Yabancı Dil Öğrenen Türk Öğrencilerin Anadil Konuşmacısı Olan ve Olmayan Öğretmenler Hakkındaki Görüşleri

Opinions of Turkish Foreign Language Learners about Native and Nonnative Teachers

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ÖZET

İngilizce 21. Yüzyılın yeryüzünde tartışmasız ortak geçer dilidir. Dünyanın her yerinde yabancı dil eğitiminin en büyük kısmını oluşturan İngilizce eğitimi için iki tane öğretmen istihdamı yaratma kaynağı bulunmaktadır. Anadili İngilizce olan dil öğretmenleri doğuştan gelen kimlikleri sayesinde kısa dönem içerisinde tamamladıkları kurslarla beraber dünyanın bütün bölgelerinde eğitimci olarak görev alabilirken, anadili İngilizce olmayanlar ise ülkeleri tarafından üniversitelerde ve ya enstitülerde kendilerine sunulan dil eğitimi öğretmenliğini tamamlayarak büyük boyutlara ulaşmış İngilizce dil öğretmeni ihtiyacına çözüm olmaktadır. Özellikle iki gruptan öğretmenlerin yer aldığı eğitim çevrelerinde hangi öğretmen grubunun daha iyi olduğu konusunda sürekli yapılan bir tartışma vardır. Bu çalışmada iki gruptan öğretmenle çalışma şansı bulmuş öğrencilerin düşünceleri incelenmiş ve bulgular nitel ve nicel olarak sunulmuştur. Çalışma sonucunda öğrencilerin belirli özellikler için öğretmen tercihlerinin değiştiği saptanmıştır.

Keywords:

Native,
Nonnative,
Language,
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ABSTRACT

English is the lingua franca of 21st century on earth obviously. It takes the biggest part in foreign language education all across the world and there are two main sources for employing teachers in the field. Native English speakers are able to find a suitable position for themselves anywhere in the world as a tutor thanks to their true born identity and a short period course else ways other language users can be an English language teacher because many countries offer English language teaching education in their universities or colleges to fulfill massive number of teacher exigence in the field. There is an ongoing debate about which group of teacher is superior the other especially in settings where both group of teachers can serve simultaneously. In this study, opinions of learners who have a chance to study both group are investigated and findings are exposed both in quantitative and qualitative manners. Results showed that learners preferred to have a lesson with either a native or nonnative English language teacher depending on the subject or skill they study.

1. INTRODUCTION

English Language Teaching is commonly formed around five major titles such as reading, writing, listening, speaking, and grammar. Teachers design their lessons considering these titles and organize the structure of education according to it. Students expect what can happen before a lesson thanks to this classification. They build their perception about teachers' competence upon given titles above and rate them proportional to a specific title instead of as a whole. The classroom management skill of a teacher is also an important factor for educational environment. For being an effective language teacher, controlling the classroom and reducing the learners' anxiety are two crucial elements (Celik, Arikan & Caner, 2013). Teachers attitudes highly affect students in positive and negative ways. Walker, Shafer, and Liams (2004) presented that negative attitudes are developed quickly but hard to change hence teachers need to monitor their behaviors to prevent such negative effects. Regardless of their nativeness or non-nativeness, teachers should be aware of these aspects and they should create a suitable environment for their students to use the target language.

English has been the dominant language of world obviously for more than fifty years. As a consequence of this situation, teaching English as a second (ESL) or foreign language (EFL) is very popular across the countries from far east to west. A lot of countries have begun teaching English at younger ages. With this movement, the number of non-native speakers is more numerous than native speakers (Karakas, Uysal, Bilgin & Bulut, 2016). This outcome led scholars to investigate how to teach English at schools effectively and they have argued about whether teachers in English education should be native or nonnative so many times and proposed their ideas with reasons (e.g. Barkhuizen, 1998; Garrett & Shortall, 2002; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2002; Samimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999). Both group of teachers are supported or criticized at different edges.

The terms nativeness and non-nativeness are even being criticized in English language context and there is no agreement upon definitions of these terms. In a more general understanding, native speaker is defined as "a person who has spoken the language in question from earliest childhood" by Oxford dictionary. As for the non- native speaker term, the definition is explained as "someone who is learning a language they did not learn to speak as a child" by Macmillan dictionary. Else ways, there are some scholars who argue that there is no native speaker of English because it belongs to everyone who speaks it now (Crystal, 1997; Davies, 1996; Philipson, 1992). Despite ongoing discussion about this matter both psycholinguistically and socioculturally, usage of the terms Native English-Speaking Teachers (NEST) and Non-native English-Speaking Teachers (NNEST) are very common in the field and comparison between NEST and NNEST teachers is brought up often to find a suitable answer to question whom teach to English to foreigner learners.

