

Nonnative Pre-Service EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Native and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers: an Exploration in Turkish Contexts

Merve Dombaycı* / Lect. (PhD Student) 

Anadolu University, Graduate School, Department of Foreign Language Education, Program in English Language Teaching (Ph.D. Program)
mervedombayci@anadolu.edu.tr

Hülya İpek / Asst.Prof. Dr. 

Anadolu University, Education Faculty, Program in English Language Teaching
hipek@anadolu.edu.tr

*Corresponding Author

Abstract

This mixed-methods study delves into the perceptions of Turkish EFL Pre-service Teachers regarding native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) and explores the potential impact of being an NNEST on their future teaching practices. In order to identify their perceptions, a questionnaire was conducted with 41 participants and the data were analyzed via descriptive statistics. In the qualitative part, open-ended questions were directed to the participants to elucidate how they think being NNEST might impact their future teaching practices. Responses were scrutinized using thematic analysis. The overall results indicated that Turkish EFL pre-service teachers recognized English can be taught effectively by both NESTs and NNESTs. They perceived having empathy in understanding students' needs and difficulties

as the main advantage of being NNEST while expressing concerns about potential disadvantages for their future practices such as nonnative pronunciation and language proficiency. On the other hand, being more self-confident and competent in using the English Language as well as teaching vocabulary, listening skills, and fluency better were the perceived main advantages of NESTs. Having a shared mother tongue with the students was considered both an advantage and a disadvantage.

Keywords: Native English-Speaking Teachers (Nests), Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers (Nnests), Pre-Service Teachers, English Language Teaching, Teacher Perceptions.

JEL Codes: I21, I23, I29

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Introduction

The debate over the respective roles of non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) and native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) in language education has escalated dramatically in recent decades as the internationalization of education is growing more and more popular each day. An ongoing debate regarding the effectiveness of being native and non-native has been reflected in language education since the 1990s. Selvi (2011, p. 187) indicates that this kind of unprofessional differentiation between NESTs and NNESTs has a very high possibility of causing “negative consequences for their teacher persona, self-esteem, and thus their in-class performance”.

As one of the pioneers addressing the issue in the language teaching and learning contexts, Medgyes (1992) indicates that although NESTs and NNESTs use different directions, both can be equally successful in the profession. He emphasizes that we should avoid unprofessional differentiations yet acknowledge the distinctions between NESTs and NNESTs. Instead, we should investigate more to normalize the differences assessing the strengths and weaknesses of each. He calls this kind of action something liberal, which is a necessary attitude in addressing this NEST and NNEST comparison issue.

Due to the ongoing discussion regarding NEST and NNEST, it is apparent that there is a gap in the research related to the impacts of this nativelikeness issue on pre-service NNESTs’ future teaching practices. The literature indeed mostly pays attention to only the perceptions related to NESTs and NNESTs. Therefore, the lack in the related literature should be addressed with research investigating pre-service EFL teachers’ perceptions towards their future teaching practices to gain a better understanding of what language teachers and prospective teachers think about NESTs and NNESTs as Moussu (2018a) suggests. This could lead to a contribution to the foreign language education field in bringing out the perceptions as well as making NESTs, NNEST, their students, readers, and authorities as well as curriculum developers realize these perceptions and take actions accordingly.

Review of Literature

The Dichotomy of NESTs and NNESTs

The globalization of the world gave rise to the use of English as a lingua franca after World War II and has led to the need for teaching and learning the English language at early stages of life. As a result, there appear to be more non-native speakers of English than native ones around the world (Moussu, 2018a). In connection with this, as more English Language teachers are needed, the question of the better teacher comes to the surface. Although new percep-

tions tend not to allow demotivating discrimination between teachers based on their nativity, the dichotomy still exists even in hiring practices of teachers seeing the natives as superior (Moussu, 2018a). This native speakerism in English Language Teaching (ELT) is related to the assumption that native speakers are better language teachers due to their linguistic and cultural expertise (Matsuda, 2018). Phillipson (1992) first called this idea of the superiority of the native speakers “the native speaker fallacy,” which was later termed by Selvi (2014, p. 589) as “the non-native speaker fallacy.” The discussion on native speakerism has been going on since the 1990s with a very clear-cut differentiation between NESTs and NNESTs. In this respect, Medgyes (1994, as cited in Medgyes, 2001, p. 434) proposes the following four assumptions:

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 on their own terms.

Now that globalization and internationalization increase each day, the assumptions of Medgyes (1994) gain support. For instance, Faez (2018, p. 2) claims that “the native/non-native dichotomy is oversimplified and problematic, as it does not capture the diverse linguistic identities that exist in today’s globalized world.” In addition, Floris and Renandya (2020) proclaim that this fallacy may threaten the power of pedagogical education and professional skills of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers. Looking into NESTs and NNESTs in the TESOL programs, Moussu (2018a) points out that authorities at certain MA TESOL programs in North American universities forbid non-native English speakers from taking part in the practicum due to concerns related to their accent, fluency, communication skills, pragmatic knowledge and cultural awareness. They are allowed to teach at low levels from time to time. Being NNESTs, their abilities are questioned right away. In the long run, as this lack of experience and opportunity may affect their performance and self-confidence, inclusion is necessary. According to Bayyurt (2018, p. 2), perceiving a native speaker as the superior English language instructor undermines NNEST inclusivity and creates inequity, which “involves seeing NESTs and NNESTs as one group whose members need equal treatment and understanding from the others in their professional and personal lives rather than marginalization of one group in favor of the other.” Indeed, as Farrell (2015) points out, we shouldn’t waste time thinking and discussing who the better teacher is and constantly promoting separation. Ins-

tead, we should focus on what competencies should be promoted.

