

Native or Non-native

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Abstract

This article explores in detail one of the most problematic academic issues students face in classrooms; native and nonnative teachers. In order to get the ultimate results of this study, a questionnaire has been distributed among a group of 18 male and female level (A) students in the Foundation Year Programme-FY- at Ibri College of Applied Sciences in the Sultanate of Oman. The findings show that both native and nonnative teachers are good provided that they are highly qualified, experienced and dedicated. Moreover, both teachers-according to this study- have some merits: native speakers teach writing best, while nonnative speakers excel in teaching grammar. Implications and suggestions are discussed in detail in the article.

Keywords: foreign language teaching, native speaker, pronunciation, semantics, vocabulary.

Introduction

Languages all are of great importance in helping people communicate and express themselves. They make life as easy as possible once they are learned well and used efficiently. In the light of globalism, certain languages have emerged as means of science and technology on top of which is English, which has recently become the most used around the globe. To teach it, there should be well-qualified teachers. This article sheds some light on the characteristics of teachers who are good at teaching it, whether native or non-native.

Review of the Literature

According to Medgyes (2001, para.2)"A native speaker of English is traditionally defined as someone who speaks English as his or her native language, or L1".

Albeit the issue of who the best teacher of English is has been dealt with by so many scholars in different regions of the world, still it remains a heated matter of controversy. Native speakers are more fluent than non- native, better at pronunciation and conversation in classrooms, but that

does not guarantee superiority and excellence in teaching and knowledge of the content. Why is that discrimination? Is it justifiable? What do some real eye and ear- witnesses say about this issue? Is it really a sort of “plight”?

While teaching English in Argentina, I was surprised about the number of students who were excited about having a native English speaking teacher. At the same time, it was interesting how little our group of native English speakers knew about the rules and grammar of our own language in my English teaching courses (Niki, 2008, para. 1).

Having the merit of being *only* a native speaker of a certain language does not mean that one can teach it-with no qualifications, of course- properly and successfully, as the teaching process needs some training courses in certain fields, particularly in methodology. Non-native students-sometimes- feel excited when meeting with native speakers of English, as it is a new experience for them with the owners of the target language. To be fair, native speakers (NS) - from what we have personally experienced – are friendly and understanding and, to some extent, more approachable than non-natives. But being friendly and approachable do need what supports that in class; knowledge about the material in hand. In order for language teachers to be successful, they should be highly trained and well experienced (Niki, 2008).

In certain parts of the world native speakers represent precious assets utilized and/or exploited to enhance the profit of some commercial institutions- schools, colleges, universities, etc., which makes a good reputation and prestige for the place they work at. This strategy- negatively-affects non-native speakers who normally feel helpless, and even hopeless, in the job market-even in their countries- and cannot compete with the strong current of rivals in this arena.

As a result, prospective non-native speakers' teachers (NNEST) are often confronted by job posts which only advertise for a native English-speaking teacher. An employer's decision to hire a native over a non-native teacher is unfortunately based on marketing strategy rather than empirical evidence (Holmes, 2018, para. 1).

For both, native teachers and employers, it is financially and socially rewarding, but what do students get in turn? They might be enjoying their time- listening to a target language from native people who correct their pronunciation, and living in an authentic situation, but in fact they need more explanation of syntax, semantics, writing techniques, etc. If native speakers provide students with the quality of structure, that will be so great. It is sure they have innate knowledge and awareness of grammar, but it is almost risky to teach with no qualifications.

Being a native speaker of a certain language with no qualifications does not make a better language teacher, but if all that is supported with degrees in that major, that

would be better. On the other hand, non-native teachers play a good role in this career; they have spent a far more time learning language systems and the most correct way of using it, in addition, they are well aware of the nature of mistakes made by ESL learners (Holmes, 2018, para.4).

When recruiting teachers, native or non-native, they should undergo professional interviews which should also be comprehensive; methodology, grammar and language competence, as well as checking years or experience and the institution offered that degree, as there are some fake diplomas obtained from unknown institutions. The place of birth should not be an obstacle in the recruiting process.

Having double standard in recruiting teachers, regardless of qualifications and pay, does badly affect the teaching profession and cause teachers to suffer and feel as if they had spent the years at college in vain. Prestigious academic institutions should take into consideration the quality of courses and the high caliber of faculty members, whether native or non-native.

