Students', Teachers' and Recruiters' Perception of Teaching Effectiveness and the Importance of Nativeness in ELT

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Abstract

The question of whether students prefer 'native speaker' teachers has been extensively explored (Chun, 2014; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005; Moussu & Llurda, 2008). Equally, there is a growing body of literature which has aimed to identify what teacher skills and qualities contribute to being an effective English teacher (Bell, 2005; J. C. Richards, 2010). Nevertheless, the question of preference for 'native speakers' has rarely been explored in the context of the skills and qualities of effective English teachers. Consequently, this MMR attempted to triangulate the perceptions of students, teachers and recruiters in Polish language schools as to which skills and qualities they view as important for an effective English teacher and compare these to the importance attached to 'nativeness'. The results show that students and recruiters attached significantly more importance to proficiency and 'nativeness' than did the teachers, who in turn found gaining rapport in class significantly more important. Nevertheless, 'nativeness' and the teacher's L1 were considered to be the least important qualities by all three cohorts. This suggests that despite the prevalence of native speakerism, ELT professionals recognise that it is not the teacher's L1, but their pedagogical skills that contribute to teaching effectiveness.

Keywords: *teaching effectiveness; attitudes; teaching English; native speakerism*

Introduction

Over the last three decades a profound bias against 'non-native speaker' teachers, often referred to as native speakerism, has been documented in the literature (Holliday, 2005; Llurda, 2005; Mahboob & Golden, 2013). As Kiczkowiak and Wu (2018) observe, this prejudice can take numerous different form, such as lower wages or negative attitudes from students. Nevertheless, one of the most visible ones is likely to be discrimination in ELT (English Language Teaching) recruitment, in particular in the private sector, where the vast majority of job ads have been found to be for 'native speakers' only (Mahboob, Uhrig, Newman, & Hartford, 2004; Ruecker & Ives, 2015; Selvi, 2010). It has also been shown that recruiters prefer hiring 'native speaker' teachers due to a perceived market demand from students (Clark & Paran, 2007; Mahboob, 2003).

This issue of preference for 'native speakers' has been explored in depth in the last two decades in a variety of educational and geographical contexts using both qualitative and quantitative approaches (Chun, 2014; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005; Mahboob, 2004; Moussu, 2002). Nevertheless, what many of these studies have in common is that they present students with a binary choice of either a 'native' or a 'non-native speaker' teacher, without taking into account the pedagogical skills and education needed to be an English teacher. This can lead to a situation where the participants base their answers on the preconceived notions they harbour about the two groups, likely influenced by the widespread and deeply-rooted ideology of native speakerism (Holliday, 2005).

However, as Farrell (2015) argues, it is not the teacher's ethnicity, mother tongue or culture that define them as a good or a bad teacher. Indeed, a vast body of literature has developed which provides insights into what constitutes teaching effectiveness (Lamb & Wedell, 2013; Muijs & Reynolds, 2001). It is vital then that research on 'native' and 'non-native speaker' teachers should also take into account the individual's ability to teach, rather than solely their mother tongue. Consequently, this study aims to examine not only students', but also teachers' and recruiters' attitudes towards 'native' and 'non-native speaker' teachers in the context of teaching effectiveness. More specifically, it attempts to identify which skills and qualities the three cohorts value most highly in an effective English teacher. In addition, it seeks to compare the importance attached to these by the three cohorts with that given to the teacher's first language.

Literature Review

First, it is important to highlight the use of inverted commas with the terms 'native' and 'non-native speaker', as opposed to the commonly used acronyms NS and NNS. The inverted commas are used to emphasise that the terms are fuzzy, lacking in concrete definitions and often based on ideology and prejudice (Holliday, 2005; Swan, Aboshiha, & Holliday, 2015). Therefore, whenever 'native' and 'non-native speaker' terms are used in this article, the inverted commas serve to remind the reader and the author that we are referring to the 'so called' or those *perceived* as 'native' or 'non-native speakers', rather than to a fixed and objective category of meaning.

The skills and qualities of effective English teachers

Researchers point out that all language teachers, whether 'native' or 'non-native speakers', must undergo pedagogical training and acquire knowledge of and about the target language in order to be able to successfully teach it (Derwing & Munro, 2005). Yet, defining what is

meant by an effective or expert language, or more specifically English, teacher can cause researchers some problems, as what is meant by effective, expert or good teaching can differ depending on local socio-cultural and educational traditions or norms (J. C. Richards, 2010).

