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Exploring Black Native English Teachers' Racial Experiences: Phenomenological Case Study in Indonesian Schools

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ABSTRACT

Despite the sustained demand for native English speakers, most educational institutions frequently favor White native teachers due to racial stereotypes, the ideology of native-speakerism, and presuppositions of linguistic superiority. This study aims to explore the racial experiences of Black English teachers in the context of English Language Teaching (ELT) in Indonesia, particularly in private schools and English institutions, focusing on how they are perceived and treated in comparison to their white counterparts. Through interviews with teachers, principals, agency staff, parents and students, this phenomenological case study highlights recurring patterns of discrimination in recruitment practices and social engagement. A qualitative survey also collected data from teachers working with Black native speakers. Participants revealed that despite their qualifications and proficiency in English, Black teachers often encounter microaggressions, have their nativeness questioned, and endure heightened scrutiny. The finding also reveals that principals, students, parents, and the general public continue to favor White English teachers for both pedagogical and commercial reasons due to stereotyping, racial bias, and social constructs that depict white people as superior and more representative than native English speakers. This research critiques the simplistic perception of nativeness by examining lived experiences, prompting educational institutions in Indonesia to reconsider their recruitment strategies to adopt a more inclusive and equitable approach to diversity in English language education. The implications of this research emphasize the need for competency-based recruitment policies, anti-racist education, and the deconstruction of native-speakerism ideology in ELT in Indonesia.

KEYWORDS:
Black English teachers; Indonesian schools; Native speaker; Phenomenological case study; Racism

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Introduction

In many East Asian countries, native English speakers are frequently employed not only as language instructors but also as cultural representatives of English-speaking societies (Wu et al., 2022). This practice reflects a longstanding belief that native speakers embody the

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linguistic and cultural ideals related to English language instruction. To explain this phenomenon, Holliday (2005) first introduced the concept of "native-speakerism" to describe the idea that native speakers "represent a 'Western culture' from which spring the ideals both of the English language and of English language teaching methodology" (p. 385). This ideology is commonly associated with individuals from countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom (Scotland, England, Wales, and Northern Ireland), Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and South Africa (Mahboob & Golden, 2013). However, scholars have increasingly challenged this perspective. The term "native speaker" is not only racialized but also exclusionary (Kiczkowiak, 2020), as it privileges certain groups while marginalizing others who may possess equivalent linguistic competence. Despite a shifting global context in which World Englishes are becoming more significant, many educational contexts still favor native varieties as models and learning objectives (Uchida & Sugimoto, 2020).

In addition, the distinction between "native English-speaking teachers" (NESTs) and "non-native English-speaking teachers" (NNESTs) has been challenged by numerous studies (A. Holliday, 2006; Manara, 2017; Rudolph, 2023), but these labels are still an integral part of teachers' identities (Aneja, 2016). Even though findings reveal that students, parents, and teachers generally prefer native speaking teachers (Colmenero & Lasagabaster, 2024), and white people and American English in the ELT context (Xu, 2025), the idea that native speakers serve as the optimal models of the target language and consequently make the most effective instructors has been challenged in scholarly discourse (Copland et al., 2020). For instance, one study found that NEST instruction in South Korea fosters greater creativity and sophistication in composition, whereas NNEST instruction facilitates more precise language use in Korean EFL students (Schenck, 2020). Another study found that both Vietnamese EFL learners and teachers concur that NESTs are more advantageous for teaching English pronunciation, with learners' proficiency levels significantly impacting their perspectives (Phuong, 2021). In Indonesia, students perceive NESTs slightly better than NNESTs, but the two groups do not differ significantly in their perceived teaching strategies (Rasyid et al., 2023). NNEST and Chinese English-major students prioritize essential attributes, whereas NESTs highlight compassion, patience, adaptability, involvement, and sensitivity to students' learning requirements (Deng et al., 2023). Armenian graduate students see both native and non-native EFL instructors as meeting their needs and providing beneficial instruction; they favor natives for vocabulary and pronunciation, while they prefer non-native instructors for affective domains (Hakimian, 2024).

