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Native speaker dichotomy: Stakeholders' preferences and perceptions of native and non-native speaking English language teachers

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Addressing the perceptions and the preferences of the upper-secondary school students, teachers, parents and administrators of the native speaking (NS) and non-native speaking (NNS) English teachers as well as investigating the variables affecting these preferences and perceptions, this study explores whether or not the native speaker myth is still prevalent. Contrary to common assumptions with regard to student and parent preferences being in favour of NS English teachers, this study purports that English as a foreign language (EFL) students who have participated in this study which is conducted in the Turkish Cypriot context favour the English teachers with good teaching skills, regardless of their NS/NNS status. The students' perceptions and preferences are compared with those of their parents, teachers and administrators. The data are collected from 185 students, 86 parents, 18 teachers and two administrators, and analysed adopting a mixed-methods research design, being predominantly quantitative. Overall, mother tongue and grade are found to be the two variables that influence the participants' perceptions and preferences with regard to the NS and NNS English teachers. Significant differences are found between student and teacher responses and between parents' and teachers' perceptions and preferences.

Keywords: administrators; English as a foreign language (EFL); native speaker dichotomy; parents; teacher preference

Introduction

Due to the fast progress of globalisation and the ever-growing role of English in trade and industry, English has become the lingua franca for most economic and industrial discourse. English is therefore in great demand worldwide, with a consequent need for more English teachers. Administrators are often unwilling to employ NNS English teachers no matter how good they are in their teaching practices (Árva & Medgyes, 2000). Only 7.9% of the teachers working for English language programmes are non-native speakers of English in the United States of America (USA) (Mahboob, 2003). The employability of the NNS English teachers is not any different in the United Kingdom (UK) (Clark & Paran, 2007) or in Canada (Derwing & Munro, 2005). It is apparent that NS English teachers constitute a minority and therefore cannot meet the growing demand for EFL/English as a second language (ESL) teachers. For this reason, it may be wise to invest in NNS English teachers to avoid economic consequences. In this respect, NNS English teachers can be regarded as emerging human resources in the education industry in most national economies. In terms of recruitment, education research on the issue is therefore helpful to employers and administrators to adapt to this transformation and reconceptualisation in the field of ESL.

South African Perspectives

The ever-growing importance of the English language can also be observed in South Africa. South Africa is a multilingual country with English being the lingua franca. English compares favorably to the local varieties, despite the fact that the speakers of English constitute only about 10 percent of the population. To illustrate, although the speakers of isiZulu outnumber the speakers of English, isiZulu ranks lower than English (Bamgbose, 2011). Parmegiani (2014) acknowledges that although isiZulu is important in terms of identity construction, they value English greatly especially in educational contexts, and English is widely accepted as 'everybody's English.' IsiXhosa speakers have stated their language-based social preferences for speakers of English, which can be attributed to the high status of English in their society (Kinzler, Shutts & Spelke, 2012). For all these reasons, English is preferred as the language of instruction, and it is also dominant in both trade and industry (De Wet, 2002). Evans and Cleghorn (2014) have found that due to the growing role of English in the industry, economy and globalisation, parents prefer schools with English as the medium of instruction, no matter how far the schools are from their homes, or how high the school fees are.

International Perspectives

Recent empirical studies question the widely held notion that the native speaker is the ideal teacher of English as well as native speaker norms being assumed to be ideal (Alseweed, 2012; Benke & Medgyes, 2005; Ling & Braine, 2007; Mahboob, 2004; Moussu, 2002; Park, 2009). In a qualitative investigation of the perceptions of ESL university students in an American university, Mahboob (2004) notes that, rather than showing a

preference for neither NS nor NNS English teachers, the participants highlight the distinct advantages and disadvantages of both kinds of teachers. Moussu's (2002) study conducted in the USA with ESL students has produced similar findings to those of Mahboob. In terms of the merits and weaknesses of both kinds of teachers, Alseweed (2012) has found similar findings as well in his study with EFL students in Saudi Arabia.

