

## Pre-service Teachers' Perceptions of Native and Non-native Speaker EFL Teachers\*

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### Abstract

This study was an attempt to explore the perceptions of non-native speaking pre-service teachers of English on the native speaker versus non-native speaker dichotomy in the field of ELT. Being freshman and senior students, two groups of ELT majors of a state university in Turkey participated in this study in order to reveal the different viewpoints across the grade levels and understand how the pre-service education has shaped their opinions. A questionnaire adapted from Ling and Braine's (2007), and Lasagabaster and Sierra's (2002) studies was used in order to study the perceptions of pre-service teachers' on the linguistic competence, teaching skills and subject matter knowledge, knowledge of the target culture, in class communication and classroom management skills of native English speaking teachers (NESTs from now on) versus non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs from now on). The analyses of data in the form of descriptive statistics depicted that both freshman and senior students thought that NESTs are better in teaching speaking, pronunciation, and culture whereas NNESTs are better in teaching grammar and English for beginners. Apart from corroborating previous research, the findings of this study can offer certain implications for language teacher education.

**Keywords:** Language teacher education, pre-service teachers, native/non-native speaking teachers

### Öz

Bu çalışmada ana dil olarak İngilizce konuşmayan öğretmen adaylarının İngilizce eğitimi alanındaki ana dili İngilizce olan ve ana dili İngilizce olmayan öğretmen ayırımına yönelik

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algılarının araştırılması amaçlanmıştır. Birinci ve dördüncü sınıf olmak üzere iki grup olan, Türkiye’de bir devlet üniversitesinde eğitim gören İngilizce Öğretmenliği öğrencileri sınıflar arasındaki farklılığı ortaya koymak ve aday öğretmen eğitiminin düşüncelerini nasıl şekillendirdiğini anlamamız amacıyla bu çalışmaya katılmıştır. Ling ve Braine’nin (2007), ve Lasagabaster ve Sierra’nın (2002) çalışmalarından uyarlanan bir anket öğretmen adaylarının ana dil olarak İngilizce konuşan ve konuşmayan öğretmenlerin dil yetilerine, öğretme becerilerine, sınıf içi iletişim ve disiplini becerilerine ilişkin algılarını araştırmak amacıyla kullanılmıştır. Betimsel istatistiksel analizler hem birinci hem dördüncü sınıf öğrencilerinin ana dil olarak İngilizce konuşan öğretmenlerin konuşma, telaffuz, ve kültürü daha iyi öğrettiği, ana dil olarak İngilizce konuşmayan öğretmenlerinse dil bilgisi ve başlangıç seviyesi için İngilizce öğretminde daha iyi olduklarını düşündüklerini göstermiştir. Alandaki önceki çalışmaları desteklemesinin yanı sıra, elde edilen sonuçlar yabancı dil öğretimi için önemli çıkarımlar sunabilir.

*Anahtar Kelimeler:* Dil öğretmeni eğitimi, öğretmen adayları, anadili İngilizce olan/olmayan öğretmenler

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## **Introduction**

The discussion concerning the dichotomy of native speaker versus non-native speaker in ELT probably has taken the most widespread attention since Medgyes’ (1992) chapter where it was put forward that native English speaking teachers (NESTs) and non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs) differ mostly in terms of language competence and teaching practice. In that paper, he asks whether NESTs would make better professionals simply because they are superior to NNESTs in terms of language competence. He answers this question with a definite no, and maintains that “natives and non-natives stand an equal chance of achieving professional success” (p. 346). He further states what is seen as a weakness on one side can turn into an advantage on the other, that is non-native teachers can successfully compete with natives especially in monolingual teaching settings. He also lists the possible ways of how NNESTs can benefit from their non-nativeness as follows:

- 1)Only non-NESTs can serve as imitable models of the successful learner of English.
- 2)Non-NESTs can teach learning strategies more effectively.
- 3)Non-NESTs can provide learners with more information about the English language.
- 4)Non-NESTs are more able to anticipate language difficulties.
- 5)Non-NESTs can be more empathetic to the needs and problems of their learners.
- 6)Only non-NESTs can benefit from sharing the learners' mother tongue. (p.347)

All of the above statements when analyzed individually point to sensible facts about the comparison of NESTs and NNESTs, and in the end imply that their strengths and weaknesses balance each other out. In his full-length book, entitled *The Non-native Teacher*, Medgyes (1994) based his argument of calling native and non-native teachers as “two different species” on four hypotheses which are:

- 1) NESTs and non-NESTs differ in terms of their language proficiency.
- 2) They differ in terms of their teaching behavior.
- 3) The discrepancy in language proficiency accounts for most of the differences found in their teaching behavior.
- 4) They can be equally good teachers in their own terms. (p. 27)

He tested these hypotheses with the help of three surveys conducted with 325 teachers from 11 different countries. The perceived differences between NESTs and NNESTs in teaching behavior were grouped under the categories of own use of English, general attitude, attitude to teaching the language, and attitude to teaching the culture. There emerged significant differences between these two groups; however, these were not taken to mean that one is better than the other. From a cultural perspective, Canagarajah (1999) also views native speakers as better teachers in EFL contexts due to their unique cultural knowledge, while he sees non-native speakers as better teachers in ESL contexts thanks to their multicultural experience. In a similar vein, Cook (2005) sketches the strengths and weaknesses of native and non-native speaker teachers as follows:

- non-native speaker teachers provide models of proficient L2 users in action in the classroom
  - non-native speaker teachers present examples of people who have become successful L2 users
  - non-native speaker teachers often have more appropriate training and background
  - non-native speaker teachers may have the disadvantage of lesser fluency, etc. (p.57-58)
- From an L2 user perspective he also lists the advantage of representing a successful model for learners as Medgyes (1992) did.

