Acehnese Students’ Perceptions toward their Native English Speaking Teachers (NEST)

*Nurul Inayah, Syamsul Bahri Ys and Nandira Syahnaz

Department of English Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, University of Syiah Kuala, Banda Aceh 23111, Indonesia;

*Corresponding author: nurulinayah@unsyiah.ac.id

Abstract

This study intends to report the perceptions of 26 Syiah Kuala University students on the strengths and the weaknesses of their native-speaking English teachers (NESTs). Collected data include close-ended questionnaire with 18 (eighteen) questions and open-ended interview with 4 (four) questions. Result of the study revealed that the students perceive the following as the NEST’s strength: creative in providing teaching materials, ideal model for pronunciation, and source of cultural information of the language. However some students were dissatisfied with the NEST’s performance in explaining grammars in the classroom. The result of the study indicates that even though NESTs are perceived as superior and a good model in teaching the target language, they also need to struggle with some obstacles in order to successfully teach the students.

Keywords: Speaking, Native English Speaking Teacher (NEST), pronunciation, grammar.

Introduction

In English language teaching, there are four skills that should be mastered by the students, those are listening, reading, speaking, and writing. According to Ur (1996, p. 120), speaking includes all other skills of knowing that language. It means that speaking is the most important skill in learning a second or foreign language. Realizing the high importance of speaking skill in EFL context, native speakers have been regarded as the model that are considered to be able to master and teach the language better than the Non-Native English Speaking Teachers (NNESTs).

In accordance with Medgyes (2001, p. 430), a native speaker of English is traditionally defined as someone who speaks English as his or her native language, also called mother tongue, first language, or L1. It also notes that native speakers of English are the people whose first language is English and have spoken it since early age, rather than having learnt it as a child or adult. As an ideal condition in English as a foreign language teaching-learning process, students are expected to be able to convey meanings in various spoken texts that have certain communicative purpose, text structure and linguistics.

However, learning to speak English requires more than knowing its grammatical and semantic rules. The students need to know both structure and particularly the context of the language use in order to be able to produce the language naturally. Since the context of language use can be well understood only by the speaker of the language, thus, native teachers are preferred in teaching speaking in EFL classroom.
Juhasz (2011, p. 86) said that students have access in the language learning process is the availability of native teachers. It means that the native teachers are needed in teaching speaking for EFL students.

In the Program of Study of English Education at Syiah Kuala University, there are four levels of speaking subject taught; speaking for everyday communication, speaking for group activities, speaking for formal setting, and public speaking & presentation skill. The speaking classes are taught by both NESTs and NNESTs. The students at the Program of Study of English Education at Syiah Kuala University are required to enroll in all the 4 speaking levels from first to fourth semester. There are 3 NESTs who teach speaking class. The NESTs become one of the students’ favorite lecturers. It has been reported that the NESTs classes are always full.

Moreover, learning English from NESTs is a phenomenon at the study program of English Education. The phenomenon then has drawn the researcher’s attention to explore the Acehnese students’ perception toward their NEST. Based on the explanation above, the research question can be formulated as:

- What is the Acehnese Students’ Perception toward their Native English Speaking Teacher (NEST)?

Therefore, the aim of this study is to find out the Acehnese students’ perception toward their NEST.

**Literature Review**

**Definition of Perception**

Perception is the process of receiving, selecting, organizing, interpreting, examining, and deliver reaction to the senses (Sobur, 2003, p. 451). It means that perception is the impression that is produced by the individual through the five senses, then it will be analyzed, interpreted and evaluated so that the individual gained the meaning.

**Definition of Speaking**

Spoken language is the foundation of all language development, hence, the foundation of all learning. It is supported by Punkoney (2015), she emphasized that oral language acquisition builds a desire to use language for a variety of purposes, such as reading, writing and listening. Speaking is any process in which people share information, ideas and feeling. It involves all of body language mannerism and style - anything that adds meaning to a massage (Hybel, 2001, p. 45). It means that speaking is a process of conveying meaning to other persons in various contexts. It is also a process of people communicating to each other.