More recently, Selvi (2025) re-evaluates Peter Medgyes' (1992) article on the worthiness of native vs. non-native English-speaking teachers (NESTs vs. non-NESTs) and presents a reappraisal of the spark that Medgyes initiated for the dichotomy. Accordingly, the stereotype of a "(non-native) speaker" was challenged by Medgyes' work on language teacher identity, which advocated for a more inclusive approach. His research questioned the use of "NESTs" and "non-NESTs" as a metric for evaluating a teacher's worth. On the surface, Medgyes' initial assertion that it is illogical to favor "NESTs" over "non-NESTs" (or vice versa) when evaluating a teacher's "worthiness" as a language user or educator was corroborated by thirty years of research. According to Selvi (2025), on a deeper level, nevertheless, Medgyes's work forced us to consider the assumptions that underlie the hierarchical dichotomy of (non) nativeness, pushing us to move beyond this binary paradigm. Selvi adds that TESOL practitioners are now urged to embrace the complexity, hybridity, and fluidity that come with identity negotiations by using a self-reflexive approach. In order to do this, Selvi suggests that we must become more conscious of our contextually dominating positionalities and the complicity they bring with normative ideologies such as "native speaker saviorism." He says that Medgyes' work continues to have an impact on how we see language teachers, even in light of the controversial nature of the terminology and acronyms. Furthermore, he emphasizes that in order to solve concerns of equality and prejudice in TESOL, it is imperative that we move beyond simplistic classifications and that we cannot rely solely on the transformative spark that Medgyes' has been carrying on his shoulders by himself for years.

Considering the EFL classrooms, it is apparent that teachers have their strengths and weaknesses and ways of teaching. In a way, they bring their unique abilities to their classrooms (Medgyes, 2001; Moussu, 2018b). In general, considering their unique features, NESTs are seen as representing the real culture of the language as well as having natural self-confidence and intuition in teaching. At the same time, according to Moussu, (2018b, p. 3) NNESTs are renowned for "their knowledge of grammar and language structure in general, as well as for their resilience, resources, patience, kindness, dedication, enthusiasm, multicultural awareness, and sense of commitment."

In particular, NNESTs usually see themselves as empathizing better with their students and being better role models because they have been in the same shoes as their students and have experienced similar challenges. This shared experience can be a motivator for their students (Madkur, 2017). Mous-

su (2018b) claims that the familiarity of NNESTs with the backgrounds of the students and understanding the educational values as well as the students' needs provide an advantage in addressing and understanding their difficulties while learning a foreign language. On the other hand, NESTs consider themselves to be modern, relaxed, and fun with the knowledge of culture and with their accent, which gives them the advantage of teaching pronunciation more effectively. However, Moussou (2018b) also claims that NNESTs have a more familiar accent, which allows students to understand easily.

All in all, in today's world where English is an international language, being dependent on the norms related to native speakerism no longer makes sense. According to Bayyurt (2018, p. 2), if this model of discrimination keeps existing, NNESTs will "perceive themselves as incompetent users of English who do not belong to the English-speaking world." Recognition of the differences and inclusion of NNESTs instead of sticking to the dichotomy is very important. For this to happen and in order not to destroy their self-confidence and self-worth and to prevent the possible feeling of professional inferiority, the value of NNESTs should be promoted (Floris & Renandya, 2020). What seems to be important here is being a good and competent EFL teacher regardless of nativism and without any feeling of inferiority. It is important that teachers empower themselves by breaking the dichotomy, acknowledging their strengths and weaknesses, and making efforts in order to be more effective English language teachers (Faez, 2018). This inclusion according to Moussu (2018a, p. 4), begins with more research looking deeper into the variety of different NEST and NNEST contexts as they possibly create "a better understanding of language teaching and help prepare and support both native and non-native speakers of English to be successful ESL/EFL teachers, ultimately putting an end to discrimination based on patterns of unfair oversimplifications."

Research Related to NESTs and NNESTs

The perceptions about NESTs and NNESTs were studied in various contexts. Students' perceptions were explored in a study with 300 students taught by 6 NESTs and 6 NNESTs in a Chinese context. Zheng (2019) found that having standard pronunciation, knowing the Western culture, and communicating with students in the target language were considered advantages of NESTs; whereas, being aware of the difficulties and needs of students and systematic teaching were the advantages of NNESTs. In addition, even though half of the students pointed out their dissatisfaction with their current oral English lessons with NESTs, many of them said that they would still choose a NEST for those lessons if they were given a chance. Walkinshaw and Duong (2012)

conducted a study with students who were 3rd year English majors at a public university in Vietnamese contexts. Their study's findings demonstrated that rather than valuing native-speakerness, the students gave importance to teacher qualities such as being familiar with the local culture and understanding students' needs, being friendly and enthusiastic, having teaching experience, as well as conducting interesting lessons. The only quality that was singled out was pronunciation and this was seen as being learned better from NESTs.