Differing from Mahboob's (2004) and Moussu's (2002) study, which are conducted in the United States, Park (2009) has sought to determine the differences between NS and NNS teachers of English in Korea. The findings do not indicate any significant difference in EFL students' perceptions of their NS and NNS teachers of English. However, another study carried out by Han (2005) with EFL students in Korea has concluded that the participants are highly negative towards the NS English teachers, criticising them for lacking the qualities of a good teacher, viz. responsibility, enthusiasm, politeness, and an understanding of Korean students' needs and interests. Rao (2010) reports similar findings to those of Han in his study with Chinese EFL students concerning NS English teachers.

With regard to demographics, Lasagabaster and Sierra (2002) have contributed to the literature by finding the correlation between the educational level of the subjects and the preference for NS teachers. Pacek (2006) has found students' nationality and educational background, but not age or gender, to play an important role in students' perceptions of the important characteristics of a NNS English teacher, and consequential to their views regarding whether an English teacher has to be a native speaker of English or not. Moussu's (2006) study indicates time, exposure and mother tongue influence ESL students' perceptions in the USA.

Benke and Medgyes (2005) are the first researchers to investigate NS and NNS teachers from EFL student and teacher points of view in a single study in Hungary. Their study has revealed that the perceptions of the two parties regarding the benefits and handicaps of NS and NNS English teachers correspond. Following Benke and Medgyes (2005), Ling and Braine (2007) have carried out their study with EFL students and teachers in Hong Kong. They report similar findings to those of Benke and Medgyes (2005). All in all, research does not indicate whether NS or NNS English teachers are preferred, but highlights the relative strengths and weaknesses of both parties, challenging the widely held notion that native speakers necessarily make for ideal teachers.

Theoretical Underpinnings

The Chomskyan paradigm dominated second language acquisition (SLA) research focusing on individual cognition in the 1980s, and early to mid-1990s. Contrary to the approach taken by cognitivists, socioculturalists defend the idea that learning is a social phenomenon, rather than an individual one. Therefore, they situate learning in a social context, and argue that cognitive development occurs in relation to social, cultural, and historical contexts (Johnson, 2009). Based on Vygotsky's argument, socioculturalists argue that language learning occurs in a social context, and that social interaction with an expert or a more capable person helps the language learner expand his/her zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Lantolf, 2000).

Lantolf (2000) views language as a metaphorical tool of mediation, which is central to the sociocultural theory. Parents, teachers and more capable peers can act as mediators in the sociocultural context of learning. Teachers who had similar experiences when they themselves were students can provide scaffolding assistance by close attendance to learners' needs and the affective dimensions and ensuring an effective classroom context accordingly. Parents' roles and their influences on their children cannot be discarded, since they are mostly the first mediators with whom children interact on the social plane. They play a central role in passing on societal values and social norms to their children, which shape their beliefs and attitudes. Sociocultural approaches tend to shed light on how an individual's 'lived experience' (Vygotsky, 1987) and the sociocultural context defines their beliefs, and the way in which they act. For this reason, such approaches are utilised to interpret and evaluate the participants' preferences and perceptions of NS/NNS English teachers in this study.

Vygotsky argues that intellect and affect are inseparable (1987). Vygotsky's 'lived experience' refers to 'the affective processes through which interactions in the ZPD are individually perceived, appropriated, and represented by the participants' (Mahn & John-Steiner, 2002). Hence, the emotional aspects along with the social interaction have an impact on language learning and cannot be underestimated in language development and EFL research.

Firth and Wagner (1997, 1998) attacked SLA for ignoring these sociocultural aspects of language learning and dictating native speaker norms. They opposed to categorising individuals according to their NS/NNS status, suggesting that individuals could have multiple identities. Drawing upon Firth and Wagner (1997, 1998), we question the common practice of categorising English language teachers as either native speakers and or non-native speakers, and the belief that NS as a category of language user make for the ideal English teachers. English teachers cannot be judged based on this category alone, as they have multiple identities that

proliferate the factors determining whether or not they become good or bad teachers.

Jenkins (2006) further developed Firth and Wagner's (1997) criticisms of SLA. In the case of EFL, learners are expected to have near-native competence, so as to be able to communicate with native speakers of English (Jenkins, 2006). This results in the dictation of native speaker norms. English is learnt in various contexts, and in some of these contexts, the main aim of learning English is to communicate with other non-native speakers of English, as in the case of lingua franca use. English as a lingua franca is used by billions of people, a fact which calls for more research examining the sociolinguistic reality of English learners in an ever-expanding variety of contexts, to see how the dictation of native speaker norms by conventional SLA is evaluated in these contexts.

