

The Effect of Native English Teachers' Cultural Knowledge on L2 Students' Aural and Oral Performances

Neda Karshenas¹

PhD Student, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Isfahan, Iran

Reza Biria²

Assistant Professor, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Isfahan, Iran

Abstract:

The present study aimed at finding out whether there existed a relationship between NES teachers' background cultural knowledge and EFL students' performances including listening comprehension and oral production. The first research question posed was related to the effect of NES teachers' background cultural knowledge on EFL students' listening comprehension when the text is rich in cultural words and concepts. It was concluded that NES teachers' cultural knowledge positively affects EFL students' aural performances. The second research question focused on the effect of NES teachers' background cultural knowledge on EFL students' oral production when they need to talk about culturally specific materials. The results indicated that NES teachers' cultural knowledge has positive effects on EFL students' oral production. The third research question, aimed at finding the students' attitudes regarding the perceived quality of NNES/NES teachers' capabilities. The students' attitudinal responses toward NES and NNES teachers in this study, were found to be significantly different; that is the analysis of the questionnaire used in this study showed great differences in the students' attitudes toward the two kinds of teachers.

The statistical analysis indicated that EFL learners instructed by NES teacher outperformed the subjects in the NNES group. The finding revealed that there existed a positive relationship between NES teachers' background cultural knowledge and EFL students' performances including listening comprehension and oral production. The results also depicted that EFL learners mostly preferred to be instructed by NES teachers. The findings may offer benefits to NNES teachers, materials developers, and policy makers to provide teaching materials for EFL students in such a way that treat language culturally.

Keywords: Native English teacher, Non-native English teacher, Oral/aural performances, Cultural knowledge.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the past decades, language educators and linguists have attempted to tackle the seemingly elusive and arbitrary definition of nativeness. Arva and Medgyes (2006) define NES teacher as someone evidently to be found in their superior and linguistic competence of English.

Some scholars (Chomsky, 1965; Medgyes, 1994/1999) argue that native speakers are defined by birth or infancy. People who are born in the community where the language is spoken are native speakers of that language. They have the intuition and communicative competence to vary their language according to different situations.

Instead of directly defining the term 'nativeness', Chomsky (1965) connected its relationship with generating linguistic theories and grammar. He believed that linguistic theories primarily explained the actual performance of an ideal native speaker who knew his language perfectly and was not affected by such irrelevant grammatical elements as distraction, a lot of interest or attention in a homogeneous speech community.

On the other hand, Arva and Medgyes (2006) define NNES teacher as someone who usually display a poorer competence of English. According to the Concise Oxford Dictionary (2000) the definition of "nonnative" is: "(of a speaker) not having spoken the language in question from earliest childhood.

The issue of NES and NNES teachers in the field of applied linguistics has become a rapidly growing, emergent field of research today. The beginning of the dichotomy is believed to be one of the tenets created at the Commonwealth Conference on the Teaching of English as a Second Language held in Macarere, Uganda, in 1961. This controversial tenet, stating that the ideal English teacher is a native speaker, provoked scholars to question its validity. The most cited, probably, in response to this view is Phillipson (1992) whose term native speaker fallacy (p.195) has been quoted widely. He argues that NNES teachers can be trained to gain abilities that are, according to the tenet, associated with NES teachers (i.e., fluency, correct usage of idiomatic expressions, and knowledge about the cultural connotations of English).

Regardless of the inconclusive definition of native and nonnative speakers in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), the qualifications of NNES and NES teachers have been a heated topic of discussion in the TESOL literature. A considerable amount of literature with contradictory results have also been published on the issue of NES/NNES teachers. A doctoral dissertation by Professor Anita Woolfolk Hoy and Professor Joseph Anthony Gliem (2008) conducted in Ohio State University in the field of English language teaching, on the differences between native and non-native language teachers regarding pedagogical advantages and disadvantages "teacher efficacy" and "teacher perceptions of language teaching."