In consideration of perceptions of in-service teachers, Ma (2012) collected data from 53 NNESTs in Hong Kong and found that the participant teachers regarded NNESTs as powerful in terms of pedagogy but weak linguistically whereas the NESTs were considered as the opposite. In addition, an interesting finding was that using L1 was regarded as both a strength and weakness of NNESTs as it both motivated the students and caused teachers to lose control.

Tajeddin and Adeg (2016) conducted a study with both NESTs and NNESTs from the UK, the US, Türkiye, and Iran and found that NNESTs considered NESTs to have better speaking proficiency, pronunciation, and self-confidence. On the other hand, NESTs regarded NNESTs as having sound knowledge of teaching methodology. A salient finding of the study was that NESTs rejected the idea of NESTs being superior to NNESTs more than NNESTs did. As a result, the researchers indicated that this could be due to the already established dichotomy in ELT, which seems to impact NNESTs' self-confidence.

Furthermore, in the Lebanese context, Hadla (2013) in his questionnaire study, looked into the perceptions of students and teachers related to native and non-native English language teachers with the following categorization: Perceptions about the definition of the labels NESTs and NNESTs; Overall learning with NESTs and NNESTs; Perceived strength and weaknesses of NESTs and NNESTs; Classroom behavior and responsibility. The outcome demonstrated that NESTs were thought to be skilled in instructing oral skills and making efficient use of a variety of resources. However, NNESTs were perceived to be proficient at teaching grammar as well as culture with a higher level of empathy.

In addition to the research conducted in local contexts, Dewaele and Leung (2022) implemented cross-sectional research including 376 NNEST participants from all over the world. The study's findings demonstrated that NNESTs' language skills are a crucial component of their learning environment and it affects their attitudes, motivation, and well-being. The teachers with higher language proficiency levels were reported to be happier and more motivated in their classrooms.

Apart from the views of students and in-service te-

achers, pre-service teachers' views on NESTs and NNESTs were also investigated. In a study in the Turkish context, by investigating the perceptions of preservice teachers enrolled in an ELT program regarding native and non-native English language teachers, Boyraz et al. (2018) found that the participant preservice teachers considered NESTs as being better at teaching fluency and pronunciation as well as teaching listening skills. The authors suggested that language teacher education programs should help NNEST teacher candidates develop their self-perceptions. Similar results were also found in the study conducted by Varol and Bayyurt (2017). That is, the participants who were ELT majors perceived NESTs to be better at teaching speaking, pronunciation, and culture while considering NNESTs to be better at understanding the difficulties of students' learning and having greater subject-matter knowledge. One of the salient findings was that the seniors in the study tended to put much more emphasis on the necessity of having a native-like accent than the freshmen.

A further study by Gurkan and Yuksel (2012) had pre-service teachers evaluate the contributions of their three native and seven non-native instructors and found that none of the parties was found superior to the other. The participants indicated that the teachers had their own strengths. For example, they considered NESTs better in speech and in representing the target culture as well as being more creative and informal. On the other hand, they found NNESTs to be better at teaching explicit knowledge of grammar, having more empathy as well as being more knowledgeable in teaching methodologies and strategies.

Apart from the views of students and teachers, the views of recruiters were also investigated. In a recent study, Kiczowski (2020) determined factors that might influence recruiters' preferences to hire NESTs in various countries around the world. He established that the majority of recruiters regarded language proficiency, teaching qualifications and experience, and performance during interviews as major recruitment criteria. Yet, for almost half of them, being a NEST was still a prominent criterion. Also, comparing his results with similar earlier studies, Kiczowski concluded that recruiters' attitudes towards hiring NNESTs are more positive suggesting that the criterion to be a NEST is less prominent.

In conclusion, research related to NESTs and NNESTs both in Turkish and in other contexts establishes that there are certain features attributed to NESTs and NNESTs and both are perceived to be valuable in teaching English. Although various studies in different contexts have investigated the perceptions of EFL learners, pre- and in-service EFL teachers, and recruiters on NESTs and NNESTs, it is apparent that no study explored how prospective NNESTs perce-

Nonnative Pre-Service EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Native and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers: an Exploration in Turkish Contexts

ive being a NNEST will impact their future teaching practices, specifically in Turkish contexts. The present research dwells on pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions regarding NESTs and NNESTs and it is expected to fill the gap by allowing the participants to reflect on how being a NNEST might impact their future teaching practices.

The Present Study

By following the research of Hadla (2013), which draws attention to the importance of the perceptions related to NESTs and NNESTs, the present study aimed to analyze prospective EFL teacher perceptions focusing on dimensions concerning "Overall learning with NESTs and NNESTs", "Perceived strengths and weaknesses of NESTs and NNESTs", and "Classroom behavior and responsibility". This study also explored how pre-service EFL teachers think being NNESTs might affect their future teaching practices. The subsequent research questions served as the study's focus:

1. What are Turkish pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs?
2. Is there a difference in the perception of pre-service EFL teachers who had a NEST and those who had a NNEST?
3. How do pre-service EFL teachers think being a NNEST will affect their future teaching?

