

DISCRIMINATION BEHIND NEST AND NNEST DICHOTOMY IN ELT POFESIONALISM

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DISCRIMINATION BEHIND NEST AND NNEST DICHOTOMY IN ELT PROFESSIONALISM

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Abstract

This paper argues that the dichotomy between native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) has resulted in discriminatory practices in English language teaching (ELT) professionalism. Reviewing four studies investigating discrimination in ELT industry in some Asian countries, this literature review reveals that most English as a foreign/second language (EFL/ESL) institutions give preferential treatment to NESTs based on some factors. Nativeness and nationality are among the top factors of discrimination in English teaching positions. Discrepancy in required academic qualification and income also prove that NNESTs have always been discriminated and marginalized in ELT employment. Furthermore, it is also found that racist policy applied by some institutions recruiting White English teachers solely because of their race and privilege. Finally, it can be concluded that some governments and institutions' policies in recruiting English teachers have played a big role in perpetuating this discrimination against NNESTs by maintaining the ideology of NESTs as superior teachers in theories and practices of ELT.

Keywords: Discrimination, native speakerism, ELT professionalism

Introduction

Globalization has made English the world's most widely spoken language for trade, education, business and tourism (Graddol, 1997, 2001; Crystal, 2003). It means English is much used by people of different mother tongues and countries of origin as a language of contact in immediate interactions. This specific function of English is known as lingua franca (ELF). Furthermore, the use of ELF by multicultural people with a range of fluency and deviation from the so-called Standard English in terms of phonology, lexis, pragmatics, grammar, and communication styles (Jindapitak & Teo, 2013) has resulted in many varieties of regional Englishes called World Englishes (WEs). Nowadays, about 80% of verbal exchanges in English worldwide are estimated between non-native speakers (Seidlhofer, 2004); thus, WEs belongs to everybody who speaks it. In this respect, native speaker competence may no longer be relevant as a golden standard to reach and the belief that the ideal English teacher is a native speaker may no longer be maintained.

Unfortunately, despite these ELF and WEs phenomena, the practice of English language teaching (ELT) worldwide still constructs professionalism within the dichotomy between native and non-native speakerism. This dichotomy has resulted in racial and linguistic discriminations in ELT professionalism because of a widespread belief in the dominance of native speaker standards in language and language teaching methodology. The term 'discrimination' itself is defined as "a selectively unjustified negative behavior toward members of the target group that involves denying individuals or groups of people equality of treatment which they may wish" (Allport, 1954: 51). Similar to this, *Webster's New World Law Dictionary* defines 'discrimination' as

the act of denying rights, benefits, justice, equitable treatment, or access to facilities available to all others, to an individual or group of people because of their race, age, gender, handicap or other defining characteristic.

From these definitions, it can be concluded that discrimination in ELT professionalism is the act of inequitable treatment to a group of people, in this case is the non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs), because of their non-nativeness.

This discrimination is perpetuated by many institutions and individuals who have the power to make hiring policies in those institutions (Selvi, 2010). Norton (1997) stated that many people in the world are strongly biased towards a preference for native English-speaking teachers (NESTs); despite the strengths that NNESTs have. Furthermore, there is also a growing understanding that this discrimination can be racist where the image of a NEST is associated with Whiteness (Kubota & Lin, 2006; Holliday & Aboshiha, 2009). Those who do not match this stereotypical English speaker are often perceived as a NNEST even if they were born and raised in countries where English is spoken as their first language (Amin, 1999).

Although many teachers and researchers claim that discrimination exists in ELT professionalism which is directed to NNESTs, many others deny it because there is insufficient objective evidence proving this phenomenon is widespread (Holliday & Aboshiha, 2009). This article aims to address the issue of discriminatory practices in ELT professionalism based on the dichotomy between NEST and NNEST. Some factors privileging NESTs will be discussed with the purpose to provide more literature on discrimination in ELT professionalism.

