

English Teacher Recruiting Assumptions in Thai Secondary Education: Is the Extralocal Teacher of English Designation the Answer?

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Abstract

Whether to hire native English (NES) or non-native English speakers (NNES) as English teachers is a highly contested topic; based on this debate, this paper seeks to corroborate the recruitment criteria for English teachers in Thailand's secondary education system. Through random sampling, 100 of the most notable public and private secondary institutions that offer general English education were chosen. Of them, 87 published official recruiting documents. Rank order was used to distinguish the perceived importance of each recruitment criterion. The criterion that was most frequently and prominently stated was Nationality. As this criterion is considered the most significant when hiring English instructors, most English teacher hiring procedures in Thailand lack inclusivity and diversity because they prioritize nationality over important factors like language ability, educational background, and experience. To overcome this frame of mind, an all-inclusive designation that includes all non-local NES and NNES instructors should be implemented. It is therefore suggested that, seeing as English is a universal language and that many qualified English instructors come from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds, secondary education organizations should be encouraged to implement the uniform "extralocal teacher of English" (ETE) designation in place of the NES and the seemingly derogatory NNES teacher labels.

Keywords: extralocal teacher of English, NES, NNES, Thai secondary education

Introduction

The deliberation over whom is the "best" secondary English teacher, either the native English speaking (NES) teacher or the non-native English speaking (NNES) teacher, is a complex issue continually debated in global English language teaching circles (Hayes, 2009; Holliday, 2015; Isaacs & Rose, 2021; Kiczowski, 2020; Leonard, 2019). One of the main arguments favoring recruiting NES teachers is that they provide a model of authentic, natural English language use that secondary students can emulate (Derwing & Munro, 2015; Tosuncuoglu, 2017). In contrast, proponents of recruiting NNES teachers argue that they can bring unique skills and experiences in learning English as a foreign or second language into the classroom (Hayes, 2009; Kamhi-Stein, 2016). Despite this ongoing debate, there seems to be a common assumption that NES teachers are, by default, the most appropriate secondary-level

English teachers, even though not always accurate, as many NNES teachers are highly qualified and effective English language teachers.

Inquiries into this matter have shown that the most important criteria to consider when recruiting English teachers for secondary education should be their language proficiency, teaching experience, education and training, teaching approach, cultural knowledge, and ability to connect with students (Floris & Renandya, 2020; Medgyes, 1992). Of course, language proficiency is fundamental, as the English teacher, regardless of if they are NES or NNES, must have a strong command of English to teach the language effectively (Bai & Yuan, 2019; Hyltenstam et al., 2018; Saito et al., 2019). Teaching experience, education, and training in English language teaching methods and techniques are also significant, as they equip the English teacher with the necessary tools to teach the language effectively (Derwing & Munro, 2015). Additionally, cultural knowledge and the ability to connect with students from different cultural backgrounds are important factors to consider. An English teacher who profoundly understands the cultural contexts of their secondary students can tailor their teaching approach to meet the needs of their students and create a more inclusive and effective learning environment.

Recruiting English teachers for secondary education institutions within Thailand has sparked a similar debate among various education stakeholders (e.g., school administrators, teachers, parents, and students) over who is the "best" secondary English teacher (Boonsuk et al., 2023; Hayes, 2009). Although it would be unjust to generalize the positions of all Thai secondary education stakeholders concerning the above dispute, similar conflicting conjectures have been observed regarding recruiting English teachers in Thailand (Kaur et al., 2016; Sanguanngarm, 2020). However, to better understand this debate, exploring the advantages and disadvantages of recruiting both NES teachers and non-local NNES teachers in Thai secondary education is essential.

The Advantages of Recruiting the NES Teacher

Studies show that Thai education stakeholders generally favor recruiting NES teachers within secondary classrooms based on the belief that NES teachers can better provide a high-quality English language education to Thai students (Boonsuk et al., 2023; Comprendio & Savski, 2019; Methanonpphakhun & Deocampo, 2016). One reason for this preference is the assumption that NES teachers from norm-providing or 'inner circle' Western countries (e.g., Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States) can provide insights into the nuances of English that non-local NNES teachers may not possess (Li & Jin, 2020). This factor lends to having more credibility and authority in teaching English, especially when teaching advanced language skills such as pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary, and being more familiar with the nuances, idioms, and subtleties of using English (Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2014). They can better explain and contextualize English language concepts for Thai students with insights into the cultural contexts in which English is used (Matsuda, 2017). This knowledge is valuable as it can help Thai secondary students better understand the language and prepare them for international communication and cultural exchanges.