Objectives of the Research

The objectives of this study are: to discover whether secondary school students prefer to be taught by native speakers, non-native speakers, or a team of NS and NNS English teachers; to determine how mother-tongue, grade and gender influence their preferences; to ascertain whether the perceptions of the students, teachers, parents and administrators corroborate or not; and to reveal the extent mother-tongue influences teachers' and parents' perceptions.

Significance of the Research

This study fills a gap in the relevant literature by bringing together native and non-native English speaking students in a single study, since all the participating students of the studies in the literature are either native or non-native speakers of English. Further to this, the study contributes to the literature by comparing and analysing the beliefs and perceptions of the relevant parties, namely students, teachers, administrators and parents in a single study.

All English teachers, regardless of their NS/NNS status, prospective English teachers, administrators, and education policy makers in both secondary and post-secondary (tertiary) education, are expected to benefit from the results of the current study. English teachers can foster their strengths and improve their weaknesses in the light of the findings of this study. This study is also beneficial for prospective NS and NNS English teachers, since they can build up their qualifications in accordance with the preferences of the relevant parties. Administrators are expected to benefit in terms of recruitment practices. Education policy makers can make some adjustments in the light of the needs of the EFL/ESL students and their parents included in this study.

Method

Population and Sample

The research study was conducted with 185 upper-secondary school students, 18 English teachers, 86 parents and two administrators of a private and a state school in Nicosia in 2016. Both schools were English medium schools, wherein 90% of the courses offered were taught in English to EFL students. Seventy-five percent (n = 139) of the students spoke Turkish as their mother tongue, and 23% (n = 38) were bilingual speakers of English and Turkish; where 20% of these bilingual speakers were born in the U.K. One and a half percent (n = 3) spoke neither Turkish nor English as their mother tongue, 78% (n = 14) of the teachers spoke Turkish as their mother tongue, and 22% (n = 4) were native speakers of English and born in the U.K. Eighty-three percent (n = 71) of the parents spoke Turkish as their mother tongue, while 17% (n = 15) were native speakers of English.

A hundred students were male and 85 students were female. Of the 18 teachers, 33% (n = 6) were male and 67% (n = 12) were female, and there were 44 male and 42 female parents. Thirty-four percent of the students (n = 64) were in Grade 10, 25% (n = 46) in Grade 11, and 41% (n = 75) were in Grade 12. Two administrators participated in this study. Turkish was the mother tongue of both administrators. They were both male, and both of them were born in Cyprus. One of them was 53 years old, and the other was sixty-two. Convenience sampling was used. All the participants responded to the questionnaire on a voluntary basis.

Research Model

As this predominantly quantitative mixed methods research study was quantitative, qualitative and descriptive in nature, a wide range of instruments was utilised. To gather quantitative data, questionnaires and interviews were used, while the participants' responses to the open-ended questions on the questionnaires and classroom observations provided the qualitative data.

Some of the constructs in the questionnaires were identified from Moussu's (2006) study, however, we broadened and adapted these to the context of the current study. The Cronbach's alpha for the student questionnaire, the teacher questionnaire, and the parent questionnaire respectively, was found to be 0.875, 0.893, and 0.887. Factor analysis revealed each factor to be above 0.45, which Büyükoztürk (2007) argued to be acceptable. To ensure reliability, the student questionnaire was piloted with 30 prospective English teachers by a professor employed at the English Language Teaching Department (ELT) in a university in Nicosia. The teacher questionnaire was piloted with six teachers and the parent questionnaire with eight

parents, under similar conditions (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007).

Given that the validity and the reliability of qualitative research depended on the usage of a variety of empirical data, such as the data gathered from interviews, observations and reflective journals, and the collection of such data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), in addition to the open-ended questions on the questionnaires and classroom observations, semi-structured interviews were also conducted. A concurrent design was utilised, which meant that quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously.