Nevertheless, despite these differences, sufficient research has been conducted to propose a tentative list of qualities and skills of effective English teachers. First, many researchers agree that the ability to motivate learners is one of the virtues of successful teachers (Bell, 2005; Jones, Llacer-Arrastia, & Newbill, 2009; Lamb & Wedell, 2013), and numerous other scholars now confirm that teachers can indeed increase or decrease their students' motivation through different activities (Jones et al., 2009; Magid & Chan, 2012; Papi & Abdollahzadeh, 2012; Wu, 2003). Therefore, being able to identify which activities help motivate learners is an important skill of an effective English teacher.

Second, numerous scholars point to the importance of subject knowledge for teachers (Lamb & Wedell, 2013; McNamara, 1991; Muijs & Reynolds, 2001; Pachler, 2007). As far as language teachers are concerned, subject knowledge includes "knowledge of second language acquisition theory, pedagogical knowledge, curricular and syllabus knowledge and cultural knowledge, as well as teachers' proficiency in the target language and an awareness of the structure and features of the target language" (H. Richards, Conway, Roskvist, & Harvey, 2013, p. 232). For example, language awareness can allow teachers to grade their language accordingly to students' level, as well as anticipate and offer solutions to potential language difficulties.

Furthermore, Britten (1985), Phillipson (1992) and Ellis (2006) have all argued that the experience of learning a foreign language should be considered an important characteristic of a successful English teacher and of their subject knowledge. This could help the teacher become a role model, which according to Cheng and Dörnyei (2007), is the key factor that can help motivate students. In addition to having learnt a foreign language, it has also been emphasised that English teachers should ideally know their students L1 and culture (Kirkpatrick, 2007). As a result, it could be argued that it is multicompetent teachers, or those who speak more than one language, make the most effective teachers.

Proficiency in the target language is also viewed as part of the necessary subject knowledge an effective teacher should have (H. Richards et al., 2013). For example, Shin (2008) views it as a crucially important characteristic of expert language teachers. This is confirmed by

Lamb and Wedell's (2013) results, which showed that some students were motivated by high language proficiency of their teachers. However, others are concerned that too much emphasis has been placed on 'native-like' proficiency as a pre-requisite of effective English teachers leading to unfair recruitment policies and an entrenchment of native speakerism (Tweed, 2011). In other words, 'native-like' proficiency as a requirement is problematic not only since it suggests that 'native speaker' proficiency is the ideal which a 'non-native speaker' must approximate as closely as possible, but also because it assumes the existence of a homogenous 'native speaker' proficiency. As a result, a necessary degree of proficiency should not be understood in terms of its closeness to the 'native speaker' norm, but rather in terms of being able to provide an intelligible and attainable language model (Kirkpatrick, 2007).

To summarise, as Farrell (2015) argues, it is not the teacher's ethnicity, mother tongue or culture that define them as an effective teacher. In fact, as early as the 50s it was pointed out that "a teacher is not adequately qualified to teach a language because it is his mother tongue" (UNESCO, 1953, p.69, as quoted in Phillipson, 1992, p. 195). Over six decades later, however, the ELT profession is still in a situation where teachers are judged based on their mother tongue, rather than the ability to teach. While there is some evidence that this can also negatively affect the careers of 'native speakers' (Houghton & Rivers, 2013), it is 'non-native speakers' who seem to be suffering more from the effects of the ideology of native speakerism (Lowe & Kiczkowiak, 2016).

In addition, this 'native' 'non-native speaker' dichotomy is to an extent evident in how the question of preference for 'native speakers' has been investigated.

The preference for 'native speaker' teachers
Indeed, while the question of whether students and recruiters prefer 'native speaker' teachers has been investigated from a variety of perspectives and in a variety of contexts (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005; Liaw, 2012; Rao, 2010; Subtirelu, 2013), it has to a large extent relied on presenting participants with a binary choice ('native' or a 'non-native'). To give one example, in Mahboob's (2004) study students were asked to write a text expressing their opinion on whether they thought 'native' or 'non-native speaker' teachers were better. Nevertheless, such an approach, overlooks the vital question of teaching effectiveness and the teacher's preparedness for the job since the participants are not told how qualified, experienced or skilled the teachers in question are.