In Cheung's study (2007), both NNES and NES teachers received positive and negative comments. NES teachers were admired for their oral skills, large vocabulary, and cultural knowledge, but criticized for their poor knowledge of grammar, their lack of experience as EFL learners, their difficulties in answering questions, and their teaching methodology.

On the other hand, advantages of being a NNES teacher have been mentioned in the literature. One study by Yuko Goto Butler (2007) investigating the effect of NES teachers and NNES teachers' on students' comprehension and students' preference was conducted in University of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, United States. Although the popular belief appears to assume that nonnative English would produce a negative effect on students' oral skills, the results failed to find any differences in student performance in terms of comprehension. However the students expressed a preference to have the NES teacher as their English teacher.

Another study exploring NES/NNES teachers is that of Ferguson (2005), which was conducted at a southwestern American university with NES and NNES teachers and their students. She investigated how NES/NNES teachers are perceived by their students, in terms of students' general attitudes and the amount of credit in terms of pedagogical effectiveness they give to their teachers based on their teacher's native language (L1). Among the findings of her study was a stronger student preference for NNES teachers than for NES teachers, despite the larger amount of credit given to NES teachers over NNES teachers.

Another study into students' perceptions was conducted by Mahboob (2004). Both NNES/NES teachers received positive and negative comments. NES teachers were admired for their oral skills, large vocabulary, and cultural knowledge, but criticized for their poor knowledge of grammar, their lack of experience as EFL learners, their difficulties in answering questions, and their teaching methodology. In contrast, NNES teachers were noticeably valued for their own language learning experience. The respondents also recognized NNES teachers' extensive knowledge of grammar, hard work, ability to answer questions, and literacy skills. They were criticized, however, for their poorer oral skills and lack of knowledge about the "English-speaking" cultures.

On this basis, the present study draws on the issue of 'nativeness', proposed by Phillipson (1992). Other than the linguistic superiority and the authority of native speakers he mentioned, Phillipson acutely singled out the important connection between a language and the culture hidden behind it. Native speakers not only have the knowledge of language, but they also have sufficient knowledge of culture embedded within the language that enables them to speak natively. Their linguistic and cultural knowledge, as well as the native pronunciation play a significant role in language teaching materials.

As a guiding theoretical perspective for this study, the concepts of top-down and bottom-up also provide valuable insights for approaching the issue. These concepts originated within the framework of schema theory and are metaphorical corollaries of schema theory, but have grown

to be somewhat independent of that framework and are no longer considered dependent on schema theory for their own validity (Hadley, 2001; Chun & Plass, 1997; Grabe, 1991; Rumelhart, 1980). Carrell (1988) claims that schema theory has provided numerous benefits to EFL teaching and, indeed, most current EFL textbooks attempt schema activation through pre-listening activities.

Bottom-up processing occurs when the listener pays attention to details, specifically the decoding of individual words and other types of linguistic cues. This type of processing is considered to be data driven and to move the listener's understanding of a text from the parts to the whole conceptually (Hadley, 2001; Hudson, 1998; Rumelhart, 1980; Singhal, 1997). Bottom-up processing combines groups of features: Phonemes into syllables, syllables into words, words into clauses, and clauses into sentences (Field, 1999). This makes bottom-up processing a step by step assembly process that deals with analyzing, identifying words and assembling sentences step by step.

Listeners also use top-down processing to make conclusions based on broad contextualized clues (Richards, 1991). Field (1999) reveals that giving listeners relevant prior knowledge can promote the use of top-down processing, which help listeners develop a better understanding. Top-down processing occurs when the listener makes predictions based on existing background knowledge and then goes about searching to fill in the anticipated specifics of the situation. This type of processing is considered to be conceptually driven and moves the listener's understanding from the whole of the concept to the parts (Hadley, 2001; Rumelhart, 1980; Singhal, 1997).

Because listeners use top-down processing, it is crucial to provide listeners with abundant contextual cues, such as familiar topics, predictable content or cultural background, to help with contextualization and bringing to life the listening situation as well as developing listening comprehension of the language. Top-down processing is mostly applied by NES and bottom-up processing by NNES. Thus, listeners develop a coherent interpretation of speech through the interactive process of "combining mental information with the information a listener brings to a text" (Widdowson in Grabe 1988, p.56).

