teachers are better at developing students' intercultural communicative skills. It allows the diversity to be exposed as well as leading the ELT community in China to stay away from native speakers' fallacy (Widdowson, 1994). The barrier for this suggestion is on the fact that schools and institutions use NESTs label for promotion (Galloway & Rose, 2015). This trend, in both public and private sectors being involved in ELT industry, makes the reconceptualization process remains difficult.

Secondly, there are changes need to be done in English teachers' recruitment practice. The requirements of qualifications need to be re-examined in accordance to Chinese context. The candidate nativeness should not be put in the hiring requirements because it does not define one's ability in teaching. Alternatively, teaching qualification will be the priority by setting a minimal standard of teaching experience and qualification such as

TEFL, TESOL, CELTA (Cheung & Braine, 2007). In addition, for China's ELT to move away from the native speakers' fallacy, it is worth trying to focus less on the candidates from the 'English Five' which are America, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (Jeon & Lee, 2006). However, the absence of unified control from the authority on managing and hiring NESTs, and the phenomenon that strong attachment to native norms as pedagogical models in China is still going strong within the ELF community, have become the missing pieces of support to implement this recommendation (He & Miller, 2011; Jeon & Lee, 2006).

Lastly, a decent proposal for teacher education program is also deemed to be crucial. The following recommendations are created thoughtfully by combining the two main parts of good teaching practices for ideal teachers in Chinese ELF context, local knowledge and teaching skills.

Table 2. Proposal for English Language Teachers Education

No	NNESTs	NESTs
1	Sharing sessions and team teaching; incorporate ELF communicative strategies into teaching (He & Miller, 2011)	
2	Exchange and training projects abroad (He & Miller, 2011)	Orientation program (Barratt & Kontra, 2000)
3	EAP courses (Pasternak & Bailey, 2004)	Teaching practice in local school (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005)

Like any other recommendation, this part also comes up with several barriers such as financial burden, limited access to training projects, NESTs' unwillingness to fully learn local knowledge (Kirkpatrick & Xu, 2002), and lack of control over isolated practices done in public and private sectors in ELT industry concerning different schedule, distance between areas, more specific-area based context, placement allocation, and coordination with the NESTs candidates. However, for the purpose of ELT development, it is worth considering and worth trying.

4. CONCLUSIONS

It is commonly agreed that the market for ELT is huge and is still demanding for further improvement and development. In terms of nativeness, the fact that native speakers of English do have benefits over their nativeness for language acquisition and proficiency, does not guarantee teaching quality. The process of language teaching and learning is a complex set which involves various aspects and requires quality for each item. Teaching is an art and acquiring a language skill requires motivation. Therefore, the concept of automatic winning or losing in ELT is considered absent despite one's nativeness of a language (English). Lastly, experience makes everything even better. Previous teaching experience supplies the teachers of NNESTs and NESTs with wisdom for better practice for both teaching skills and at least local knowledge.

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