

Emerging Challenges of Teaching English in Non-native English-Speaking Countries: Teachers' View

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Abstract

Teaching English to students, particularly non-English speakers, requires proper strategies and methods. By doing so, each teacher has his/her challenges. This study intends to unveil the emerging challenges faced by English teachers from non-native English-speaking countries (non-NESCs) such as China, Japan, Thailand, Senegal, Mongolia, Cambodia, and Laos. This study stands on to answer two research questions: 1. What are the challenges of teaching English in non-native English-speaking countries? 2. Is there any effort to overcome the challenges? If so, how do they overcome it? By utilizing the qualitative method, seven teachers are interviewed to tell their challenges. The result indicates three main problems, including learning materials which do not cover students' need, too big classroom size and school environment, and also students' low motivation. Some programs are conducted to overcome those challenges. For example, Japan has an Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) who comes once a week to cooperate with the English teacher in each school. Then, Volunteer English Teacher (VET) program helps English Teachers in Laos.

Keywords: English language teaching, challenges, non-native English-speaking country, non-native English-speaking teacher

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INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, learning English is one of the prominent needs of a human being. Oder & Eisenschmidt (2018) clarify the importance of learning English as a tool to access in achieving new knowledge and opportunities in a global context. Also, English is widely used in every continent that uses English for their day-to-day needs, totals over 250 million (Broughton, Brumfit, Flavell, Hill, & Pincas, 2003). Not only from this aspect, the use of English worldwide, but this phenomenon is also mainly influenced by colonization, ship-borne trade with the Americas, and politic (Howson, 2013). Therefore, non-native English-speaking countries attempt to create an English environment in every school as the primary step to learn English from an early age.

Teaching English as a foreign language means that English is learned in non-native English-speaking countries. Braine (1999 as cited in Chun, 2014) states that a native speaker—not English as the specific context, will create a better teacher than a non-native speaker. By this statement, an English teacher must have many challenges when teaching their students both in English skills or teaching skills (Faez & Valeo, 2012). Besides enhancing their English ability, a teacher should maintain their motivation and enthusiasm in teaching (Oder & Eisenschmidt, 2018). Sometimes students' learning motivation decreases so that students' learning performance is not following the lesson plan (Ayres, Swayer, & Dinham, 2001; Nurvita, Pratolo, Nuroniah, Rizon, 2019; Zulfikar, Dahliana, & Sari, 2019). This problem is one of the causes of teachers' lack of enthusiasm in teaching,

and this will affect their teaching performance. Also, another factor coming from the school climate can affect teachers' motivation. School climate covers positive atmosphere which is contributed by supportive work conditions from the principal, teachers partner, school staffs, and communal school organizations (Brown & Roloff, 2011 as cited in Oder & Eisenschmidt, 2018).

In this twenty-first century, an English teacher is also required to teach effectively. Measuring effective teaching is something unstable and challenging because it will emerge a subjective view. Two studies (Frenzel, Taxer, Schwab, & Kuhbandner, 2019; Oder & Eisenschmidt, 2018) indicate that measuring effective teaching is coming from two aspects, intrinsic and extrinsic. The intrinsic aspect involves the teacher's trait, such as motivation, enthusiasm, and interpersonal between teachers and students. The extrinsic aspect is coming from the teacher's skill, which can be formed by the training to improve their effective teaching, for example, their competency in instructional material and teaching strategy. Instructional content is like designing and developing a syllabus, lesson plans, and supplementary material (Gormley, Hammer, McDermott, & Rothenberg, 1993). Then, teaching strategy relates to the way of teaching, managing the classroom, teaching approach (Raganwati, 2015).

Regarding the essentials of English in language teaching, we query the main challenges of English teachers in non-native English-speaking countries (non-NESCs) in teaching English according to their context and views. Two main questions are formulated, which can furtherly analyze within this study: 1. What are the challenges of teaching English in a non-native English-speaking country? 2. Is there any effort to overcome the challenges? If so, how do they overcome it?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Bolhuis & Voeten (2004, as cited in Oder & Eisenschmidt, 2018) find that motivated teachers are likely to promote active and functional learning strategies that achieve the best outcome of students. Frenzel et al. (2019) show that displayed enthusiasm had significant main effects on perceived teacher motivation, teacher enjoyment, and seen clarity and structure. All of those indicators were well measured by the high displayed enthusiasm condition than in the low displayed enthusiasm condition. It means that teacher motivation and enjoyment have very high effects on students' motivation. This result supports Radell et al.'s (2010 as cited in Frenzel, Taxer, Schwab, & Kuhbandner, 2019) finding, which reveals that when students had learned from a motivated teacher, the students can learn in autonomy and high behavior.