2. Significance of the study

Considering the importance of background knowledge in the process of listening comprehension and oral production the present study set out to study the following issues. Furthermore, investigating the learners' attitude towards different aspects of NES/NNES teachers. Findings of this study would highlight that NES teachers may naturally be equipped with a kind of knowledge which differentiates them from their NNES counterparts. Accordingly, based on the problem under study the following research questions were addressed:

RQ1. Does having a NES teacher, as a source of authentic cultural knowledge, give the

EFL learners an advantage in listening comprehension over those without a NES teacher when the text is rich in cultural words and concepts?

RQ2. Does having a NES teacher, as a source of authentic cultural knowledge, give the EFL learners an advantage in oral production over those without a NES teacher when they need to talk about culturally specific materials?

RQ3. Do EFL students hold different attitudes regarding the perceived quality of NNES/NES teachers' capabilities?

Based on the research questions which were posed, the following hypotheses are formed:

H1. NES teachers' background cultural knowledge does not have any effect on EFL students' listening comprehension when the text is rich in cultural words and concepts.

H2. NES teachers' background cultural knowledge does not have any effect on EFL students' oral production when they need to talk about culturally specific materials.

H3. EFL students do not hold different attitudes regarding the perceived quality of NNES/NES teachers' capabilities.

3. Methodology

Participants

The participants in this study were 60 students (30 males and 30 females) labeled as advanced students with an age range of 20 to 25, and all native speaker of Farsi studying English at two language centers (DONYA-YE-ZABAN) located in Isfahan. These samples were selected on the basis of Oxford Placement Test to make sure they are in the same level of proficiency. These samples had received the same instruction, and were under the controlled condition of the same instructional materials. The only difference was that half of the students had been instructed by NES teachers for a period of 15 terms and the other half by NNES teachers for the same period.

Instrument

Several instruments were used in the current study:

1. *Listening comprehension test:* The students were asked to listen to a two culture-bounded English texts about national celebrations and cultural heritages (superstitions) in the United States, (Peck, 2004) on received oral language exposures in English from various sources (movie videos, documentary films, radio news and pre-recorded dialogs or monologs). Then they were asked to answer 20 multiple choice questions related to the above texts.

2. *Oral production test*: The students were given a test booklet containing some pictures about some cultural events such as Saint Patrick's Day and Memorial Day in the United States (Peck, 2004). Then they were asked to explain the events these event were selected because they had been described in the class before test administration.
3. *Attitudinal questionnaire*: The subjects were asked to respond to the attitudinal questionnaire taken from self-reported behavioral differences between NES and NNES teachers cited in Medgyes (1994) regarding various qualities of NES and NNES teachers.

Procedure

Two groups of advanced students, studying at two language centers were given a version of OPT. A t-test-test run on their score proved their equality in terms of their general English proficiency. The same materials that were used for the pilot study were given to both groups, and the same procedures was followed to gather the data. The participants were given the comprehension materials while attending ordinary class sessions. Then students were asked, while they were listening to two culture-bound English texts, to answer 20 multiple choice questions. This procedure conducted within approximately 30 minutes.

The listening comprehension test selected for this study corresponds to the advanced level of English curriculum. The vocabulary, syntactic complexity, length of sentences, length of paragraphs used in the text and test items were designed to be appropriate for the participants in this study Terry Peck (2004). The comprehension questions were in the format of a multiple-choice test. The comprehension test contained 20 items.

In a separate session, the same students were invited to the central office. Each student was given a time table which was prepared in advance. It showed an exact time for each student who was supposed to take the production test.

On the scheduled dates two teachers from the same language centers were also invited in order to rate participants' production ability. Raters did not know what exactly the study was about. This was decided because knowledge about the purpose of research influences the results, therefore, they become unreliable.