It is also typical for researchers to include questions where respondents have to compare 'native' and 'non-native speaker' abilities (see Moussu, 2010 for a comprehensive review of the research). For example, respondents might be asked to decide to what extent 'native speakers' can help students learn more about the target culture, whether 'non-native speakers' are better at teaching grammar, or whether it is more motivating to study with a 'native speaker' (Chun, 2014; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2002; Moussu, 2006). It is argued here that such an approach can further perpetuate native speakerism by reinforcing the beliefs that the respondents already hold about the two groups, without in fact even attempting to answer the crucial question of what constitutes teaching effectiveness.

A welcome departure from such an approach was Moussu's (2010) study in which the students were asked about their perceptions of the teacher that was currently teaching them without prompting the respondents with the labels 'native' or 'non-native'. Likewise, Aslan and Thompson (2016) asked respondents to evaluate the effectiveness of their English teachers on a range of different categories such as their attitude to learners, teaching style or personality, again without being prompted by the two labels. It is important to emphasise here that in the former study 'non-native speaker' teachers received overwhelmingly positive evaluation from students, while in the latter the researchers did not observe any statistical difference between how high or low 'native' and 'non-native speakers' were rated on particular categories.

Another approach that attempts to move beyond the comparative fallacy (Moussu & Llurda, 2008; Selvi, 2014) and acknowledge the importance of pedagogical preparedness is to compare the importance students attach to 'nativeness' of their teacher with the skills and qualities of effective teachers identified in the literature. For example, Walkinshaw and Duong (2012) used a binary scale on which student had to indicate whether a given quality of an effective teacher (e.g., experience, qualifications) was more or less important than the teacher's 'nativeness'. The results showed that only in terms of pronunciation, 'nativeness' was chosen as more important. Similarly, the respondents in Levis et al.'s (2017) questionnaire had to rank in order of importance thirteen skills and qualities of effective teachers provided by the researchers, and it was found that being a 'native speaker' was the least important quality.

All in all then, it seems that the research on preference for 'native speaker' teachers has to a large extent not taken into account skills and qualities of effective English teachers. As a
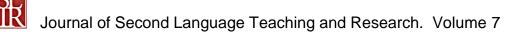
result, further research comparing the importance attached to 'nativeness' and the skills and qualities of effective teachers is warranted. In addition, many of the studies reported on in this section have been carried out either in the US (Levis et al., 2017; Mahboob, 2004; Moussu, 2002) or in Asia (Chun, 2014; Walkinshaw & Duong, 2012). While some research has been conducted in Europe, many publications seem a decade or more old (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2002, 2005; Pacek, 2005). In addition, the literature review only yielded one study which has been carried out in Poland (Kula, 2011). Likewise, with regards to the research on the qualities and skills of effective teachers, no study to date has been found that addressed this issue in Poland. Finally, few studies have addressed teachers' or recruiters' perceptions of 'native' and 'non-native speaker' teachers. In fact, only one study focusing on the former group (Moussu, 2006), and three studies on the latter group (Clark & Paran, 2007; Mahboob et al., 2004; Moussu, 2006) have been identified.

Consequently, the aim of this study was to bridge this research gap and to identify which skills and qualities students, teachers and recruiters in Polish language schools find important in effective English teachers. Furthermore, the study also attempted to ascertain the importance these three groups attach to the teacher's 'nativeness'. The aim was to see whether there were differences in the perceptions of the three groups regarding the skills and qualities of effective English teachers, as well as the importance of 'nativeness'. More specifically, the research reported on here aimed to answer the following questions:

1. Which skills and qualities do students, teachers and recruiters find important in effective English teachers?
2. Are there any measurable differences between students', teachers' and recruiters' perceptions with regards to the skills and qualities of effective teachers each finds important?
3. How important is 'nativeness' or the teacher's L1 for students, teachers and recruiters in comparison to the other skills and qualities of effective teachers?

Methodology

In order to answer these questions, MMR (Mixed Method Research) approach was used. According to Dörnyei (2007), using an MMR approach has the advantage of minimising some of the inherent shortcomings and maximising the strengths of quantitative and qualitative methods, providing a more comprehensive and deeper understanding of the studied phenomena.