A growing body of scholarly work has begun to critically examine Whiteness within ELT (Ramjattan, 2019; Ruecker, 2011; Stinson & Migliarini, 2023), particularly in addressing the racial prejudice and inequality faced by non-native English speakers. For example, findings indicate that Foreign Asian teachers in China are susceptible to inequalities in recruitment and salary compared to their White counterparts (Lee et al., 2025). They also face systemic inequalities and dynamic hierarchies in the English language teaching profession, influenced by factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and social class (Selvi et al., 2024). Another study argues that ELT hiring practices continue to favor White teachers, especially in non-Western countries, due to racialized assumptions about language ownership and legitimacy (Shakesprere et al., 2021). A Nigerian teacher with excellent English skills may still be viewed as "less native" than a White teacher from a non-English-speaking country such as Poland or Germany. This reinforces a global racial hierarchy in education, where appearance often takes priority over ability (Kubota & Fujimoto, 2013). Furthermore, engaging in ELT requires interaction across racial and cultural divides, creating opportunities for meaningful intercultural communication and reciprocal understanding among educators, students,

institutions, and policymakers (Kramsch & Uryu, 2020; Norton, 2013; Von Esch et al., 2020). Nonetheless, these interactions reveal and perpetuate racial biases and systemic inequalities within ELT contexts (Kubota, 2023). In the field of education, racial bias influences recruitment, compensation, and interactions, particularly toward teachers of color (Walkinshaw & Duong, 2012). Emerging studies specifically address the experiences of Black individuals in ELT contexts in some countries, such as in South Korea (Charles, 2019; Seo, 2024; Seo & Kubota, 2023), English schools (Bennett et al., 2025), China (Xu, 2025), and Saudi universities (Almayez, 2024).

While native-speakerism-fueled injustices and power disparities must be eliminated (Ahn, 2019; Guo et al., 2021), it is crucial to examine the views of teachers, parents, principals, agencies, and students about native Black English teachers in an Indonesian school context. The misconception that native speakers must have a white complexion leads to challenges for Black native teachers in securing positions and being fully accepted by schools. In addition, while racism, whiteness, and native-speakerism in ELT have been widely discussed in international scholarship, there is still a dearth of research that focuses on the experiences of Black English teachers in Indonesia. This gap underscores the need for contextual studies in Indonesia that critically highlight the voices and lived experiences of Black English teachers, especially in the early stages of their entry into the field. These studies would strengthen the ELT literature, challenge preconceived notions about race, and provide an empirical foundation for more inclusive and equitable recruitment practices. Consequently, this issue highlights the need to examine how Indonesian schools perceive and accept Black and white native English teachers, shedding light on potential biases and discrimination in hiring practices.

This study also explored Black native English teachers' lived experiences and perspectives on racism in schools. In addition, racial prejudice, especially towards teachers of color, is an important and urgent topic that deserves deeper discussion—particularly in multicultural environments like Indonesia. This research contributes to strengthening equitable hiring practices, fostering an anti-discrimination school culture, and increasing public awareness that teaching and language skills cannot be reduced to racial classifications or the "native speaker" stereotype. To delve into the problems, the research addresses the following questions: What perceptions, beliefs, and assumptions do school principals, teachers, parents, students, and educational agencies hold regarding Black English teachers in Indonesian schools? How do Black English teachers make sense of their lived experiences of racism and discrimination in Indonesian educational institutions?

