To Be or Not to Be?
Non-Native Speaking Teachers of English Teaching English

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There are different definitions of native and non-native speakers. According to the definition presented by Calafato (2019), a native speaker is a person who has been learning a language from early childhood. Meanwhile, a non-native speaker is a post-pubertal learner of a foreign language. In general, he or she can theoretically attain native-level ability in the target language (Calafato, 2019). Being a native or a non-native speaker directly impacts his or her teaching abilities. Notably, there is a long-standing debate in the language learning environment whether these two types of teachers are better in the classroom. Even though it is more popular to have a native speaker teacher, there is no sufficient evidence to demonstrate that he or she is a better teacher. In this regard, a non-native speaker teacher (non-NEST) of English can be as effective in teaching as a native speaker because he or she can serve as a learner model, apply effective learning strategies, supply learners with information about English, predicting and preventing language difficulties, being more

empathetic to learners needs and problems, and efficiently use the mother tongue.

During the language learning process, there are two basic models of language learner. On the one hand, many teachers and learners are aspired by a native speaker ideal that represents a perfect knowledge of language (Calafato, 2019). In particular, it is referred to as "the golden standard of grammatical correctness and perfect pronunciation" (Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2014, p. 1). On the contrary, many people and students perceive non-native speakers as those who have a deficient knowledge of language. In general, this assumption is wrong since the language knowledge of a native speaker depends on his or her age, geography, occupation, and social status (Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2014). Consequently, language proficiency of a native speaker varies. On the other hand, non-NEST represents a successful model of multilingual learner that can inspire other people involved in language learning activities (Calafato, 2019). From my personal experience, non-NEST is a good learner model. Notably, every teacher is meticulously trained to be a professional. Moreover, being an education means a lifelong learning and self-improvement of skills and knowledge of the subject to adapt to the latest needs and changes in the professional sphere. Thus, non-native speaker serves as an effective learner model.

In 2020, the latest needs and changes in the professional sphere are related to the coronavirus outbreak. Many countries enforce measures that restrict the number of individuals who are allowed to stay in public places. These new rules have disrupted the normal operation of schools and universities. In general, the duration of such measures has been extensive and they will likely be extended in some parts of the world until the situation will be under control. In this context, many private and public educational institutions have introduced alternative methods for students and teachers, such as remote teaching, to continue education in situations when the actual school attendance is not possible (Reimers et al., 2020). There are several recommendations for English teachers to adapt to the latest needs and changes. According to Hasper (2020), self-reflection and the usage of continuous professional development strategies enhance teachers' knowledge and growth. The possible benefit of remote teaching is that it eases the reflection on one's teaching techniques because a reviewer can watch recorded lessons and examine an individual's teaching style (Hasper, 2020). Furthermore, a teacher can enhance the knowledge of the subject by learning new information and improving the necessary skills through online educational resources (Reimers et al., 2020). Thus, teachers can respond to the latest needs and changes in the professional sphere.

The other sphere of comparison is the effectiveness of teaching language learning strategies. Native speaker teachers have little knowledge about the process of language learning and lack the expertise about language teaching methodology (Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2014). When teaching a foreign language, non-NESTs are more effective comparing with native speakers because they can employ the skills, concepts, and learning strategies they acquired during their own experience of foreign language learning. In this regard, these teachers possess better cognitive and social capabilities of foreign language teaching.

Many teachers use creative strategies to enhance language awareness, pragmatic knowledge, and intercultural competence of learners (Calafato, 2019). At the same time, I have explored that teaching effectiveness significantly depends on teacher's interest in the subjects and his or her efforts in accumulating information and knowledge about the subject. For instance, if a teacher has personal interest in the subject, his or her teaching will be more effective. In addition, the other important factor is the level of training and education of the non-NEST. A common strategy employed by non-native teachers is to make a list of strategies or methods that were effective or still work for them in language learning. By sharing personal experience and learning strategies with students a non-NEST could make the language acquisition easier. Hence, the ability

of non-native English speaker to teach language learning strategies more efficiently varies.

Both native and non-native speakers can provide to learners with precise information about English. Notably, native speaker teachers have better oral skills, wider vocabulary, as well as the knowledge of English culture; however, they struggle with explaining complex language items and have minor knowledge of grammar (Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2014).

Native speakers understand language basing on intuition because they have learned the language during communication and basing on the contextual situation. In this context, students might struggle to perceive the logic about the English language that native speakers have (Mauludin, 2015). At the same time, a distinct advantage of the non-NEST is that he or she can supply learners with unique information about English language. For example, non-native speaker usually excel at teaching literacy, grammar and vocabulary (Calafato, 2019). From my perspective, non-NEST can be as effective teachers as native speaker as long as the former could make use of his or her given teaching talent while helping students to succeed in learning English. In this regard, both types of teachers can excel in supplying language learners with information about English language.

Non-native speakers are more efficient in predicting and preventing language difficulties. Native speaker teachers are more effective in creating friendly atmosphere during the lesson and using body language. They are generally seen as more creative, flexible and informal that significantly helped to anticipate and prevent language difficulties (Aslan & Thompson, 2016). However, although native speaker teacher has better oral skills, their speech could be difficult for learners to understand. It seems that differences in cultural and linguistic backgrounds might inhibit learning (Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2014). Meanwhile, non-NEST are more aware of pragmatic aspects of target language learning having the ability to compare and contrast cultural assumptions related to foreign language, providing students with deeper insights (Calafato, 2019). I believe that after receiving a formal training and having once learned a foreign language, a non-NEST is more effective in preventing language difficulties basing on one's own experience. Therefore, non-NEST is more efficient in predicting and preventing language difficulties.

