University Students' Perceptions of the Influence of Native and Non-native Teachers

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Abstract

This paper reports the outcome of a study carried out in Qassim University with 169 Saudi male novice university students to obtain a deeper insight into their perceptions of their native English speaker teachers (NESTs) and non-native English speaker teachers (NNESTs) in the English language classroom. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected in two stages by means of students' questionnaires and interviews. The results reveal statistical significant difference in the respondents' perceptions in favor of NESTs. Students showed more preference for NESTs as they go to higher levels. Students previous learning experiences may affect their general preference for NESTs since they were taught by both types of teachers. Subjects also exhibited an explicit preference for NESTs in relation to the teaching strategies adopted. However, the respondents showed moderately favorable attitudes towards NNESTs who provide a serious learning environment and a favorable response to learners' needs.

Keywords: native, non-native, students' perception, teaching English

1. Introduction

1.1 Context of the Problem

Research on non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs) is a fairly recent phenomenon as issues relating to them used to be politically incorrect to be studied and discussed openly (Al-Issa, 2005; Zughoul, 2003). The place of nonnative speakers as English teachers has probably been an issue as long as English has been taught internationally. However, the majority of students worldwide learn English in foreign language contexts, and, consequently, most English teachers work in such contexts too (Cook, 1999). In addition, most English language learners in the world are taught by NNES teachers (Bulter, 2007; Evrim, 2007). Medgyes's work in the early 1990s (1992, 1994) has laid emphasis on issues relating to NNESTs in the area of teachers' self-perceptions as well as learners' perceptions of their EFL teachers whether they are native or nonnative. Issues relating to NNESTs and NESTs have been studied by many researchers (see for example McDonald and McRae, 2010; Widdowson, 1994 and Xiaoru, 2008).

In the field of English language teaching (ELT), a growing number of teachers are not native speakers of English. Canagarajah (1999), states that 80% of the world's English language teachers are non-natives. The number of people worldwide learning English is steadily increasing, to the point where Kachru (1996) estimates that there are four non-native English speakers for each native English speaker. Despite these ratios, many countries such as Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait and The United Arab Emirates still consider that foreign languages should be taught by native speakers of the language and therefore they actively recruit native speakers of English. Phillipson (1992a) labels this as the native speaker fallacy.

Differences between NESTs and NNESTs have been amply discussed, and arguments in favor or against each one have been tossed back and forth (see for example Alseweed and Daif-Allah, 2012; Braine, 2005; Ling and Braine, 2007; Liu, 2008; Madrid, 2004; Maum; 2002; Phillipson, 1992b; Todd and Pojanapunya, 2009; Wu & Ke, 2009).

Whatever the view adopted on the topic, the native/nonnative issue still arouses tremendous interest in the field of ELT. Although numerous studies have been conducted into the matter, few have focused on students' perception of their English language teachers (e.g. Ling & Braine, 2007 and Wu & Ke, 2009). In addition, few

studies have been carried out in the Middle East (see for instance, Al-Issa, 2005; Alseweed and Daif-Allah, 2012; Daif-Allah, 2010; Zughoul, 2003). This study is an attempt at mixing research with the researcher's experience as a NNEST to seek answers to the following research questions:

1.2 Research Questions

1-   What are Saudi students' perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs?

2-   Do university students show a significant difference in their perceptions of either NESTs or NNESTs?

3-   What is the effect of teachers' teaching strategies on students' perceptions of their teachers?

1.3 Hypotheses

Based on the previous literature and the research questions, the following hypotheses can be drawn:

1- There is no significant difference in the respondents' perceptions of their NESTs or NNEST.

2- There is no significant difference in the respondents' perceptions of the teaching strategies used by either NESTs or NNESTs.

3- In general, Saudi university students will not show positive perceptions of either NESTs or NNESTs over the other.

