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## **Native and nonnative English teachers' perceptions of their professional identity: Convergent or divergent?**

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### **ABSTRACT**

There is still a preference for native speaker teachers in the language teaching profession, which is supposed to influence the self-perceptions of native and nonnative teachers. However, the status of English as a globalized language is changing the legitimacy of native/nonnative teacher dichotomy. This study sought to investigate native and nonnative English-speaking teachers' perceptions about native and nonnative teachers' status and the advantages and disadvantages of being a native or nonnative teacher. Data were collected by means of a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. A total of 200 native and nonnative teachers of English from the UK and the US, i.e. the inner circle, and Turkey and Iran, the expanding circle, participated in this study. A significant majority of nonnative teachers believed that native speaker teachers have better speaking proficiency, better pronunciation, and greater self-confidence. The findings also showed nonnative teachers' lack of self-confidence and awareness of their role and status compared with native-speaker teachers, which could be the result of existing inequities between native and nonnative English-speaking teachers in ELT. The findings also revealed that native teachers disagreed more strongly with the concept of native teachers' superiority over nonnative teachers. Native teachers argued that nonnative teachers have a good understanding of teaching methodology whereas native teachers are more competent in correct language. It can be concluded that teacher education programs in the expanding-circle countries should include materials for teachers to raise their awareness of their own professional status and role and to remove their misconception about native speaker fallacy.

**Keywords:** professional identity; native teachers; nonnative teachers; inner-circle; expanding-circle

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## Introduction

Traditional assumptions that gave native speaker teachers superiority over nonnative speaker teachers led to the consideration of native speakers as the ideal teacher (Phillipson, 1992). In the past years, there have been a number of studies reporting on the relative advantages of nonnative teachers that enable them to be more competent teachers in their own and other countries (Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999; Chun, 2014; Cook, 2005; Inbar-Lourie, 2005). According to Doerr (2009), even though native speakers are sometimes still favored over nonnative teachers and possess dominant status in ELT, nonnative teachers have certain unique advantages that can compensate for their weaknesses in terms of linguistic aspects. As nonnative teachers have an awareness of the local culture and the local languages spoken within the country, their role is highlighted in the context of English as an international language.

Beijaard, Verloop, and Vermunt (2000) define teachers' professional identity as a combination of "the teacher as a subject matter expert, the teacher as a pedagogical expert, and the teacher as a didactical expert" (p. 750). According to Huang (2014), nonnative teachers' beliefs about their own status are shaped by their environment, their past experiences, and their learners and employers. Norton and Tang (1997) argue that individuals' identity is not fixed and that it grows and develops by means of social comparison with others. They contend that perceptions regarding nonnative teachers' attributes and their social identity are not absolute, but rather relative to native speaker teachers' identity and status. Considering the importance of teachers' role in language teaching, the purpose of the present study was to investigate how native and nonnative teachers of English specify their identities as English teachers. To this end, the study focused on teachers' perceptions about the native and nonnative English-speaking teachers' professional status and the advantages and disadvantages of being nonnative teachers.

## Literature Review

### *Native/Nonnative Teacher Dichotomy*

In the profession of English language teaching, a preference for native speakers has been based on the assumption that native English teachers are the ideal teachers. However, it is not easy to define the native speaker because being a native speaker cannot be determined by considering only the place of birth or the first language (Boyle, 1997). Phillipson (1992) questioned the validity of the native speaker concept by stating that no scientific validity supports this concept. While entitling this notion the *native speaker fallacy*, he suggests that it may be rooted in the belief that native speakers have more competence in "demonstrating fluent, idiomatically appropriate language" (p. 194), which, as he argues, can be taught to nonnative teachers. Phillipson believes that teachers are made rather than born regardless of being native or nonnative.

Liu (1999) recommends that the focus must be shifted away from the native and nonnative speaker dichotomy to the importance of being professional and the professional training of teachers. Pasternak and Bailey (2004) argue that this dichotomy is simplistic and irrelevant, maintaining that nativeness does not necessarily mean proficiency. In addition, as Pasternak and Bailey state, proficiency is only one element of professionalism, the other being professional preparation. Besides, regardless of their mother tongue, teachers should have enough training to teach the language. Yet, despite all arguments, the dichotomy of native and nonnative speakers and the terms native and nonnative speakers are still being used in the profession (Medgyes, 2001). Medgyes suggests that there is no need to reject or ignore the dichotomy, but rather it should be scrutinized carefully. In recent years, research investigating the advantages and disadvantages of native and

nonnative English-speaking teachers and their professional status has emerged as an area of interest (Moussu & Llurda, 2008).