Method

Research Design

We used a qualitative phenomenological case study approach (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Hatch, 2002; Patton, 2014) to capture the voices and lived experiences of five Black English teachers who faced racism and discrimination when applying for English-teacher positions in Indonesian schools. We also explored the stories of teachers, a headmaster, agency employees, and private English-course instructors about their engagement with Black English teachers. While the case study component allowed a thorough examination of these experiences within a limited social and institutional setting, phenomenology was appropriate for investigating participants' subjective meanings, interpretations, and emotional reactions to racialized and discriminatory experiences. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA),

a qualitative research approach that seeks to understand participants' lived experiences and subjective perceptions, formed the methodological foundation (Eatough & Smith, 2008; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2012). Furthermore, by using participants' perspectives as the primary source of information, the phenomenological case study design allows researchers to understand the essence of human experience sequentially (Gallagher, 2012). Integrating phenomenology with a case study enabled the researchers to explore the lived experiences of five Black English teachers and how these experiences were shaped by the institutional and sociocultural contexts within Indonesian educational institutions. This approach offered a deeper understanding of both personal experiences and the contextual factors shaping them.

Participants

A total of 66 participants contributed to this study through interviews, surveys, and informal conversations. The interview participants included four Black English teachers from diverse backgrounds: Nigerian, Afro-American, Caribbean American, and South African. The Nigerian participant, as the second author, shared her perspectives and lived experiences of racial discrimination while seeking employment and while working for about 3 years as an English teacher in Indonesia. Nine private English tutors, four representatives from educational agencies providing native English-teacher recruitment services, 15 schoolteachers who had collaborated with native teachers, and three principals from schools in Bekasi, Jakarta, and Tangerang participated in the interview.

To complement the interview data, 29 respondents completed a survey: 7 females, 21 males, and 1 participant preferred not to disclose their gender. In addition, during the school visits, the researchers engaged in informal conversations with a parent and a student. Although these people were not officially recruited as participants, their viewpoints provided insightful context on how Black English teachers are viewed in Indonesian classrooms. The following criteria for teachers, principals, and English instructors were used to recruit the participants: 1) At least one year of professional experience; 2) Direct communication with or supervision of native English instructors; 3) Voluntary participation; and 4) Employment in a school or educational institution that had previously employed foreign teachers.

The principals offered insights into institutional perspectives on hiring native English teachers from abroad, drawing on their extensive experience managing teaching staff and recruitment processes. Their answers shed light on how parent-school dynamics, race, and appearance affect teacher recruitment decisions. The other participants are also an important part in providing rich information and contributing their perspectives and experiences related to the researched topic.

Data Collection

The participants were contacted through professional networks, WhatsApp, and direct email invitations. A brief overview of the research, ethical consent, and a confidentiality notice were included in the invitation. The second author served as a researcher-participant, a Black native English teacher in one of the schools in Bekasi, providing the first author with insider access to some schools. Thus, we could easily obtain data. The data were collected from direct semi-structured interviews, WhatsApp messages, and screenshots of public opinion.

We interviewed participants at different places and times, as agreed, for about 30-40 minutes. Before interviewing the participants, we built rapport to establish trust between

researchers and participants. Fitriani and Sari (2023) acknowledge that building a welcoming atmosphere is essential to fostering trust between participants and researchers. To complement the interview data, we also conducted an online survey with two open-ended questions about why the school prefers White native English teachers over Black ones, and teachers' interactions and experiences working with Black native English teachers. The survey data provided supporting evidence for understanding broader stakeholder perceptions. They were not treated as primary phenomenological data; instead, the phenomenological analysis relied primarily on in-depth interviews with Black English teachers and other key participants who provided rich accounts of lived experience.

We received 27 responses out of the more than 50 we sent via email and WhatsApp, resulting in a response rate of approximately 58%. Because participation was voluntary, the possibility of non-response bias cannot be excluded. Participants may have had different perspectives from those who did not participate. Thus, the online qualitative survey data were used to corroborate and triangulate the qualitative interview findings rather than to generalize, as in quantitative research. Thus, the results presented in Tables 1 and 2 should be interpreted with appropriate caution and not regarded as representative of all participants in Indonesian educational institutions.

