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Research Article

Exploring Discrimination Faced by Non-Native English Teachers in the Israeli School System: A Mixed-Methods Study

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English, as the world's most widely spoken language, holds immense global significance. Consequently, proficiency in English is a coveted skill across the globe. This heightened importance of English naturally elevates the role of English teachers in society. This pilot study looks at the unique challenges faced by two distinct categories of English teachers: native speakers (NESTs) and non-native speakers (NNESTs), who often contend with disparities in treatment within educational systems, by families, students, and within the broader cultural context of their respective nations. The primary aim of this research is to investigate whether such disparities exist within the Israeli school system, where English education is mandated from the third grade onward. Employing a mixed-methods approach, this study draws insights from the perspectives of 105 Israeli high school English teachers, alongside input from four school principals and two local coordinators. The findings of this study offer support for the hypothesis that non-native English teachers (NNESTs) encounter more pronounced and critical challenges compared to their native English-speaking counterparts (NESTs). This discrimination manifests in various forms, impacting their professional lives and the quality of education they provide. In conclusion, this research not only points to the disparities faced by NNESTs but also paves the way for future investigations into this issue. The implications of this study extend beyond the Israeli context and have broader implications for educational systems worldwide, urging stakeholders to reevaluate and address the equitable treatment of English teachers, regardless of their native or non-native background.

1. Introduction

With approximately 1.5 billion speakers worldwide, English stands as the predominant global language (Statista Research Department, 2022). For those who do not learn English as their primary language in an English-speaking nation, two primary avenues for acquisition emerge: learning it as a second language within an English-speaking country (referred to as English as a Second Language or ESL), or receiving instruction from educators within one's non-English speaking homeland (known as English as a Foreign Language or EFL). Central to the acquisition of English are the individuals tasked with teaching it: native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs). How students perceive their instructors significantly influences their English language proficiency (Dehbozorgi, 2012). For instance, numerous students exhibit a preference for NESTs over NNESTs (Butler, 2007), despite the fact that a majority of English teachers worldwide are NNESTs (Árva and Medgyes, 2000).

This study explores teacher preferences for NESTs and NNESTs in Israel. Globally, there are prevailing misconceptions about English language instructors. Notably, NESTs are often favored over NNESTs simply due to their native speaker status, a phenomenon Phillipson (1992) termed the 'native speaker fallacy.' Research has indicated that a teacher's accent can influence how students assess their teaching abilities (Edwards, 1982). While native speakers are often preferred, non-native speakers frequently confront bias, perceived inferiority, and discrimination when seeking teaching positions (Braine, 2010a). Investigating these biases assumes significance because teachers' emotions have a substantial impact on their students (Frenzel et al., 2009), and educators are acutely aware of how their native or non-native English proficiency is perceived by both society and their students.

But why place such emphasis on English education and determining who is best suited to teach the language? In Israel, English is the predominant language of business and academia. Although not an official language, government organizations disseminate information online primarily in English, effectively granting English de facto official status in Israel (Yelenevskaya, 2015). English teachers in Israel take immense pride in imparting a language highly coveted by families and regarded as offering abundant opportunities for their children (Carmel and Badash, 2018). Israel is not unique in esteeming English instruction—Taiwanese culture similarly views English as a gateway to superior educational prospects, enhanced career prospects, and fostering connections with influential English-speaking nations (Chang, 2016). In an increasingly globalized world, English serves as the lingua franca of

science, education, finance, the vast majority of internet content, and facilitates global communication (Manyike, 2017).

This study contributes to the literature on NESTs and NNESTs by examining attitudes toward English teachers in Israel. Initially, relevant literature on NESTs and NNESTs, including their respective advantages and disadvantages, will be reviewed. Subsequently, the research questions and methodology will be discussed, which includes a survey questionnaire and interviews, along with the results. Finally, the paper will conclude with a discussion and directions for future researchers. In sum, this research aims to extend our understanding of how students perceive NESTs and NNESTs and the factors that shape these perceptions.

2. Literature Review

Defining NESTs and NNESTs

The distinction between "native speaker" and "non-native speaker" in the context of English language teaching is not straightforward, with various interpretations and complexities. While a basic definition characterizes native speakers as those who speak English as their first language and non-native speakers as those who learn it as a foreign or second language (Braine, 2010a), nuances arise when considering diverse contexts.