1.4 Research Objectives

The purpose of the study is to explore the general perceptions of university students of NESTs and NNESTs in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It also aims to find out with whom Saudi university students believe they learn more: with native or with non-native EFL teachers.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is important in three aspects. First, it may serve as one of few empirical studies to investigate Saudi students' perceptions of their learning preferences for both NESTs and NNESTs in Saudi Arabia. Second, it can also be taken as a reference for EFL learners to get a better understanding of the students' awareness of the potentials of different English language teachers with regard to NESTs and NNESTs. Finally, both NESTs and NNESTs who seek professional development can gain some insights from the findings and take them into consideration in teaching the English language.

1.6 Limitations of the Study

1-   It only studies the perceptions of male students about their male teachers.

2-   Subjects of the study contact learning hours with native teachers lasted only two semesters (28 weeks).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Defining Native and Non-native Speakers

The issue of the 'native' and 'non-native' English teacher is not talked about much in public, although teachers of either affiliation are keen to talk about it (Jin, 2005). Suárez (2000) argues that the term *'native'* is an ordinary word that denotes the locality, one is born or brought up in and it has a positive connotation in the ELT field. On the other hand, the term '*non-native'* appears too embarrassing to mention and it has low priority on the ELT agenda. Moreover, it has negative effects on the morale of teachers who feel inferior and inadequate when they compare themselves to their native colleagues. He points out that anything following the negative prefix *'none'* is bound to be negative.

Lee (2005:8) suggests six defining features of a native speaker that some authors such as Kubota (2004); Maum (2002) and Medgyes (1992) support and agree with. These are: "the individual acquired the language in early childhood and maintains the use of the language, the individual has intuitive knowledge of the language, the individual is able to produce fluent, spontaneous discourse, the individual is communicatively competent and able to communicate within different social settings, the individual identifies with or is identified by a language community, and the individual does not have a foreign accent."

Several researchers have stated that the definition of native and non-native speakers is problematic (Chang, 2007; Liu, 2008; Medgyes, 1992). Being a monolingual speaker of a language (which is rare) and being born in a particular place does not adequately facilitate the quest in defining the native speaker since many native speakers of a language do, in fact, speak other languages besides their own; and monolinguals may be the exception rather than the norm (Maum, 2002).

On the terminological front, Suárez (2000) has terms such as L1 English speakers or L1 speakers of English and L2

English speakers or L2 speakers of English. When referring specifically to English language teachers, he has lately taken to using the L1 English teachers label   for those whose mother tongue is English and L2 English teachers label for those who have a mother tongue other than English. Similarly, Cook (1999) suggests that "L2 users" for non-native speakers. This is still an infelicitous classification because some people are speakers of more than two languages. Also these terms can be interpreted as meaning teachers who teach English as an L1 or teachers who teach English as an L2. Although these terms seem unsatisfactory and imprecise, they are less obnoxious than native and non-native, and in the context of ELT they are understood.

However, due to the ongoing debate in defining the "native/non-native speaker" terms, this study would continue to use native/non-native speakers since this term has been widely accepted by most people in the world.

2.2 Status of Non-native-English-speaking Teachers

The term NNESTs has created a division among professionals in the ELT profession. Supporters of the term believe that it is necessary to distinguish between native and non-native-English-speaking teachers because their differences are, in fact, their strengths. For instance, Maum (2002) validates that those who oppose the dichotomy feel that differentiating among teachers based on their status as native or non-native speakers perpetuates the dominance of the native speaker in the ELT profession and contributes to discrimination in hiring practices.

In an attempt to explore this idea, Mahboob (2003) investigated the status of non-native English teachers as ESL teachers in the USA. Using a questionnaire, he examined the hiring practices of the administrators of 118 college-level adult English language programs. Mahboob found that the number of NNESTs teaching ESL in the United States is low (only 7.9% of the teachers employed at these programs). Mahboob attributes the low figure to the preference given by most (59.8%) program administrators to 'native English speakers' in hiring practices.