Data Analysis

To examine the interview data, the study used interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to explore participants' lived experiences and meaning-making processes. Open-ended survey responses were analyzed thematically, as shown in Tables 1 and 2. Thematic analysis identified recurring patterns in participants' perceptions and experiences. Responses to the first open-ended question produced three themes regarding preferences for White native English instructors, whereas responses to the second question yielded three themes related to experiences with Black native English instructors. Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology underpins IPA, a qualitative research methodology that emphasizes the interpretive process of understanding lived experiences (McManus Holroyd, 2007; Smith et al., 2012). Given that access to these realities is mediated by subjective interpretation, IPA aims to investigate how people experience and interpret them (Smith et al., 2012).

Four steps comprised the interpretive and reflexive analytical process: (1) reading the data several times and taking notes; (2) turning the notes into emergent themes; (3) looking for connections and grouping themes; and (4) summarizing the results (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Findings from both data sources were subsequently integrated during interpretation to provide a more thorough understanding of Black English teachers' perceptions and experiences. The entire process was carried out by two researchers who read the transcripts multiple times, discussed code development, and categorized them to enhance dependability and confirmability. In the final phase, the authors used analytical remarks and quotes from interviews and surveys to describe and strengthen theme development, which was conducted iteratively. It moved back and forth between participants' narratives and cross-case patterns to ensure that the final codes and themes remained closely associated with participants' experiences rather than with a single researcher's interpretation.

To ensure data accuracy and consistency, we used several techniques. To confirm the accuracy of participants' answers, member checking was conducted to maintain credibility. Participants received their interview transcripts and summaries of key interpretations for verification, accuracy confirmation, and clarification. Screenshots of public opinions, the second author's field notes, and survey responses were used as supplementary

data sources to contextualize and triangulate the interview findings. We included thorough descriptions of the participants and the setting to help readers better understand how the findings can be applied in different contexts. While dependability was attained through consistent data collection and analysis techniques, confirmability was strengthened by carefully recording every step of the research process to reduce bias. These initiatives ensure that the findings are reliable and accurately represent participants' opinions on the study's topic. Furthermore, to minimize potential bias, given the second author's personal experiences, particular attention was paid to reflexive journaling and continuous discussion, analytic memos, and comparative interpretation to bracket preconceptions and ensure that participants' voices remained central throughout the data analysis. This procedure allowed the conclusions to be based on participant narratives rather than the researchers' preconceived notions or experiences.

Researcher Positionality

The first author has extensive experience conducting qualitative research using several qualitative research designs, such as phenomenology and case studies. Although she has not personally experienced racial discrimination in the ELT profession, she used to have teaching experiences in an ELT context in different educational settings and witnessed inequality and unequal treatment experienced by teachers of certain colors and races in teaching and learning, as well as in recruitment. The second author, a young Nigerian English teacher who has studied, lived, and worked in Indonesia for about six years, brought an insider perspective to this study. During her teaching career in Indonesia, she experienced racial discrimination due to her skin color while applying for an English teaching position in several educational contexts. Combined with the second author's personal experiences, these observations heightened the researchers' awareness of how race, skin color, and other socially constructed identity categories (Al Hakim, 2021) may influence recruitment practices, teaching and learning processes, and professional opportunities in the Indonesian ELT sector. However, the second author's field notes were employed mainly as reflexive and contextual materials rather than as a key source of evidence. Thus, this matter warrants exploration, and this finding offers policy contributions.

Ethical Consideration

We fully informed participants about the study's objectives, methodology, and the potential advantages of its findings before they participated. Additionally, we clarified that their participation was entirely voluntary. To ensure that participants understood their role in the study, informed consent was obtained and meticulously documented. We took extra care to ensure that each participant's identity was protected. Additionally, we ensured they were aware of the measures we took to protect their privacy, including using initials or pseudonyms when presenting data and securely storing data. Participants' privacy was completely protected because only we had access to the raw data.

