

Investigating Non-Native English Teachers' Strategies in Teaching English Speaking to Young Language Learners: A Case Study

Mega Fadhilah¹, Nuraeni²
Universitas Ibn Khaldun Bogor
megafadhilah@gmail.com¹

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Abstract

Teaching English speaking to young language learners requires particular treatments. For non-native English teachers, certain problems might be the difference of both students' and teachers' language and cultural shock. The aims of this study were to investigate non-native English teacher's strategies in teaching speaking to young learners, to find the barriers faced by the teacher and also how they overcome the barriers. Qualitative method was employed to conduct this study. Two non-native English teachers who taught in elementary level in Southern Thailand were the participants of this study. The data and information needed were collected through twenty five questions in a questionnaire sheets and several questions related with the topic were asked in an interview session. The result of this study revealed that the respondents used several strategies while teaching speaking in elementary level, such as applying Audio Lingual Method and Communicative Language Teaching method, playing games, doing group-work and drilling activities to enrich the students' speaking ability. Besides, the non-native English teachers also implemented intrinsic method in order to make students interested in learning, such as keep motivating students about the importance of learning English, giving reward as an appreciation of what they reached and creating a stress-free environment in the classroom. The non-native English teachers also agreed that they needed a lot of patience in facing the young learners' behavior during the English teaching learning process.

Keywords: speaking, teacher strategies, non-native teachers, young learners

INTRODUCTION

Cameron (cited in Nirmawati 2015) stated that speaking is an oral communication of language to express meanings so that other people can make sense of them. Moreover, it is recognized as an interactive, social and contextualized communicative event. Similarly, Martinez Flor (cited in Nirmawati 2014) proposed that speaking requires learners not only to know how to produce linguistically connection but also pragmatically appropriate utterances. In brief, learners need to know how to use the language in context. In fact, speaking is the most important skill because it is the only one which can be seen by others directly, while the other three skills (reading, writing and listening) are needed in the process of learning the speaking skill itself.

Acquiring speaking proficiency is a hard skill for English language students to achieve. At the beginning stages of second-language acquisition, students are often “stuck in the middle ground of being conversational in English, but lacking in the breadth of English needed for content area success” (Sasson, 2013).

Today, English speaking skill is not only for a wide communication networking but also for social advancement. Therefore, teaching English in ASEAN, especially in Thailand has increased to improve English language teaching (ELT) in order to prepare their citizens for the upcoming merger of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) started in 2015. Thailand also takes English as an important skill to be mastered by their citizens in order to meet the demand of AEC (ASEAN Economic Community). English in Thailand is considered as a foreign language, and it is used for the academic purposes, career advancement, and traveling needs (Sinwongsuwat, 2014)

Phothongsunan (2014) claims that the English teaching and learning methods in Thai schools and universities may not achieve their goals since a number of Thai students still have unsatisfactory levels of English language ability, either in academic or professional contexts. In teaching EFL and also English for young learners in Thailand, speaking is usually taught in the classroom using certain methodologies, such as the Grammar Translation and Audiolingual methods.

Based on the preliminary observation, when the researcher was in Southern Thailand, it was found that young learners in Southern Thailand who learn English tend to be hard in mastering the language because of several factors, such as external factor and internal factor. The external factors are Thai learners got the minimum chance to speak or communicate with English in their environment and they are only aware to speak English in front of their English teacher or as the teacher’s instruction only. The internal factors come from their originality as Thai that their tongue is not as flexible as other because the mother tongue is Thailand language which its accent and how to pronounce each words is totally different from English, they cannot pronounce English words as easy as the other tongue from other countries, especially for those who are the beginners in English language learning. The other internal factor is that Thai has their own letters or characters in their writing system. For several cases, it is also a problem for the learners in using English alphabet either read or written, because they do not get used to the English alphabet.

In the teaching of speaking, Richards (cited in Richards 2008) claimed that teachers make use of a variety of approaches, ranging from direct approaches focusing on specific features

of oral interaction (e.g., turn-taking, topic management, and questioning strategies) to indirect approaches that create conditions for oral interaction through group work, task work, and other strategies. Furthermore, Harmer (2008) mentions that some teachers get very involved very much with their students during speaking activities and want to participate in the activities. There is nothing wrong with it as long as the teacher does not start to dominate, it is probably better to stand back so that they can watch and listen to what is going on. Sometimes, teachers will have to intervene in some way if the activity is not going smoothly. If someone in a role-play can't think of what to say or if a discussion begins to dry up, the teacher will have to decide if the activity should be stopped because the topic has run out of theme.