Research Tools and Procedure

More specifically, this MMR consisted of three phases. First, in the exploratory qualitative phase focus group interviews were utilised to identify the skills and qualities of effective teachers which teachers and students found important. Unfortunately, it was not possible to form focus groups for recruiters due to the fact that those participating in the study were based in six different cities in Poland. All focus groups were asked the same question: *what in your opinion are the seven most important skills and qualities of an effective English teacher?* and as a group had to agree on a list. The focus groups were homogenous (teachers and students were not mixed) and the aim was that they would be comprised of between six and ten informants as recommended by Dörnyei (2007).

Secondly, the focus groups were followed by a quantitative strand in which on-line questionnaires were used. The questionnaire was part of a larger study conducted for the purposes of the author's PhD project and originally consisted of three parts. However, this article only reports on the third part of the questionnaire, which gathered data on the skills and qualities of effective teachers. The seven skills and qualities of effective English teachers identified in the qualitative exploratory phase were placed on a rank order scale. Additionally, being a 'native' and a 'non-native speaker', as well as speaking English as an L1 and L2, were added to the list to see how important the respondents would find them in comparison to the other seven skills and qualities. Respondents had to place the items on a scale of 0 to 100, with 0 corresponding to 'Not important at all', and 100 to 'Very important'. While it could be argued that such a wide scale might render it difficult to use consistently, it can also lead to more nuanced responses.

Finally, the quantitative strand was followed by an explanatory qualitative phase in which semi-structured interviews were utilised. The interviewees were asked to explain which skills and qualities of effective teachers they found the most important and how important was the teacher's first language in comparison. These were conducted either in Polish or in English, depending on the interviewee's individual preference.

Sample Sizes

To facilitate the presentation of the data and to ensure clarity and precision, those participants who took part in the focus groups are henceforth referred to as informants, those who completed the questionnaire as respondents, and those who were interviewed as interviewees. The word participant is only used to mean those who participated in all three

strands of the study. In addition, when extracts from qualitative data are presented, symbols and numbers in square brackets are utilised to denote who a particular extract comes from. Thus, [S1] stands for a student, [R1] for a recruiter, and [T1] for a teacher. To further minimise the possibility of identification, the numbering does not correspond to the order in which the focus groups or follow-up interviews were conducted.

79 informants, 49 (62%) of whom were students, and 30 (38%) who were teachers, took part in focus groups. They came from six language schools spread among five cities in five different administrative regions in Poland. The participating schools were part of British Council, EMPiK and International House chains. There were six focus groups of teacher informants and eight of student informants. No additional background information was collected from them.

Second, 120 respondents agreed to participate in the survey and signed the consent form. However, not all responded to all the questions, and only 86 respondents - 57 of whom were students, 24 teachers and 5 recruiters - completed the entire questionnaire. Since background information on these participants was collected at the end of the questionnaire, only the information about the 86 respondents who completed the survey is presented below in Table 1.

Table 1. *Background Information About Student, Teacher and Recruiter Respondents*

		Students		Teachers		Recruiters	
		No	[%]	No	[%]	No	[%]
Gender	Male	13	22.8	7	29.2	3	60
	Female	44	77.2	17	70.8	2	40
Age	18-24	17	29.8	1	4.2	0	0
	25-34	17	29.8	16	66.7	1	20
	35-44	15	26.3	5	20.8	1	20
	45-54	8	14.0	1	4.2	1	20
	55-64	0	0.0	1	4.2	2	40
Perceived linguistic identity	Polish L1	53	93	5	20.8	2	40
	English L1	0	0	11	45.8	1	20
	Other L1	2	3.5	2	8.3	0	0
	Bilingual	2	3.5	3	12.5	0	0
	Multilingual	0	0	1	4.2	1	20
	Other	0	0	2	8.3	1	20
Experience studying, teaching or recruiting	Less than a year	5	8.8	2	8.3	0	0
	1-3 years	16	28.1	7	29.2	1	20
	4-6 years	7	12.3	4	16.7	1	20
	More than 6 years	28	49.1	11	45.8	3	60
Proficiency level	Beginner	2	3.5	1	4.2	0	0
	Elementary	10	17.5	4	16.7	0	0
	Pre-Int	9	15.8	0	0.0	0	0
	Int	15	26.3	4	16.7	0	0
	Upper-Int	17	29.8	3	12.5	0	0
	Adv	3	5.3	2	8.3	3	60
	Proficiency	0	0.0	9	37.5	2	40