Provided that the goal of language teaching is not to sound like a native speaker, as contended by Cook (2007), native and nonnative English-speaking teachers will have the same position and nonnative English speaking teachers are even advantageous as they are multilingual. Likewise, Llurda (2004) argues that there is an increasing appreciation of nonnative teachers and a decrease in the role of native speaker teachers as being the role model and the ideal teacher. Llurda believes that, as nonnative teachers have already experienced the process of learning a language and expressing themselves in different languages, they can better guide the students in the process of learning English as an international language. In the same line, Cook (2005) proposes that since nonnative speaking teachers are proficient learners and users of English, they can make good examples of successful learners. They are likely to understand the learners' requirements and problems better and share empathy with them as they are familiar with the context (Coskun, 2013). Nonnative speaking teachers can expose learners to varieties of local accents and cultures along with an international culture that is desirable in an EIL context (Alptekin, 2002).

Llurda (2009) argues that the variety that is embodied in an EIL approach offers the nonnative English speaking teachers more authority in teaching the language. Llurda adds that, while the teachers' experience of various forms and contexts of English use and their own acceptance of the EIL approach to language teaching is crucial in successful implementation of the approach, this is not the case for the majority of teachers. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate the attitudes and perceptions held by teachers and learners toward teaching English as an international language. However, almost all of the studies on this topic are limited to a sample of nonnative teachers and do not account for the opinions of native teachers, who constitute a large subgroup of English teachers globally.

#### *Research on Native/Nonnative Teachers*

Stimulated by the interest in investigating native and nonnative teachers' professional status, one strand of research has emerged that focuses on teachers' self-perceptions and what teachers think about their advantages and disadvantages (Amin, 2001; Doğançay-Aktuna, 2008; Golombek & Jordan, 2005; McKay, 2003; Medgyes, 1994; Reves & Medgyes, 1994; Samimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999).

Among the earlier studies regarding the self-perception of native and nonnative English-speaking teachers is one by Reves and Medgyes (1994), which included native and nonnative English-speaking teachers from ten countries. The result of the survey revealed that the majority believed in the existence of differences in the teaching practices of native and nonnative teachers. Most of the nonnative teachers specified that they had difficulties with linguistic aspects such as vocabulary, fluency, and pronunciation. Very few stated that these difficulties in language did not influence their teaching. As to the importance of teachers' self-confidence, Reves and Medgyes suggest that nonnative teachers should be aware of their own advantages and recognize that the differences between them and native speaker teachers are natural and legitimate.

In another study, Samimy and Brutt-Griffler (1999) focused on the self-perception of nonnative TESOL students to see if they thought their teaching behavior was different from that of native speaker teachers. A significant majority of participants stated that they had language difficulties which influenced their teaching practices. Participants considered native teachers to be accurate, fluent, and flexible and to be familiar with the intricacies of English and the use of colloquial, authentic English. On the other hand, they believed that nonnative teachers relied on textbooks,

were aware of the influence of negative transfer on learning, and used L1 in the classroom. They also believed that nonnative teachers were more efficient because of their knowledge of learners' background and needs. None of the participants regarded native speaker teachers to be superior.

Focusing on nonnative teachers, Amin (1997) interviewed them about their perceptions of perfect teachers as stated by their students. According to participants, their students assumed that only white people could be native speakers of English, knowing the "real," "proper," and "Canadian" English (p. 580). Participants reported feeling disempowered by these stereotypes held by their students. Later, in another study on immigrant female ESL teachers, Amin (2001) found that native speakers were perceived to have an inner-circle accent. She stated that "accents, like race, are socially organized" (p. 92). Amin considered accents to be a linguistic demonstration of nativism which was another form of racism. Participants of her study argued that nonnative teachers possess adequate proficiency in English. Besides, they contended that good teaching practice does not depend on being a native or nonnative speaker of English, but rather it depends on being well prepared and educated for teaching.

McKay (2003) investigated Chilean teachers' opinions and reported that they recognized themselves as bilingual teachers of English and were aware of their strengths. According to these teachers, their strengths were their knowledge of the local culture, local language, and local education system, and their weakness was their limited opportunity for education and professional development. When she asked them who they would hire if they were the manager of an institution, over half of them responded they would hire Chilean teachers. Their reason for this decision was the sociocultural awareness and better grammatical knowledge of Chilean teachers. According to those who stated that they would hire native teachers, native teachers were more prestigious, more attractive, and had a better pronunciation. When asked about the greatest strengths of native-speaker teachers, they mentioned accurate pronunciation, fluency, and knowledge of their own culture, and the weaknesses of native-speaker teachers were unfamiliarity with the Chilean context and culture and lack of fluency in Spanish.

