

THE ROLE OF NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKING TEACHERS IN DEVELOPING THE ORAL AND WRITTEN PROFICIENCY OF ALBANIAN EFL LEARNERS

MSc. Erla Minja

Department of English Language
Faculty of Foreign Languages, University of Tirana
E-mail: minjaerla@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) who serve as co-teachers in Albania's primary schools, middle, and high schools. The research aimed to determine whether Albanian students are satisfied with the presence of these volunteers and whether they perceive improvements in their English proficiency - particularly in speaking and writing, as well as in other skills as reading. A dual-survey method was employed, gathering data through questionnaires to both native English-speaking teachers and their students. The findings reveal that NESTs are perceived as approachable and pleasant, and are often viewed by students as more interactive and engaging than their regular non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs). Lessons delivered by volunteers tend to incorporate more activities and technology, distinguishing them from traditional teaching methods. As a result, students reported improvements in speaking, writing and, overall engagement in English classes. However, the study also identified certain challenges. Many students initially struggled to understand the volunteers due to their limited English proficiency and unfamiliarity with native English accents. Despite these difficulties, the study concludes that NESTs not only enhance students' English-language skills but also provide valuable professional insights for Albanian teachers, motivating them to adopt more interactive and technology-supported teaching methods.

Keywords: English as a Foreign Language (EFL); Speaking Fluency; Writing Accuracy; Native English-Speaking Teacher (NEST); Non-Native English-Speaking Teacher (NNEST).

PËRMBLEDHJE

Ky studim shqyrton rolin e mësuesve anglishtfolës që shërbejnë si mësues ndihmës në shkollat fillore, 9-vjeçare dhe të mesme në Shqipëri. Gjatë këtij hulumtimi synohet të zbulohet nëse nxënësit, të cilët kanë gjuhë amtare shqipe, janë të kënaqur me praninë e vullnetarëve dhe nëse ata kanë vënë re një përmirësim në rrjedhshmërinë e tyre në gjuhën angleze, veçanërisht në të folur dhe të shkruar, apo dhe në aftësi të tjera gjuhësore si leximi. Studimi u realizua përmes dy pyetësorëve, duke mbledhur të dhëna nga mësuesit anglishtfolës dhe nxënësit e tyre. Gjetjet treguan se mësuesit anglishtfolës vlerësohen për

qasjen miqësore dhe qëndrimin pozitiv ndaj nxënësve, dhe shpeshherë konsiderohen nga nxënësit më motivues dhe më efektivë në krijimin e një mjedisi bashkëpunues mësimor. Orët e mësimin të zhvilluara nga këta mësues përfshijnë më shumë aktivitete dhe përdorimin e teknologjisë, gjë që i bën të dallohen nga metodat tradicionale të mësimdhënies. Si rezultat, nxënësit kanë treguar përmirësim në të folur, të shkruar dhe në angazhimin në orët e anglishtes. Megjithatë, u vunë re edhe sfida. Fillimisht, shumë nxënës e kishin të vështirë të kuptonin mësuesit anglishtfolës për shkak të njohurive të kufizuara në anglisht dhe theksit të tyre. Pavarësisht kësaj, studimi del në perfundimin se mësuesit anglishtfolës jo vetëm që përmirësojnë aftësitë e nxënësve në gjuhën angleze, por gjithashtu ofrojnë ide dhe janë shembuj motivues për mësuesit shqiptarë, duke i nxitur ata të përvetësojnë praktika mësimore moderne që kombinojnë ndërveprimin dhe teknologjinë.

Fjalët çelës: Anglishtja si Gjuhë e Huaj; rrjedhshmëri në të folur; saktësi në të shkruar; mësues anglishtfolës; mësues gjuha amëtare e të cilit nuk është anglishtja

1. Introduction

As of 2025, there are around 1.53 billion people worldwide who speak English either natively or as a second language (Statista, 2025), making English thus the world's international language, a global lingua franca that connects people, places and cultures. English is the language of entertainment, business, science and technology. It plays a vital role across numerous fields, enabling communication on a global scale and unlocking various opportunities for learning and employment.

Native English-Speaking Teachers in Albania play a crucial role in helping students learn English as a foreign language. They are not just teachers but also supporters who dedicate two years or more to living and working in Albanian communities. The training they undertake beforehand prepares them to collaborate with local teachers, usually in areas with limited resources, where their impact is really needed.

The TEFL program, through the work of NESTs placed in schools around Albania that serve as assistant teachers, aims to achieve three (3) goals. The first one is to improve students' proficiency in English, their communication and life skills through English instruction in the classroom or through extracurricular activities. The importance of NESTs becomes much clearer when considering student motivation as well. NESTs repeatedly make use of hands-on activities to promote the effective use of English. By using these strategies, they encourage students to go beyond retention and develop useful communication skills.

