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## Teaching English as a Non-Native Speaker: Identity, Challenges, and Strengths

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### Dr. Pankaj Vaishnav,

Faculty in English, Al Seeb Vocational College, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
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**Abstract:**

The global demand for English language education has led to an increasing presence of non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) in classrooms worldwide. While NNESTs play a vital role in English language teaching (ELT), they often encounter linguistic biases, professional barriers, and cultural challenges that impact their career progression and classroom experiences. This paper explores the identity formation of NNESTs, the challenges they face, and the strengths they bring to ELT. It highlights the linguistic, professional, cultural, and pedagogical difficulties NNESTs encounter. It also includes pronunciation biases, native-speakerism in hiring practices, and the struggle to adapt to native-speaker-centered curricula.

Despite these challenges, NNESTs possess unique advantages, such as empathy for learners, multilingual competence, and the ability to apply contrastive analysis between English and local languages. The paper further discusses strategies to overcome these obstacles, emphasizing confidence-building, identity-based teaching, and continuous professional development. It advocates for inclusive ELT policies that recognize the contributions of NNESTs and promote equitable hiring practices. By shifting the focus from native-speaker norms to teaching effectiveness, NNESTs can reshape the ELT field and create a more diverse and inclusive learning environment.

**Keywords:** NNESTs, ELT, linguistic identity, professional challenges, multilingual teaching

## Introduction

In recent years, the role of non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) in English Language Teaching (ELT) has gained significant attention. The number of English learners has been increasing due to the incomparable importance of English in various domains (Wang & Fang, 2020: 2). With globalization and the increasing demand for English proficiency worldwide, NNESTs form a substantial part of the teaching workforce, particularly in multilingual and multicultural settings. Their presence challenges the long-standing dominance of native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and highlights the need to

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reevaluate traditional perspectives on language proficiency and teaching effectiveness. While NNESTs contribute significantly to English language teaching, they often face complex issues of professional identity shaped by student expectations, institutional biases, and broader societal attitudes toward native and non-native accents (Braine, 2010). These challenges can affect their confidence, career opportunities, and even teaching practices. However, NNESTs also possess unique strengths, such as a deep understanding of the learning process, bilingual or multilingual proficiency, and culturally responsive teaching strategies.

Identity plays a crucial role in shaping the professional experiences of NNESTs. It influences their confidence, teaching methodologies, and interactions with students and colleagues. Moussu & Llurda (2008: 316) state that it is necessary to recognize the importance of a speaker's acceptance by a community as one of its members, as it is what will ultimately be determining the social recognition of the NS/NNS (native speakers/non-native speaker) identity. A strong sense of professional identity allows teachers to navigate challenges with resilience and assert their credibility in the field. However, identity formation for NNESTs is often complex, as it is shaped by linguistic background, cultural affiliations, and external perceptions. Understanding this dynamic is essential for fostering a more inclusive ELT environment. ANEJA (2006: 576) states that individuals are not native or nonnative speakers per se, but rather are (non) *native speakered* with respect to different characteristics, through different institutional mechanisms, individual performances, and social negotiations. Such challenges faced by NNESTs range from linguistic biases to institutional barriers. Issues such as accent discrimination, lower employment prospects, and the preference for native speakers can create professional roadblocks. Additionally, adapting to different cultural and educational systems presents further difficulties. These challenges, while significant, also provide opportunities for professional growth and innovation in teaching practices.

Despite these hurdles, NNESTs bring invaluable strengths to ELT. Their firsthand experience of learning English as an additional language equips them with empathy for students facing similar struggles. Some research shows that non-native teachers might even outperform their native counterparts in teaching learners to speak the target language (Ghane & Razmi, 2023: 1). Their multilingual skills allow them to employ diverse pedagogical strategies, making learning more accessible and engaging. Furthermore, their ability to bridge cultural gaps fosters an inclusive learning environment that respects linguistic and cultural diversity. Recognizing and leveraging these strengths is crucial for promoting equity and effectiveness in ELT.

This article aims to explore the identity formation of NNESTs, the challenges they face, and the strengths they bring to ELT. By examining these aspects through a practical lens, this study seeks to offer insights into how NNESTs can navigate their professional journeys while contributing meaningfully to language education.