These findings were substantiated as well in a study by Jenkins (2005), who interviewed nonnative teachers of English regarding their attitude toward their accent. For participants in this study, a native-like accent had positive connotations and was considered to be "good, perfect, correct, proficient, competent, fluent, real, and original English," whereas a nonnative speaker accent was associated with negative characteristics such as "not good, wrong, incorrect, not real, fake, deficient, and strong" (p. 541). Jenkins found that teachers' past experience in the classroom or other social settings, their current status, and their thoughts about their professional prospect could influence their identification with native speakers or their aspiration for a native-like accent.

Golombek and Jordan (2005) studied how two MA students of TESOL from Taiwan indicated their identities as legitimate English teachers. They found that the participants had conflicting identities and were influenced by the native speaker myth, the privileged position of native speakers, and the view that native equaled whiteness. In another study, Kim (2011) explored the self-perception of nonnative English teachers. The findings revealed that participants had low self-esteem as a result of influence of native speakerism as it had the key role in graduate students' perceptions about themselves as future nonnative teachers. They deeply believed that only native speakers could be perfect teachers. They were concerned with their accent and believed that they would always have this problem. The author discusses that participants of the study were concerned with their accented English and believed that since they did not speak Standard English they would not be able to acquire a job. However, as a result of the teacher education program in the United States, their attitude improved and they felt more confident.

In a more recent study, Coskun (2013) investigated the beliefs of Turkish EFL teachers toward the administration's plan to hire native teachers from the inner-circle countries. The majority of participants were against this project and their biggest concern was employment discrimination and the fear of losing their jobs to native speaker teachers. The participants also indicated that conflicts would happen as they may feel less dominant and lose their classroom authority as native speakers become more powerful.

The findings of the studies reported above provide more evidence for nonnative EFL teachers' uncertainty about their accent and linguistic proficiency, while being aware of their own strengths as well. Findings of these studies are based on a small number of participants, which hampers any strong generalizations. Furthermore, nearly all of the studies with a focus on native and nonnative teachers' dichotomy investigated only nonnative teachers' perceptions and paid scant attention to native speaker teachers' attitudes.

#### *Purpose of the Study*

The preceding studies revealed that while participants generally believed in the presence of differences between native and nonnative teachers, they did not support the superiority of native teachers. They all considered native teachers to have some advantages, mainly related to the aspects of linguistic competence such as accuracy and fluency. They assumed that advantages for nonnative teachers were concerned more with the pedagogical and emotional aspects of teaching. In traditional methods in ELT, one of the main roles of the teacher was to introduce native speaker varieties of English, as they were considered to be prestigious and legitimate models for learning English. However, in an EIL context, the teachers' role is not limited to providing just the native speaker variety of the language.

Against this backdrop, this study aimed to investigate both native and nonnative English-speaking teachers' perceptions of native and nonnative English language teachers' professional status and the advantages and disadvantages of native and nonnative teachers. In order to meet the study's purpose, the following research question was addressed: "What are native and nonnative English-speaking teachers' perceptions of native and nonnative teachers' professional status and the advantages and disadvantages of being a native/nonnative?"

## **Method**

### *Participants*

A total number of 200 native and nonnative English-speaking teachers from inner-circle and expanding-circle countries participated in the questionnaire phase of this study. The participation of the teachers was on a voluntary basis and the sampling technique used in this study was convenience sampling (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2012). One hundred native English-speaking teachers were from the United States and the United Kingdom (inner-circle) and 100 nonnative teachers were from Iran and Turkey (expanding-circle). This sample consisted of 47% male and 53% female teachers. Moreover, a 62.5% majority of the participants had an M.A. degree in TEFL, while 2% had a Ph.D., 18.5% had a B.A., and 16.5% had a certificate in teaching. It must be noted that for each circle, teachers from both countries were contacted to arrive at an appropriate sample size; however, the focus of the study was variation between inner-circle and expanding-circle teachers, and within group variations were not considered. The demographic information of the participants is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1  
*Participants' Demographic Information*

		Frequency	Percentage
Country of Origin			
	Iran	50	25%
	Turkey	50	25%
	United Kingdom	50	25%
	United States	50	25%
		200	100.0
Gender			
	Male	94	47%
	Female	106	53%
ELT Qualification			
	Certificate	33	16.5%
	BA	37	18.5%
	MA	125	62.5%
	PhD	5	2.5%

Participants completing the questionnaire were asked if they would like to take part in the next phase of the study where they would be interviewed about their perception of their professional identity. Thirty teachers agreed to participate in the interview phase: 15 native and 15 nonnative English-speaking teachers.

#### *Instrumentation*

Two instruments were used to collect the data: a questionnaire and an interview. Based on Creswell's (2009) categorization, the design of this study was sequential explanatory mixed methods, characterized by the collection and analysis of quantitative data in a first phase followed by collecting and analyzing the qualitative data in a second phase that built on the results of the initial quantitative results.

