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OPINION AND IDEAS

TRANSFORMING THE DIVIDE: MOVING BEYOND NATIVE SPEAKERISM IN ELT

The field of English Language Teaching (ELT) deals not only with language teaching but also with the notion of identity and ownership of the language. While language holds the essence of the cultural and societal function that ties the community or nations together, the ideology of native speakerism continues to permeate ELT contexts and classrooms (Holliday, 2006). The dichotomy between Native-English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and Nonnative-English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) has been debated for decades as a highly contested topic in the ELT field (Harsanti & Manara, 2021; Holliday, 2005; Kumaravadivelu, 2016). Bias and sometimes prejudicial views on the English language teacher competence between NESTs and NNESTs are often manifested in the field. Preconceptions that view the expertise of teachers through this categorization, e.g., NESTs are considered experts in pronunciation and speaking, while NNESTs are considered proficient in reading, writing, and grammar, remain prevalent (Harsanti & Manara, 2021; Rasyid et al., 2023).



One aspect that has been an intricate challenge among English language teachers is the common beliefs about English teaching. There is a deep-rooted connection between the idea of NESTs being the standard for achievement and progress in English language learning (Kumaravadivelu, 2016). This is strengthened by the belief that NESTs have depth of interaction with the English language and culture, and therefore are automatically better at teaching it (Holliday, 2006). NNESTs, on the other hand, follow the teaching and strategies that are directed by the framework and materials driven by the context of English-speaking countries. This dynamic within the ELT profession has informed the norms of teaching methods and approaches (Kumaravadivelu, 2016). To date, NNESTs have frequently been passive followers in the field rather than exercising their own agency. It is not uncommon to learn that teachers and language learners favor native speakerism within the ELT context, including within the EFL classrooms in Indonesia.

Recent studies by Harsanti and Manara (2021) highlighted that the native speakerism ideology remains an aspect that influences the way teachers think about English teaching in Indonesia. NNESTs emphasize standard British or American accents, reflecting a monolithic perspective of English in the ELT classroom. While a more recent study by Rasyid et al. (2023) revealed no significant difference between NESTs and NNESTs among English language learners in their survey, the focus group discussion (FGD) with student participants revealed a preference for NESTs, who were seen as having the correct standard of English. NESTs were seen to have more merits in terms of their flexibility in navigating the class rather than overly relying on the textbook. The results of these studies revealed a distinct pedagogical approach: NNESTs are often characterized by a focus on grammar but valued for a better understanding of students' challenges, while NESTs are perceived as more effective in oral communication aspects with more flexibility to meet student needs.

While these results highlight how NESTs and NNESTs are actually different, generalizing them will not suffice for the diverse reality of English language teachers themselves.

Acknowledging that both NESTs and NNESTs have strengths and weaknesses that influence their teaching strategies, the division of non-native and native speakers should not be a trap toward preferring one over the other, but rather to empower teachers to learn from each other's strengths and work on aspects that are essential in our professional journey of teaching.

As teaching skills can be improved, both NESTs and NNESTs must keep their professional development a priority. These include taking time to hone their teaching approaches, methods, and strategies to create a classroom where students can develop their English language skills. With the rapid changes in our globalized world, the need for collaboration among professionals, both NESTs and NNESTs, to create shared communities of practice as language teachers regardless of their linguistic origins is indeed crucial for enhancing the nature of our diverse ELT field.



In fact, such transformation is not entirely new within the ELT context, including in Indonesia. This can be seen in the growing influence of professional networks such as TEFLIN (The Association for the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language in Indonesia), APSPBI (Association of English Language Education Study Programs), and iTELL (Indonesia Technology Enhanced Language Learning), and some other teachers' or teacher educators' associations, which bring along collaborations from both NNESTs and NESTs to share their respective expertise. The hope is that these ongoing communities of practice can continue, paving the way toward a quality, fair, and inclusive ELT landscape for all teachers.

INCLUSIVE ELT LANDSCAPE FOR ALL TEACHERS.



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