Deductive coding was employed in coding the qualitative data, since the constructs of the questionnaires constituted the predetermined themes, which were as follows: preference for NS/NNS English teachers; teacher appreciation; learning difficulties; and beliefs. As for the reliability of the qualitative data, after the data obtained from the interviews were transcribed and coded, two experts on qualitative research were asked to help. These experts read the transcribed data and coded the qualitative data independently to corroborate our analysis. A complete agreement was reached between the experts' and our coding.

Data Collection

After the students and the teachers filled out the questionnaires, their teachers gave them the parent questionnaires to be given to their parents. Three hundred and seventy questionnaires were handed out, but only 86 of these were returned by the students. The low return rate was due to the fact that, although each student was given two questionnaires in case both the father and the mother would be willing to participate, one questionnaire was returned by each student. Although the parents were not given a deadline, the parent questionnaires were returned to the English teachers within a week.

All interviews were semi-structured and open-ended, far from being under the total control of the researcher, and hence, under the partial control of the interviewee (Warren, 2001). It was assumed that the interviewees would provide deeper insight under such conditions. Six teachers, two of whom were native speakers and four of whom were non-native speakers; and 24 students, two of whom were native speakers and twenty-two of whom were non-native speakers; as well as two administrators were interviewed. Apart from the two native speakers of English, the students for the interviews were randomly selected. Four Grade 10, four Grade 11 and four Grade 12 students from the state school and four Grade 10, four Grade 11 and four Grade 12 students from the private school participated in the interviews. One of these four students from the private school and one from the state school were native speakers of English. Two individual interviews were conducted with both administrators, which enabled us to compare the administrators' perceptions with those of the students, teachers and parents. They lasted 20 to 30 minutes and on their request were not recorded.

The teachers set the dates and times for classroom observations. Each teacher was observed once in the second week of the fall semester. The classes of two NS and two NNS English teachers from each school were observed for 45 minutes by the first researcher. We had eight classroom observations in total. By being a peripheral observer, the researcher avoided making the students and the teacher feel intruded upon, was not intrusive in any case, and observed the NS and NNS English teachers with regard to differences in their teaching practices, as well as students' attitudes towards them (Adler & Adler, 1994). Detailed notes were taken during the classroom observations, which enriched the qualitative data, and ensured the triangulation of the data.

Data Analysis

SPSS 20 revealed the frequencies and percentages for each statement in each construct for the means to be compared. ANOVAs were conducted to find out how the means varied depending on the demographic variables, such as mother tongue, grade and gender, and the Schaffer Test revealed the significant differences in the responses of the participating groups. In addition, a *t*-test was performed to determine the significant differences in the responses of students, teachers, parents and administrators in terms of mother tongue. With regard to the qualitative data analysis, once the interviews were transcribed and deductive coding applied, the categorical content analysis was conducted manually through scrutinising the categorised data.

Results

The responses to the items in the constructs of the questionnaires, namely teacher preference, teacher appreciation, and students' learning difficulties and beliefs were analysed in order to reveal students' perceptions. The majority of the students (73%) indicated that they preferred NNS English teachers with good teaching skills to NS English teachers with poor teaching skills, with the highest mean score (M = 3.95, SD = 1.291). However, as shown in Table 1, the means in this construct were all between 3.95 and 3.62, which suggested that the students preferred NS English teachers in general.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics for teacher preference

Participants		Items	*n*	*M*	*SD*
Students	S9	I prefer non-native speaker (NNS) English teachers with good teaching skills to NS English teachers with poor teaching skills.	185	3.95	1.291
	S1	I prefer a native speaker (NS) English teacher to teach me English.	185	3.88	1.164
	S2	I prefer to have both NS and non-native speaking (NNS) English teachers as a team to teach me English.	185	3.62	1.117

This finding was supported by the qualitative findings that emerged from the open-ended questions on the questionnaire. Fifty-seven percent (n = 83), including nine native speakers of English, indicated a preference for a team of NS and NNS English teachers. Twenty-four percent (n = 33), including seven native speakers of English wrote that they preferred NS English teachers. Nineteen percent (n = 27), including two native speakers of English, preferred NNS English teachers. Therefore, the general tendency seemed to indicate a preference for NS English teachers. However, when teaching skills were considered, there was a tendency to favour good teaching skills. Thus, no matter what the status of the English teacher was, they preferred the ones with good teaching skills.