For instance, countries like India, where English is used extensively in education and professional communication, blur the lines between native and non-native speakers (Medgyes, 1992). Similarly, individuals with mixed linguistic backgrounds, such as Juan's case, raised in the United States with a Mexican father and Norwegian mother, challenge traditional definitions (Medgyes, 1992). Real-world implications are evident, as some English teachers who grew up speaking English grapple with whether they should identify as native or non-native speakers (Liu, 1999).

While the concept of a native speaker remains contentious, scholarly consensus acknowledges the distinction between native and non-native English-speaking teachers, despite the difficulties in precisely defining these categories (Medgyes, 1992; Braine, 2010a; Levis et al., 2017). The literature suggests that this divide persists, albeit amid ongoing debates.

Advantages of NESTs

Native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) possess certain advantages in English language instruction. They naturally exhibit superior language proficiency, marked by fluency, spontaneity, diversity, confidence, and contemporary usage (Mahboob, 2003; Árva and Medgyes, 2000; Reves and Medgyes, 1994). In contrast, non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) may tend to overuse formal language (Mahboob, 2003; Reves and Medgyes, 1994).

NESTs, particularly those who do not share their students' mother tongue, rely predominantly on the target language during instruction (Árva and Medgyes, 2000). Their cultural background enriches the learning experience, offering unique cultural insights. Simply having a NEST as an instructor can inspire students to delve deeper into the target language, akin to immersing themselves in a country where the language is spoken (Árva and Medgyes, 2000).

Preference for NESTs extends beyond language proficiency, with some biases evident in various cultural contexts. In some Asian cultures, for instance, families and institutions express a preference for NESTs, based on perceptions of teaching effectiveness and spoken communication (Takada, 2000; Tang, 1997). Such biases, whether founded or not, benefit NESTs within these societies.

Advantages of NNESTs

While NESTs hold clear advantages, it is crucial to acknowledge the strengths unique to non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs). They offer valuable attributes, such as:

Modeling Language Learning: NNESTs consciously learned the target language, making them ideal role models for language learners. Native Language Proficiency: NNESTs, by definition, are not native speakers of their students' language, enabling them to communicate fluently in the students' mother tongue. Anticipating Language Barriers: NNESTs, having overcome language hurdles themselves, are well-equipped to anticipate and address students' difficulties. Grammatical Expertise: NNESTs often possess in-depth knowledge of the target language's mechanics, surpassing that of native speakers. Empathy and Understanding: NNESTs can empathize with students' struggles, having experienced similar challenges while learning the target language. Teaching Experience as Non-Natives: NNESTs bring a unique perspective to teaching the target language, as they have undergone the process of learning it as non-native speakers themselves.

These advantages are supported by empirical research. For instance, NESTs may struggle with teaching English grammar and mechanics, while NNESTs tend to excel in these areas (Árva and Medgyes, 2000; Ellis, 2005). Additionally, shared cultural and linguistic backgrounds allow NNESTs to better predict and address their students' language-learning difficulties (Reves and Medgyes, 1994; Árva and Medgyes, 2000; Braine, 2010b; Nagamine, 2017).

In summary, NNESTs bring unique strengths to English language instruction, often compensating for the areas where NESTs excel.

Administrator Attitudes towards NESTs and NNESTs

Administrators' perceptions of native and non-native English-speaking teachers significantly impact hiring and professional opportunities. Research indicates that a considerable percentage of administrators prioritize hiring native speakers (Clark and Paran, 2007). This preference extends to administrators of intensive English programs in the United States (Mahboob et al., 2004). Consequently, non-native speakers may face discrimination in terms of employability and career advancement (Braine, 2010a).

Teacher Attitudes and Self-Perceptions

Student, family, and cultural biases can affect the classroom environment and teacher self-perceptions. While Asian cultures, for example, may exhibit a preference for NESTs due to accents and a focus on spoken communication, attitudes towards NESTs and NNESTs are evolving (Moussu, 2002; Moussu, 2006; Nagamine, 2017; Chang, 2016). Recent studies suggest that NNESTs hold a positive self-image (Lee et al., 2017), and student preferences may not consistently favor NESTs (Samimy and Brutt-Griffler, 1999; Chun, 2014).

Moreover, some studies indicate that students may struggle to differentiate between NEST and NNEST accents, and teacher accents may not significantly influence student outcomes (Butler, 2007; Rubin, 1992; Kelch and Santana-Williamson, 2002). Over time, the perceived differences between NESTs and NNESTs may be diminishing (Nagamine, 2017; Chang, 2016).