### **Teachers’ Perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs**

Following the ground-breaking work of Medgyes’ (1992), a number of researchers have entered the previously avoided field of native/non-native teacher distinction. Reves and Medgyes (1994) were among the first researchers to conduct an international investigation into the differences between NESTs and NNESTs in their teaching practices

mainly stemming from their differing levels of language competence. With the help of a questionnaire, they aimed to reach a total of 216 native speaker and non-native speaker English teachers from 10 different countries and looked for the relationship between their language proficiency and their self-perceptions together with their teaching attitudes. The first emerging result was that the majority of teachers identified themselves as non-native speakers, and 68 % of them stated there are differences in the teaching practices of NESTs and NNESTs. Another striking result was the admittance of 84 % of the NNS teachers that they experience language difficulties, including vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, speaking, and listening comprehension. Only a minority of the participants admitted that these difficulties did not exert any negative effects on their teaching performance. In the light of these findings, the authors suggested “frequent exposure to authentic native language environments and proficiency-oriented in-service training activities” for NNESTs to overcome their language-related difficulties (p. 364). Moreover, they emphasized the importance of raising the awareness of non-native speaker English teachers about their advantageous position as language teachers.

With a slightly different design, Samimy and Brutt-Griffler (1999) investigated self-perceptions of 17 non-native graduate students attending TESOL programs in the US. In addition to surveys and interviews, the researchers collected data through classroom discussions and autobiographical writings of the participants. They aimed to find out if those graduate students perceived any differences between native and non-native speaker English teachers, and if they did, what the perceived differences were. The results demonstrated that language-related difficulties affected the teaching practice of most of the participants in varying degrees. Additionally, nearly all of the participants indicated they perceived some differences between NESTs and NNESTs, in that native instructors were perceived as more informal, fluent, accurate, and able to use a variety of techniques; whereas the latter group of teachers was identified as using L1 for the medium of instruction, relying on textbooks, being aware of negative transfer, and knowing the learners’ background. Probably, the most striking conclusion emerging from the participants’ responses was their attaching the source of differences in the teaching practices of native and non-native speaker instructors to the sociocultural contrasts between Western and Asian societies rather than to the factors pertinent to language proficiency.

Inbar-Lourie (2001) explored where English language teachers in Israel put themselves on the continuum of native and non-native speaker, and which factors are influential in their defining themselves as such. In this first phase of the study, self-report questionnaires were conducted with the participation of 102 teachers to examine the elements that account for their native or non-native self-ascriptions. The findings depicted nine variables influential in explaining the teachers' self-perceived native speaker identity. Two of them were found to be the best predictors of teachers' self-ascribed identity; namely, whether they were exposed to the language between the ages of 0 to 6 and whether the others perceived them as native speakers or not. There is also a second phase of the study, which aimed to determine whether native or non-native identity affects the espoused pedagogical perceptions of 93 NESTs and 171 NNESTs. Through a self-report questionnaire consisting of 48 items, it was revealed that teachers' native or non-native background is insufficient to explain differences in most perception domains, and three points were found to have explanatory power in accounting for differences between native and non-native groups. Firstly, the native group seemed to agree more with the superiority of native teachers in terms of language proficiency and teaching culture. On the contrary, NNESTs acknowledged the fact that they maintain better relationships with students, and they could make use of shared language to facilitate the learning process. However, no differences emerged in perception categories pertaining to teaching and assessment practices, to defining students' knowledge in English, to the status of English language, and to the goals for teaching it. Furthermore, the researcher indicates that "emphasis on the language proficiency of the native speaking teacher devalues the professional status of language teaching as it disregards subject matter knowledge components acquired through training and professional expertise" (p.3). In conclusion, it was declared inefficient to classify teachers as native or non-native speakers, and rather hiring teachers based on their professional expertise and personal attributes was recommended.

Árva and Medgyes (2000) integrated a new dimension into the study of differences between native and non-native teachers: the insights gained from their classroom practices. In addition to investigating the differences in the teaching behavior between native and non-native teachers, through classroom observations they aimed to compare their self-reported behavior to their actual classroom behavior. With the primary

aim of reviewing the differences between NESTs and NNESTs established in the work *The Non-native Teacher* (Medgyes, 1994), the lessons of the 10 participating teachers were video-recorded and follow-up interviews were conducted with each of them. In terms of language proficiency, the results of that study also revealed a superiority of native speakers in all four language skills and all areas of competence. Furthermore, the video-recorded lessons of NESTs were characterized by humor, a loose atmosphere, teachers' acting as facilitators and as sources for cultural information. As for NNESTs, confirming the findings of Medgyes (1994), all five non-native teachers were observed to heavily rely on at least one course book. They turned out to be poor in providing cultural information, and some of them led rather strict classroom environments.

Another study on non-native teachers' self-perceptions is Llurda and Huguet's (2003) research implemented with the participation of 101 NNESTs working in primary and secondary schools in Spain. The researchers aimed at finding out the subjects' perceptions of their own language skills, the effect of those skills on their teaching, the development of those skills over time, their teaching ideology, and lastly their position in the native speaker and non-native speaker teacher debate. Firstly, the results depicted that secondary school teachers were more confident about their language skills than primary school teachers. Yet, primary school teachers showed greater awareness of their language improvement compared to secondary school teachers. With regard to the research question about the participants' stance in the NEST/ NNEST debate, primary school teachers seemed to be more affected by native speaker fallacy; that is, half of them expressed they would prefer native speaker teachers if they were to hire language teachers. On the other hand, the majority of secondary school teachers opted for a balanced hiring option between NESTs and NNESTs. Furthermore, they expressed their belief in the advantages of being non-native speaker teachers.

