

Beliefs about Non-Native Teachers in English as an International Language: A Positioning Analysis of Iranian Language Teachers' Voices

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Abstract: The unprecedented growth of English and arrival of English as an International Language (EIL) has generated a new fledged argument about English language teachers' role and status around the world. To date, much of the debate on the native/non-native distinction in EIL settings and factors contributing to sharpen distinctions has remained unsettled. This gap motivated this study on the English teachers' grasp of their role and their stance in the EIL setting of Iran. For this purpose, this study adopted both quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore the nature of the English teachers' attitudes through an EIL scale and teachers' narrative accounts through Telegram groups. The three-level positioning analysis (Bamberg, 1997) of English teachers' narrative accounts contradicted their perceptive evaluations of their status, as non-native English teachers. The results proved that, despite highlights of blurred distinctions, English teachers in Iran still believe that English belongs to the native speakers and position native speaker teachers as better models for pedagogical practices. The results have implications for teachers' beliefs and the role of teacher education programs.

Keywords: English as an International Language (EIL), Positioning, Native Teachers, Non-native Teachers.

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Introduction

The perception of the stance of non-native teachers is largely affected by constant comparisons between native and non-native teachers thus affecting their teaching practices. A prevailing mentality in EIL settings prioritize native-speakers as superior models of English language teaching practice due to their linguistic capabilities (Braine, 2010; Kirkpatrick, 2010). As proposed by Tang (1997), there exists an inevitable constant comparison between native speaker teachers and non-native speaker teachers which is continuously “developed and accentuated” and largely affect the identity of non-native teachers. While, based on Davies’ (2004) definition, the only difference of native and non-native can be acquiring a language in childhood, in ELT realm, this distinction goes beyond the inquisitional or linguistic capabilities (Kachru, 1981) and allows ideological standpoints and inequity (Canagarajah, 1999). This highlights the fact that “social attitudes towards the English proficiency”, an ideologically shaped radical factor in native/non-native distinctions, shape non-native English teachers’ roles (Tang, 1997, p. 577).

With the arrival of World Englishes (WE), localized forms of English became legitimate Englishes and the distinctions between varieties of English turned out to be blurred (Bolton, 2012). This presumption led to the coinage of English as an International Auxiliary Language (Smith, 1976), and the arrival of plural forms of English, such as varieties of Englishes, International Englishes, New Englishes, English Languages, and the most popular one, World Englishes. More recently, there has been a growing acceptance of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF).

Likewise, legitimizing varieties of English assumed to make the sharp distinctions between native/non-native speakers to be dimmed in theory. As a pioneering figure, on the native/non-native distinctions, Smith (1976) believed that non-native speakers of English should not be categorized as the generalized others; instead, according to Smith, as a byproduct of globalization, English belongs to anyone who uses it. In the same vein, followed by the recent debate on native/non-native distinctions, a considerable number of scholars subscribed to the disfigured nature of the sharp distinctions. Among many recent scholars, Llurda (2009) criticized the sharp discriminations between native/non-natives and believed that classifying the speakers of any language into native/non-native is representative of the idea of a sharp division between ‘us’ and ‘others’.

However, there might be mismatches between the real practice of teaching and what scholars presume and postulate in theory about native/non-native distinctions. Also

incongruities might occur between what is optimistically assumed to be valued in an EIL setting by non-native speaker teachers and learners to foster an anti-discrimination atmosphere and what is really perceptively understood by teachers and learners. Despite the unsupported discriminations between the native and non-native (Alptekin, 2010; Canagarajah, 2007; Ferguson, 2009; Jenkins, 2002, 2006; Seidlhofer, 2001; Wang, 2012) and the new fledged influx of anti-discriminatory objectives, the “dominance of native speaker pedagogic models in the English curriculum”, “lack of familiarity with linguistic features in other varieties of English”; and “lack of awareness of the legitimacy of the non-native varieties of English” still has a tremendous effect on the public mentality (Li, 2009, p. 109) and makes it align with traditional values and goals of ELT. It is hard to escape the fact that English teachers’ mentality regarding their status has a vast impact on their professional identity and hence has a great touch on their teaching practices. Therefore, investigating how English teachers in an EIL setting, such as Iran, perceive their stance compared with that of native English teachers is mandatory.

Literature Review

The astonishing spread of English, stimulated by different economic, social, and educational reasons, has caused an increased emphasis on teaching English as an international language in the educational systems. McKay (2002) clearly highlights the fact that teaching an international language is different from teaching any foreign or second languages. In the same vein, on a broader understanding of EIL, Modiano (2009) states that EIL emphasizes situational adaptation and pragmatic aspects of communication, in contrast to foreign language education. For Modiano, EIL needs to be considered as a legitimate pedagogy, that is, language teachers need to actively promote multicultural awareness and constantly feed multilingual and bilingual speakers (Kirkpatrick, 2010) in the language classroom without the presupposition that American and British varieties of English are considered as the yardstick to measure the legitimacy of other varieties.

From a pragmatic point of view, McKay (2009) challenges a native speaker model and states that language use is context-bound. This assumption questions the traditional ELT objectives which was assumedly modeling the native-speaker norms. Kasper (1997) highlights a disadvantage of using native norms as a model that will lead to conflicts in L2 users’ sociopragmatic norms, that is to say target norms might not concord their beliefs and values. There is no doubt that all non-native users of English are legitimate users of the EIL;

therefore, it is unneeded for adopting native speaker norms which in some cases might lead to negative perceptions in non-native speakers (Sridhar, 1996) and obscure one's realization of individual identity in the target language (Modiano, 2009).

