RESEARCH ARTICLE

NON-NATIVE ENGLISH-SPEAKING TEACHERS: It doesn't sound like a bad idea
ÇAĞRI TUĞRUL MART

Department of Languages, Ishik University, Erbil, Iraq

ÇAĞRI TUĞRUL MART

ABSTRACT

Though native speakers have been favored to teach English, non-native English speaking teachers can teach effectively in English if they have reached high levels of proficiency in the target language. A native-like command of a language and pedagogical content knowledge can enable non-native English speaking teachers to demonstrate competent teaching. The objective of this study is to show that non-native English speaking teachers have also advantages over native speaking teachers.

Key Words: Native English speaking teachers, Non-native English speaking teachers, proficiency, Competence, Teaching skills

INTRODUCTION

On account of the established belief that native speakers teach English better than non-native English speaking teachers, non-native English speaking teachers encounter some challenges in English teaching profession. It is true that teachers of English language must possess a high level of oral and written proficiencies in English; therefore, non-native English speaking teachers find it hard to struggle for acquiring native-like proficiency. Maum (2002) states two challenges: accent, and credibility. Teachers with bad accents are considered as less effective and they are perceived as unfavorable as they will negatively affect the learners. The idea "of being viewed by students, fellow teachers and administrators as incompetent" (Shin, 2008, p. 60) diminishes the credibility of non-NESTs in an English learning environment. Non-native English speaking teachers cannot use English as successfully as native speaking English teachers. According to Medgyes (1992) non-native English speaking teachers cannot use English accurately and appropriately, and their

fluency will not compete with native fluency. However, non-native English speaking teachers can become 'proficient users' as Paikeday (1985) suggests, and can contribute to the realm of English.

Native and Non-Native English Speaking Teachers

The difference between native English speaking teachers (NEST) and non-native English speaking teachers(Non-NEST)in terms of linguistic competence is clearly noticed (Shin, 2008; Medgyes, 2001). A native speaker is someone who speaks English as his or her native language, also called mother tongue, first language, or L1 (Medgyes, 2001). Native speakers are owners of proper, authentic English (Widdowson,1994); therefore, the level of language proficiency they have is better. Ulate (2011) argues that native speakers are creative in language use; moreover, they possess ability to communicate within social settings, and grasp of meanings. Furthermore, fluency is a significant characteristic of them that a non-NEST cannot achieve. The ability NESTs possess to use the

language is a great advantage of them over Non-NESTs.

A Non-NEST may be defined as someone who speaks English as a second or foreign language, and works in an EFL environment (Medgyes, 2001). Widdowson claims that "the language that is authentic for native speaker users cannot possibly be authentic for learners" (1998, p.711).Non-Nests, by no means, reach a native level.Peter Medgyes (2001, p. 435) compares NESTs and Non-NESTs in terms of their use of English as:

NESTs
Own use of English
Speak better English
Use real language
Use English more confidently

Non-NESTs

Speak poorer English
Use "bookish" language
Use English less confidently
The Advantages of Being a Non-NEST

Ulate (2011) states that a good language teacher is neither native nor non-native, but the one that is professionally or personally prepared to perform the education task. It is not true to say that NESTs are better teachers because they demonstrate high language proficiency so quality of teaching must be taken into consideration. It is to a large extent important to have native-like command of a language to teach it well, but teachers with pedagogical content knowledge help students more in language acquisition. According to Árva and Medgyes (2000, p. 358), "teachers should be hired solely on the basis of their professional virtue, regardless of their language background". An adequately qualified non-NEST can perform language teaching effectively. Depending on the teaching skills, non-NESTs can demonstrate competent teaching if they have language requirements.

Non-NESTs are language learners at the same time, thus they can predict the learning difficulties that students face, and can develop different language learning strategies. Non-NESTs have a deeper understanding of student learning, for that reason they solve a wide range of learning problems of students. The effective use of the strategies at the right time will bring about accomplishment. Non-NESTS place an emphasis on accuracy in language learning which will provide a better opportunity for learners to understand how language works. Gaining accuracy in the target language will result in better use of language skills. Mostly NESTs are unaware of the language system; on the other hand, non-NESTs, since they have acquired how the process of foreign language development occurs during their own learning process, can provide students abundant information about it. Non-NESTs can be more helpful to students as they have "conscious knowledge of grammar, language learning experience" (Shin, 2008, p. 63). They can develop a better understanding of grammar, and seek for different styles of teaching it. Moreover, they can "provide language enrichment experiences for learners" (Richards, 2011, p.3).

The use of mother tongue in foreign language teaching has a positive role. There is always a communication gap possibility between students and NESTs. But using the first language is a great advantage of non-NESTs owing to its facilitating factor. Students stand a better chance of comprehension if L1 is used. As Medgyes (1992) points out: "Only non-NESTs can benefit from sharing the learners' mother tongue" (p. 347). Medgyes (2001, p. 435) compares NESTs and Non-NESTs in terms of their attitude to teaching the language as:

NESTs
Non-NESTs
Attitude to teaching the language
Are less insightful
are more insightful
Focus on:
focus on:
Fluency
accuracy

Meaning

form

Language in use

grammar rules

Oral skills

printed word

Colloquial registers

formal registers

Teach items in context

teach items in isolation

Prefer free activities

prefer controlled activities

Favor group work/pair work

favor frontal work

Use a variety of materials

use a single textbook

Tolerate errors

correct/punish for errors

Set fewer tests

set more tests

Use no/less L1

use more L1

Resort to no/less translation

resort to more translation

Assign less homework

 assign more homework

Mastery of language teaching competencies will enable non-NESTS to become an effective teacher. Richards (2011, p.3) lists the abilities non-MESTs need to perform language teaching effectively as:

- To comprehend texts accurately
- To provide good language models
- To maintain fluent use of the target language
- To give clear explanations and instructions in the target language
- To provide examples of words and grammatical structures
- To select target language resources
- To give correct feedback on learner language
- To provide input at an appropriate level of difficulty
- To monitor his or her own speech and writing for accuracy
- To use appropriate classroom language
- To provide language-enrichment experiences for learners.

CONCLUSION

Though non-NESTs cannot become native speakers of a new language, they can use it competently, and can contribute to English language teaching successfully. Because they are both teachers and learners, non-NESTS can understand learners' needs and develop more effective ways of teaching them.

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