In essence, while NEST and NNEST advantages and biases exist, evolving perceptions and diverse preferences underscore the complexities surrounding this topic. The qualities valued in an English language teacher appear to bridge traditional distinctions, emphasizing the importance of a holistic approach to language education.

3. Research Questions

The study aims to investigate perceptions of native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) within the context of English foreign language (EFL) high schools in Israel. Given Israel's unique linguistic landscape, where English holds importance in business and education despite its non-official status (Aronin and Yelenevskaya, 2022), this research is particularly pertinent. Utilizing surveys, data will be gathered from various stakeholders, including teachers, coordinators, and principals. The primary objective is to gain comprehensive insights into the perspectives surrounding NNESTs and NESTs among all those involved in the teaching process. Within the broader question of NEST and NNEST perceptions, several sub-questions will be addressed:

How do English teachers perceive the NEST/NNEST distinction?

   a. Is there a difference between Native and non-native teacher perspectives?
   - What are the general perceptions of principals and policymakers within the Israeli school system regarding NESTs and NNESTs in English instruction?

Hypotheses

The hypotheses of this study are as follows:

- NNESTs will receive less favorable feedback and, overall, encounter a more negative attitude from the surveyed participants, while NESTs will receive more positive feedback and be generally held in higher esteem. Consequently, Israeli NNESTs will perceive less support from their peers and administrators compared to their NEST counterparts. Peer and administrative support are crucial for self-efficacy and effective integration.
- Israeli teachers and administrators will perceive NESTs as more desirable for the Israeli school system.
- Teachers who do not possess an American or British accent will face greater challenges in teaching EFL students, as these students are likely to be more accustomed to English spoken with American or British accents.

4. Methodology

Participants

This research delves into the perspectives of English teachers, school coordinators, and principals within Israeli high school settings. The study encompasses 105 surveyed teachers, including both native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs). All participants operate within high school environments, with ages spanning from 20 to 75 and teaching experience ranging from 1 to 47 years. The teachers' native languages encompass Hebrew, English, bilingual proficiency, and a minority with mother tongues other than English or Hebrew. In addition, in-depth interviews were carried out with two English coordinators and four principals.

Questionnaires and Interviews

To gauge preferences and opinions regarding NESTs and NNESTs among teachers, coordinators, and principals, a combination of questionnaires and interviews was employed. The questionnaire and interview design drew inspiration from Kayalp's work (2016). Detailed copies of the questionnaire can be found in the appendix. Participants were informed of the voluntary nature of their involvement and their right to withdraw at any point without consequences. Each participant provided written consent before partaking in the study. Instructions and questions were presented in both English and Hebrew. The questionnaire, with a 100% completion rate, typically required approximately 10 minutes to finish. It aimed to elicit participants' personal preferences concerning NESTs and NNESTs.

The initial questionnaire section collected demographic data, including gender, age, nationality, primary language, teaching experience duration, and self-identification as a native English speaker. Subsequently, participants self-evaluated their English proficiency and performance as English educators using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (very low) to 5 (excellent). Proficiency questions covered reading, writing, comprehension, and communication skills in English. The section on self-confidence encompassed aspects such as teaching writing, reading, listening, grammar, culture, and test preparation. It also permitted teachers to rank their competency in teaching beginner, intermediate, and advanced English students. The final section, utilizing a 5-point Likert scale (1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree), probed participants' attitudes toward native and non-native English teachers. This section comprised 33 questions exploring topics like perceived student preferences for NNESTs/NESTs, the perceived teaching superiority of NNESTs/NESTs in

pronunciation, listening comprehension, and grammar. An open-ended section allowed teachers to express their perceived strengths and weaknesses of both NESTs and NNESTs. All questionnaire data, excluding open-ended responses, was quantitatively scored. Descriptive statistics were conducted on each dataset, as discussed in the results section.

In addition to teacher questionnaires, semi-structured interviews were conducted with four principals and two local English coordinators. For the full list of interview questions, refer to the appendix. These interviews, which included topics such as hiring preferences and perceived strengths and weaknesses of NESTs and NNESTs, were transcribed for data analysis and categorization according to themes.

Data Collection Procedures

To ensure accurate responses, a brief clarification of the terms NEST and NNEST was presented at the survey's outset. Native-speaker English language teachers were defined as "teachers whose first (native) language is English," while non-native-speaker English language teachers were described as "teachers who learned English in addition to their first language."

Invitations to participate in the study were distributed via email to Israeli English teachers. The emails provided an overview of the study's purpose, background, and participants' roles in the questionnaire. They assured confidentiality and emphasized that responses would be used exclusively for academic research.

