A Comparative Study of Students' Perceptions about the Effectiveness of Teachers in English Language Classroom at College Level in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

English is taught as a foreign language at school and university level in Saudi Arabia. The issue of teachers, who are better performer according to their effectiveness in a classroom, still remains unresolved. The present paper focuses on this issue of native and non-native speaker English teachers about their effectiveness. It reports the outcome of a study carried out in Jazan University, Saudi Arabia. The study was conducted with 120 Saudi male students. The object was to get a deeper insight into the students' perceptions about the Effectiveness of Native English speaker teachers and Non-Native English speaker teachers in English Language Teaching classroom. The effectiveness of the model study was based on enhancing the language proficiency level of the learners in the context of pedagogical behavior of teachers. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected through the questionnaire surveys, interviews and end semester results of the participants. The learners involved in this model study were Preparatory Year students of (Level-1&2) taking Intensive English Language Course at Jazan University, KSA. The findings of the study statistically indicated the students' perceptions in favour of such Native English speaker teachers and Non-Native English speaker teachers (Arabs, Non-Arabs) both, who leave no stone unturned to maintain a serious learning environment. They apply varying strategies in order to enhance and improve the language proficiency level of the learners. The results will be beneficial for native and non-native teachers in terms of realizing their deficiencies and raising awareness.

Keywords: language proficiency, native, non-native, preference, students' perception

1. Introduction

1.1 Problem

The issue of native/nonnative is still alive and unresolved in the field of ELT that who is a better teacher? A lot of studies have been conducted into the matter, some have focused the topic in collaboration with students' perceptions too. (e.g. Wu & Ke, 2009, Ling & Braine, 2007). Some other studies have been carried out in the Middle East (see for instance, Zughoul, 2003, Al-Issa, 2005; 2012; Daif-Allah, 2010; Alseweed, 2012;).

It is fact that in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), majority of the teachers are nonnative 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. Various researches and surveys approve this notion. 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 early1990s (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 native English speaking teachers NESTs have been studied by many researchers (see for example McDonald and McRae, 2010; Widdowson, 1994 and Xiaoru, 2008). The researcher's teaching experience as a NNEST is related to the subject. Therefore, the current study is an attempt to find answers to the following research questions.

1.2 Research Questions

1-To what extent novice college level Saudi students show difference in their perceptions of either NESTs or NNEST with regard their effective teaching?

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

3- Do the Saudi students find native teachers or non-native English teachers performing better in the class?

1.3 Hypotheses of the Research
Based on the previous literature and the research questions, the following hypotheses can be drawn:
1- Saudi Students perceptions of Effectiveness of Teachers do not depend on maintaining serious learning environment with varying strategies regardless of their nationalities or background.
2- There is no significant difference in the students' perceptions of the teaching strategies used by either NESTs or NNESTs if used effectively.
3- There is no significant difference in the respondents' perceptions of their NESTs or NNEST in terms of performance.

1.4 Purpose of the Research
The objective of the study is to explore the general perceptions of college level 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. Whom they find more effective in the ELT classroom. What are some recommendations to be followed by teachers and employers on the basis of the research study.

1.5 Significance of the Research
The importance of this study could be analyzed in three ways.
1. Any EFL teacher regardless of his background can seek guidance and enhance professional development from the findings in order to teach in Saudi Arabia or any other country.
2. It may be used as one of few empirical studies to investigate Saudi students' perceptions of their learning preferences for both NESTs and NNESTs in Saudi Arabia.
3. It can be used as a reference for EFL learners to note the teachers' potentials on the basis of their performance in an ELT classroom in the context of NESTs and NNESTs.
4. This study may prove useful for the recent interest in attaining bilingualism as a feasible objective for the near future in this country KSA or elsewhere.
5. This study may provide an insight into recruitment of new teachers to the recruiting organizations or employers.

1.6 Limitations of the Study
1- The respondents (students) are novice university/College level students in Level (1&2 at the preparatory year campus.

2- It only studies the perceptions of male students about their male teachers at the Preparatory Year Arts College in the remote, southern region of the kingdom.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Defining Native and Non-native Speakers

It is obvious that issue of native and nonnative speakers as teachers of English has been controversial from the moment this language began to be taught internationally. Indeed, the native English speaker teacher NEST vs. non-native speakers English speaking teacher (NNEST) question has generated an argument, polemic, or controversy – as it has been variously termed – which is growing in significance as the importance of learning language in general, and English in particular, is increasingly acknowledged.

Various researchers have stated that the definition of native and non-native speakers is difficult (Chang, 2007; Liu, 2008; Medgyes, 1992). Being a monolingual speaker of a language 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).

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.

2.2 Status of Non-native English speaking Teachers

The status of nonnative speakers as teachers of English has been a contentious issue from the moment this language began to be taught internationally. The term NNESTs has created a division among professionals in the ELT profession. 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 the favour of NNESTs, 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.