**ResearchObjectivesandScope**

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The present study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. To examine the role of identity in shaping the professional experiences of NNESTs.
2. To identify the key challenges faced by NNESTs in various teaching contexts, with a particular focus on linguistic, professional, cultural, and pedagogical aspects.
3. To highlight the strengths and advantages that NNESTs bring to the ELT profession.
4. To propose practical strategies for overcoming challenges and enhancing NNEST effectiveness in language teaching.

The scope of this article is limited to NNEST experiences in multilingual and multicultural settings, with a special focus on personal linguistic backgrounds and teaching experiences in India & Oman. While the study does not involve empirical data collection, it draws from existing literature, reflective analysis, and real-world teaching experiences to provide practical insights. The findings and discussions are intended to benefit NNESTs, ELT researchers, policymakers, and teacher training programs aiming to foster a more inclusive and equitable approach to language education.

## 1.3 Literature Review

The professional identity, challenges, and strengths of NNESTs have been extensively discussed in ELT research. Several studies highlight the persistent preference for native English-speaking teachers, often referred to as native-speakerism (Holliday, 2006; Medgyes, 2018). Research indicates that NNESTs frequently face linguistic discrimination and job market disadvantages due to the perception that native speakers are inherently better language instructors (Selvi, 2014; Mahboob, 2010). However, scholars such as Canagarajah (1999) and Braine (2010) have argued that NNESTs bring unique advantages, including a deeper understanding of the language learning process and multilingual awareness that benefits learners.

The role of teacher identity in ELT has also been widely explored (Varghese et al., 2005; Tsui, 2007). Studies show that NNEST identity is shaped by various factors, including personal linguistic background, professional experiences, and institutional expectations (Liu, 1999; Golombek & Jordan, 2005). Researchers emphasize that NNESTs often struggle with self-confidence due to external biases but can develop a strong professional identity through continuous learning and engagement with the ELT community (Moussu & Llurda, 2008). Challenges faced by NNESTs are multifaceted. Linguistic challenges, such as pronunciation biases and accent-related discrimination, are common (Jenkins, 2000; Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2012). Professional challenges, including limited career advancement opportunities and institutional barriers, have also been documented (Seidlhofer, 1999; Holliday, 2005). Additionally, cultural adaptation in diverse teaching environments can pose difficulties, particularly for NNESTs working in regions where their first language is not widely spoken (Kachru, 1992).

Despite these challenges, research highlights the strengths of NNESTs. Studies show that their multilingual competence enables them to employ more effective pedagogical strategies (Cook, 1999 ; Ellis, 2006). NNESTs often act as role models for students,

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demonstrating that achieving proficiency in English is attainable through dedicated learning (Kamhi-Stein, 2004). Furthermore, NNESTs' ability to understand learner difficulties allows them to provide tailored instruction and support (Amin, 1997; Llurda, 2004).

## 1.4 Research Gap

While existing research provides extensive insights into NNEST identity, challenges, and strengths, there is limited discussion on practical strategies for overcoming these challenges in multilingual and multicultural settings like Oman. Most studies focus on broader theoretical debates or specific geographical contexts, often overlooking the lived experiences of NNESTs in regions where Arabic is the dominant language. This article aims to fill this gap by offering a practical perspective, drawing from firsthand teaching experience and reflective analysis to propose actionable strategies for NNESTs to navigate their professional roles effectively.

## 2. Identity of Non-Native English Teachers

## 2.1 Understanding Teacher Identity in a Multilingual and Multicultural Context

The identity of non-native English teachers (NNESTs) is shaped by their unique linguistic and cultural experiences. Unlike native English-speaking teachers (NESTs), NNESTs often navigate multiple languages and cultural frameworks, influencing their pedagogical perspectives. In a multilingual and multicultural context, teacher identity is dynamic and multifaceted, shaped by personal histories, professional experiences, and societal perceptions of language proficiency and expertise. Guo & Sidhu (2024: 3) observe that teachers with extensive cross-cultural experiences are more likely to possess higher levels of multicultural awareness. NNESTs often embody a dual identity - being both language learners and language teachers. This dual role enhances their ability to empathize with students' struggles and devise strategies that cater to multilingual learners. In classrooms where students also speak multiple languages, NNESTs can create inclusive environments by drawing from their own experiences of learning English as an additional language. Their understanding of language acquisition challenges allows them to provide nuanced support to learners, making them effective mediators between different linguistic and cultural perspectives.

