Challenges of Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers and Career Prospects

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Abstract

English language teaching is popular among the native speakers of English in Asia. Despite having a large number of teacher demands in teaching English as a second language or foreign language, non-native English-speaking teachers were very much restricted in this job market. The main objectives of the study were to investigate if the teaching of speaking and listening skills were taught in Indian schools, and if there exists job discrimination in teaching English to non-native English-speaking teachers. The current study was a mixed-method by collecting data from university students from India and job advertisement websites. A sample of N=223 university students in India and 138 teaching jobs were collected from job advertisement websites based in Thailand. The findings showed that none of the Indian schools taught Listening and Speaking skills in formal classroom learning. In the English teaching job market, over 95% of employers looked for native English-speaking teachers. The study might cast a new strategy to minimize the segregation of non-native English-speaking teachers from native-speaking teachers by implementing proper lessons in speaking and listening skills in English teaching classes.

Keywords: *English, native speaker, non-native speaker, India, Thailand, job*

Introduction

In today's interconnected world, the ability to communicate effectively in English has become an invaluable skill. Whether it's for professional advancement, academic pursuits, or simply navigating the global landscape, proficiency in English as a second language (ESL) or foreign language (EFL) opens doors to countless opportunities. The significance of teaching English as a second or foreign language extends far beyond linguistic competence; it fosters cultural exchange, enhances career prospects, promotes educational access, and facilitates global cooperation. This introduction will delve into the multifaceted importance of ESL/EFL instruction, exploring how it enriches individuals' lives and contributes to the broader global community.

Learning English serves a multitude of purposes, making it a highly valuable skill in today's world. English is the lingua franca of the modern era, spoken by millions of people worldwide. Proficiency in English enables individuals to communicate effectively with speakers from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, facilitating international business transactions, diplomacy, tourism, and cultural exchange. In many industries, English proficiency is a prerequisite for career advancement. Whether in business, technology, academia, or the arts, the ability to communicate fluently in English opens up job opportunities, enables participation in global projects, and enhances professional networking.

English is the dominant language of academia, with many prestigious universities offering courses and research programs conducted in English. Proficiency in English allows individuals to access a wider range of educational resources, pursue higher education abroad, and participate in international academic collaborations. English is the primary language of the internet, with a vast majority of online content available in English. Knowledge of English

is essential for accessing online resources, engaging with digital platforms, and staying updated with the latest developments in technology and innovation.

English-language literature, music, films, and other cultural artifacts are widely disseminated and celebrated around the world. Learning English provides individuals with the opportunity to explore and appreciate diverse cultures, traditions, and artistic expressions from English-speaking countries.

English proficiency enhances the travel experience by facilitating communication with locals, navigating transportation systems, and accessing tourist information. Whether for leisure or business travel, knowing English makes it easier to connect with people and immerse oneself in different cultures.

English is the predominant language of diplomacy and international cooperation. Proficiency in English enables individuals to engage in cross-border collaboration, participate in global forums and conferences, and contribute to discussions on pressing global issues.

Learning English is useful for a wide range of purposes, spanning from personal enrichment and cultural exchange to professional advancement and global engagement. It serves as a bridge connecting people from diverse backgrounds and plays a crucial role in fostering understanding, cooperation, and progress on a global scale.

English teaching skills are grouped into four skills. They are:

1. Reading
2. Writing
3. Speaking and
4. Listening

Statement of Problem

The current study focused on issues related to oral communication skill learning (speaking and Listening skills) and employment prospects for non-native speakers of English. Despite a large number of educated people using English in India, the general quality of English language proficiency is low in India. An international level of education quality evaluation in 2009 including English subjects for school-level children, India took part PISA test (Program for International Student Assessment) and India stood 72nd rank out of 73 countries (Program for International Student Assessment, 2021). Education quality in India is a major concern. India ranks 60th out of 113 countries (EF English Proficiency Index, 2023). Despite the numerous Information and Technology engineers who could join global job hunting career exploration globally, professional English teaching careers could not compete successfully with native speakers. The present study focused on India's communication approach to English language teaching, and employers' preference towards native English-speaking teachers or non-native English-speaking teachers.

