



SUCCESS STORIES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING



Editors

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Success Stories in English Language Teaching and Learning

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"My Teacher is Like a Mirror": The Students' Perspectives on Their Non-Native English Speaking Teacher

Agis Andriani

Siliwangi University, Tasikmalaya, West Java

A good English language teacher is someone who has a balanced level of technical knowledge and its practical application in teaching. This is applicable not only for native English speaking teachers (NESTs), but also for the non-native English speaking teachers (non-NESTs). The position of English language teachers as such is very important. This is because they, particularly the non-NESTs, are required to teach a language which is not their mother tongue.

There are controversies regarding the role of non-NEST in the context of teaching English. Many of the arguments are in favor of NEST, whereas some other arguments do not focus too much on NEST. For example, Llorca (2005:16) finds that Non-NESTs were perceived as relying on textbooks, applying differences between the first and second languages, using the first language as a medium of instruction, being aware of negative transfer and psychological aspects of learning, being sensitive to the needs of students, being more efficient, knowing the students' background, and having exam preparation as the goal of their teaching. Meanwhile, Rajagopalan (2005: 283) put forward a statement which is not in favor of the Non-NEST. The statement was that "Non-native speaker teachers (NNSTs) are typically treated as second class citizens in the world of language teaching."

On the other hand, taking a stand in between the two kinds of English teachers, Medgyes (1992: 340) argues that "natives and non-natives have an equal chance to become successful teachers, but the routes used by the two groups are not the same." Medgyes (1992: 349) also states that "The

ideal non-NEST is the one who has achieved near native proficiency in English." Due to the ideal competence of the non-NESTs, many arguments support the importance of development of non-NESTs' professional language awareness, learning, and professionalism are what English teachers need to know. In the same line, Ur (2002: 389) adds, "Professionalism means preparing oneself to do a competent job through learning." Llorca (2005: 14) concludes, "The hypotheses were that the NESTs and non-NESTs differ in terms of (1) language proficiency, and (2) teaching practice (behavior), that (3) most of the differences in teaching practice can be attributed to the discrepancy in language proficiency, and that (4) both types of teachers can be equally good teachers on their own terms."

The above statements are in line with the proposition that when someone wants to be a good teacher, he or she must fulfil some criteria. Braine (cited in Llorca, 2005: 11) considers that many research studies examine how students see the role of non-NESTs. Braine states, "Research on the self-perceptions of non-NESTs, or the way they are perceived by their students is a fairly recent phenomenon. This may be due to the sensitive nature of these issues because non-NESTs were generally regarded as unequal in knowledge and performance to NESTs, and issues relating to Non-NESTs may have also been politically incorrect to be studied and discussed openly."

Technical knowledge, pedagogical skills, interpersonal skills, and personal qualities (Brown, 2000) are the good English teacher ideal attributes. Besides, other characteristics are stated by Allen (cited in Brown, 2000: 429). According to Allen, ESL teachers should have competent preparation leading to a degree in TESL, love of English language, critical thinking, persistent urge to upgrade oneself, self subordination, readiness to go the extra mile, cultural adaptability, professional citizenship, and a feeling of excitement about one's group. These describe that a good language teacher should know what language English is, be able to do all language skills, know deeply of how to teach the language and its context, be always upgrading her or her ability in language by learning or joining the related events (technical knowledge). Furthermore, he or she should also be able to measure the students' abilities, apply many ways in teaching well, be a good manager, give what the students needed, arise the students to be 'full' to participate

...in teaching learning process, use the words in teaching that make the stu-
dents easier to understand, and make the material interesting and not bor-
ing (pedagogical skills). Moreover, he or she should realize that his or her
students are not from the same background, pay attention to all the stu-
dents without discrimination, give the students opportunities to convey their
ideas, and have the good relationship with others (interpersonal skills). Fi-
nally, he or she should be a dynamic person in facing the changing, and
thinking and preparing before doing (personal qualities).

Based on the important role of English teachers and how pertinent it is
to have research on students' opinions on their non- NESTs, this study fo-
cuses on how the Sundanese students have their perspectives on their non-
native English speaking lecturer.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study involved 83 Sundanese students who were students of the
English Department of a university in Tasikmalaya, West Java. The students
are in their pre-service education to become teachers after they finish their
study. The students were required to respond to some questions about the
characteristics of a good language teacher. The term 'teacher' refers to the
lecturer who is currently teaching in the English Department.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The participants have the various point of views with regard to the
characteristics of a good English teacher. They emphasize that there are
certain criteria in order to be a good English teacher. These are realized in
the written responses on their English lecturer. Their responses are related
to the point of knowledge of way in teaching (technical knowledge), peda-
gogical skill, ability in interaction (interpersonal skills), and personal values.

Technical Knowledge

The students place their lecturer as a person who knows more about
English by showing his or her abilities in all language skills, teaching using the
way to teach the language and its context, and progressively improving those
abilities by joining some academic forums. According to the students, a good
English lecturer:

[1] "can motivate the students to use the good language". (Student 41)

[2] "has good pronunciation, can explain the subject clearly, has the high sense of humour, and has a lot of knowledge." (Student 6)

[3] "uses good language although the student does something wrong, gives motivation to the students in order not to be bored." (Student 18)

Modiano (2005: 38-39) says, "... in order to assist the learner in the development of their own accent, one which is communicatively expedient, the ELT practitioner will need to have special knowledge of the pronunciation 'difficulties' that are particular to the language group of which the learner is a member." This states that in the real condition of teaching, the way used in teaching and its related elements help the students have the skills of language.