The Participants were given production materials individually in order to test their speaking abilities. They were asked to explain the events. This procedure was conducted within approximately 10 minutes for each student. For this task each student was rated by two different raters according to the five scale Weighing Table developed by Farhady et al. (2007). This rating scale was developed for use with EFL speakers ranging from 1 to 6.

In the same session the students were then asked to respond to attitudinal questions regarding various qualities of the NES and NNES teachers on their own. For this task they were given the

booklet containing 8 items designed according to a 5-point Likert scale and were asked to answer all the questions based on the instruction in the booklet. This procedure was conducted within 10 minutes.

The attitudinal questionnaire in the current study focused on seven specific measures. It was applied in order to assess the students' perceptions of the two kinds of teachers (NES and NNES teachers). These aspects were chosen based on the self-reported behavioral differences between NES teachers and NNES teachers cited in Medgyes (1994) as described earlier.

4. Results

In order to answer each one of these research questions a certain statistical procedure was used. In this part all these statistical procedures are elaborated and explained thoroughly.

RQ1. Does having a NES teacher, as a source of authentic cultural knowledge, give the EFL learners an advantage in listening comprehension over those without a NES teacher when the text is rich in cultural words and concepts?

RQ2. Does having a NES teacher, as a source of authentic cultural knowledge, give the EFL learners an advantage in oral production over those without a NES teacher when they need to talk about culturally specific materials?

RQ3. Do EFL students hold different attitudes regarding the perceived quality of NNES/NES teachers' capabilities?

Results of the Listening Comprehension Test

Table 1.

Descriptive Statistics of all Subjects on the Test of Listening

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
listening	60	7.00	20.00	14.5167	3.33696	11.135
Valid N (listwise)	60					

Table 2.

Descriptive Statistics of Both Groups on Test of Listening

	GROUP	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
listening	native teacher	30	16.9667	1.60781	.29354
	non-native teacher	30	12.0667	2.76597	.50499

Table 3.

The Result of t-test for the Test of Listening

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)
Listening	4.111	.067	8.389	58	.000
			8.389	46.589	.000
	Equal variances assumed				
	Equal variances not assumed				

Results of the Speaking Test

Table 4.

Descriptive Statistics of both Groups on Test of Speaking

	GROUP	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
total speaking	native teacher	30	89.0333	5.65980	1.03333
	non-native teacher	30	70.2333	10.53625	1.92365

Table 5.

The Results of the t-test for the Test of Speaking

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)
total speaking					
Equal variances assumed	12.062	.001	8.610	58	.000
Equal variances not assumed			8.610	44.450	.000

Table 6.

Descriptive Statistics for the Test of Speaking

	group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
vocabulary	native teacher	30	5.6000	.49827	.09097
	non-native teacher	30	4.3000	.74971	.13688
accent	native teacher	30	5.8333	.37905	.06920
	non-native teacher	30	4.4667	.81931	.14958
grammar	native teacher	30	5.4667	.50742	.09264
	non-native teacher	30	4.4000	.72397	.13218
fluency	native teacher	30	5.7333	.44978	.08212
	non-native teacher	30	4.3333	.75810	.13841
comprehension	native teacher	30	5.8000	.40684	.07428
	non-native teacher	30	4.2333	.85836	.15671

Table 7.
The Results of the t-test for the Test of Speaking

Independent Samples Test

t-test for Equality of Means

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
vocabulary	7.910	58	.000	1.30000	.16435
accent	8.292	58	.000	1.36667	.16482
grammar	6.608	58	.000	1.06667	.16141
fluency	8.699	58	.000	1.40000	.16094
comprehension	9.034	58	.000	1.56667	.17343