In his study of comparing expert and novice NESTs and NNESTs in Chinese schools, McNeill (2005) examined teachers' awareness of lexical difficulties in pedagogical texts. The results indicated that novice non-native speaker teachers were very skilled at predicting the words that would pose difficulties for learners, whereas neither novice nor expert native speaker teachers were skillful in making accurate predictions about the possible lexical problems students would encounter. Asato (2008) in a small-scale case study sets out to explore the self-perceptions of one Japanese and

one Korean teacher in terms of their linguistic competence, communicative competence, and teaching methodologies in comparison to native English speaking professionals. The findings indicated that both of the participants were aware of their advantages of being multilingual and of their language learning experiences. Moreover, they viewed native speaker English teachers as providers of authentic language input with poorer pedagogical knowledge.

In her study of exploring NNESTs' awareness of different cultural dimensions while teaching English as an international language, Bayyurt (2006, 2017) conducted semi-structured interviews with 12 non-native speaker English teachers from public and private schools. The relevant finding for the scope of the present study is the teachers' belief that being a non-native speaker teacher is an advantage for them in approaching cultural and linguistic issues in EFL classrooms. Additionally, Dogancay-Aktuna (2008) examined the perceptions of 21 NNESTs in Turkey on their status as non-native English teachers, on their professional identities, and on their skills. The majority of participants rated their language skills as high in general. Still, some others expressed a need to improve their competence on the use of idiomatic expressions and conversational English. More than 50 % of the participants noted that they had experienced prejudice due to their non-native status, and most of them thought this status was detrimental for their professional career and teaching experience. Nevertheless, they showed appreciation of being NNEST as it enabled them to understand the issues better in this context than if they were native speaker teachers. Ozturk and Atay (2010) also investigated the perceptions of three Turkish teachers on NESTs/NNESTs dichotomy over a period of eighteen months. Through conducting interviews with these non-native speaker teachers, they reached the conclusions that being a non-native teacher affects the morale of their participants in a negative way and they perceive themselves less in rank in view of the NESTs. A further result of this study displays the current position of Turkey on NESTs/NNESTs issue as it was made apparent that most institutions advertised themselves as employing native speaker teachers and they preferred NESTs for their vacant positions.

The research spanning over two decades now on the self-perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs depicts that both groups are well aware of the difference between native and non-native speaker teachers with regard to their linguistic and teaching skills. Most

importantly, they perceive the adverse effects of this lower proficiency on their teaching behavior as well as realizing the benefits of sharing the same language, culture, and learning experience with their learners on their practices. Besides, it is far-fetched to assume that NESTs and NNESTs are monolithic in nature considering the variation within each group stemming from individual differences with regard to experience and pedagogical skills (Moussu, 2010).

### **Students' Perceptions of NESTs/NNESTs continuum**

In addition to the self-perceptions of teachers regarding native/non-native speaker teacher issue, it is immensely valuable to investigate students' opinions on this topic so as to obtain a clearer and wider picture. It is also vital to study the perceptions of students in terms of understanding their perceptions regarding the unique qualities of NESTs and NNESTs and to make all the stakeholders aware of what students' preferences are (Uzum, in press). One of the early studies that contribute to this field is Moussu's (2002) master's thesis in which she intended to reveal the feelings and expectations of 84 ESL students at a U.S. university about their NNESTs at the beginning of the semester and how their perceptions were influenced by time and exposure. A questionnaire was given to students both at the beginning and at the end of the term and three interviews were conducted with six students in this 14-week period. The results depicted that in general students held positive views of their NNESTs at the beginning of the semester, and that their positive views increased through time and exposure.

Lasagabaster and Sierra (2002) exemplified the situation from the autonomous community of Basque in Spain regarding 72 undergraduate students' views about NESTs and NNESTs. With the help of a questionnaire, they asked English Language major students on the one hand, and Basque, Spanish and German Philology major students on the other to rate native and non-native speaker teachers in terms of specific areas, such as language skills, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, etc. Their results depicted a general preference for NESTs at all levels, but also the number of students who preferred native speaker teachers increased in higher levels (i.e., at tertiary level). In line with the results of Medgyes' (1994) study on the self-perceptions of teachers, students also showed a preference for native teachers in areas of pronunciation, speaking, vocabulary,



culture, and civilization respectively. On the other hand, they exclusively preferred NNESTs for teaching grammar and learning strategies.

In a qualitative design, Mahboob (2004) set out to examine the perceptions of 32 students at a U.S. university regarding the distinctions between native and non-native speaker teachers. The results indicated students' preferences for NNESTs because they were thought to employ various teaching methodologies and to be better able to teach grammar and to answer students' questions. Moreover, they believe that NNESTs are better teachers since they have gone through the same experiences as the learners. However, the participants of that study expressed their positive regard for NESTs especially in terms of teaching oral skills including pronunciation as well as teaching vocabulary and culture.

Moussu (2006) studied student attitudes, teacher self-perceptions, and intensive English programs' administrators' beliefs and practices concerning native and non-native speaking ESL teachers in her doctoral thesis. As a large-scale, cross-sectional and longitudinal investigation, she gave questionnaires to 1040 ESL students both at the beginning and at the end of an academic year, and to 18 NNESTs and 78 NESTs. The results showed that all in all students held more positive attitudes towards NESTs than NNESTs. However, the students taught by NNESTs had more positive attitudes towards their teachers than the students taught by NESTs had. Similar to the findings of her M.A. thesis, time and exposure increased the positive attitudes of students towards both NESTs and NNESTs in this study, too. At odds with the findings of previous studies (e.g., Mahboob, 2004), students did not find NNESTs better at teaching grammar, but appreciated the listening/speaking classes they took from these teachers. As for the self-perceptions of teachers, it was observed that NNESTs lack confidence in their language proficiency and teaching skills; however, they were aware of the advantage of going through similar language learning experiences with them.

