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English Language Teachers' Views On Nativeness And Non-Nativeness Of English Teachers

ABSTRACT

The debate of world Englishes has introduced some novelties to teaching English within a lingua franca perspective that is relevant to the current position of English. Based on the current status of English, communication with only native groups of people does not seem realistic for English language learners. Thus, it hardly is applicable to present one single standardized model of English to English language learners. Instead, it becomes rather significant to offer them a non-standardized English language by introducing world Englishes from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds since the knowledge of English can no longer be constrained to one single variety. This study tries to figure out native and nonnative English speaking teachers' differences in a teaching context from a nonnative English speaking teachers' perspective. Collecting data from an open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, the study aims to draw a clear picture of what nonnative English speaking teachers think about themselves and their counterparts, native English-speaking teachers, at their institution. The study has some significant implications regarding English language teaching, attitude towards native and nonnative speaking teachers.

Keywords: English language teaching, native and nonnative English speaking teachers, English as a lingua franca, world Englishes, culture.

Introduction

McKay (2003) relates the issue with some implications related to English language teaching. First, the content of English language teaching can not be limited to the inner circle context, which leads to bilingual teachers' local and intercultural knowledge integration into teaching English. In this vein, what we need is a change of mindset focusing on multilingual and multicultural environment where nonnative speaker teachers have the potential to accommodate the already existing needs of language learners. Sifakis (2004) also highlights the very importance of learners' various cultural and linguistic backgrounds in the context of teaching English. Canagarajah (2005) claims nonnative speakers can communicate and negotiate more often and better than before since globalization in the post-modern world entails more mobility with a higher interaction with various cultures and fluidity of language use. Similarly, Rajagopalan (2004) challenges the notion of superiority of native speakers as EFL professionals and discusses the fact that native speakers should no longer be regarded as a model speaker of world Englishes (WE). Native speakers may be unable to perform communicative tasks in world Englishes context as communicative competence in WE is directly linked to multilingual and multicultural nature (Rajagopalan, 2004). As McKay (2002) proposes "the teaching and learning of an international language must be based on an entirely different set of assumptions than the teaching and learning of any other second and foreign language" (p.1). These facts make it urgent to question the former assumptions of teaching standardized English merely focusing on native-speaker norms, native speakers as a model of competence and native speaker as the ideal teacher in ELT. These assumptions need to be reformulated by the ideology of teaching English as a lingua franca (ELF), and not as a foreign language (EFL), through diverse standards of world Englishes and teaching English based on diverse norms through multicultural and multilingual perspectives of non-native English language teachers.

Bayyurt (2006) examines the importance of raising teachers' awareness of the concept of culture and various dimensions in language teaching. In this respect, Bayyurt investigates how teachers defined the concept of culture, what they think about the integration of culture into their EFL classes and how they position themselves as a teacher. Her study depicts that the language teachers were quite aware of the strong connection between language teaching and culture and that they discussed issues of culture in their classrooms via different elements from learners' home culture, from those of native-speakers' culture and international cultures from all around the world. This fact can be related to Byram, Gribkova and Starkey's perceived notion (2002) of intercultural communicative competence referring to "the ability to interact with people as complex human beings with multiple identities and their individuality" (p. 10). This definition does signal the competence of negotiation between different cultures as well as

English Language Teachers' Views On Nativeness And Non-Nativeness Of English Teachers

reflecting on one's values, beliefs, and behaviors. Alptekin (2002) suggests native – nonnative as well as nonnative – nonnative speakers as discourse participants and defines competent users of language as those having intercultural insights and knowledge. He suggests that successful users of language in this pedagogical model are those who are equipped with the necessary resources of linguistic and cultural behavior to effectively participate in communication and that they are aware of differences and manage how to handle them appropriately. Özkan (2017) in her study discusses that nonnative speaker teachers of English (NNESTs) who are knowledgeable of globalized English feel more confident as NNESTs.