Demir (2017) finds three main challenges of English teachers when teaching English as a foreign language: student-related, teacher-related, and institutional difficulties. The student-related problem appears because Turkish students are not interesting the material which is not in Turkish and not relevant coursebook. However, this statement is subjectively coming from students who believe that English is difficult. In teacher-related, the most challenging problem is managing the classroom. Some teachers say that because the students are lack of motivation, the teacher cannot teach the lesson as their planning. Whereas, the institutional-related refers to classroom size and technological support provided by the school. In other words, Demir's (2017) finding shows that the problems emerge from the motivation itself.

Other related challenges faced by EFL teachers are classroom practice and commitment to teaching (Hayes, 2009). He says that classroom practice refers to the difficulty of Thai students in learning English because of less vocabulary, considering grammatical errors, and no one peer can join in the conversation. Then, commitment to teaching relates to the teachers, which lead to teachers' motivation again. If we genuinely

pay attention to those problems, the root of the problem is from two sides, which are interrelated to one another. Similarly, Hayes (2005), his finding reveals the problem faced by non-native English speaking educators in Sri Lanka. Commitment to teaching as a job or vocation. Through an in-depth interview, the teachers, as reflected in Hayes's (2005) finding shows that the teachers are proud to be an English teacher, but only 20% dedicates themselves as a vocation. It happened because of some factors: more work for teachers, intensified stress levels, lack of interest in teaching, and a rise in the numbers of alienated students at school.

Some studies also compare English teaching performance between native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and non-native English-speaking teachers (non-NESTs). Students perceive that NESTs are more competent in teaching reading, speaking, and pronunciation because they are more fluent and understand their cultural knowledge. Nevertheless, for teaching writing and grammar, students prefer to be taught by non-NESTs who have a sensitivity to difficulties (Chun, 2014). Chun's (2014) finding supports Walkinshaw & Thi Hoang Duong's (2012) result which reveals that NEST is better in teaching English in an oral context, but they cannot understand students' culture. It always makes misunderstood between teachers and students (Walkinshaw & Thi Hoang Duong, 2012).

The emerged problems displayed by some previous studies generate tensions to non-NESTs. Because of this, some researchers seek solutions to break the primary issue in teaching language (Hayati, 2010; Rahimi & Zhang, 2015; Serdiukov & Tarnopolsky, 1999; Steyn & Jarongkhongdach, 2016; Todd, Stinson, & Sivakumaran, 2016; Yu, 2018; Zhang, 2013). Applying video-conferencing, which involves NEST from various native English-speaking countries, can gain more intercultural awareness and ignite discourse strategies to let converse as is (Wang, 2006 as cited in Yu, 2018). In such, applying critical pedagogy to non-NEST also can enhance non-NESTs' awareness of their strengths as bilingual or multilingual speakers and how they can properly utilize these strengths in the classroom (Hayati, 2010). Restructuring and sheltering instruction also can be used by non-NEST to teach in the class where teachers use tools such as visuals, supplementary materials, cooperative learning, and hands-on activities to teach (Todd et al., 2016).

By reviewing some results showed by previous studies, this study also wants to unveil the emerging challenges faced non-NESTs in some countries like China, Japan, Thailand, Senegal, Mongolia, Cambodia, and Laos which are non-native English speaking countries and how the effort of each country to overcome those challenges.

RESEARCH METHODS

By involving seven English teachers ($n = 3$ females) who are from China, Japan, Thailand, Senegal, Mongolia, Cambodia, and Laos, this study unveils the emerging challenges of teaching English. All the participants are master students in the international department of a university in Japan and have capabilities in the teaching field. The age ranges from 24 to 40. The length of the teaching of each respondent is different from six months up to 17 years. Also, they teach English spread over the primary level to higher education.

Methods

This study stands on qualitative data by using an in-depth analysis of the semi-structured interview. A semi-structured interview can let the researchers use the questions with the focus group, but still, investigate and clarify quickly and more depth (Gilham,

2000). Only one person attends each interview session. A session takes 20-30 minutes within one week. Because this study involves people from various countries and has an international atmosphere in faculty, the interview uses English to ask questions.

The advantages of a semi-structured interview will give the interviewer full of attention and make them comfortable to answer all the questions. Even the interviewer can dig the respondent's answers, which has an ambiguous meaning. Because taking notes will distract the interviewer's focus, the researchers are suggested to use tape-recorder during the interview session. The questions of the interview are about their experiences during teaching English, what challenges they faced, and what efforts they did. The items can be modified while the interview session to gain a sincere answer from respondents (Johson & Christensen, 2004). Each of the responses will be analyzed in detail and in-depth in the discussion part.