The special treatments are needed in teaching English to young learners including speaking, Shak and Gardner (2008, cited in Pinter 2011) showed that 10-year-old children are interested in working with focus on form tasks, The four tasks are: a consciousness-raising task, a dictogloss, a grammar interpretation task and a grammar task, the result showed that children generally enjoyed all the tasks and their attitudes were positive. Therefore, Cabrera and Martínez (cited in Pinter 2011) demonstrated that teachers language use in the second language classroom is an important learning source, especially if it is accompanied with effective interactive adjustment.

Therefore, this study discusses how a non-native English teacher in teaches speaking to the young learners using appropriate strategies. Study about teacher's strategies have already been done by several researchers such as Anjaniputera (2013) in *Teachers' Strategies in Teaching Speaking to Students at Secondary Level* aiming to portray teacher's strategies in teaching speaking to students at secondary level and recognizing students' response towards the strategies by involving an English teacher and a class of 22 students. The result revealed that the strategies used by the teacher were cooperative activities, role-play, creative tasks, and drilling. In the meantime, students' response towards the strategies resulted in positive attitude as they responded that the strategies helped them to speak, as well as concerned oral production of students whose participation was emphasized. Pratama and Indah (2015) also did a similar study entitled *Teaching Speaking to Young Learners*. The data from observations show that the teacher used Audio Lingual Method (ALM) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as the method of teaching speaking to young learners. The barriers faced by the teacher in teaching speaking to young learners are reluctant students, lack of vocabularies and missing pronunciation. In facing the reluctant students, the teacher tried to

not focus on students, while the activity was going he observed the class to observe why that particular activity can breakdown. The teacher played his role as a prompter, when the students faced some difficulties in pronouncing words and arranging the sentences and as resource by providing video, song, pictures as the media for learning. The data from lesson plan also shows that topical-based syllabus is effective for teaching young learners.

The two studies above, focus on how the strategies in teaching speaking to the English language learners especially young learners. This study emphasizes at investigating the strategies used by non-native teacher in teaching speaking to the young learners in Southern Thailand. Besides, it will find several barriers faced by the teachers and the way the teachers overcome the barriers in teaching speaking to the young learners in Thailand.

The aims of this study are to 1) investigate the strategy of non-native English teacher in teaching foreign students that might be implemented to teaching foreign students from different country, 2) find the barriers faced by teacher in teaching speaking to foreign students, and 3) observe the way to overcome the barriers used by the non-native teacher in teaching speaking that might be implemented to teaching foreign students from different country.

Teaching Speaking

Like writing, speaking is included in productive skills rather than receptive skills (reading and listening). Harmer (2007) points out that a key factor in the success of productive-skill tasks is the way teachers organize the students and how they respond to their work. So, teacher can set down a basic methodological model for teaching productive skills, especially speaking. Speaking session allow students to investigate their thoughts and feelings about a topic.

There are some basic methodologies in teaching speaking to the students as stated by Harmer (2007); firstly, in the *lead-in* stage, teachers engage students with topic. Perhaps the teacher ask them what they know about a certain subject like their experience they have or anything, secondly, when teachers set the task, they explain exactly what students are going to do, at this stage teacher may need to demonstrate the activity in some way, for example, if they want students to work in pairs, they can show the class how the activity works by being one of a public pair so that everyone sees the procedure in action. Then, when the students have started, teachers will monitor the task, this may mean going around the class to check the students' work and help them if they got any difficulties. When the activity has finished,

teachers give *task feedback*. This is where teachers may help students to see how well they have done.

Another teaching strategy in teaching speaking used in order to get the students able to speak fluently. Nation (cited in Newton 2009) viewed that a quick way of gaining early fluency in a language is to memorize useful phrases. There are several advantages in doing this. First, simple communication can occur at an early stage. For example, learners should be able to say who they are, where they come from, and what they do from the very first language lessons. They should also be able to greet people with phrases like *good morning*, and *good day* and to thank them. Second, memorizing phrases and sentences allows learners to make accurate use of the language without having to know the grammar. Third, knowing sentences like *please speak more slowly* allows learners to take control of a conversation and use it for language learning purposes. Fourth, the words are patterns that make up such phrases can make the learning of later phrases.