Currently, English use occurs between non-native/non-native even more than native/non-native speakers; therefore, mastering a native or near-native proficiency of English might not lead to successful communication for the reason that non-native speakers need a sound comprehension of the meanings and manners of diverse non-native speakers (Qiufang, 2012). Accordingly, some scholars (e.g. Cook, 1999) underscore the need for successful non-native teachers as models of language learning, owing to the fact that non-native learners never become monolingual users of English; thus, they are required to be treated as genuine non-native users in EIL settings. In the same vein, many researchers put emphasis on the fiction of superiority of native English teachers over non-native ones (Wang, 2012) in EIL settings which needs to be addressed and approached critically. Non-native teachers should be empowered with a nativeless and decentered perspective of English (Llurda, 2009; Metz, 2017) and accordingly empower learners to resist their assimilation into the target culture (Phillipson, 1992), and familiarize the learners with the local culture (Ali, 2009). English teachers are also required to positively practice methods of presentations and to enhance effective language learning styles (Raddaoui, 2005) which will lead to the advantages of having multilingual experience (Cook, 2007).

A numbers of studies investigated the perceptive understandings of teachers, learners, and supervisors of the non-native English teachers' status compared with those of native English teachers (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2002, 2005; Llurda, 2005; Nemtchinova, 2005, Walkinshaw & Hoang Oanh, 2014). Lasagabaster and Sierra (2002, 2005) investigated learners' perceptions of non-native speaker teachers in an EFL context. In both studies, English learners, despite being aware of some of the advantages of non-native speaker teachers, preferred native speaker teachers in general. Moreover, Nemtchinova (2005) examined native speaker teachers' opinions about non-native speaker student-teachers in a TESOL program. In this study, non-native speaker teachers were mostly reported as suffering from less self-confidence due to their constant self-evaluations. Finally, Llurda (2005), on the comparison between non-native speaker student-teachers and native speaker student-teachers in a TESOL program, discussed that non-native speaker teachers were well considered by the supervisors in North-American universities but a few of them reported to lack language proficiency.

Studies provide evidence for the fact that inclination toward native varieties is not mainly due to linguistic factors, but, as Kachru (1981) calls it, it is because of stereotyped mental systems. The power of stereotyping is reportedly considered as a major factor in shaping the non-native speakers' attitude toward varieties of English (Delamere, 1996; Lippi-Green, 1997; Llorca, 2000). To avoid stereotyping and monolithic and mono-centric native-speaker-based pedagogy, Li (2009) put forward the idea of 'pluricentricity' that has to be the norm in teaching English in outer and expanding circles. To Li, the linguistic and discourse-pragmatic patterns should be innovatively localized according to the sociolinguistics of any particular area.

English teachers play the foremost role as the agent of teaching English; therefore, their attitudes and mentalities as well as their perceptions of their status in the new paradigm of EIL would drastically affect their practices of language teaching. A number of studies put forward some critical arguments signifying the non-native English teachers' mentalities and attitudes toward their standpoint in EIL settings, such as: non-native speaker teachers' perception of their source model of teaching as less reliable and accepting the native speaker as a source of authority (Tsui & Bunton, 2000), non-native speaker teachers' reliance on an external norm rather than their domestic sources (Sifakis, 2004), non-native speaker teachers' insecurity about their language proficiency and their acceptance of native speaker teachers as ideal models of language teaching (Llorca, 2008; Llorca & Huguet, 2003), and non-native speaker teachers' preference for conformity to native linguistic norms and disapproving non-native norms to be transferred in English communications (Tajeddin, Alemi, & Pashmforoosh, 2018). In addition, teachers in Tajeddin et al.'s (2018) study pictured an undesirable view of non-native varieties' use; in contrast, they appreciated the use of American or British varieties for institutional purposes. Also, it was found that non-native speaker teachers praise native accent, and consider native speakers as owners of English language (Sifakis & Sougari, 2005).

Llorca (2004), probing fundamental reasons underlying non-native speaker teachers' rejection of their own norms and resources and their overreliance on the external model, claims that language departments at academic situations take a native variety orientation. As Llorca continues, these flawed perceptions are rooted not only in non-native speaker teachers' mentalities and perception of their stance as English teachers, but also in teacher education programs. To overcome this, non-native speaker teachers need to grow a non-centered view of language learning/teaching and, according to Widdowson (1994), claim the

ownership of it. However, while native speaker teachers are still widely perceived as better teachers by learners, it is hard to escape the fact that, as long as the native variety is considered as a yardstick, or as Cook (2007) puts, the goal in ELT is to model a native speaker, native speaker is the best model of English pedagogy. To Cook, it is the responsibility of the corresponding teachers, which will necessarily be a non-native speaker teacher in EIL setting to practice and value the particular 'nativeless variety' or a decentered view of English (Metz, 2017).