In addition, a non-native speaker teacher is more sensitive to the needs and problems of students. Native speaker teachers are favored while teaching pronunciation, but they are rarely viewed as formal educators. For instance, they can lack insight into the local education environment and sometimes struggle to build rapport with students (Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2014). Furthermore, a native speaker helps to

enhance English fluency because during the lesson they establish an authentic English-speaking environment. As a result, students have no other choice but to speak English that might create problems in comprehending the lesson (Mauludin, 2015). On the contrary, non-NEST has better planned lessons, gave a lot of homework, prepared students for exams and regularly checked for errors (Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2014). From my own experience I know that regardless teacher's values and beliefs non-native speakers are more tolerant to their students. I do my best to adapt to each student's needs tailoring the lessons and motivate them to language learning. In this context, respecting learners' needs is not only an ethical principle, but it also ensures psychological comfort to guarantee a stable learning environment. Encountering the fact that all students are different, a teacher should make the lesson that would suit the needs and difficulties faced by learners. As a result, a non-NEST is more sensitive to learners' language needs and problems.

A unique advantage that a non-NEST has over a native speaker is the knowledge of students' mother tongue. Using the native language and English as a foreign language a teacher can engage in code-switching during which he or she can more effectively explain syntactic and pragmatic levels of a target language (Calafato, 2019). For instance, Walkinshaw and Oanh (2014) argue that Hungarian learners of English preferred non-native speakers because they could explain

difficult grammatical items in their native language. Moreover, the usage of the mother tongue assists students to get the better understanding of a lesson. This is especially relevant for those who only begin to learn the language. In particular, students can openly ask questions without being worried about not knowing English. In this situation, if a person does not understand a new material, a non-NEST can explain it using learner's mother tongue. Furthermore, students feel more confident and less anxious during the communication with a teacher who shares the same knowledge and language learning experience (Mauludin, 2015). Being a non-native speaker myself, I agree that it is more convenient to work with a teacher who knows your first language because he or she is more effective in explaining new material and difficult topics. Hence, a significant advantage of a non-NEST is the usage of students' first language.

In the end, regardless of being native or non-native speaker, being a teacher is a complex task. In general, there are three main components, namely talent, training, and experience, that determine the quality of teaching. I believe that as in any other profession experience and training are crucial, but talent is decisive. In particular, if a person has a natural talent to teaching, a job becomes a pleasure. Moreover, teaching with pleasure changes students' lives as well.

Being inspired by amazing teachers myself, I decided to follow their path as well.

I know that being a non-native-speaking teacher is not an easy task because it requires hard work and constant improvement. For example, to improve my proficiency level and become a better professional, I attend specialized English language courses every summer. These courses help me to improve my knowledge of English language and teaching abilities. In 2018, I took part in the teaching courses arranged by Oxford University. During this program, I improved my English pronunciation by learning from native speakers. Moreover, I gained a better perception of learning progress and teaching approaches. Hence, I always take an opportunity to enhance my English and teaching style.

From my personal experience, many language learners prefer a native speaker teacher when working on the accent and developing pronunciation skills. However, some students find it challenging to understand a native speaker with a possible strong accent that deviates from standard English, which is adopted in learning materials. At the same time, learners, whose supervisor is a non-NEST, benefit from such an experience because they learn to understand different English accents (Calafato, 2019). I believe that the pronunciation skills of a non-native speaker are based on the

ability to speak correctly, which is achieved by the continuous practice aimed at improving language proficiency. In this regard, almost all non-NESTs can build up their pronunciation proficiency if they work hard enough. During the teaching process, I recognize that students might make pronunciation mistakes, although I pay more attention to word usage, which should have a correct meaning and be comprehensible. Therefore, a non-native speaker can have proper pronunciation and teach these skills to his or her students effectively.

Being a non-NEST has a positive impact on the development of learning abilities in different subjects. For example, individuals who know a foreign language have more developed knowledge of syntax and expand their vocabulary with less effort, making the level of their literacy skills higher. Multilinguals is more effective in learning additional language due to the knowledge and possession of skills, learning techniques, and concepts, which were developed during the previous language acquisition (Calafato, 2019). Knowing different languages helped me to build up new language skills. Knowing Romanian helped me to learn Japanese and English because my first language includes all sounds used in my second and third languages. Thus, knowing several languages has a positive effect on learning abilities.

In conclusion, a non-NEST can be a successful teacher of English. On the one hand, native speakers serve as language standard models. On the other hand, non-native speakers are examples of learner model. Opposite to native speakers, non-native speakers have better knowledge of learning strategies that were acquired during their own experience of foreign language learning and can use their skills and competence to teach their students. Moreover, non-NESTs excel at teaching grammar, literacy, and vocabulary. Furthermore, non-native speakers are more aware of different aspects of language learning having the ability to compare and contrast cultural assumptions related to foreign language. In addition, they also use their own experience to predict and prevent students' language difficulties. Non-NESTs are more effective in tackling language learning problems and empathetic to the needs of learners. The other advantage non-native speakers have is the knowledge of learners' mother tongues that can significantly assist the learning process.

Finally, being a good teacher means having a natural talent or the nature's gift for this profession.

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