## 2.2 The Influence of Linguistic Background on Teaching Style and Classroom Interactions

A non-native teacher's linguistic background significantly impacts their teaching style and interactions with students. Teachers who have learned English as an additional language bring unique insights into the learning process, often emphasizing metalinguistic awareness and explicit instruction. Their familiarity with different grammatical structures, phonetic patterns, and discourse strategies allows them to anticipate common student difficulties and address them proactively.

Moreover, NNESTs often adopt pedagogical strategies that align with their own learning experiences. Lai (2016: 206) explains that personal preference or sociocultural factors such as teachers' language learning experiences and beliefs, professional preparation and educational philosophy as well as institutional contextual factors are crucial. For example, they may focus on contrastive analysis, drawing comparisons between students'

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first languages and English to facilitate understanding. This approach can be particularly effective in contexts where students share a common linguistic background with the teacher. Additionally, NNESTs are more likely to use code-switching strategically, helping students' bridge linguistic gaps and enhancing comprehension through translanguaging practices. After a case study on Indonesian students, Rasyid et al., (2023: 6) state that the students preferred to have nonnative teachers because they mostly apply for pair work in the class.

Classroom interactions are also influenced by students' perceptions of NNESTs. In some educational settings, non-native teachers may face challenges related to linguistic authority, where students initially perceive native speakers as more competent. However, NNESTs who embrace their linguistic identities confidently and demonstrate expertise in language teaching can counter such biases. Establishing credibility through professional knowledge, innovative teaching methodologies, and effective communication skills can shift students' attitudes and foster respect for NNESTs' abilities.

## 2.3 Reflection on Personal Experiences of Navigating Multiple Languages while Teaching English

As a non-native English teacher, navigating multiple languages while teaching English presents both challenges and advantages. Personally, my linguistic journey has played a pivotal role in shaping my teaching philosophy. Having learned English alongside my native language Marathi, I am fluent in Hindi and understand some regional languages of India. Last few years in Oman has helped me learn Arabic also. With the help of such an exposure to multifarious languages, I understand the cognitive and emotional aspects of language learning. This awareness allows me to connect with students empathetically, validate their struggles, and offer strategies that I found effective in my own learning journey. One of the key challenges I have encountered is balancing language use in the classroom. While I strive to maintain an immersive English environment, I recognize the value of leveraging students' first languages to enhance comprehension and engagement. At times, code-switching has helped clarify complex concepts, making learning more accessible. Additionally, my experience with multilingualism has made me more attuned to students' varying levels of language proficiency, enabling me to tailor my teaching methods accordingly.

Despite occasional doubts about my linguistic authority, I have learned to embrace my identity as a non-native English teacher. Rather than viewing my background as a limitation, I perceive it as a strength that allows me to foster a more inclusive and supportive learning atmosphere. By sharing my own language-learning journey, I inspire students to see multilingualism as an asset rather than a barrier. This perspective not only enhances language acquisition but also promotes a positive attitude toward diverse linguistic identities in the classroom.

## 3 Challenges Faced by Non-Native English Teachers

## 3.1 Linguistic Challenges: Accent Concerns, Pronunciation Biases, and Student Perceptions

One of the most prominent challenges faced by NNESTs relates to linguistic biases, particularly regarding accents and pronunciation. Many learners and institutions tend to

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associate a "native" accent with higher proficiency and credibility, which can lead to biases against teachers who speak English with a non-native accent. Putri (2020: 65) observes that NESTs were able to provide the linguistic model for students, especially in terms of pronunciation and oral language proficiency.

These biases may affect student perceptions, classroom authority, and even hiring opportunities. NNESTs often find themselves needing to prove their proficiency despite their extensive training and expertise. For instance, a non-native English teacher may find that students initially hesitate to accept their pronunciation of certain words, such as the difference in how they articulate /r/ and /v/ sounds. A student might say, "My previous teacher pronounced it differently," implying that the native-like pronunciation is the correct one. Such moments can create self-doubt for NNESTs, even when their pronunciation is clear and intelligible.

Moreover, pronunciation differences can sometimes become a point of scrutiny, with students expecting their teacher to sound like a native speaker. However, intelligibility and clarity in communication are far more important than adhering to native norms. NNESTs can counter these biases by emphasizing effective communication skills and fostering a classroom environment that values diverse linguistic backgrounds.

## 3.2 Professional Challenges: Native-Speakerism, Job Market Discrimination, and Career Progression Limitations

Native-speakerism, the belief that native speakers are inherently better English teachers, poses a significant barrier for NNESTs. Many educational institutions and hiring bodies prioritize native speakers, often listing "native English speaker" as a job requirement. This systemic discrimination limits job opportunities and career advancement for qualified NNESTs. Maganaka (2023: 122) notices that the participants' actual hiring practices revealed that being a native speaker superseded qualifications in importance. Results showed that recruiters assigned more importance to the NES criterion, followed by nationality and accent.