Some people get provoked when dealing with the issue of native-nonnative, and relate it to a wider circle- political matters.

Most, if not all native speakers have not studied a professional career or pedagogy or teaching, they usually teach being engineers, managers or business people and ...having in mind that a class is not a place to give students some knowledge and wait for them to reproduce it, but a space for human people to interact and share together...what can a businessman teach to a student? How can we trust our students' education to American business people? Americans or British with their linguistic imperialism, their economic and political "power", teaching us or our students? What kind of ideologies are our students learning? (Marino, (2011, para.26).

Here is a misery of a frustrated Korean teacher who has no way to get a job as a teacher in his *own* country. It seems that some institutions have become model places for commercial purposes by recruiting unqualified native speakers. This reminds me of a well-saying in Asia: "if it walks and talks, that's ok". In other words, if the one speaks that language -no matter whether he/she has qualifications -that's good.

One of the Koreans started talking about his frustration with his work context. I was intrigued and decided to try and find out as much as I could. It turned out that his institution was employing a number of unqualified native speakers to teach(mostly "conversation" classes) and that these " teachers" were being paid twice as much as local(Korean) teachers who had had five years' training! (Tennant, 2016, para. 4).

Taking short training courses might not fully help native people to take teaching as a profession. Some training courses can be obtained in a few weeks. These training courses aid people to work overseas, not in their homelands, where they are not allowed to teach unless they have a "license". The type of passport very much talks.

By the rise of globalization and openness to the world, it has become obvious that all people have become closer. Native people of English have spread all over the world and carried their cultures wherever they go. As a result, this has made it easier for people of the third world to see westerners recruited mainly for their passports, at the same time they- people of the third world- suffer prejudice in their countries.

Unfortunately, there still seems to be the feeling that "Nativeness" and the type of passport held, etc. is a prerequisite for any positions around the world. But how can a teacher who has taken a four-week course be better (and worth more in terms of pay) than one who has studied for five years? (Tenant, 2015, para.7).

Could anybody imagine that there are some teachers-having no qualifications- whose ultimate goals are excavation, pleasure, discovering the unknown, saving money, etc., rather than teaching? They get recruited on the spot and enter classrooms and start duplicating copies of themselves; weak, non-professional, and mislead students.

The majority (but not all) of NESTs- Native English Speaking Teachers- in Spain are inexperienced, under qualified and –to put it bluntly- not there to teach. Teaching is not their end goal, it is simply a way to spend some time abroad and learn a new language"(Matt, 2017, para.7).

In this case, who is to blame, the administration, the teachers, or the government? This is a disastrous decision that affects the future of a whole generation, bearing in mind that the young people of today are the leaders of tomorrow, and one can imagine the type of tomorrow's leaders taught by such "teachers". Fake diplomas are the most dangerous issues ever.

The researchers have taught at a number of colleges and universities in different countries and have witnessed some teachers (both native and non-native) - not only with no qualifications- but also with fake Masters and PhDs; which is against ethics. These people have set the worst example for their students, and taught them a practical lesson in plagiarism and treason; they are real and professional traitors. Fortunately, they were caught and deported and put on the black list.

There was another case with a native speaker colleague who said he was planning to visit 100 countries, visited about 90, and planning to visit the rest in the coming years. His ultimate aim was only touring, picnicking, and discovering areas. The funny thing is that in the same

semester, before enjoying his stay in the new academic institution, he was caught drunk on campus and sacked on the spot.

It seems foolish to assume that just because someone speaks English they can teach it effectively. Without training in classroom management and lessons in English grammar, native speakers cannot be effective ESL instructors. They may be able to speak the language but explaining it is an entirely different matter (Arntsen ((n.d.), para. 5).

People can speak their mother tongues fluently, but when it comes to teaching - with no qualifications, of course- they should step down or apologize; it's unethical. In addition, that needs a diploma, taking courses in grammar, methodology, class management, preparations, etc., as teaching is a noble message; not a job of the jobless.

Who is the best teacher?

In fact there are so many opinions based on facts that determine the characteristics of the suitable teacher who can perform his/her job in a very smart way, regardless of nationality or passport.