Several learning activities can also be the strategies used by the teacher to make students speak and express what they have understood. As suggested by Harmer (2008) the following activities are helpful in getting students to practice 'speaking as a skill'. Here are some activities that can be used as teachers' strategies in teaching speaking especially in a lower-level student:

- a. Information gap activity, this is when two persons have different information about an incomplete picture but they need to complete the picture so they have to share the information they have, and there will be a 'gap' between them.
- b. Telling stories, students need to be able to tell the stories in English, so in this case, students are divided into groups and they are given the topic in the picture so they need to tell the story about the picture to their friends. Once they have had a chance to look at the pictures, the pictures are taken away.
- c. Favorite object, in this part, students are in the activity which they need to tell about their favorite objects (things like MP3, pictures, clothes, etc).
- d. Meeting and greeting, students role-play a formal/business social occasion where they meet a number of people and introduce themselves.
- e. Surveys, this can be used to get students interviewing each other. In this activity, students list activities such as climb a mountain, do a bungee jumping, etc. and then go around the class asking 'have you ever climbed a mountain?', 'have you ever done a bungee jumping?' etc.

Reiser and Dick (1996, cited in Anjaniputra 2013) claims that to meet the teaching-learning goals, teacher can use different strategies. Furthermore, Cole (2008, cited in Anjaniputra 2013) highlights that to accomplish students' educational needs, the teacher has a role in providing the appropriate strategies or plans, which the main purposes is to be able to communicate using the language that being learnt. These also means that to make students' speak english is teachers' responsibility by implementing the suitable teaching speaking strategies.

Teaching Young Learners

The first order of business in the beginning level ESL classroom is to create an unthreatening, comfortable and stress-free environment. In working with young children, the need to tear down the negative affective filter is especially great. Whether or not young language learners are immigrants or whether they were born in the United States, their very first language learning steps may require an emotional adjustment. Some young language learners suffer from being uprooted. Others are traumatized by finding themselves among the people who do not speak their language. Given what is known about the role of emotions in second language learning, it is essential to assure that young language learners feel comfortable and secure when taking their first language learning steps. (Gordon, 2007).

Crosse (2007) concerned about competent trainers or teachers need to observe the children's movement and to note whether the children interest or not and also ready or not to communicate in English. Here, the children need plenty of supports and opportunities to repeat and practice new phrases. If the imaginative play area is organized as a shop, the children will hear greetings and phrases such as 'Good morning', 'Hello' and 'What do you want?', 'What would you like?' and 'Goodbye'. These everyday phrases can be used on a daily basis when learning and working with the children in the classroom. Repetition in a relevant context offers children chances to consolidate their learning and feel proud of their achievements. The imaginative play environment also allows children to see another culture and learn about it, and on other occasions, it offers all children the motivation to learn about different cultures from their own.

Working with young children, teachers need to train their observational skills to understand and assess the particular needs of individual children. They then need to respond appropriately to these needs. Sometimes, this cause the extend learning that makes children quickly become tired and need more restful activities. Therefore, concerning these factors,

trying to communicate with children in a new language and puzzling out different ways of participating and behaving can be useful, it is unsurprising that children need less-demanding activities. It is as if the children have to switch off, and at these times teachers will need to offer activities that can be achieved at a slower pace. Through quiet, independent activities, supported if necessary by a sensitive adult, the child will still feel involved and included but able to recharge their batteries. Drawing, sequencing pictures and listening to a first-language story tape are all worthwhile activities that can be carried out at the individual's own pace. Small-world Play is good to maintain links with the main activity but one where the child's first language could accompany their play particularly if another child or group of children shared the same language. On some occasions teachers may get any difficulties in understanding what a child is trying to communicate. When children learning their first language experience got frustration because adults are unable to tune in to their needs, this will intensify them as young bilingual learners. There are several factors to consider in teaching speaking to young learners such as the characteristic of young learners, selected material and the strategies in teaching speaking to young learners.