Methodology

Participants and Setting

In this study, the participants were 41 pre-service EFL teachers studying at the ELT program of a state University in Türkiye where pre-service teachers are trained to become EFL teachers. Participants were chosen with convenience sampling, which refers to a sample that includes participants who are available, ready, and willing to participate (Given, 2008). Participants were informed about the content of the study and that their responses would be used for academic purposes. Participants received assurance that their identities would remain confidential. 41 pre-service EFL teachers voluntarily participated in the study. Their ages ranged between 17 and 26. 27 of the participants were female and 14 were male. Among them, 8 were freshmen, 6 were sophomores, 9 were juniors, and 18 were senior students, which enabled to obtain a diverse range of perceptions across various academic years. The diversity of participants is believed to add to the validity. 18 of the participants had taken a course from a NEST teacher while 23 of them had not.

The study was conducted in full compliance with the ethical guidelines outlined by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE). All research procedures adhered to COPE's principles of integrity, transpa-

rency, and ethical conduct in scholarly publishing. Informed consent was obtained from the participants and the responses were anonymized to protect confidentiality. Participation was voluntary, and respondents had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

Research Tools

The design of this study was mixed-method, combining qualitative and quantitative data for a richer understanding and presenting comprehensive results following the steps instructed by Creswell and Plano Clark (2018).

As the main instrument of this study, the questionnaire created by Hadla (2013) that determines perceptions regarding NESTs and NNESTs was implemented to explore the perceptions of the pre-service EFL teachers regarding being NESTs and NNESTs. The initial section of the questionnaire comprised four questions to gather participants' demographic information. Information on gender, age, and year of study were collected to provide a general overview, but these factors were not analyzed as variables. The primary focus in the demographic data was whether the participants had been taught by a native teacher or not. The second section of the questionnaire comprised 24 five-point Likert-type questions on overall learning with NESTs and NNESTs; perceived strengths and weaknesses of NESTs and NNESTs; and classroom behavior and responsibility. The consent of the participants was taken at the beginning of the questionnaire and those who agreed with the terms and conditions participated in the study voluntarily. All 41 participants gave their consent to participate in the study. In order to determine how being a NNEST might affect their future teaching practices, participants were posed two follow-up, open-ended questions at the end of the questionnaire requiring their thoughts on the possible advantages and disadvantages of being NNESTs in their future classroom teaching practices. The reliability of the questionnaire was originally verified by Hadla (2013) in his study. In addition to this, in the present study, expert opinion was sought on the appropriateness of the questionnaire for the purpose of the study as well as the structure and content of the open-ended questions.

Data Collection Procedure and Analysis

In order to collect the quantitative data for this study, the questionnaire followed by two open-ended questions, was distributed through a digital platform via Google Forms. To answer the first two research questions, the questionnaire results were analyzed quantitatively. Descriptive statistics were employed and statistical analyses were carried out for each Likert-type question by computing the mean and standard deviation. An independent samples t-test

was conducted to examine whether there were significant differences between participants with and without experience with NESTs. The assumptions of normality were checked using the Shapiro-Wilk test, confirming that the data were normally distributed ($p > .05$). Statistical significance was determined at a threshold of $p < .05$, ensuring a robust interpretation of the results. Effect sizes were calculated to assess the practical significance of the observed differences, providing additional depth to the statistical analysis.

Participants' responses to the open-ended questions were analyzed using thematic coding following the six-phase approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2017). This process included data familiarization, initial code generation, theme identification, theme review, theme definition, and final reporting. Themes were identified considering common patterns, and consistency was ensured by intercoder reliability checks conducted by an additional researcher.

Following their independent analysis, the quantitative and qualitative data were combined for inter-

retation. Recurrent and non-recurrent units and categories were defined from the answers. After the initial data analysis, assistance from another researcher from the field was obtained in coding and determining the accuracy of themes drawn from them. Lastly, the outcomes of the questionnaire and the content analysis were contrasted, and the findings were revealed and discussed.

Findings

Pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs

Regarding the initial research question, the perceptions of the participants on NESTs and NNESTs were analyzed through descriptive statistics. To analyze and compare the answers that the participants gave in the questionnaire, the means of each item under the three subdimensions of the questionnaire were calculated. The first analysis, shown in Table 1, illustrates the perceptions of the participants related to overall learning with NESTs and NNESTs.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics on the Overall Learning with NESTs and NNESTs