For school administrators, the best thing to do is to stop looking at races as the basis for hiring an English teacher. They should look into the credentials of the applicants. Language teaching is not just about a deep understanding of the language. It is also about one's ability to teach. A lot of schools commit the mistake in hiring a native English teacher who does not even have an experience in teaching at all (Racoma, 2018, para. 5).

Some native speakers admit that their nationality and color do them a great favor when applying for jobs, but they also admit that it is not the criterion upon which things work.

So both employers and students seem to think that because

I am English, I must be a better teacher, which has got to be good for me. As a result, you can't be blamed thinking that I am pleased about this situation. Without any effort on my part,

I'm placed ahead of the vast majority of teachers around in the job market. But you'd be wrong, it offends me and I want to see it Change (Taylor, 2014, para. 3).

Though it is a merit and an advantage, "Nativeness" is considered unfair by some frank and honest native speakers of English; they would love to see it change and substituted for "qualification" rather than anything else. Is speaking students' native language beneficial?

The knowledge and good use of students' native language helps overcome a lot of linguistic problems. If the teacher shares students the same nationality and culture, he/she knows the main points of weaknesses they suffer from. On the other hand, if the native speaker teacher of English speaks and understands students' first language, that will be so beneficial; he/she can deal with some abstract vocabulary and usages in a better way.

It is clear that when the teacher is from the same linguistic culture as their students, they have a massive advantage in an accurate and nuanced use of the L1 over a NEST. I can get really good at Spanish, but my Costa Rican colleagues will always have an advantage in using L1 in the classroom. No matter how hard I wish for it, that won't Change (Taylor, 2014, para.7).

With all respect to all NS (native speakers) of languages all over the world, the idea of discussing the native and non-native issue does not mean demeaning or underestimating any language, in particular English as an international language. Nobody aims at demolishing or erasing any language. From a sociolinguistic point of view, all languages are important and worth studying; as they serve their speakers. There is no language superior to another. "Numerous have been the studies which have sought to destroy the myth of the native teacher and his/her alleged superiority with respect to the non-native one" (Madrid, 2004, para. 12).

Just to bear in mind that many languages that were prosperous at a time had died and become ' HISTORY'. Why is that tinge of superiority of a certain language? Nowadays there are a number of languages standing in the queue to become first internationally.

No doubt that NSs (native speakers) do speak their own language naturally, fluently, and spontaneously, but at the end of the day, they are human beings, not angels, and what is a credit is the knowledge and content given to students in classrooms. NSs and NNSs both have strengths and weaknesses that cannot be denied.

Regardless of the existing belief that, native speakers of a Language make better teachers, the amount of research questioning this and providing evidence on how important it is to recognize the strengths in native and non-native teachers has been valuable and has s(h)own that both can be equally good professionals, in spite their native and non-native status"(Rodrigo, 2012, para. 18).

Preparing lessons before coming to class is necessary. No matter how many years one has taught a certain subject, it is important to have a look at the material concerned before being in the classroom. Sometimes tiny, but important things, might not be covered by the teacher in the class if no preparation- in depth- takes place a head. Students, as a result, will be the big losers. "Sometimes when native speakers come to our classrooms, they have not prepared their classes, because they know the language and they think this is everything they need to teach students the language"(Marino, 2011. para. 56).

Instead of looking at NSs and NNSs as two separate groups (one being better or more qualified to be a teacher than the other), it should be emphasized that cooperation and help between NS and NNS should be highlighted, since both groups have specific advantages and weaknesses (Matsuda & Matsuda, 2001). Aren't there some real bases to consider when recruiting teachers both, native and non-native?

The real bases in determining a good language teacher include the in-depth knowledge and creativity in teaching the lesson. Thus, both native and non-native English speakers with great credentials to back them up deserve to be hired. (Racoma, 2014, para. 6).

Some stereotypes should be discarded when recruiting teachers. In Spain, for example, students have a say in this field; many of them do not prefer to be taught by a fellow Spanish teacher, no matter how high qualifications he/she has. They think they will get their teacher's accent and gain no improvement at all (Racoma, 2014). "in Thailand, most students feel like they can learn more from native speakers who have"fair"skin (Racoma, 2014, para.6).