Similar to the results obtained by the quantitative instrument, the textual data gathered through the interviews revealed that most students were in favour of the teachers with good teaching skills, regardless of the teachers' native or non-native status. While 58% had a clear preference for a team of NS and NNS English teachers, 25% did not indicate a clear preference for either NS or NNS English teachers, and only a small percentage (16%) showed a clear preference for NS English teachers. More than half of the participants (58%) stressed the importance of 'the English teachers being good, and having effective teaching skills.' All the interviewed students stressed the importance of the personality of the English teacher, teaching competence, and language proficiency. An interviewed student reported 'I think an English teacher must be able to speak fluently. It is not the nationality or the mother-tongue, I think if a teacher speaks fluently and has good teaching skills, she is successful.' As Table 2 illustrates with regard to teacher appreciation, students did not indicate a clear preference for either NS or NNS teachers with all the means in this construct being between 2.81 and 3.06.

Table 2 Descriptive statistics for teacher appreciation

Participants		Items	*n*	*M*	*SD*
Students	S30	NNS English teachers respect me more.	185	3.06	1.157
	S31	I participate more when I am with a NNS English teacher.	185	3.04	1.217
	S25	I feel more comfortable with a NS English teacher in class.	185	3.02	1.207
	S29	I am more motivated in a class with a NNS English teacher.	185	3.02	1.123
	S23	When I have a NS English teacher, I enjoy English classes more.	185	2.97	1.206
	S32	It is frightening to speak English with a NS English teacher.	185	2.84	1.295
	S22	NS English teachers are friendlier than NNS English teachers.	185	2.81	1.199

Consistent with the quantitative findings, the qualitative data emerged from the interviews revealed that, with regard to teacher appreciation, only a small percentage (16%) had positive perceptions of NS English teachers. A great majority of the participants (84%) did not have a clear preference for NS or NNS English teachers. During the interviews a student noted 'NS and NNS English teachers have different things to offer. I can benefit from both NS and NNS teachers.'

The next construct focused on the students' learning difficulties. As displayed in Table 3, sixty-three percent of the participants agreed with the item 'NNS English teachers can understand my problems about learning English better,' with a mean score of 3.62. Another finding was that the participants believed NNS English teachers can provide a better idea as to how to learn English (M = 3.54).

Table 3 Descriptive statistics for learning difficulties

Participants		Items	*n*	*M*	*SD*
Students	S5	NNS English teachers can understand my problems about learning English better.	185	3.62	1.215
	S11	NNS English teachers can give me better ideas about how to learn English.	185	3.54	1.128
	S24	When a NNS English teacher teaches me English, I understand the topics more.	185	2.99	1.189

The last construct attempted to investigate students' beliefs of NS/NNS English teachers, where the results indicated that 45% of the participants did not believe 'An English teacher must be a native speaker of English,' and while 34% agreed with the statement, 21% were neutral. Table 4 shows that, despite the mean score of 3.91 for 'NS English teachers know better English' and

3.45 for 'I trust NS English teachers more,' the rest of the mean scores were between 2.87 and 3.14, indicating no clear-cut belief system in favour of NS English teachers.

The qualitative findings with regard to beliefs supported the quantitative findings as well. A small number of the interviewees (10%) indicated that an English teacher had to be a native speaker of English. The rest of the participants (90%) stated clearly that English teachers did not have to be native speakers. Classroom observations also backed up this finding, namely that students' attitudes towards their NS and NNS English teachers were similar.