Phillipson (1996) points out to the native speaker fallacy to refer to unfair treatment of qualified NNESTs. Supporting this view, Suarez (2000) points out that non-native teachers of English, finding themselves being compared to their native speaker colleagues in an unfair way, build the "I-am-not-a-native-speaker syndrome" (p. 84), which has catastrophic effects on these individuals' self-esteem, and thus, ultimately on their performance. In this context, Kim, (2002) argues that some NNESTs are likely to suffer from lack of confidence in their language proficiency, regardless of its level.

What can be described unfair is when you find that there are many native English speakers without teaching qualifications a being hired as ESL teachers than qualified and experienced NNESTs, especially outside the United States (Al-Issa, 2005; Daif-Allah, 2010; Zughoul, 2003). It is argued that the issue of hiring in the teaching profession should have the required credentials of all English teachers as its priority regardless of their native language (Nayar, 1994; Phillipson, 1996). This would shift the emphasis in hiring from who the job candidates are (i.e. native or non-native speakers of English) to what they are (i.e. qualified English teachers) and allow for more democratic employment practices.

Phillipson (1996) argues that NNESTs to be potentially the ideal ESL teachers because they have gone through the process of acquiring English as an additional language. They have first-hand experience in learning and using a second language, and their personal experience has sensitized them to the linguistic and cultural needs of their students. Phillipson concludes that many NNESTs, especially those who have the same first language as their students, have developed a keen awareness of the differences between English and their students' mother tongue. This sensitivity gives them the ability to anticipate their students' linguistic problems and places them at an advantage in teaching English.

Kim (2002) suggests that NNESTs can gain confidence as teachers by recognizing that language fluency is not the only factor affecting their qualification as teachers. Widdowson (1994), supports this view: "real proficiency is when you are able to take possession of the language, turn it to your advantage, and make it real for you" (p. 384). NNESTs can take ownership of English and be aware of not to be trapped in an inferiority complex (Braine, 2005).

2.3 Studies on Students' Perceptions of Native and Non-native English Teachers

The debate over whether NESTs are more qualified English teachers than NNESTs has been raised in non-English speaking countries over a decade. It originally resulted from findings about the discrepant linguistic proficiency of the teachers that would be the major factor when we assess teaching performances in terms of NESTs and NNESTs.

Medgyes, himself a non-native speaker, was one of the pioneers who brought the issue concerning NNESTs to the open. Medgyes (1994: 25) advanced three hypotheses based on his assumption that NESTs and NNESTs are 'two different species' "they both differ in terms of language proficiency, teaching practice (behavior), and that both NESTs and NNESTs could be equally good teachers in their own terms".

Medgyes (1994) conducted a survey on NESTs and NNESTs working in ten countries to determine their success in teaching English. He found that the two groups had an equal chance of success as English teachers. His results showed that the only area in which the NNESTs seemed to be less qualified is English language proficiency which is consistent with Samimy and Brutt-Griffler (1999) and Xiaoru (2008). Compared to their native-English-speaking colleagues who can be good language models for their students, NNESTs can be good learner models, having gone through the experience of learning English as a second or a foreign language as they have adopted language-learning strategies during their own learning process, most likely making them better qualified to teach those strategies (Medgyes, 1994).

In their research, Samimy & Brutt-Griffler (1999) surveyed and interviewed 177 non-native graduate students from Korea, Japan, Turkey, Surinam, China, Togo, Burkina Faso, and Russia. In addition to using a questionnaire they used classroom discussions, and in-depth interviews. They identified the NESTs as being informal, fluent, accurate, using different techniques, methods, and approaches, being flexible, using conversational English, using authentic English, providing positive feedback to students, and having communication as the goals of their teaching. NNESTs were perceived as relying on textbooks, applying differences between the first and second languages, being aware of negative transfer and psychological aspects of learning, being sensitive to the needs of students, being more efficient, knowing the students' background, and having exam preparation as the goal of their teaching. However, they did not consider the former to be superior to the latter.