Objectives

1. To investigate the teaching of speaking and listening skills in Indian schools.
2. To investigate if employers discriminate against non-native English-speaking teachers in cross-border English teaching jobs.

Review of Literature

The literature review section analyzed documents from 1985 to 2024 mostly related to non-native English-speaking teachers and students' attitudes toward native and non-native speaking teachers.

Challenges Faced by Non-native English-Speaking (NNES) Teachers

Reis (2011) provided insights into the challenges confronted by NNES teachers within the realm of English language instruction. Despite constituting the majority of teachers within the field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) globally, NNES educators often struggle to establish their legitimacy as English-as-a-second/foreign-language (ESL/EFL) instructors (Canagarajah, 1999). This struggle is largely attributed to the pervasive "native speaker myth" (Phillipson, 1992), which perpetuates the belief that native speakers inherently

excel as language instructors in comparison to non-native speakers. Despite challenges to this assumption by applied linguists proposing alternatives to the native speaker and non-native speaker dichotomy (Cook, 1999; Rampton, 1990), the native speaker myth persists, contributing to the marginalization of NNES teachers and undermining their professionalism.

Yoon (2013) studied the challenges encountered by NNES individuals, with a particular focus on graduate students, examining issues such as classroom participation, marginalization, and power dynamics. Despite a strong desire for participation, international students often experience reduced engagement due to contextual factors and limited English proficiency (Norton, 2000). The study underscored the importance of collaborative efforts to foster inclusivity and understanding among native and international students.

Shin (2008) emphasized the significance of NNES teachers attaining high levels of English proficiency and cultural competence to effectively navigate educational environments. The author advocated for teacher education programs to equip NNES teachers with ethnographic skills to facilitate their professional growth.

Hasanah and Utami's (2019) research explored the challenges faced by English teachers from non-native English-speaking countries, highlighting issues such as inadequate learning materials and large class sizes. Efforts to address these challenges, such as Japan's Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) program and Laos's Volunteer English Teacher (VET) program, aim to enhance English teaching effectiveness in non-native English-speaking countries.

The teaching profession goes by nationality and native speaker status brought up the issues of unfairly marking teachers' quality became a matter of intellectual discussion. Robert Phillipson coined the term "native speaker fallacy" in 1992 to critique the belief that native speakers are the best language teachers. This model disregards the diversity of native speakers, the multilingual reality, and the pedagogical skills of non-native English teachers. George Braine (1999) argued that the fact about being a non-native English teacher goes through different stages and strategies of language learning making them even more advantageous as a teacher of the English language. There have been supporters and opponents of native English teachers.

Liu (2009) drew attention to deficiencies in English teaching practices, particularly the absence of communicative teaching elements and overreliance on traditional testing methods. This traditional approach hampers students' development of communicative language skills.

In conclusion, addressing the challenges encountered by NNES individuals necessitates collaborative efforts among educators, policymakers, and stakeholders to cultivate inclusive learning environments and improve English language instruction. Future research endeavors should prioritize longitudinal studies to gain deeper insights into identity shifts and participation dynamics among NNES individuals (Davies, 2005).

Student Attitudes Towards Native and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers

Studies examining student attitudes towards native and non-native English-speaking (NNES) teachers have traditionally utilized questionnaire surveys. However, due to the potential involvement of prejudices, alternative research methods aimed at eliciting implicit attitudes are being explored (Todd & Pojanapunya, 2009). In one such study, the Implicit Association Test was employed to investigate the implicit attitudes of Thai students toward NNES teachers, revealing complex attitudes with an explicit preference for native-speaker teachers but warmer explicit feelings towards non-native speaker teachers (Todd & Pojanapunya, 2009).