Many scholars have put emphasis on the idea that change in the perspective toward EIL needs to start from teachers. As Jenkins (2007) put it, English language teachers hold a non-enthusiastic attitude toward EIL. If teachers lack a proper understanding of the spread and current use of English, an EIL perspective can be appropriately implemented and reflected in the language teachers' practice, thus affecting curriculum (Brown, 1995; Burns, 2005; Kachru, 1984; Matsuda, 2005, 2006, 2009; McKay, 2002).

In Iran, accordingly, as a country in the expanding circle of English language speakers, English is the major foreign language in the educational system. Moreover, English is the sole medium of instruction in some international schools and international universities. This led to the growth of thousands of English language institutes. Language teachers have a significant role to provide the grounds for the national and international needs to be met. As Gill (2012) states, "whether it is just or unjust, they represent the human resource that most impacts on the development of the human capacity needed for the nation" (p. 50). However, as a byproduct of the growth of learning/teaching English, language teachers have been gradually affected in terms of their perception of their status as an EFL teacher in the EIL context of Iran. Sharifian (2009) believes that "English has played a multitude of roles in people's lives, and many speakers of English have developed complex relationships with the language, such that it has touched their identities, cultures, emotions, personalities, and so on, so the stories they tell about their relationship with it reveal significant links between language, culture and identity" (p. 5). In this regard, the way language teachers perceive their stance in comparison with their native counterparts plays the foremost role in their professional identity as well as affecting their teaching practices within the language classrooms. In the same vein, teachers' perception of their role and professional identity acts as a catalyzer to their embracing or rejection of EIL (Masoumpanah & Zarei, 2014). The scarcity of the studies focusing on the EFL teachers' perceptions of and reflections on their

stance with regard to the native English teachers instigated the incentive of the present study to look deeply into:

1. How do EFL teachers in Iran perceive their status as non-native teachers in an EIL setting?
2. What are Iranian EFL teachers' reflections upon their stance as non-native teachers in an EIL setting?

Method

The first instrument the current study adopted was a scale (EIL scale) developed by the authors to gauge teachers' perceptions of their status as an English teacher in an EIL setting. What is more, the present study delved deeply into the teachers' reflections, by engaging a number of teachers in interactive communication on EIL related issues posed in social network groups designed by the authors through a three-week time span. In the present study, for both phases, EIL scale administration and social group discussion forum, the convenient sampling was adopted (Mackey & Gass, 2005). In the above named sampling method, the participants who appeared to be available and enthusiastic to take part in the process of data gathering were nominated by the researchers.

Participants

In the first phase of the present study, directed at figuring out the participants' perceptions of their status as English teachers in an EIL setting, 195 (117 females and 78 males) English teachers participated voluntarily. These volunteer participants were assured anonymity and their rights, and were asked to sign consent forms, indicating their understanding of the study's goals and methods. The teacher participants were studying English Language Teaching at the university level and were English teachers at the same time in different institutes.

For the second phase, being exploratory and interpretative in nature, 36 teachers, both male (N=8) and female (N=28), participated on a voluntary basis. The participants were divided randomly into 5 Telegram groups, got into the act of voicing their points of views in the panel discussions which were held through social network discussions for three successive weeks. The telegram groups were specifically designed to engage teachers in the weekly discussions of English teachers' reflections on their status in an EIL setting. In the second phase, teachers were asked to comment on the themes postulated by the researcher

(the second author) and tagged on the social network groups (5 Telegram groups). In the same way, they were offered the space to comment on the other teachers' ideas on each theme. This built up the interactivity of the discussions and clued in more revealing factors regarding Iranian English language teachers' reflections upon their status in the EIL setting of Iran.

Instruments

In the present study, to deeply scrutinize the English teachers' perceptions of and reflections upon their status in the EIL context of Iran, both quantitative and qualitative means of investigation were employed. The quantitative instruments included the EIL scale, specifically designed to examine the perception of English teachers regarding EIL related issues. The items were selected through the review of the related literature into a pool; successively, the most relevant items were chosen, piloted, went through expert judgment, revised, finally adjusted to fulfill the very intention of the EIL scale.

On the other hand, in the qualitative phase, the social network group (Telegram) discussions were arranged to elicit the language teachers' reflections, narratives, and narrative accounts on their status in the EIL setting of Iran. Five telegram groups were designed, each of which included 5-8 members (overall 36 EFL teachers). The comments posed by the members on each EIL related theme were observable by every member of the telegram groups. This made the opportunity for the English teachers who participated in this phase of the study to have the opportunity to comment on their colleagues' opinions and notes.

The topics of the discussions were selected in line with the scales' themes. However, the topics of the social network discussions were open-ended and provoked more detailed personal experiences of the teachers on the EIL related themes. Additionally, the findings in this phase were used to triangulate the scale results.

Data Collection

Teachers' perceptions of their stance as English teachers have significant effect on their perception of professional identity (Llurda, 2008). In phase one, to examine teachers' perception of their status in the EIL setting of Iran, the data were gathered in intra-personal level, echoing their beliefs through the EIL scale. For the EIL scale administration, an online version of the EIL was developed through Google Forms and administered online to

approximately 300 teachers among whom 195 English teachers responded. The administration of the questionnaire was managed through Telegram, e-mail, and LinkedIn website.