Finally, a total of 13 interviewees - 3 (24%) of whom were students, 5 (38%) teachers and 5 (38%) recruiters - agreed to take part in the semi-structured interviews that followed the questionnaires. All of them had also taken part in the questionnaire. Seven (54%) interviewees were female, while the remaining 6 (46%) were male.

Data Analysis Techniques

First, qualitative data were analysed using content analysis, which is defined as "a strict and systematic set of procedures for the rigorous analysis, examination and verification of the contents of written data" (Cohen, Manion, Morrison, & Bell, 2011, p. 583). The content analysis in this study followed three steps, which are also typically found in literature (Brown, 2014; Cohen et al., 2011; Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011), which - starting with the initial and broadest one - were initial/open coding, focused/analytic coding and axial/thematic coding.

As far as quantitative data are concerned, descriptive statistics were used to calculate the number of responses for a given question, and the mean (M). Standard Deviation (SD) was also calculated. This was followed by an analysis using non-parametric statistical tests. The choice of non-parametric tests was motivated by the fact that Likert scales produce ordinal variables, and as a result should not be treated with parametric tests, despite the fact that these are widely applied in social sciences. Specifically, to determine whether there were significant differences between the cohorts, Kruskal-Wallis H test was utilised. To check which of the three groups differed significantly, Tamhane's T2 test was utilised. Results are reported as significant for p values greater than 0.05.

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited as far as its sampling scope is concerned. Since it was only conducted in several language schools in Poland on a rather limited number of participants, caution needs to be taken when generalising the findings. In addition, the choice of schools from three big language school chains might also have introduced some bias to the data. Hence, future studies could attempt to investigate native speakerism in universities, public schools or independent language schools to see whether they would corroborate the data from this study. Furthermore, due to the phenomenon of social desirability, the informants and the interviewees might have given the researcher the answers he expected, rather than expressing their actual beliefs (Edwards, 1957). Finally, since the interviewees were drawn using convenience sampling, and since the vast majority of the teacher interviewees were 'native speakers', it is possible that the data from the interviews represents a skewed sample of the quantitative data. As a result, caution needs to be taken when interpreting and comparing the quantitative and qualitative findings.

Results and Discussion

In this section the results of the study are presented and discussed combining the findings from the qualitative and quantitative strands.

The Qualities and Skills of Effective Teachers

Eighty-five (*n*=85) respondents completed this part of the questionnaire, 57 of whom were students, 24 teachers and 5 recruiters. The respondents had to assign a level of importance from 0 (*Not important at* all) to 100 (*Very Important*) to twelve teacher skills and qualities. Table 2 shows the mean (*M*) importance for each of the twelve qualities skills of effective English teachers.

Table 2. *Qualities and Skills of Effective English Teachers*

Item	An effective English teacher…	Mean (*M*)		
		Students	Teachers	Recruiters
1	Is a Native English Speaker.	67.9	17.9	66
2	Is creative.	83.2	80.4	68
3	Knows teaching methodology.	77.4	78.8	80
4	Knows English well.	96.8	93.8	98
5	Has high language awareness.	83.9	83.8	84
6	Can convey knowledge effectively.	89.6	94.6	86
7	Is a Non-Native English speaker.	33.7	15.8	22
8	Can motivate students.	88.8	94.2	84
9	Is flexible.	82.5	90	80
10	Has good rapport with students	85.3	95	78
11	Speaks English as their mother tongue.	69.8	21.3	64
12	Speaks English as a foreign language.	42.6	18.3	24

It can be seen from Table 2 above that there are important differences between the responses given by teachers, recruiters and students, particularly as far as the five most important qualities and skills of effective English teachers are concerned, but also in terms of the importance attached to being a 'native speaker'. Consequently, these key differences are discussed in the following sections.

