

An Access into the Reality Ofusing Non-Native English Materials

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Abstract: This paper took into consideration students' and teachers' perceptions on the efficacy of using NNEMs in learning and teaching English and perceived features of non-native English varieties that are supposed to be learned through NNEMs, the fact of using NNEMs in class, including challenges faced by teachers, and students' and teachers' expectations about NNEMs in teaching and learning English. Qualitative and quantitative data were gathered from 230 students and five teachers at a public university, employing written questionnaires and interviews. The findings showed that most of the teachers and students supported using NNEMs because of their great value. Pronunciation and cultural aspects were perceived as most important and useful to learn through NNEMs. The usage of NNEMs by the teachers was reported in terms of skills, types, stages of the lesson, and activities involved. The teachers had faced many difficulties, including material selection, time constraints, learners' negative views, and a lack of support from their college. The students expressed their hope of being exposed more to NNEMs. Pedagogical implications and suggestions for further research are also discussed.

Keywords: non-native English materials (NNEMs), world Englishes (WEs), native speakers of English (NSs), non-native speakers of English (NNSs).

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Rationale for the Study

Recently, the number of people using English as a lingua franca (ELF) is believed to have increased dramatically. This means that people from different geographical and cultural backgrounds communicate with not only native speakers (NSs) but also non-native speakers (NNSs) of English. Accordingly, it is not surprising that NNSs have already outnumbered their native counterparts (Crystal, 2004; Kumar-Bhowmik, 2015). Also, Coskun (2010) confirms that this increasing number of NNSs has led to the appearance of different English varieties and has influenced some important issues related to English language teaching (ELT).

Despite the reality that English learners interact more with NNSs than NSs outside the classroom, in most of the ELT contexts, like in Vietnam, the so-called "standard English" (SE), such as American English and British English, still dominates and receives much more attention (Lê ThịHuong, 2013) than other dialects that are considered. The question raised here is: if materials in class should reflect authenticity and correspond to students' actual language use, then non-native English materials (NNEMs) should be of interest. At a public University, most learning and teaching English materials used are those written by NSs. Thus, some teachers and students may have it in mind that the target of learning English is SE.

How to make teaching materials more comprehensive and useful to help students become familiar with various types of non-native English varieties at a public University and to become effective users of English in their future careers has therefore been the inspiration for the researcher to conduct the study entitled "An Access into the Reality of Using Non-Native English Materials at a public University". The researcher hopes to gain insight into the actual needs of learning and teaching in terms of non-native English varieties, teachers' and students' attitudes towards using NNEMs in

classes, or the overall problems they may have when incorporating those materials in their teaching and learning.

1.2. Aims of the Study

The main aim of this study is to discover the perceptions of students and teachers of English concerning the use of NNEMs at a public University. In doing so, it is expected to find out how, in reality, the teachers have dealt with these kinds of materials in teaching English and the challenges that they may have in incorporating NNEMs into their lessons. The ultimate aim of the study, therefore, is to suggest some methods for effective integration of the NNEMs into the classroom.

1.3. Research Questions

To acquire the intended objectives, the study is designed to seek answers to the following research questions:

1. Which aspects of non-native English materials do the students and teachers perceive to be useful?
2. How might the teachers integrate NNEMs into their teaching, and what are the perceived challenges?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Definition of Materials

As claimed by Nelson, C. L. (2012), teaching materials can be defined as “any systematic description of the techniques and exercises to be used in classroom teaching”. It might also be understood that teaching materials are any resources that are used by teachers to deliver instruction to students.

Materials are normally designed in two main forms: “printed ones” such as books, workbooks, and teachers’ guides; and “non-printed ones” such as audiotapes, videotapes, and computer-based materials to meet learners’ needs and objectives (Tok, 2010). Teachers, therefore, have a variety of choices to choose appropriate types of materials for their particular classes and purposes.