The Thai stakeholders also feel that NES teachers who are young, attractive, and have a Western appearance (i.e., Caucasian) are better able to motivate students

and make English language learning more enjoyable and engaging (Kiczkowiak, 2020; Methitham, 2012; Ruecker & Ives, 2015). This belief is based on the assumption that students are more likely to be interested in learning from teachers who are closer to their age and who fit their perceived societal beauty standards, which is often associated with cultural and linguistic competence. Having NES teachers in English classrooms can give Thai students diverse perspectives and exposure to different cultures. This exposure can help promote cultural understanding and awareness, which is vital for building a more inclusive and equitable English learning environment (Fry & Bi, 2013).

Finally, there is also a belief among Thai education stakeholders that simply being a native English speaker is enough to qualify someone to teach English, regardless of their qualifications, experience, or educational background. This belief is often based on the assumption that NES teachers are inherently better equipped to teach English because of their native language proficiency (Holliday, 2015).

The Disadvantages of Recruiting the NES Teacher

Research has consistently shown that teaching competence is based on more than just language proficiency (Bowen et al., 2021). Effective teaching requires a combination of language proficiency, teaching skills, and knowledge of pedagogy. Accordingly, being a native speaker of English does not automatically qualify someone to teach English (Cheng et al., 2021; Dewaele & Saito, 2022). To be an effective English teacher, one must have a solid understanding of the language's structure, grammar, and vocabulary and a good grasp of language acquisition theories and teaching methodologies (Matsuda, 2017).

English teachers should also possess strong communication skills, patience, and the ability to engage students in learning. The preference for young, attractive, and Western-looking NES teachers can have negative consequences (Kiczkowiak, 2020; Ruecker & Ives, 2015). For example, it can lead to discrimination against NES teachers who do not fit this archetype, including those who are people of color or from non-Anglophone countries. Ultimately, this partiality can also perpetuate stereotypes about the Western world and create unrealistic expectations of what an English teacher should look like (Methitham, 2012).

The Advantages of Recruiting the Non-Local NNEST Teacher

Research has shown that factors such as teacher experience, training, and pedagogical skills are much more significant predictors of successful English language education than the physical characteristics of the teacher (Aneja, 2016; Bowen et al., 2021; Comprendio & Savski, 2019). Research has also shown that non-local NNEST teachers may better understand the challenges Thai students face when learning English as a second language as they have gone through the process of learning it themselves (Floris & Renandya, 2020). Therefore, non-local NNEST teachers may be more familiar with the difficulties that Thai secondary students face when learning English, including the differences in pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary, and non-local NNEST teachers may be better able to explain grammar rules and pronunciation in ways that are more accessible to Thai secondary students (Bai & Yuan, 2019; Matsuda, 2017; Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2014).

Similarly, non-local NNEST teachers may better understand the nuances of learning English (Hayes, 2009). They may be able to explain them more easily to Thai

students. This ability can be vital for Thai students struggling to understand English grammar and pronunciation (Derwing & Munro, 2015). Therefore, having a non-local NNES teacher who can provide such clear explanations can significantly affect their language acquisition (Kamhi-Stein, 2016).

Moreover, non-local NNES teachers, particularly those from neighboring South and Southeast Asian nations such as India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal, and the Philippines, may be more attuned to Thai students' cultural backgrounds and learning styles (Floris & Renandya, 2020). These non-local NNES teachers may share similar cultural values, traditions, and norms with Thai students, making it easier for non-local NNES teachers to relate to and understand Thai students' perspectives (Perez-Amurao & Sunanta, 2020). Moreover, non-local NNES teachers from neighboring countries may better understand the cultural and linguistic nuances of the Thai language, which can be helpful when teaching English to Thai students.