Liu and Zhang (2007) attempted to identify the differences between NNESTs and NESTs in China in terms of attitude, means of instruction and teaching results as perceived by 65 Chinese students. They were asked to comment on their native English speakers teachers and Chinese teachers of English. The findings revealed no significant difference in students perceptions of the two groups (see also Madrid, 2004 and Park, 2009). The students perceive both groups as hardworking and competent. As far as the means of instruction is concerned, foreign teachers' approaches to text materials are more varied.

Torres (2004) examined the preferences of 102 adult students for NESTs or NNESTs. Results indicated the students have a general preference for NESTs over NNESTs, but have stronger preferences for NESTs in teaching specific skill areas such as pronunciation and writing. Similarly, Madrid (2004) carried out a study on 459 L2 learners to obtain a deeper insight into students' perceptions of the influence of native and non-native teachers on the English language classroom. The results of the study portrayed that students did not evince a preference for native teachers, whom they value as much as non-native ones. Nonetheless, as the students advance on to the higher grades, their preference for the native teacher also increases.

Xiaoru (2008) investigated 75 Chinese male and female college students' perceptions of non-native English speaker teachers. A questionnaire was used to collect data by means of both closed and open questions. A high proficiency in English ability, to use English functionally and the awareness of the culture of English speaking countries were the strengths observed in NESTs. In the case of NNESTs, the ability to empathize with students as fellow foreign language learners, a shared cultural background, and the emphasis they placed on grammar and strategies were seen as their strengths. The findings also indicate that the students have a clear preference for NESTs believing that they are more fluent and accurate with a special emphasis on their good pronunciation and sound knowledge of the target language (see also Park, 2009) This paper concluded that Chinese students see their NESTs and NNESTs having their respective strengths. Similarly, a recent study carried out by (Alseweed and Daif-Allah, 2012) with Saudi subjects found that university students prefer NESTs for specific language skills (listening, pronunciation and speaking). They prefer NNESTs for the language skills writing and grammar. However, the issue of the students' general perception of their NESTs and NNESTs was not discussed in this study.

2.4 Who is the "Better" Teacher?

The assumption that NESTs are better teachers has never been tested pedagogically. Bueno (2006: 25) rejecting the idea that NESTs are better, says that "I do not know of any piece of research that has shown that they are better teachers; however, the long-held belief that they are better is still there with no proof whatsoever to support such a theory."

Most of the related studies reveal no consensus as regard to who the better English language teacher is, native or non-native. It shows that both NESTs and NNESTs have their own merits and demerits and it is unfair to judge one group based on their challenges (see for example Bueno, 2006; Laborda, 2006; Madrid, 2004; Matsuda and Matsuda, 2001; Liu and Zhang, 2007, Park, 2009). Luksha and Solovova (2006) point out that both native and non-native English speaking teachers have certain intrinsic advantages and disadvantages but it depends on the personality and their abilities. They argue that a good teacher is one who: knows the subject; is willing to share the knowledge; loves the job; is always ready for the unexpected; has plenty of patience. Liu (2008) found that

co-teaching between NESTs and NNESTs can contribute to the improvement of the teaching quality of both of them. Put simply, Park (2009) considers a combination of native English speaking teachers and non-native English speaking teachers is an appropriate teaching behaviour.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

The present study was carried out in Qassim University with Saudi students who had been taught English by both native and non-native English speaking teachers. The respondent sample consisted of 169 male undergraduates; their ages were 18-22, (mean age 20 years); and the number of years of studying English ranged from 7 to 10 years, (mean 8.5 years). These students were chosen because they had been taught by both groups of teachers at the same time for two semesters to express their perceptions of their instructors. The teachers were 70 male native and nonnative instructors. 30 of them are NNESTs from eight countries Algeria Egypt, Jordan, India, Lebanon, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Syria. They all share with the students the religious background (i.e. Islamic culture) and the target language learning experience, but the Arab teachers share in addition the students' native language. Most of them are lecturers with Master degrees in English literature or linguistics, and only four are PhD holders in applied linguistics and English literature. These teachers are aged between 35 and 56, having diverse experiences (12 to 30 years) of teaching English as a second/ foreign language in various institutions at different levels. Almost all NNESTs had been taught by both NESTs and NNESTs and they have an average of nine years experience working with native speaker teachers of English. 40 NESTs are from Australia, Canada, England, New Zealand, South Africa, and USA. The majority are language instructors with Bachelor degrees in English, 6 with Master degree in applied linguistics, and 2 are PhD holders in linguistics and curricula & instruction. NESTs are aged between 26 and 62, having diverse experiences (3 months to 35 years) of teaching English as a second/ foreign language in various places worldwide. These teachers have little experience working with nonnative speaker teachers of English. The students study a total of 16 contact hours of English per week, distributed among the four language skills (reading 6 hours, writing & grammar 6 hours, listening & speaking 4 hours).