Ling and Braine's (2007) article is a contribution to the literature since in contrast to the previous studies conducted in ESL settings in the USA, their study takes the views of university level EFL students in Hong Kong into consideration. Via conducting a questionnaire with 420 participants from seven distinct universities and interviews with 10 participants from three of these universities, they aimed to discover the attitudes of university students towards non-native speaking teachers of English. Overall, students

expressed their positive attitudes towards NNESTs despite some stated shortcomings, such as an exam-oriented teaching and spoon feeding students in their language use. On the other hand, the students acknowledged the strengths of their NNESTs, such as applying effective teaching strategies and understanding the difficulties students encountered due to holding a similar educational and cultural background.

In the context of Turkey, Üstünoğlu (2007) carried out research on the students' perceptions of native and non-native teachers of English in Turkey. With the help of a 30-item questionnaire, the opinions of 311 university students concerning 38 native and non-native teachers' in-class teaching roles, in-class management roles, in-class communication roles, and individual features were analyzed. The results point to a meaningful difference between native and non-native teachers from students' point of view. Specifically, NNESTs were found to fulfill in-class teaching and in-class management roles in a better way than NESTs whereas native teachers turned out to present more favorable qualities and to fulfill in-class communication skills better. On the other hand, in Kemaloglu-Er's (2017) study on university students' perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs in an English-medium university setting in Turkey, no significant differences were found between NESTs and NNESTs with regard to in-class teaching roles as well as in-class management roles. Yet, similar to Ustunluoglu (2007), NESTs were reported to be significantly better in in-class communication skills with some more favorable qualities. Kemaloglu-Er (2017) emphasized the joint collaboration of NESTs and NNESTs in the research setting, which was stated to pave the way for a sound partnership and high levels of professionalism. Inceçay and Atay's (2008) study can be given as another example of the students' perceptions of native and non-native speaker EFL teachers. Data were collected by means of video-recordings and interviews from 2 teachers and 18 students. Their findings showed that although the majority of participants expressed a preference for native speaker teachers, in total students had diverse attitudes towards NESTs and NNESTs due to the different cultural backgrounds of teachers, teachers' relationships with their students, and the teaching techniques they used in their classrooms.

### **Nativeness/Non-nativeness from a World Englishes Perspective**

Kramsch (1997) articulates that being a native speaker and having a high command of a language does not necessarily mean that every native speaker is entitled to teach that language. Considering the fact that English has become an indigenized language in most of the countries that Kachru (1976) defined as the outer circle, it is really difficult to classify people as native speakers or non-native speakers. Moussu and Llurda (2008) provide a good example of this situation by portraying the case of a child raised in a country where a non-native variety of English is spoken as the first language (e.g., India, Nigeria), and posit that we would have a native speaker of a non-native variety in such a case. In a similar vein, they maintain that it would be rather inaccurate to assume a homogenous group of non-native speakers since each individual comes from a different geographical, cultural, and linguistic background. In sum, the authors put forward that the categorization of NS versus NNS fails to project the real conditions and language proficiency of a given speaker, and is even misleading in suggesting that one is superior to the other in communicating effectively and intelligibly. In the end, they recommend it would be wise to use these terms with “extreme caution” (p. 319).

Coskun (2010) reviews the relevant literature on the place of English in Turkey and on the concept of World Englishes with a specific reference to teaching culture and pronunciation in the context of Turkey as an expanding circle country. In the end, he challenges the traditional approaches of teaching pronunciation and culture which focused only on native-speaker models, and by linking the issue to the World Englishes perspective he suggests that ELT profession in Turkey should adopt different paths to expose students to a variety of speaking and discourse patterns across cultures so that they can be linguistically ready for intercultural communication.

The review of literature above makes it apparent that there is a fairly satisfactory number of studies conducted on the perceptions of teachers (both native and non-native) and of EFL learners. Nevertheless, the views of freshman and senior pre-service teachers of ESL/EFL have not been the focus of many studies in a comparative manner. The participants of the current study can be regarded as both students and teachers, in that freshman students are more akin to approach the issue from students’ perspective. Senior students, on the other hand, seem to have answered the questionnaire more from teachers’ perspective as they are a few steps closer to being a teacher than freshman students who

still stand on the student end of the student to teacher continuum. In fact, as teacher candidates it is rather important to raise the awareness of ELT students on this issue as well as introducing them the debates over ELF. To this end, the present study can contribute to the existing literature by taking into consideration pre-service teachers' perceptions about NESTs/NNESTs distinction as well as asking for their opinions about the hotly debated issue of ELF. The specific research questions to be investigated through this design are as follows:

1) What are the perceptions of freshman and senior ELT students on the dichotomy of NESTs/NNESTs?

2) What are the perceptions of freshman and senior ELT students on the dichotomy of NESTs/NNESTs in the context of teaching English as part of ELF?

### **Method**

The participants of this study are 46 freshman and 48 senior students of the Foreign Languages Teaching Department of a state university in Istanbul, Turkey. All of the participants have been following an intense ELT curriculum in this department, which mainly follows the teacher education program regulated by the Council of the Higher Education. All human research procedures were followed including institutional permissions and consent processes.