The Disadvantages of Recruiting the Non-Local NNES Teacher

Despite the previously mentioned advantages of the non-local NNES teachers in the secondary English language classroom in Thailand, non-local NNES teachers have some perceived disadvantages in teaching English as a second language (Methanonpphakhun & Deocampo, 2016). Studies show that non-local NNES teachers may have difficulty with English pronunciation and accent, affecting their students' ability to effectively model correct English pronunciation and intonation (Bai & Yuan, 2019; Derwing & Munro, 2015; Matsuda, 2017; Tan et al., 2021). Furthermore, non-local NNES teachers may have a limited English vocabulary, making it difficult to explain more complex concepts or engage in sophisticated discussions with more advanced students. Likewise, non-local NNES teachers may not have a deep understanding of the cultural nuances of English-speaking countries, which can affect their ability to teach certain cultural aspects of the language. Moreover, some Thai education stakeholders may be biased against non-local NNES teachers, assuming they are not as qualified or proficient in English as NES teachers (Perez-Amurao & Sunanta, 2020).

Exploring the Recruiting Criteria of English Teachers

Considering the above dichotomy, diverse classrooms comprising English teaching staff of NES and non-local NNES teachers would best provide necessary role models for Thai students. They can improve learning outcomes (Methanonpphakhun & Deocampo, 2016). Exposure to different cultures and perspectives can broaden Thai students' horizons and promote cultural understanding (Seargeant & Swann, 2013). Therefore, based on these presumptions, this paper aims to corroborate the existence of inclusivity and diversity in English teacher recruitment in the secondary English education system.

Methodology

As stated, this study aimed to corroborate the existence of value, respect, and being treated fairly for all NES and NNES teachers within the criteria for recruiting English teachers in Thai secondary schools.

Data Set

Random sampling was utilized in selecting 100 of the most notable government and non-affiliated private secondary schools which provide general English education at the secondary levels listed by the Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC). The Office of the Basic Education Commission, an extension of the Thai Ministry of Education, is a Thai governmental agency whose mission is to organize and promote basic education from primary school to high school. Random sampling is a standard research method used in various fields, including social sciences, marketing, and information technology (Singh & Mangat, 1996). Random sampling aims to ensure that the sample is representative of the population and that any data collected from the selection can be generalized to the larger population.

The website of each one of the top 100 government and non-affiliated private secondary schools was perused for official government documentation about English teacher recruiting. Of the 100 websites visited, official English teacher recruiting documents were published by 87 secondary schools. According to the reviewed literature, age, language proficiency, and nationality were the most prominently mentioned criteria for NES and non-local NNES teachers. Therefore, this study desired to explore the cited standards of age, language proficiency, nationality, and other degree and experience criteria generally associated with recruiting English teachers (Mahboob & Golden, 2013).

Statistical Analysis

Rank order, a statistical method of arranging variables based on their relative values or attributes, was used to distinguish the perceived value of the above hiring criterion (Holmes, 2022; Spohn, 2012). In rank order, each item is assigned a rank or position based on its value or attribute. The highest-ranked, or first and most mentioned, criterion is understood to have the most significant value or attribute. The lowest, or last and least mentioned, the criterion has the least significant value or attribute.

Rank order is often used in general recruiting and decision-making. It can provide a clear hierarchy of hiring factors based on their importance or preference, allowing for easier comparison and identification of the most essential or adequate options between candidates. In this analysis, rank order was applied to English teacher recruiting criteria by prioritizing the most important criteria and assigning them a higher ranking than the less important criteria.

Findings

If implemented objectively, rank order can be valuable in evaluating teacher recruiting criteria. It helps prioritize the most critical factors and ensure that the best English teacher candidates are selected based on their qualifications and experience. As such, the first step in identifying the most important criteria for hiring English language teachers was scrutinizing each of the 87 official recruitment documents.

Upon perusal, each of the five criteria (e.g., age, language proficiency, nationality, degree, experience) was pinpointed and categorized from most to least and first to last mentioned. Each criterion was ranked in order of priority based on the frequency and percentage of each based on the number of citations. As a result, this still helped to establish a clear criteria hierarchy and prioritize its importance, as the highest-

ranked criteria would be given priority during the English teacher selection and recruiting process.