Identities are shaped and reshaped in the discourse. Examining evidence of ideological bias in the discourse (Widdowson, 2007) reveals teachers' discourse strategies and practices for the (re)construction of identity, power, agency, and perception of their stance. De Fina (2013) regards the positioning of identity as a locally enacted, reciprocally constructed, and dynamic notion. Therefore, this study sought to investigate teachers' positioning of their stance and role as English teachers in the EIL setting of Iran through their reflective understandings. Teachers' reflections were elicited through social media groups (Telegram) in an interactive discourse. At the inter-personal level, the negotiation of the teachers' reflections on their status in social network (Telegram groups) and among teachers was thoroughly scrutinized. For the second phase of the present study, panel discussions were held in Telegram groups, for the intension of eliciting English teachers' reflections on their status as English teachers in an EIL setting. Each week the researcher (the second author) posted a topic of discussion on the groups and asked the members to voice their opinions. Meanwhile, the same researcher mediated in a few cases to elicit more interactional discourse among the teacher participants and also in case of misunderstandings and misinterpretations of the topics. The interventions were done neutrally not to impose ideas or to break the flow of the discussions. The teachers' opinions and comments on the topics and their replies on other teachers' discussions were gathered and subjected to the close positioning analysis (Bamberg, 1997).

Data Analysis

The data from the EIL scale administration went under descriptive analysis to calculate the descriptive statistics and normality. The normality was checked by considering the skewness and kurtosis measures of the questions which were all between -2 and +2. Therefore, according to Tabachnick and Fidell (2007), the data met the assumption of the normality. The first research question sought to find the status of English language teachers with regard to EIL related issues. The analysis involved the data obtained from the teachers' perceptions of the EIL related themes included in the scale.

In order to analyze teachers' reflections through panel discussions in the social network groups, Bamberg's (1997) three-level positioning analysis was employed to scrutinize the

discursive practices, emerging within the interactional context of panel discussions. Positioning was initially defined as “the discursive production of a diversity of selves” (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 47). Data from 36 selected teachers were subjected to closer qualitative analysis of discourses and positioning work. For this, Bamberg’s (1997) three-level model of positioning was adopted. Extending Labov and Waletzky’s (1967) framework for narrative analysis, Bamberg sought to bridge the tension between the traditional/structural approaches and performance/pragmatic approaches to narrative analysis. To resolve this tension, he introduced a three-level analysis of narratives in order to examine the positioning work done by the narrators. Bamberg (1997) argues “in conversations—due to the intrinsic social force of the conversing—people position themselves in relation to one another in ways that traditionally have been defined as roles. More importantly, in doing so, people “‘produce’ one another (and themselves) situationally as ‘social beings’” (p. 336). In the present study, the data obtained from Telegram group discussions are considered narratives and narrative accounts as they are exploratory and dialogic (De Fina, 2009). To examine the social and positioning work of narrators, Bamberg delineated three levels of analysis. These include:

1. How are the characters positioned in relation to one another within the reported events (that is, how are the characters produced using linguistic devices)?
2. How does the speaker position him- or herself to the audience (in other words, how are the actions presented using linguistic devices)?
3. How do narrators position themselves to themselves (how does the speaker present the idea of “who am I”? beyond the immediate content)?

In this study, three-level positioning analysis, a potent tool in identity studies (De Fina, 2013), was employed to examine deeply into how English teachers position others and themselves. This qualitative analysis deployed by the researcher provided in-depth visions toward their stance which was beyond quantitative data.

Findings

This section looked into the English teachers’ perceptions of their status as an English teacher in an EIL setting and how they evaluate their status in their perceptive comparisons to the native English speaker teachers. Also, this scale probed the EFL teachers’ perception of the ownership of English and how EFL teachers in Iran perceive their role as English speakers and English teachers.

Scale Validation

Results of the EIL scale were subjected to a principal component analysis (PCA) with direct oblimin rotation. As shown in Table 1, in component one, item 2 (native-speaker language norms should serve as a yardstick for assessing non-native teachers), item 3 (native English teacher is a better model), item 4 (native English teacher can assess students better), item 5 (native English teacher can teach English use better), and item 7 (non-native English varieties are not legitimate) are clustered together. In Component two, item 1 (EIL belongs exclusively to native speakers), item 6 (being a native teacher is more important than teachers' qualifications), item 8 (being aware of learners' context does not make a non-native teacher more qualified), item 9 (being aware of learners' needs does not make non-native teachers more qualified), and item 10 (non-native teacher can never be as qualified as native teachers) are clustered.

Table 1. Pattern Matrix for the EIL Scale

	Component	
	1	2
EIL.4	.886	
EIL.3	.880	
EIL.5	.831	
EIL.2	.758	
EIL.7	.753	
EIL.9		.902
EIL.8		.871
EIL.6		.795
EIL.10		.727
EIL.1		.695

Note: Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Teachers' Perceptions of their Status in an EIL Setting

Furthermore, as reported in Table 2, the total mean of the scale equaled $M = 2.9$ and total standard deviation was $SD = .71$. A frequency analysis was run for 195 teachers' responses to the EIL scale (see Table 2). Teachers agreed with the following statements: "native-speaker language norms should serve as a yardstick for assessing non-native teachers" (item 2: $M = 3.64$, 70.8% agreed and strongly agreed), "native English teacher is a better model" (item 3: $M = 3.64$, 70.8% agreed and strongly agreed), "native English teacher can assess students better" (item 4: $M = 3.64$, 70.8% agreed and strongly agreed), "native English teacher can teach English use better" (item 5: $M = 3.72$, 71.8% agreed and strongly agreed), and "non-native English varieties are not legitimate" (item 7: $M = 3.62$, 64.6% agreed and strongly agreed). All these items were clustered together under component 1 in the pattern matrix.