The questionnaire consisted of 11 close-ended items. Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with each statement on a five-point Likert-scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," which was used to find out how teachers perceived their professional identity. The choice of themes covered in the questionnaire was informed by a comprehensive review of previous works and research such as Llorca (2004). The questionnaire was developed for the purpose of this study and hence it was validated before being used. It was piloted among a group of 50 native and nonnative English-speaking teachers. Cronbach's alpha was calculated to be .80.

The reason for choosing a questionnaire, as stated by Aldridge and Levine (2001), was its potential to ensure the collection of a large amount of data in a fast, precise, and rather efficient manner. However, since questionnaires do not provide a comprehensive analysis of research issues, the data were triangulated through a semi-structured interview. The interview was developed with the purpose of eliciting more comprehensive information and triangulating the data collection. Interview questions concerning the advantages and disadvantages of being native and nonnative teachers were adapted from McKay (2003) in line with the main content of the questionnaire. As interviews with both native and nonnative teachers were semi-structured, there were flexible interactions so that teachers could elaborate on the subject matter being asked and other relevant issues as well.

### *Procedure*

The data for the present study were collected using a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. First, the quantitative data were collected through a closed-ended questionnaire. Next, the qualitative data collection was performed using a semi-structured interview to triangulate the findings of the questionnaire with a sub-group of participants. In order to check the reliability of the questionnaire, it was piloted with a group of 50 native and nonnative English-speaking teachers before the main study. The data collected from the pilot study were statistically analyzed and the mean, skewedness, and kurtosis were calculated for the questionnaire. After ensuring the normality of the data, to evaluate the reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach's alpha was calculated as a means of internal consistency. Based on the results of the statistical analysis and after making some modifications, the questionnaire was administered to the English teachers. As only the Iranian pool of the participants was available face to face, the questionnaire was administered electronically to the other participants from Turkey (expanding circle) and the United States and the United Kingdom (inner-circle). As for the interview, those participants who had expressed their willingness to participate were interviewed. The interviews with participants from countries other than Iran were conducted by means of voice or video chat, instant messaging, and email.

To answer the research question of the study, both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the collected data. The first section of the questionnaire provided demographic information about the participants such as their nationality, educational background, and gender. The descriptive statistics were computed including frequency counts and percentages. Moreover, the Mann-Whitney U Test was performed to explore the differences in the perceptions of native and nonnative teachers. Interview data were analyzed by applying content analysis. Responses were read carefully, keywords were highlighted, and coding categories were developed to facilitate analysis and comparison between the two groups' responses.

## **Results**

### *Questionnaire Results*

The purpose of this study was to investigate native and nonnative English teachers' perceptions of their professional status and the advantages and disadvantages of being a native/nonnative teacher in the context of English as an International Language. In what follows, the results of the questionnaire data analysis are reported (Table 2), showing teachers' perception.

Table 2  
*Native Speaker (NS) and Nonnative Speaker (NNS) Teachers' Responses to Questionnaire Items*

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Undecided		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	NS	NNS	NS	NNS	NS	NNS	NS	NNS	NS	NNS
1. Native-speaker teachers are more effective teachers for teaching language skills.	16%	15%	41%	46%	28%	15%	12%	21%	3%	3%
2. Native-speaker teachers have a better knowledge of pronunciation of the English language.	6%	3%	24%	4%	17%	19%	41%	68%	12%	6%
3. Native-speaker teachers have better speaking ability than nonnative teachers.	8%	2%	24%	14%	27%	17%	30%	53%	11%	14%
4. Native-speaker teachers have better knowledge of authentic and real-life use of English than nonnative teachers.	1%	3%	16%	9%	21%	12%	44%	67%	18%	9%
5. The government should hire native-speaker teachers from English speaking countries to teach in countries where English is learned as a foreign language.	18%	8%	28%	46%	29%	21%	16%	23%	9%	2%
6. Native-speaker teachers have more self-confidence than nonnative teachers.	18%	10%	36%	32%	26%	21%	15%	29%	5%	8%
7. Nonnative teachers are inferior to native-speaker teachers as far as native-like proficiency is concerned.	21%	6%	35%	41%	23%	18%	19%	32%	2%	3%
8. Native-speaker teachers can be perfect models of language proficiency for nonnative teachers.	8%	5%	39%	30%	32%	16%	18%	43%	3%	6%
9. Nonnative teachers can never achieve a native-speaker teacher's professional status.	33%	13%	49%	64%	17%	14%	1%	8%	0%	1%
10. Nonnative teachers can better discover and correct language learners' failure and errors.	7%	3%	40%	18%	30%	17%	16%	47%	7%	15%
11. There should not be any discrimination between native and nonnative teachers as far as employment opportunity is concerned.	3%	0%	11%	11%	13%	14%	30%	35%	43%	40%