Mother-Tongue, Grade and Gender

With regard to mother tongue, there was a significant difference between the preferences of NS and NNS secondary school students [F (2.182) = 3.49, p = 0.032]. The students whose mother tongue was Turkish agreed with the statement 'I prefer to have both NS and NNS English teachers as a team to teach me English,' with a mean score of 3.74. However, the students whose mother tongue was English were neutral, indicating no clear preference amongst them for a team of NS and NNS English teachers (M = 3.23). There was also a significant difference between the responses of the NS and NNS students to the statement 'NNS English teachers can understand my problems about learning English better' [F (2.182) = 5.07, p = 0.007]. The NNS students agreed with the statement 'NNS English teachers can understand my problems about learning English better' (M = 3.78). On the other hand, the NS students were neutral, with a mean score of 3.12. Further, a significant difference was found between the NS and NNS students' responses to the item 'Compared to NS English teachers, NNS English teachers followed the course book more' [F (2.182) = 5.28, p = 0.006]. The mean for the NNS students' responses was 2.99, and for those of the NS students 3.51. Another significant difference was found between the responses of the NS and NNS students to the statement 'when I have a NS English teacher, I enjoy English classes more' [F (2.182) = 6.61, p = 0.002]. While the NNS students were neutral with the mean being 2.79, the NS students agreed with the statement with the mean score of 3.53.

Table 4 Descriptive statistics for students' beliefs

Participants		Items	*n*	*M*	*SD*
Students	S3	NS English teachers know better English.	185	3.91	1.162
	S12	I trust NS English teachers more.	185	3.45	1.160
	S4	Some NNS English teachers are better than NS English teachers.	185	3.14	1.185
	S6	An English teacher must be a native speaker of English.	185	2.94	1.236
	S8	NS and NNS English teachers are similar in terms of language use.	185	2.87	1.081

The One-Way ANOVA displayed another significant difference in the responses to 'I feel more comfortable with a NS English teacher in class.' The significant difference was found between the responses of the NS and NNS students [F (2.182) = 5.85, p = 0.003]. The students whose mother tongue was Turkish were neutral (M = 2.86), however, the NS students agreed with the item with the mean score of 3.56. As far as mother tongue was concerned, the last significant difference was found concerning the responses to the statement 'NNS English teachers correct my mistakes more' [F (2.182) = 4.05, p = 0.019]. The means for the responses of the NS and NNS students were 2.63 and 3.14, respectively.

In terms of students' grades, the One-Way ANOVA revealed a significant difference concerning S9. The significant difference in terms of grade was found between the responses of grade 10 and Grade 11 students [F (2.182) = 3.52, p = 0.031]. Grade 10 students preferred NNS English teachers with good teaching skills to NS English teachers with poor teaching skills with the mean score of 3.73. Grade 11 students, on the other hand, strongly agreed with the statement with the mean score of 4.37. The qualitative findings supported these results as well. Fifty-eight percent of the interviewed students highlighted the importance of teaching skills. With regard to the influence of gender as a variable on student preferences and perceptions, no significant difference was detected.

Differences in Students', Teachers' and Administrators' Preferences

Significant differences were detected concerning S2 [F (2.285) = 4.03, p = 0.019] and S4 [F (2.285) = 5.59, p = 0.004] via the One-Way ANOVA. While the students agreed with S2, which stated 'it is better for students to have both NS and NNS English teachers as a team in their classes' with the mean score of 3.62, the teachers strongly agreed with the item with the mean score of 4.39. Both of the administrators agreed with the students. Another significant difference was found concerning the responses to S4, which stated 'Some NNS English teachers are better than NS English teachers.' When it came to this item, the students were neutral, with the mean score of 3.14, while the teachers agreed with the item with the mean score of 3.94. The responses of the administrators were similar to those of the teachers.

Differences in Parents' and Teachers' Preferences

The Scheffe Test revealed a significant difference between the responses of the parents and those of the teachers concerning S2 stating 'it is better for students to have both NS and NNS English teachers as a team in their English classes.' Whereas the parents agreed with the item with the mean score of 3.60, the teachers strongly agreed with the mean score of 4.39.

The influence of mother-tongue on teachers' and parents' preferences

As Table 5 displays, concerning mother-tongue, there were statistically significant differences between the responses of the teachers whose mother tongue was Turkish and those of the teachers whose mother-tongue was English to S6, t (16) = -2.951, p = 0.009, S22 t (16) = -2.165, p = 0.05, S11, t (16) = 2.22, p = 0.41, S25, t (16) = -2.165, p = 0.05 and S2, t (16) = 2.13, p = 0.04.