Results

The Perceptions of Participants towards Black Native English Teachers in Indonesian Schools

The findings revealed diverse perceptions among the participants (principal, teachers, students, and parents), but a consistent pattern emerged highlighting the racialized

construction toward White English teachers when it comes to assigning the "native" title. A private school elementary principal in Bekasi said, "We understand native speakers come from many countries, but parents still trust White faces more."

Numerous participants implicitly linked nativeness to Whiteness, indicating that White teachers were more qualified as legitimate native English teachers. For instance, a parent from Kindergarten in Bekasi expressed her point of view that "My child was surprised when the new teacher was black. She said, He doesn't look American." Similarly, a student of the fourth grade at Bekasi School said, "You don't look like someone who speaks English naturally. Are you from Africa?" These quotes reveal that racial assumptions play a central role in how colored native English teachers are received. Many participants had internalized a belief system where "native" is subconsciously equated with "White." They showed surprise, skepticism, or hesitation when encountering non-White English teachers, although some stakeholders, such as principals, acknowledged the qualifications and fluency of colored native English teachers.

On the hiring side, several school principals admitted that they prioritize White candidates due to parental expectations and perceived advantages in school branding. One principal in a private school in Jakarta stated: "We love your CV. But the parents want a White teacher for marketing, not because you're not good." The data was also strengthened by a WhatsApp message in Bahasa Indonesia between the agency CEO and a school representative (SR), translated and narrated into English as follows. The agency said that they were sending native teachers to school to teach conversation. The SR confirmed whether the native teachers were *Bule* (White) or of Caucasian appearance. When the agency said that the teachers would be Afro, the SR preferred Caucasian appearance despite not being racist.

Additionally, schools mentioned that foreign teacher profiles with White faces received more inquiries and engagement when promoted online. This preference for Whiteness was even confirmed by agents and HR recruiters who work with various educational institutions. Some of their responses include: "We only get orders for White teachers. When we submit Black or Brown applicants, the schools often ignore them. Even though we explain their qualification, it seems that they don't really care about it (Educational recruitment agency in Tangerang)."

The research also utilizes real screenshots of conversations, social media comments, and personal messages that reveal unfiltered preferences for White native English teachers. These screenshots serve as naturally occurring data—spontaneous, unprovoked statements that reflect societal attitudes. Many of these screenshots include statements like: "We want White native teachers only", "Colored native speakers don't look professional", "Parents prefer White teachers—it attracts students more."

Such findings strongly reflect colorism and appearance-based discrimination deeply embedded within the hiring culture in the Indonesian educational system. The online survey data, as a supplementary source, revealed why schools prefer White native English teachers over Black ones (Table 1) and Indonesian teachers' experiences working with Black native English teachers (Table 2). Table 1 presents three identified themes from participants' responses, including racial bias and stereotyping; assumptions of aesthetic and linguistic superiority; and market demand, along with illustrative excerpts.

Table 1 Survey responses of school preferences on White native teachers

Themes	The Illustration of Excerpt
Racial Bias and Stereotyping	• Systemic racism and stereotyping; they are white and European • Because they do not have a freaking clue! They think that only Whites can be native English speakers (and that native English speakers can only come from certain, predominantly white countries) • It is believed that some white native English teachers are actually relatable • Schools often prefer White native English teachers due to lingering stereotypes that associate whiteness with "authentic" English and perceived prestige, despite this being a biased and inaccurate view.
Aesthetic and Linguistic Superiority Assumptions	• Because of the good English in terms of pronunciations • Because they mostly think White native English teachers have superior knowledge than the black native English teachers • Because of their accent • They mistake being White for necessary requisite for being able to teach the English language • They are more attractive
Marketing Demand	• Due to promotional purposes (advertising) • The school often prefers white native English teachers due to racism, stereotypes, and marketing demands • They often mention the only reason they prefer White native teachers is due to marketing reasons.