**Teaching Speaking**

In the context of English as a foreign language, teaching speaking is considered as an important part of foreign language learning. The ability to communicate in a foreign language clearly and efficiently contributes to the success of the learner in every phase of live. Teaching speaking means teaching students to get involved in the target language, since speaking lesson cannot be separated from conversation itself (Littlewood, 1984, p. 83). It means that teaching speaking is a reciprocal process between the teacher and the students where the teacher guides the students to express their ideas, feelings, and opinions orally.

**Aspects in Teaching**

**Teaching Competence**

Teaching competence is one of the cores of being a successful teacher. Teaching competence includes the awareness of the teachers’ role. According to Harmer (2001, p. 57), teachers have multiple roles in learning to achieve a successful lesson since one lesson can contain various activities. He also added that if the teachers can adapt themselves by changing roles from one activity to another, their
effectiveness as teachers is greatly enhanced. There are 8 roles of teacher proposed by Harmer (2001, p. 57), those are: (1) as a controller, (2) as an organizer, (3) as an assessor, (4) as a prompter, (5) as a participant, (6) as a resource, (7) as a tutor, and (8) as an observer.

**Cultural Knowledge in Learning English**

Culture and language are the two components that cannot be separated. So, when students learn a second language, they will automatically learn its culture. According to Gebhard (1996, p. 124), teachers can teach four concepts that not only can bring about appreciation for people and culture but also can be useful for students when they are situated in cross-cultural communication situations. Those four concepts are: (1) cross-cultural communication which includes adapting behavior, (2) cross-cultural communication which involves problem solving, (3) getting to know other people to understand a culture, and (4) studying our own culture to understand another culture.

**Teaching Style**

Every teacher has his/her own style in teaching. Scrivener (2005, p. 25) as cited in Mounira (2014, p. 30) explained that there are three broad categories of teaching styles: (1) the explainer, (2) the involver, and (3) the enabler.

**Classroom Management**

Calderon (2016) defined classroom management as one of the most important roles played by teachers because it determines teaching success. In short, classroom management can be defined as teachers’ strategies for creating and maintaining an optimal condition for the learning process. A good classroom management requires clear instructions which are key components that attract students’ attention. Teachers have to create a fun and flexible learning environment for students because it is important for students to enjoy a learning process in the classroom.

**Teacher’s Personal Aspect**

Teacher is one of the most important factors that influence the successful teaching and learning process. They are the one who knows well the condition of the students and their needs. A good teacher certainly should have good personalities. According to Koko (2001) as quoted by Andabai (2013, p. 74), there are four teacher personalities that can influence students in learning process, which are: (1) enthusiasm, (2) creativity, (3) dedication, and (4) discipline.

**An Overview of NEST**

Several scholars have attempted to conceptualize the term of native speaker. According to Tay (1982) as cited in Jiufang (2007, p. 4), native speaker is one who acquires English in childhood and continues to use it as his or her dominant language which has reached a certain level of fluency. In addition, Lee (2005, p. 8) suggests six defining features of a native speaker. These are: the individual acquired the language in early childhood and maintains the use of the language, the individual has intuitive knowledge of the language, the individual is able to produce fluent, spontaneous discourse, the individual is communicatively competent and able to communicate within different social settings, the individual identifies with or is identified by a language community, and the individual does not have a foreign accent. After a detailed definition of the native speaker of English, NEST possesses certain attributes that can facilitate the teaching process. Regarding the positive aspects of NEST, Stern (1983) as quoted by Andreou and Galantimos (2009, p. 202) mentions five characteristics of native speaker: (1) subconscious knowledge of rules, (2) intuitive grasp of meanings, (3) ability to communicate within social settings, (4) range of language skills, and (5) creativity of language use.
As for the weaknesses of NEST, Tang (2002) enumerated several points: (1) different linguistic and cultural backgrounds from learners, (2) lack of the awareness of learners’ needs, (3) unable to perceive the difficulties of learning the target language, and (4) unfamiliar with learners’ learning contexts.