It could be unfair when you find that there are many native English speakers without teaching qualifications are 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.

Widdowson (1994), supports the 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). 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.

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 (Mohammad A. Alseweed (October 19, 2012). Alseweed, 2012, Walkinshaw and Oanh, 2014, Shih and

Chen, 2017).

2.3 Who is the "Better" Teacher?

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.

Major ratio 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, Park, 2009).

The assumed idea 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."

A 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. Another study carried out by (Alseweed, 2012) with Saudi students reveal statistical significant difference in the respondents' perceptions in favor of NESTs. However, the respondents showed moderately favorable attitudes towards NNESTs who provide a serious learning environment and a favorable response to learners' needs.

3. Method
3.1 Participants
The current study was carried out in Jazan University with Saudi students who were taught English by both native and non-native English speaking teachers. The respondent sample consisted of 120 male undergraduates; their ages were 18-22, and the number of years of studying English ranged from 7 to 8 years. These students were chosen because they were taught by both groups of teachers at the same time for two semesters to express their perceptions of their instructors. The teachers at the preparatory year campus are male native and nonnative from different countries. The NNESTs are from Pakistan, Sudan, Egypt, India, Jordan, Bangladesh, Saudi Arabia and Senegal. Most of them are lecturers/instructors with Master degrees in English literature, linguistics, English or ELT and some are PhD holders in English literature, applied linguistics and ELT related fields These teachers are aged between 29 and 57 having diverse experiences (5 to 32 years) of teaching English as a second / foreign language in various institutions at different levels. The NESTs are from UK, US and Canada. The majority are language instructors with Bachelor degrees in English or any other related fields and a few with master degrees. NESTs are aged between 29 and 59, having diverse experiences (3 to 19 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 15 contact hours of English per week, distributed among the four language skills (**Level-1**:reading &writing 5 hours, & grammar 5 hours, listening & speaking 5hours, **Level 2**: reading 4 hours, writing 4 hours, grammar 4 hours, Listening& Speaking 3 hours).

The students in the current study were the same in terms of their English language proficiency level at the time of registration belonging to the same college and age. The teachers involved in teaching and performance were both NESTs and NNESTs with almost same teaching experience, qualification and age.

3.2 Measures and Research Design
The data was collected in three stages by means of questionnaires surveys, interviews and end semester results of the students. It was qualitative and quantitative. In the first stage, a questionnaire was administered to the sample with the purpose of finding out students' perceptions of their NESTs and NNESTs. The questionnaire consisted of 15 statements was administered at the end of the academic year. The first component consisted of seven 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. The common perceptions component was judged on the

basis of eight statements covering reasons underlying students' common perceptions of their native and non-native EFL teachers. Each item of the questionnaire included two choices (NESTs - NNESTs). Respondents were asked to choose one.

The second stage consisted of interviews with four different groups students each with 30 students and total 120 students who had experience with NESTs and NNESTs. Each student was asked to give his answers regarding the reasons underlying their preference for native and non-native EFL teachers with regard their effectiveness, the appropriate level learners can benefit from either group of teachers or both, and with whom learners would learn better.

At the third stage the students end semester results of four different groups total 120 students taught by both (NESTs - NNESTs) were collected. The same skill taught by these teachers was considered as a touchstone to find their performance. The qualification level and teaching experience of the teachers was also equivalent.

4. Findings and Discussion
Data collected from the participants are tabulated in Table 1 below.

4.1: Questionnaire Surveys:
Table 1 below provides detailed information to answer the first research question *"To what extent novice college level Saudi students show difference in their perceptions of either NESTs or NNEST with regard their effective teaching?"* As shown in the table 70% of the students think native English teacher prepares us for independent learning better. In addition, 74% of the students believed that a NEST is more friendly than a NNEST because he provides a relaxed learning environment.

Table 1 also gives an insight into the students' perception about the second research question *"What is the effect of teachers' teaching strategies on students' perceptions of effectiveness of their teachers?"* Another finding shows that 90% of the sample would have more positive attitudes toward the learning of English speaking people culture if they had a native English teacher. They find a NEST encourages and motivates them more to learn English. They also believe that they can learn better English communicative styles.