	N	M	SD
1. I will develop better grammatical skills when I am taught by a NEST than when I am taught by a NNEST.	41	2.98	1.172
2. I will learn more vocabulary words when I am taught by a NEST than when I am taught by a NNEST.	41	3.85	1.108
3. My pronunciation will improve better when I am taught by a NEST than when I am taught by a NNEST.	41	4.54	.674
4. My listening skills will improve better when I am taught by a NEST than when I am taught by a NNEST.	41	4.00	1.183
5. I will develop better reading skills when I am taught by a NEST than when I am taught by a NNEST.	41	2.73	1.225
6. I will become a more fluent speaker when I am taught by a NEST than when I am taught by a NNEST.	41	4.02	1.012
7. I will become a better writer of English when I am taught by a NEST than when I am taught by a NNEST.	41	2.71	1.188
8. I will learn better about different cultures when I am taught by a NEST than when I am taught by a NNEST.	41	4.22	.988
9. In my opinion, native English speakers make the best English language teachers.	41	2.27	1.184
10. I can learn English just as well from a NEST as I can from a NNEST.	41	3.90	.995

Note. 5 strongly agree, 4 agree, 3 neither agree nor disagree, 2 disagree, 1 strongly disagree

The results revealed that the participants mostly agreed on the items of the overall learning with NESTs and NNESTs. In particular, as can be seen in the means of Item 3 ($M=4.54$) and Item 8 ($M=4.22$), it can

be said that the participants strongly agreed on the possibility of improving pronunciation and learning about different cultures when taught by NESTs. Especially Item 3, related to improving pronunciation,

Nonnative Pre-Service EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Native and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers: an Exploration in Turkish Contexts

stands with the highest mean ($M=4.54$) implying a high agreement with this statement. In addition, the participants expressed agreement on improving fluency (Item 6, $M=4.02$), improving listening skills (Item 4, $M=4$), and learning more vocabulary (Item 2, $M=3.85$) when taught by a NEST. Overall, participants agreed on learning English equally well from both a NEST and a NNEST (Item 10, $M=3.90$). Item 10 here appears to be noteworthy as participants seem to agree that a NEST and a NNEST can teach English equally well. This finding is also supported by item 9 ($M=2.27$), which is related to whether

NESTs are the best English teachers and is the only item that the participants highly disagree with. The participants were neutral in deciding whether they could develop grammar (Item 1, $M=2.98$), reading (Item 5, $M=2.73$), and writing skills (Item 7, $M=2.71$) better with a NEST.

Apart from the views related to overall learning with NESTs and NNESTs, the next part of the questionnaire was related to the perceived strengths and weaknesses of NESTs and NNESTs, and the results are given below in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics on Perceived Strengths and Weaknesses of NESTs and NNESTs

	N	M	SD
11. A NEST helps his/her students develop more positive attitudes towards learning English than a NNEST.	41	2.78	1.235
12. A NNEST who speaks the students' first language is more capable of predicting students' difficulties in learning the English language.	41	4.32	.850
13. A NNEST who speaks the students' first language shows more empathy to the needs of his or her students in learning the English language.	41	4.07	.848
14. A NNEST provides a better learner model to his/her students than a NEST does.	41	3.20	1.145
15. The NEST has higher self-confidence using the English language than the NNEST.	41	3.44	1.184
16. The accent of the NEST makes him/her a better English language teacher than the NNEST.	41	2.34	1.257
17. The NNEST who speaks the students' first language (L1) is more knowledgeable of the students' culture than the NEST.	41	3.83	1.022
18. A NEST is more competent in using the English language than a NNEST.	41	3.41	1.024
19. A NNEST can provide students with more information about the English language.	41	2.68	1.105
10. I can learn English just as well from a NEST as I can from a NNEST.	41	3.90	.995

Note. 5 strongly agree, 4 agree, 3 neither agree nor disagree, 2 disagree, 1 strongly disagree

Concerning the perceived strengths and weaknesses of NESTs and NNESTs, Table 2 demonstrates that the participants strongly agreed on item 12 ($M=4.32$), which indicated that a NNEST is better at predicting the difficulties of the students in learning English. This item attracts notice as its mean was high while the standard deviation was low, which means that the participants' ideas were not scattered in the answers; the majority agreed with this statement. Furthermore, the participants agreed that a NNEST shows more empathy for students' needs (Item 13, $M=4.07$), and has a higher cultural knowledge (Item 17, $M=3.83$); whereas, a NEST is more self-confident (Item 15, $M=3.44$) and competent in using the English Language (Item 18, $M=3.41$).

Moreover, as is seen in the means of Items 11 ($M=2.78$), 14 ($M=3.20$), and 19 ($M=2.68$), the central tendency of the participants towards deciding whether a NEST is better at developing positive attitudes, being a better role model than a NNEST and whether a NNESTs is better at providing more information about the language in the classroom was neutral. Participants seem to have a neutral stance on these issues. Last of all, considering the mean of Item 16 ($M=2.34$), the participants disagreed that the accent of a NEST is the indicative factor that makes the NEST the best English teacher.