Even when NNESTs secure teaching positions, they may face slower career progression due to institutional biases. For instance, an experienced NNEST with a master's degree in TESOL and years of classroom experience might find themselves overlooked for a leadership position in favor of a less experienced NEST. A school administrator might justify the decision by citing student or parent preferences, despite the NNEST's strong teaching credentials. Such barriers can be disheartening and limit professional growth. Promotions, leadership roles, and professional recognition may be harder to attain compared to their native-speaking counterparts. Overcoming these challenges requires advocacy for merit-based hiring practices, professional networking, and continued professional development to showcase pedagogical expertise.

## 3.3 Cultural Challenges: Adapting to the Cultural Expectations of Students and Institutions

Teaching English is not just about language proficiency - it also involves navigating

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cultural expectations. NNESTs who teach in foreign countries or diverse classrooms may encounter cultural barriers that influence classroom dynamics. Students may have preconceived notions about the ideal English teacher, and NNESTs may need to work harder to establish credibility and rapport. Walkinshaw & Oanh (2012: 7) highlight a cultural and communicative gap in NNEST-fronted classrooms. For instance, an NNEST teaching in an East Asian country may find that students expect a more authoritative and lecture-based teaching style, whereas the teacher, coming from a background that encourages interactive learning, prefers open discussions and student participation. When students remain silent in response to open-ended questions, the teacher may initially perceive this as disengagement, while students may simply be adhering to cultural norms of respect. Understanding and adapting to such expectations can take time but is crucial for fostering an effective learning environment.

Additionally, institutional expectations regarding teaching styles, disciplinary methods, and student engagement may differ from the teacher's own cultural background. Adapting to these norms while maintaining one's teaching philosophy can be a challenging balancing act. Therefore, as Aljuaid (2024) state that teachers with cultural intelligence are more adept at creating and presenting a culturally appropriate and considerate curriculum. Emphasizing cross-cultural understanding and integrating diverse perspectives into teaching can help bridge these gaps and create a more inclusive learning environment.

## 3.4 Pedagogical Challenges: Adhering to English Curricula Designed with Native-Speaker Models

Many English language curricula and assessment frameworks are designed with native-speaker norms in mind, making them less inclusive of NNESTs' teaching approaches and linguistic insights. Standardized English proficiency tests, textbooks, and syllabi often reflect native-speaker linguistic models, overlooking the needs of multilingual learners and teachers.

For instance, an NNEST teaching in a non-English-speaking country might find that the prescribed textbook emphasizes idiomatic expressions and cultural references from inner-circle English-speaking countries, such as the U.S. or the U.K. When explaining phrases like raining cats and dogs or break a leg, the teacher may struggle to make them relatable to students who have never encountered such expressions in real life. Instead, the NNEST might prefer using locally relevant examples of metaphorical language, but strict curriculum guidelines may limit this flexibility.

This can make it difficult for NNESTs to align their teaching methodologies with prescribed curricula while also addressing the realities of second-language acquisition. Matsuda (2012) examines how English curricula can be adapted to reflect the realities of English as a global language rather than adhering strictly to native-speaker models. A shift toward recognizing World Englishes and incorporating diverse linguistic models in curriculum design would help create a more equitable teaching and learning environment. While these challenges pose significant obstacles for NNESTs, they also highlight areas

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where non-native teachers bring unique strengths to the ELT profession. Rather than viewing these difficulties as limitations, NNESTs can leverage their multilingual competence, empathy, and deep understanding of language learning to enhance their teaching effectiveness. The following section explores the key strengths NNESTs contribute to language education, demonstrating how these attributes help counteract the biases and barriers discussed earlier.

## 4. Strengths and Advantages of Non-Native English Teachers

### 4.1 Empathy for Learners: Shared Experiences in Learning English as an Additional Language

NNESTs possess a deep understanding of the struggles and challenges of learning English because they have undergone the same process. Unlike NESTs, who may have acquired English naturally from birth, NNESTs have experienced firsthand the complexities of learning grammar rules, mastering pronunciation, and overcoming communication anxiety. Nobre (2024) rightly points out how this shared experience allows teachers to empathize with students and offer tailored strategies to address common difficulties.