Table 5 *T*-test results in terms of teachers' mother tongue

	Items	Mother-tongue	*n*	*M*	**S**	*df*	*t*	*p*
S6	An English teacher must be a native speaker of English.	Turkish English	14 4	2.14 4.00	1.027 1.414	16	-2.951	.009
S22	NS English teachers are friendlier than NNS English teachers.	Turkish English	14 4	2.29 3.75	.825 1.500	16	- 2.165	.019
S11	NNS English teachers can give students better ideas about how to learn English.	Turkish English	14 4	3.71 2.25	0.914 1.893	16	2.223	.041
S25	Students feel more comfortable with a NS English teacher in class.	Turkish English	14 4	2.86 3.75	.363 1.500	16	- 2.165	.046
S2	It is better for students to have both NS and non-native speaking (NNS) English teachers as a team in their English classes.	Turkish English	14 4	4.64 3.50	0.633 1.732	16	2.139	.048

Table 6 shows that with regard to mother tongue, there were statistically significant differences between the responses of the parents whose mother-tongue was Turkish and those of the parents with English as their mother-tongue to S2, t (83) = 3.130, p = 0.002, S23, t (84)= -2 .414, p = 0 .18, S32, t (84) = 2.324, p = 0.02, S28, t (84) = 2.322, p = 0.02, S22, t (84) = -2.320, p = 0.02, S4, t (83) = 2.202, p = 0.03, S8, t (84) = 2.212, p = 0.03 and S5, t (84) = 2.150, p = 0.03.

Table 6 *T*-test results in terms of parents' mother tongue

	Items	Mother-tongue	*n*	*M*	**S**	*df*	*t*	*p*
S2	I prefer to have both NS and non-native speaking (NNS) English teachers as a team to teach my son/daughter English.	Turkish English	70 15	3.77 2.80	.981 1.521	83	3.130	.002
S23	When my son/daughter has an NS English teacher, he/she enjoys English classes more.	Turkish English	71 15	3.03 3.80	1.069 1.373	84	2.414	.018
S32	My son/daughter finds it frightening to speak English with a NS English teacher.	Turkish English	71 15	3.04 .27	1.212 .961	84	2.324	.023
S28	NNS English teachers correct students' mistakes more.	Turkish English	71 15	3.31 2.73	.855 .961	84	2.322	.023
S22	NS English teachers are friendlier towards students than NNS English teachers.	Turkish English	71 15	2.52 3.40	1.286 1.549	84	-2.320	.023
S4	Some NNS English teachers are better than NS English teachers.	Turkish English	71 14	3.58 2.93	.936 1.328	83	2.202	.030
S8	NS and NNS English teachers are similar in terms of language use.	Turkish English	71 15	3.14 2.60	.867 828	84	2.212	.030
S5	NNS English teachers can understand students' problems in learning English better.	Turkish English	71 15	3.69 3.00	1.008 1.604	84	2.150	.034

Discussion

Adopting a sociocultural approach as a theoretical lens, the findings were interpreted to find that the participants of this study had developed positive perceptions of NNS English teachers. Being active agents in the classroom, teachers build relationships with their students in the sociocultural context of the classroom. Cross (2010) emphasised the importance of understanding the complexities of the classroom context in language learning, with a special emphasis on teachers. Obviously the NNS English teachers of this study had ensured a desirable classroom context for their participants, which generated the students' positive perceptions. Rather than a blind preference for NS English teachers, the participants stressed the importance of personality, good teaching skills, and efficiency. That the findings did not indicate an overt preference for NS English teachers was consistent with the findings of Ling and Braine (2007), as well as those of Mahboob (2004) and Moussu (2002). A confirmation of Lasagabaster and

Sierra's (2002) emphasis on professionalism rather than the NS and NNS status can be observed in the responses of the participants of this study who valued the importance of the personality and the teaching skills over the teacher's native and non-native status. This finding confirmed Pacek's (2006) results that NS English teachers were not valued over NNS English teachers, and that personality categories were valued to a large degree. These findings supported the argument posed by Firth and Wagner (2007) that individuals cannot be categorised based on their native or non-native status only, as individuals can have multiple identities. The finding that personality categories were favoured over NS/NNS categories develops and adds to Firth and Wagner's criticisms of mainstream SLA/EFL. From a sociocultural perspective, the personality of the teacher plays a central role in providing intellectual and emotional support, by means of which to enable students move further in their ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978).