Finally, concerning classroom behavior and responsibility of NESTs and NNESTs, results in Table 3 illustrated that participants disagreed on the items in this dimension.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics on Classroom Behavior and Responsibilities

	N	M	SD
20. A NEST prepares his or her lesson more carefully than a NNEST does.	41	1.90	1.044
21. A NEST is a better teacher than a NNEST because he or she does not use the students' first language in class.	41	2.39	1.339
22. A NEST is stricter in class than a NNEST.	41	2.27	1.096
23. A NEST uses a variety of materials in the classroom more than a NNEST does.	41	1.80	.928
24. A NNEST is more exam-oriented than a NEST.	41	2.90	1.446

Note. 5 strongly agree, 4 agree, 3 neither agree nor disagree, 2 disagree, 1 strongly disagree

As can be seen in Table 3, participants strongly disagreed that a NEST uses various materials in a classroom more than a NNEST does (Item 23, $M=1.80$). Moreover, they also disagreed that a NEST is more careful in planning a lesson (Item 20, $M=1.90$); and, that a NEST is stricter in a classroom environment (Item 22, $M=2.27$). Lastly, Items 21 ($M=2.39$) and 24 ($M=2.90$) indicate the participants either had a neutral stance or disagreed whether or not speaking the first language of the students is an advantage for a NEST and whether or not a NNEST is more exam-oriented in the classroom.

To address the study's second research question, the impact of the participants' interactions with a native teacher on their perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs was examined. Accordingly, the results revealed that

18 of the participants had taken a course from a NEST while 23 of them had not. In order to find out if there was a difference between the groups with and without native teacher experience in terms of their perceptions, their scores on the perception questionnaire were compared. As one of the groups consisted of less than 20 participants, a Shapiro-Wilk test was run on the data. The results of the Shapiro-Wilk yielded that the data met the assumption of normality $W(18) = .952$, and $W(23) = .930$ for the group with a native teacher interaction experience and the group without native teacher interaction experience respectively ($p > .05$). Therefore, an independent samples t-test was computed to compare these two groups. The mean scores, standard deviation values, and t-test results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Means, Standard Deviations, and T-test Results for the Groups

	N	M	SD	t	df	p
Native teacher experience	18	76.4	14.321	-.052	39	.95
No native teacher experience	23	76.6	11.15			

As Table 4 demonstrates the findings revealed that there is no statistically significant difference between the group with a NEST experience ($M=76.4$, $SD=14.321$) and the group without a NNEST experience ($M=76.6$, $SD=11.15$) in terms of their perceptions on NEST and NNEST teachers ($t(39) = -.052$ with $p > .05$). It can be inferred from these findings that taking language courses from native teachers does not impact students' perceptions significantly.

Pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions of their future teaching practices as NNESTs

The participants' answers to the two open-ended questions were examined in light of the third research question, which asked about their future self-perceptions as NNESTs. The questions were presented in Turkish, the participants' native language. After conducting a thematic analysis, select excerpts were translated into English and verified by an academic

Nonnative Pre-Service EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Native and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers: an Exploration in Turkish Contexts

in the field. In that process, themes were identified. Recurrent themes drawn from the codes were then shown in tables and then supported with extracts. In the first question, the participants were asked whether

they think being a NNEST would have any advantages in their future teaching practices. Table 5 illustrates the findings:

Table 5. The Perceived Advantages of Being a NNEST (N41)

Theme	Definition	N	Sample Excerpt
Empathy	Empathizing difficulties students experience during the language learning process	23	<i>"I will be able to understand what language stages my students are going through. Because I went through the same stages when I was a student."</i> (Participant 4)
Shared mother tongue	Speaking the mother tongue of the learners	12	<i>"It will definitely have an advantage because if my students are not at a level to explain their problems in English, then I can listen to them in Turkish and try to solve the problem in the best way possible."</i> (Participant 37)

As Table 5 demonstrates, participants' responses revealed that empathy and shared mother tongue were the most common themes regarded as the advantages of being a NNEST. In connection with empathy, the participants tended to mention the advantage of understanding difficulties students faced in language learning owing to the same educational and cultural backgrounds, and experiences. Accordingly, more than half of the participants (N23) mentioned understanding the difficulties students experience and students' needs as their advantage in their future classroom environment. The extract from the answer of the following participant also exemplifies this:

"They (NNESTs) can continue their teaching by empathizing with students more at times when students have difficulties while learning. By understanding their shortcomings and mistakes, they can be better at giving positive feedback." (Participant 13)

Some of the participants even mentioned that this could result in being a good role model to the students and enable them to respond to students' needs.

This can be noticed in the statement that follows by Participant Number 12:

"Since I have experience with the problems my students will encounter, I can be a better role model and offer solutions."

In addition to empathy, the second most often mentioned advantage by the participants (N12) was related to the Turkish Language as a shared mother tongue of the students and the teacher. Accordingly, using the students' native language, when necessary might be very advantageous and this bilingual nature of the classroom would make the students more comfortable and make the teacher more reachable. In this sense, Participant 26 made the following comment:

"I can prevent false information that will become fossilized by explaining in their mother tongue where my students do not understand English."

In the second open-ended question, the participants were asked whether they thought being a NNEST would have any disadvantage in their future classroom practices. The most recurrent themes are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: The Perceived Disadvantages of Being a NNEST (N41)

Theme	Definition	N	Sample Excerpt
Pronunciation	Having native-like pronunciation	16	<i>"I think I will be insufficient for my students in teaching pronunciation as mine will not be native-like."</i> (Participant 26)
Shared mother tongue	Speaking the mother tongue of the learners	9	<i>"The tendency of teachers to use the target language less can be a disadvantage of having a shared mother tongue because students can get used to it when they respond in Turkish in class and this may affect their language improvement."</i> (Participant 4)

Language proficiency	Being proficient in the target language	4	<i>"I will tend to try to improve my English constantly in case my students may approach me with prejudice." (Participant 14)</i>
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Participants' responses revealed that pronunciation (N16), shared mother tongue (N9), and language proficiency (N4) were common themes regarded as the disadvantages of being a NNEST. In addition, several participants (N12) appeared to perceive no disadvantages of being NNESTs in their future classrooms.