2.2. Roles of Materials in Teaching the English Language

There have been various explanations about the important role of English materials in the learning and teaching process. On the one hand, materials are not only a source of input but also portray a certain view of the world (Matsuda, 2012). In other words, materials provide a framework, a source of ideas, and activities for teachers and learners to achieve their aims. Also, materials can construct students’ perceptions and their beliefs about the target language. On the other hand, in the present-day use of English as ELF or EIL, teaching materials help learners be aware of differences such as forms, uses, and users (Matsuda & Friedrich, 2011). Materials can also help to unfold a new landscape of learning models and methodologies for learners, in which they can see there are still many other varieties of English in the world (Brown, 1993). It can be argued that the content of materials in ELT strongly affects learning and teaching achievements. The more appropriate the materials are, the better the learning outcome will be.

2.3. Current Trends and Perspectives in Learning and Teaching Materials

Different perspectives on teaching material development have been studied to better understand which aspects should be highlighted. Some researchers have shed light on selecting and evaluating the usefulness of authentic materials (AMs) or non-authentic materials (NAMs) and their implementation in the classroom (Guariento & Morley, 2001; Paltridge, 2001; Shrum & Glisan, 2000). Others have focused on supporting theories relating to incorporating different types of English into materials for a classroom setting (Harris, 2012). While the current debates on these two views will be discussed, more emphasis will be put on the latter as it directly relates to this study. AMs and NAMs have been an issue about the types of material that teachers should use in the classroom. Possibly, a combination of both types of material could be useful. In many studies, the common thread in the definition of AMs is “exposure to real language and its use in its community” (Al Azri & Al-Rashdi, 2014, p. 249). There are still some disadvantages to using AMs since they can often be too culturally biased and contain many complicated structures. In support of this viewpoint, Miller (2005) once said that AMs are too difficult and time-consuming to choose, revise, and prepare.

In contrast to AMs, NAMs refer to anything that has been specially designed for pedagogical purposes. They include worksheets, textbooks, and instructional CDs or DVDs. If AMs provide a chance for students to encounter real communication, NAMs can be useful for equipping learners with fixed and well-formed structures such as grammar and vocabulary in the classroom. Teachers can thus save time searching for and designing such materials. Alongside these advantages, NAMs, however, sometimes contain unvaried texts or a series of “false-text indicators” (Berardo, 2006).

In short, it can be stated that both the AMs and the NAMs used in Vietnamese classes have an orientation towards the teaching of SE or English of NSs, while non-native varieties of English are not paid due attention to. This is a big consideration for ELT in the twenty-first century because of the appearance of more varieties of English, which will be discussed in the following part.

2.4. WEs and Teaching Materials

Traditionally, NSs in the IC are considered to be standard-providing users. British and American English are often regarded as the two most popular choices for instructional models in many parts of the world. This also impacts the mainstream of content in language learning and teaching materials. The English native language varieties are typically used as a standard in EFL and ESL teaching (Seidhofer, 2004). Therefore, materials are mainly presented or focused almost exclusively on such kinds of English. This argument is supported by Bieswanger (2008), who says that the dominance of native norms is still marginally reflected in ELT curricula and teaching materials in the classroom. There are two main arguments that many scholars and applied linguists have taken into consideration: one is the emphasis on teaching native or SE only, while the other suggests incorporating various English varieties within instructional materials.

2.5. Teachers’ and Students’ Perceptions towards the use of NNEMs in Class

2.5.1. The Learner's Perception of the Target Language

The recognition of learners’ attitudes and perceptions towards the target language has contributed to a growing body of evidence that suggests that they are the two most important factors that influence the learning outcome and learning behavior (Hosseini & Pourmandnia, 2013).

When speaking about a person’s perception, we often think of his or her awareness, comprehension, or understanding of something. In a simple sense, that is what a person thinks about or understands. Perception is also interpreted as the ability to easily comprehend and notice something using one’s senses. In the ELT aspect, for example, an English teacher’s perception of teaching techniques means the teacher knows when and how to try different techniques with different types of learners to increase their learning achievement. That is the perception of students’ weaknesses and strengths, and then teachers may come up with ideas for better teaching. In this present study, teachers’ and students’ perceptions towards the use of NNEMs will be one of the researcher's focal concerns about the discussion of their attitudes. Understanding to what extent students and teachers perceive the usefulness of learning different non-native English varieties through NNEMs, therefore, can greatly contribute to better teaching.