Table 1

Number of Recruitment Criteria Mentions (n = 87)

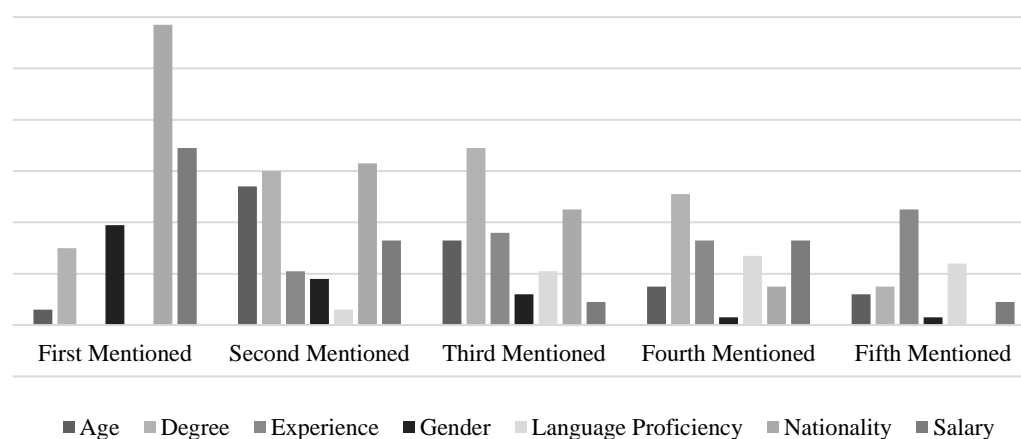
Recruiting Criterion	Government Schools (n = 68)		Private Schools (n = 19)		Totals	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Age	35	51	10	53	45	52%
Degree	59	87	16	84	75	86%
Experience	36	53	4	21	40	46%
Language Proficiency	22	32	4	21	26	30%
Nationality	62	91	18	95	80	92%

Note: f = frequency; % = percentage

As seen in Table 1, Nationality, specifically those of NES teachers, was the most prominently mentioned criterion (92%). In contrast, just under a third (30%) of the documents cited English Language Proficiency, an essential precursor for teaching English. Similarly, Experience was casually mentioned in less than half (46%) of the official recruiting documents. Incidentally, possessing a university Degree was also mentioned in most documents (86%), but only as a general condition of securing a work permit for legal employment, not as specific support of subject area knowledge.

Figure 1

Rank Order of Recruiting Criteria (n = 87)



As shown in Figure 1, since Nationality (e.g., American, Australian, British, Canadian, Irish, New Zealander) is not only the most predominantly mentioned criterion but was also the most substantially first mentioned, it would be reasonable to presume that this criterion must be the most significant factor when hiring English teachers.

Discussion

This analysis shows that there is a lack of inclusivity and diversity in English teacher recruitment in the secondary English education system, seeing as Thai education stakeholders favor recruiting NES teachers from Australia, Canada, Ireland, the United Kingdom, the United States, and New Zealand within secondary classrooms due to their more assumed innate understanding of the English language and culture (Mahboob & Golden, 2013). However, the classification of an NES teacher's nationality is not always clear-cut. To further investigate this phenomenon, the 87 formal recruiting documents were further scrutinized to determine what nationalities were officially considered NES teachers. However, the search revealed inconclusive information. To rectify this situation, the Ministry of Labour (Thailand), Ministry of Education Thailand, Office of Basic Education Commission, and the Teachers Council of Thailand were contacted for assistance in procuring such information. After an exhaustive search, it was determined that no official declaration from the above government agencies of what nationalities constitute NES teachers.

While it is generally understood that NES teachers learned English as their first language, there may be variations in proficiency, dialect, and cultural background that make it difficult to define what it means to be an NES teacher (Isaacs & Rose, 2021). For example, someone born and raised in the United States and speaks English fluently may have a different accent or vocabulary from someone who grew up in the United Kingdom or Australia. Secondly, the concept of an NES teacher is tied to ideas about language proficiency and cultural competence, which are not always straightforward. Thai education stakeholders may have different opinions about what level of language proficiency and cultural understanding is necessary to be considered a native speaker, which can create confusion and inconsistency in how the term is used. Thirdly, the importance placed on having an NES teacher in the classroom may vary depending on the context and goals of the language program.

Sometimes, having an NES teacher may be essential for providing students with an authentic and immersive language experience (Tosuncuoglu, 2017). In other cases, the focus may be more on language instruction and teaching skills, in which case the teacher's nationality may be less critical. The lack of clarity around what nationality constitutes an NES teacher reflects the complex and nuanced nature of language and cultural identity and the diversity of perspectives and priorities among Thai education stakeholders.