In contrast, teachers' responses to the scale proved that they disagree with the statement that "English exclusively belongs to native speakers" (item 1: $M=2.08$, 72.3% disagreed and strongly disagreed). Also, they disagreed with the following statements: "being a native teacher is more important than teachers' qualifications" (item 6: $M=2.15$, 77.9% disagreed and strongly disagreed), "being aware of learners' context does not make a non-native teacher more qualified" (item 8: $M=2.47$, 65.6% disagreed and strongly disagreed), "being aware of learners' needs does not make the non-native teachers more qualified" (item 9: $M=2.39$, 71.8% disagreed and strongly disagreed), and "non-native teacher can never be as qualified as native teachers" (item 10: $M=2.39$, 67.2% disagreed and strongly disagreed). These items fell within component 2.

Table 2. *Descriptive Statistics of the TIEIL (Teacher Identity in EIL setting) Scale*

	Mean	SD	Percentages				
			1	2	3	4	5
1. English as an International language belongs exclusively to native English speakers (American, British, Australian, & Canadian).	2.08	1.27	46.2	26.2	5.1	18.5	4.1
2. Native-speaker language norms should serve as the yardstick for measuring non-native-speaker teachers' language accuracy.	3.64	1.12	7.2	11.3	10.8	51.8	19
3. Compared to a non-native teacher, a native English teacher is a better model of language proficiency for English students to follow.	3.64	1.10	5.1	14.9	9.2	51.8	19
4. A native English teacher can assess English students' language proficiency better than a non-native teacher.	3.57	1.19	6.7	16.9	11.8	42.6	22.1
5. A native English teacher can teach the appropriate use of language in different contexts more efficiently than a non-native teacher.	3.72	1.09	4.6	13.8	9.7	49.2	22.6
6. Being a native rather than a non-native teacher of English is more important than the teachers' qualifications, ability, and experience.	2.15	1.19	32.3	45.6	3.6	11.8	6.7
7. Non-native varieties of English (Singaporean, Indian, Malaysian, Chinese, &...) are not as legitimate as native varieties of English (American, British, Australian, & Canadian).	3.62	1.11	5.6	12.3	17.4	43.6	21
8. Being aware of the learners' learning context does not make a non-native English teacher more qualified than a native English teacher.	2.47	1.11	15.9	49.7	11.8	16.9	5.6
9. Being aware of the local learners' needs does not make a non-native English teachers more qualified than a native English teacher.	2.39	1.07	14.9	56.9	8.2	14.4	5.6
10. Non-native English teacher can never develop qualifications comparable with those of a native English teacher.	2.39	1.27	27.7	39.5	7.2	17.9	7.7
Total	2.97	.717					

Note: 1(strongly disagree), 2(disagree), 3(undecided), 4(agree), 5(strongly agree)

Teachers' Reflections on their Status in an EIL Setting

To investigate teachers' reflections on their identity in an EIL setting and also the way they evaluate their status as an English teacher compared to native speaker English teachers, they were posed three discussion topics in the Telegram discussion groups for three successive weeks. The discussion topics were as follows:

1. Do you believe in native/non-native speaker dichotomy?
2. Do you think English as an International Language (EIL) belongs exclusively to native speakers (namely, American, British, Australian, and Canadian)?
3. Do you think a native speaker teacher is superior to a non-native teacher or a non-native speaker teacher is superior? Please explain.

To analyze the data obtained from Telegram group discussions, including teachers' written discussions, accounts, and narratives, Magnitude Coding (Saldana, 2015) was employed for the aim of quantification of the teachers' general ideas about the discussion topics. The coded responses were subjected to frequency analysis and finally were inserted into a table (see Table 3). As shown in the table, 63.3% of the teachers in the focused group agreed with the fact that there exists native and non-native distinction. However, the EFL teachers disagreed (73.3%) with the exclusive ownership of English language by native speakers. Moreover, 70% of the EFL teachers believed that native teachers are not superior to non-native ones.

Table 3. *EFL Teachers' Reflections on EIL Themes*

Themes	Agreement (%)	Disagreement (%)
I believe in native and non-native dichotomy	63.3	21.6
EIL belongs exclusively to native speakers of English	13.3	73.3
NS teacher is superior to NNS teacher	26.6	70

Furthermore, for a deeper discourse analysis of the English teachers' discussions, accounts, and narratives, Bamberg's (1997) three-level positioning analysis was employed to look into the underlying ideologies and logics underpinning their opinions.

(1) I believe in Native and Non-native Dichotomy

The majority of EFL teachers approved of native and non-native dichotomy. For example, teacher 7 positions English as belonging to native speakers (positioning level 1) and argues that not any non-native speaker can own it, except only learning to speak it. She positions non-native speakers as having no right to claim the ownership of EIL due to the fact that,

according to her, they have not ‘lived their life’ with English language ‘through emotions’, ‘thoughts’, and ‘traditions’. Her notions are in contrast with the fact that all non-native users of English are legitimate users of EIL (Kasper, 1997). Non-native users of EIL do not need to model culture-associated-with-English norms, which might lead to conflicts in L2 users when adopting the target norm and cause false perceptive understandings due to the conflicts with learners’ self-identity (Modiano, 2009; Sridhar, 1996). Yet, the sociolinguistics of any society need to be embedded based on any context. This is in line with what Li (2009) advocates as “pluracentricity” of English language teaching in EIL settings.

