Attitudes towards Indonesian Teachers of English and Implications for Their Professional Identity

by

Ardian Wahyu Setiawan

Master of Education (TESOL), Monash University, Australia, 2006

Bachelor of Arts in English Literature, the State University of Malang, Indonesia, 2001

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores the way various education stakeholders, including students, parents and other subject teachers (OSTs), perceive Indonesian teachers of English (ITEs) in relation to the strong preference for native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) in the field of English language teaching in Indonesia. More importantly, it investigates the way the ITEs perceive their professional selves despite the other stakeholders’ perceptions. The study also explores some relevant issues, such as the way the stakeholders perceive English, the way they conceptualize an ideal English teacher, the way they understand the term ‘native English speaker’ and the way they perceive NESTs.

The study was conducted at a senior high school in Malang, Indonesia, involving 178 third-year students, twelve parents, eight OSTs and six ITEs. Semi-structured interviews were employed for collecting data from eighteen students, the twelve parents, the eight OSTs and the six ITEs. In interviews with the students, a computer-based image elicitation technique was used for exploring the racial aspects of students’ various concepts of an ideal English teacher. Additionally, 160 students were involved in group discussions. In the data analysis, a hermeneutic-reconstructive approach was used.

This study reveals that the participants’ perceptions of English are not isolated from sociocultural, economic and political factors related to the language. This suggests that there is a discourse closely intertwined with such complex factors in classrooms which influences the identity of teachers. Furthermore, it is found that the participants’ conceptualizations of an ideal English teacher are multifaceted. The native speaker fallacy, the belief that ideal English teachers are native speakers of English, is visible among the students and there is a racial dimension to the students’ various concepts of the teacher. Nevertheless, the fallacy was not dominant in the participants’ conceptualizations. Generally, the perceived characteristics of an ideal English teacher identified in this study favor neither NESTs nor NNESTs. Therefore, there are opportunities for both NESTs and ITEs to be regarded as ‘good’ English teachers. The study also indicates that the native speaker fallacy is problematic not only because it is founded on misconceptions about native English speakers, but also because there are misunderstandings about the term ‘native English speaker’, particularly among students and parents.

Surrounded by such problematic issues, the professional identity of NESTs and ITEs were perceived differently by the participants. The stereotype of NESTs as ‘superior’ teachers had
influenced the way the participants perceived NESTs and ITEs. NESTs were seen as having more strengths, particularly by students, parents and OSTs. ITEs, by contrast, were perceived as having more varied strengths and weaknesses. The students, parents and OSTs used the stereotypical image of NESTs as ‘superior’ teachers as a benchmark against which to assess ITEs.

ITEs perceived themselves positively despite the presence of negative perceptions. Through the analytical lenses of social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978) and dialogical self theory (Hermans, 2001), this study has identified two factors contributing to ITEs’ self-perceptions: (1) ITEs’ awareness of different characteristics of NESTs and ITEs, and their ability to see their distinctive features as strengths, and (2) ITEs’ ability to see other individuals, particularly students, as an important element of their professional selves. Overall, this study contributes to the understanding of the complexity and multifacetedness of ITEs’ professional identity.
Declaration

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

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Ardian’Wahyu Setiawan
School of Education, Faculty of Arts
The University of Adelaide

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List of Acronyms

DST : Dialogical self theory
EFL : English as a foreign language
EIL : English as an international language
ELT : English language teaching
ESL : English as a second language
ITEs : Indonesian teachers of English
L2 : Second language
NESTs : Native English-speaking teachers
NNESTs : Non-native English-speaking teachers
OSTs : Other subject teachers
SIT : Social identity theory
TESOL : Teachers of English to speakers of other languages
The UK : The United Kingdom
The US : The United States of America
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