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Turkish Teacher Candidates' Perceptions of Native-Speakerism

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Abstract. This qualitative study explores the opinions of 23 preservice teachers on native-speakerism in the English language teaching (ELT) profession. The participants were asked to respond to a prompt in writing, with reference to the situation in Turkey. They were at the same time doing a practicum, so they were able draw on their experiences in their cooperating schools, where foreign teachers were part of the staff. Their essays reflected a particular concern with discrimination in hiring practices and a strong rejection of the native-English-speaker teacher (NEST) / non-native-English-speaker teacher (NNEST) divide. They also exhibited an awareness of other paradigms such as a lingua franca (ELF) and World Englishes (WE).

Keywords: Nonnative-English-speaking-teacher, English language teaching (ELT), teacher education, preservice teachers

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1. INTRODUCTION

With the growing influence of globalization, English has become a language used by millions of people for a variety of purposes in a wide range of contexts. This situation has resulted in the questioning of traditional distinctions between English as a native language (ENL), English as a second language (ESL), and English as a foreign language (EFL) and more recent constructs such as English as a lingua franca (ELF), World Englishes (WE), and English as an international language (EIL). This reflects both the dynamic nature of English language usage and highlights the fact that English is now most commonly used for communication between nonnative speakers (NNSs) with different first languages.

Parallel to this paradigm shift, the ideology of native-speakerism has been widely criticized in the ELT literature. Native-speakerism is defined as “an established belief that ‘native-speaker’ teachers represent a ‘Western culture’ from which spring the ideals both of the English language and of English language teaching methodology” (Holliday, 2005, p. 6). In other words, native-speakerism is the common assumption that native English speakers (NSs) are better English teachers because they supposedly have a superior knowledge of the language and a better understanding of Western teaching methodology. In this view, NSs are considered norm providers, and NNSs are considered deficient. According to Kabel (2009), native-speakerism is “not simply a reflection and continuation of colonial constructs and practices, a site where images of a ‘Modern’ ‘Self’ and a ‘Traditional’, Other are produced and reproduced” (p. 16). Kabel maintains that the discourse of native-speakerism creates and sustains hegemony and inequality in the ELT profession. In fact, Houghton and Rivers (2013) emphasize that native-speakerism may be part of a larger set of prejudices:

Native-speakerism is prejudice, stereotyping and/or discrimination, typically by or against foreign language teachers, on the basis of either being or not being perceived and categorized as a native speaker of a particular language, which can form part of a larger complex of interconnected prejudices including ethnocentrism, racism and sexism. Its endorsement positions individuals from certain language groups as being innately superior to individuals from other language groups. Therefore native-speakerist policies and practices represent a fundamental breach of one’s basic human rights (p. 14).

More recent, postmodern conceptualizations attempt to problematize nativeness on the grounds that the categories of “native” and “nonnative” are too simplistic and therefore reinforce the hegemony. For example, Aneja (2016), drawing on qualitative data from four preservice teachers, shows how complex and fluid (non)native identity can be and indicates that such complexity requires an in-depth understanding of the matter. She concludes that, rather than labeling English teachers as native or nonnative speakers, we should consider a more dynamic approach, which she termed “(non)native speakering”:

(Non)native speaking provides a way to move beyond attempts to categorize individuals archetypically a priori and instead considers how and why (non)native speakerist categories are produced, understood, and resisted through individuals' experiences and identity negotiation. (p. 590).

As is the case with other ideologies, the effects of native-speakerism are extensive and visible in several areas of ELT, including employment (Clark & Paran, 2007; Mahboob & Golden, 2013; Ruecker and Ives, 2014), teachers' professional identity development (Wernicke, 2017), learner attitudes (Karakas, 2017), materials selection, language assessment, and language teaching methods (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). The ideology of native-speakerism inherently consists of unequal power relations that are generally to the disadvantage of NNSs. Although it is uncommon, native speakers are also occasionally affected by this ideology (Lowe & Kiczkowiak, 2016; Rivers, 2017; Waters, 2007). One of the most important consequences of native-speakerism is the differential labeling of English teachers as native-English-speaking teachers (NESTs) or nonnative-English-speaking teachers (NNESTs). The native vs nonnative dichotomy is peculiar to language teaching. Unfortunately, this categorization usually results in a (negative) comparison of NNESTs to NESTs (Borg, 2006).