FINDINGS

Emerging Challenges

1. China

He taught at lower secondary level in Tibet for six months in 2017. The type of school was a dormitory, which covered primary until upper secondary level. The school had very few teachers, but the teachers had a high salary than teachers in Mainland of China. It was because of the condition of the school in that area. The situation was at the top of the mountain, pretty cold and dry. The school only had five hydrants, which were not enough for drinking and taking a bath to all the students. Then, the students had low motivation to learn English. Many factors influenced them, such as unsupported environment, lack of English learning resources, over class size, and also a socioeconomic factor. The majority of students were coming from a poor family, so they had no future planning to continue to study. Also, the number of students was over class size. One grade had seven classes, and each class had 50 students. It was a vast number, which was difficult for teachers to reach each of the students' progress.

2. Japan

His experience of teaching English was one year in 2017. The students in primary school liked studying English because they thought that English was an activity, not a subject. However, now the majority of secondary students started thinking that English became more difficult because they learned grammar with many new vocabularies and practiced speaking. They realized that English was essential as a tool to communicate with foreigners and to go abroad. Still, the environment did not support to let them speak English naturally, even though the teacher engaged them. Also, the class size was too big for a teacher to teach English. About 40 students in one class covered different characteristics of students. The textbook sometimes was not appropriate for students' needs, so the teachers use supplementary material to perfect it.

3. Thailand

She taught at the primary level for three years until now. The most challenging problem was the language barrier. They still attempted to translate or find the same meaning between English and Thai. They had unstable motivation because they did not learn English initiative, but their parents' initiation. To keep maintaining their motivation, the teacher brought up exciting topics with fun teaching material in every meeting.

4. Senegal

He got a professional certification for teaching at the secondary level in 2014. Since that, he taught English at the upper secondary level for three years in Senegal.

The hardest problem of him was managing students in the class. The students did not like studying because most of them were reluctant to learn, especially English. However, it all depended on how the teacher treated his students. If the teacher had good intention in the treatment, they could study well in the class. Another challenge was students' background, including economic background which affected their motivation and achievement in class. When teaching English in class, the teacher should ensure every student paying attention to the teacher. Unfortunately, the number of students was too big, about 40-50 students in which surely over to learn English. Then, he thought that his school was still better, because in a remote area in Senegal, the number of students could reach 60-70 for each class. Ultimately, he emphasized that the textbook also was not updated for students' needs and should be revised.

5. Mongolia

She taught English spreading over the primary and secondary levels for five years. In learning English, some students showed negative attitudes when learning English. Because some unmotivated students disturbed other students who had high motivation. They perceive that English was too tricky both in speaking or writing.

Regarding this problem, the language structures of Mongolian language and English were different, which sometimes was quite complicated for students. Based on the entrance examination of English to university, English teachers tended to teach mostly on the grammar and vocabulary sessions. Then, most of the students were bored to learn English grammar. Another problem was the textbook which was not adequate enough to be discussed in one hour, but the direction was for one hour. Therefore, it was not suitable for the students' needs.

6. Cambodia

He had been an English teacher from 2008 to 2018. He was also an English trainer in Cambodia. He trained secondary English teachers. Being a teacher and trainer, the respondent faced many problems as also experienced by most English teachers in Cambodia. Because English started to be taught in 2003, there were not adequate English resources, including qualified English teachers and course books. To become qualified English teachers in Cambodia, they should graduate from the English department, passed a national examination, and also had teaching experiences. With a short period from 2003 until 2019, there were not many qualified teachers, but contract teachers.

7. Laos

She had taught English from 2002 until 2017 at a university level in Laos. She was also a trainer for primary school teachers, specifically on curriculum development once a year. Reflecting on her experiences, she stated that the most challenging experience in teaching English for primary teachers was the classroom size which was too big, consisting of 40-50 students. They could not manage well every student when teaching English. Comparing to other countries, Laos was still low in the English context. The second problem of teaching English was a language barrier. The English teachers were Lao people who were non-native English speakers. The teachers found challenges to pronounce some English words correctly, disregarding the fact that at primary level, students will need to follow teachers' pronunciation.

Efforts and Its Implementations

1. China

The educational department of China attempts to facilitate every school with an appropriate textbook as well as trained and certified teachers. Then, the government also cooperates with the university, asking the university to send university students to teach in a rural area such as Tibet.

2. Japan

ALT is one of the efforts proposed by MEXT (Ministry of Education). They invite native-speaking English teacher such as American, Canadian, Australian, and Singaporean to come to school and teach together with Japanese teachers in one moment. Every Thursday, they come to school, making a plan with various and exciting methods as their suggestions. As a result, the students are more excited to learn English because they directly learn from NEST.