Brutt-Griffler and Samimy (2001) have claimed that notion of nativeness itself is a non-elective socially constructed identity rather than a linguistic category. If this claim is true, then it is possible that superiority of NES teachers in English Language Teaching (ELT) is a placebo effect deriving from one's beliefs and attitudes. Yet augmenting number of researches show that learners, parents, and even NNEST teachers believe that NES teachers are best especially in terms of teaching oral part of the language whereas NNEST are superior with regard to teach grammar part of the language (e.g Cheung, 2002; Demir, 2011; Moussu & Braine, 2006; Karakas, 2016; Ustunoglu, 2007; Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2014).

2. THE STUDY

It has been commonly believed that NEST are better at teaching to EFL/ESL notwithstanding the fact that they have a minor percentage in English language teachers (Canagarajah, 2006; Clouet, 2006; Graddol, 1997). This study examined the perceptions of learners about their teachers' specific skills in teaching depending on their nativeness or non- nativeness. Learners are studying in Turkey and Turkey is one of the countries which use English as a foreign language in education. They compared their teachers in these details; grammar, reading, writing, listening and speaking, at the beginning of learning process, and at the further stages of learning process. The study tries to find answers to below questions from learners' point of view:

1. What are the differences between a Native Speaker English language teacher and a Non-native Speaker English language teacher in specific skills according to you?
2. Which one of teacher do you prefer to study with a specific skill?

The participants in this study were university students who were enrolled at Mehmet Akif Ersoy University in Burdur. They studied English in a language course and completed at least B2 level in Common European Framework (CEFR). Their ages change from 18 to 26. They all had opportunity to study with NNEST

and NEST in each skill in their main courses. Addition to their main courses, they had a chance to join speaking clubs which are hosted by NEST. They studied English 8 hours in a week. There was no limit of joining speaking clubs though.

Survey was performed through an online application served by Google. Students answered the questions outside the course in their free time after they achieved at least B2 proficiency in English

2.1 Results and Discussions

In this section, learners' opinion about their teachers nativeness or non-nativeness related to grammar, reading, writing, speaking, listening, at the beginning levels and in advance levels were given and discussed. First, their choices are given in a figure then result discussed upon their comments why they chose that one.

Figure 1, 2 & 3. Learners' Choices to Study Grammar and Writing Topics

Grammar education is the most important part of foreign language education in Turkey. To prove proficiency, people have to take written exams ruled by governmental groups. Being a sufficient user of a language means

getting high scores from these written exams. Eighty-one percent of students want to study grammar topics of English with NNEST and seventy-eight percent of students want to study writing with NNEST. They believe in general that NNEST are better than NEST in grammar teaching because they know problems a student may encounter related to the topic they teach from their previous learning experiences. They also want to speak in their mother tongue to ask question clearly when they do not understand a specific point. A participant says “.. If you learn grammar skill of a language, it must be definitely a Turkish teacher. No matter how well you know English, mother tongue is more beneficial ...” Another student passed an opinion which is in the same fashion with the one above that it is ok to study grammar with a NEST but they should know how to speak Turkish so they can use it when they teach grammar. Explaining grammar in their first language blocks misunderstandings when they get it according to them. They also claimed that especially studying grammar is not an enjoyable skill and NNEST can change this situation with explaining rules and giving examples in Turkish to make it humorous. Another major factor for studying grammar with a NNEST is that they mostly believe NNEST know grammar better than NEST especially at complex ones. Concerning reading, a great number of students want to study it with a NNEST because they consider reading as a complimentary skill to grammar and consider NNEST as a walking dictionary from English to Turkish in their mind. Also, they claimed that NNEST give tips and tricks about how to solve questions more often than NEST ones. A student expressed “... NNEST teachers are like automated and they can draw a pattern easily about given task in reading activities. They are also time saver for me because they can give you meaning in your language faster than checking a dictionary... ß” In terms of writing skills, mostly they emphasized that NNEST are good at detecting their miss-thoughts about forming a sentence and help them block this mindset with explaining it to them with a comparison of first language and target language. They also believe that NNEST are better at being an authority than NEST in classrooms and as a result NNEST are better than NEST in terms of classroom management.