T7: I kinda do! English is not just a language. It's a matter of the interwoven relationship between a language and its culture. So, everybody can learn to speak in English. However, it just belongs to the people who have lived their life through emotions, thoughts, traditions, and the other similar stuffs in this language.

Teacher 4, in line with teacher 7, uses linguistic devices in the discourse to express her mentality that English only belongs to native-speakers and positions native speakers as role models for non-native ones (positioning level 1). As clear in the findings, the majority of teachers, in their reflective understandings, discussed for the native/non-native dichotomy. It is evident from the account that teacher 4 prioritizes the linguistic features and places native speaker teachers more capable in these aspects. Therefore, according to teacher 4, native speaker teachers are better role models. The stereotyped mindset about native speaker superiority affects public attitudes and as a result causes lack of confidence and insecurity regarding proficiency in language teachers. This is in line with what scholars call native speaker superiority fiction (Wang, 2012) or stereotyped mentality (Kachru, 1981).

T4: There's certainly a difference and we need a role model for speaking english fluently and who is a better role model than an English native speaker?

(2) EIL Belongs Exclusively to Native English Speakers

The majority of EFL teachers disagreed with English-language ownership exclusively by native speakers. Few, however, reported their agreement. Again, teacher 7 positions native speakers dissatisfied with the fact that the English language, along with the culture associated with English, is adopted by many people around the world (positioning level 1). Through positioning level 3, she implies that no cultural values and events can be deeply adopted and practiced. By “I feel terribly bad for the native speakers” she displays sympathy toward

native speakers to express how saddening it is if speakers of other languages claim the ownership of the English language. Her discriminatory flawed perception (Llurda, 2004) deliberately overlooks the diversity and projects her dogma, rooted in lack of EIL knowledge, about her culture and language that cannot be used and practiced by other people in the world (positioning level 3). She positions herself as unable to adapt to the target culture because she believes that if one speaks a language, this does not mean that one owns the language.

T7: I feel terribly bad for the native speakers. They feel like their identity is getting stolen by people all around the world. Take this, you like YE TOOP DARAM GHELGHELIE, KHALE BAAZI, [this is a song] and lots of similar childhood memories because they belong to you, right? Now, can you imagine somebody, like an American, with an accent singing one of your sweet childhood songs and feel the same as you? The answer is NO for sure. A nonnative might be able to use the words and in some cases, like mine, live with this language every little second but still can't make sense of tonight which is a night before Thanksgiving and my neighbors are super excited about their pecan pie, turkey, cranberry sauce, ... Belonging has way more to do than only speaking a language. Sorry guys this question is one of my challenges as a mom to a bilingual kid.. I'm challenging with this every day. I'm too wordy I know. I only believe that English belongs to its own people, as Persian that only belongs to us.

In reaction to teacher 7, Teacher 2 uses linguistic devices in the discourse to directly oppose T7's notions and positions Persian language as belonging to everyone who speaks it (positioning level 1). T2 believes that any foreign cultural event can be adopted and internalized, even with some adaptations, and become a part of one individual. Opposing stances between and among teachers about how they perceive and position non-native speakers of English and claim their legitimate rights can be due to their knowledge of EIL.

T2: Persian does not belong only to us!!!!!! It belongs to all who can speak it. About the thanksgiving example: U have ur own feelings, that might be different from what a native American think about them. But when u prepare ur own feast, ur own food, ur own party, it belongs to u in that extent.

Teacher 15 explicitly calls 'intercultural competence', 'identity', and 'EIL' as fancy terminologies produced to distract critical researchers opposing ruling policies (positioning level 1 though linguistic devices in the discourse). To her, EIL belongs to native speakers in contrast to what is advertised. She also believes that these concepts are produced by the first

world scholars and if they have been developed in outer or expanding circles of English users, they would have been treated differently (positioning level 1). T15's standpoint, as she denotes, goes beyond simplistic EIL views and positions these notions as ideologies imposed on non/native speakers in outer/expanding circles.

T15: I think EIL is just a nice label like other newly developed labels such intercultural competence and identity to distract those critical researchers and their followers around the world from the colonist effects of English language and culture becoz i believe under this veneer the same old vicious policies are still ruling. So yes i think EIL still belongs to native speakers culture even though it claims the opposite. However if it was a term created by scholars from the outer circle countries i might have thought differently...

(3) Native Speaker Teachers Are Superior to Non-native Speaker Teachers

In response to this prompt, 70% of the EFL teachers disagreed with it. Teacher 2 explicitly positions non-native speaker teachers (local teachers) as more privileged due to being aware of local "learners' cultural background" and well aware of the experience of the learning that "particular language" (positioning level 1). She puts emphasis on what Davies (2004) calls as the main difference between native and non/natives: childhood acquisition. She also positions those who favor native speaker teachers as "ordinary people" (positioning level 1). By this, she implies that, in her opinion, those who favor native speakers are unaware of the qualifications of non-native teachers (positioning level 3) who, to her, are even more knowledgeable than native-speaker teachers (positioning level 1). This falsely shaped public attitude/mentality is rooted in discriminatory views about English language ownership and feeds ideological inequity (Canagarajah, 1999) thus incorporating to flawed perceptions in public.