The Importance of Proficiency

Student respondents considered knowledge of English as the most important skill of an effective English teacher (M=96.8). This was followed by the ability to convey knowledge effectively (M=89.6), to motivate students (M=88) and having good rapport with students (M=85.3). The importance of knowing English well for being considered an effective English teacher is evident in the comment of one student informant:

> *Knowledge of grammar, knowledge of the language is for me an absolutely basic element to be a teacher. It cannot be overlooked. Without it, it would be a mistake to be allowed to teach. It's difficult to imagine a maths teacher without any knowledge of maths. [S7]*

It was also mentioned that the teacher should know the language beyond what is taught in classes or books, possibly through having lived or studied abroad, which is also linked to culture:

> *I think that it's something like, I'm just not sure how to put it, a knowledge not only from books, but for example that somebody has been, a sort of practical knowledge, that somebody has been abroad, lived there, that they know the culture and the language, not only the one from the books. [S8]*

Likewise, in a study of EFL learners in Thailand, Mullock (2010) found that students highly appreciated teachers who were proficient. This might explain student respondents' preference for having classes with 'native speaker' teachers as in the literature being a 'native speaker' is frequently associated with superior proficiency (Medgyes, 1992, 1994; Quirk, 1990). In other studies, students have also been found to praise 'native speaker' teachers for their wide range of vocabulary and oral fluency (Barratt & Kontra, 2000; Rao, 2010). In contrast, one of the main weaknesses of 'non-native speaker' teachers frequently reported by students is their low proficiency in the language (Árva & Medgyes, 2000; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005).

Similarly to student respondents, recruiters ranked knowing English well as the most important skill (*M*=98) of an effective English teacher. This item's mean importance was more than twelve points higher than those immediately following it: *can convey knowledge effectively* (*M*=86), *can motivate students* (*M*=84) and *has high language awareness* (*M*=84). It is also worth noting that this item had by far the lowest SD of all twelve items (*SD*=4), which indicates that the recruiter respondents agreed to a large extent on the importance of proficiency. The importance recruiter respondents attach to proficiency of the teacher is evident in this comment from one recruiter interviewee:

> *For example, I think that for me the most important thing is that they know the language to a high degree of proficiency, C2 for example (…), because you can't have a teacher that can only teach up to FCE, for example. I wouldn't hire them, because for me the proficiency is too low. [R3]*

Moreover, another recruiter interviewee mentioned that regardless of their proficiency, 'non-native speakers' are still not as proficient as 'native speakers' and can only teach up to a certain level:

> *The weaknesses, though, are that their language is not internalised to the degree that they were weaned on it, so to say. They are capable of teaching up to a certain level, but for a example on C2, a 'native speaker' would be advisable. [R1]*

Although this study did not include pronunciation as a skill or quality of an effective teacher, other research shows that recruiters find 'native-like' accent an important hiring criterion (Clark & Paran, 2007; Mahboob et al., 2004). Furthermore, Moussu (2006) showed that the main weaknesses of 'non-native speaker' teachers reported by recruiters in the US were low proficiency, low range of vocabulary and a foreign accent. As a result, it does seem that the results obtained in this study corroborate those of other researchers.

Teacher respondents, on the other hand, assigned more importance to good rapport (*M*=95), conveying knowledge effectively (*M*=94.6) as well as motivating students (*M*=94.2) than to knowing English well (*M*=93.8). Nevertheless, knowing English well had a relatively low SD (*SD*=7) in comparison to conveying knowledge effectively (*SD*=17.5) and motivating students (*SD*=12.9). Although the importance of proficiency in the language was highlighted both in focus groups and interviews, the teachers in this study stressed at the same time, however, that being a 'native speaker' is not relevant:

> *I think the language level of a teacher is a skill, is a factor, because a teacher,*
> *wherever they come from, whatever their L1 is, needs to be able to answer*
> *sometimes unexpected questions, needs to be able to command the confidence*
> *of students and their families. So, the language level is an important and relevant*
> *factor and I would argue that whether this comes from a 'native speaker' is*
> *unimportant. [T1]*

Even though the importance of proficiency was not stressed by as many teacher as student interviewees and informants, this could possibly be due to the fact that they took it to be such a fundamental skill that they did not even think it necessary to mention it, as evidenced by this comment from one teacher informant:

> *[Being proficient],* we take it for granted. *It's not even on our list. [T19]*