In addition to encouraging the practical and efficient use of English, NESTs also implement activities that tend to empower and inspire student's creativity and, most importantly, teach critical thinking skills. In 2024 *Write On!*

Project was launched which aims to help students improve their writing skills and later take part in a contest on a national and international level.

The second goal of NESTs is to help teachers and instructors improve their English language proficiency, teaching methods and resource development skills. This joint effort is particularly important in contexts where access to continuous professional development is limited. Even though many Albanian teachers are hardworking and experienced, they might lack opportunities to engage with authentic English or adapt to innovative language teaching methods. Given the privilege to work directly with NESTs, they are engaged in the target language regularly, which builds fluency and comfort in using English in their own instruction. This continuous language exposure helps to enhance their confidence in classroom delivery.

The third goal emphasizes enhancing school and community ties, encouraging teachers, staff, administrators and community members to collaborate more closely and take on active, leading roles within the school environment. Many Albanian schools sometimes function in isolation, with limited involvement from family and local organizations. NESTs help address this by encouraging stronger engagement between the surrounding community and the school. Their attendance and approach encourage a welcoming atmosphere and shared purpose; education is seen as a collective effort, not just the responsibility of teachers or school administrators alone.

Over the past few years, the English language has become increasingly vital in Albania, recognized even as a key skill for educational advancement, career development and global participation. Its inclusion as a mandatory subject in the national curriculum reflects its growing importance. Students continue to encounter significant barriers in acquiring communication skills, particularly in speaking and writing, despite the expansion of English instruction in Albanian schools. An excessive emphasis on a grammar-focused instruction, textbook-based learning and teacher-centred methodologies often limits student interaction, creativity, and confidence when communicating in English in real-life situations.

This gap is particularly evident in areas where access to native language models, authentic materials, and diverse teaching strategies is limited. Under these circumstances, students may achieve high marks in written assessments, but still struggle to speak fluently or express complex ideas in writing. Furthermore, local teachers, although experienced and dedicated, may lack access to ongoing professional development in innovative or communicative teaching approaches. The requirement for a more versatile student-centered learning environment, which highlights critical thinking and engagement, has become of growing importance.

In dealing with these obstacles, the presence of Native English-Speaking

Teachers (NESTs) has presented itself as a potentially strategic solution. In spite of their contributions, there is still a lack of a thorough, empirical understanding of how NESTs influence English language learning outputs in the Albanian settings. Further inquiry is needed into which specific skills are more impacted, how students respond to different teaching styles, and how local teachers benefit professionally from this collaboration. There is also a need to explore how community-oriented initiatives supported by NESTs help strengthen school environments and promote broader educational milestones. In the absence of such insight, the role of NESTs risks is being undervalued or inconsistently integrated into school systems that could profit from their presence. In Albania, the gap in empirical research is significant. While (Hyseni, 2019) documented general challenges in speaking and writing skills among secondary students, and (Gjergji, 2019) examined teacher proficiency, no study to date has employed a mixed-methods design to quantify student progress under volunteer instruction, nor systematically contrast it with local teaching practices.

2. Literature Review

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) studies how individuals learn a language beyond their mother tongue. Unlike first language acquisition, SLA is influenced by factors such as age, cognition, social environment, teaching methods, and motivation (Ellis, 1994). Krashen's Input Hypothesis emphasizes that learners acquire language best through comprehensible input slightly above their current level ("i + 1") (Krashen, 1982). Experiential approaches, as noted by Afrin (2025) and Kolb (1984), enhance learning by engaging learners in real-world contexts, thereby promoting fluency and meaningful use of language.

Teaching speaking in EFL contexts is often challenging due to fear of errors, low confidence, and language anxiety (Nuraini, 2021). Experiential methods like project-based learning and Total Physical Response (TPR) reduce stress and encourage active engagement (Ofiaz, 2018). Writing instruction requires linguistic competence, organization, and critical thinking, with students struggling more due to limited exposure to authentic models and structured guidance (Sari & Kusumaningrum, 2018). In Albania, communicative approaches are growing, emphasizing writing as a purposeful, audience-aware activity (Shabani, 2023).

NESTs bring fluency and authentic language input, often improving students' oral skills and listening comprehension (Pizarro Chacón, 2022). NNESTs, having learned English as a foreign language, can provide relatable strategies and guidance. However, biases often favor NESTs, affecting classroom perceptions (Liu, 2009; Selvi, 2011). Collaborative co-teaching models, in which NESTs and NNESTs work together, combine the strengths of both, fostering authentic language use alongside explicit instruction and cultural responsiveness (Sabina, 2011; Edwards, 2009).

3. Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative research design complemented by classroom observations and note-taking to examine the influence of Native Speaking Teachers (NESTs) on the development of speaking and writing skills among Albanian middle and high school students. Two questionnaires were used: one for NESTs and one for students who had been taught by both NESTs and local English teachers. The instruments collected demographic data and explored teaching methods, learning experiences and attitudes towards each type. Both questionnaires were distributed via Google Forms to ensure accessibility, anonymity and voluntary participation.

A purposive sampling method was applied to include participants with relevant experience. Alongside survey data, classroom observations and note-taking were conducted in both NEST- and NNEST-led classes to capture differences in instruction, engagement and interaction. Data were analyzed descriptively to identify common trends and recurring themes. Ethical principles, such as informed consent and confidentiality, were upheld through the research process. This combined approach provides a clear picture of NEST's impact on English language learning in Albania.

4. Results

This study examined the influence of Native English-Speaking Teachers on the development of speaking and writing skills among Albanian students, using data from teacher and student questionnaires, as well as classroom observation and note-taking. The findings revealed several consistent patterns that highlight some differences between NESTs and NNESTs and their respective impacts on language learning outcomes.

Overall results show that NESTs tend to apply communicative, student-centered approaches, focusing on interaction, collaboration, and meaningful use of language. They often encourage students to express opinions, engage in discussions, and participate in role-play or real-life simulations. These practices created a more relaxed classroom atmosphere, helping students build confidence and fluency while reducing anxiety about making mistakes. Students frequently described NEST-led classes as dynamic, enjoyable, and motivating, emphasizing that these lessons helped them use English more naturally in conversation.

Writing instruction under NESTs focused on developing students' skills through drafting and refining, prioritizing creativity, organization and personal expression over strict grammatical accuracy. Students reported that writing tasks were more personal and engaging, often related to their experiences or interests. This method allowed them to develop writing fluency and a better understanding of tone and coherence. In contrast, NNEST-led lessons were typically more

structured grammar-focused, and exam-oriented, which helped students improve accuracy but limited opportunities for expression and spontaneous speaking.

Both teachers and students identified speaking and writing as the skills that improved the most as a result of NEST-led instruction. Students noted that interaction with native speakers helped them expand their vocabulary, improve pronunciation, and gain exposure to authentic expressions and idiomatic usage. Teachers observed that their students became more active participants, showing greater enthusiasm for classroom discussions and group activities.

Observational data supported these findings, showing that NESTs often relied on authentic materials—videos, songs, games, and project-based tasks—rather than traditional textbooks. Their lessons tended to integrate cultural topics and real-world contexts, which kept learners engaged and helped them understand how English functions beyond the classroom. NNESTs, on the other hand, were more consistent in applying textbook materials and following a structured curriculum, emphasizing accuracy, grammar, and exam preparation.

Despite the overall positive outcomes, several challenges were noted. Students sometimes struggled with unfamiliar accents or fast speech, and vocabulary limitations occasionally hindered full participation. In schools with fewer resources, NESTs also faced difficulties in effectively implementing interactive methods. Nevertheless, data indicated that the presence of NESTs enhanced classroom interaction, broadened students’ exposure to authentic English, and contributed to the development of communicative competence.

The combined evidence from questionnaires and classroom observations suggests that NESTs significantly influence not only students’ language proficiency but also their motivation, confidence, and attitudes toward learning English. Their teaching methods complement those of local teachers by fostering fluency, creativity, and cultural awareness—key components in modern English language education.

Category	Finding / Observation	Percentage / Frequency
Skills Needing Improvement (Teacher Perspective)	Writing	70%
	Speaking	64%
Most Effective Speaking Activities (Teacher & Student Perspective)	Role-plays / Simulations	54% (teachers), 32.3% (students)

Category	Finding / Observation	Percentage / Frequency
	Pair/group conversations	52% (teachers), 30.6% (students)
Main Difficulties Speaking (Student Perspective)	Pronunciation	41.9%
	Fear of making mistakes	27.4%
Main Difficulties Writing (Student Perspective)	Grammar	68%
	Spelling & punctuation	60%
Types of Writing Tasks Assigned	Essays / Paragraphs	56% (teachers), 41.9% (students)
	Creative writing	24% (teachers), 22.6% (students)
Student Motivation with NEST	High motivation	85.5%
Most Improved Skills (Student Perspective)	Speaking	56.5%
	Writing	51.6%

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of Native English-Speaking-Teachers (NESTs) on Albanian students' English proficiency, focusing on oral and written skills, classroom engagement, motivation, and collaboration with local teachers. The findings reveal that NESTs play a distinctive and highly valuable role in Albanian EFL classrooms, complementing the strengths of Albanian teachers while introducing authentic communication, creativity, and interactive learning strategies that significantly enhance the overall language learning experience.