2.5.2. The Influence of Teachers’ Attitudes on Students

According to Tan and Tan (2008) and PhạmHòaHiệp and TônNữNhuHương (2010), teachers’ attitudes and perspectives influence those of their students. Accordingly, it is logical to learn more about English language teachers’ attitudes and beliefs towards learning non-native English varieties first, as they later convey those to learners and users. In terms of teaching English varieties, teachers’ beliefs certainly “have a considerable impact on the approach to which varieties are selected for teaching purposes” (Litzenberg, 2013, p. 125). For example, a study by Young and Walsh (2010) shows teacher participants who were uncertain which variety of English they had learned and therefore demonstrated little concern for target models in their teaching. In this sense, if teachers have no exact idea of the nature of EIL, EFL, or any other non-native English varieties, they probably do not know how to introduce learners to such terms or may show no interest when teaching those aspects. Thus, it is a crucial task to consider both teachers and students when doing research on teaching WEs in general and on the use of NNEMs in particular.

2.6. Challenges that Teachers may Face when using NNEMs

The application of NNEMs will be subject to the social reality of a particular context and beliefs, together with the attitudes of those who are involved in the learning and teaching process. Consequently, it may face both challenges and opportunities (Wen, J. et al., 2017). Regarding the limited size of the research, the researcher only focuses on exploring teachers' difficulties.

The first challenge that English teachers may encounter is selecting suitable and reliable materials. Researchers have remarked on this difficulty as the reason why teaching WEs seems to not always be an easy task. Despite the obvious benefits of learning about various non-native varieties of English, real examples of materials to help students realize the benefits of learning WEs are, however, still limited. In other words, few publishers or organizations are actively producing those materials (Sutherland, 2011).

Secondly, the challenges can be laid on language learners' ideologies, which leads to an unacceptable view of using NNEMs. As we have mentioned before, in any learning context where learners are not aware of the crucial role of learning non-native English varieties or negatively consider those materials not useful, teachers may encounter more difficulties when teaching English. PhạmHòaHiệp and TônNữNhuHương (2010) describe this factor in university contexts in Vietnam as:

With the deep knowledge of learners' and teachers' motivation, expectations, and aspirations regarding teaching and learning English in specific contexts, it would be challenging to promote any model of English that learners in specific contexts of the world perceive as useful for themselves (p. 48).

Finally, the testing system is also a big challenge for language teachers. Teachers, for instance, use NNEMs in classroom activities, which often orient learners to use English in real interactions, while assessment of learners' competence normally follows the Common European Framework for materials used. Still, a bit of a contradiction exists, which suggests that if NNEMs are promoted, the criteria of assessment also need to be changed. And therefore, the achievement of native-speaker competence should be less emphasized (Coskun, 2011). In short, though there seem to be other challenges that teachers may be confronted with, the above ones are the most common noted by previous studies. However, one may be correct in this situation, but not always in other contexts. This indicates that a closer look at each specific context should be carried out where NNEMs are implemented to obtain more useful pedagogical suggestions.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Approaches

Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were used to gain valid and reliable data for the research. These two approaches can bring the greatest value when they are combined for several reasons. The qualitative method allows the researcher to collect data flexibly through the use of a semi-structured interview to understand deeply the teachers' and students' perceptions towards the application of NNEMs in the current context. Data collection in terms of perceptions or attitudes, for instance, may not naturally exist in quantitative form. Therefore, a qualitative method is a great choice. Furthermore, the quantitative method helps the researcher gain a high level of reliability through the data collected from the questionnaire (Balsley, 1970).

3.2. Participants

Data for this study were obtained from two groups of participants: 230 students and 5 teachers at public University.