METHOD

The qualitative method was employed in this study. Edmonds (2017) claims that "Qualitative method represents a form of data collection and analysis, with a focus on understanding and emphasis on meaning. This method is often used to explore the 'how' and 'why' of systems and human behavior and what governs these behaviors. Specifically, it is a method for examining phenomena, predominantly using 'words' for data". The main purpose of this research was to know what strategies used by non-native English teacher in teaching speaking to young learners.

As stated by Wallen (cited in Istamela 2014) population is the larger group to which one hopes to apply the results. Meanwhile, Frey (cited in Chintya 2015) proposed that sample is the representative selection of the population as research information. In this study, the population were the English teachers were teaching in the elementary school in Southern Thailand. The sample of the study was two non-native English teachers who taught in first and fourth grade of elementary school in Southern Thailand. They were involved in gaining the data about the strategies used by the non-native English teachers in teaching speaking to young learners, the barriers were faced by the teachers in teaching speaking to foreign students, and the way to overcome the barriers that were used by the teachers in teaching speaking to young learners.

Questionnaire sheets with close ended questions; for the non native English teachers consisted of 25 questions to reveal their strategies in teaching speaking to the young learners, 20 questions in the questionnaire were adapted from Ya-Nan (2009) about “Motivational Strategies: Students’ and Teachers’ Perspectives”, the points asked were about their knowledge about the strategies that could be used in teaching English to young learners. The other 5 questions were arranged by the researcher, the points asked were about their experience in teaching foreign students especially young learners, the difficulties in teaching English to the foreign students and how they overcame the difficulties (see Appendix 3). Several alternative options were served as the answer which can be chosen by participants. The alternative choices were “Strongly disagree”, “Disagree”, “Uncertain”, “Strongly agree” and “Agree”.

Interview guide sheets consisted of several open ended question to conduct the interview session to get the deeper information about their knowledge in teaching, their strategies that could be used in teaching English to young learners, their experience in teaching foreign students especially young learners, the difficulties in teaching English to the foreign students and how they overcame the difficulties. The questions were open ended which allowed the participants to share their ideas and opinion freely regarding non-native English teachers strategies in teaching speaking and it was recorded through the sound recorder. In investigating the non-native English teachers’ strategies in teaching speaking to the young learners in elementary school, the researcher collects the information from the questionnaire given, and conducted the interview session.

The procedures in collecting the data in this research were first finding some theories and concepts about teaching speaking. Next was choosing the participants. This research chose the non-native English teachers who taught in grade two and four of elementary school in Southern Thailand. Third was to prepare the questionnaire sheet and interview guideline as the research instrument. Fourth was interviewing the non-native English teachers and recorded it through sound recorder. Afterwards, the data gained from interview and questionnaire were analyzed. The final step was to interpret the findings from those instruments; and make a conclusion based on the obtained data.

The steps of analyzing data from interview session were 1) transcribing the data from the recording of interview into the text, 2) categorizing the data from interview into several themes which becomes the main concern of this study, 3) reducing inappropriate data, 4) interpreting the data from interview. Meanwhile, the steps of analyzing data from

questionnaire sheets were 1) reading the questionnaire result from participants, 2) categorizing the answer of each question and 3) analyzing the data from questionnaire based on Likert scale.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the gained data, both of the participants agreed to use games and others fun activities in teaching young learners, and they strongly agreed to teach the students various learning techniques that will make their learning easier and more effective. In this point of view, Good and Brophy (2000, cited in Khaemis 2006) agreed that "learning should be fun, the problem with students' motivation appear because teachers sometimes unconsciously makes the enjoyable activities become drudgery". It can therefore be concluded that interesting and fun strategies can be used to promote speaking in the EFL classroom.

Furthermore, Nunan and Linse (2005) concerned about the teaching method such as Audio Lingual Method (ALM), there were two important features in ALM such as choral response and dialogues. Choral response was a drills activities that aimed at getting learners to practice using the patterns that occurred in the language. The other features of ALM was dialogues, it involved the script with a grammatical rules that they could use in their real life. The answer of both participants in the questionnaire also revealed that they used audio lingual method in teaching speaking to young learners by giving clear instructions about how to carry out a task by modeling every step that students would need to do and creating opportunities so that students could mix and got to know each other better (e.g. group work, game-like competition). While the other statements revealed the use of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method by varying presentation format (e.g. a grammar task can be followed by one focusing on pronunciation; a whole-class lecture could be followed by group work).