Most studies in this area have focused on ESL contexts in the USA, overlooking the broader context of English learning in foreign language (EFL) settings. A study conducted in Hong Kong explored university students' attitudes toward their NNES English teachers, revealing generally favorable attitudes with some identified shortcomings (Ling & Braine, 2007).

Mahboob (2004) shed light on perceptions of NNES and native English-speaking teachers, particularly in teaching oral skills. While native English-speaking teachers were perceived as adept at teaching oral skills, some students criticized their ability to teach grammar and answer questions effectively. In contrast, NNES teachers were praised

for their teaching methodologies, personal attributes, and ability to provide emotional support. This study advocated for a collaborative model of language teaching and teacher education to harness the strengths of both native and non-native English-speaking teachers (Mahboob, 2004).

Contrary to the "native speaker fallacy," which posits that only native speakers can be effective language teachers, research findings suggest that ESL students do not have a clear preference for either native or non-native English-speaking teachers (Todd & Pojanapunya, 2009). Instead, students recognize the unique attributes of both types of teachers and acknowledge the strengths of NNES teachers, highlighting the importance of collaboration between native and non-native English-speaking teachers in creating a conducive learning environment (Mahboob, 2004).

In response to the increasing demand for English language skills worldwide, particularly in non-native English-speaking countries, there is a growing need for trained spoken English teachers capable of teaching English as a second language (Sawalmeh & Dey, 2023). The training of spoken English teachers must be contextualized to the local environment while incorporating modern teaching techniques and technology to enhance language learning. Despite challenges such as variations in language use and lack of standardization, globalization has facilitated the development of standardized curricula and teaching materials, contributing to the production of more effective and competent English teachers (Sawalmeh & Dey, 2023).

In Indonesia, where English is not widely used for communication, undergraduate students transitioning from EFL to ESL contexts face challenges in speaking English for academic purposes (Winnie et al., 2023). To address these challenges, stakeholders in the education sector should focus on improving English-speaking skills through targeted interventions and support mechanisms (Winnie et al., 2023).

Babajanova and Babadjanova (2023) identified challenges and proposed solutions for teaching English pronunciation as a second language in Uzbek classes, emphasizing the importance of effective pedagogical strategies and teacher training in addressing pronunciation difficulties.

In summary, research on student attitudes toward native and non-native English-speaking teachers underscores the complexity of attitudes and perceptions in language education. Collaboration between native and non-native English-speaking teachers is essential in creating inclusive and effective learning environments. While NNES English teachers have co-existed with native-speaker teachers for centuries, research on their effectiveness, self-perceptions, and student attitudes has only recently gained attention (Ling & Braine, 2007).

Literature reviews indicated strengths and weaknesses of native English speakers and non-native English speaking teachers. The current studies tried to understand the latest trend in southeast India particularly India and Thailand.

Research Methodology

The study was a mixed method. Data collection was carried out in two different ways. The first method was interview and interaction with the students. The second method of data collection was retrieving job advertisements from a website based in Thailand.

Sample Size

N=223 university students were studying the courses B.Ed. and M.Ed and were interviewed for three years-2021, 2022 and 2023.

Table 1

Number of Participant Student During Interview and Interaction

Participants	2021	2022	2023
B.Ed. (No. of students)	51	62	57
M.Ed. (No. of students)	23	25	5

N=223

The job advertisement mentioned native English in their advertisement.

Table 2

Job Advertisement Specifying Native English Speaker During Job Advertisement

Employers looking for Native English speaker	99
Employers not specifying looking for Native English speaker	39

Note. This information was extracted from the ajarn.com website on May 10, 2024.