In order to reach a large group of students and to obtain a meaningful and representative sample as much as possible, the current study made use of a questionnaire which consists of 37 items in total and which is adapted from Ling and Braine (2007), and Lasagabaster and Sierra (2002) with certain omissions and additions. The questionnaire was piloted with the help of two different colleagues with PhDs on ELT who scrutinized the items meticulously and indicated the changes needed. The final draft of the instrument was prepared accordingly. The first two items were multiple choice questions that asked the participants to choose all that apply on what NESTs and NNESTs would teach best. The third item of the questionnaire aims to explore students' familiarity with three central notions of the focus of this study. Thus, it asks the participants to write the long forms of three acronyms which are EFL, ESL, and ELF. The rest of the instrument includes 34 statements to which the participants would show the degree of their agreement on a five-point Likert type scale.

For the ease of analysis and for the sake of displaying results in a more meaningful way, similar levels of agreement degrees were combined in together; that is “disagree strongly” and “disagree somewhat”, and “agree strongly” and “agree somewhat” were brought together as they point to fairly similar degrees of agreement. Therefore, in the end the results were demonstrated on a three-point scale containing classes of “disagree strongly/ disagree somewhat”, “neither agree nor disagree”, and “agree strongly/ agree somewhat” answers. All the results were entered into SPSS version 20 and descriptive statistics were used to analyze data. For the first two questions, frequencies for each option (ranging from “a” to “o”) were calculated to reach the average of students’ choices and the most commonly chosen options. The third item was analyzed qualitatively by counting the correct entries for each acronym. For items from 4 to 37, frequencies were calculated to see the distribution for each item, and percentages were given in the tables which would compare the results for freshman and senior students.

### **Results**

The first two questions asked pre-service teachers’ opinions on what NESTs and NNESTs teach best, and provided the options of:

- a. reading
- b. grammar
- c. listening
- d. writing/composition
- e. speaking/oral communication
- f. pronunciation
- g. culture
- h. vocabulary
- i. test preparation classes (TOEFL,etc.)
- j. college preparation classes
- k. business English
- l. English for beginners
- m. English intermediate learners
- n. English for advanced learners
- o. nothing

Since the participants were instructed to choose all that apply to these two questions, the percentages of each option were calculated individually. Hence, the results are displayed in this fashion. The analysis of the first two questions yielded striking results for the answers of the first two research questions and provided clues for the participants’ perceptions of the differences between NESTs and NNESTs. They also displayed the overlapping and differentiating points between the freshman and senior

students. Accordingly, 77 % of freshman students chose speaking/ oral communication, 70 % chose pronunciation, and 56 % chose culture as the areas that NESTs teach best. Similarly, senior students were also of the opinion that native teachers teach speaking/ oral communication, pronunciation, and culture best (85 %, 85 %, and 81 % respectively). Whereas freshman students noted that NNESTs teach grammar, vocabulary, and English for beginners most effectively (with a percentage of 76, 47, and 47 respectively), senior students perceived that NNESTs teach grammar, English for beginners, and writing/ composition best (73 % for grammar, 73% for English for beginners, and 62 % for writing/ composition).

Unfortunately, none of the participants in this study provided the long forms of the acronyms of ESL, EFL, and ELF. Thus, they showed limited to no awareness on what these abbreviations meant. In fact, this was expressed by a couple of students in personal communication when the researcher informally asked some of them the reason why they left those parts empty.

For creating a meaningful discussion, the items from 4 to 37 are classified under five groups as they cluster around the same dimension and will be examined with reference to the items under their respective category. The first five items of the Likert-type scale are pertinent to the perceptions on language competence of NESTs and NNESTs. The answers of freshman and student students are given in Table 1:

Table 1.

*Pre-service teachers' perceptions of NESTs/NNESTs' language proficiency*

Statements	Percentages					
	Disagree strongly/ Disagree somewhat		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree strongly/ Agree somewhat	
	Freshman	Senior	Freshman	Senior	Freshman	Senior
4. I think ESL /EFL teachers should all speak with a perfect accent.	14.6	10.8	31.7	6.5	53.6*	82.6*
5. NNESTs have difficulties understanding and responding to students' questions in English.	31.1	47.9	35.6	22.9	33.3	29.1
6. Many NNESTs have difficulty understanding and answering students' questions in the target language.	35.5	42.5	37.8	31.9	26.7	25.5

7. NESTs can correct wrong and incomplete answers more effectively than NNESTs.	22.2	14.5	42.2	22.9	35.5	62.5*
8. NNESTs speak more clearly and comprehensibly than NESTs.	33.3	33.3	24.4	27.1	42.2	39.6

\* % > 50

When we have a look at the distribution of answers for this first part of the questionnaire, it is apparent that the percentages are quite evenly distributed along the continuum of “disagree strongly/ disagree somewhat”, “neither agree nor disagree”, and “agree strongly/ agree somewhat” scale. Actually, it is interesting to note that a great number of participants opted for the “neither agree nor disagree” option for nearly all of the items. Still, it looks like senior students have a slightly better understanding of the distinction between NESTs and NNESTs with regard to their language proficiency. The most distinguishing result seems to have emerged for the first item since more than half of the both freshman and senior students chose the “agree strongly/ agree somewhat” options for this statement. Therefore, it is sensible to argue that most of the participants think that ESL /EFL teachers should all speak with a perfect accent. In fact, nearly all of senior students agreed with this statement, whereas slightly more than half of freshman students expressed their agreement for this item. It is obvious, then, that senior students who will most probably be non-native speaker English language teachers next year place heavy emphasis on the use of a decent accent by English language teachers. Moreover, nearly half of the senior students disagreed with the statement that “NNESTs have difficulties understanding and responding to students’ questions in English”. Apparently, they do not believe that non-native teachers suffer from using English in the classroom. Interestingly, the majority of them thought that NESTs can correct wrong and incomplete answers more effectively than NNESTs. Although they believe in the proficiency of NNESTs in tackling classroom talk, if they have to compare, they find the linguistic abilities of NESTs better than NNESTs.