T2: I think native speakers cannot teach as well as us. For so many reasons. First, not knowing enough of the learners' cultural background, second, not being the learner of that particular lg (i.e. English in this case) have made us (as English as an international lg teachers) better ones. The only things ordinary people preferred native English teachers are their accent and their knowing a lot of idioms. These are what can make eil teachers more appealing to ordinary learners compared to native speaker teachers. But I believe eil teachers may know a lot but they try to oversimplify their lg or because of other reasons, they

don't show how good they are in these two aspects. And I don't think there is a dichotomy at all. All are English teachers whether native or nonnative. What matters is professional development. How skillfully an English teacher can handle students, their learning, expectations,

Teacher 1 believes that knowledge of English does not contribute to being a good English teacher. Through positioning level 3, she implicitly highlights the significance of teaching skills, not mere linguistic proficiency, for both native and non-native teachers.

T1: Being a native speaker is not related to being a good teacher. Teaching has its own method. Some perfect speakers are not able to transfer their knowledge at all. But if someone is native and at the same time a successful transferer you can call it the icing on the cake!

In contrast, teacher 12 contends that proficiency matters and it makes the native-speakers more privileged when it comes to job opportunities (positioning level 1). She expresses her grief in the discrimination between the two groups (positioning level 3). By this, she admits that there is a native/non-native dichotomy. Also, she believes that native-speakers are biasedly overvalued to non-natives in professional and educational systems (positioning level 1).

T12: Since proficiency in English has become the main qualification required to get a better job and higher salary, it can be a professional disadvantage for non-native speakers. Also, native speakers are naturally so relaxed, flexible and confident in comparison with non-natives; as a result, there is always a sense of unfair treatment or discrimination between them.

Teacher 8 positions native proficiency a privilege but not enough compared to 'ethic and genuine desire' of any non-native teacher to teach and transfer knowledge (positioning level 1). Moreover, teacher 8 values teaching skills and teacher motivation over nativeness and positions herself detached from the native speaker teacher superiority fiction.

T8: I second that motion. The most important characteristic of any English teacher is not whether the teacher is native or not but rather if he/she knows how to impart knowledge to the level of his/her students, if it's smth he/she is passionate abt, & if he/she is willing to put the effort in to prepare a gud class. Having a high or even native proficiency helps a lot to facilitate learning, but it's not a substitute for work ethic & a genuine desire to do a good job.

Teacher 16 reports her comparative experience of language learning with both native and non-native teachers. Through positioning level one, she openly positions native teachers as more linguistically proficient compared to non-native ones; however, to her, non-native teachers are more aware of language learning process rooted in their own experiences of leaning a language. Therefore, she believes that non-native ones have a better grasp of what learners are going through in this process (positioning level 1).

T16: As a student, I've had both native and non-native teachers. The most brilliant privilege of the former over the latter, in my opinion, is their real English language in contrast with the Persian English language spoken by others. However, non- native teachers engage themselves in the process of teaching and learning much more than native ones. As they have experienced the difficulties of foreign language learning, they have a better understanding of their students.

Discussion

Despite scholars' presumptions regarding the ownership of English by anyone who uses it and calling native/non-native distinctions flawed (Alptekin, 2010; Canagarajah, 2007; Ferguson, 2009; Holliday, 2005, 2009; Jenkins, 2002, 2006; Llurda, 2009; Modiano, 2009; Seidlhofer, 2001; Smith 1976), this still has not been prevalent supposition among EIL teachers and learners. In the present study, majority of the teachers voted against the exclusive ownership of English by native speakers. They also reportedly ranked native teachers' better models for learning English and voted for their superior capabilities in assessing language learners and teaching English use which is rooted in a prevalent mentality. However, their perceptions reflected the idea that non-native teachers' awareness of the local context and learners' needs make them better and they can also develop language proficiency comparable to the native ones.

In contrast, when it came to the EFL teachers' reflections on their professional identity in an EIL setting, they took the opposite stance, that is, they mostly agreed with the native and non-native distinctions. This can be due to the little amount of contextualization in their reflective understandings rather than an abstract perception of the issues. However, regarding ownership, they mostly believed that English does not exclusively belong to natives. Their controversial ideas in their perceptions and reflections can be seen as the controversy between what they idealistically perceive and suppose as true and what they really confront

in the real practice. For example, teacher 15 held a pessimistic view of the inner circle and international policies and called these terminologies, such as EIL, fancy labels to distract critical researchers, such as her, as implied, from the ‘the colonist effects of English language and culture’. She projects her view about culture to the EIL phenomenon and associates it with a cunning strategy to mislead scholars in outer circles.