Literature Review

The Emergence of World Englishes

The term 'World Englishes' (WEs) emerged as a result of hot debate between Quirk (1985, 1990) and Kachru (1985, 1991). Quirk (1985, 1990) insisted that British English or American English be held as the yardstick of 'Standard English' and suggested that Englishes in various contexts, especially in the outer-circle countries were just interference varieties. Meanwhile, Kachru (1985) argued that English has been indigenized and institutionalized in the Outer Circle such as India, Singapore, and Nigeria which resulted in varieties of English like Indian English, Singaporean English (Singlish) and Nigerian English. Kachru (1986) then proposed the term 'World Englishes' to refer to these new varieties of English spoken in the outer-circle countries.

Regarding the global spread of English, the term 'World Englishes' is now used to describe the nativized and distinct varieties of English spoken worldwide. Kachru (1985) proposed the first model of the global spread of English into three concentric circles; the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle and the Expanding Circle (see Figure 1). The Inner Circle refers to countries where English is primarily used as a mother tongue or native language (ENL) in every sphere of life such as in USA, England, and Australia. The Outer Circle refers to English spoken in countries where it is spoken alongside with the native tongue to officially communicate in several domains or carry out various institutionalized functions (Kirkpatrick, 2007) such as in India, Singapore and Nigeria. English in this Outer Circle is also called as English as a second language (ESL). The third one is the Expanding Circle. English spoken in this circle is often described as English as a foreign language (EFL), which means it plays no official role but is usually taught and learned in schools such as in China, Russia, and Indonesia.



Figure 1. Kachru's (1985) World English model

Referring to the three concentric circles of Kachru's (1985) model, there is no doubt that speakers from those three circles perform differently in English according to the contexts in which it is employed. This model is indeed aimed to remove the dichotomy and demonstrate the pluralistic reality of the language and show that English changes as it spreads. It also suggests that one variety is not better than any other because there is no such a thing as Standard English. Widdowson (1994: 385) supported Kachru's argument against Standard English and argued that native speakers cannot claim ownership of English:

As soon as you accept that English serves the communicative and communal needs of different communities, it follows logically that it must be diverse. An international language has to be an independent language. It does not follow logically, however, that the language will disperse into mutually unintelligible varieties. For it will naturally stabilize into standard form to the extent required to meet the needs of the communities concerned. Thus, it is clearly vital to the interests of the international community of, for example, scientists or business people, whatever their primary language, that they should preserve a common standard of English in order to keep up standards of communicative effectiveness. English could not otherwise serve their purposes. It needs no native speaker to tell them that.

Furthermore, Norton (1997: 427) argued that English “belongs to all people who speak it, whether native and non-native, whether ESL or EFL, whether standard or non standard.” In other words, anybody who views himself/herself as a legitimate speaker of English can own English and no particular group can claim its ownership, which strengthens the concept of WEs.

English as a Lingua Franca

The emergence of WEs has brought challenges and attracted scholars (e.g. McKay, 2002; Matsuda, 2003; Seidlhofer, 2004; Kuo, 2006) to discuss related issues such as English as a lingua franca (ELF) and its conceptualization, development, and teaching. Firth (cited in Seidlhofer, 2004: 211) defined ELF as “a contact language between persons who share neither a common native tongue nor a common culture, and for whom English is the chosen foreign language of communication.” Furthermore, Seidlhofer (2004) reminded the uses of ELF are not just related to the Expanding Circle, but also includes native speakers as well as members of the Outer Circle.

Regarding the given definition and the function of ELF, English language teaching (ELT) in ESL/EFL contexts should be aimed to develop learners’ ability to communicate with other English speakers from different parts of the world, not to prepare learners to achieve intelligibility for native-speaker receivers or aim to develop the kind of communicative competence based on descriptions of a native-speaker model (Kuo, 2006). Furthermore, Medgyes (2001) stated that the number of English speakers in the Outer and the Expanding Circles far exceeds the number of speakers in the Inner Circle, which means the interactions in ELF tend to occur among those who are not native speakers of English. Thus, English teachers in those countries need to teach their students ELF whose main purpose is develop their ability to communicate in international contexts such as in business negotiations, trades or transnational conferences, not for daily communication with English native speakers and it is the teachers’ responsibility to prepare their learners to function effectively in such contexts.

