

Turkish EFL Learner Perceptions of Native and Non-native English Language Teachers

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to present the results of a study at the Uludağ University that involved 120 Turkish, preparatory class students in different levels to reveal their perceptions of native English speaker teachers (NEST) and non-native English speaker teachers (NNEST). Quantitative data were collected using a questionnaire consisting of 15 questions with a five-point Likert type scale. The results demonstrate that there is a significant difference between the learners' perceptions of their NEST and NNEST. However, there is not a meaningful difference among different levels. Students showed high preference for NEST because they could learn more about the NEST's culture. The subjects appreciate both NEST and NNEST in terms of easing their students' learning process in different aspects. They also find NEST more proficient in high level classes, and listening speaking skills; On the other hand, NNEST are seen to be more proficient in low level classes, and in grammar, writing lessons according to the students' perception. Students do not have sharp preference for vocabulary and reading lessons. On the whole, the students agree that the lessons should be taught by both NEST and NNEST since they both have good albeit different qualities. Additionally, proficiency of the teachers is seen as far more important than the teachers' mother tongue. The case of language teaching by NEST and NNEST has not been examined much in Turkey from students' perspective. Thus, the indications of this study would be enlightening for the NEST and NNEST to apprehend their incompetence and may arouse their consciousness.

Keywords: Native speakers, non-native speakers, foreign language learner perceptions, EFL in Turkey.

Introduction

English is the most frequently spoken and taught language all around the world. The teaching of English as a second language is performed by two groups of teachers; native speakers (NEST) and non-native speaker (NNEST) teachers. Brown (2013) defines a Native speaker (NEST) as someone whose main or first language (L1) is English and who has learned it first as a child, and Non-native speaker (NNEST) as someone who learned a language other than English as a first language, and is learning or has learned English as an additional language (L2). The native / nonnative concern is a very interesting topic calls amazing interest in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). Many researchers have attempted to study the subject. For instance, Benke and Medgyes (2005) studied differences in teaching behavior between native and non-native teachers. Liu & Zhang (2007) analyzed student perceptions of native & non-native teachers. Alseweed (2012) investigated university student's perceptions of the influence of native and non-native teachers. Brown (2013) examined students' attitudes and perceptions towards the teaching behavior of native and non-native teachers.

Although considerable research has been done, the literature is surprisingly poor in related research on Turkish EFL learners. A review of the recent literature yielded several studies with Turkish participants. Tatar and Yıldız (2010) studied empowering nonnative-English speaking teachers in the classroom. Üstünlüoğlu (2007) investigated university students' perceptions of native and non-native teachers. Çelik (2006) examined the artificial battle between native and non-native speaker teachers of English in Turkey. Bayyurt (2006) analyzed non-native English language teachers' perspective on culture in English as a Foreign Language classroom.

It is obvious that there are very few studies on Turkish students' perception of their native and non-native teachers of English. Thus, it is desirable to perform research focused on Turkish EFL learners. The purpose of the present study is to identify the general perceptions of preparatory class students of native speaker English teachers (NEST) and non-native speaker English teachers (NNEST) at Uludağ University, in Turkey. The study aims to find out which teacher a) makes students learn more about the target culture, b) eases the learning process of the students, c) is more proficient in high / low level classes, d) is more proficient in which language skill.

Method

Participants

The present study was carried out in Turkey with Uludağ University School of Foreign Languages preparatory class students who had been taught English by both native and non-native English speaking teachers for two semesters. 120 respondents, 40 elementary level, 40 pre-intermediate level and 40 intermediate level, evaluated their native and non-native teachers of English. The students study a total of 24 to 30 contact hours of English per week according to their level of English, distributed among the four language skills (e.g., listening, speaking, writing, and reading), grammar, and vocabulary lessons. They had five different teachers, most of whom were NNEST who share the target language learning experience and the students' native language. There were only two NEST both of whom arrived from the USA with on Fulbright scholarship.

Questionnaire

At the end of the academic year, quantitative data were collected by means of a one-page, double-sided questionnaire consisting of 15 questions for NEST and 15 questions for NNEST, and also two general statement questions. The questionnaire was in the native language, Turkish, to avoid any language boundaries, especially for elementary level students.

The students were asked to rank the statements using a five-point Likert-type scale. In this scale 1 represents strong disagreement, 2 represents disagreement, 3 represents neither agreement nor disagreement, 4 represents agreement and 5 represents strong agreement. The questionnaire included five sections: (a) teaching target culture (Item 1); (b) easing the learning process (Items 2-7); (c) proficiency of the teacher in high / low level classes (Items 8-9); (d) proficiency of the teacher in different language skills (Items 10-15); (e) general statements (Items 16-17). A brief instruction was written at the beginning of the questionnaire to explain the purpose of the study and to clarify important terms used throughout the questionnaire such as NEST / NNEST. The students were asked to respond with honesty.

Findings and Discussion

According to the participants' responses, 84% of the students consider they would learn more about the culture of the English speaking people with a NEST. 70% of the students agreed that NNEST is more aware of students' culture and learning needs. They empathize with the needs of language learners and anticipate learning difficulties. Also, 75% of the students agreed that NNEST knows the English language difficulties of their students better than NEST, thus, is more aware of the students' needs as they passed through the same experience while learning English as a foreign language.

55% of the students found NNEST more experienced and more conscious of the students' learning styles. However, 72% of the students stated that NEST is friendlier and they could have a relaxed learning environment in their classes. 76% of the students agreed that they would have more positive attitudes towards the learning of English if they had a NEST.