The effect of native-speakerism on English language learners and teachers has been the focus of recent research. Many studies present narrative accounts of NNESTs who are negatively affected by the ideology (e.g. Kim, 2011). The NNESTs in Kim's study, for instance, were concerned about their future careers as English teachers because they strongly believed that an ideal teacher should be a native speaker. In another study, Nguyen (2017) investigated the views of a diverse group of Vietnamese teachers of English on the native-speaker model. Although the participants had developed a critical perspective on the native/nonnative teacher divide, they were influenced by native-speaker models when it came to proficiency in English. Samuel (2017) found that the NNESTs in his study spent more time on lesson preparation because they teach in their L2. These teachers also made decisions on classroom instructional practice in line with their self-perceptions of teaching ability.

In the Turkish context, related research has examined native-speakerism issues from the point of view of learners, teachers (foreign and local teachers alike), teacher educators, and school administrators. English language learners' perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs (Aslan & Thompson, 2016; Üstünlüoğlu, 2007), university intensive English program instructors' perceptions regarding the teaching of culture (Önalın, 2005), EFL teacher educators' perceptions of their NNEST status (Dogancay-Aktuna, 2008), teachers' perceptions of native speaker norms (Soruç, 2015), expatriate and local administrators' and local teachers' perceptions of each other (Palfreyman, 2005), and employment of NESTs in Turkey (Sarigül, 2018) are some studies that examined the issue. All confirm the pervasiveness of the native/nonnative distinction and a de facto discrimination against NNESTs.

The opinions of preservice teachers about native-speakerism and the native vs nonnative distinction are relatively under-researched. The available research, however, points to two major conclusions, the first of which is that being a NNS is an important barrier to building a career. Atay's (2008) study of 112 Turkish preservice teachers found that being compared to NESTs is a main source of anxiety for prospective NNESTs. The majority believed that NSs are better teachers because of their linguistic and cultural knowledge and that native-like competence is necessary. Other studies found that insufficient knowledge of the target language and its culture caused anxiety in Turkish preservice teachers and teachers alike (Öztürk, 2016). The second conclusion is that discrimination against NNESTs in hiring is common. Ozturk and Atay (2010) interviewed three Turkish teachers of English over a period of 18 months. Their accounts revealed that native-speakerist practices were indeed common in the hiring of teachers and that NSs were always welcome, regardless of whether they had ELT qualifications. Finding employment was also a matter of concern for preservice Turkish NNSs, as reflected in their negative reactions to the then-impending hiring of large numbers of NESTs for Turkish schools as part of a nationwide government-initiated project (Coşkun, 2013).

Although native-speakerism has been harshly criticized and constructs such as ELF and World Englishes have emerged, native-speakerism is still pervasive, and is unfortunately internalized by NESTs NNESTs as well, including those who are still in training. Many preservice teachers have low self-esteem and lack confidence in themselves as teachers even before they take a full-time teaching position. Therefore, it is important to understand how teacher candidates perceive native-speakerism and how this ideology affects them. The related research makes use of quantitative data collection tools such as questionnaires and surveys, but studies that investigate the matter through qualitative methods are rare. Studies that focus on preservice teachers doing their practicum are also limited. The present study aims to address this gap in the literature by providing insights from this specific group.

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

How do Turkish NNEST teacher candidates perceive native-speakerism and in what ways do native-speakerist practices affect them?

Aim of the Study

This exploratory study aims to gain insights into the views of Turkish preservice NNESTs on native-speakerism in the ELT profession and to describe how native-speakerist practices are affected them.

2. METHOD

A qualitative research methodology was adopted because qualitative analysis yields a more in-depth understanding of phenomena. As Richards and Morse (2013) state, "If the

purpose is to understand phenomena deeply and in detail, you need methods for discovery of central themes” (p. 28).

Participants

Participants were students in their final year of a four-year ELT degree program at the department of foreign language education at a major English-medium research university in Istanbul. At the time of the study, they were in the second term of a yearlong practicum at various private and public schools. All were females whose ages ranged from 21 to 23 years. In the first term, the participants had made weekly visits to their cooperating schools to observe classes at different levels and to take field notes. In the second term, in addition to observing classes, they taught three to six times, depending on the cooperating school. They were also enrolled in a seminar course where they read and discussed articles on ELT-related related topics, including reflective teaching, lesson planning, native and non-native English speaking professionals in TESOL, ELF and World Englishes, and professional development. Native-speakerism was introduced and explored through key readings on the topic. It was also discussed in class in relation to the participants' practicum experiences. The topic of native-speakerism and native and nonnative speaking professionals was also dealt with in other courses in the context of ELF and World Englishes.