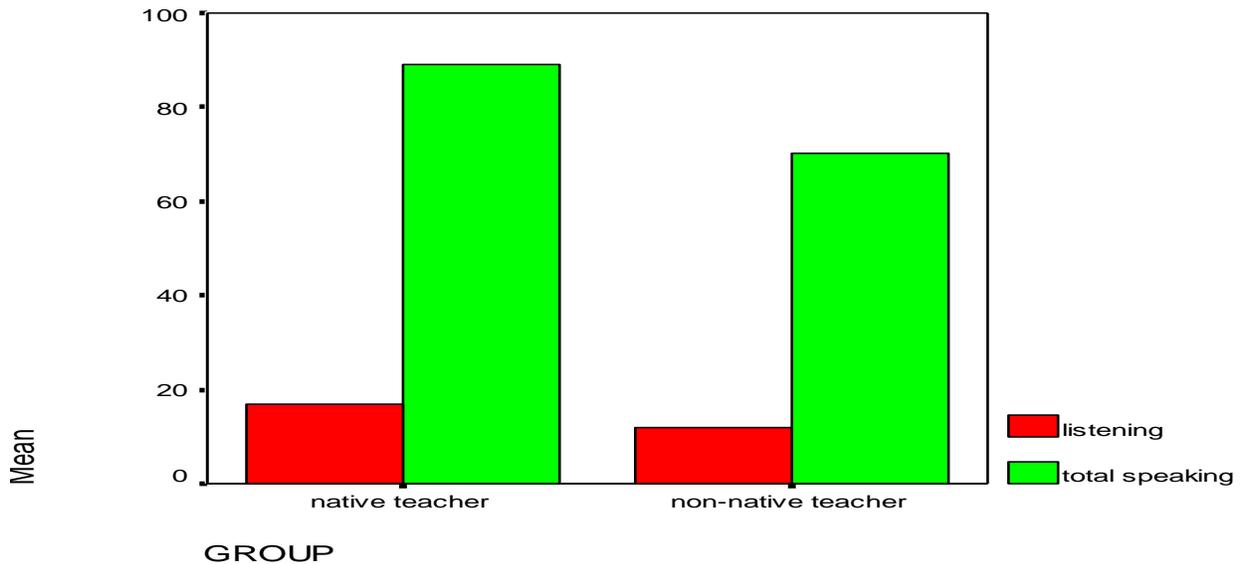


Figure 1.
The mean results for the test of listening and speaking

Results of the Attitudinal questionnaire

Table 8.

Descriptive Statistics for the Attitudinal Questionnaire for Both Groups

Group Statistics

group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
teachers' pronunciation native teacher	30	5.00	.000	.000
teachers' pronunciation non-native teacher	30	3.57	.728	.133
teachers' use of English native teacher	30	4.87	.346	.063
teachers' use of English non-native teacher	30	3.60	.498	.091
teachers' focus on fluency native teacher	30	4.90	.305	.056
teachers' focus on fluency non-native teacher	30	3.07	.740	.135
teachers' use of colloquial English native teacher	30	5.00	.000 ^a	.000
teachers' use of colloquial English non-native teacher	30	4.00	.000 ^a	.000
teachers' use of idiomatic English native teacher	30	4.90	.305	.056
teachers' use of idiomatic English non-native teacher	30	2.67	.479	.088
teachers' strictness native teacher	30	4.53	.507	.093
teachers' strictness non-native teacher	30	2.67	.479	.088
teachers' empathy toward students' problem native teacher	30	3.30	.466	.085
teachers' empathy toward students' problem non-native teacher	30	2.43	.504	.092
students' wish to have them as their English teacher native teacher	30	4.83	.379	.069
students' wish to have them as their English teacher non-native teacher	30	2.63	.490	.089

a. t cannot be computed because the standard deviations of both groups are 0.

Table 9.