Pedagogical Skills

By having pedagogical skills it means that he or she can know the level of capability of his or her students, so he or she can know what their needs are. He or she is also able to manage the classroom by involving the students in learning attractively and easily. This condition makes the class eager to join the atmosphere. That pedagogical skills are important can be seen from the following responses:

[1] "A good teacher is like a mirror. (He or she) can make the students active and creative, make the student to have good attitude. The students can be able to be a good student from the teacher. She comes on time, uses more ways to teach, should be discipline and have more knowledge." (Student 7)

[2] "(He or she) can give the material in various ways, e.g., by using the daily language in that place. (He or she) should never give punishment, but say whether something is right or wrong." (Student 40)

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[2] "(He or she) can give the material in various ways, e.g., by using the daily language in that place. (He or she) should never give punishment, but say whether something is right or wrong." (Student 40)

[3] "Not monotonous". (Student 21)

[4] "(He or she) can educate, give the students inspiration, belief and perspective of language, increase the students' interest, become educator, motivator, inspirator, collaborator, researcher, and evaluator." (Student 4)

[5] "(He or she) should have sufficient ability, encourage students to apply and use the language in daily life." (Student 27)

Interpersonal Skills

Applying no discrimination in teaching and knowing the students background will be important in teaching. The availability of chances for the students to tell their ideas or share their experiences in learning are valuable to motivate them. McGoarty (1996: 3) says,

For teachers, their words suggest that respect for all forms of language used in the communities in which they teach is essential. At the same time, in all school settings, language is always the medium and sometimes the object of formal study. Often, teachers have a particular responsibility for certain aspects of language instruction, whether they be acquisition of native language literacy skills or skills in a second language.

With regard to interpersonal skills, the respondents' comments are as follows:

[1] "becomes an idol for their students. The teacher's capability in language makes the students appreciate to study and join in their class. The students will think if they learn this subject, it will be interesting and understandable." (Student 20)

[2] "Gives the student 'study of life'." (Student 29)

[3] "Explains about moral, norms, and the God's rule. No distasteful and judge the students." (Student 37)

[4] "Great attitude and always give motivation, and attention, and appreciate the students' opinion." (Student 26)

Apart from the importance of interpersonal skills, teachers' *vivid* skills are required. Johnston (2003:1) states that "The teacher is a moral agent on the same line. Lurda (2004: 320) stated,

No matter how covert this conflict may be, the acquisition of a new language poses a threat to the existing linguistic status quo of the learners, and therefore to the very foundations of their own identity. Teachers are responsible for presenting the multifaceted reality in which the new language is used and for helping the learner to express their own identity through this newly acquired voice.

These settle that the students need the figure who can be their 'exemplary figure' in real life. This is not easy work, but it is not impossible to do.

Personal Qualities

This emphasizes the way the teachers can continuously improve their knowledge and how to do that in the real action. The respondents say

[1] "His (or her) own way to teach, give some homours or interesting stories connected to the material." (Student 39)

[2] "(He or) she has not only knowledge but also experience, because it makes the teacher able to share about anything." (Student 35)

[3] "(Her or she) can guide the students to be a good person, ...prepare all of the material and master it." (Student 17)

The whole elements (technical knowledge, pedagogical interpersonal skills, and personal qualities) are important for the teachers in order to be excellent teachers. The non-NESTs, who use the same language as their students, and teach the other language to the students, have the chance to use their language (L1) in teaching. This is because, as one of the students stated

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Personal Qualities

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...his or responsibility that he or she 'must understand the learner's situation' (Student 30). The use of L1 is supported McNeill (cited in Llorca, 2005: 123) who concludes,

ESL teachers who speak the same L1 as their students are generally more accurate in identifying sources of lexical difficulty in reading texts than teachers whose mother tongue is English and who are not familiar with the students' L1. In practice, most non-native speaker ESL teachers share their students' L1 and therefore are more likely to be successful at focusing on areas of potential difficulty from their students' perspective."

In the same vein, Macaro (cited in Llorca, 2005: 63) says,

In classroom discourse, by contrast, codeswitching is considered by many to be neither an asset nor a valuable addition. This may seem surprising given that so often, in modern approaches to language teaching and learning, teachers attempt to make the second language classroom a mirror of the outside world...

Furthermore, Macaro (cited in Llorca, 2005: 69) argues that the use of L1 with L2 has its particular function, namely

- (1) building personal relationship with learners (the pastoral role that teachers take on requires high levels of discourse sophistication);
- (2) giving complex procedural instructions for carrying out an activity;
- (3) controlling pupils' behaviour;
- (4) translating and checking understanding in order to speed things up because of time pressures (e.g., during exams); and
- (5) teaching grammar explicitly.

Thus, the use of L1 will be helpful for the students to understand the material, but it should be with the use of the target language. It should facilitate the teaching of L2.

Andriani, "My Teacher is Like a Mirror": The Students' Perspectives on Their Non-Native

The description of the functions stresses the importance of English language teaching. Miller (2009: 38) says, regarding preservice education, we can say that language teaching cannot be separated from social language use in classrooms, or from situated meanings and practices, involving specific social and institutional contexts and relationships." In addition, she emphasizes that "all teachers have to maximize their linguistic repertoires and intercultural skills." (Miller, 2009: 53).

CONCLUSION

The non-native English speaking teacher (non-NESTs) have their special position in the context of teaching the target language. This is on the needs of the students who are in the same context as their teachers. The most important thing is that the teachers should have the characteristics of good language: they should have favorable technical knowledge, that the teacher has his own right to apply the teaching learning process in the classroom, no matter that he or she is non-native. However, it is necessary to note that teachers should be aware of the differences arising in this issue in relation to the NEST.

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