The results in Table 1 above also show students' perceptions of their NNESTs. Students' responses reflect their awareness of the strengths of their NNESTs. 75% of the sample agreed that NNESTs are experienced because they are more conscious of the students' learning needs and styles than NESTs. Another about 78% of the students believe that NNESTs are more competent due to their awareness of the students' culture and maintain the class discipline in a better way. They also seem more satisfied with the explaining strategies and methods of NNESTs as 76% say that NNESTs explain lessons clearly and effectively. According to the students' experience of studying English 61% think that (non-native) performs better in the class. 77% students opted for NNESTs for understanding them better in English language classroom. Therefore, we may conclude that students show their likeness to those teachers both **NESTs or NNEST on the basis of their effective teaching through applying varying teaching strategies.**

Table1. Saudi students' perceptions of their native and non-native EFL teachers on the basis of the effectiveness in ELT classroom:

Components: The effect of teachers' teaching strategies on students' perceptions.	Percentages (NESTs NNESTs)	
Statements:		
1. A (native / non-native) English teacher would explain lessons to us clearly and effectively.	24%	76%
2. According to my experience of studying English I think that (native / non-native) performs better in the class.	39%	61%
3. A (native / non-native) English teacher applies better strategies for independent learning.	70%	30%
4. A (native / non-native) English teacher would use effective teaching methods to enhance our level.	54%	46%
5. I would prefer to study with (a native / a non- native) English teacher as he encourages and motivates to learn.	60%	40%
6. A (native / non-native) English teacher would use innovative teaching strategies to help students learn better.	35%	65%
7. A (native / non-native) English teacher is easy to understand during teaching in class.	23%	77%
Components: Students' Common Perceptions of native and non-native teachers.		
Statements:		
1. I would learn more about the culture of the English speaking people with a (native/non-native) English teacher.	90%	10%
2. A (native/nonnative) English teacher knows the English language difficulties of his students.	30%	70%
3. A (native/non-native) English teacher isn't more concerned about the class discipline.	70%	30%
4. A (native/non-native) English teacher is aware of students' language needs and styles.	25%	75%
5. I experienced (native/non-native) English teachers' difficulty understanding students' questions.	81%	19%
6. I think (native/non-native) English teacher is competent because he is more aware of the students' culture and maintains class discipline.	22%	78%
7. I found (native/non-native) English teacher more friendly in the classroom environment and uses all the time English.	74%	26%
8. A (native/non-native) English teacher is experienced because he is more conscious of the students' learning styles.	24%	76%

4.2: Analysis of Interviews

To find answer to the third research question **"Do the Saudi students find native teachers or non-native English teachers performing better in the class?"** Interviews' results with students related to the topic show that the Saudi students mostly like to interact with a teacher of an opposite culture. The Saudi students like to communicate with a NESTs in a relaxed classroom setting without any sense of fear. Such environment provides students chance to use the target language. The students think that a native teacher is more friendly to them and

doesn't take notice of their mistakes comparatively. Students find informal environment with NESTs comparatively in the classroom.

The interviews further reveal statistics about NNESTs. NNESTs are more familiar with their students' needs and learning styles than NESTs as they are experience to teach EFL students. Some students said "We like a NNEST because he can understand our questions well when we use some Arabic". Another group of students said "we prefer a NNEST because he can control the class and students are always well disciplined to learn in his presence". Students think that a NNEST Arab or Non- Arab is more aware of students' cultural background which is vital to successful communication.

Table 2. Statistical analysis of students' responses toward NESTs and NNESTs on the basis of interviews.

Teachers	No. of Students	Mean	Mean dif
In the favour of NESTs	120	0.51	0.02
In the favour of NNESTs	120	0.49	

Statistical analysis of the data collected on the basis of interviews don't show a significant difference in students' perceptions of their English language teachers in favour of NESTs or NNESTs. It merely provides a slight difference in the favour of NESTs. Generally, towards some points students like NESTs and for some other points they prefer NNESTs. Therefore, this result provides the answer to the third research question *"Do the Saudi students' find native teachers or non-native English teachers performing better in the class?"* This result is consistent with some studies such as Todd and Pojanapunya (2009); Lasagabaster and Sierra (2002); Medgyes (1994); Park (2009); Torres (2004) and Xiaoru (2008); according to these researches students show likeness for NESTs but no significant difference.

4.3: Result analysis of Learner/Teachers Performance at End of semester exam taught by native and non-native teachers of English

The summary of end of semester exam result of four sections of English classes of the same level, taught by native and non-native speaker teachers of English each group was analyzed to confirm the effectiveness of native and non-native speaker teachers of English. The exam results showed that learners who were taught by the native and non-native teachers of English who maintained serious learning environment with varying strategies performed better compared to the learners who were taught in the conventional way by the native and non-native teachers of English who didn't maintain serious learning environment with varying strategies. The summary of end of semester exam of 4 classes at the same level is displayed in Table 3 (a), (b), (c) & (d).

Table 3(a). Students were taught by a native teacher of English

Letter Grade	A	B	C	D	F	
Marks	Marks Above 90	80-89	70-79	60-69	Below 60	Total
No. of Learners	05	9	10	03	03	30

Table 3 (a) represents the details of letter grades and marks of learners who were taught by a native teacher of English who maintained serious learning environment with varying strategies.