3.2 Measures and Research Design

Quantitative and qualitative data was collected in two stages by means of questionnaires and interviews with students. In the first stage, a questionnaire was administered to the sample with the purpose of finding out their perceptions of their NESTs and NNESTs. The questionnaire consisted of 16 statements and was administered at the end of the academic year. The general perception component was judged on the basis of eleven statements covering reasons underlying students' perceptions of their native and non-native EFL teachers. The second component consisted of six statements and aimed at collecting information about students perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs on the basis of the teaching strategies teachers use in the classroom. Each item of the questionnaire included two choices (NESTs - NNESTs). Respondents were asked to choose one.

The second stage consisted of interviews with 60 students who had experience with NESTs and NNESTs. Those students were randomly chosen to represent subjects of the study. The interviews were administered in Arabic so that students can express themselves precisely and clearly. Each candidate was asked to give his answers regarding the reasons underlying their preference for native and non-native EFL teachers, the appropriate level learners can benefit from either group of teachers or both, and with whom learners would learn better. Students were also encouraged to give comments or other additional information the interview questions did not cover.

4. Findings and Discussion

Data collected from the participants are tabulated in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Saudi students' perceptions of their native and non-native EFL teachers

Components	Statements	Percentages	
		NESTs	NNESTs
General Perceptions of native and non-native teachers	1- I feel more comfortable in class with a (native / non-native) English teacher.	89%	11%
	2- I would learn more about the culture of the English speaking people with a (native / non- native) English teacher.	94%	6%
	3- A (native/non-native) English teacher is competent because he is more aware of the students' culture.	27%	73%
	4- A (native/non-native) English teacher is aware of students' language needs.	34%	66%
	5- Many (native/non-native) English teachers have difficulty understanding students' questions.	77%	23%
	6- A (native / non- native) English teacher knows the English language difficulties of their students.	32%	68%
	7- The (native / non- native) English teachers are very nice and very responsible.	72%	28%
	8- A (native/non-native) English teacher motivates me to learn about English speaking people and their culture.	91%	9%
	9- A (native/non-native) English teacher is friendly because he provides a relaxed learning environment.	83%	17%
	10- A (native/non-native) English teacher is experienced because he is more conscious of the students' learning styles.	18%	82%
	11- I would have more positive attitudes toward the learning of English if I had a (native / non- native) English teacher.	77%	23%
Students perceptions of learning strategies used by teachers	12- A (native / non- native) English teacher would use innovative teaching strategies to help students learn better.	63%	37%
	13- A (native / non- native) English teacher would explain lessons to us clearly.	31%	69%
	14- A (native / non- native) English teacher prepares us for independent learning better.	79%	21%
	15- A (native / non- native) English teacher would encourage me to learn to speak English better.	65%	35%
	16- If I could choose a teacher myself, I would choose a course taught by (a native / a non- native) English teacher.	72%	28%
	17- On the whole, I would prefer a (native / non- native) English teacher.	78%	22%

Table 1 above provides detailed information to answer the first research question *"What are the Saudi students' perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs?"* As shown in the table 89% of the students feel more comfortable in a class taught by a NEST. In addition, 72% - 83% of the students believed that a NEST is more friendly than a NNEST because he provides a relaxed learning environment.