For interviews with principals and local administrators, transcripts were generated. Each interview was manually transcribed, and any personally identifying information was coded to preserve interviewee confidentiality.

Ethical Considerations

Participants willingly and knowingly consented to their involvement before receiving the questionnaire. Confidentiality was guaranteed, with participants identified only by initials. Names of students, if mentioned during the interviews, were not excluded from the study. All teachers signed a consent form before participating in the research.

5. Results

Questionnaire

The demographic data shows that all participants in this study are high school educators. Among the 105 respondents, 90.5% (N=95) identified as female. Concerning nationality, the cohort consisted of nearly equal proportions of Israelis (N=41, 39%) and Americans (N=44, 41.9%), with just two individuals identifying as both American and Israeli. A further 18 participants (17.1%) hailed from nationalities other than Israeli or American. The average age of the participating teachers was 46.28 years, with a standard deviation of 11.76. On average, teachers had 16.43 years of teaching experience, with a standard deviation of 10.83. Participants were divided into two categories based on whether English was their first language (L1). Approximately half of the respondents (N=47, 44.8%) identified as native English speakers (NESTs), while the remaining 55.2% (N=58) identified as non-native English speakers (NNESTs). Hence, our sample exhibited a relatively balanced distribution of NESTs and NNESTs, fulfilling the requirement for robust descriptive statistics analysis

Variable	Values	N	%
Gender	Female	95	90.5
	Male	10	9.5
Nation	Israeli	41	39.0
	American	44	41.9
	Both	2	1.9
	Other	18	17.1
English speaker	Yes	47	44.8
	No	58	55.2
Age	M (SD)	46.28 (11.76)	
Teaching experience (years)	M (SD)	16.43 (10.83)	

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Teacher Confidence in English Proficiency

To probe the hypothesized differences between native and non-native English-speaking high school educators, t-tests for independent samples were executed. Most t-tests indicated significant differences. When self-assessing their English command, native speakers invariably reported higher confidence than non-native educators across areas such as reading comprehension, writing/composition, listening comprehension, speaking/oral communication, grammar accuracy, vocabulary breadth, and pronunciation. However, in the domain of grammatical rule knowledge, a deviation was observed. This metric did not manifest a significant difference between the two groups, resonating with prior studies that highlight NNESTs' confidence in their English grammar mastery. Notably, while both groups portrayed high confidence levels (with all categories registering mean scores surpassing 4 on a 5-point Likert scale), native speakers manifested superior confidence.

Variable	English L1 N=47		English not L1 N=58		t-score	P – value
	M	SD	M	SD		
Reading comprehension	4.96	0.20	4.81	0.40	2.31	0.023
Writing/Composition	4.85	0.42	4.47	0.65	3.50	0.001
Listening comprehension	5.00	0.00	4.79	0.49	2.91	0.004
Speaking/Oral communication	5.00	0.00	4.50	0.60	5.71	0.000
Grammar accuracy in use	4.81	0.54	4.41	0.62	3.43	0.001
Knowledge of grammar rules	4.21	0.95	4.48	0.63	-1.74	0.085
Breadth of vocabulary	4.87	0.34	4.38	0.59	5.11	0.000
Pronunciation	4.96	0.20	4.41	0.65	5.52	0.000

Table 2. Teacher Confidence in Own Knowledge

Variable	English L1 N=47		English not L1 N=58		t-score	P – value
	M	SD	M	SD		
Reading	4.57	0.95	4.90	0.36	-2.38	0.019
Writing/Composition	4.77	0.43	4.69	0.54	0.79	0.430
Listening	4.70	0.62	4.79	0.55	-0.79	0.431
Speaking/Pronunciation	4.85	0.42	4.53	0.73	2.64	0.010
Grammar	4.28	0.93	4.55	0.60	-1.84	0.069
Culture	4.87	0.45	4.47	0.68	3.52	0.001
Test preparation	4.72	0.54	4.78	0.46	-0.54	0.592
Beginner levels	3.62	1.39	4.41	0.96	-3.47	0.001
Intermediate levels	4.47	0.78	4.66	0.64	-1.36	0.178
Advanced levels	4.79	0.59	4.45	0.86	2.30	0.024

Table 3. Teacher Attitudes Towards NNESTs and NESTs

In this section, the questionnaire probed the teachers' attitudes towards NESTs and NNESTs. The following questions produced significant findings:

Students Prefer a Native Speaker as an English Language Teacher (p = 0.000, t-score = 3.90): Native English teachers perceive that students prefer them, while non-native teachers hold a differing opinion. Both groups' average responses hovered between neutrality and agreement (the mean for non-natives was 3.03, and the mean for natives was 3.79), suggesting that neither group uniformly believes that native English speakers are the absolute preference of students.