The findings indicated that native English teachers are associated with white identity and Western countries. White English teachers are therefore seen as more genuine, reliable, and credible, aligning with the ideal image of an English teacher, even though Black teachers can have equivalent linguistic competence and professional qualifications. Furthermore, there is an assumption that white teachers are more proficient in pronunciation, accent, and language skills than black teachers. Marketing factors also emerge as an essential motive, with schools and training institutions viewing the presence of white teachers as a selling point that can boost the institution's appeal to parents and prospective students. Overall, these findings imply that social constructs that associate whiteness with authority, prestige, and legitimacy in English teaching continue to shape perceptions of English teachers in Indonesia, possibly perpetuating native-speakerism and racial bias in teacher recruitment and hiring processes.

Table 2. Survey responses of Indonesian teachers' experiences working with Black native teachers

Themes	The Illustration of Excerpt
Professionalism and Dedication	• I have had the pleasure of working with them, and it was a positive and enriching experience. They brought professionalism, warmth, and unique cultural insights that made learning and collaboration even more meaningful. • She brings passion and clarity to every lesson, making complex topics easy to understand; her dedication to her students' success is truly inspiring; it is valuable learning experiences; she consistently demonstrates professionalism, patience, and deep subject knowledge; her ability to motivate and empower others sets her apart as an exceptional educator.
Cultural Insight and Student Engagement	• Well, working with a black native was real-world experience. I mean, one thing I learned from her was that she integrated fun into learning English. I can still recall her students' passion and interest.
Competence and Impact	• They beat my imagination as I got overwhelmed by their mastery. • They are hardworking, funny, and open to speaking better with children. • Black native teachers are actually more learned than native White speakers.

Table 2 presents three themes that emerged from data on Indonesian teachers' experiences working with Black native English teachers: professionalism and pedagogical

competence, positive interpersonal relationships, and cultural enrichment. The findings reported predominantly positive experiences. These results point to a discrepancy between the general public's perceptions of Black English teachers and the direct experiences of those who work with them.

Overall, these findings indicate that negative perceptions or misgivings about Black native English teachers tend to stem from racial assumptions and stereotypes, rather than actual professional experiences. Conversely, those who have interacted and worked directly with Black native English teachers report positive experiences and acknowledge their competence, professionalism, and significant pedagogical impact.

The Lived Experiences of Black native Speakers of English

Despite possessing advanced academic qualifications, including a high IELTS Exam score and being a certified native English speaker, the second author has consistently faced barriers that stem from racial prejudice. In many cases, job applications were rejected not because of a lack of experience or skill, but solely because of skin color. The statement was: "There were times I was the most qualified applicant, yet I received no response. Meanwhile, less qualified white teachers got the job immediately" (The second researcher's field note, 2025). This consistent pattern of rejection and exclusion contributes to emotional fatigue, frustration, and demoralization. It also reveals how institutions uphold performative diversity while still subscribing to Eurocentric ideals in practice. The second author also shared her point of view: "Some schools told me directly, 'You're great, but the parents won't like your appearance.' At first, it shocked me. Later, I began to expect it." "Once I was hired, I still had to keep proving myself. I felt like I had to be perfect every day—not just to be respected, but to survive the job."

These emotional and psychological impacts go beyond the hiring stage. They manifest in daily treatment at work, from being undermined in meetings to receiving lower pay than white counterparts. Other teachers of color working in Indonesia also shared similar experiences, highlighting that the issue is not isolated. One teacher, who is African American, explained: "The students respected me, but the parents always looked confused when I entered the class. I was once told to step out because a parent assumed I was a cleaner." A Caribbean-American teacher who worked in Central Java and also in Bali for three years added: "I had to explain myself repeatedly. I even tried to wear makeup to 'soften' my look. Imagine being a native and trying to prove your nativeness every day. It's draining." Another teacher with dual citizenship (South Africa and the UK) reported that "I wasn't offered renewal even though I had the highest student satisfaction rate. They replaced me with a White teacher who spoke worse English."