The majority of the participants were graduates of state teacher-training high schools in various parts of the country, including cities and towns outside major metropolitan centers, including some in less developed regions of the country. Students in such schools generally come from low- to middle-income families. Most have not had contact with native English-speaking teachers in their primary or secondary education, as these are a rarity in state schools. Most do not have experience of travel abroad, although some may have taken part in the University's own exchange programs.

In the practicum schools, each participant had three cooperating teachers as mentors, each of whom was teaching a different age group and level, ranging from grade 1 to grade 12. Some had the opportunity to observe both NESTs and NNESTs during their practicum. In addition to their practicum experience, some of the participants had previously taught in private language institutes or as one-on-one tutors. All participants were assigned a pseudonym in reporting the findings.

Data Collection

The data were collected during the 2015 spring semester from students in a seminar course taught by the researcher. One of the assignments of the course was to write a reaction paper on a topic that was covered in the readings and classroom discussions. Twenty-three of the students chose to write on native speakerism. The length of the essays was between 300 and 500 words. The researcher provided two prompts to help them focus: Do you think native speakerism exists in hiring English teachers in Turkey or other places? How does the idea of native speakerism influence you as an NNEST?. Both the prompts and the responses were written in English.

Data Analysis

The data were in the form of essays but the nature of the content of the essays was qualitative. A content analysis approach was followed to analyze the data. Julien (2008) describes content analysis as “the intellectual process of categorizing qualitative textual data into clusters of similar entities, or conceptual categories, to identify consistent patterns and relationships between variables or themes” (p. 120). Following Saldana’s (2013) two steps in coding qualitative data, descriptive codes were created as part of First Cycle coding. “A descriptive code assigns labels to data to summarize in a word or short phrase” (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). In Second Cycle coding, the descriptive codes were combined to form broader categories, or themes. Common themes that emerged included the advantages and disadvantages of native and nonnative-speaker teachers, positive and negative self-perceptions, criticism of the native speaker construct, native-speakerist practices, the employment situation in Turkey, and ELF and World Englishes. These were combined under two major themes: (1) native-speakerism in employment and negative self-perceptions and (2) resisting native speakerism through an awareness of ELF and WE.

As recommended by Miles and Huberman (1984), the researcher worked with a colleague with expertise in qualitative research and teacher education to ensure intercoder agreement. The two coders independently read 20% of the data, and each meaningful idea unit was coded. After the initial codes were created, the researchers discussed the codes, which were found to be consistent with each other. Minor differences were resolved. They then combined these codes into broader themes/categories and compared their categories. A high level of agreement between the coders was found.

3. FINDINGS

Approximately 80% of the participants recognized the existence of native-speakerism in the Turkish context, especially in the hiring of teachers. In some responses, even the term native-speakerism was used:

I think that there definitely is native speakerism going on in hiring English teachers, both in Turkey and in most of the expanding countries. There is a (wrong, in my opinion) belief that native speakers are better teachers of English. (Hande)

Some schools and principals and even parents have the misconception. Thus it can be safely said that today in Turkey native speakerism is an issue to be concerned of. (Seyran)

Other comments, while not using the term native-speakerism, made reference to specific events or situations that exemplify native-speakerism, such as differential treatment on

the basis of native/nonnative status or job advertisements that indicate a preference for native speakers.

Participants' statements about the effects of native-speakerism centered around two major themes: (1) native-speakerism in employment and negative self-perceptions and (2) resisting native speakerism through an awareness of ELF and WE.

Native-Speakerism in Hiring and Negative Self-Perception

Discrimination in the hiring of teachers was the most common native-speakerist practice discussed by the participants. Seventy-eight percent shared at least one account of NESTs being favored over NNESTs in hiring:

Private schools, language learning centers now believe that they need NESTs to look prestigious. I've even heard that some language schools ask NNESTs to pretend as if they are natives by giving them pseudo names. (Pinar)

I believe that we do need NSs who have gone through a TEFL education....even when being a NS is not a sufficient criterion to teach EFL, the fact that being a foreigner is enough to teach is just unbelievable. (Deniz)

According to experiences related by the participants, many private schools hire foreign teachers because they believe this makes the school appear more credible and professional. Demands from parents for NESTs was another reason cited for these schools to prefer NESTs. Taking a closer look at the profile of the NESTs in the schools, participants realized that some teachers who were presented (to the students and parents) as native speakers of English were actually foreign non-native speakers of English from various countries and linguistic backgrounds, including traditionally EFL countries (such as Morocco, Hungary, and Spain). In such cases, the term "foreign teachers" has been conflated with "native speaker of English," a practice that is not uncommon in Turkish private schools. This was seen as a native-speakerist practice that led to inequity and discrimination.