The following eight items of the questionnaire are pertaining to pre-service teachers’ perceptions of NESTs/NNESTs’ teaching skills and subject-matter knowledge. Under this category, the most striking results again emerged from the senior students’ answers, while freshman students remained unsure for most of the issues under this classification, too as it is displayed in Table 2. This may stem from their entering the field recently and from the fact that they had not received any ELT courses yet. They had just

completed their first term at the department which is widely shaped by advanced level language courses, such as reading-writing, oral communication or listening comprehension. Another reason may be related to the fact that most of them may not have encountered any NESTs to refer to in their school years so far. As a result, not having discussed these issues in any ELT courses and not having any experience with a native teacher may have directed them to choose “neither agree nor disagree” option and may explain the reason for their indecisiveness.

Table 2.

*Pre-service teachers' perceptions of NESTs/NNESTs' teaching skills and subject-matter knowledge*

Statements	Percentages					
	Disagree strongly/ Disagree somewhat		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree strongly/ Agree somewhat	
	Freshman	Senior	Freshman	Senior	Freshman	Senior
9. NNESTs can understand learning difficulties better than NESTs.	21.8	21.7	32.6	13	45.6	65.2*
10. NESTs are better English teachers.	25.6	37	28.3	37	44.2	26.1
11. Students can learn English better with a teacher who speaks their first language.	25	23.4	27.3	36.2	47.7	40.4
12. NNESTs motivate students to do their best to learn English.	25.6	25.5	39.5	38.3	34.9	36.2
13. It would be better if NNESTs were not allowed to teach in ESL/EFL programs.	30	83.9*	40	8.7	30	17.3
14. There are many NNESTs who teach just as effectively as NESTs.	21.5	14.6	31	8.3	47.6	77*
15. NNESTs can implement more effective learning methods than NESTs.	28.5	14.9	40.5	44.7	30.9	40.4
16. NNESTs have a more comprehensive knowledge of the subject-matter area than NESTs.	22.3	14.9	42.2	27.7	35.6	57.5*

\* % > 50



To start with discussing the results, most of the senior students agreed with the statement that “NNESTs can understand learning difficulties better than NESTs”, while almost half of the freshman students agreed that students can learn English better with a teacher who speaks their first language. These two results altogether show that the participants respect the general teaching skills and subject-matter knowledge of NNESTs. Next, a great majority of senior students disagreed with the idea that it would be better if NNESTs were not allowed to teach in ESL/EFL programs. Moreover, a large number of them agreed with the items 14 and 16, which are both about the belief that NNESTs can teach as effectively as NESTs and that they have a more comprehensive subject-matter knowledge than NESTs respectively. These, in total, demonstrate that senior students are by large aware of the NESTs/NNESTs dichotomy, and they also hold the idea that non-native teachers are as good as or even better in some aspects than native teachers when it comes to their teaching abilities of English. Furthermore, they are firmly content with the existence of non-native teachers to teach English as prospective NNESTs.

The results for the next four items examining pre-service teachers’ perceptions of NESTs/NNESTs’ knowledge of the target culture are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3.

Pre-service teachers’ perceptions of NESTs/NNESTs’ knowledge of the target culture

Statements	Percentages					
	Disagree strongly/ Disagree somewhat		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree strongly/ Agree somewhat	
	Freshman	Senior	Freshman	Senior	Freshman	Senior
17. Learners need NESTs to learn about the target culture.	11.6	23.9	25.6	17.4	62.8*	58.7*
18. Having a class with NNESTs is an opportunity for students to broaden their understanding of another culture.	31.8	25.5	29.5	42.6	38.6	31.9
19. Only NESTs know about the target culture well.	45.5	52.2*	27.3	19.6	27.3	28.2
20. NNESTs can help students adjust to the target culture better than NESTs.	29.6	27	45.7	37.5	22.7	35.4

\* % > 50

On the whole, similar results emerged from freshman and senior students for these statements. Specifically, they seem to be in line with each other in agreeing that learners

need NESTs to learn the target culture since most of them opted for “agree strongly/ agree somewhat” options for item 17. At the same time, both groups agreed in disagreeing that only NESTs know about the target culture well. Hence, it can be claimed that though the participants think NNESTs are also informed about the target culture, NESTs are better at informing learners about it.

In Table 4, the participants’ responses for the next six items of the questionnaire are provided, and they are pooled under the category of pre-service teachers’ perceptions of NESTs/NNESTs’ communication with students and classroom management skills.

Table 4.

*Pre-service teachers’ perceptions of NESTs/NNESTs’ in-class communication and classroom management skills*

Statements	Percentages					
	Disagree strongly/ Disagree somewhat		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree strongly/ Agree somewhat	
	Freshman	Senior	Freshman	Senior	Freshman	Senior
21. Many NNESTs usually communicate more effectively in the classroom than NESTs.	28.9	25	42.2	31.2	28.9	43.7
22. When there are communication problems between students and NESTs, students cannot do anything to improve the situation.	37.8	29.1	24.4	33.3	37.8	37.5
23. On the whole, NNESTs show about the same level of concern for students as NESTs do.	25	12.7	31.8	44.7	43.1	42.5
24. NNESTs are more competent in stimulating interest at the start of the lesson than NESTs.	20.5	25	47.7	37.5	31.8	37.5
25. NNESTs are more competent in maintaining order and discipline in the classroom than NESTs.	17.8	16.7	35.6	20.8	46.7	62.5*
26. NNESTs are more competent in ensuring active participation of students than NESTs.	31.8	27.1	36.4	37.5	31.8	35.4

\* % > 50

Most of the answers for the items in this part of the questionnaire are evenly distributed for both freshman and senior students. Obviously, they do not perceive much

difference between native speaker and non-native speaker teachers of English in terms of their in-class communication skills or boosting motivation/participation in learners. The most striking result concerns their high level of agreement with the idea that NNESTs are more competent in maintaining order and discipline in the classroom than NESTs. This suggests that they find non-native teachers stricter in ensuring order and discipline in the classrooms compared to native teachers. This may result from their assumptions about NESTs' being more lenient and more tolerant in the class because of their general representation in our culture as holding these qualities.