Students Would Learn More Vocabulary with a Native Speaker of English as Their Teacher (p = 0.000): Native teachers believed themselves to be more advantageous in teaching vocabulary, while

significantly fewer non-native teachers agreed.

Students' Pronunciation Would Be Better with a Native Speaker of English as Their Teacher (p = 0.001): Native teachers perceived themselves as more effective in improving students' pronunciation, while non-native teachers were less convinced.

If Students Could Choose the Course, They Would Prefer a Course Taught by a Native Speaker of English (p = 0.000): On average, both groups believed that students would slightly benefit more when taught by NESTs than NNESTs, with NESTs themselves more strongly agreeing.

Students Reading Skills Would Be Better with a Native Speaker of English as Their Teacher (p = 0.000), Students Would Speak More Fluently if They Had a Native Speaker English as Their Teacher (p = 0.020), A Teacher Who is a Native Speaker of English Would Assess Students' Listening Comprehension Better Than a Non-Native Speaker of English (p = 0.000), and similar questions regarding student writing, speaking, pronunciation, and grammar (p = 0.000-0.001): Native teachers believed they excelled at assessing these language skills compared to non-native teachers. These findings are intriguing, especially considering that non-native teachers reported significantly higher confidence in their ability to teach reading.

The results indicate that while non-native teachers express confidence in teaching reading, native teachers believe that they outperform their non-native counterparts in assessing students' reading, writing, speaking, listening, pronunciation, and grammar skills. These findings highlight disparities in perception between NESTs and NNESTs regarding their effectiveness in certain aspects of English language instruction.

Teacher Comfort and Attitudes

In this section of the questionnaire, we explored teachers' comfort levels and attitudes towards various aspects of English teaching. Several questions produced noteworthy results:

- Teaching Reading (p = 0.019): Non-native English teachers reported feeling significantly more confident in their ability to teach reading compared to native English teachers.
- Teaching Speaking and Pronunciation (p = 0.010) and Teaching Culture (p = 0.001): Native speakers expressed significantly more confidence in teaching speaking, pronunciation, and culture.
- Teaching Different Levels of Students: Non-native English teachers felt significantly more confident in teaching beginner-level students (p = 0.001), while native English teachers reported

significantly more confidence in teaching advanced students (p = 0.024). There was no significant

difference in teaching intermediate-level students.

Variable	English L1 N=47		English not L1 N=58		t-score	P-value
	M	SD	M	SD		
Students prefer a native speaker as an English language teacher.	3.79	0.95	3.03	1.01	3.90	0.000
At college/university, students prefer a native speaker as an English language teacher.	4.26	1.05	3.90	1.10	1.69	0.094
If students could choose, they would prefer to have two teachers: one native speaker of English and one non-native speaker of English.	3.00	1.37	3.41	1.39	-1.53	0.130
Students would learn more vocabulary with a native speaker of English as their teacher.	4.04	1.33	3.05	1.18	4.04	0.000
Students' pronunciation would be better with a native speaker of English as their teacher.	4.62	0.71	4.03	1.01	3.35	0.001
Students listening skills would be better with a native speaker of English as their teacher.	3.79	1.10	3.36	1.17	1.90	0.060
Students reading skills would be better with a native speaker of English as their teacher.	3.21	1.21	2.41	1.01	3.68	0.000
Students would speak more fluently if they had a native English speaker as their teacher.	3.87	1.21	3.34	1.09	2.35	0.020
A teacher who is a native speaker of English would give students more strategies/ideas to learn better.	2.47	1.21	1.71	0.73	3.98	0.000
Students would learn more about English-speaking countries with a native speaker of English as their teacher.	3.89	1.11	3.05	1.43	3.31	0.001
A teacher who is a native speaker of English would assess students' listening comprehension better than a non-native speaker of English.	3.11	1.22	1.93	1.07	5.25	0.000
A teacher who is a native speaker of English would assess students' reading comprehension better than a teacher who is a non-native speaker of English.	3.15	1.23	1.91	1.01	5.63	0.000