Firstly, as can be seen in Table 6., considering pronunciation, participants mentioned pronunciation as a potential disadvantage, which can also be seen in the following extract:

"The way I use words and my pronunciation will be much different from a native teacher because mine won't be as good as the natives' pronunciation." (Participant 16)

Concerning pronunciation, some participants specifically tended to mention 'accent' as a disadvantage and believed that they wouldn't be able to be efficient in teaching accents to their students because they lack a native-kind accent:

"I may not be helpful about accent, but I should also emphasize here that the important thing is to be able to communicate correctly." (Participant 12)

"The possibility of not meeting the expectations of the students in terms of accent worries me." (Participant 41)

Secondly, participants considered shared mother tongue as another disadvantage. One of the participants indicated that

"The possibility of completely disabling English may be a disadvantage when the class needs explanations in Turkish. Because I fear that I will get used to using Turkish as an easy way out." (Participant 15).

In addition to pronunciation and shared mother tongue, language proficiency was also mentioned as a disadvantage, appearing as the third theme. That is, compared to NESTs, they feared being judged by their students for their limited vocabulary and language proficiency. One of the eye-catching comments was formulated as follows:

"Since language learning is a long and endless journey, I think I may have some deficiencies in language. Especially in certain academic subjects, it is necessary to know the terminology and content well. As a non-native teacher, these will be a disadvantage for me." (Participant 35)

Furthermore, while a few of them (N2) stated that they had no idea about the possible advantages

of being NNEST, some participants (N4) expressed that being a NNEST would not offer opportunities in their future teaching practices. These participants did not provide further explanations or reasons and only shared the following:

"I don't think it's a distinctive feature." (Participant 11)

"I don't think it will provide any advantage or disadvantage." (Participant 24)

Lastly, 12 of the participants did not see any disadvantages of being NNEST in their classrooms as depicted in this comment:

"I don't think being a NNEST will have any disadvantage." (Participant 7)

Other than pronunciation, the need for mother-tongue use, and language proficiency, the participants did not perceive any disadvantages of being NNEST in their future practices.

Discussion

The present study explored the perceptions of Turkish pre-service EFL teachers regarding NESTs and NNESTs and examined how being an NNEST might impact their future teaching practices. The findings contribute to the ongoing discussion in ELT by reinforcing prior literature while offering insights specific to the Turkish context.

The study revealed that pre-service EFL teachers generally perceive both NESTs and NNESTs as capable of effectively teaching English. This aligns with Medgyes' (1992) assertion that NESTs and NNESTs differ in their teaching approaches yet can be equally successful. Participants acknowledged that NESTs have advantages in pronunciation, fluency, and cultural knowledge, while NNESTs are better at understanding students' difficulties, displaying empathy, and predicting language learning challenges. These findings are consistent with prior studies (e.g., Bayyurt, 2018; Boyraz et al., 2018; Copland et al., 2020; Dewaele & Leung, 2022; Gurkan & Yuksel, 2012; Hadla, 2013; Moussu, 2018a; Tajeddin & Adeg, 2016; Varol & Bayyurt, 2017; Zheng, 2019) that highlight the strengths of NNESTs in pedagogical skills and student engagement.

On the other hand, a significant finding was that students' prior experience with NESTs did not significantly affect their perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs. This result seems to be compatible with the claim of Farrell (2015), which is that it is not who you are but it is how you teach. This suggests that

exposure to NESTs does not necessarily reinforce the native-speaker fallacy, where native speakers are presumed to be superior teachers (Phillipson, 1992). Instead, it supports the idea that teacher effectiveness is based on a combination of skills rather than nativeness, as argued by Faez (2018), and Floris and Renandya (2020). In alignment with Walkinshaw and Duong (2012), and Kiczowski (2020) studies, the participants in this study seem to give importance to teacher qualities rather than being concerned with the native-speaker issue.

Regarding the potential advantages of being an NNEST, the most frequently mentioned theme was empathy, followed by the ability to share the students' mother tongue. These opinions are in line with earlier studies (e.g. Madkur, 2017; Moussu, 2018b; Floris & Renandya, 2020), which highlight how NNESTs can relate to their students and provide individualized help because of their own experiences as language learners. A shared mother tongue was seen as a double-edged sword, nevertheless. Although it can help with explanation and communication, it can also result in an over-dependence on the local tongue, which could make it more difficult to use English in the classroom. The results are in compliance with the study in the Turkish context (Gurkan & Yuksel, 2012) in which the use of the learners' native language was found very useful in situations such as preventing difficulties in the target language. Studies like Ma (2012) and Hadla (2013) have already observed this contradiction, showing that L1 usage was both a strength and a weakness for NNESTs. Furthermore, in the related literature, it is apparent that empathy being considered as the advantage of NNESTs is found to be a salient theme of many studies in different EFL contexts (Boyras et al., 2018; Gurkan & Yuksel, 2012; Varol & Bayyurt, 2017; Zheng, 2019).