However, despite the purpose of ELF, ELT in ESL/EFL contexts still maintains the teaching of native varieties of English. This irrelevant practice of ELT promotes the idea that native-speakerism as the only perfect teaching model, which perpetuates the worldwide perception that only native speakers can make the best English language teachers. Although the notion that native speakers of a language are innately better teachers of that language than non-native speakers has been challenged, many ESL/EFL institutions maintain the perception that their students place greater value on learning from a NEST than from a NNEST (Walkinshaw & Duong, 2012). This perception has been the source of discrimination in ELT professionalism through the dichotomy between the two groups of teachers; NEST and NNEST.

NEST and NNEST Dichotomy

The controversy of the dichotomy between NEST and NNEST in the field of second and foreign language teaching has received considerable attention in literature in the past two decades (Mahboob & Golden, 2013; Selvi, 2010). Moussu and Llorca (as cited in

Holliday & Aboshiha, 2009) argued that the distinction is losing its relevance within the context of the expanding nature of English, the increased recognition of teachers with a wide variety of language backgrounds, and evidence that language learners do not find it meaningful. Furthermore, Medgyes (2001) argued that that this distinction has been deemed politically incorrect terms, and those who still use them can expect to be accused of employing discriminatory language. Furthermore, a number of researchers (e.g. Norton, 1997; Selvi, 2014; Widdowson, 1994) have also reported that being a native speaker of English is not an essential factor in being an effective teacher because both NESTs and NNESTs have strengths and weaknesses.

Unfortunately, those scholars' opinions about the advantages of both groups of teachers do not have much impact in changing the notion of native speakerism. Holliday (2005: 6) defined native speakerism as "an established belief that 'native-speaker' teachers represent a 'Western culture' from which springs the ideals of both the English language and of English language teaching methodology." As a result, native speakerism is still widely believed in ELT industry in ESL/EFL contexts.

Research Method

This study applied a literature review method. As Onwuegbuzie and Frels (2016: 49) stated that a literature review might be considered as a research method because the literature reviewer chooses from an array of strategies and procedures for identifying, recording, understanding, meaning-making, and transmitting information pertinent to a topic of interest.

The data used in this study was mainly taken from four studies (Mahboob & Golden, 2013; Saengngoen, 2014; Selvi, 2010; Wang & Lin, 2013) investigating institutionalized discrimination in ELT industry in some Asian countries. Articles from some websites were also used as references to give more information on factors that were not much discussed in the four papers reviewed.

Discussion

The prevalence of native speakerism in the ELT profession leads to discrimination against NNESTs. The findings of this study reveal that the discriminatory practices can be categorized into some factors including nativeness, nationality, academic qualification and teaching experience, whiteness, and financial discrepancy.

Nativeness

Mahboob and Golden (2013) conducted a study investigating discrimination in ELT job advertisements from the website *ESL Jobs World* (www.esljobsworld.com). Based on an analysis of 77 advertisements (42 from East Asia and 35 from the Middle East), the result showed that nativeness was the single most frequent criterion mentioned in the advertisements across the two regions with 61 advertisements (79.2%) that recruited only NESTs.

Similar to this study, Selvi (2010) also conducted a study analyzing job advertisements in two job advertisement repositories, namely TESOL's Online Career Center (<http://careers.tesol.org>) and the International Job Board at Dave's ESL Café

(<http://www.eslcafe.com/joblist>). The results indicated that 60.5% of 38 advertisements in TESOL's Online Career Center required nativeness as a qualification for prospective applicants. Meanwhile, the analysis of advertisements in the International Job Board revealed that 74.4% of 157 advertisements required "native or native-like/near native proficiency" as a qualification for prospective applicants and all of the favored American English.

