The Superiority of the Native English Teachers over the Non-Native English Teachers

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The continuous controversy that goes around the superiority of the Native English teachers (henceforth NETs) over the Non-native English teachers (henceforth NNETs) is constantly a point of discussion among TESOL experts. Some specialists such as Harmer (1991), Pennycook (1998) and Phillipson (1992) confirm the idealism of the NETs. Others see that the gap between NETs and NNETs is becoming closer. However, in this essay, I will argue that NETs still have the lead and impact in the TESOL classrooms. The arguments are based on showing the positive effects of NETs on learners' motivation and attitudes towards target language learning, as well as their linguistic and cultural impact on students.

It is believed that the main merit of NNETs is their linguistic and communicative ability to use students' L1(Ma 2012). Findings of Walkinshaw & Oanh (2014) report that the first benefit of NNETs for Vietnamese students is their aptitude to explain in L1. Ma (2012) clarifies that the linguistic strength of NNETs provides active and fast interaction with the students especially those with low levels of English. The NNETs objectives of using L1 is to improve communication between teacher and learners; strengthen student-teacher relationship as well as enhancing learning (Harbord 1992). The above views hypothesized that the NNETs linguistic power in speaking students' mother tongue could be a device that assists in second language acquisition.

While it is possible to agree with the opinions discussed above about a probable role to NNETs' linguistic and communicative aptitude in the interaction with their students by using L1 in TESOL classrooms, it does not follow that these teachers have the same linguistic and communicative knowledge of the target language. This is due to fact that they are perhaps not perfect speakers-listeners that Chomsky (1965) describes in his linguistic theory. Being non-native speakers of English, the NNETs 'are thought to be somehow far from achieving complete competence of the second language whatever they try to. Such a belief could be accepted by theorists and practitioners (Stern 1983). What has been mentioned above reflexes the difficulty NNETs encounter in their trial to be a native-like model for their learners. Ma (2012) noticed that one of the points reported by students about NNETs performance was their inaccuracy in grammar and pronunciation. Furthermore, the use of L1 itself is thought to bring some negative impacts on both the teacher and the learner. Atkinson (1987) summarises these negative impacts as follows:

1. A common feel by the teacher and/or the students for the need to translate every item in order   to have actual understanding of it.

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2. The use of inaccurate translation by the teacher and/or students leads to a failure in observing the differences between equivalent forms, equivalence in semantics as well as characteristics of pragmatics.

3. Despite their capability of expressing what they mean, students have the habit of using mother tongue when speaking to the teacher.

4. The importance of using only English in most activities inside the classroom is not realized by the students.

When using L1, both the teachers and students miss the chance to practice the target language. Aboyan (2011) reports that Armenian students and teachers have negative attitudes towards using L1 in TESOL classrooms. These findings meet Hussein's (2013) who states that the great part of students and teachers in Jordan do not believe that a foreign language learning and teaching is going to be easier via speaking L1 in the classroom. They state that mother tongue has unhelpful impact on motivation and fluency and maintains improper learning of English. On the contrary, only 12% of students and 10% of teachers have the opposite belief.

Moreover, it is widely demonstrated that NETs are capable of stimulating learners' motivation and creating positive attitudes towards the target language. Motivation plays a crucial role in determining the success or failure in second language learning (Richards &Schmidt 2002). NETs ability to create non-traditional teaching styles encourages learners to practice English effectively. It is perhaps obvious that such exceptional teaching techniques enhanced the acquisition of English to many learners. Wong (2014) conducted a research on the effect of NETs on student's preferences and motivation. The collected data proved that English language learning was facilitated due to the non-threatening atmosphere provided by NETs. The student's less controlled behavior in the classroom prevented anxiety occurrence, therefore, learners found themselves more encouraged to practice target language. Such a friendly environment made students more initiative and self-motivated. On the other hand, Sahin (2005) conducted a research on NETs' contribution to learners' attitudes and motivation. The findings of the study showed that the students' attitudes were positively formed via exposure to NETs which developed language learning. The correlation between students' attainment in the lessons of English and their attitudes was significant which indicates that student achievements could be predicted through their attitudes towards the second language.

In addition, being a native speaker of English, NETs are recognized globally for their linguistic strength. This means that they have the innate knowledge about their language rules (Crystal 1997). In other words, when applying Stern (1983) concept of linguistic competence to NETs, the result seems be a competent language teacher as regards form and semantics. Lasagabaster & Sierra (2005) reported that the Spanish students, who had been exposed to NETs, pointed out that these teachers had better pronunciation, and they had more awareness about vocabulary and terminologies as well as having good knowledge

about language. Students added that they started to have good comprehension to native speakers, and that listening to NETs enhanced their listening skills. They also remarked the NETs' writing and reading experience as well as their speaking super quality if compared with NNETs. These findings are consistent with Rao's (2010) who stated that Chinese students enjoyed the classroom authentic language spoken by NETs in the first place especially the pronunciation and intonation accuracy "[t]he most enjoyable thing in attending NES teachers' classes was to listen to their idiomatic English" (p. 62). Students drew the attention to the NETs' valuable usage comments. These remarks go similarly with (Ma 2012) who reported that - in Hong Kong- NETs developed students' listening, pronunciation as well as speaking skills. The learners expressed appreciation and admiration of teachers' accuracy especially in grammar and pronunciation.

Due to NETs distinctive knowledge of their culture, they are believed to be the true 'mirror' that reflects the way language is used in target community to the learners of English everywhere. Rather than having the knowledge 'about' language only, they have the knowledge of 'how' language is used socially (Harmer 1991). To put it in today's technical terminology, NETs know the software of the language (its linguistic form) and they also have awareness of the hardware (its community). Baker (2012) argues that language is thought to be difficult to teach without awareness of its cultural context. Knowing the linguistic form of a language is not enough, it should be integrated with its social aspects to understand language completely (BBC 2011). Walkinshaw & Oanh (2014) noticed that one of the significant reported advantages of NETs for Japanese and Vietnamese students was their willingness to be acquainted with the target society. One of the motivating factors in learning a second language was student's desire to share foreign cultures. A Vietnamese student's comment was: "[w]e can know much about culture and people in that native speaker teacher's country." (p.6). The findings of Rao (2010) on Chinese students gave another support to the cultural familiarity where foreign communities were represented lively by the example of NETs. Students reported that the learning process of English was facilitated by the NETs' knowledge of culture. They added that cultural background was necessary for them to remove difficulty in their understanding of English.

In this essay, I have considered the controversy regarding the superiority of NETs over NNETs. On one hand, there is a belief that the main virtue of NNETs is their linguistic ability of using the learners' L1 which is thought to facilitate learning especially to students with very poor English. However, there is substantially more evidence that NETs have additional impact on learners' motivation and attitudes towards second language acquisition; students' linguistic ability; as well as learners' cultural knowledge about the target community. Taking these benefits into consideration, I would strongly agree with the view that it is better to learn English from a native speaker teacher than from a non-native speaker teacher.

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