Results from interviews with students related this highly percentage to several reasons most important of which is that the Saudi students mostly like to interact with a teacher of an opposite culture. Second, the Arab student likes to communicate with a native teacher in a relaxed classroom setting without any sense of fear. Such a relaxed teaching-learning environment motivates students to speak the target language and achieve an ultimate aim of language learning. Third, the NESTs are friendly and more lenient toward students' mistakes and attendance. Fourth, very often NESTs are not particular about discipline and informality. In addition, in a class taught by NEST, students are sometimes allowed to chat, to move, to leave the class at any time without permission, and to use their native words without any blame on the part of the teacher. One student said "I have the sense of feeling at home in a class taught by a native teacher". Students state that such behaviors may not be accepted by a non-native teacher who may not allow students to discuss any topic irrelevant to the lesson or spend the time without focusing on the lesson.

Another finding shows that 77% of the sample would have more positive attitudes toward the learning of English if they had a native English teacher. This is probably due to the students' belief that a NEST motivates them to learn about English speaking people and the teachers' culture as indicated by 91% of the sample. Students justified their responses as they find that natives manifest their culture naturally in their behaviors and their verbal and nonverbal communications. One student remarked that a native teacher is a real and live representative of the foreign culture and he can definitely teach his language better than a teacher from a

different culture.

The results in Table 1 above also show students' perceptions of their NNESTs. Students' responses reflect their awareness of the strengths of their NNESTs. 82% of the sample agreed that NNESTs are experienced because they are more conscious of the students' learning styles than NESTs. Another 73% of the subjects believe that NNESTs are more competent due to their awareness of the students' culture and learning needs. In addition, 68% of the sample have the belief that NNESTs know the English language difficulties of their students better than NESTs.

The interviews also revealed some good reasons underlying their responses. First, a NNEST is aware of students' cultural background which is central to successful communication. Second, having gone through the same experience in learning English as a foreign language, a NNEST is more familiar with his students' needs and learning styles than a NEST. One student said "I like a NNEST because he can understand my questions when I use some Arabic". This last comment is supported by 77% of the sample who agree that NESTs have difficulty understanding students' questions. Another student said "I prefer a NNEST because he can control the class and students are always quiet in his presence". These comments reveal learners awareness of some of the strengths of NNESTs.

Statistical analysis of the data shows a significant difference in students' perceptions of their English language teachers in favor of NESTs as shown in Table 2 below. Therefore, this result provides the answer to the second research question *"Do university students show a significant difference in their perception of either NESTs or NNESTs?,* and it also disconfirm the first research hypothesis *"There is no significant difference in the respondents' perceptions of either their NESTs or NNESTs".* However, this result is not consistent with some studies such as Lasagabaster and Sierra (2002); Medgyes (1994); Park (2009); Todd and Pojanapunya (2009); Torres (2004) and Xiaoru (2008) who found that students have more preference for NESTs but there was no significant difference.

Table 2. Statistical analysis of students' attitudes toward NESTs and NNESTs

Teachers	N	Mean	Mean dif	S. D.	T	df	Tab T	Sig.(2-tailed)
NESTs	169	0.63	0.26	0.14	31.23	168	1.65	0.00
NNESTs	169	0.37						

Analysis of students' responses to the second part of the questionnaire came to emphasize the positive reflection of Saudi university students towards their NESTs. 63% of the respondents prefer the way NESTs deliver their classes and agree that NESTs would use ground-breaking teaching strategies to help students learn better. One student said "a NEST teaches us how to learn. He always listens to us and speaks less". For this reason, 79% of the participants are in favor of the teaching strategies NESTs use as they aim toward enhancing independent learning and focus on the process more than the outcome. In addition, 65% of the participants highlight that NESTs encourage and develop students' confidence to use the language in class as well as assimilating everyday situations in class. Therefore, 72% of the sample made it clear that if they are to choose a teacher for a specific English language course, they would choose a course taught by a native English teacher. One student said "a native teacher involves us in group activities most of the time and in his class we feel like true humans rather than empty cups to be filled with knowledge". Another student added "my native teacher doesn't stop us when we make mistakes and always appreciates our contributions regardless of how right or wrong it is". On the other hand, 69% of the participant stressed that a non-native English teacher would explain lessons more clearly than a native. Some students stated that a NNEST would use Arabic to explain some ambiguous terms that we could not understand in English.