3.2.1. Students

The researcher delivered 240 copies of the questionnaire to the student group. However, 230 copies were given back to the researcher and used for the data analysis. These learners are majoring in English as EFL at a public University. From the second year to the fourth year, participants ranging from 19 to 24 years of age were randomly chosen. The mixed-level participants allowed the researcher to obtain a variety of information. 13 students (7 males and 6 females) from this group were randomly chosen for the interviews.

3.2.2. Teachers

To gain an insight into the reality of using NNEMs in teaching practice and their perspectives on this issue, five teachers from the English department teaching different skills were involved in this study. Their ages range from 25 to 45, and their teaching experience ranges from 3 to 20 years.

3.3. Data Collection Instruments

The two instruments employed in the study comprise the following:

3.3.1. Questionnaire

A questionnaire is often considered an effective technique for collecting data from a large number of participants. One reason for questionnaire usage is that it can save the researcher’s time and finances. More specifically, it is much easier to collect data within a short period with a large participant number. With the aid of computer software (SPSS), the researcher can analyze the data collected quickly and precisely. Respondents can complete the questionnaire at their convenience and answer questions in any order, which makes them feel at ease while completing it. The researcher can also gain more information through their comments on open-ended questions.

3.3.2. Interview

Interviewing is considered one of the most commonly used techniques in qualitative research. It involves some planning, but there is the prerogative to vary the interview path based on the participant’s responses. The first reason for this choice is to help the researcher control the response situations and schedule a convenient time and place, as well as the question sequence being asked. Particularly, it offers flexibility for both the interviewer and interviewees. Though this kind of data collection instrument seemed to be time-consuming and costly, it enabled the researcher to have better control throughout the interview (Creswell, 2016). Secondly, as the main purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of participants’ opinions, attitudes, and feelings concerning the usage of NNEMs, which the questionnaires sometimes cannot easily evaluate, an interview is useful.

3.4. Data Analysis Procedure

The data collected from questionnaires was processed into statistical percentages. The results of the statistical evidence were demonstrated through tables and figures. In addition, the data collected from interviews was grouped. A tape recorder was used to record the interviews. Then, these interviews were fully translated and analyzed by the researcher

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Useful Features of non-native English Perceived by Students

Table4.1. *Useful features of non-native English perceived by students*

Options		Responses (From230 students)	
		N	Percent
A	A	118	51.3%
	B	89	31.6%
	C	69	30%
	D	97	42.2%

Note: *Respondents could choose more than one answer.*

A: Various samples of the most common pronunciation and speech of different non-native speakers of English, such as those in the ASEAN region.

B: Samples of idiomatic expressions used by speakers of non-native countries

Differences in grammar used by non-native speakers of English

Samples of the cultural diversity of different non-native English speakers in addition to those of native ones

Table 4.1 demonstrates participants’ opinions on particular features of non-native English they think are important to be included within NNEMs. Specifically, 51.3% (118 students) of the participants agreed that samples of pronunciation or speech of different NNSs, especially those in the ASEAN

region, should be the focus of NNEMs used in class, followed by culture (42.2%), vocabularies such as idiom expressions (31.6%), and grammar (30%). To those who are familiar with NSs' accents, NSs' accents seemed very tough to comprehend. About the content of NNEMs, 10 of 13 students suggested that the teachers should use NNEMs, which include samples of various pronunciations or accents of NNSs. This is not for acquiring the NNSs' accents but for raising awareness of different accents and pronunciations so that students will be able to catch whatever English dialects One student expressed:

People's accents may influence their pronunciation. Therefore, when learning non-native English varieties, pronunciation should be the first priority to facilitate our listening comprehension. When we are good at it, we can learn about culture, vocabulary, and grammar through reading texts.

(Interview on April 5, 2023)

Secondly, getting to know other NNSs' cultures was acknowledged as the second most important feature. The participants were aware of the close link between learning a language and its culture. Language and learning are involved in the traditions and customs of NNSs because culture strongly affects people's speaking styles. This finding supports Matsuda's (2012) study that learning more about other cultural practices helps learners behave in the right way. This also goes along with Matsuda (2003), who argued that acquiring World Englishes can improve international understanding for students and teachers as well. This result is also supported by the study of Kachru and Nelson (2006), in which they highlighted that having several international varieties of accent is more important than being or sounding native.