NESTs provide students with exposure to authentic English pronunciation, natural rhythm, idiomatic expressions, and everyday vocabulary that textbooks

often overlook. Their communicative, student-centered methods, such as role-plays, storytelling, debates, interactive games, and project-based tasks, encourage spontaneous use of English, reduce anxiety, and create a dynamic, engaging classroom environment. By promoting risk-taking, error tolerance, and open expression, NESTs help students build confidence and fluency in ways that traditional, grammar-focused instruction alone cannot achieve. Students repeatedly reported that lessons with NESTs felt “more fun,” “different,” and “more engaging” compared to standard classroom experiences, demonstrating that motivation and positive attitudes toward learning are crucial outcomes of native speaker-led instruction.

Writing instruction under NESTs also had a significant impact. Beyond traditional essays and grammar-focused tasks, NESTs implement projects that provide purpose, audience, and relevance, making writing a meaningful and engaging activity. Initiatives such as the *Write On!* competition, collaborative storytelling, journaling, and letter-writing projects allow students to express personal ideas, explore creativity, and develop a unique voice in English. Importantly, these activities simultaneously improve grammar, vocabulary, organization, and coherence, highlighting that writing development under NESTs is both holistic and practical. A further challenge addressed in EFL writing is interference from students’ first language (L1), which can affect sentence structure, logical sequencing, and punctuation. NESTs, together with Albanian teachers, help learners recognize and overcome L1 influence through comparative grammatical analysis, targeted feedback, and scaffolding, ensuring that students internalize English-specific forms and structures while still expressing themselves confidently.

The study highlights the complementary nature of NESTs and Albanian teachers. While Albanian educators provide essential support with grammar, accuracy, and exam preparation, NESTs introduce authentic communication, interactive practice, and creative tasks. This partnership ensures that students receive a balanced education, combining linguistic precision with meaningful, practical use of English. The strategic, occasional use of Albanian by NESTs further enhances understanding without reducing exposure to English, demonstrating a pragmatic approach that addresses learners’ immediate needs while maintaining immersion.

Speaking and writing were identified as the skills most significantly enhanced by NEST instruction. Students reported improvements in pronunciation, fluency, listening comprehension, and spontaneous oral production, alongside increased confidence in expressing opinions and participating in discussions. Writing skills improved equally, particularly in academic and creative contexts, including essays, letters, and collaborative projects. Factors contributing to these

improvements include consistent exposure to authentic English, interactive and low-pressure learning environments, regular feedback, and opportunities for extracurricular practice through debates, English clubs, and competitions. These findings highlight that the impact of NESTs extends beyond classroom instruction, fostering a deeper connection to English and promoting lifelong learning skills such as creativity, critical thinking, and self-expression.

This research also challenges several commonly held assumptions about the role of NESTs in EFL classrooms. Contrary to portrayals in previous studies, NESTs do not focus solely on oral fluency or ignore structured learning; they actively engage in grammar instruction, exam preparation, and writing development, adapting their methods to meet students' academic and linguistic needs. Furthermore, NESTs successfully integrate authentic language use with institutional curricula, creating hybrid, flexible approaches that combine structure with creativity. Such integration enhances long-term acceptance of NEST contributions in public schools, showing that native-speaking teachers can complement rather than replace local pedagogical systems.

The study emphasizes the importance of learner-centered, communicative, and interactive approaches that do not rely on technology. Competitions, debates, storytelling, and project-based writing exercises demonstrate that students can fully develop speaking and writing skills using minimal resources, relying instead on imagination, collaboration, and teacher guidance. These findings suggest that innovative pedagogical strategies can thrive even in under-resourced settings, and that both NESTs and local teachers can contribute meaningfully to a comprehensive English learning experience.

Overall, NESTs enhance Albanian students' English learning by providing authentic input, motivating classroom dynamics, and meaningful opportunities for language production. Their presence complements the structural support provided by Albanian teachers, addressing both fluency and accuracy, and helping students overcome challenges such as L1 interference. By fostering creativity, confidence, engagement, and collaboration, NESTs contribute to a more holistic and effective approach to English language education in Albania, bridging the gap between formal instruction and authentic communication.

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