In discussing discrimination, participants also referred to differences they observed between the professional qualifications of local teachers and foreign teachers. Many of the foreign teachers had little or no educational qualifications for teaching English as a foreign language, unlike the Turkish teachers of English, who generally had training in ELT. The participants believed these NESTs were hired simply because they were NSs.

Discrimination in hiring resulted in NNESTs' developing a negative perception of themselves and of their own language competence. As the following accounts illustrate, the participants felt disadvantaged and unlucky, and some even reported losing their confidence in terms of their ability to become a teacher:

I need to admit that observing such cases in the field damages my confidence and hopes for my future career. (Pinar)

As a prospective teacher, being an NNEST, the idea of native speakerism decreases my motivation and shakes my self-confidence. (Demet)

As a prospective NNEST, I actually think that native speakerism is a big injustice to us. Getting your chance to be a teacher taken away from you is very discouraging. (Hande)

Such comments demonstrate that the ideology of native-speakerism, especially as reflected in hiring practices, has a decided negative effect on how the preservice teachers perceived themselves.

Resisting Native-Speakerism through an Awareness of ELF and WE

In their comments about the negative effects of native-speakerist practices, 65% of the teacher candidates seemed to have developed a critical way of thinking that was shaped by their recently acquired understanding of ELF and WE. The following statements illustrate a high awareness of both paradigms.

I believe that in order to help our students become global citizens we should...expose them to many cultures of the world, not only that of the USA or UK. (Ece)

There are many people who think that native English teachers are superior because they speak beautifully. When they speak, it just “sounds better”. ...English is now not only the language being spoken in Britain or the USA. Being an international language, English includes several different varieties around the whole world. (Deniz)

Their awareness of ELF and WE helped mitigate the negative effects of native-speakerism. Many participants reported that they felt empowered, motivated and self-confident as a result of this awareness:

Thanks to the classes I took in my third and fourth year and also because of my experience as a teacher, I realized that I can be really successful in teaching English, even in speaking, as an NNEST. (Bahar)

If NNESTs get used to the idea of EIL they would feel themselves much more self-confident. (Deniz)

If we integrate awareness of WE into our curriculum, we can get rid of native speaker fallacy. (Irem)

Acknowledging that one could be a good teacher regardless of their native language has helped me getting over my insecurities. (Bihter)

With knowledge about ELF and WE, participants had a more realistic evaluation of the relative strengths (and weaknesses) of NESTs and NNESTs in the Turkish context. For example, one explained the desperation she felt the first time she was taught by a NEST; she felt self-conscious and insecure about her language abilities. After some time,

however, rather than comparing her language abilities to those of the NEST, she simply acknowledged the difference and appreciated the teacher's English. Finally, she realized that a simple native/nonnative comparison is not necessarily meaningful. Another participant felt that NESTs may have an advantage in terms of language skills, but her "passion for teaching and love for her students" empowered her as a language teacher. Similar ideas were expressed by other participants.

NEST and NNEST Strengths and Weaknesses

Participants who had a chance to observe both NESTs and NNESTs during their practicum or in other teaching contexts frequently compared the two groups. They saw that NNESTs in the Turkish context served as good role models for students, as successful users of English. Many English language learners in schools were motivated to study English because they wanted to be like their teachers. The strengths of Turkish NNESTs most frequently cited by the participants are presented in Table 1:

Table 1

Strengths of Turkish NNESTs

Strength	F
A good model for students	6
A shared first-language and cultural background	5
Experience of learning a foreign language	5
Ability to empathize with difficulties that students experience	3

Areas where Turkish NESTs needed improvement included language competence and fluency. According to the participants, one of the reasons for the high demand for NESTs could be the inefficiency of some NNESTs.

By contrast, language competence and knowledge of culture were the two main strengths of NESTs. However, NESTs were considered weak in classroom management and pedagogical content knowledge. Participants thought that NESTs who had no experience of learning a foreign language or who held no ELT qualification would likely experience difficulty, especially when they are new to the country and the educational system. Observing the difficulties that NESTs experience in the Turkish context helped the preservice teachers appreciate the importance of having an educational qualification in teaching English as a foreign language.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings of this study reveal that the participants recognized the existence of native-speakerism in the Turkish EFL context and that they were negatively affected by its ideology. This finding is not at all surprising, as it is well documented in the literature (Lowe & Kiczowski, 2016). This study showed that the negative effects of native-speakerism can occur as early as the practicum experience, leading to low self-efficacy and negative self-perceptions. Given the increasing number of expatriate teachers at all levels of the Turkish education system, it is likely that many future teacher candidates will be affected unless fair practices in hiring teachers are established.