The Result of t-test for the Attitudinal Questionnaire

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
teachers' pronunciation	Equal variances assumed	119.883	.000	10.785	58	.000	1.43
	Equal variances not assumed			10.785	29.000	.000	1.43
teachers' use of English	Equal variances assumed	25.040	.000	11.440	58	.000	1.27
	Equal variances not assumed			11.440	51.670	.000	1.27
teachers' focus on fluency	Equal variances assumed	15.345	.000	12.550	58	.000	1.83
	Equal variances not assumed			12.550	38.592	.000	1.83
teachers' use of idiomatic English	Equal variances assumed	24.644	.000	21.524	58	.000	2.23
	Equal variances not assumed			21.524	49.180	.000	2.23
teachers' strictness	Equal variances assumed	3.198	.079	14.645	58	.000	1.87
	Equal variances not assumed			14.645	57.815	.000	1.87
teachers' empathy toward students' problem	Equal variances assumed	3.863	.054	6.915	58	.000	.87
	Equal variances not assumed			6.915	57.649	.000	.87
students' wish to have them as their English teacher	Equal variances assumed	12.915	.001	19.448	58	.000	2.20
	Equal variances not assumed			19.448	54.550	.000	2.20

Table 10.

The Result of Mann-Whitney Test for the Teachers' Pronunciation

Ranks				
	group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
teachers' pronunciation	native teacher	30	43.50	1305.00
	non-native teacher	30	17.50	525.00
	Total	60		

Test Statistics^a

	teachers' pronunciation
Mann-Whitney U	60.000
Wilcoxon W	525.000
Z	-6.478
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

a. Grouping Variable: group

Table 11.

The Result of Mann-Whitney Test for the Teachers' Use of English

Ranks				
	group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
teachers' use of English	native teacher	30	44.30	1329.00
	non-native teacher	30	16.70	501.00
	Total	60		

Test Statistics^a

	teachers' use of English
Mann-Whitney U	36.000
Wilcoxon W	501.000
Z	-6.594
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

a. Grouping Variable: group

Table 4.12.

The Result of Mann-Whitney Test for the Teachers' Focus on Fluency

Ranks				
	group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
teachers' focus on fluency	native teacher	30	45.05	1351.50
	non-native teacher	30	15.95	478.50
	Total	60		

Test Statistics^a

	teachers' focus on fluency
Mann-Whitney U	13.500
Wilcoxon W	478.500
Z	-6.853
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

a. Grouping Variable: group

Table 13.

The Result of Mann-Whitney Test for the Teachers' Use of English

Ranks

group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
teachers' use of colloquial	native teacher	45.50	1365.00
	non-native teacher	15.50	465.00
Total	60		

English

Test Statistics^a

	teachers' use of English
Mann-Whitney U	.000
Wilcoxon W	465.000
Z	-7.681
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

a. Grouping Variable: group

Table 14.

The Result of Mann-Whitney Test for the Teachers' Use of Idiomatic English

Ranks

group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
teachers' use of idiomatic English	native teacher	45.50	1365.00
	non-native teacher	15.50	465.00
Total	60		

Test Statistics^a

	teachers' use of idiomatic English
Mann-Whitney U	.000
Wilcoxon W	465.000
Z	-7.144
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

a. Grouping Variable: group

Table 15.

The Result of Mann-Whitney Test for the Teachers' Strictness

Ranks				
	group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
teachers' strictness	native teacher	30	45.50	1365.00
	non-native teacher	30	15.50	465.00
	Total	60		

Test Statistics^a

	teachers' strictness
Mann-Whitney U	.000
Wilcoxon W	465.000
Z	-6.910
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

a. Grouping Variable: group

Table 16.

The Result of Mann-Whitney Test for the Teachers' Empathy toward Students' Problem

Ranks				
	group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
teachers' empathy toward students' problem	native teacher	30	40.95	1228.50
	non-native teacher	30	20.05	601.50
	Total	60		

Test Statistics^a

	teachers' empathy toward students' problem
Mann-Whitney U	136.500
Wilcoxon W	601.500
Z	-5.208
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

a. Grouping Variable: group

Table 17.