The last category under this data analysis is pre-service teachers' perceptions on ELF and teaching ELF, which covers the items from 27 to 37, and the analysis of this part answers the last two research questions.

Table 5.

Pre-service teachers' perceptions on ELF and teaching ELF

Statements	Percentages					
	Disagree strongly/ Disagree somewhat		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree strongly/ Agree somewhat	
	Freshman	Senior	Freshman	Senior	Freshman	Senior
27. Schools should teach English not as the native speakers speak it, but for efficient international communication.	23.2	14.5	25.6	20.8	51.2*	64.6*
28. I am not bothered about mistakes that other learners of English make as long as I understand what they want to say.	28	20.9	25.6	22.9	74.4*	56.2*
29. I expect my learners to reach a native-like competence.	25.6	18.7	20.9	25	53.5*	56.3*
30. British or American English are standard English.	28.6	14.9	21.4	19.1	50*	66*
31. British or American people own English language.	22	14.9	26.8	19.1	51.3*	66*
32. Turkish English or Singlish (Singaporean English) can also be taught as varieties of English.	36.6	45.8	43.9	29.2	19.5	25

33. I feel more comfortable while communicating with native speakers.	34.9	14.6	39.5	35.4	25.6	50*
34. I feel more comfortable while communicating with non-native speakers.	33.3	31.2	26.2	22.9	40.5	45.8
35. Non-native speakers have the ownership of English.	35.1	35.4	45.2	35.4	16.7	29.2
36. I place heavy emphasis on grammatical accuracy and fluency in oral production.	22	27.1	39	16.7	39	56.3*
37. I place heavy emphasis on grammatical accuracy and fluency in written production.	34.4	10.4	31.7	18.8	44	70.8*

\* % > 50

Generally, it was realized that the participants are not very open to teaching other varieties of English, and in fact expressed a general agreement about it. Accordingly, half of the freshman and most of the senior students hold the idea that British or American English are the standard English. Some contradictory results emerged from the analysis of this last part. Apparently, the participants do not care much about native-like accuracy as long as there is mutual intelligibility, and they are quite tolerant about mistakes in the learning process. Yet, they aim at a native-like competence for their learners at the same time. They conceive that British or American people have the ownership of English rather than non-native speakers, and this once again proves their traditional approach to teaching English. Different from the freshman students, fourth graders indicated that they place heavy emphasis on fluency and accuracy in both written and oral communication.

In sum, these results do not indicate a wide discrepancy between freshman and senior ELT students in their perceptions of the NESTs/NNESTs dichotomy and of the issues related to ELF. What emerges is that they do not have immutable opinions which depict stagnant views for either native or non-native teachers. Nevertheless, senior students were more determined most of the time about their preferences, while freshman students displayed evidence of confusion and uncertainty for most of the topics covered through this questionnaire. Except from this difference, when they picked up more

unequivocal options at the either end of the continuum, these always complied with the senior students' choices.

### **Discussion**

The overall results emerging from this study can be discussed under several sections. To start with the areas that pre-service teachers perceive NESTs and NNESTs teach best, it was observed that both freshman and senior students thought that native teachers teach speaking/oral communication, pronunciation, and culture while non-native teachers were assumed to teach grammar and English for beginners courses best. Although both groups selected writing/composition as an area that NNESTs teach best, vocabulary was chosen by slightly more participants as the third choice for this question by freshman students. This finding widely supports Lasagabaster and Sierra's (2002), and Mahboob's (2004) results, among others, which also exhibited students' preference of native teachers in the domains of speaking, pronunciation, and culture, and their preference for non-native teachers for teaching grammar. Especially, the participants' preference for NNESTs for the beginner levels echoes the increasing preference for NESTs by the students as their grade levels increase in Lasagabaster and Sierra's (2002) study, which again suggests an inclination for NNS teachers at the initial phases of learning English. Additionally, it lends support to İnceçay and Atay's (2008) study since their participants also indicated it would be preferable to have non-native teachers at the beginning stages as Turkish explanations of some structures would be easier to understand for them. Regarding the aspects of teaching culture, pre-service teachers, in general, subscribed to the view that students can learn culture better with NESTs than NNESTs. Despite the fact that NNESTs in the profession viewed being a non-native teacher as an advantage in terms of covering linguistic and cultural issues in the class (Bayyurt, 2006, 2017), the pre-service teachers in the present study do not hold a similar opinion. This may rise from their monolithic approach to culture (teaching only British or American culture) the same as the way they approach language competence (reaching native-like ultimate attainment). When we have a look at the issue from teachers' self-perceptions perspective, it is in line with Reves and Medgyes' (1994) findings where NNS teachers affirmed that they experienced difficulties in speaking, pronunciation, and fluency. The views of the pre-service teachers in the current study also confirm the insights of those practicing teachers.