Data Analysis

For object 1:

There were 223 B.Ed. and M.Ed. students from the 2021 to 2023 academic sessions, were interviewed. The respondents were asked if they learning speaking and listening skills in a formal classroom. All of the respondents mentioned that they never had speaking and listening classes as skills of English learning.
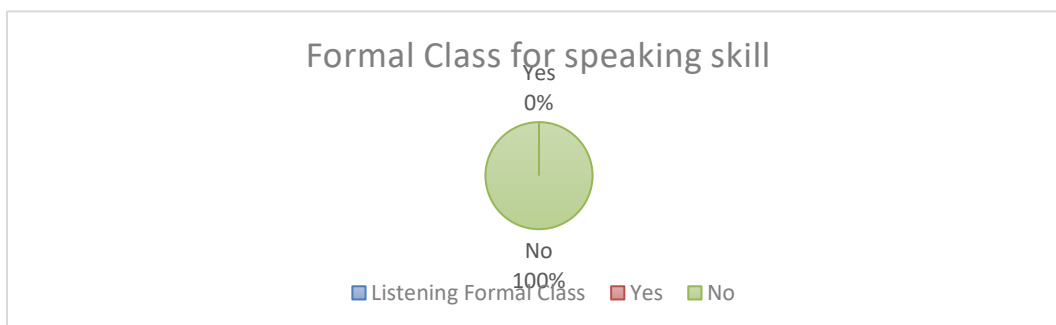

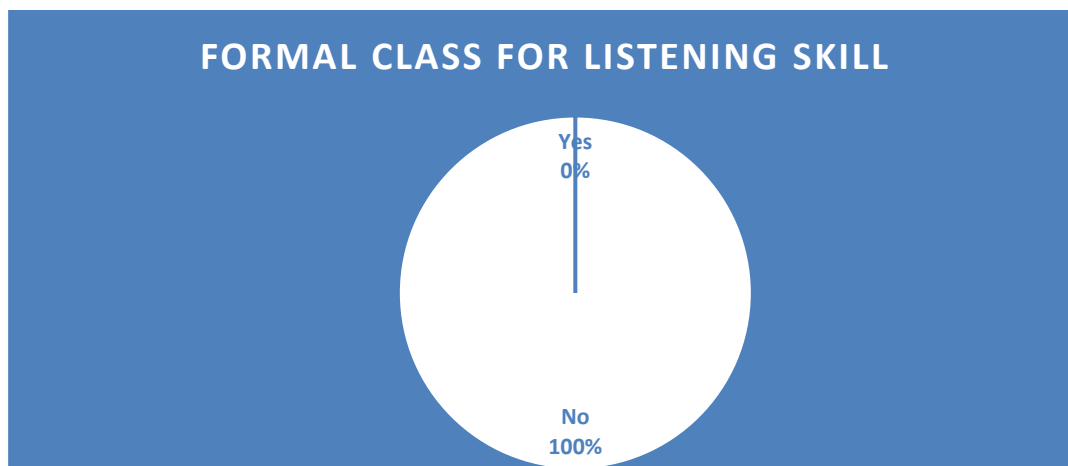*Figure 1, School Teaching Speaking Skills Formally Expressed by Students*

Figure 2, School Teaching Listening Skills Formally Expressed by Students

For objective 2:

Only date 10 May 2024, the Ajarn.com website was analyzed for the job advertisement. On the screen, the first 143 jobs were taken as samples. Five jobs were excluded as they were not related to the English language. Therefore, 138 jobs were included in the data analysis. Of the total number of jobs 138 listed, 99 jobs were mentioned as native English-speaking teachers. The remaining 39 job advertisements did not mention native

speakers. Only one advertisement mentions looking for a non-native English speaker. The jobs were put on advertisements for a period of from one day to one week. The job locations were mostly for Thailand and five jobs were for Myanmar and Middle Eastern countries.