Wang and Lin's (2013) study focused on the recruitment policies of foreign English teachers in four countries in East Asia; Japan, Korea, Hong Kong and Taiwan. One of the most influential policies in these four countries is the program of recruiting native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) to participate in English language education in public schools, including the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program (JET Program) in Japan, the English Program in Korea (EPIK) in Korea, the Native English-speaking Teacher Scheme (NET Scheme) in Hong Kong, and the Foreign English Teacher Recruitment Project (FETRP) in Taiwan. The analysis of this study revealed a prevailing subscription to native speakerism among these governments. They also stated that "the ideology of NESTs as superior teachers in theories and practices of ELT... is readily adopted by these governments and materialized in the NEST recruitment policies." (Wang & Lin, 2013: 11)

Saengngoen (2014) analyzed three websites (www.esl101.com/discover/Malaysia, www.teachingthailand.com, and www.schooljob.in.th) and found English language schools in Malaysia and Thailand use the native-speakerism approach to select ESL/EFL teachers. The findings of his study revealed that native-speakerism is widely adopted in East and Southeast Asia, especially in Thailand. He furthermore stated that Thailand's Ministry of Education has propagated the native-speakerism ideology by creating structures that support the superiority of the English native speakers and marginalizes EFL Thai teachers and other NNESTs (Saengngoen, 2014).

Nationality

Nationality appeared as one of the factors of discrimination for NNESTs in Mahboob and Golden's (2013) study. Thirty eight of 77 (49%) ELT job advertisements in East Asia and Middle East listed specific countries from which the applicants must come (as seen in Table 1 below).

Nationality	Percentage of Preference
USA	95%
United Kingdom	89%
Canada	84%
Australia	66%
New Zealand	55%
Ireland	37%
South Africa	24%

Table 1. Mahboob and Golden's (2013) list of applicants' nationality preference
While both regions showed preferences for candidates from North America and the UK, there were differences when it came to other countries. The advertisements from East Asia showed more of a preference for applicants from Australia and New Zealand, while

those from the Middle East mentioned Ireland and South Africa more frequently. The result also revealed that no advertisements from East Asia listed South Africa as a desired native speaker country which highlighted an association between native English speakers and Inner Circle Englishes because no Outer Circle countries were specifically mentioned as possible places from which native speakers would be accepted.

Selvi (2010) found that the job advertisements in the two websites he analyzed privileged citizens of certain countries. About 21.1% of the advertisements in TESOL Online Career Center ($n = 8$) and 12.5% of the advertisements in International Job Board ($n = 26$) discriminated based on nationalities/countries of residence of the applicants. The distribution of advertisements discriminating applicants based on their nationalities can be seen in Table 2.

Nationality	Number of Ads. In TESOL OCC	Number of Ads. In IJB
USA	9	27
Canada	8	26
United Kingdom	3	18
Australia	3	15
New Zealand	2	15
Ireland	2	8
South Africa	2	6

Table 2. Selvi's (2010) distribution of applicants' nationality preference

The results of this study showed similarity with those of Mahboob & Golden's (2013) associating native English speakers with Inner Circle Englishes. However, there were one advertisement looking for candidates from one Outer Circle (Philippines) and one stating that candidates with near native English proficiency from European countries would also be considered.

The four programs that Wang and Lin (2013) studied aim at recruiting NESTs from certain native English-speaking countries (see Table 3). Although JET Program in Japan changed its policy after 1989 to include applicants from some European countries such as France, Germany and Russia but in practice as high as 93% of JET participants were from the six English-speaking countries. Similar to this, the NET Scheme in Hongkong does not exclude applicants from non-Inner Circle countries yet it aims to recruit NESTs from native-speaking countries. In conclusion, among all NESTs recruitment programs, Hong Kong is the most flexible, while Taiwan is the strictest in terms of the nationalities of NESTs to be recruited.