Considering the variety in English language teachers in Turkey in terms of first language, country of origin, nationality, and educational background, the participants rejected a simple NEST/NNEST distinction—a categorization that stems from the ideology of native-speakerism—partly because labels such as native and nonnative-speaker were simply inadequate to capture the variety. The foreign national teachers may be non-local, non-native teachers, native-speaking teachers from inner circle countries, or teachers from outer circle countries.

Another important finding is that incorporating constructs such as ELF and WE into teacher education programs can increase teacher candidates' awareness of native-speakerist practices, and the native/nonnative divide. This finding corroborates previous studies on how English language learners and preservice teachers benefit from ELF-aware tasks and activities (Rose & Galloway, 2017; Galloway & Rose, 2018). As a case in point, Sifakis and Bayyurt (2015) show how a teacher education model informed by ELF-aware principles and practices led teacher candidates to take a more critical approach to native-speakerism and native/nonnative categorization.

The participants acknowledged the strengths and weaknesses of NESTs and NNESTs. Although they had held certain beliefs about these two groups of teachers regarding their potential strengths and weaknesses, their views were strongly influenced and reshaped by the teachers they observed. The more the participants observed successful NNESTs, the more positive their attitudes towards them became. This finding is in line with previous research on the changing perceptions of learners and preservice NNESTs (Moussu, 2010; Skliar, 2014; Tatar & Yildiz, 2010). It also supports Hayes's (2009) position that the criterion for "nativeness" should not be linguistic competence, but should be conceived as one's ability to understand and function in their own particular teaching context.

Recommendations

The participants benefitted from class discussions on topics related to native-speakerism; they gained a new awareness that helped them develop strategies to minimize the negative effects of the native-speakerist ideology and adopt a professional identity. English language teacher education programs should therefore consider integrating constructs such as ELF and WE into their curriculum. To build on the

awareness, preservice teachers could also be encouraged to develop ELF-aware tasks for use in their practicum teaching (Sifakis & Bayyurt, 2015).

In-service teachers can also derive benefit from an increased awareness of ELF and WE. Liu (2018) reports that practicing teachers may have a tendency to advocate for native-speaker norms more than their students do. Practicum courses could be designed in a way that increases cooperation between preservice and in-service teachers, thereby fostering the spread of ELF awareness.

Yet another implication for English language teacher education programs in Turkey is the need for more focus on improving fluency in English. ELT programs are generally successful in equipping future teachers with knowledge of language teaching methods and classroom management skills, but they are less successful in developing their fluency in English. This is in line with Medgyes's (1999) observation that language teacher education programs should prioritize improving the language skills of preservice teachers.

Finally, the participants pointed out that NESTs and NNESTs each have their own strengths and weaknesses, and that their effectiveness in the classroom depends heavily on contextual factors such as the learner profile, whether the context is ESL or EFL, and the type of course being taught (Moussu, 2018). Given that the differences between NESTs and NNESTs can complement each other, collaboration could create a more balanced relationship where all teachers feel equal and confident.

Suggestions for Further Research

Several suggestions for further research can be made based on the findings of the present study. First, the study of the ideology of native-speakerism calls for more in-depth and longitudinal research designs that will enable researchers to capture this multidimensional and complicated matter. In addition to learning how native-speakerism is reflected in hiring practices and in teachers' self-perceptions, there is a need for the matter to be explored in different contexts and other areas of English language teaching, such as teaching materials, methods, and approaches. Second, this study shows how participants questioned and reflected on native-speakerist practices with the help of ELF and WE perspectives and how they developed new perspectives, an indication of a change in their professional identity. This suggests that further research could look into how NNESTs develop their professional teacher identity and resist native-speakerism.

Limitations of the Study

The data for this study was conducted in a single teacher education program in Turkey with a limited number of participants, so the findings cannot be generalized. However, considering that the context where the study was conducted and that the participants were representative of nonnative preservice teachers in terms of their background and

educational experiences, the findings have implications for similar teacher education programs in other EFL contexts.

The study made use of data only from student essays on the topic of native-speakerism. Although it was not possible to carry out interviews or do observations, one-on-one interviews and focus groups might have provided a more in-depth understanding of the native-speakerism question as a multidimensional matter.

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