Discussion

The Perceptions of Participants towards Black Native English Teachers in Indonesian Schools

The findings reveal that perceptions of Black native English teachers are heavily influenced by physical appearance and racial stereotypes, often overshadowing professional credentials. Even when Black teachers had similar pedagogical and linguistic skills, participants often associated being a native speaker with being white and showed more faith in White educators. This reflects the ideology of native speakerism — the belief that only White, Western-born individuals represent the ideal English teacher (A. Holliday, 2006; Ruecker & Ives, 2015). The results imply that racialized presumptions about legitimacy, credibility, and authority in ELT

shaped stakeholders' opinions in addition to language-related factors. Even though Black English teachers' professional abilities are becoming more widely acknowledged, these presumptions seem to play a part in Indonesia's preference for White native English teachers.

Although participants acknowledged the fluency and qualifications of Black or Brown native speakers, many continued to associate “native” with whiteness. This mirrors Kubota and Lin’s critique of whiteness in ELT, which highlights how global English teaching still centers white norms, especially in Asian contexts like Japan and Korea (Kubota & Lin, 2006). It seems that in non-English-speaking countries such as Japan, Korea, and Indonesia, learners encounter similar problems and perceptions regarding the ideal image of native English speakers. Our findings extend this pattern to Indonesia. Similarly, in the words of Litman (2025), depending on how much their clients valued having a White teacher as part of dynamic international education plans, education companies branded their foreign instructors as White.

Media representations also mattered: many students and even teachers were surprised to see non-White native English speakers. This aligns with a Korean study that students often questioned the legitimacy of non-white foreign teachers due to a lack of media exposure (A. R. Holliday, 2005; Kubota & Lin, 2006; Ruecker & Ives, 2015). However, previous findings have revealed a correlation between lower levels of racial bias and foreign media consumption (Zhen et al., 2023). This suggests that the media can reduce racial prejudice, thereby benefiting World Englishes. Despite teachers' actual proficiency, Indonesian parents and school leaders often judged ability by skin color rather than fluency. Some participants used seemingly supportive language (She's good for a black teacher), which reveals benevolent racism — a subtle form of prejudice where acceptance is conditional and patronizing. This reflects deeper internalized hierarchies of race and nativeness.

As mentioned by Holliday (2008), influential employers in Britain's English language teaching sector have told me that although they would do away with the discriminatory distinction between "native speakers" and "non-native speakers" tomorrow, they are unable to do so because their "customers demand it" (p. 121). The results show a glaring mismatch between experience and perception. Teachers who had direct professional experience with Black native English teachers consistently reported positive perceptions of their competence, professionalism, and educational impact, even though many stakeholders preferred White native English teachers due to racialized assumptions and marketing considerations. This disparity implies that unfavorable opinions of Black native English teachers stem more from societal attitudes that associate Whiteness with linguistic authority and academic prestige than from actual teaching effectiveness. Therefore, the results provide further evidence that native-speakerism in the Indonesian ELT context operates through racialized constructions of credibility, expertise, and employability in addition to language-related presumptions.

The Lived Experiences of Black Native Speakers of English

The data clearly demonstrate that racial bias affects hiring decisions and daily workplace experiences for colored native English teachers. This finding is consistent with a study showing that participants' preference for L1 teachers far outweighs their preference for pedagogically qualified instructors. Additionally, students are more likely to favor white L1 teachers than Black ones in Brazil, Italy, Spain, and Korea (Zhen et al., 2023). The results point to the existence of linguistic racism and racial hierarchy in the marketing, hiring, and payment procedures as well as at the classroom microlevel. In addition to upholding white norms, the Chinese ELT market appropriates an "American" identity by emphasizing the American

curriculum, teachers, and English. This is because administrators, teachers, parents, and students legitimize English as an American property (Xu, 2025). Furthermore, the analysis of previous findings highlights the racist ideologies of White normativity and White saviorism, which create, justify, and explain South Korea's need for native English speakers (Jenks & Lee, 2020). The schools also contribute to racism in terms of the recruitment process for new teachers. For example, the results show that most schools in Asia appear to take advantage of native-speakerism through their application requirements and compensation policies, which often favor only certain groups, even though a small number have relatively fair policies and emphasize professional qualifications (Domingo, 2025).