Pronunciation was the most frequently mentioned drawback of having a NNEST, followed by worries about language ability. Similar to findings from research like Tajeddin & Adeg (2016), Zheng (2019), and Dewaele & Leung (2022), where NNESTs reported concerns about their speaking skills and self-confidence, many participants were afraid that their inability to pronounce words like native speakers would limit their usefulness. The reason might be because of their fear of negative evaluation, a term used by Horwitz et al. (1986), by their students due to their non-native accents. However, as much as they emphasize pronunciation, it seems that they prioritize intelligibility over native-like pronunciation, as also argued by Medgyes (1994). This is also consistent with the larger body of research on ELT teachers' identities and self-perception, which indicates that NNESTs may internalize linguistic fears as a result of the field's enduring native-speakerism (Copland, Mann, & Garton, 2020).

Overall, the findings support the claim that peda-

gogical abilities, empathy, and adaptability—rather than nativeness—define a good EFL teacher. As stressed by Farrell (2015) and Bayyurt (2018), the field should place more emphasis on teacher development and inclusivity than on the binary distinction between NESTs and NNESTs. The study's findings corroborate those of other experts in the field who point to the necessity to prevent any dichotomy between NESTs and NNESTs, seeing one as superior to the other (Bayyurt 2018; Faez, 2018; Farrell, 2015; Floris & Renandya, 2020; Medgyes, 1992; Moussu, 2018b). At the end of the day, it is obvious that each teacher brings unique qualities and characteristics into the classroom. The results indicate that teacher education programs should reinforce NNESTs' strengths in pedagogical tactics and student support while addressing their concerns regarding pronunciation and competency through focused training in these areas. Encouraging a mindset shift away from the native-speaker fallacy could help NNESTs develop greater self-confidence and professional identity, an approach also recommended by Selvi (2025), who suggests that a post-binary perspective can lead to greater equity in TESOL. Promoting a mentality change away from the native-speaker fallacy may aid NNESTs in becoming more self-assured and establishing their professional identities.

To put it all up, this study adds to the body of literature by demonstrating that Turkish pre-service EFL teachers acknowledge the need for both NESTs and NNESTs, but they are also worried about how effective they will be as NNESTs in the future. The long-standing native/non-native divide can be broken down by addressing these issues in teacher education programs and promoting a more inclusive perspective on ELT, which will eventually benefit both educators and students.

Conclusion and Implications

This study examined Turkish pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs, revealing that both groups are perceived to have unique strengths and weaknesses. NNESTs were praised for their empathy, common experiences, and capacity to comprehend students' challenges, whereas NESTs were linked to advantages in pronunciation, fluency, and cultural understanding. The study also showed that pre-service teachers' perceptions are not significantly changed by exposure to NESTs, supporting the notion that nativeness has no bearing on educational efficacy. In addition, having the same mother tongue as the students is seen both as an advantage and a disadvantage in this study. However, it was agreed that despite these differences, English can be learned well with both NESTs and NNEST.

The current study takes a significant step towards promoting an understanding of how being a NNEST may impact pre-service EFL teachers' future teach-

hing practices. The study's conclusions enhance the field of foreign language instruction by providing insights into how NNESTs envision their future practices as well as how they perceive the strengths and weaknesses of being NNEST in EFL contexts.

The findings of the investigation have a number of significant implications. First and foremost, NNEST professional development should be prioritized in teacher education programs by offering instruction that improves NNESTs' pronunciation and general language skills. By addressing these issues, NNESTs may gain self-assurance and dispel the myth of native speakers. Second, courses ought to promote an inclusive viewpoint that honors a variety of teaching philosophies and advances the notion that pedagogical expertise, not native-like competency, is what makes instruction effective. Lastly, in order to promote greater diversity in employment prospects, hiring practices and institutional attitudes should change to acknowledge the value that both NESTs and NNESTs provide to ELT.

Future research should further investigate the long-term impact of teacher education interventions on NNESTs' confidence and professional identity. Additionally, exploring students' perceptions of NNESTs and NESTs across different educational settings could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics within EFL classrooms. In doing this, additional instruments, such as interviews with teachers and observations in their classroom contexts could be incorporated to reveal richer insights. By addressing these issues, the ELT field can work towards a more inclusive and equitable teaching environment for all educators, regardless of their linguistic background.

Lastly, the findings ought to compel educators and authorities to take into account pre-service EFL teacher perceptions and how these beliefs would affect their future instruction, normalize the perceived differences, and take necessary actions in their teacher training programs instead of pretending that this issue does not exist. As Moussu (2018b) also suggests, there can be courses specifically designed for NESTs and NNESTs in teacher training programs to give them a voice and see their own qualities. This is important because as this study revealed, their perceptions affect how they see themselves teaching as NNESTs.

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Nonnative Pre-Service EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Native and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers: an Exploration in Turkish Contexts

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