One student thought that:

I find it interesting to study other NNSs' cultures. We should know about them, for example, things that we think are good in our culture but are considered prohibited in other cultures. This would be very helpful for communication.

(Interview on April 5, 2023)

On the other hand, the percentages are lower for vocabulary and grammar aspects. The participants tended to consider them less important to learn compared to the other two features. However, it does not mean students ignore them. Though it is necessary for learners of English to master grammar, it sometimes does not affect the success of communication. In some cases, even though learners use English in their own way and may make some grammatical mistakes, the listeners can still understand them. Nevertheless, it would be helpful for students to get to know more "potential salient features" of ELF lexicon grammar, such as those identified in Voice (Jenkins, 2006, p. 170)

In addition, one of the main causes of communication breakdown is vocabulary use among interlocutors. This may occur when one non-native speaker uses certain expressions that may be a translation from their native language. Therefore, learners must learn more about the expressions and metaphors that NNSs may use. These samples of particular vocabulary used by NNSs, in reality, would be significant for students' learning.

4.2. Teachers' use of NNEMs in Class

4.2.1. Teachers'usage of NNEMs in Class

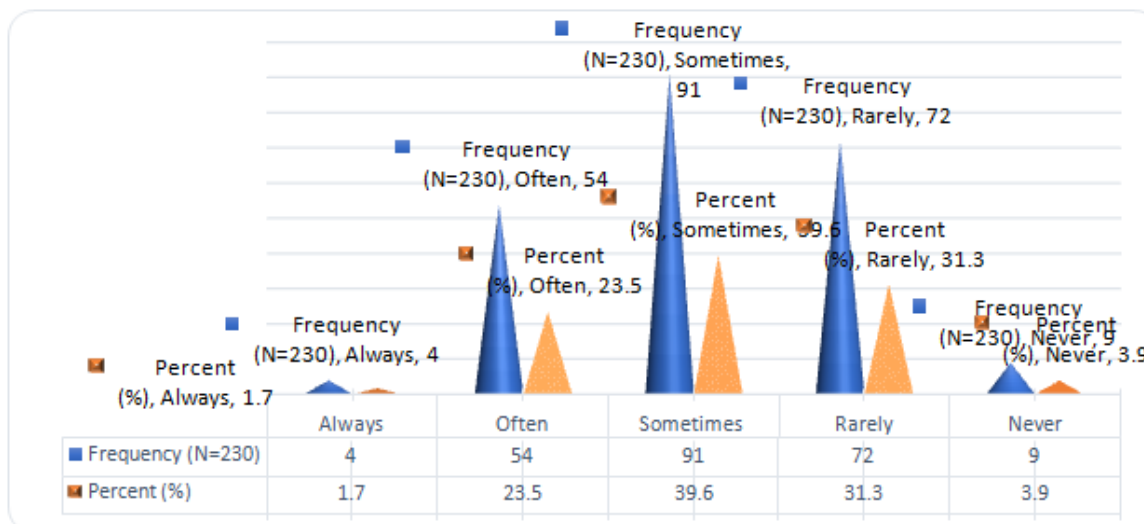


Figure4.1. Frequency of using NNEMs in class

As shown in Figure 4.1, 91 out of a total of 230 participants (39.6%) indicated that their teachers “sometimes” use NNEMs, followed by 72 (31.3%) and 54 (23.5%), respondents who reported the teachers “rarely” and “often” used them, respectively. The facts indicate that in the majority of the classes, students had few chances to experience different Englishes as more influential materials written by NSs were preferred by students and teachers. Teachers made use of various forms of NNEMs, including written, audio, and visuals. In addition, NNEMs were frequently used to facilitate practicing listening and speaking skills and less frequently for reading and writing practice in class. The amount of NNEMs was also somehow reflected through the stages of the lesson and follow-up activities. Therefore, the following discussion is needed to give a better view of this topic.

