

Linguistic Challenges and Identity Dynamics: The Role of Non-Native English-Speaking Tutors in Writing Centers

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Abstract: This paper explores the roles and challenges of non-native English-speaking (NNES) tutors in writing centers. Writing centers play a critical role in supporting students' development of writing skills, and research in this area is increasingly important for advancing academic writing theory and practice. The paper discusses the complex linguistic identities of TESOL teachers, challenging the simplistic native/non-native speaker dichotomy. The study reveals that NNES tutors possess valuable plurilingual competencies that are often undervalued in the TESOL profession. The paper advocates for a more nuanced understanding of NNES tutors' contributions and the impact of their linguistic backgrounds on student-tutor dynamics. It calls for further research into the implications for writing center practices and policies in linguistically diverse academic environments.

Keywords: non-native English-speaking tutors, writing centers, linguistic identity, academic writing, tutoring roles

Introduction

Writing centers play a vital role in supporting students' development of writing skills, and writing center research is becoming increasingly critical in the growth of academic writing theory and its application. The paper argues that NNES tutors bring valuable, yet often undervalued, plurilingual competencies to writing centers. It advocates for a more nuanced understanding of these tutors' contributions and the impact of their linguistic backgrounds on student-tutor dynamics, calling for further research into the implications for writing center practices and policies in linguistically diverse academic environments.

1. A study on the role and expectations of British writing center mentors from a diversified perspective

1.1 Attitudes of tutor roles

The first area is about tutor roles and expectations in writing centers. Liu and Harwood (2022) examined tutor roles in the United Kingdom. This study discussed the different attitudes toward tutor roles at a writing center at a university in the United Kingdom. The study included three separate groups regarding their views of the writing center: international students from China, writing instructors, and the writing center administrator. Tutors at writing center tutorials have many duties, with all three those who participated agreeing on the responsibilities of coach and commentator. However, according to Liu and Harwood (2022), there are different interpretations of tutors' roles, such as proofreader and counselor, due to the various policies and expectations regarding grammar correction.^[5] The research had the advantage of focusing on Chinese international students, which focused on non-native English students' views about tutors and writing centers.

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However, this type of concentration limited the applicability to different student populations.

1.2 Tutors' perceptions

Furthermore, Aldohon had more specific research on how tutors perceive their roles and how these perceptions align with their real tutoring sessions, he selected two proficient tutors who participated in individualized tutoring sessions at a writing center as subjects for study. There were three consistent perceptions of tutors from the two participants: their tutoring objectives, the qualities of effective tutors, and the use of tutoring methodologies. Both tutors shared a common goal of developing independence and self-confidence in student writers, which emphasizes the importance of guiding students to become proficient academic writers rather than simply improving their written papers. Additionally, they identified critical qualities of effective tutors, including engaging and supporting writers, building rapport, and facilitating learning.^[1] Different from the previous literature, the advantage of this article is that it focuses on tutors' perception of how to be a good tutor, although two participants may have bias.

2. Challenges and coping strategies faced by non-native English teachers in EFL writing centers

2.1 Challenges faced by NNES tutors

The second area is about the non-native speaker tutors in writing centers. Mack's (2024) research aimed to investigate the difficulties encountered by composition instructors whose first language is not English at an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing institution based in Japan.^[6] By using qualitative methods, including interviews and focus groups, Mack (2004) identified five main challenges faced by NNES tutors: confused communication, students' quiet in class, misaligned requirements, interpreting tutors' provided information, and mistake correction.^[6] This study's strength was that it focused on the viewpoints of non-native English speaker (NNES) tutors as well as the growing field of international writing centers in EFL contexts. After talking about the challenges faced by non-native English-speaking tutors in writing centers, it is also essential to consider the students' perceptions and views who interact with NNES tutors.

2.2 Students' evaluation of NNES tutors

Okuda (2019) did a research to investigate the assessment of English writing tutorials by Japanese graduate student writers at a Japanese institution, where the instructors were non-native speakers.^[7] The researcher documented tutoring sessions and conducted post-session assessments with both instructors and learners to analyze their impressions. This study discovered three factors that contributed to a positive relationship between the tutor and tutees: alignment of goals between the tutor and tutee, the tutees' preference for certain teaching approaches, and trust with regard to the tutor's ability to write.^[7] The results excluded tutors' language proficiency because the students had a projected view that non-native tutors are experts in higher-level issues, such as textual organization and coherence, which significantly influenced tutees' perceptions.^[7] The benefit of this article is that it identified key conditions that positively influenced the evaluation of tutorials with NNES tutors, which is helpful.

2.3 Dynamic of the identity of NNES tutors

Fan and de Jong (2020) conducted a narrative case study that investigated the professional identities of a Chinese language instructor in the USA.^[4] The study employed a narrative approach to emphasize the participant's experiences in shaping and navigating her career paths as both a bilingual educator candidate and a Chinese mandarin instructor. There were two significant transitional periods: the shift from China to the USA and the change in identity from an undergraduate to a profession in her field of interest.^[4] In conclusion, the study talked about the process of professional identity formation among NNES tutors, particularly those from teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) in their native nations, to become ESL teachers in English-dominant contexts like the United States.^[4] The statement highlights the significance of acknowledging the constant evolution of language teacher identities and the influence of native speaker ideology on NNES tutors' opinions of their own talents and credentials.^[2]

3. NNES teachers and English variants: perspectives and comparisons on the effectiveness of

EIL and ELF

3.1 NNES tutors and English varieties

Young and Walsh (2010) examined the views from NNES instructors on the effectiveness and appropriateness of English varieties such as English as an International Language (EIL) and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), compared with instructors whose first language is English.^[8] The conclusion was that non-native English-speaking teachers often do not know which variety of English they should teach, and they commonly employ a "conventional" variant of the English language, usually either British or American English. due to their perceived formal and practical utility. Teachers are uncertain about its practical application in real teaching practices, although they find the concept of EIL/ELF is theoretically attractive.^[8] This study emphasized a gap between the theoretical appeal of EIL/ELF and its practical application in the actual classroom. It also emphasized the complexities of teaching English as a global language and the need to consider local contexts and learner requirements.

3.2 Language proficiency and self-perceived teaching abilities

Faez, Karas, and Uchihara (2021) addressed concerns among educators and employers regarding the impact of language proficiency on teaching skills.^[3] The study examined how language proficiency relates to teachers' self-efficacy in various teaching domains by collecting data from 19 studies. Although the previous research generally suggested a positive correlation between English competence and teaching self-confidence, the extent of this relationship and the influence of specific language skills on different teaching abilities remain inconsistent. A moderate relationship ($r = .37$) existed between language ability and educational self-efficacy, which indicated that language proficiency played a role in teachers' perceptions of their teaching abilities.^[3] However, the study also emphasized the need of taking into account additional characteristics, such as expertise in teaching and the sort of self-efficacy/proficiency measurements, that might potentially influence this association.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, there is an intersection of the above aspects: the roles and challenges of NNES tutors in writing centers. This exploration of non-native English speaker (NNES) tutors in writing centers reveals critical insights into the linguistic dimensions of tutoring practices. By recognizing and leveraging the linguistic strengths of NNES tutors, writing centers can foster more inclusive and effective pedagogical practices that better serve a global student body. Future research should continue to examine how linguistic identity and proficiency influence tutoring strategies and student outcomes, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of language use in educational contexts.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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