Table 2 shows that more than 50% of both native and nonnative teachers disagreed with item one and the conception that native teachers are more effective teachers (Item 1). Regarding Item 2, the difference was greater, as 74% of nonnative teachers and 53% of native teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that native speaker teachers have a better knowledge of the pronunciation of the English language. Likewise, 67% of nonnative teachers and 41% of native

teachers agreed with Item 3, which states that native speaker teachers have better speaking ability than nonnative teachers. While a 76% majority of nonnative teachers also agreed with item 4, stating that native speaker teachers have better knowledge of authentic and real-life use of English than nonnative teachers, this rate was 62% for native teachers.

Regarding item 5, it can be seen from Table 2 that almost half of both groups disagreed with the idea of the government's hiring native teachers. Moreover, while only 20% of native teachers believed in native teachers' having more self-confidence, 37% of nonnative teachers believed so (Item 6). Regarding nonnative teachers' inferiority (Item 7), native teachers disagreed more strongly (56%) with this attitude than nonnative teachers (47%).

Analysis of responses to Item 8 showed that 49% of nonnative teachers agreed with the statement that "native-speaker teachers can be perfect models of language proficiency for nonnative teachers," while only 21% of native speakers agreed with it. Both groups disagreed strongly with the idea that nonnative teachers can never achieve a native teacher's professional status (Item 9).

A great divergence was found between native and nonnative teachers' perceptions of error correction (Item 10). Whereas a 62% majority of nonnative teachers believed that nonnative teachers can discover and correct errors better, only 23% of native teachers gave credence to this assumption. As can also be seen from Table 3, both groups agreed with item 11 (NS=73%, NNS=75%), which reads that there should not be any discrimination between native and nonnative teachers as far as employment opportunities are concerned.

To find out whether the differences in responses of the native and nonnative speaker teacher groups were statistically significant, Mann-Whitney U Test was run for all items. Results of the Mann-Whitney U Test for item 2 indicated a significant difference in responses of native teachers (Md=4, n=100) and nonnative teachers (Md=4, n=100),  $U=4033.5$ ,  $z=-2.59$ ,  $p=.00$ . As for item 3, the difference in responses of native teachers (Md=3, n=100) and nonnative teachers (Md=4, n=100) was also significant ( $U=3693.5$ ,  $z=-3.34$ ,  $p=.00$ ). Likewise, in item 6, there was a statistically significant difference between responses of native teachers (Md=2, n=100) and nonnative teachers (Md=3, n=100),  $U=4033.5$ ,  $z=-2.44$ ,  $p=.01$ . The results suggest that nonnative teachers agreed more strongly with the items stating native speaker teachers have a better knowledge of pronunciation, a better speaking ability, and more self-confidence than nonnative teachers.

Results of Mann-Whitney U Test also showed significant differences between native and nonnative teachers' responses regarding four more items. For instance, native teachers disagreed more strongly (Md=2, n=100) with item 7, which states that "Nonnative teachers are inferior to native-speaker teachers as far as native-like proficiency is concerned" ( $U=4014.5$ ,  $z=-2.51$ ,  $p=.01$ ). Similarly, there were significant differences with regard to item 8, which states that "Native-speaker teachers can be perfect models of language proficiency for nonnative teachers." Regarding item 9 as well, native teachers disagreed more strongly with the concept that "Nonnative teachers can never achieve a native-speaker teacher's professional status." The last item that native speaker teachers disagreed more strongly with (Md=3, n=100) was item 10. This item states that nonnative teachers can better discover and correct language learners' failure and errors.

### *Interview Results*

The interview included three questions. At first, the participants were asked about the advantages of being nonnative teachers: "What are the most important advantages that nonnative teachers have over native teachers?" Analyzing their responses revealed that, except for two native teachers, both groups believed that nonnative teachers have their particular strengths. The advantages of

nonnative teachers stated by native speaker teachers are depicted in Table 3, which shows that according to native teachers, nonnative teachers' main advantages include better explanation of grammar rules and better methodology, in addition to greater insights and more sensitivity to learners' problems and challenges.