Table 3(b). Students were taught by a non-native teacher of English

Letter Grade	A	B	C	D	F	
Marks	Above 90	80-89	70-79	60-69	Below 60	Total
No. of Learners	06	11	11	01	01	30

 Table 3(b) represents learners who were taught by a non-native teacher of English who maintained serious learning environment too.

Table 3(c). Students were taught by a native teacher of English

Letter Grade	A	B	C	D	F	
Marks	Above 90	80-89	70-79	60-69	Below 60	Total
No. of Learners	01	04	07	09	07	30

Table 3(c) indicates the performance of learners who were taught by a native teacher of English who didn't maintain serious learning environment with varying strategies in order to enhance and improve the language proficiency level of the learners.

Table 3(d). Students were taught by a non-native teacher of English

Letter Grade	A	B	C	D	F	
Marks	Above 90	80-89	70-79	60-69	Below 60	Total
No. of Learners	01	03	09	11	06	30

Table 3(d)   also clearly shows the poor performance of students who were taught by a non-native teacher of English who couldn't maintain serious learning environment too.

The results of Table 3 (a) and (b) clearly indicate better performance of students in End Semester Exam than the learners mentioned in Table 3 (c) and (d). Moreover, learners obtained higher grades in Table 3 (a) and (b) than those in Table 3 (c) & (d). It is evident from the results that effectiveness of teacher has great impact on the performance of learners in tests and exams. In the current study statistical analysis of students' preferences to the teaching strategies were found in favor of NESTs and NNESTs both who maintain a good learning environment with varying teaching strategies. These results are consistent with some studies such as Madrid (2004); Liu and Zhang (2007), Park (2009) and Mazhar Shahid (2014) as students prefer both.

However, this is not the case with studies such as Liu and Zhang (2007), Samimy and Brutt-Griffler (1999), Alseweed (2012) who found that students preferred NESTs because they would use various teaching strategies. Nonetheless, as the students advance on to the higher grades, their preference for the native teacher also increases (Mohammad A. Alseweed (October 19, 2012). Alseweed, 2012, Walkinshaw and Oanh, 2014, Shih and Chen, 2017).

Therefore, the students' perceptions of the effectiveness of native teachers of English and non-native teachers of English depend upon teachers who provide a serious learning environment with varying teaching strategies and a favorable response to learners' needs regardless of their nationalities or background NESTs or NNESTs.

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 an intensive course at preparatory year.

5. Discussion

The results of the current study and other studies could be attributed to some differences due to certain reasons. Firstly, some of the previous studies' learners were studying English as a major while the students in the current study learned English as an intensive English language program at preparatory college level 1&2 leading to majoring in English. Secondly, the students in the present study are only male while in most of the other studies are both male and female. Thirdly, the learning experience of the present study learners with native speaker teachers is first time at college level while they were already taught by non-native teachers at the previous levels. In order to get a precise judgment of the students' perceptions of effectiveness of native teachers of English and non-native teachers the time spent for the learning may not be sufficient i.e. 28 to 30 weeks only. This present study was carried out in male campus and the learners were mere male at Arts College in the remote southern region of Saudi Arabia while most other studies were focused on both gender the male/female.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to find out Saudi students' perceptions of their native and non-native English language teachers in context of the teachers effectiveness in the ELT classroom. The acquired results didn't reveal significant difference in the respondents' perceptions of their NESTs and NNESTs in general. However, Saudi students showed positive perceptions of their NESTs and NNESTs. According to the questionnaire surveys results, findings through interviews and end semester results statistics revealed comprehensive outcomes. Statistical analysis of the data didn't show a significant difference in students' perceptions of their English language teachers in favour of NESTs or NNESTs. The respondents believe that NNESTs are contributing effectively in the field of English language teaching by virtue of their own experiences as English language learners and teachers. Students think that a NNEST Arab or Non- Arab is more aware of students' cultural background comparatively which is vital to successful communication. NNESTs are more familiar with their students' needs and learning styles than NESTs as they are experience to teach EFL students. The Saudi students like to communicate with a NESTs in a relaxed classroom setting without any sense of fear. Such environment provides students chance to use the target language. The students think that a native teacher is more friendly to them and doesn't take notice of their mistakes comparatively. Their perception of NESTs is stronger than that of NNESTs in terms of classroom relaxed environment. However, the students showed a mixed attitude in general and preferred those teachers in particular who taught them using varying strategies and pedagogies and maintained serious learning environment. They didn't show significant difference in their perceptions with regard the NESTs or NNESTs. Their focus was the effectiveness of the teacher in the ELT classroom regardless of their nationalities or back ground. 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), Park (2009) and Mazhar Shahid (2014). 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.

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Walkinshaw, Oanh, 2014   DOI: 10.1177/2158244014534451

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