On the other hand, there was a controversy between English teachers’ perceptions and reflections regarding how they rate native English teachers compared to non-native ones. In teachers’ reflections, in contrast to their perceptions, when it came to discussion related to comparison between native/non-native speaker teachers, majority of teachers disagreed with native English speaker superiority in pedagogical practices (e.g. in serving the best model as a teacher, assessing learners, proficiency in teaching language use, etc.) while teachers’ perceptions of their comparative mentalities in EIL scale showed that EFL teachers in this study rated non-native teachers more capable in terms of pedagogical practices and serving better models for learners. In addition to the data obtained from teachers’ perceptions, which majorly aligned with the idea of ‘superiority of native speaker teachers regarding pedagogical practices’, in data obtained from teacher reflections, some English teachers also admitted native speaker teachers’ superiority (26.6%). These findings were in line with previous research in the literature (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2002, 2005; Li, 2009, Tsui & Burton, 2000) where teachers rated native English teachers serving as better models for language teaching. According to Kachru (1981), this inclination toward native speaker teachers is mainly due to the linguistic factors; however, Kachru believes that this prevalent ideology goes beyond linguistic aspects. This can be seen as the stereotyped mentality in giving power and authority to native speaker teachers and shaping non-native English teachers’ attitude and beliefs regarding their status in an EIL setting.

Moreover, in teacher reflections (13% of EFL teachers) and in teacher perceptions (22.6% of EFL teachers), the teachers maintained that ‘English belongs to native-speakers’. This also can be traced back to their perception of English teachers’ feeling of ownership of their native (Persian) language. For instance, Teacher 7 expressed a high degree of belongingness to the Persian language, culture, and values. This idea, in her view, was projected to her judgment about the ownership of English language which is exclusive by native speakers.

On the other hand, despite English teachers’ reflective evaluation of native speaker teachers as better models of language teachers, they also privileged non-native teachers, due

to their familiarity with local peculiarities. Teachers' perceptions and reflections in this regard were in line with Tang's (1997) notion of non-native speaker teachers' superiority in language teaching contexts due to their awareness of learners' local context, needs, and learning processes.

The controversies in the teachers' perceptions of their status as English teachers in an EIL setting can be seen as a result of their poor awareness of the legitimacy of varieties of English. As was clear in the EIL scale, 64.6% of the teachers believed in the illegitimacy of the varieties of English. Furthermore, the flawed tendency toward native norms and stereotyped mentalities regarding power and authority of native norms are further reasons for teachers' perceptions. English teachers' ideologies are reshaped through their interaction with this dynamic context of EIL setting, and their perceptions of their status affect their attitudes and feelings toward their status. Therefore, their mentalities regarding their status can be shaped and reshaped as a result of the interaction with the institute context such as learners' expectations and preferences of native-like teachers or institutes' standards which are close to native English teacher standards. As put by Llurda (2004), non-native teachers lack self-confidence due to the imposed ideology of native speaker superiority from the context, let it be the learners' preference for native norms or authorities' standards for hiring teachers. EFL teachers need to be provided with the required knowledge and awareness to embrace a decentered view of English (Llurda, 2009). Teachers' perceptions of their status as English teachers affect their teaching practice and thus learners as well as public attitudes toward non-native/local norms. Therefore, teachers' perceptions of their professional identity and professional role play the foremost role in English education which needs to be addressed and scrutinized. This would be impossible unless teacher education centers provide language teachers with the required awareness raising to claim their voice and credit their local variety. This will empower teachers to detach themselves from the idealized native-speaker norms of English language teachers because teaching EIL is different from teaching any other foreign language (Mckay, 2002). There is no standard variety or legitimized model for EIL teaching, and multiple models and varieties serve as the target model. Intelligibility in the EIL context needs to be redefined and not confined to legitimizing native linguistic varieties as the yardsticks, but EIL teachers need to be perceived as legitimate pedagogues.

Conclusion

Since the arrival of English as an international language (EIL), due to the unprecedented growth of English, the majority of teachers in the world are not teaching in their native

languages. Also, as a byproduct of this rapid expansion of the English use, the demographics of English users and definition of the ownership of English have transformed. Moreover, as languages enable human beings to communicate, English language users, including English language teachers/learners, are involved in the process of symbolizing and identifying their new group membership and evaluation of their stance as English teachers compared to native ones, which might be a challenge to their own identity. Teachers' perceptions of their status are radically important as this affects their attitudes and accordingly their pedagogical decisions and pedagogical practices.

Today, English belongs to anyone who can functionally use it. Bending English to suit the context specificities of EIL settings and detaching from the general mentality from standard and native like variety is of high importance. Teachers need to distance their belief system and philosophies of teaching from the traditional perceptions and get rid of the old values privileging the native speakers of English as the best models of perfection in teaching/learning practices. The diverse nature of EIL privileges non-native speaker teachers to be considered as superior teachers compared to their native speaker counterparts. However, the results of the present study proved that teachers need awareness raising to shift their attitudes toward their status as English teachers in the EIL setting of Iran. This fundamental point seems to be missing in teacher education courses, which needs to be revisited and addressed properly. English language teachers are required to be armed with the necessary knowledge regarding their status and role in the EIL context of Iran and empowered with the awareness of the legitimacy of their version of localized pedagogy.

Most teachers who participated in the present study were not specifically exposed to EIL concepts in their education. A further study can comparatively investigate those teachers who are well aware of the EIL related concepts and teachers who have not been trained in this field. Also, the comparison between native and non-native English teachers' mentalities and perceptions of the role and stance toward the non-native teachers in EIL settings is worth investigations. Furthermore, the present study focused only on teachers' perceptions while a comparison between teachers' and students' perceptions can reveal how learners see their teachers and how learners' perceptions affect their expectations and definitions of a "good" and "bad" teacher.

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