Table 3  
*Native Teachers' Perception of Advantages of Being Nonnative Teachers*

Advantages	Frequency
Better explanations of grammar rules	8
Greater insights into first language interference problems	7
Better methodology	7
More sensitivity to students' challenges	6
Anticipation of students' problems	6
Empathizing with the students	5
Explanation of difficult concepts in the first language	5
Focus on grammar	4

The two extracts below from the native teachers' interviews are revealing for the way in which they illustrate the diversity of views:

*None [i.e. no advantage to being a nonnative teacher]; I honestly do not believe a person should teach a language that is not their mother tongue. (NS teacher #1)*

*They [i.e. nonnative teachers] are often able to articulate rules and explanations of English better, because they have had to learn them explicitly themselves. They tend to have a better sense of what lexical or grammatical patterns are frequent and useful to learn. They are usually better able to understand why certain areas of English will be difficult or confusing for the learners. (NS teacher #4)*

The advantages of nonnative teachers, as specified by nonnative teachers, are given in Table 4. As the table shows, nonnative teachers perceived their own main advantages as being aware of learners' difficulties, understanding learners better, serving as a role model for them, and being familiar with the context of learning.

Table 4  
*Nonnative Teachers' Perception of Advantages of Being Nonnative Teachers*

Advantages	Frequency
Acquaintance with the language difficulties learners face	4
Familiarity with the context and culture of the learner	4
Understanding the learners better both socially and culturally	4
Serving as a role model	4
The use of the first language to explain difficult concepts	2
Sharing language learning strategies	2
Better explanation of grammar	2

Three excerpts from the interviews are given below, showing the aforesaid strengths:

*They can serve as role models by sharing language learning strategies with their learners. Also, NNS may be better able to explain/ simplify rules more than their NES counterparts. (NNS teacher #7)*

*They have struggled learning the language and know well the learners' critical problems - nonnative teachers are very good at Grammar as well. (NNS teacher #10)*

*They are familiar with the problems that learners face since they were EFL learner themselves. (NNS teacher #12)*

The second interview question asked the participants about the advantages of being native English speaker teachers: "What advantages do native-speaker teachers have? What is their greatest strength?" The greatest strength of native-speaker teachers, according to both native and nonnative speaker teachers, were their natural and intuitive knowledge of pronunciation as well as their knowledge of authentic and colloquial language. The following are the native teachers' perceptions of advantages of being native-speaker teachers (Table 5). The table shows that native teachers perceived themselves to have an extensive knowledge of correct language, colloquial language, and English culture.

Table 5  
*Native Teachers' Perception of Advantages of Being Native Teachers*

Advantages	Frequency
Extensive and intuitive knowledge of correct language	9
Better sense of connotations and idiomatic expressions	8
Deeper understanding of English culture	7
Better knowledge and teaching skill of conversational English	6
Understanding the nuances in actual use of language	5
Perfect pronunciation	3

The excerpts below document native teachers' perception of advantages assigned to native teachers:

*The advantage native-speaking teachers have is the ability to apply both informal and formal language into instruction. Native-speakers better understand the everyday vernacular of the English language, and if the end result of learning English is to communicate effectively, then native-speakers can better instruct real conversational English. (NS teacher #7)*

*Native language teachers have the advantage of understanding the culture that is bound in the language and the advantage of providing listening practice that is authentic, spontaneous, not contrived, and meaningful. (NS teacher #15)*

According to nonnative teachers, native English speaking teachers have certain strengths (Table 6). Nonnative teachers perceived native teachers as having correct pronunciation, intonation, accent, and speaking ability, as well as greater knowledge of colloquial language.

Table 6  
*Nonnative Teachers' Perception of Advantages of Being Native Teachers*

Advantages	Frequency
Correct pronunciation and intonation	6
Intuitive knowledge of conversational language	6
Better accent and speaking ability	5
Being aware of everything naturally	5
Extensive knowledge of the vocabulary and expressions	4
Familiarity with the intricacies of the language	4
Being exposed to natural English	4
Greater self-confidence	3

Some of the above advantages are reflected in the excerpts below:

*I think they are more self-confident especially in teaching pronunciation. (NNS teacher #1)*

*Correct pronunciation and intonation, an authentic source of language for contact, a larger vocabulary size. (NNS teacher #5)*

The last interview question was about the biggest worry of nonnative teachers about their identity: "What can be the biggest concern of a person who is a nonnative teacher of English?" Native teachers listed the following to be possibly the biggest concerns of nonnative teachers (Table 7). As stated by native teachers, nonnative teachers' main concerns involved using language correctly, having correct pronunciation, and facing discrimination in the workplace.

Table 7

*Native teachers' perception of worries of being nonnative teachers*

Worries	Frequency
Using the language correctly and appropriately	5
Students and schools preferring native teachers	5
Facing discriminations with hiring	4
Pronunciation	4
Lack of confidence	4
Correct use of collocations and prepositions	3
Proving themselves to the students and the authorities	3
Answering students' questions	2
Grammatical and lexical errors	2

For instance, the following quotes reveal native teachers' understanding of nonnative teachers' worries:

*Fear that the students are judging or comparing their own level of English to that of the teacher. Dealing with students who disagree with the teacher's understanding of the language. (NS teacher #5)*

*Lack of confidence. Bookish language, not idiomatic. Can be thrown by questions outside the book, which they had not prepared, Overuse of first language in the classroom if shared with learners. (NS teacher #13)*

On the other hand, nonnative teachers voiced their biggest worries about being nonnative teachers (Table 8). These worries included, inter alia, finding jobs and discrimination in the workplace. Besides, they were concerned about achieving a native-like accent and understanding the English culture.