The Result of Mann-Whitney Test for the Students' Wish to have them as Their English Teacher

Ranks				
	group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
students' wish to have them as their English teacher	native teacher	30	45.50	1365.00
	non-native teacher	30	15.50	465.00
	Total	60		

Test Statistics^a

	students' wish to have them as their English teacher
Mann-Whitney U	.000
Wilcoxon W	465.000
Z	-7.054
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

a. Grouping Variable: group

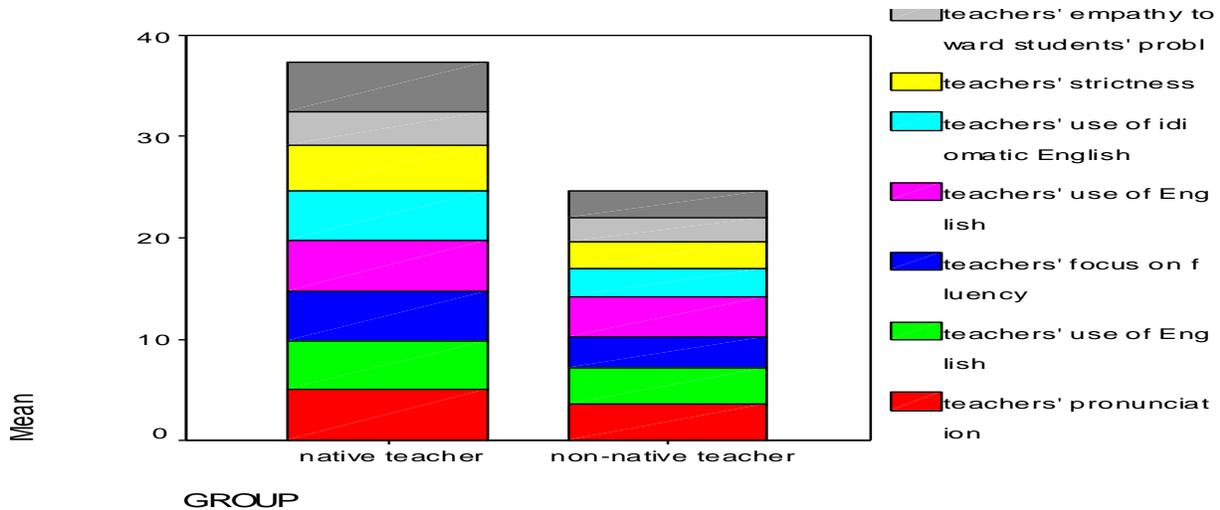


Figure 2.

The mean results for the attitudinal questionnaire

5. Discussion

Results from this study suggest that differences exist between the two groups under study. Statistical analyses show that NES teachers' background cultural knowledge seem to have positive effect on EFL students' listening comprehension and oral production. However, the same scores from students who were taught by NNES teacher did not show the same result. Native English teachers' knowledge of language and sufficient knowledge of culture embedded within the language enables them to transfer their information more effectively. Second, native teachers tend to create more relaxing, friendship-oriented relationships with students. They use authentic English in interacting with students, use more effective and innovative teaching techniques and methods, and emphasize communication. This study also draws on informal talk with participants in order to clarify whether having different teachers (NES/NNES) would cause different result on their listening comprehension and oral production. Those students having classes with NES teachers emphasized on the connection between language and culture and what was implied by Phillipson (1992) about importance of culture and its impact on teaching. They believed that NES teachers effectively transfer information to their students while they were

teaching materials. They stated that NES teachers properly talk about cultural details and go to the points so that students could get enough information.

In case of components of the oral production test, result from this study implies that NES teachers' background cultural knowledge seem to be in relation to these components. As Phillipson (1992) stated: their (NES teachers') linguistic and cultural knowledge, as well as the native accent play a significant role in language teaching materials. Based on what Davies (2003) claimed in chapter one the native speaker has intuitions (in terms of acceptability and productiveness) about his or her grammar, unique creative capacity to produce words, fluent discourse and at the same time ability to comprehend. Participants in their informal talk also stated that since their NES teachers had been brought up in a native environment they had large capacity of cultural words in their mind. So they transferred and made students familiar with a variety of words and spontaneous speech while they were teaching. Therefore, their students have enough knowledge in order to be at a distinct advantage while they were taking tests that were rich in cultural concepts.