Liu and Zhang (2007) and Samimy and Brutt-Griffler (1999) found that students preferred NESTs because they would use various teaching strategies. In the present study statistical analysis of students' preferences to the teaching strategies adopted by their NESTs and NNESTs found significant differences in favor of NESTs as shown in Table 3 below. This provides the answer to the third research question *"What is the effect of teachers' teaching strategies on students' perceptions of their NESTs and NNESTs?"*. It also disproves the validity of the second research hypothesis *"There is no significant difference in the respondents' perceptions of the teaching strategies used by either their NESTs or NNESTs"*

Table 3. Statistical analysis of Students' perceptions of the teaching strategies used by NESTs and NNESTs

Teachers	N	Mean	Mean dif	S. D.	T	df	Tab T	Sig. (2-tailed)
NESTs	169	0.62	0.24	0.17	43.21	168	1.65	0.00
NNESTs	169	0.38						

Analysis of the last item of the questionnaire reveals that the majority of the subjects of the study (78%) have a preference for NESTs. However, this is not the case with studies such as Madrid (2004); Liu and Zhang (2007) and Park (2009) as students prefer both. Since the students in the present study had previous learning experiences with both types of teachers, they are able to decide with which type they would learn better. Some students justified their responses stating that they would need NNESTs at lower levels of education as they need a teacher who shares the same language and cultural background, but when they go higher up to the university level a NEST would be more helpful. This is consistent with Torres (2004), Madrid (2004), and Lasagabaster and Sierra (2002) who found that adult ESL students' general preference for NESTs increases as they move to more advanced levels of study. The finding of the present study provides an answer to the second research question ***"Do university students show a significant difference in their perception of either NESTs or NNESTs?"*** and it disproves the validity of the third research hypothesis ***"In general, Saudi university students will not show positive perceptions of either NESTs or NNESTs over the other.*** " as shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Statistical analysis of students' general perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs

Teachers	N	Mean	Mean dif	S. D.	T	df	Tab T	Sig.(2-tailed)
NESTs	169	0.62	0.24	0.17	43.21	168	1.65	0.00
NNESTs	169	0.38						

The differences between the results of the present study and other studies could be attributed to some reasons. Firstly, the gender of subjects in the present study is only male while in most of the other studies is both male and female. Secondly, the learning experience of the present study participants with native speaker teachers is probably not enough (only two semesters i.e. 28 weeks) for the students to have a precise judgment on their native speaker teachers. Thirdly, some of the previous studies' participants were studying English as a major while the participants in the present study learned English as a compulsory subject.

5. A Look at the Future

The researcher believes that each group of teachers is not superior to the other and that a combination of both types of teachers would help students learn English better. Both NESTs and NNESTs have a diverse level of mastery of the language as well as having certain intrinsic advantages and disadvantages. Therefore, a team of native and non-native EFL teachers would help achieve the ultimate goals of any English as a foreign language program since the two groups have an equal chance of success as English teachers. This view is emphasized by many researchers such as Lasagabaster and Sierra (2002); **Luksha and Solovova (2006); Matsuda (1999);** McDonald and McRae (2010) and Park (2009). The collaboration between NESTs and a NNESTs could maximize their particular strengths through mutual sharing and provide a positive environment for collaborative teacher development and students' benefit.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this was to find out Saudi students' perceptions of their native and non-native English language teachers. The findings revealed marked significant difference in the respondents' perceptions of their NESTs and NNESTs. Saudi students showed positive perceptions of their NESTs and NNESTs which gives the latter more confidence and visibility in the profession. The respondents believe that NNESTs are contributing effectively to the field of English language teaching by virtue of their own experiences as English language learners and teachers. However, their perception of their NESTs is stronger than that of NNESTs. The results also showed participants' preferences for NESTs increases as they go higher up in their education based on their previous learning experiences. Subjects of the study also exhibited a high explicit preference for NESTs over NNESTs as regard to the teaching strategies adopted by both types of teachers. The students believe that NESTs use motivating teaching methods which assist in learning the language in a better and sound way. However, the respondents are aware of the strengths of their NNESTs who can provide a serious learning environment and are