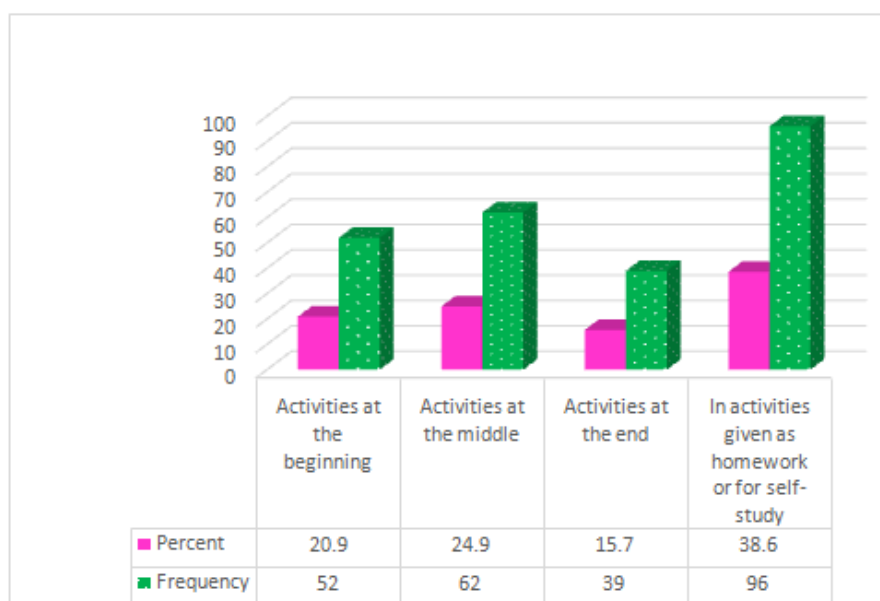


Figure4.2. Stages of lessons teachers used NNEMs in class

Note: Respondents could choose more than one answer

Figure 4.2 presents the reflections of the participants on the stages of the lessons in which teachers used NNEMs. The results suggest that teachers used NNEMs in every stage of the lesson. The most frequent use was activities given as homework or for self-study, which account for 38.6%, followed by activities in the middle (24.9%), at the beginning (20.9%), and at the end (15.7%). The results reflect that NNEMs do work as supplementary sources. Most students generally recognized that

teachers took advantage of using NNEMs for a variety of activities and purposes, among which keeping portfolios at home, doing group work, and warm-ups are in favor. These activities were flexible and adapted to suit the lessons. Some students said they had no idea about this because teachers had never let them approach NNEMs. Also, they even did not know the existence of other Englishes, especially those in the EC and OC. One student stated, “Well, I do not know how to say it because I have never heard about NNEMs. In class, teachers often let us listen to audios or watch videos by NSs, not those of NNSs.”

(Interview on April5, 2023)

4.2.2. Teachers' Opinions Regarding the use of NNEMs

According to the teachers' experience with using NNEMs, 4 out of 5 teacher interviewers stated that they combined NNEMs in their teaching lessons to build up necessary strategies for effective communication. The findings also showed that the teachers used flexible kinds of NNEMs, but the most frequently used ones were the video, audio, and written documents from the Internet, such as those from the Massive Open Online Course (MOOC), and sometimes from good students' papers:

Yes, I have used these kinds of materials mostly to highlight the importance of the correct pronunciation of short and long vowels. I let them watch a video about an Italian man. It was so hilarious that everyone laughed out loud. It helps to create an interesting atmosphere before starting the lessons.

(Interview on April 7, 2023)

There has been a noticeable change in using NNEMs. The teachers said that they had no specific idea on which skills and stages of the lessons the materials should be used as long as they fit the activities and intended purposes.

4.3. Challenges Faced by Teachers when Incorporating NNEMs

Based on the teachers' interviews, they had difficulties using NNEMs for the following reasons: The first challenge for most of the teachers was related to the “reliability of materials”. Though diverse sources about English varieties can be found on the Internet, it is sometimes hard to choose which one is reliable.