As for the perceptions of pre-service non-native EFL teachers on the language proficiency of NESTs and NNESTs, it was noted that they expect a perfect accent from teachers of ESL/EFL. In fact, senior students placed heavier emphasis on native-like accent compared to freshman students. Therefore, as prospective teachers who will commence teaching within a year, it seems obvious that more NNS teachers will start the profession obsessed with a native-like accent. Secondly, although they believe that NNS teachers would not face any difficulties handling students' questions, still they believe in the linguistic abilities of NS teachers more. In a similar vein, Árvá and Medgyes (2000), Moussu (2006), Reves and Medgyes (1994), and Samimy and Brutt-Griffler (1999) found that as practicing NNS teachers their participants accepted that they experience language difficulties. On the other hand, NS teachers participating in those studies expressed their belief on the superiority of native speakers in terms of linguistic proficiency. It comes as no surprise that most native speakers have farther-reaching knowledge of language; however, as Inbar-Lourie (2005) underlines this over-emphasis on native speakers' language proficiency devalues the professional merits of language teaching such as subject-matter knowledge which is acquired through painstaking training and experience.

Another significant finding of the study is the high opinions of especially senior students of NNESTs in terms of their teaching abilities. They consider that NNS teachers can understand learning difficulties better than NS teachers and they have more comprehensive subject-matter knowledge. This finding lends further support to Ling and Braine's (2007), and Mahboob's (2004) investigations in that the participating students in those studies also displayed appreciation for the teaching methodologies and strategies employed by NNESTs. Furthermore, pre-service teachers participating in this investigation expressed their belief that NNESTs are better in ensuring order and discipline in the classroom compared to their NS colleagues. Similarly, the video-recorded lessons of non-native teachers in Arva and Medgyes' (2000) study were characterized by strict classroom environment, while native speaker teachers maintained looser and more informal classroom climates. Moreover, the students taking part in İnceçay and Atay's (2008) research also articulated the freedom provided in the class and the flexible nature of instructors as the reasons for their choices over NESTs. Thus, this result is consistent with the inferences of the studies highlighting that native teachers are perceived to be good at communication with their attractive individual features (e.g.

Kemaloglu-Er, 2017; Üstünoğlu, 2007), while non-native teachers' in-class management skills are emphasized (e.g. Üstünoğlu, 2007).

For the discussions around ELF, although the participants showed an awareness of using English for international communication and a tolerance for mistakes as long as mutual intelligibility is ensured, they still have a traditional stance on teaching and using Standard English and have not yet acknowledged its varieties. In fact, the participants seem to tolerate the mistakes observed during the learning period as long as mutual intelligibility is ensured. Nevertheless, their objective is to help learners reach native-like attainment in the long run. This actually contradicts with the *lingua franca* core which emphasizes the use of English for intercultural communication and mutual understanding between native speakers and non-native speakers or among non-native speakers (Jenkins, 2005). Despite the prevalent attraction of the participants of the present study to perfect accent and reaching native-like competence, Dauer (2005) holds the idea that a foreign accent should be accepted as a regional variety and should be taken with respect provided that the intelligibility is guaranteed. Moreover, Coskun (2010) also finds it crucial for Turkish learners to be exposed to different varieties of English, such as Australian-English or Indian-English rather than solely Standard English from an ELF perspective, and he goes on to suggest a number of activities to be used for that purpose. All in all, the current study depicts the perceived differences between NESTs and NNESTs by freshman and senior level teacher candidates in terms of specific teaching areas, classroom management skills, and exposing students to the target language culture although they do not seem to hold strong, stable, and conclusive perceptions as to the distinction. In a way, they view NESTs and NNESTs as powerful and strong in their own unique ways across different dimensions of teaching profession. In this respect, it lends support to Moussu's (2010) study which also put forward that students' views of native and non-native ESL/EFL teachers were not entirely positive or negative. To exemplify, in Kemaloglu-Er's (2017) study NESTs were reported to have a great deal of experience with the culture of students as well as the pedagogical culture of the educational context and know the students' L1, thus they were deemed to adapt to the students' culture well, a possible reason why there were no significant differences between NESTs and NNESTs in teaching and in-class management skills. Additionally, Todd and Pojanapunya (2009) found out that students' explicitly stated attitudes towards NESTs or NNESTs can be

different from their implicitly held attitudes and underlined the complexity and inconclusiveness of perceptions. Student teachers' uncertainty about the strengths or weaknesses of their native versus non-native instructors also illustrates the fluid nature of attitudes and how they are affected by a combination of factors including teacher's personality, identity, skills, and knowledge and student's experiences. With all these findings, this study provides support to the existing literature by presenting congruent evidence in most areas.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

This study depicts that neither freshman nor senior students have sufficient knowledge of the current issues in ELT, such as native/non-native distinction or ELF. Hence, there is an urgent need to introduce pre-service teachers to these concepts by adding courses on those subjects or integrating elements of them into the existing curriculum. A further finding of the present investigation is the freshman students' inability to make informed choices on most of the topics addressed. The fact that they are new at the department and are newly getting used to demands of college life cannot be denied. They might not hold strong opinions in either way as well possibly due to their limited experiences with native English-speaking teachers. In the light of these observations, they may also be encouraged to reflect on their strengths or weaknesses as prospective NNESTs and made aware of their teaching identities. This study takes the initial steps towards raising the awareness of non-native speaker pre-service teachers on the native/non-native teacher continuum and on the existence of ELF in the field of ELT contributing to recent studies on ELF-awareness in pre-service teacher education (Bayyurt, 2017; Deniz, Özkan & Bayyurt, 2016; Kemaloğlu-Er & Bayyurt, 2016; Sifakis and Bayyurt, 2015). As a small-scale study conducted in a very limited period of time, it only depended on questionnaire data which lacked the detailed descriptions of participants' opinions or better self-disclosure that can be gained through interviews. Therefore, it would be resourceful to replicate this study by also conducting series of interviews with groups of students from different grade levels so as to ask for the rationale or explanation for some of their choices. these are self-reported data and may reflect students' ideas and conscious thoughts about these issues, but not necessarily affect, which are more effectively measured by implicit association tests (see Todd & Pojanapunya, 2009).



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