In terms of teacher appreciation, the participants of this study indicated that both NS and NNS English teachers were equally polite and friendly, and that they were respected equally by both groups of teachers. Classroom observations supported this finding as well. These findings were not consistent with Han's (2005) results that the NS English teachers were criticised for being rude and lacking an understanding of students' needs and interests. The finding that the participants felt equally comfortable with both groups of teachers corroborated the findings of Kasai, Lee and Kim (2011).

The finding that NNS English teachers anticipated learning difficulties and hence helped more in their students' English learning process was due to the fact that NNS English teachers themselves had undergone the same experience (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2002), and thus had first-hand knowledge about what their students were going through. Drawing on a sociocultural perspective, it can be argued that the emotional experiences of NNS English teachers, while they themselves were learning English, played a role in understanding what their students were going through. Owing to the fact that the NNS English teachers had their own 'lived experience' (Vygotsky, 1987) in terms of EFL learning, they could help their students overcome learning difficulties more effectively than their NS counterparts, who did not have such an experience. The finding concerning NNS teachers' giving better ideas about how to learn English aligned with the work of Tarnopolsky (2000). Another explanation accounting for this preference for NNS teachers in terms of learning difficulties could be that, as voiced by Ling and Braine (2007), NNS English teachers could not only understand but also predict the potential challenges their students were likely to encounter. From a sociocultural perspective, due to their 'lived experience' (Vygotsky, 1987) NNS English teachers could provide intellectual and scaffolding assistance that could move their students along within their ZPD. This finding was in line with that of Árva and Medgyes (2000) and Barratt and Kontra (2000), whose respective results showed that NNS English teachers anticipated their students' learning difficulties very well. This anticipation, due to the common mother tongue, enabled NNS teachers to have an advantageous position (Tarnopolsky, 2008).

The participants of this study did not harbour a clear-cut belief system in favour of NS English teachers. That most participants (71%) believed some NNS English teachers were better than NS English teachers, and that 69% of them identified a non-native speaker as their role model, explained the fact that the participants had developed positive attitudes towards their NNS English teachers. Drawing on a sociocultural perspective, these positive attitudes could stem from the parental influences along with the classroom context created by the NNS English teachers. Being a component at the meso-level, parents' beliefs and positive attitudes towards NNS English teachers may exert influence over those of their children. These findings align with those of Ling and Braine (2007) and Moussu (2002). That the teachers and administrators admitted some NNS English teachers were better than NS English teachers can be explained through performance management results. Referring to the performance management system conducted in their schools (Atamtürk, Aksal, Gazi & Atamtürk, 2011) both administrators and some teachers reported during the interviews that some NNS English teachers scored better than their NS counterparts during their performance management process.

When compared, significant differences were detected between student and teacher perceptions with regard to preference for a team of NS and NNS English teachers and beliefs regarding who was better. There was also a significant difference between the responses of the parents and those of the teachers regarding their preferences for a team consisting of NS and NNS English teachers. It was discovered that the parents attached more importance to the personality and teaching skills of the teachers than they did to their native and non-native status. Based in sociocultural approaches, parents and their children are members of the society, and the sociocultural context of the society plays a central role in shaping their attitudes. Drawing on this perspective as a theoretical lens, this finding showed that NS English teachers were not preferred over NNS English teachers, simply because of their NS status in the sociocultural context of the Turkish Cypriot society. The finding that the NS/NNS status of the teachers was not

important to parents was found to be in line with the study of Evans and Cleghorn (2014).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study yields nuanced insights into the preferences and perceptions of EFL students, as well as their parents, teachers, and administrators with regard to the NS/NNS English teachers. The results indicate that, according to both students and parents, the personality and teaching skills of English language teachers are more important than their NS/NNS status. Despite the commonly held belief that NS norms are ideal, there has been a growing realisation that NNS teachers can be good ESL/EFL teachers. This perspective ought to be addressed by further research conducted in various settings and cultures.

Administrators are required to attach more importance to the qualifications, personality and teaching skills of English teachers, regardless of their NS/NNS status in their recruitment practices, and to invest in NNS English teachers who are emerging human resources in the education industry.

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Note

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