Participants shared instances where White candidates with weaker credentials were hired over them, or they were excluded entirely based on race. This aligns with findings from Comprendio and Jindapitak (2025), which show how deeply ingrained racialized native-speakerism is in shaping attitudes and sustaining disparities in ELT. In addition, previous results in Pakistan show a pervasive preference for English, which maintains racial hierarchies in ELT by signifying "whiteness" and sophistication. This study emphasizes the urgency of decolonizing educational methods and promotes inclusive, diverse language instruction that separates language ability from racial stereotypes (Ali & Salam-Salmaoui, 2024).

This hiring practice reflects linguistic racism — a form of structural discrimination where language ability is assumed based on racial appearance (Flores & Rosa, 2015). Furthermore, the emotional toll of constantly defending one's identity as a native speaker connects to teacher identity theory (Varghese et al., 2005), which argues that identity is negotiated in response to institutional and societal expectations. In Indonesia, the rejection and invisibility that teachers of color experience challenge their sense of legitimacy and belonging.

Conclusion

Two key conclusions from this study support the objectives of the investigation. First, there were notable differences in opinions among stakeholders when the perspectives of principals, teachers, students, parents, and educational agencies regarding Black English native speakers in Indonesia were investigated. Due to stereotyping, racial bias, and social constructs that portray white people as superior and more representative than native English speakers, principals, students, parents, and the general public continue to favor White English teachers, not only for pedagogical reasons. Furthermore, a marketing-oriented mindset in private schools and training institutions reinforces this tendency, in which "white native speakers" are perceived as more marketable and more attractive to educational consumers.

The findings revealed that teachers with firsthand experience working with Black English teachers, by contrast, exhibit noticeably more positive perspectives. They rated Black English teachers as highly professional, pedagogically competent, linguistically skilled, and able to build warm, effective relationships with students. These findings indicate a gap between perceptions based on racial stereotypes and actual professional experiences in the classroom. Second, the exploration of the experiences of four Black English teachers confirms that racism in the ELT context in Indonesia is both structural and symbolic. Racism is still a part of their work reality, especially when it comes to skin color and physical appearance. It shows up as doubts about competence, unfair treatment, stereotypical remarks, and obstacles to professional acceptance.

This study has several limitations that warrant consideration. First, the relatively small number of participants, particularly among Black English teachers, limits the generalizability of the findings. Second, the study employed an entirely qualitative approach, emphasizing the depth of experience and subjective meanings but precluding quantitative measurement of the prevalence of attitudes or levels of discrimination in the larger population. Third, the research context, which focused on private schools and course institutions in specific regions of Indonesia, limits the transferability of the findings to other educational contexts, such as public schools or non-urban areas. Thus, creating opportunities for future research with a wider range of participants, using a mixed-methods approach, and emphasizing institutional policies is a must.

Although participants acknowledged the professional competence of Black English teachers, the study discovered that perceptions of native English teachers were significantly impacted by racial stereotypes, assumptions of White superiority, and marketing considerations. These results have significant theoretical and practical implications for ELT in Indonesia. This study promotes the need for deconstruction of native-speakerism and Whiteness, and racialized assumptions within ELT. This study also underscores the need to review competency-based recruitment policies and promote practices that ensure hiring decisions are based on qualifications and teaching competence. Furthermore, these findings emphasize the importance of anti-discrimination education and diversity literacy for parents and students, ensuring that teacher quality is assessed on the basis of professional competence rather than race or physical appearance. From a policy perspective, this research can serve as an initial reference for formulating ethical guidelines and anti-racism policies in ELT practices in Indonesia.

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