Variable	English L1 N=47		English not L1 N=58		t-score	P-value
	M	SD	M	SD		
A teacher who is a native speaker of English would assess students' speaking better than a non-native speaker teacher of English.	3.91	1.25	2.59	1.27	5.37	0.000
A teacher who is a native speaker of English would assess students' writing better than a teacher who is a non-native speaker of English.	3.91	1.14	2.62	1.23	5.55	0.000
A teacher who is a native speaker of English would assess students' pronunciation better than a teacher who is a non-native speaker of English.	4.32	1.02	3.52	1.20	3.63	0.000
A native English language speaker would assess students' knowledge of grammar better than a non-native speaker English language teacher.	3.15	1.37	2.33	1.10	3.41	0.001
Students can learn just as well from a teacher who is a native speaker of English as they can from a teacher who is a non-native speaker of English.	3.60	1.35	4.05	1.16	-1.86	0.065
Native speaker English teachers teach just as effectively as teachers who are non-native speakers of English.	3.94	1.15	3.79	1.15	0.63	0.528
If students could choose the course themselves, they would choose a course taught by a native speaker of English.	3.87	0.99	3.09	1.17	3.65	0.000

Table 4. Perceived Student Attitudes Towards NESTs and NNESTs

In this table, we examined teachers' perceptions of students' attitudes towards NESTs and NNESTs. Notable findings include:

- Teachers thought Students Prefer a Native Speaker as an English Language Teacher (p = 0.000, t-score = 3.90): Native English teachers believe that students prefer them, while non-native English

teachers hold a different view. Both groups' responses fell between neutrality and agreement (the mean for non-natives was 3.03, and the mean for natives was 3.79), indicating that neither group uniformly believes that native English speakers are the exclusive preference of students.

- Teachers thought Students Would Learn More Vocabulary with a Native Speaker of English as Their Teacher ($p = 0.000$): Native teachers believed they were more effective in teaching vocabulary, while significantly fewer non-native teachers agreed.

- Teachers thought Students' Pronunciation Would Be Better with a Native Speaker of English as Their Teacher ($p = 0.001$): Native teachers perceived themselves as more effective in improving students' pronunciation, while non-native teachers were less convinced.

- If Students Could Choose, They Would Prefer a Course Taught by a Native Speaker of English ($p = 0.000$): On average, both groups believed that students would slightly benefit more when taught by NESTs than NNESTs, with NESTs themselves more strongly agreeing.

These results highlight the disparities in perception between NESTs and NNESTs regarding their effectiveness in various aspects of English language instruction.

Variable	English L1 N=47		English not L1 N=58		t-score	P – value
	M	SD	M	SD		
Students feel more comfortable in class with A native English language speaker.	3.06	1.01	2.29	1.01	3.89	0.000
Students would learn more about the culture of English-speaking people from a teacher who is a native speaker of English.	4.11	0.96	3.48	1.38	2.62	0.010
A teacher who is a native speaker of English is friendly because he/she provides a relaxed learning environment.	2.34	1.22	1.78	0.90	2.73	0.008
Students have more positive attitudes to studying English when they have teachers who are native speakers of English.	3.23	1.07	2.28	1.12	4.45	0.000
Students don't care whether their English teacher is a native speaker or a non-native speaker of English, as long as he/she is a good teacher for them.	3.98	1.38	4.03	1.14	-0.23	0.821
A teacher who is a native speaker of English is better at explaining grammar than a non-native teacher.	2.21	1.00	1.76	0.92	2.42	0.017
A teacher who is a native speaker of English is better at explaining vocabulary than a non-native teacher.	3.68	1.29	2.40	1.27	5.12	0.000
A native English language speaker is better at explaining speaking.	3.96	1.14	3.16	1.24	3.42	0.001
A teacher who is a native speaker of English is better at explaining listening skills than a non-native teacher.	2.91	1.28	2.17	1.09	3.20	0.002
A teacher who is a native speaker of English is better at explaining writing than a non-native teacher.	3.45	1.23	2.48	1.16	4.12	0.000
A teacher who is a native speaker of English is better at explaining pronunciation than a non-native teacher.	4.36	0.92	3.69	1.27	3.03	0.003
A teacher who is a native speaker of English encourages students to speak more English in class.	4.15	1.08	3.97	0.90	0.95	0.345

Table 5. Classroom Atmosphere

This section focused on teachers' perceptions of classroom atmosphere and how it relates to NESTs and NNESTs. Significant findings include:

- Students Feel More Comfortable in Class with A native English language speaker (p = 0.000).
- A Teacher Who is a Native Speaker of English is Friendly Because He/She Provides a Relaxed Learning Environment (p = 0.008).
- Students Have More Positive Attitudes Towards Studying English When They Have Teachers Who are Native Speakers of English (p = 0.000).