The challenges come from the validity. I am not sure whether they are good enough. Sometimes, a video can be interesting, but there are too many mistakes that make it difficult to get the best of both worlds. As a non-native teacher of English, it is even harder for me to see the problems of the NNEMs. You may think it is okay, but it is not under the view of NSs.

(Interview on April7, 2023)

This finding is compatible with the previous researcher's conclusion, saying that though Internet sources nowadays can provide several authentic WEs materials, a problem is that teachers sometimes feel hesitant to use them as they are not sure about the trustworthiness of the materials or where to begin (Sutherland, 2011).

Another one gave an example:

It might be difficult to find good NNEMs because some may have a few grammar errors or the structure of the material may be different from that of native speakers due to culturally influenced differences.

(Interview on April 6, 2023)

As has been noticed, 3 out of the teachers interviewed stated that there was a serious lack of investment in facilities for supporting the use of NNEMs found at a public University. They can look for a variety of material written by NSs in the library, but very few of it is from NNSs.

Moreover, being time-consuming was another confrontation. It is generally believed that it takes a lot of time to select, adapt, or design activities from the NNEMs to well fit the lesson plan rather than normal materials written by NSs. In contrast, for some other teachers who have long years of experience, this is not a major challenge because they know how to be flexible in using them. 65% of the participants shared this similar view:

“When I teach students about the outline of “an argumentative essay”, instead of saying that in the introduction you have to do this, you have to do that. I just offered them good versions of NSs and NNSs. Then students can recognize how similar or different the versions are. I think it will take time if you do it just for fun. I focus on one thing, and I know how to set up everything, so I have enough time to do it.”

(Interview on April 7, 2023)

In conclusion, though it may face both challenges and opportunities (Xie, 2014), NNEMs were regarded as bringing a lot of benefits for learners at the researched public university.

5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1. Summary of Major Findings

Summing up the findings, the major points of the research can be listed as follows:

As aforementioned, NNEMs were assumed with certainty by a majority of teachers and students to be of great value and importance. Though all features of non-native English (pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and culture) were perceived to be useful to learn through NNEMs, aspects of culture and pronunciation particularly received more attention. For one reason, being exposed to the common pronunciation, accent, and cultures of non-native Englishes would be helpful in achieving successful communication. While teachers also highlighted a careful consideration of the content of NNEMs to meet learners’ needs and purposes for the lessons.

Both teachers and students shared the same idea that NNEMs were found in every stage of the lesson and not always fixed to any. In addition, some teachers showed that they used mostly audio and video types rather than written ones to fit skills and purposes. Teachers took advantage of NNEMs in different activities mostly to provide learners opportunities to be close to the Englishes of NNSs, to highlight common mistakes often made by learners, and to build up an awareness of those varieties for effective communication.

As for obstacles faced by teachers, problems related to finding reliable materials among the many sources on the Internet nowadays make it hard for them to choose from. Moreover, the constraints of time and learners’ negative views on NNEMs also caused a hesitance to use them in class. Last but not least, a little recognition of the role of teachers among themselves to introduce or teach non-native English varieties is also a big challenge to come to an agreement on what should be the focus.

5.2. Implications and Recommendations

The previous sections have made it clear that non-native English varieties are still not adequately represented in the current teaching materials at a public university. Nevertheless, in light of the condition of those varieties perceived by both students and teachers, NNEMs have been recognized as an effective tool to facilitate learning and teaching. This small study hopes to raise its voice on this issue. The question remains as to how the use of more NNEMs in ELT can be executed without making too many demands for learners and teachers.

What was revealed from the study is that, although there was recognition of the usefulness of NNEMs, the limited number of NNEMs used in class might not meet learners’ needs. However, it requires many efforts by teachers in terms of understanding other non-standard varieties, learners, and the context of using those materials. The researcher expects that this study will be a great help for teachers and administrators in getting deep insights into their current teaching context at the current researched public university in terms of using NNEMs in the classroom.

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