Sooner or later non-native speakers will take over. Many countries have started nationalizing a lot of sectors, especially “education”. A new voice has come from a native speaker to convey some news in this regard:

The tide is turning, slowly, but it’s turning. In the future you will have more rights and be more respected by an industry in which you are the backbone. And this is the point that needs to be remembered- they are many, many more of you than there are of me. You have the power, so use it. I just wish more of you realized that. (Taylor, 2014, para.11).

Questionnaire Analysis

Native or Non-native

Survey Result

A questionnaire is distributed among 18 students at Ibri College of Applied Sciences, Oman, in order to see students’ preference regarding their English language teachers—native or non-native.

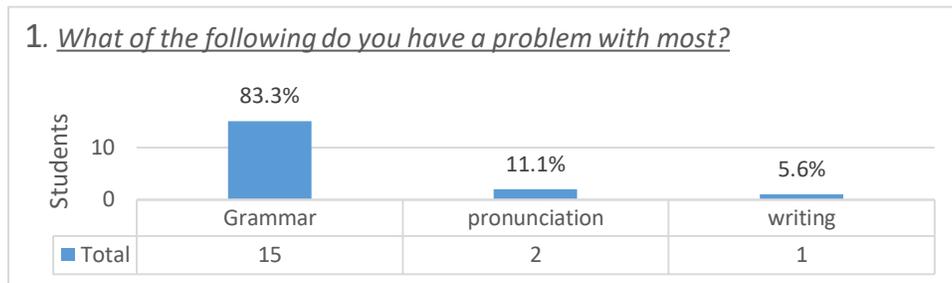
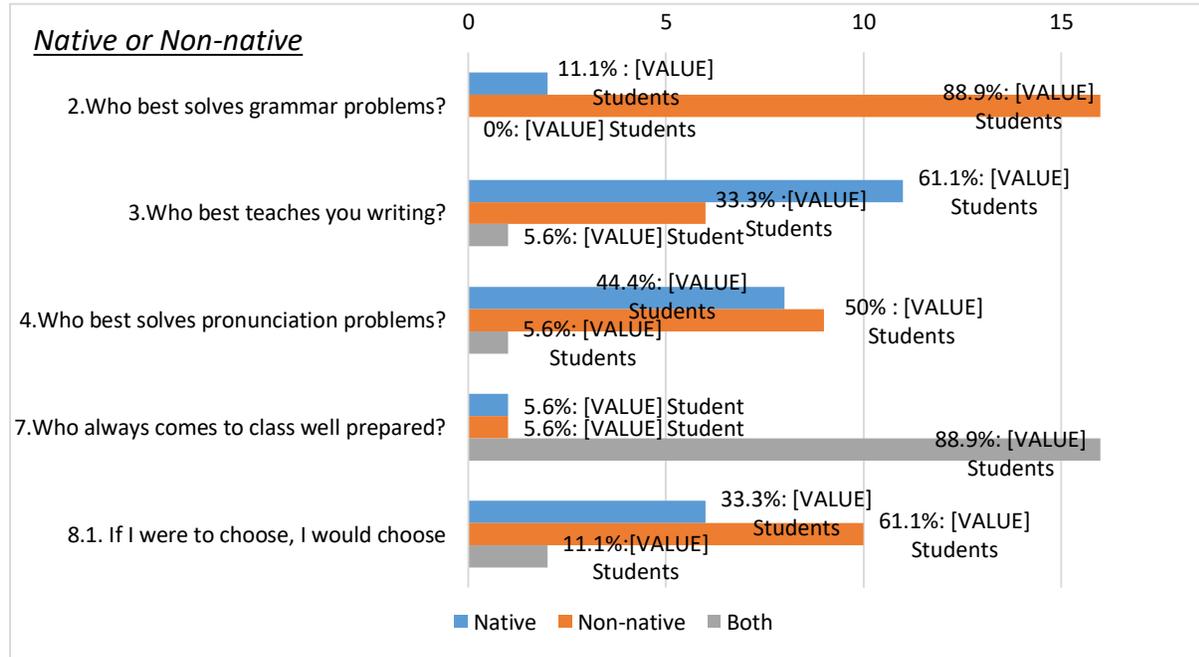


Table1: Shows students’ responses to the skills they have a problem with most.