Program	Nationality						
	USA	UK	Canada	Australia	New Zealand	Ireland	South Africa
JET Program	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
EPIK	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
NET Scheme	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
FETRP	✓	✓	✓	✓			

Table 3. Wang & Lin's (2013) Applicants' Nationality Preference

Finally, Saengngoen (2014) also found that some ESL/EFL institutions in Malaysia, Thailand and Taiwan explicitly include the nationalities of the English teachers to recruit in their advertisements. The nationalities of prospective applicants include USA, UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. However, applicants from South Africa and European countries will also be considered if qualified. Saengngoen (2014) furthermore stated that most academic institutions in East and Southeast Asia choose to hire native English speakers for English teaching positions solely based on their nationalities.

Academic Qualification and Teaching Experience

The third factor of discrimination behind NEST and NNEST dichotomy is the difference on hiring policies in terms of academic qualification and/or teaching experience. Saengngoen (2014: 12) stated

The Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC) requires Thai public schools to hire English native speakers as English instructors without a requirement to have an English language degree or an English teaching certificate. A teaching license is also exempted if a candidate is a native English speaker. On the other hand, if public schools want to employ non-native English speakers, candidates are required to have both a language teaching degree as well as a teaching license.

He also found out that English teachers in Taiwan are not required to have any teaching experience or an English teaching degree to teach in a tutoring school as long as they are native English speakers from North America, Australia, New Zealand, or the UK.

Wang and Lin (2013) reported that teaching qualifications and experience are not required or prioritized in recruiting NESTs in the four programs they studied. Nearly 90% of JET participants are not certified teachers and most of the NESTs do not have teaching experience or content knowledge of English language. Meanwhile, only 26% of the EPIK participants hold teaching certificates. The NET Scheme in Hong Kong requires applicants to hold teaching certificates but does not consider it as the first priority. In Taiwan, although it was initially stated in the FETRP that applicants need to possess teaching certificates, the government has been lax in enforcing this criterion due to the difficulty in recruiting qualified NESTs. Based on these findings, they criticized the governments' adoption of the notion of native English speakers as ideal English teachers regardless of their professional training and education background as an act against the cultivation of teacher professionalism whose central components are qualifications and experience. They furthermore stated

teacher professionalism has been assigned a different agenda by the governments' subscription to native-speaker norms and the legitimization of unqualified and inexperienced native speakers in the ELT profession, which devalue the local NNESTs in those four countries. (Wang & Lin, 2013: 16)

Whiteness

There is an argument that discrimination in ELT professionalism can be racist, where the image of a NEST is associated with Whiteness (Kubota & Lin, 2006; Holliday & Aboshiha,

2009). Mahboob and Golden (2010) and Saengngoen (2014) support this argument through their research findings showing that some EFL/ESL institutions only hire White NESTs. Mahboob and Golden (2010) found two advertisements from institutions in East Asia recruiting only White candidates. Saengngoen (2014) found a job advertisement for a private secondary school in Chiang Mai, Thailand, which explicitly pointed out that the school would give priority to Caucasian native speakers and will consider qualified European Caucasians.

This racist hiring policy is also practiced in Korea and China. Jung (2014) reported that it is common for employers to request applicants put their photos on their resumes, so they can weed out black applicants through document examination. He furthermore stated that some *hagwon* (the term used to refer for-profit private institute in Korea) even hire non-native English speakers from Europe and the Middle East over black applicants whose mother tongue is English (Jung, 2014). Similar to this, Tom (2012: para. 7) explained that this policy is also practiced in ELT in China,

Racial discrimination is a harsh reality within China's ESL industry, where recruiters actively seek the blond-hair, blue-eyed all-American archetype (along with similarly equipped Britons, Australians and other native speakers close behind). While brown hair also is acceptable, having a white face is a near-absolute requirement.