Figure 4 & 5. Learners' Choices to Practice Speaking and Listening Skills

Speaking skill is considered as the most difficult skill to be obtained by Turkish EFL students. Almost all of the students believe that it is better to be with a NEST when it is time to practice speaking. They stated when they practice with a NNEST, they would like to switch to their mother tongue whenever they feel themselves being challenged. Seventeen students stated that they are afraid of feeling being ashamed if they make a mistake in front of a NNEST. They said NNEST are stricter than NEST ones about mistakes. They stated that when they study speaking with a NEST, they push themselves to understand their teachers and in exchange of this they want to express themselves to their teachers when they have something to say. With no other way around, they are motivated to speak English. A participant passes opinion on matter as "... I have to talk in English because teacher does not understand me when I talk in Turkish. At first I started to communicate by words then I was able to maintain little conversations ...". They also stated that NNEST themselves speak in Turkish even in speaking activities and this makes them to speak in Turkish from that point. They claimed NEST are better speakers than NNEST ones and they learn correct pronunciation of the words from them more accurately than NNEST. NEST create more enjoyable environment and as a result students believe they do not feel themselves prisoned by their teachers. Although they are given fact that it is a higher possibility to speak a non-native speaker of English than a native speaker, their belief is not changed in this view. In this group, there are students who will go to European countries in an exchange program and none of them will be in United Kingdom. Some students mentioned that having a chance to practice speaking with a NEST makes them feel superior to the one who do not have this chance before. The most common reason behind they want a NEST in listening skills is that NEST bring more authentic listening materials into classroom than NNEST. A participant declared this matter as "I have been tired of listening alike conversations in listening skills over years. Most of the time they speak robotic and in fixed pace yet it is hard to find someone talk like that in real life. NNEST stick to these kinds of practices too much and it is boring." According to them, studying with a NEST is already practicing both listening and speaking skills at the same time through all learning process.

Figure 6 & 7. Learners' Choices to Study with a NEST or NNEST at the Beginning or at the Advance Levels

Beginning can be hard for any subject and building blocks are extremely crucial for a healthy understanding of

target topic. Students in this study mostly believe that foreign language education should be in this order: grammar, reading, listening, writing and speaking. It is seen that learners in this study want to start studying English with a NNEST. They prefer someone to speak their first language in the beginning phases of learning process just to make secure themselves to correctly understand. Instead of being completely blind at the beginning phase without speaking Turkish, they would like to have some who can make explanations in their L1. A participant answers this question as "... I can't imagine myself in an environment where people speak only English at the beginning phases. I would have felt like a stranger in a forest who came across with Indians..." In Turkey, foreign language education principles have been shifted by Ministry of Education in recent years. It is set to start without grammar now at early ages. Yet when these students started studying English, teachers' main purposes were teaching grammar deductively. It is possible that their believes are shaped through this past experience. Another point of starting with a NNEST is that they believe NNEST are better at managing classroom environment and it should be taken seriously in beginning levels to avoid having too much wasted time in a lesson. They categorize skills as grammar, reading and writing at one side and listening and speaking at another side. They accept as truth that skills in a category are complementary to each other so they should be given in a similar fashion to complete them successfully. They sense that to be able to study with a NEST, they have to know basics of the target language first. There is a general assumption among students in the study about foreign language education which is that grammar is the main purpose of studying a foreign language. They believe speaking skill is a luxury yet in the end they want to utter language like a native one even though they do not want to be exposed language in the beginning process of their education.

CONCLUSION

In this study, Turkish EFL students' perceptions of nativeness and non-nativeness in teaching process was investigated. It was designed to find out with whom they would like to study specific titles. These titles were grammar, reading, writing, listening, speaking, beginning stages, and later stages of foreign language education. Results are shown that Turkish EFL participants in this study desire to start studying English with a NNEST. They wish for completing the grammar part first. They ask to receive explanations in Turkish when they study grammar, reading, writing. This outcome shows similarity with previous studies done by researchers in different countries (Diaz, 2015; Hadla, 2013; Mahboob, 2004). After they fulfill their expectations with grammar part, they would like to move on education with a NEST to improve their oral skills. They have an idea that NEST are better at oral skills and know the target language in the deepest fashion possible and they are more friendlier and encourage students to speak in a natural way freed from rules. Result shows parallelism with the ones performed by other researches in different countries (Mermelstein, 2015; Murtiana, 2011; Wu & Ke, 2009). They rely on a NNEST for their future expectations and consider studying with a NEST as a kind of funny leisure times. They mostly care about getting a certificate or passing the exams hence they built their perceptions on this idea.

One should note that the study was performed with some limitations. Firstly, educational and cultural background of students was not considered as a variable nevertheless it can be a pivotal facet in modeling their cognizance. Secondly, sample universe may not reflect the whole still results can be benefited by similar organizations in similar settings. Finally, the study depended on interviews and not an observation of students and teachers in teaching environment. In further studies, these limitations can be eliminated and additional variables like age and gender might be considered for a more detailed research.

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