CLT with children was slightly different than CLT with adults, because children often enjoyed playing the role of an adult or grown up. This kind of play was very meaningful for young learners since it made them had a higher chance to speak in different language that they would use later on in life. Games, was a part of purposeful playing activities. As such, games were very appropriate teaching technique in the young learners classroom. When games were well-planned, it offered the advantages of both ALM and CLT. Games could also be structured to maximize English-language use in young learners classroom. (Nunan and Linse 2005).

In conclusion, most of the participants use of ALM and CLT in English teaching-learning process and it was really helping for them to teach English to young learners even they were foreign teachers. They used several features of ALM and CLT such as games, drills activities, group work, etc., they also implemented some intrinsic strategies such as creating fun, comfortable and stress-free environment in the classroom because it was important to get students motivated in learning English.

The participants mostly agree about the statements about how to teach to young learners in order to make students motivated in learning. As suggested by Gordon (2007) first order of business in the beginning level ESL classroom is to create an unthreatening, comfortable and stress-free environment. Some young language learners suffer from being uprooted. Others are traumatized by finding themselves among the people who do not speak their language. Given what is known about the role of emotions in second language learning, it is essential to assure that young language learners feel comfortable and secure when taking their first language learning steps. In order to create an unthreatening, comfortable and stress-free environment, the two participants were strongly agree in several statements served in the questionnaire, such as they need to explain the students about the importance of 'class rules', show them respect and care about each of them, create a supportive and pleasant classroom climate, tell the students that the important thing in learning a foreign language is to communicate meaning, rather than worrying a grammatical rules, and monitor the students accomplishment and take time to celebrate it.

Crosse (2007) concerned about competent trainers or teachers need to observe the children's movement and to note whether the children interest or not and also ready or not to communicate in English. Here, the children need plenty of supports and opportunities to repeat and practice new phrases. In line with that, the other statements in the questionnaire given also revealed that the participants were agree that they need to try to find out the students' need, goals and interests, they as a teacher also need to encourage students to select specific goals for themselves for example by learning 5 words and write three sentences every day, etc., bring in humor and laughter in the class, familiarize them the cultural background of English language and teaching them self-motivating were also the statements agreed by both participants. The eighteen questions in the questionnaire were the answer to reveal the first problem statements about strategies used by the non-native English teacher in teaching speaking to the young learners.

All of the of participants strongly agreed or agreed that the differences of both students' and teachers' language and the students' motivation in learning are the one which gives most influences in English teaching learning process or in other words those were the barriers for them in teaching foreign students. Related with those findings, Harmer (2007) stated that some of the characteristics of young learners were 'they talk in their mother tongue about what they understand and do, this help them learn' and 'individual attention and approval from the teacher are what they need', so it was normal if the non-native English teachers in Southern Thailand faced the difficulties in term of language and the students motivation. In line with that, Harmer (2007) also agreed that young learners' understanding was not just comes from explanation, but also from what they see, hear and better if they had a chance to touch and interact with, moreover, rather than directly, they often learn indirectly. The other two statements revealed those theories that fifty percent of participants were strongly agree and the other fifty percent were agree that working with young learners need special treatment compared with adults and the students behavior was also the barriers in English teaching learning process.

One hundred percent of participants strongly agreed that teaching speaking to the young learners need several strategies to be implemented in the classroom. All of the participants were also agree that the variety of methods/strategies in teaching is more important than experiences in teaching speaking to young learners. The other statement revealed that fifty percent of participants were disagree and the other fifty percent were agree that experience in teaching young learners is more important than the variety of method in teaching speaking to young learners. Those findings supported by Slattery and Willins (2001) that young learners learn in a variety of ways, for example, by watching, listening, imitating and doing things, they also had quite a short attention span and so need variety activities to make them stay focus and enjoy the lesson.