Research Method
This study is a qualitative research. In this study, the researcher attempted to collect, analyze, interpret, and describe the data about the Acehnese Students’ Perception of their NEST by looking at the students’ response. There are 3 NESTs who currently teach speaking classes at the Department of English Education at Syiah Kuala University, all of whom were the subjects of this study. The object of this study is the perception of the 26 Acehnese students of the English Study Program at Syiah Kuala University of their NESTs. They were randomly selected by using lottery from 2013 and 2014 academic year.

The 4-point Likert scale questionnaire which includes items “strongly agree”, “agree”, “disagree”, and “strongly disagree” and interview were used as the main instruments of this study. There were 18 questionnaire items covering five aspects: teaching competence, cultural knowledge, teaching styles, classroom management, and teachers’ personal aspect (Kasai, Lee, and Kim, 2011) and 4 interview questions related to NESTs.

To collect the data, the 18 questions of the questionnaire were asked to be answered by the 26 students. And after the questionnaire was distributed and completed by the students, the researcher interviewed 10 students consisting of 5 students from each academic year. The data from the questionnaire were analyzed by using the formula as suggested by Sudijono (2010, p. 43). And for the interview, the result data of interview was transcribed in narration.

Results and Discussion

Teaching Competence
This section examines the students’ perceptions of their (NESTs) Native English Speaking Teachers’ competence in teaching. The questions about teaching competence were asked from item number 1 to 5.

Figure 1. The percentages of each item of the questionnaire in the teaching competence aspect which seen from the students who chose “strongly agree” to the questions.

Figure 1 above illustrates that 88.46% of students strongly agree that their NESTs are fluent speakers of English. This finding is unsurprising because the NESTs who teach at the Study Program of English Education of Syiah Kuala University are certainly from English speaking countries such as USA and Australia. The result also showed that the students perceived the NESTs as fluent speakers of English because they just have the advantage of being born and raised in the English-speaking countries and they also have used English for their lifetimes as their mother tongue.
The figure also shows that item number 3 about grammar obtain the lowest percentage. The students perceived that NESTs cannot confidently answer grammar questions. This finding was in line with the statements from two interviewees (R8, R10). They stated that NESTs do not learn the basic of English and they cannot explain it well, which means NESTs are less proficient in grammar. It is similar to the result study of Lasagabaster and Sierra (2005); the students yielded a clear preference for NESTs in the areas of pronunciation, speaking, and listening, but not in more systematic aspects of the language such as lexis and grammar because “sometimes they haven’t got the knowledge to explain it”. It can be understood that NESTs do not pay more attention to grammar because the native speakers do not have experience learning English as a second language like the Non-native Speaker Teachers (NNESSTs) do. In this context, non-native English speaking teachers have better command of grammatical rules because they had gone through the process of learning English, structure, and its rule before they can speak naturally. Meanwhile, native speakers can speak English more naturally and they know how to say things correctly without understanding the grammar involved. Sometimes, it becomes a reason why it is difficult for NESTs to explain grammar to the students.

Cultural Knowledge
This section describes the cultural knowledge that native speaker of English teacher should have when they are teaching the language to the foreign students. Thus, the questions about cultural knowledge were asked from item number 6 to 7.

Figure 2 above shows that both items are represented by the same percentages. The students perceived that NESTs are knowledgeable about the culture of English speaking countries and they also provide the cultural information for the students. This finding corroborated the study by Coskun (2013, p. 12), who emphasized the strength of the NEST as a more accurate source of cultural knowledge. It means that the cultural knowledge of the countries where English is spoken as the mother tongue should be provided by NESTs in teaching EFL students in class. Therefore, it can be understood that NESTs’ strength is as a source of information of the culture concerning the place they were born and raised.