able to respond to learners' needs. Although students showed marked preference for NESTs, they actually showed warmer feelings toward NNESTs. Students made it clear that they do not behave differently with both types of teachers and they focus on their strengths.

7. Implications and Recommendations

In spite of the limited scope of the study, a few pedagogical implications and recommendations could be forwarded.

1- NNESTs might turn out their non-nativeness to be a self-righteous merit through collaboration with qualified native English-speaking teachers since teaming up and sharing strengths, insights from various linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds would provide moral support for each other and benefit both to grow professionally.

2- Program administrators could take students' perceptions and preferences into account when recruiting EFL teachers.

3- NNESTs may take advantage of their own strengths and improve their teaching abilities through engaging themselves in professional teaching training.

4- A team-teaching approach in which a NEST and a NNEST share the same class is probably worth a try. This could help in developing cross cultural awareness of all teachers as well as increasing language confidence of NNESTs.

5- Educators in non-English speaking countries may provide in-service training programs that focus on developing NNESTs' oral proficiency in general and pronunciation in particular to overcome the problems of a low proficiency in pronunciation or accentuation some teachers might have.

6- The study recommends further research on the effect of gender on influencing student explicit and implicit attitudes towards their NESTs and NNESTs and on larger sample sizes in various geographical regions.

7- The effect of local teachers' accents on students' oral English performance and perceptions might be an important issue that needs to be examined.

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Appendix

Students' Questionnaire

Here are some statements about the native versus non-native teachers of English. Please say whether you agree or disagree with these statements. There is no right or wrong answer. Please be as honest as possible.

Thank you so much.

Part One: *Personal Information*

• How long have you been studying English? (Please Circle only one)

(1-3years)   (4-6 years)   (7-10 years)   (11-13 years)

Please note that your teacher can be

(a) A native for example (British, American, Canadian, Australian, New Zealander).

(b) A non-native for example (Arab, Pakistani, Indian)**.**

Please respond to the following by ticking (√) only one box of the right columns either agree or disagree against each statement.

Part Two: Students' Perceptions of native and non-native speaker teachers of English

Statements		
Section One: Perceptions of native and Non-native teachers	**Agree**	**Disagree**
1- I feel more comfortable in class with a (native / non- native) English teacher.		
2- I would learn more about the culture of the English speaking people with a (native / non- native) English teacher.		
3- A (native/non-native) English teacher is competent because he is more aware of the students' culture.		
4- A (native/non-native) English teacher is aware of students' language needs.		
5- Many (native/non-native) English teachers have difficulty understanding students' questions.		
6- A (native / non- native) English teacher knows the English language difficulties of their students.		
7- The (native / non- native) English teachers are very nice and very responsible.		
8- A (native/non-native) English teacher motivates me to learn about English speaking people and their culture.		
9- A (native/non-native) English teacher is friendly because he provides a relaxed learning environment.		

10- A (native/non-native) English teacher is experienced because he is more conscious of the students' learning styles.		
11- I would have more positive attitudes toward the learning of English if I had a (native / non- native) English teacher.		
Section Two: Learning Strategies		
12- A (native / non- native) English teacher would use innovative teaching strategies to help students learn better.		
13- A (native / non- native) English teacher would explain lessons to us clearly.		
14- A (native / non- native) English teacher prepares us for independent learning better.		
15- A (native / non- native) English teacher would encourage me to learn to speak English better.		
16- If I could choose a teacher myself, I would choose a course taught by (a native / a non- native) English teacher.		
17- On the whole, I would prefer a (native / non- native) English teacher.		