81% of the students agreed that NNEST can give more assistance to a beginner/elementary level student. 67% of the samples believed that NEST should give lectures in more advanced levels such as intermediate, upper-intermediate.

96% of the participants preferred NEST to NNEST for speaking skill. 59% of the students were also in favor of NEST for listening skill. For reading skill, students preferred NEST 55%. Students supported 85% NNEST for grammar lesson. For writing skill again students prefer NNEST 60%. The students were indecisive for vocabulary lesson, 51% of the students preferred NNEST, 46% preferred NEST.

83% of the students didn't wish that they only had NNEST of English. 60% of the participants stated that the teacher's native language is not important if they are good teachers.

Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to understand Turkish preparatory class student perceptions of their NEST and NNEST. As Sun (2014) indicates, the perception of what makes an effective English teacher is changing with the changing views of communicative competence and the awareness of intercultural communicative competence. The effectiveness of English teachers should be determined their linguistic, instructional, and intercultural competence rather than simply being a native speaker of English. The results of the study support this idea. One group of teachers is not superior to the other. The participants had different teacher preferences for different items in the questionnaire.

According to the student participants, both NEST and NNEST contribute to their learning process. In general, students find NEST more effective in teaching about the target culture; however, they find NNEST more aware of their own culture and the students' learning styles since they experienced the same difficulties while learning English. As NEST provides a relaxed learning environment, students found NEST friendlier, and they have more positive attitude towards learning English with a NEST. Most of the participants suggested that NEST can be helpful for advanced levels whereas NNEST can help beginner levels more.

Participants might have found it difficult to understand a NEST in the early grades. However, the students want both types of teachers to speak only the target language in the classroom. Surprisingly, elementary level students supported this idea more than pre-intermediate level students. The students wanted NEST to teach speaking skills with a great majority. Thus, it can be inferred that students prefer NEST especially for listening and speaking skills in order to learn proper pronunciation of English. On the other hand, the participants prefer NNEST for writing, grammar and vocabulary lessons which often need to be explained clearly by the teacher. Alseweed (2012) found that students prefer NNEST since they can explain lessons more clearly than a NEST by using native language to elaborate ambiguous terms that they could not understand in English. As a result, students mostly wanted to be taught by both NEST and NNEST and they give more emphasis on being a good, qualified teacher rather than the native language of their teacher.

This study can be a parameter for universities' foreign languages preparatory schools to employ NEST in their school. The results of the study may guide the schools to benefit from NEST effectively. For recommendations, NEST can be informed about the culture of the students whom they are going to teach before they start working in that country, this may lead to high satisfaction of the students. For NNEST in-service training programs can be applied to enhance oral proficiency since the most important weakness of NNEST is speaking compared to NEST in view of the students.

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Appendix I

Student perception questionnaire aimed at their Native English speaking (American) teachers

STATEMENTS	SCALE				
	Strongly disagree	disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
1. I can learn better about the culture of the English speaking people with a native teacher.	1	2	3	4	5
2. A native English teacher is competent because she is more aware of the students' culture.	1	2	3	4	5
3. It is good for a native teacher not to speak any Turkish in the classroom.	1	2	3	4	5
4. A native English teacher is aware of students' language needs and language learning difficulties.	1	2	3	4	5
5. A native English teacher is friendly because she provides a relaxed learning environment.	1	2	3	4	5
6. A native English teacher is experienced because she is more conscious of the students' learning styles.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I would have more positive attitudes toward the learning of English if I had a native English teacher.	1	2	3	4	5
8. A native teacher can be more helpful for elementary level students.	1	2	3	4	5
9. A native teacher can be more helpful for higher level students.	1	2	3	4	5
10. A native teacher can teach speaking skill better	1	2	3	4	5
11. A native teacher can teach listening skill better	1	2	3	4	5
12. A non- native teacher can teach grammar better	1	2	3	4	5
13. A native teacher can teach vocabulary better	1	2	3	4	5
14. A native teacher can teach writing skill better	1	2	3	4	5
15. A native teacher can teach reading skill better	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix II

Student perception questionnaire of Non-native English speaking (Turkish) teachers

STATEMENTS	SCALE				
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
1. I can learn better about the culture of the English speaking people with a non-native teacher.	1	2	3	4	5
2. A non-native English teacher is competent because she is more aware of the students' culture.	1	2	3	4	5
3. It is good for a non-native teacher to speak Turkish during the lesson.	1	2	3	4	5
4. A non-native English teacher is aware of students' language needs and language learning difficulties.	1	2	3	4	5
5. A non-native English teacher is friendly because she provides a relaxed learning environment.	1	2	3	4	5
6. A non-native English teacher is experienced because she is more conscious of the students' learning styles.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I would have more positive attitudes toward the learning of English if I had a non-native English teacher.	1	2	3	4	5
8. A non- native teacher can be more helpful for elementary level students.	1	2	3	4	5
9. A non- native teacher can be more helpful for higher level students.	1	2	3	4	5
10. A non- native teacher can teach speaking skill better.	1	2	3	4	5
11. A non- native teacher can teach listening skill better.	1	2	3	4	5
12. A non- native teacher can teach grammar better.	1	2	3	4	5
13. A non- native teacher can teach vocabulary better.	1	2	3	4	5
14. A non- native teacher can teach writing skill better.	1	2	3	4	5
15. A non- native teacher can teach reading skill better.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Ideally I would prefer a course taught by a non- native English teacher.	1	2	3	4	5
17. Native language of the teacher is not important as long as she is competent.	1	2	3	4	5