This analysis further shows that English language proficiency, teaching experience, and a subject-specific university degree fall near the lower end of the rank order. Research shows that successful English language education depends on the teacher's language proficiency, pedagogical skills, and ability to connect with students (Bowen et al., 2021). Regardless of nationality, teaching English as a foreign or second language is a specialized field that requires specific training and education. Teachers who have received training in English language teaching are better equipped to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of the language and to teach the skills needed to communicate effectively in English.

While there seems to be a preference for NES teachers in secondary classrooms in Thailand, it is vital to consider the strengths and weaknesses of all teachers, regardless of their nationality, ethnicity, or cultural background. Moreover, a collaboration between NES and NNES teachers can help to provide a well-rounded

English language education that benefits Thai students. Therefore, Thai education stakeholders must adopt a more inclusive and diverse approach to English teacher recruitment, considering various qualifications, experiences, and backgrounds (Sanguanngarm, 2020).

Lack of Inclusivity and Diversity in Secondary English Education

The apparent lack of inclusivity and diversity in English teacher recruitment in the secondary English education system can present significant challenges to developing Thai students (Fry & Bi, 2013). It is important to note that there is considerable variation in the recruitment process across schools and regions in Thailand. However, the abovementioned criteria are widely acknowledged factors that Thai education stakeholders consider when hiring English teachers in Thailand.

Focusing primarily on nationality rather than pertinent criteria such as language proficiency, experience, and subject knowledge may lead to a lack of qualified English teachers (Kamhi-Stein, 2016). Many Thai students may need qualified teachers to have access to quality English language instruction, limiting their ability to acquire the English skills required for educational, economic, and social advancement. Likewise, a lack of qualified English language teachers can result in unequal distribution of teachers across regions, with rural and remote areas often facing more significant shortages than urban areas. A lack of qualified English language teachers can also lead to high turnover rates as teachers move from one school to another or leave the profession altogether. This phenomenon can result in instability and inconsistency in language instruction, negatively impacting student learning outcomes. In some cases, a lack of qualified English language teachers may also mean a limited capacity for English teacher training and professional development, further exacerbating the shortage of qualified teachers. Overall, a lack of qualified English language teachers can hinder the growth of Thailand's national English education programs and limit opportunities for Thai students to acquire the language skills needed for success in a globalized world (Kaur et al., 2016).

Unfortunately, biases and stereotypes around nationality persist in Thai secondary educational settings, leading to discrimination against NNES teachers. This mindset can manifest in hiring practices, promotions, and other aspects of professional development. Research has shown that such biases can have a negative impact on both NNES teachers and their students (Aneja, 2016). As such, NNES teachers may face additional challenges in building rapport with Thai education stakeholders. In contrast, Thai students may miss out on valuable opportunities to learn from a diverse range of role models and perspectives. Therefore, it is crucial for educational institutions within Thailand to actively work to address bias and discrimination in their hiring practices and support the professional development and advancement of all qualified and talented teachers, regardless of their nationality, race, or ethnicity (Kaur et al., 2016). Promoting diversity and inclusivity in the teaching profession can benefit NES and NNES teachers and students and help create a more equitable secondary educational system (Sanguanngarm, 2020).

Contesting the NES / NNES Designations

As mentioned earlier, Thai education stakeholders focus on nationality as the primary criterion for recruiting English teachers. As a result, concentrating on nationality rather than pertinent criteria such as language proficiency, educational qualifications, and experience, most English teacher recruitment practices in Thailand lack inclusivity and diversity (Isaacs & Rose, 2021). Such as with this analysis and other research overwhelmingly illustrates that this mindset has created a dichotomy between NES and NNES teacher groups and the bias and discrimination that stems from such a practice (Aneja, 2016). In order to overcome this state of mind, an all-inclusive designation should be developed and implemented that is inclusive of all non-local NES and NNES teachers.

Implementing the homogeneous "extralocal teacher of English" (ETE) designation to abolish the NES and the often pejorative NNES teacher labels is being proposed to promote inclusivity and diversity in English language education. The term 'extralocal' denotes being from outside or beyond a local area, community, or region, not having any association with a particular local ethnicity, nationality, or geographic location (Fought, 2006); therefore, the ETE designation would refer to a teacher of English from a country or region outside the local area where they teach. For example, both an American teacher and a Filipino teacher who teach English in Thailand would be considered ETEs in Thailand; but a local Thai teacher of English, even though they were educated outside of Thailand, would not be considered an ETE. Furthermore, ETEs can bring unique perspectives and teaching methods to the classroom, which can benefit students learning English as a second language.