For instance, an NNEST teaching in an EFL classroom may recall their own struggle with phrasal verbs, such as understanding the difference between give up (to quit) and give in (to surrender). Aware of how confusing these expressions can be for learners, the teacher might introduce real-life scenarios to help students grasp the meanings more effectively. By sharing personal learning experiences - such as how they initially confused these verbs but found a strategy that worked - students see that challenges are part of the learning journey and can be overcome with persistence.

Additionally, NNESTs are often more attuned to common pronunciation difficulties that arise from students' first languages. For example, a Spanish-speaking student might struggle with distinguishing between /b/ and /v/, or an Arabic-speaking learner might have difficulty pronouncing /p/ and /b/. An NNEST who has encountered and overcome similar pronunciation challenges can provide specific techniques, such as tongue placement exercises or minimal pair practice, to help students improve. Their ability to relate to learners fosters a supportive classroom environment and provides effective strategies to overcome language learning obstacles (Smith, 2025). Even students feel encouraged and understood in this process. By sharing their personal experiences and demonstrating that mastery of English is attainable, NNESTs serve as role models who inspire students to persist in their language-learning journey.

### 4.2 Multilingual Advantage: Effective Use of Students' First Languages for Better Comprehension

Being multilingual enables NNESTs to use students' first languages strategically to enhance comprehension. Grosjean (2012) points out how multilingual educators can use their language skills to facilitate better learning experiences. This linguistic flexibility helps students grasp English more effectively while reinforcing their multilingual skills. For example, an NNEST in Oman who speaks both Arabic and English might encounter a situation where students are struggling to understand a particular English grammatical

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structure, such as the use of the present perfect tense. Instead of solely relying on English explanations, the teacher might switch to Arabic to explain the concept in simpler terms, making connections with the students' existing knowledge of Arabic grammar. They could say, "In Arabic, we have a similar structure, where you say 'أنا أكلت' (I have eaten), but in English, the emphasis is more on the result of the action." This approach not only bridges the gap in understanding but also reassures students that their first language is a valuable tool for learning.

Additionally, when discussing cultural differences between English and the students' home cultures, the teacher can draw on their own experiences with languages like Marathi or Hindi to provide more relatable examples. For instance, a lesson on polite requests in English might reference how in Hindi, there's a subtle difference between "क्या आप मुझे यह दे सकते हैं?" (Can you give this to me?) and "क्या आप कृपया मुझे यह दे सकते हैं?" (Can you please give this to me?), helping students understand both linguistic nuances.

This multilingual advantage fosters a classroom atmosphere where students feel supported in their own languages, enhancing their comprehension of English while also affirming the value of their linguistic identities. By using students' first languages strategically, NNESTs help them build confidence in their language-learning process.

**4.3 Effective Teaching Strategies: Applying Contrastive Analysis between English and Local Languages**

NNESTs can apply contrastive analysis to highlight differences and similarities between English and students' native languages. This method aids in reducing language interference and improving language acquisition. Contrastive analysis involves comparing the linguistic structures of English with those of the students' first languages to identify areas where learners might encounter difficulties or confusion. VanPatten & Williams (2015) use this style and provide insight into how NNESTs can apply these theories in their teaching practice. By leveraging their understanding of multiple languages, NNESTs can create effective pedagogical approaches that cater to learners' linguistic backgrounds.

For example, an NNEST teaching Arabic-speaking students might use contrastive analysis to address common pronunciation issues. In Arabic, the sounds for certain English consonants (like /p/ and /b/) do not exist, which can lead to confusion when students pronounce words like pat and bat or pen and ben. The teacher can explain the difference by showing how the sound is produced in English, offering visual aids (such as tongue positioning), and providing plenty of practice with minimal pairs.

The strengths of NNESTs - such as their ability to empathize with learners, leverage multilingualism, and apply contrastive analysis - offer powerful tools to counteract biases and professional barriers. However, simply possessing these strengths are not enough; NNESTs must also adopt proactive strategies to navigate their professional journey successfully. The following section outlines practical approaches that can help NNESTs build confidence, establish professional credibility, and advocate for a more inclusive ELT

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environment

## 5 Strategies for Overcoming Challenges

### 5.1 Building Confidence in Linguistic and Professional Identity

NNESTs can overcome biases by embracing their linguistic identity and focusing on their strengths. Confidence in teaching abilities, effective communication, and pedagogical expertise are key factors that help counter negative perceptions. Shapiro (2021) emphasizes the importance of critical language awareness, encouraging teachers to reflect on their language choices and the impact on their teaching identity. Instead of attempting to mimic a native accent or teaching style, NNESTs can embrace their unique position as educators who understand the challenges of learning English from a non-native perspective.