As Llorca (2009) states the ELT job market has been filled by native English speaking teachers (NESTs) and being a native-speaker has been a precondition for most of the job advertisements of many institutions. This unfair case of discrimination against non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs) leads to a strong feeling of inferiority and a poor self-image (Moussou & Llorca, 2008). However, problematizing the notion of a native speaker and disproving the established assumption that "the ideal teacher of English is an NES" led to a reconceptualization of pedagogical and professional legitimacy in NEST/NNEST dichotomy (Selvi, 2011). In one of his studies, Medgyes (1994) investigates who is worth more: the native or the non-native by researching the preferences of highly sophisticated teachers, teacher trainers, applied linguists and publishers. The question was who to employ in an ELT school in Britain. Two-thirds of sixty respondents preferred to employ NESTs; yet, if hard-pressed, they stated that they would choose a qualified NNEST rather than a native without ELT qualifications. The rest – one-third of the participants – indicated that the native/non-native issue would not be a criterion to judge the applicants providing that the NNEST was a highly proficient speaker of English. Medgyes (1994) suggested that school principals, by employing NESTs, may only satisfy the demands of stakeholders such as international students in Britain who prefer to be taught by NESTs. The findings of Medgyes's survey showed that the majority of respondents regarded both NEST and NNEST as equally successful. Those who highlighted the superiority of NEST cited characteristics such as better command of English and the ability to use colloquial and idiomatic English as prime factors. The respondents also indicated that in terms of their general attitude, NESTs could adopt a more flexible approach, were more innovative and casual, use English more confidently, tolerate errors, and supply more cultural information. On the other hand, the argument of NNEST focused mostly on their competencies in predicting learners' potential difficulties and the use of L1 as an effective tool to make comparisons and contrasts between the two languages.

Finally, Medgyes (1994) suggests that NESTs and NNESTs are different in several respects, yet are equally effective teachers. He finds NNESTs less competent concerning 'command of English'; however, he considers this shortcoming as an advantage of developing capacities NESTs can never acquire. He lists the positive aspects of being NNEST as providing a good learner model for imitation (a good model as proficient speakers, successful learners, and successful teachers), teaching language learning strategies more effectively (functions and types of language learning strategies such as memory strategies, social strategies, affective strategies, metacognitive strategies, compensation strategies, and cognitive strategies), supplying information about the English language (triggering language awareness, and explaining differences), anticipating and preventing language difficulties better (making use of linguistic and cultural awareness), being more empathetic to the needs and problems of learners (being more self-aware by virtue of being learners of English themselves), and making use of learners' mother tongue (Medgyes, 1994, p. 51).

Canagarajah (2005) also highlights the importance of multiple varieties of English in communication since today's English involves a diversity of accents and mobility due to globalization in this post-modern world. Rajagopalan (2004) questions the former privileged status of native speakers as EFL professionals. According to him, the native speaker cannot be a model speaker of world Englishes (WE) anymore. The native speaker may even be not competent enough in performing communicative tasks in the world Englishes context since such context requires a multilingual and multicultural nature, which may indicate that being monolingual and monocultural may be a barrier. McKay (2003) argues that defining the notion of the native speaker as a basis of SLA research and taking this construct as criteria of judging pedagogical expertise is particularly unreasonable and unrealistic. According to McKay, the stronger qualities of bilingual and multilingual teachers with respect to their local and intercultural knowledge must be acknowledged and this would definitely bring out the urgent need for a shift from monolingual and monocultural perspectives of NESTs to multilingual and multicultural approaches of NNESTs to accommodate and satisfy the current needs of English language learners and other stakeholders. Doğançay-Aktuna (2008) conducted a study in Turkey in which she investigated the professional identities, self-perceived skills and status of 21 non-native English speaking teacher educators. Findings indicated that more than half of the participants had faced a kind of discrimination in their professional careers and teaching experiences because of their non-native status. In terms of their self-perceived language skills, they rated their competences as high and overall, though some of them stated that they felt less competent in idiomatic expressions and conversational English. In his study conducted with 32

English Language Teachers' Views On Nativeness And Non-Nativeness Of English Teachers

students enrolled in an Intensive English Program in a large Midwestern ESL program, Mahboob (2004) explores students' perceptions of NEST and NNEST concerning a) linguistic factors, b) teaching styles, c) personal factors. According to the findings, NESTs are perceived to be superior in teaching oral skills, vocabulary and culture but are perceived to be less competent in teaching grammar and providing answers to students' grammar-related questions, which is associated with their lack of experience in learning a second language and weakness in their teaching methodology. On the other hand, NNESTs were favored in terms of their ability in teaching literacy skills and grammar. As for their teaching styles, NNESTs were perceived to adopt more appropriate teaching methodologies and more able to respond to students' questions. The participants also highlighted NNESTs superiority in terms of providing emotional support. As for their weaknesses, they were criticized because of their lack of ability in teaching oral communication skills. Mahboob (2004, p. 30) attributes this finding to students' rooted belief in relying on native speaker models to acquire 'true' and 'correct' pronunciation. All in all, the studies on NEST and NNEST demonstrate that making such a distinction is particularly inadequate. Teachers should be assessed by their professional qualifications rather than their first language backgrounds. Both NESTs and NNESTs may have strengths and weaknesses in their respects. Thus, the ELT market needs both working in collaboration as well as balancing and complementing each other.