However, some may argue that incorporating the ETE designation may oversimplify the complexity of English language teaching and learning and the ongoing discussion concerning the NES and NNES designations. While it is true that English is a global language, and there are many qualified English teachers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and that this linguistic and cultural diversity is essential in the classroom, there are still differences in terms of language skills, cultural knowledge, and teaching approaches that different ETEs bring to the table. Nevertheless, acknowledging and valuing these differences can help to promote a more inclusive and effective learning environment (Medgyes, 1992).

Moreover, promoting inclusivity and diversity in English language teacher recruiting is essential for the development and success of an English language program (Perez-Amurao & Sunanta, 2020). Although implementing a homogeneous ETE designation may not be the most effective or appropriate way to achieve this goal, it is vital to recognize and value the diversity of English teachers and their unique contributions to the classroom without erasing their differences. In order to fully encapsulate the all-encompassing ETE designation, education stakeholders must be made aware of the negative connotations associated with the terms NES and NNES teachers, as well as the previously discussed benefits of using the ETE designation. The stakeholders should encourage diversity in English teacher hiring practices by actively seeking qualified ETEs from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Finally, advocating for using the ETE designation among educational institutions, policymakers, and other stakeholders to promote a more inclusive and equitable approach to English language teaching should become a global priority.

The Answer to English Teacher Recruitment Within Thailand

Different criteria must become the focal point when recruiting ETEs to develop inclusivity and diversity in secondary English education within Thailand (Medgyes, 1992; Seargeant & Swann, 2013). First, the ETE should have a high level of proficiency in English, including strong speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. The ETE should have a recognized teaching qualification, such as a bachelor's degree in education or a TEFL/TESOL certification, demonstrating their understanding of English teaching methodologies and language acquisition theories. The ETE should have relevant teaching experience, preferably in a similar context to the position they are applying for. This teaching experience should demonstrate their ability to plan and deliver practical English lessons, assess student learning, and manage classroom dynamics. The teacher should be culturally aware and sensitive and have experience working with Thai students or students from diverse backgrounds. This criterion includes understanding different learning styles, beliefs, and values and adapting teaching methods accordingly. The ETE should demonstrate high professionalism and commitment to their role, including a strong work ethic, punctuality, and reliability. They should also be able to work collaboratively with colleagues and communicate effectively with students and parents. Finally, the ETE should have a genuine passion for teaching and a desire to help students succeed. They should be enthusiastic, engaging, and able to motivate students to learn. Therefore, by considering these criteria, Thai education stakeholders can ensure that they hire qualified, effective ETEs, regardless of nationality, who can support Thai secondary students in their language-learning journey (Sanguanngarm, 2020).

Conclusion

While the sample size for this study was relatively small, it provided insight into the general attitudes and perspectives of education stakeholders responsible for recruiting English teachers in Thailand's secondary education system. As shown, the perceived importance of each recruitment criterion was ranked to determine which factors were given priority. Surprisingly, nationality was the most frequently and prominently cited criterion within the recruiting documents. Unfortunately, prioritizing nationality over relevant standards for extralocal teachers of English (ETE), such as language ability, educational background, and experience, leads to an English program that lacks inclusivity and diversity. Essentially, the most important criteria when hiring English teachers should be their language proficiency, teaching experience, education and training, teaching approach, cultural knowledge, and ability to connect with students rather than the teacher's nationality.

For these reasons, ETE should be implemented as an alternative term to NES and NNEST teachers, often seen as problematic and misleading categories. The term ETE highlights that language teachers come from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds and that these differences can be valuable resources in language teaching and learning. By using this term, educators can move away from the limitations of traditional categories that perpetuate harmful stereotypes and assumptions about language and identity and embrace a more inclusive and dynamic approach to language education. Ultimately, an ETE's effectiveness depends on many factors, including their teaching style, experience, and ability to connect with their students. Instead of focusing solely on nationality, it is essential to consider their overall qualifications and suitability

for the role. In consideration, Thai education stakeholders should create an inclusive and diverse learning environment that celebrates different perspectives and backgrounds. Fundamentally, by embracing the strengths of the ETE designation, students can be provided with a well-rounded and enriching educational experience.

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