Figure 3
Job Advertisement in Thailand, Myanmar, and Middle East Countries Mentioning Native English Speaker
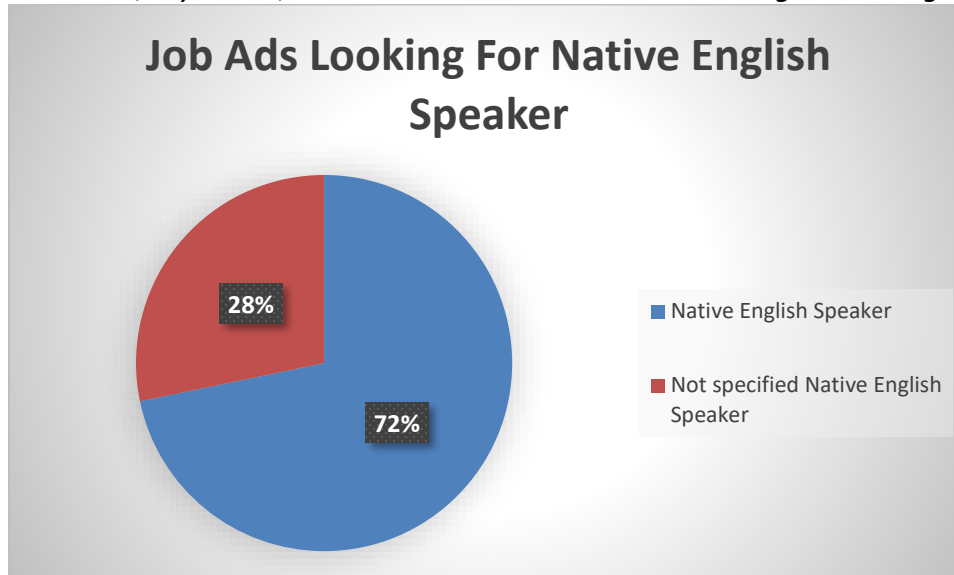
Note. N=138, total job advertisements included in the data analysis. The employers looking for native English speaker=99. Employers who did not specify native English speaker=39. Information extracted from ajarn.com on 10 May 2024.

Findings

One hundred percent of the Indian students studying B.Ed. and M.ed. courses reported that they did not have a formal lesson for speaking and listening skills. Over 70% of employers mention directly the word "Native English Speaker".

Discussion

The native and non-native dichotomy of English teachers is sensitive. Robert Phillipson coined the term "native speaker fallacy" in 1992 and it sent a sensitive argument of a tone of discriminatory feeling. Some recruiters avoid the word Native English speaker. However, the salary range is specifically for a native English speaker. The salary of the job advertisements is an indicator of native or non-native English speaker requirements. In the data analysis, it could be understood that over 95% of job advertisements look for native speakers. However, due to the nature of the sensitivity of the words native and non-native, some recruiters tried to avoid the words "Native and non-native English speaker". In reality, the employers were mostly looking for native English speakers not only for English subject teachers but also for other subjects. Parents' demand for native English teachers is also another indirect influence for recruiters looking for native English-speaking teachers. A study by Todd & Pojanapunya (2009) in the context of Thailand found students more favorable toward native speakers than non-native English-speaking teachers. It also casts a discriminatory perspective of employers toward non-native English-speaking teachers. The salary of native speakers is higher than that of non-native English-speaking teachers, mostly based on the passport holders of particular countries. A few schools are looking for non-native English-speaking teachers. This is mainly based on a cheap labor approach in that non-native speakers were offered lower salaries than their counterpart native speakers. The literature studies show low salaries of non-natives tried to connect to the teacher's English language proficiency, accent, and pronunciation (Babajanova and Babadjanova, 2023). One overlook about the matter is, that nationality becomes the first choice than the proficiency and ability of the teacher. Therefore,

teachers' salaries reflect the nationality of the teacher. The issue of learning English as a second language or foreign language is the lack of teachers' emphasis on speaking and listening classes. Due to a lack of focussing in such areas, Indian students generally spend a good amount of time in preparation for TOEFL and IELTS exams. This is because of the low proficiency in the English language during the schooling period.

Conclusion

This study concluded that Indian schools completely lack formal classes for speaking and listening schools. Over 72% of employers in Southeast Asia prefer native English-speaking teachers. Some employers avoid mentioning the word "native speaker or non-native speaker" during job advertisements, however in reality over 95% of the job recruiters look for native English speakers indirectly inferred by the level of salary offer. There is some sort of job discrimination towards non-native English-speaking teachers if the teachers are teaching outside their home countries.

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