3. Thailand

To enhance students' motivation in learning English, the teachers use any possible teaching materials. The teachers can use music, Disney Movie in its native language, flashcard, and other things relate to the materials. They like to sing and dance so that they will solve the problems a little bit. The teachers also try to speak English frequently with a slow and bright tone and right intonation, so the students can understand the meaning and with their effort to answer in English. Besides, the teachers let them learn by their initiation and way to ignite their awareness in learning English.

4. Senegal

Senegal is a developing country. So many obstacles faced by the teachers teaching in class. To overcome those problems, the educational government recruits a voluntary teacher who passes the national standard in education to teach in school. The government got them by collaboration with other countries. In the class context, the teacher uses supplementary material to perfect the textbook when teaching in class, mainly English subject.

5. Mongolia

The educational government in Mongolia conduct an activity to facilitate students' interest like a competition—Language Olympiads. The government pays attention to who want to learn more then, transfer them to that competition. Also, the teacher uses various materials in teaching English to engage the other students who have a lack of interest, such as maps, movies, posters, and other exciting material that can support them.

6. Cambodia

The educational government of Cambodia cooperates with the Australian government to improve English education in Cambodia. By developing a coursebook called English for Cambodia (EFC), it is planned to help English teachers in Cambodia teaching English in school.

7. Laos

Lao government tries to facilitate teachers to join the training. The training proposes to make them more qualified uniquely as an English teacher. Then, another effort is the government cooperates with NESCs to recruit a voluntary teacher to teach at school. This program is called Voluntary English Teachers (VET) program. Hopefully, NEST gives English knowledge to the teachers by using various strategies and methods. So, students are more motivated to learn English.

DISCUSSION

The fact of teaching English in non-NESCs that quite challenging is actual. Faez & Valeo (2012) said that being an English teacher is complicated. It means that a teacher should have English knowledge and the proper way to transfer that knowledge. As shown in the results, we indicate three main problems faced by the teachers from NESCs (China, Japan, Thailand, Senegal, Mongolia, Cambodia, and Laos). The three main issues are inappropriate textbooks, too big classroom size and school environment, and also students' low motivation in learning English.

Talking about textbooks is something crucial (Dejene, 2017). English handbook is one of the sources for students to learn English besides teachers or other sources. Many teachers complain that English textbook sometimes is not suitable for students' need nowadays (as reflected by Japan, Senegal, Mongolia, and Cambodia). To create a well-prepared textbook based on students' need takes time in several process and revision. One aspect of improving school quality is the instructional process contribution (Fuller, 1985). He said that a good textbook could consistently influence students' achievement. By this statement, it is clear enough that textbook or coursebook also include one crucial aspect in contributing learning improvement. They can reflect on the Cambodian government effort that making collaboration in developing textbooks will support a standard textbook for students' need in learning English.

The second problem is classroom size, which also is the most challenging case from those countries (China, Japan, Senegal, and Laos). Teaching English will effectively teach in a small size number of students (Broughton et al., 2003). Because learning English is involving four skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing, it will be effective if the number of students in the class ranges from 20-25. However, this number must be hard for several countries like Senegal, as mentioned by the respondent that every district only has one single school. Looking at developing countries or even developed countries which are non-NESCs, they still encounter this such problem—too big classroom size. This problem probably can be solved by implementing various teaching strategies and methods, also including supplementary material to teach English in big classroom sizes.

The last emerging challenge is students' motivation in learning English, which is a big problem from all countries in this study. Moreover, education ministries in several countries such as Japan, Laos, and China notice this as a severe problem. Various programs are implemented by the government and schools in collaboration with multiple parties from the university level and even with the NESCs. It means that learning motivation is the root of ideal teaching and learning activities (Frenzel, Taxer, Schwab, & Kuhbandner, 2019). By implementing some programs such as Assistant Learning Teacher (ALT), Voluntary English Teacher (VET), and the collaboration with student teachers in the university are expected to be able to spur student motivation in learning as well as teachers in developing their knowledge in teaching English.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this study found the challenges of teaching English in non-native English-speaking countries. The challenges were categorized into three main problems which indicated by the findings; they are learning materials which do not cover students' need, too big classroom size and school environment, and also students' low motivation. However, each of non-NECSs had some efforts which had been attempted to resolve those problems. Eventually, this study also has limitations because it only involves seven

participants, and this is considered not adequate enough to explore the real emerging challenges in the teaching of English in non-native English-speaking countries. However, this study can be a reference for other researchers who want to investigate a similar topic more deeply and in detail so that research can be refined as time goes by.

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