While both NESTs and NNESTs had varying degrees of agreement or disagreement on these statements, their perceptions differed significantly.

Variable	English L1 N=47		English not L1 N=58		t–score	P –value
	M	SD	M	SD		
A teacher who is a native speaker of English employs modern teaching methods and techniques.	2.49	1.10	2.03	1.08	2.13	0.035
A teacher who is a native speaker of English uses more interesting class activities.	2.49	1.37	1.91	1.03	2.46	0.016

Table 6. Teaching Methodology

The last set of questions examined teaching methodology. Findings include:

- A Teacher Who is a Native Speaker of English Employs Modern Teaching Methods and Techniques (p = 0.035).
- A Teacher Who is a Native Speaker English Uses More Interesting Class Activities (p = 0.016).

Both groups generally disagreed with these statements, with non-native English teachers expressing stronger disagreement.

Overall, these results shed light on the differing perceptions and attitudes of NESTs and NNESTs in various aspects of English language teaching, providing valuable insights into their viewpoints and self-assessments.

Open Response: Teacher Perceptions

In response to the open-ended question about the strengths of NESTs, several common themes emerged among teacher responses, each accompanied by the percentage of teachers who highlighted these strengths:

- Knowledge of culture (18.1%)
- Pronunciation (27.6%)
- Fluency (25.7%)
- Confidence (12.4%)
- Vocabulary (37.1%)

These perceived strengths align with existing literature on the subject, supporting the notion that NESTs bring valuable cultural and linguistic insights to the classroom. However, some respondents also noted potential drawbacks, such as a lack of understanding of students' local culture and language.

Critiques of NESTs included perceptions of:

- Ignorance of local culture (18.1%) and language (23.8%)
- Lack of empathy for students struggling with English (45.7%)
- Accusations of relying solely on being "native" instead of having proper education in English instruction
- Challenges related to heavy accents, although this contradicted some respondents' views on the advantages of native accents
- Inferior classroom management skills when compared to Israeli colleagues (5.7%)
- Weaknesses in teaching grammar (41%)
- Language discrepancies between English and Hebrew, with concerns that NESTs may not adequately address these differences

Responses regarding NNESTs often mirrored the strengths and weaknesses associated with NESTs. Some common themes among NNEST strengths included fluency in Hebrew, relationship-building skills, knowledge of teaching strategies, and empathy for students.

Interviews

This section presents a comprehensive overview of insights gathered from interviews with six educational leaders, comprising four principals and two local coordinators. These interviews aimed to explore various aspects of hiring practices, teacher strengths and weaknesses, and student preferences regarding Native English-Speaking Teachers (NESTs) and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers (NNESTs).

Hiring Practices:

Principal 1: believes in assessing a teacher's holistic classroom environment during the hiring process, with language proficiency considered a secondary criterion. Their primary focus lies in qualities such as patience and adaptability, demonstrating a willingness to hire both NESTs and NNESTs based on teaching skills and personal attributes.

In contrast, Principal 2 has consistently hired NNESTs, prioritizing teaching skills over native fluency. Language proficiency is evaluated during the interview but is not the primary criterion for selection.

Principals 3 and 4 adopt a hiring approach that values a teacher's overall suitability rather than their native or non-native status. Both emphasize the importance of gathering extensive information about prospective teachers, including their experience and recommendations.

The local coordinators share a similar perspective, focusing on assessing language proficiency during interviews, particularly communicative skills. Personal traits like kindness and classroom management abilities are also valued by prospective teachers.

Advantages of NESTs:

- Principal 1 highlights NESTs' strengths in fluency, confidence, and knowledge of English slang, which are recognized as advantageous in language instruction.
- Principal 2 aligns with Principal 1 regarding the advantages of NESTs, particularly emphasizing their confidence, vocabulary, and fluency. She suggests that NNESTs may lack confidence in using English in the classroom.

- Principals 3 and 4 disagreed with the assumption that NESTs possess distinct advantages. Principal 3 believed that NESTs excel in language knowledge, while Principal 4 expressed a lack of belief in NEST advantages based on personal experience.