These discussions of localization of knowledge and practice as well as of power, access, and equality are of central concern to scholars, researchers, and practitioners who look through the NNEST lens and show how the NNEST movement developed in the field. Along with these discussions, this specific study tries to seek responses to three questions below:

1. How do NNESTs perceive culture in their English language teaching context?
2. How do NNESTs perceive native and nonnative teachers in their English language teaching context?
3. What are the views of NNESTs regarding native and nonnative teacher dichotomy based on their own experiences at their institutions?

Methodology

Participants

The participants in this study (n=24; 17 females and 7 males; age range: 36-43) were all nonnative English speaking teachers. They had between 7-10 years of teaching experience in ELT. All participants were following a curriculum proposed by the State Ministry of Education (MoE) and they were all full-time language teachers at their institutions. The participants were

working at four different private schools in Adana at the time of the study. Participants of the study were chosen from private schools because there were both native and nonnative English teachers working at the same institution.

Data Collection

This study adopted a case study design in which the data was collected qualitatively. As for the sampling, the researchers focused on homogeneous sampling to respond to the research questions and achieve the objectives of the study.

The data was collected through two techniques: an open-ended questionnaire and four focused group interviews conducted in four different private middle schools. These schools were all located in Adana, Turkey. In this study, descriptive design was utilized to analyze and interpret the qualitative data gathered throughout the study. Keeping in mind that qualitative design needs to rely on data gathered from different sources, both an open-ended questionnaire and face-to-face interviews were employed in collecting the data. Thematic analysis was carried out for determining common themes and they were all discussed with verbatim.

Instruments

As was stated above, the data was collected via two techniques: an open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. To ensure the intelligibility of the questionnaire, the researchers conducted a piloting study with 10 Turkish EFL teachers and some minor changes were made. Upon revising the items in the questionnaire, three experts in the field were asked to check the intelligibility of the items. Each participant in the study was interviewed for 15-20 minutes. The researcher conducted the interviews at the meeting room of each institution by the required consent released from each school principal. The researchers and participants negotiated a schedule to have an interview, and the interviews took 24 hours to complete.

Anonymity and confidentiality were taken care of during the whole research process. Twenty-four participating EFL teachers were interviewed to gather more reliable qualitative data about participants' perceptions related to English being a global language. The semi-structured interviews which aimed to provide the researcher with an in-depth analysis of the data about participating teachers' perceptions specifically searched into teachers' perceptions of themselves as teachers of English as an international language (EIL) and their perceived needs in teaching EIL. The interviews were conducted and recorded in the meeting hall of each private school and were later transcribed. The following questions were posed to participants in the interviews:

English Language Teachers' Views On Nativeness And Non-Nativeness Of English Teachers

How do you perceive culture in ELT and how do you deal with culture in your classrooms? How do you perceive yourself as a language teacher? Do you feel any difference between yourself as nonnative and native English speaking teachers? If so, in what aspects?

Based on your observations, how do students view native and nonnative English speaking teachers?

What is the administration's attitude towards NST and NNST?

Are class hours allocated fairly between NST and NNST?

Is there any unfairness observed regarding staff work, such as duty work, etc.?

Who do you think English belongs to? To inner-circle countries or speakers of the language?

The researchers took every effort to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. For credibility issues, member checking was conducted to interpret the interview data by asking the participants to verify the transcribed data. Reliability was accomplished upon researchers getting together to decode and decipher categories and themes in the analysis process to eliminate potential researcher bias. Additionally, the researchers received support from other colleagues who are experts in the design of qualitative research regarding coding and theme identification. Finally, the researcher took every effort to explain each step of the study as clear as possible to ensure the dependability of the research.

All the participants voluntarily participated in the study and filled out study consent forms. They also were informed about the confidentiality of the data; were assigned numbers, and were assured that the data would not be shared with third parties. No conflict of interest with other people or parties was declared by the researchers.

Data Analysis

The data obtained through the two instruments, open-ended questionnaire, and interviews, was analyzed in terms of common emerging themes.

ResultsEmerging themes from an open-ended questionnaire and interviews

Four different categories of emerging themes, along with verbatim, will be discussed in this section.