Table 8

*Nonnative Teachers' Perception of Worries of Being Nonnative Teachers*

Worries	Frequency
Finding jobs and being paid and treated like the native teachers	6
Acquiring a native-like pronunciation and speaking ability	6
Understanding the culture of the English	5
Acquiring language skills perfectly	4
Answering all the questions of the students	4
Being uncertain at some points what is correct	3
Proving themselves	2

The following excerpts from the interviews partly reflect the above themes:

*Native-like pronunciation, speaking fluently, knowledge of English speaking countries' culture (Lack thereof).* (NNS teacher #12)

*I believe that not knowing all English slang, expressions or daily uses of language as it is happening 'live' in the native country.* (NNS teacher #13)

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore native and nonnative English-speaking teachers' perception of being a native or nonnative teacher of English and the professional status of native and nonnative speaker teachers. The participants were 200 native and nonnative English-speaking teachers from Iran, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Analysis of the participants' responses to the questionnaire showed that both groups alike agreed that there should not be any discrimination between native and nonnative teachers for employment purposes. They did not find achieving a native speaker's professional status unattainable for nonnative teachers. A significantly larger proportion of nonnative teachers believed that native teachers have better knowledge of pronunciation and better speaking ability, whereas native teachers showed less agreement with these statements and believed that being a proficient teacher does not depend only on being a native speaker of English. In addition, a larger number of participants in the nonnative group assumed that native teachers have a better knowledge of authentic and real life use of English than nonnative teachers.

The aforementioned results were supported by the interview data. Analyzing interview responses revealed that, except for very few native teachers, both native and nonnative teachers believed that native teachers have certain strengths. The main advantages of native speaker teachers as specified by nonnative teachers were correct pronunciation and intonation, familiarity with the intricacies of the language, being exposed to the real-life context of English use, and being aware of everything naturally. Native speakers listed perfect pronunciation, intuitive knowledge of correct language, deeper awareness of English culture, higher confidence in using English, a better ability in teaching informal English, understanding the nuances in the actual use of language as native speaker teachers' strengths. Similar results were reported by McKay (2003) with Chilean EFL teachers, as participants cited perfect pronunciation, fluency, and knowledge of English culture as native teachers' strengths. Likewise, Kim (2011) reported that nonnative English teachers were influenced by the native speakerism ideology which led to low professional self-confidence. In Kim's study, participants believed that only native speakers could be ideal teachers and assumed that the English spoken by native speakers was perfect and authentic.

Llurda (2009) argues that if the native-speaker model remains the purpose of teaching, there will always be native teachers who perceive themselves as superior to nonnative teachers. However, in this study, both groups, though native teachers more strongly, disagreed with the conception that nonnative teachers are inferior to native teachers in terms of proficiency. This is similar to what has also been reported in Samimy and Brutt-Griffler's (1999) study. In addition, comparable results were reported by McKay (2003) regarding the self-perceived advantages of nonnative teachers. The majority of the participants in both groups believed that nonnative teachers have their own advantages and, despite being nonnative, can be good teachers. With regard to nonnative teachers' advantages, native teachers argued that nonnative teachers are more able to determine their students' problems and to empathize with them as they are familiar with the students' first language and know their difficulties in learning English. Likewise, nonnative teachers accentuated the

advantages of nonnative teachers such as familiarity with the problems of the learners, the knowledge of cultural differences, empathy with the learners both culturally and socially, and their ability to explain difficult concepts in the first language. This result is compatible with what has been suggested by Llorca (2004) and Coskun (2013) regarding the advantages of nonnative teachers.

According to native teachers, nonnative teachers are trained better in terms of language education, explain grammar rules more effectively, have a greater understanding of L1 interference problems, have better teaching practice, and are more sensitive to the students' problems. The native teachers who held positive attitudes toward nonnative teachers regarded them as effective and proficient teachers of English. However, nonnative teachers' self-perception was more oriented toward the sociocultural aspects of teaching. They believed that their advantages included familiarity with the context and culture of the learners, understanding learners better socially and culturally, and serving as a role model for learners. Thus, nonnative teachers' self-perception was influenced by the native speaker fallacy, and their responses indicated that they perceived themselves to lack the essential characteristics of a proficient teacher.