The students' attitudinal responses toward NES and NNES teachers showed great differences in the students' attitudes toward the two kinds of teachers regarding their accuracy of pronunciation, confidence in their use of English, focus on fluency versus accuracy, use of colloquial English and use of idiomatic English in the class. It is interesting to note that regarding teachers' strictness and teachers' empathy toward students' problems the majority of students perceived NNES teachers better qualified. Although differences were found on the two previous items, students showed great desire to have NES teachers as their English teachers. One point, which is worth mentioning about NES teachers, is their accent and pronunciation. In this case, this study implies that the NES teachers are in fact more readily accepted by the students than NNES teachers. Therefore, they are given some credibility by the students, but NNES teachers are not given. According to what Anderson-Hsieh (1992) claimed specific elements of speech, such as prosodic features of pronunciation, have been identified as also having some influence. This researcher observed some evidence that indicates students instructed by NES teachers and those instructed by NNES teachers show different responses to certain prosodic features of accented speech (see, e.g., Field, 2005, for the case of lexical stress). In their informal talks majority of students agreed that the pronunciation and accent of NES teachers was authentic; they are more fluent than NNES teachers, in areas of words with multiple usage, slang and colloquial English, phrases and idiomatic expressions (which are constantly evolving), and particularly, cultural issues; and NES teachers were more equipped than NNES teachers. They also believed that NES teachers can teach pronunciation, speaking and listening better and more accurately than NNES teachers. The students also added that NES teachers were able to teach customs, culture better, and eventually help students improve their English skills better than NNES teachers. However, this part is beyond the scope of this study and more systematic research is necessary to reveal which elements of NNES and NES teachers' speech may affect student comprehension and

production skills and the underlying mechanism of the way this occurs.

Conclusion

This study identified the rational on the effect of NES teachers' background cultural knowledge on students' performances including listening comprehension and oral production, and discussed differences among students instructed by NES teachers and those instructed by NNES teachers in the language learning environment. It is concluded in this study that NES teachers' background cultural knowledge can positively influence the students listening comprehension and oral production. It is explored that the students' performances have improved through the effect of NES teachers' cultural knowledge. Explicit tests were given in order to find whether or not the students' listening comprehension and oral production have been improved in experimental group. The findings of this study, first and for most, will aim to help Iranian EFL teachers based on a dominant theory known as Schema Theory (Anderson, 1984) which provides good insight in this respect. The result can also help EFL syllabus designers, policy makers and administrators to be aware of the differences and try to provide materials and text books for EFL students in such a way that treat language culturally.

Even though NNES/NES teachers are different in their teaching strategies, EFL students must accept it as a natural phenomenon. Because of the absence of cultural background knowledge in the mind of NNES teachers EFL students instructed by the same teachers may be at a distinct advantage in comprehension, yet they will have access to cultural materials through the internet, chat, movies.

Limitations

Although the data support the effectiveness of NES teachers' background cultural knowledge on students listening comprehension and oral production as well as their attitudes toward NES teachers, some of limitations of this study should be mentioned. These findings are still suggestive, however, given the inherent unreliability of the small number of items obtained from the statistical analyses. The participants' background information also needs to be further evaluated. The current study recruited advanced students only, and it did not explore the effects of other variables such as gender, learning style, personality factors, teacher qualifications, prior achievement, and other contextual factors that are likely to affect students' performances and their attitudes toward NES and NNES teachers. It would also require researchers to obtain larger sample sizes and measure significantly more items. To the extent possible, future studies should incorporate more comprehensive measures that would allow for multilevel modeling analysis.

Suggestions for Further Research

The current study to the best of the researcher's knowledge is one of the first to investigate the effect of NES teachers' background cultural knowledge on students' performances including listening comprehension and oral production in language learning environment as well as of students' attitudes toward NES and NNES teachers from a pedagogical point of view. Given the fact that currently the majority of English learners in the world are taught by NNES teachers (Brutt-Griffler, 2002) and that English is being introduced at younger and younger grade levels as a foreign language in many parts of the world, more research is called for on this topic.

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