The researcher concluded that both participants mostly use picture, body language and drilling activities in teaching speaking in the elementary level. This kind of method/strategies were categorized as an Audio Lingual Method in the teaching learning process as stated by Nunan and Linse (2005) "There are two important features in ALM such as choral response and dialogues. Choral response is a drills activities that aimed at getting learners to practice using the patterns that occur in the language. The other features of ALM is dialogues, it involves the script with a grammatical rules that they can use in their real life." The findings were revealed the same statement highlighted by Harmer (2007) that young learners talked in

their mother tongue about what they understand and do, this help them learn. The barriers faced by the participants in teaching elementary level are the difference of language between the teachers' (Philippines language) and students' (Thai language) and the students' behavior are two main barriers in teaching speaking, while the other difficulties mentioned by the first participant were about the students who were not accustomed to use English alphabet and because in the school that she worked, English was not a subject, it tend to be about pronunciation but she need to teach English as a subject, so it makes her need to find another way to deliver the material and make students understand. The other participants also mentioned that when the students who had just heard a foreign language and could not understand it at first were also the difficulties for her.

Slattery and Willins (2001) pointed out that young learners were comfortable with routines and enjoy repetition. From the gained data, it could be concluded that the participants agreed that to overcome the barriers in teaching speaking in the elementary level, the non-native teacher need to have a lot of patience in facing the students' behavior, they also have to teach the students vocabulary in each meetings by showing them such body language when they were not understand, teach them from the very beginning and make them understand how to follow the teachers' rules and discipline. The difference of both students' and teachers' language could be solved by learn together with them, as the first participant said *"I learn with the student, I will ask 'what is this?' and they will answer, and I will remember"*, so the teachers also learn vocabularies in Thai in order to make students easier to remember the English vocabularies.

CONCLUSION

From the result of data analysis from both interview session and close-ended questionnaire, the researcher concluded that the non-native English teachers in Southern Thailand faced the same problem in teaching English to young learners, those were mostly about the difference of both students' (Thai) and teachers' (Philippines) language and the students behavior.

To deal with those main problems, they had several strategies such as using body language and picture to teach vocabularies to students in case the teachers did not know what was the name of the things they need to teach in Thai language. For example, if the teachers told the students about verb and the students were hard to understood it, the teachers had to whether show them the picture or practice what they would tell, if the word was 'eat' so they needed to show the students the body language of it until the students could guess by

themselves what the teachers had told, and then students need to memorize it well. In case the students forget about some words in English, so it was important for the teachers to also learn about the meaning of each words they told in Thai language and memorize it, teachers needed to learn and grow with the students each day. With many vocabularies that the teachers knew, it would be easier for them to teach the students in another topic. The other main problems were about the students' behavior. As young children, it was normal if the students got so hyperactive in the classroom and it was the teachers' responsibilities. In this case, both participants agreed that they needed to have a lot of patience in facing their behaviour, sometimes the students run around the class, went outside or even fought in the classroom. If the teachers needed to punish the students, they would only hit the students in order to make them realize their mistake and forgave each other then returned into their seat and continue the lesson. As the participants agreed, they needed to hit them with love, just to discipline the students, not to make them felt down and guilty.

In delivering the materials and lessons, both of participants agreed to first create comfortable classroom's atmosphere by giving them morning greeting and asking them how was their life, etc. In the material itself, the teachers usually involved the students in drilling activities in repeating what teachers said when explaining the topic, providing a question and answer session to make sure that the students understood and doing self or group work in each topic. Those features that involved in Audio Lingual Method and Communicative Language Teaching were very helping for them to teach speaking to young learners as foreign teachers.

The other findings about the problem faced by non-native teachers in Southern Thailand was the use of English alphabet that was rare there, as we all knew that Thailand had difference alphabet in their writing system and most of the Thai used that especially in Southern Thailand. In this case, it is very important for non-native teachers in Southern Thailand to teach students how to spell a letter, a word until a sentence in English in to make students accustomed to speak English. Besides, the participants agreed that experiences in both teaching foreign students and young learners also very helping in facing the problem as non-native English teachers, they also took TESOL before they taught in other countries and it was also important for them. Over all, most of the participants agreed that the most important things in teaching young foreign learners was to always be patience, had a lot of strategies and also a lot of experience.

For the other researchers, since the present study was done in Southern Thailand, it would be good if the same study conducted in Indonesia or perhaps in other countries over the world since English were the international language so that there would be so many teachers especially non-native English teachers in each countries to be investigated with the similar research question. Based on the weaknesses of this study that only investigated the research problem supported with few theories, it seems necessary that the next study should investigate more about how the non-native English teachers taught abroad in certain level, with more specific aspects to be observed, more participants and involved the students to gain the data about the students' perception to complete the result and findings.

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