In this study, native teachers' self-perceived abilities included having an extensive and intuitive knowledge, more confidence, better sense of colloquial language, and perfect pronunciation. As stated by nonnative teachers, the advantages of being a native teacher of English were associated primarily with speaking skill and pronunciation. This shows that native teachers' identification of themselves was positive; nonnative teachers also identified native teachers as effective and proficient teachers. These results are consistent with the findings of Medgyes and Arva (2000), who found that native and nonnative teachers are different in terms of their language skills and teaching behavior and attribute dissimilar language proficiency as the cause of these differences.

Nonnative teachers' awareness of their strengths in this study is in line with Medgyes and Arva's (2000) and Kim's (2011) findings. In Kim's study, participants regarded their bilinguality as an advantage in their profession and even recommended that any teacher of English needs to speak an additional language other than English. In addition, the fact that nonnative teachers have gone through the same process and share empathy with learners was repeatedly mentioned by other researchers (Cook, 2005; Patek, 2005). For instance, Patek (2005) argues that nonnative teachers are better able to predict learners' problems and empathize with them, as they have gone through the same route while learning a foreign language.

The findings of the present study regarding the worries and concerns of nonnative English speaking teachers are consistent with previous research findings (Coskun, 2013; Doğancıy-Aktuna, 2008; Golombek & Jordan, 2005; Kim, 2011). The nonnative participants of the study specified their concerns as being hired, paid, and treated like the native teachers, which offers further evidence of nonnative teachers' worries about employment discrimination. Likewise, in the study by Golombek and Jordan (2005), teachers were concerned with employment discrimination and observed that in their country anyone who spoke English and looked like a foreigner could get a teaching job. Like the findings of Reves and Medgyes (1994), nonnative teachers' concerns mainly revolved around language proficiency and a native-like accent. This is also reported by Kim (2011), as prospective teachers were concerned about their language proficiency.

Native speaker teachers were asked about their thought on what could be nonnative teachers' biggest concerns. Their responses were largely similar to nonnative teachers' responses. Native speaker teachers argued that nonnative teachers' main worries might be using language correctly, achieving high language proficiency, proving themselves to students and hirers, and facing discrimination in hiring. These concerns were reported by Kim (2011) and Golombek and Jordan

(2005), showing that native teachers from the inner circle could recognize nonnative teachers' difficulties.

## Conclusion

As indicated by Pasternak and Bailey (2004), the debate between native and nonnative English-speaking teachers is controversial because of the lack of a comprehensive definition for the term native speaker and accordingly nonnative speaker. This study focused on teachers' perception of the professional status of native and nonnative teachers. The findings of the study revealed that both groups of teachers agree that native and nonnative teachers have their own strengths and can be good teachers in their own terms regardless of what their first language is. Some of the native teachers stated that what matters is not being a native or nonnative speaker of English, but that being a good teacher is tied to the ability to help students benefit from the time spent in the class and to facilitate the process of language learning. Nonnative teachers should be provided opportunities to realize their own advantages and recognize the importance of professional development over nativeness. They should learn that, due to being well experienced and educated, they can contribute to the educational process. As Cook (1999) states, multilingual teachers are even more qualified than monolingual teachers as "students may feel overwhelmed by native-speaker teachers who have achieved a perfection that is out of the students' reach" (p. 200). He thinks that students may favor a nonnative teacher who presents a more attainable model to the students.

The findings of this study point to the lack of nonnative teachers' self-confidence and awareness of their own role and status compared with native teachers. Therefore, it is essential for teacher education programs to develop courses and materials for teachers to raise their awareness, *inter alia*, about their own professional status, role, and contribution to the educational process. These programs need to make nonnative English-speaking teachers aware of their own advantages and their potentials to be good language teachers. There is a need to explain to teachers that what matters is not being a native English speaker but is how they use their language to connect to their students and co-construct language knowledge. Nonnative teachers need to be informed that the attitudes of the majority of stakeholders in the profession have started to change toward being generally positive about them. This study would be beneficial to nonnative speaker teachers, because the findings extend the knowledge base that exists about the attitudes and assumptions held by native and native-speaker teachers about the professional status and advantages of nonnative teachers. Therefore, the findings of this study can inform prospective teachers and raise their awareness of their own role in the language education process.

This study was limited to nonnative teachers from two expanding-circle countries. Further research on teacher beliefs can draw on a more diverse sample of nonnative teachers from other countries. Studies are needed to explore outer-circle teachers' perceptions of the professional status of native and nonnative teachers. Additionally, this study was limited to teachers' perceptions. Future studies can investigate learners' beliefs about native and nonnative teachers and the possible matches and mismatches between learners' and teachers' beliefs.

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