It seems that 15 students say grammar is the most difficult part in learning English, while two just feel that pronunciation is the most difficult one. However, there is only one who admits that writing is the most difficult skill.

Table2: Shows students’ responses to their choice among native, non-native, or both in the aspect of English teaching.



Question 2 shows that 16 students out of 18 say non-native teachers are the best in solving grammar problems, while 2 say native teachers. For the third question, 11 out of 18 say native teachers are the best in teaching writing, whereas 6 choose non-native. However, one student says both teachers teach writing best. Regarding the fourth question about solving pronunciation problems, 8 say native speakers are better, whereas 9 say non-native; one preferred both. For the fifth question, most of the students say both native and non-native teachers come well prepared to class, while one says native, and the other non-native.

The eighth question was about their preference and reasons of choosing native or non-native teachers. It is clear that 10 students out of 18 choose non-native teachers because they are good at teaching and they understand them better than native speakers as their speech is clearly understood. In contrast, only 6 choose native speakers because they have no problem with understanding their speech. Moreover, they feel they can learn to speak English easily. However, two students say both.

In the open-ended questions, question five, students highlight the advantages of choosing a native speaker teaching English because they learn new words and expressions. A native speaker teaches the right pronunciation and helps them understand grammar, improve writing, reading and speaking skills. Moreover, native teachers are good at communication with students; funny, friendly and helpful. On the other hand, all students say non-native speakers are very good teachers. Regarding the advantages of having non-native speakers teaching English, students think they help them understand the subject very well. In addition, they help improve speaking,

grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and writing. They push them and make them study a lot, teach in a good way and get them always well prepared. Another reason is that some teachers know their-students' - language very well, which is a merit.

Recommendations

- when recruiting teachers, they must sit for a professional interview so as to make sure they have knowledge on what they are going to teach.
- certificates and years of experience must be appropriate.
- class observation is required, and new teachers should be under probation for at least 3 months.
- students should take part in evaluating their teachers.
- it should be highlighted that native and non-native teachers are not enemies and have to cooperate positively in a friendly atmosphere, and that should be reflected on students' performance and excellence.

Conclusion

The Native or Nonnative issue is still a matter of controversy and the debate seems never to reach a satisfactory solution. Native speakers deal with the writing skill in a way that students do appreciate; more fluent and know much about their culture and heritage, and can make the classroom as authentic as possible. On the other hand, non-native speakers are more aware of the weakness points of their students and can deal with them accordingly. They are better in teaching grammar and can easily switch into students' first language in order to ensure full comprehension.

I think both native and nonnative language teachers are important in the educational field provided that they have the knowledge required backed by qualifications. I am so optimistic that - in the light of globalism- this issue will disappear, as nonnative teachers and students will have the chance to exchange ideas and live in a virtual English environment via the latest ways of technology. Is that possible? Let us wait and see.

About the Researchers

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Questionnaire

The purpose of this questionnaire is to collect information for an article titled "Native or Non-native Teacher?"

This information will not be misused and you will not be identified.

Thank you for your co-operation.

الهدف من هذه الاستبانة هو جمع معلومات لمقالة بعنوان "المدرس الناطق بالانجليزية او غير الناطق بها".

لن يتم استخدام هذه المعلومات بطريقة غير لائقة.

ملاحظة: "ليس من داع لكتابة اسمائكم".

Please tick the write answer.

1. What of the following do you have a problem with most?
 - a. Grammar
 - b. Writing
 - c. Pronunciation
2. Who best solves "Grammar Problems"?
 - a. Native
 - b. Non-native
3. Who best teaches you "Writing"?
 - a. Native
 - b. Non-native
4. Who best solves "Pronunciation Problems"?
 - a. Native
 - b. Non-native

In your words, answer the following questions. (Don't worry about spelling mistakes).

5. If a native speaker teaches me, I get the following advantages:

.....

.....

.....

6. If a non-native speaker teaches me, I get the following advantages:

.....

.....

.....

7. Who always comes to class well-prepared:
 - a. Native
 - b. Non-native
 - c. Both
8. If I were to choose, I would choose:
 - a. A native speaker
 - b. A non-native speaker

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