Advantages of NNESTs:

- Principal 1 believes that NNESTs excel at explaining why certain aspects of English are the way they are since they consciously learned the language. He also suggests that NNESTs may have superior methods for retaining knowledge.
- Principal 2 initially indicates that NNESTs do not possess specific strengths but later acknowledges their understanding of the difficulties faced by non-native English speakers.
- Both local coordinators recognize the cultural and practical advantages of NNESTs, particularly their understanding of the challenges faced by native Hebrew speakers learning English. NNESTs are appreciated for their ability to share effective language learning techniques and their knowledge of English language culture.

Student Preferences:

- All interviewees concurred that students' preferences for NESTs or NNESTs are not based on native or non-native status. Instead, they emphasized that students prioritize effective teaching proficiency, caring attitudes, appropriate classroom management, and language understanding.

In summary, these interviews provide a well-rounded perspective on hiring practices and the advantages and disadvantages of NESTs and NNESTs, as seen through the eyes of educational leaders. These insights underscore the importance of adopting a balanced approach to teacher recruitment and recognizing the unique strengths of both teacher groups. Ultimately, the focus remains on the qualities that make a teacher effective in the classroom, regardless of their native or non-native status.

6. Discussion

This comprehensive pilot study examined the preferences and perceptions of 105 English teachers, two local coordinators, and four principals within the Israeli school system, shedding light on the intricate dynamics between Native English-Speaking Teachers (NESTs) and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers (NNESTs) in English language education. The investigation aimed to discern

whether there is a prevalent preference for a particular type of English teacher among school administrators, coordinators, and teachers in Israel.

The study found that the Likert scale responses from NESTs predominantly leaned toward positive evaluations of their group, revealing a self-bias in favor of NESTs. This trend was evident across various aspects of English language teaching.

In terms of English proficiency, NESTs reported significantly higher levels of self-assuredness in their language skills compared to NNESTs, with the exception of English grammar rules, where both groups expressed similar confidence. This result is consistent with existing research showing that NNESTs often take pride in their grammar proficiency.

NESTs also exhibited greater confidence in teaching speaking, pronunciation, and culture. These findings align with previous research highlighting NESTs' perceived strengths in pronunciation and cultural insights. However, it's important to note that NNESTs can also be effective in teaching culture (Díaz, 2015; Chang, 2016).

Interestingly, both NESTs and NNESTs rejected the idea that NESTs significantly encourage more English use in the classroom. This result contrasts with some prior research, which suggested that NESTs might promote greater language use among students. Additionally, both groups disagreed with the notion that NESTs employ better teaching techniques and offer more interesting class activities, though NNESTs expressed stronger disagreement.

In open-ended responses, NESTs were praised for their use of English in the classroom but criticized for poor classroom management, potentially stemming from limited cultural and linguistic understanding. In contrast, NNESTs were commended as positive role models but faced criticism for overreliance on Hebrew. NESTs were praised for their superior cultural knowledge, while NNESTs were lauded for their understanding of local language and culture.

Overall, strengths and weaknesses seemed to complement each other between NESTs and NNESTs, with one group's strengths often being the counterpart's weaknesses, in line with existing literature.

The interviews with the principals and local coordinators provided valuable insights into hiring practices and preferences for NESTs and NNESTs. Principals prioritized hiring good teachers over proficient English speakers and did not exclusively favor NESTs or require native fluency. The local coordinators emphasized English competency, kindness, and classroom management skills when hiring.

Implications and Recommendations

The study suggests that NESTs and NNESTs in Israel possess complementary strengths and weaknesses, emphasizing the importance of a balanced approach in English language education. Mixing both types of teachers within a school can help mitigate potential weaknesses and provide students with diverse experiences.

To achieve this balance effectively, an atmosphere of mutual respect and collaboration between NESTs and NNESTs should be cultivated. This includes encouraging teamwork, joint projects, and open communication to harness the advantages of both teacher types. The study's findings support the notion that neither group is inherently superior; their strengths and weaknesses align with the context and teaching levels.

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations should be noted. The study did not include English teachers in Arab schools, which represent a distinct context. Additionally, the use of English outside the classroom and teacher interactions in the staff room were not explored. Further, the study interviewed only four principals and two local coordinators, limiting the breadth of perspectives.

Future research should incorporate more principals and local coordinators, consider teacher interactions outside the classroom, and encompass NESTs and NNESTs from Arab schools to provide a more comprehensive understanding of English language education in Israel.

In conclusion, this study contributes valuable insights into the complex landscape of English language education in Israel, emphasizing the importance of a balanced approach that leverages the strengths of both NESTs and NNESTs for the benefit of students.

Appendixes

See the Supplementary data section.

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