Culture

Almost all the participants in the study (n:24) underlined the importance of visual materials to reflect upon culture in classroom settings. Language teachers here in the study took samples that did reflect daily instances of each specific culture. For example, while NESTs celebrating Easter would bring items related to celebrations to the classroom, the NNESTs in

this study would introduce the local culture by giving some vivid examples, talking about ayran (diluted yoghurt) and yoghurt. And NNESTs can easily explain how to make ayran in English to their students so that they can teach this term or concept when they come across anyone unfamiliar with the Turkish culture. Another cultural characteristic concerning both cultures is touching. While this is hardly permissible in NESTs' culture, it is rather common in NNESTs'. NESTs observe more distance during communication in class, while this may not be the case among NNESTs. Learners stated that they find humor in NESTs' classes, while this is not usually the case in NNESTs.

Another emerging theme with a high frequency was found to be authenticity. Twenty participants in the study thought that authenticity could be achieved by dealing with the target culture in class. These participants stated that they used both their local and target cultures to prove to be more interesting and meaningful for their learners. Another theme, self-identification was merged in NNESTs elicited data. Eight participants claimed that they referred to Turkish culture in class to assert their Turkish identity. The verbatim below displays participants' views in this sense:

Participant 4: *As an NNEST, I focus on our own culture, which is more interesting for my students since they are familiar with the concepts.*

Teaching strategies

Regarding grammatical usage, 18 of the participants mentioned that NNESTs were more effective in teaching structure and mechanical drills. However, they added that NESTs were also more adept in oral skills, and yet NNESTs had more pedagogical knowledge and teaching skills so that learners could easily comprehend issues taught by NNESTs. NESTs may have more discipline problems when compared to NNESTs. NNESTs can control learners more easily since they already are familiar with local culture and ways how to tackle discipline issues. The verbatim below displays one of the participants' views related to this issue.

Participant 7: *It is the teaching style, and not natives, that makes a teacher competent.*

Students' views of NESTs and NNESTs

Twenty-one of the participants mentioned that NESTs were liked much but NNESTs were regarded much more interesting and humorous in class and they liked their lessons more due to humor integration into their classes. Parents in private schools prefer to have NESTs instead of NNESTs since they have the belief that NESTs are better teachers than NNESTs. The verbatim below displays one of the participants' views about students' views on this matter.

English Language Teachers' Views On Nativeness And Non-Nativeness Of English Teachers

Participant 11: *Students seek fun in English classrooms and this is achieved better by NESTs.*

Administration's attitude towards NESTs and NNESTs

Twenty-two of the participants claimed that the primary expectation of the administration from NESTs was to fulfill responsibilities such as workload, meetings, etc. The participants stated that while NESTs had only 2 class hours, NNEST did at least 6 with one class at the primary level. The administrators expected much more from NNESTs than they did from NESTs, and this the administration would make legally binding in NNESTs' contracts. While NESTs were strictly observant of their rights, NNESTs could be more adaptive and flexible in taking extra responsibility, albeit may not exist in the contract. The verbatim below depicts one of the participants' views regarding the administration's attitude towards NESTs and NNESTs.

Participant 15: *Our principal is not fair in distributing duties among native and nonnative teachers and this makes us frustrated at work.*

In general, both NESTs and NNESTs could have different teaching qualities which may differ from culture to culture. Respondents in this study expressed that they should do more work on oral skills rather than dealing with so much grammar to have interesting and lively class sessions for their learners. A good teacher, according to NNESTs in the study, is someone who is loved and respected, someone who connects the known to the unknown, as content requires, provides training and education, and discovers talents in students. For interactive speaking and listening skills, all NNESTs agreed that NESTs were valued much due to their pronunciation and procedural knowledge, especially due to their knowledge of idioms, collocations, and other colloquial language items. However, they also held the belief that through good training and workshops, NNESTs could easily overcome such shortcomings in their professional life.

Conclusions and Implications

The respondents in this study unanimously claimed that a good teacher does not necessarily have to be a NEST, since an NNEST may have considerable teaching qualities in an EFL context. While NESTs may provide richness and variety in classes, NNESTs could easily familiarize themselves with different cultures speaking English and thus prepare themselves to maintain effective English classes. Undoubtedly, regardless of who you are, native or non-native, what truly matters is the teaching qualifications you bear and the techniques and methods you utilize to impart these to your students.

With its limited scope and participants, this study may have some implications for school principals who may find themselves employing NESTs besides NNESTs. This is particularly important when it comes to adherence to fairness in workload delegation and observance of ethical issues in the working place. Also, similar implications have been addressed in Ölmez İstanbullu's (2019) and Genc and Bada's (2005) studies where it is stated that individual and contextual factors would affect the quality of NNESTs and institutional supports, as well as individual efforts, would highly contribute to empower NNESTs.

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English Language Teachers' Views On Nativeness And Non-Nativeness Of English Teachers

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