Teaching Style
This section analyzes the results of questionnaire about students’ perception of their NESTs’ teaching styles. The questions about teaching style were asked from item number 8 to 13.
The percentages of each item of the questionnaire in the teaching style aspect which seen from the students who chose “strongly agree” to the questions.

The Figure 3 above shows that most of the students gave positive perception concerning NESTs’ teaching style. The students perceived that NESTs use various materials in addition to textbooks. This finding is supported by Medgyes (2001, p. 435) who mentions that in NESTs teaching behavior, NESTs use a variety of materials. However, this positive finding was also found from the interview results. For instance, the interviewee number 6 claimed that NESTs, in teaching, are very creative and not monotonous. The researcher thinks that it is because the native teachers have knowledge about the language, so that they are able to provide the learning materials from other sources than textbooks and they are also able to explain it with more simple language without having to fixate on the book.

Classroom Management
This section analyzes the results of questionnaire about classroom management aspect. Students were asked the questions about classroom management from item number 14 to 15.

The percentages of each item of the questionnaire in the classroom management aspect which seen from the students who chose “strongly agree” to the questions.

The figure above shows that all the students perceived NESTs are able to provide a relaxed learning environment. As stated by interviewee number 1, NESTs teach very well, creative, and they can create an enjoyable classroom atmosphere. This finding was in line with the result of study conducted by Urkmez (2015). The researcher thinks that it is only the influence of their culture. The native teachers used to learn in a relaxed learning environment where they do not just sit behind the desk. It is supported by Ballester (2015, p. 3), he asserted that the teacher should establish a positive environment in class which translates as students being more interested, motivated, and learning more effectively. It includes eye contact, body position and movement. Therefore, they try to apply the same thing in the EFL classroom. However, our classroom culture is different. The students are get used to sit and listen. They are lacking of physical movement. Once the NEST exposes the students
with unusual experience, playing music, the students were interested and motivated to learn English.

**Teachers’ Personal Aspect**
Regarding personal aspects of the teachers, the students were asked the questions about teachers’ personal aspect from item number 16 to 8.

![Figure 5](image-url)

**Figure 5.** The percentages of each item of the questionnaire in the teachers’ personal aspect which seen from the students who chose “strongly agree” to the questions.

Figure 5 above clarifies that the questionnaire item number 18 is the highest percentage in the teachers’ personal aspect in the questionnaire. All the students positively wanted to be as good as their NESTs. It is unsurprising that the students want to speak English fluently like the NESTs do. It is supported by Juhasz (2011, p. 91), he stated that NESTs serve as a perfect example for their students to get the right pronunciation and correct intonation of the language and also they possess a wide range of expressions, especially the idiomatic vocabulary, which, in real-life communication, is very useful. The students put NESTs as their ideal model because they can imitate their pronunciation and expression. The students also feel like they can learn directly from NESTs in producing a language naturally and more sounds like native. On the other hand, the NEST itself own the language and can provide a good example for students on how to use the language properly in any situations.

**Conclusions**
The aim of this study is to find out the Acehnese Students’ Perception toward their Native English Speaking Teacher (NEST). The students’ perceptions, here, were classified into five categories; students’ perception toward NESTs’ teaching competence, cultural knowledge, teaching style, classroom management, and teachers’ personal aspect. Based on data gathered and analyzed from questionnaire and interview, it can be concluded that the 26 students represented positive response toward NESTs. The 26 students perceived that NESTs are superior in teaching oral skills. NESTs are also regarded as the ideal model for pronunciation. The 26 students also perceived NESTs as strong source of cultural information about the target language. Concerning NESTs’ teaching style, the students described NESTs as models for creative teaching, have many ways in teaching, and not monotonous. In other words, NESTs use various materials in teaching. On the other hand, the 3 NESTs are less proficient at explaining grammar. It is due to the 3 NESTs who have acquired knowledge of a language from birth so they do not have experiences to learn English, structure, and its rule as a second language.

In addition, all the students want to be as good as NESTs in speaking. The students are motivated to learn and practice English with NESTs and they hope that they can speak English fluently like native speaker.
References