Financial Discrepancy

Among all factors of discrimination discussed in this paper, literature discussing different amount of salary made by NESTs and NNESTs is the most difficult to find, which is perhaps related to the inappropriateness of asking the money someone makes in most cultures. However, Saengngoen (2014) addressed this particular factor of discrimination in his study. Based on the data on the website of the Internal Audit Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC) of Thailand, he reported that there was a big gap between the salary made by NESTs and Thai nationals working in Thai public high schools. NESTs can get up to USD 1,333.33 which is almost twice as much salary as Thai nationals holding a doctorate degree can get. Furthermore, the salary earned by NESTs is neither classified by their academic background nor teaching experience but the level of class they are teaching. Meanwhile the salary for local teachers is dependent on the degrees the teachers are holding (see Table 4 and Table 5 for details).

Payment	Class Level	
	Junior High Classes	Senior High Classes
Salary	30,000 baht (USD 1,000)	40,000 baht (USD 1,333.33)
Overtime (per hour)	600 baht (USD 20)	800 baht (USD 26.66)

Table 4. Saengngoen's (2014) list of payment rates for NESTs in Thai public schools

Similar policy paying NESTs much higher than NNESTs is also applied by some institutions in Indonesia and Korea. Griffith (2015) reported that some schools in Indonesia pay trained NESTs between USD 800 to USD 1200 per month, which is about ten times the local wage. Most schools also offer free accommodation alongside the

salary, which permits a comfortable lifestyle. Jung (2014) reported that Korean teachers are frequently paid less than NESTs for the same jobs. NESTs with no job experience are offered 2.1 million won and those with a minimum of one year of teaching experience will earn 2.2 million for monthly wage, meanwhile Korean teachers are only offered a monthly wage of 1.9 million won. In addition to this, some schools also offer additional facilities such as free air fare, accommodation and even offering to pay up 50 percent of healthcare and pension deductions for their potential NESTs.

Education Level	Salary
4-year college	15,050 baht (USD 501.67)
5-year college	15,800 baht (USD 526.67)
4-year college + 1-year graduate level certificate	15, 800 baht (USD 526.67)
6-year college	17, 690 baht (USD 589.67)
Master's degree	17, 690 baht (USD 589.67)
Master's degree with minimum study time of 5 years	18, 690 baht (USD 623)
Doctoral degree	21,150 baht (USD 705)

Table 5. Saengngoen's (2014) list of salary rates for Thai teachers in public schools

Conclusion

The starting point of writing this paper was the denial that discriminatory practices against NNESTs exist and are widespread in ELT industry. The discussion in this article reveals that NESTs and NNESTs dichotomy contributes to discrimination in English teaching positions, with a strong preference for NESTs as candidates. These discriminatory practices also perpetuate the dominance of the native speaker in the ELT profession. Nativeness and nationality are among the top factors privileging NESTs to get easy access to employment and leaving NNESTs unqualified despite their English-related academic background and years of teaching experience.

While more studies are needed to investigate discrimination in terms of race and income gap made by NESTs and NNESTs, this literature review has also proven that discrimination in ELT industry is sometimes racist, which gives employment opportunity to White people regardless their status as native- or non-native English speakers. Furthermore, NNESTs are also discriminated in financial aspect, in which they earn less salary than their counterparts for doing the same job.

Finally, regarding the findings of this literature review, I would like to suggest three points in order to eradicate these discriminatory practices. Firstly, World Englishes should be recognized and granted the same "prestige" as the native-like English accents. Secondly, it is suggested that the status quo of native speakers be eliminated by requiring both NESTs and NNESTs to undergo the same type of tests and trainings. Thirdly, TESOL, as the largest professional organization that unites English language teachers all around the world, should be the anti-discriminatory voice of the profession by issuing a statement that rejects the use of native speakerism as a job requirement and advocates ELF as the standard of ELT worldwide.

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