An example of this could be an NNEST from India teaching English in an international school. Rather than focusing on mimicking a native speaker's accent, the teacher could highlight their ability to help students navigate common issues faced by non-native speakers, such as understanding idiomatic expressions or overcoming pronunciation difficulties. By using their own experience as a teaching tool, they can show students that there are multiple ways to be proficient in English, and their unique perspective can enrich the learning process.

### 5.2 Adopting an Identity-Based and Student-Centered Teaching Approach

A teaching approach that acknowledges both the teacher's and students' multilingual realities fosters a more inclusive and effective learning experience. NNESTs that recognize and integrate their linguistic and cultural identities into their teaching methods create a classroom environment that values diversity and encourages students to embrace their own multilingual backgrounds. Marcel (2024: 334) explains that teachers have to be prepared to recognize and use their multilingual identity in providing an inclusive classroom that respects students for their linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

For example, an NNEST teaching in an Arabic-speaking country may encounter students who feel pressured to conform to native-speaker norms. Instead of enforcing a rigid English-only policy, the teacher could implement translanguaging strategies - allowing students to use Arabic when brainstorming ideas before presenting them in English. This approach not only builds confidence but also validates students' linguistic identities while reinforcing their English skills.

A teacher from India teaching in a multicultural classroom might share their personal experience of learning English as an additional language, discussing the challenges they faced and the strategies that helped them succeed. This approach helps students relate to their teacher, reducing the hierarchy between "expert" and "learner" and fostering a sense of shared linguistic growth.

By integrating these strategies, NNESTs can create a more engaging and supportive learning environment, where both the teacher's and students' linguistic and cultural realities are seen as strengths rather than obstacles.

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**5.3 Engaging in Continuous Professional Development and Joining NNEST Advocacy Networks**

To build credibility, enhance career growth, and challenge native-speaker biases in the English language teaching (ELT) profession, NNESTs can actively engage in professional development and advocacy networks. Continuous learning and participation in professional communities not only strengthen pedagogical skills but also provide opportunities for networking and policy advocacy. For example, an NNEST teaching in Southeast Asia might initially face hiring biases due to the widespread preference for native English speakers. By pursuing professional development opportunities—such as obtaining internationally recognized teaching certifications (e.g., CELTA, DELTA, or TESOL) - they can showcase their expertise and challenge misconceptions about NNESTs' teaching abilities.

Joining advocacy groups such as TESOL International Association's NNEST Interest Section or IATEFL's TEASIG (Testing, Evaluation, and Assessment Special Interest Group) allows teachers to connect with like-minded professionals, share research, and contribute to discussions that shape ELT policies. These platforms also provide mentoring opportunities and access to the latest research on best teaching practices. Additionally, attending ELT conferences (such as TESOL, IATEFL, or local teacher training workshops) allows NNESTs to stay updated with modern teaching methodologies, interact with ELT professionals worldwide, and present their research. This exposure not only boosts their confidence but also establishes them as authoritative voices in the field.

By continuously upgrading their skills and joining professional networks, NNESTs can challenge stereotypes, gain professional recognition, and contribute meaningfully to English language education.

**6. Conclusion**

The role of non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) in English language teaching is both challenging and rewarding. Despite facing biases related to linguistic identity, professional opportunities, and institutional expectations, NNESTs bring invaluable strengths to the classroom. Their firsthand experience in learning English as an additional language enables them to empathize with students, employ multilingual teaching strategies, and foster inclusive learning environments. By embracing their linguistic and cultural identities, NNESTs can challenge prevailing stereotypes and demonstrate that effective English teaching is not confined to native speakers alone.

To navigate these challenges, NNESTs must build confidence in their professional and linguistic identities, adopt student-centered teaching approaches, and actively engage in continuous professional development. Advocacy efforts, professional networks, and policy changes are essential in promoting equitable opportunities for NNESTs in the global ELT landscape. Recognizing and leveraging the strengths of NNESTs can lead to more inclusive and effective English language education, benefiting both teachers and learners alike. The future of ELT must shift toward a more diverse and accepting perspective, where teaching

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competence is measured by pedagogical skills rather than native-speaker status.

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