All in all, then, it seems that the student and recruiter participants in this study attach more importance to knowing English well, than do the teachers. Although these differences are minimally above the threshold to be considered statistically significant (p=0.53) as far as the quantitative strand is concerned, the data from the qualitative strand indicates that proficiency is much more important for student and recruiter participants than it is for teachers, who emphasised that the ability to teach is more important:

> *I mean, it is important to be proficient, but knowing how to teach is more*
> *important. [T2]*

The importance attached to proficiency could explain student respondents' preference for 'native speaker' teachers and recruiter respondents' preference for hiring 'native speaker' teachers found in literature, since 'native speakers' are often reified as having superior language skills, while 'non-native speakers' are criticised for their low proficiency. Nevertheless, further research is needed to ascertain this.

The Importance of Rapport

Second, a significant difference could be noted between the mean importance that the three cohorts assigned to having good rapport with students (χ^2(2)=9.439, p=0.009). Tamahane's posthoc analysis indicated that this difference was significant between teacher and student respondents (p=0.025), as well as teacher and recruiter respondents (p=0.021), which suggests that the teacher participants find good rapport to be more important than do the student and recruiter participants.

The importance teacher respondents assign to good rapport is also evident in the qualitative data collected, even though at times different terms and adjectives were used to refer to establishing and maintaining good rapport:

> *The first one we came up with is building rapport with students. That's quite important, because above all if you've got that, then everything else falls into place. [T13]*

> *Ability to create rapport with the group. [T18]*

> *Good with people, I think it all comes down under that. [T20]*

Student informants also commented on the importance of good rapport, which was linked to being friendly and positive:

> *The teacher should be open-minded and good with people. They should also be a bit friendly, but not too much, because when he or she will be too much friendly, then we not be progress in the study, but a bit friendly could help us to open and speak English. [S11]*

> *The teacher should have a positive attitude to all students. Sometimes it's late, and a person that comes in with a positive outlook on life can also stimulate us to think creatively. [S36]*

Nevertheless, while certainly valuing the teacher's openness and likeability, students do not necessarily wish them to be too friendly. For example, one student informant mentioned that the teacher:

> *should also be a bit friendly, but not too much, because when he or she will be too much friendly, then we not be progress in the study, but a bit friendly could help us to open and speak English. [S11]*

In order to gain and maintain rapport then, the teacher then needs to be able to strike a balance between being open and friendly with the students, and maintaining appropriate distance. Unfortunately, no other data pertaining to the Polish ELT context is available in the literature, therefore making it difficult to establish why some students might prefer friendlier teachers. Data from other countries, however, indicate that European students, in contrast to Asian ones, find personal traits and the teacher's likeability to be less important than for example teacher's knowledge or ability to teach (Pacek, 2005). In fact, there might even be differences between students of different ages as evidenced by Koç's (2013) study of Turkish

elementary and high school students, where the former were found to value discipline and classroom management, while the latter empathy. This therefore indicates that it is crucial the teacher understands their students and adapts their teaching style accordingly, since different students in different cultures, of different ages, and different levels might be motivated by diverse factors (Lamb & Wedell, 2013; Mullock, 2010).

The Importance of 'Nativeness' and the Teacher's L1

Having discussed the skills the three cohorts found important, it is essential to now address the question of the importance of 'nativeness' or the teacher's L1. As Table 2 above shows, when answers of all respondents are analysed together, it is clear that the four qualities related to the teacher's 'nativeness' or mother tongue – namely, *is a Native English Speaker* (item 1), *is a Non-Native English speaker* (item 7), *speaks English as a mother tongue* (item 11) and *speaks English as a foreign language* (item 12) - were the least important for all three cohorts.

However, there are significant differences between the importance of these traits when student respondents' means are compared with those of teacher respondents. First, posthoc Tamhane's T2 analysis indicates that there is a significant difference (p=0.00002) between how important being a 'native speaker' (item 1) was for student (M=67.9) and teacher respondents (M=17.9). Furthermore, there is a significant difference (p=0.00001) between how important it was for student (M=69.8) and teacher respondents (M=21.3) that the L1 of an effective English teacher was English (item 11). This suggests that the teacher's L1 and their 'nativeness' are significantly more important for student respondents than they are for the teacher respondents.

While the recruiter respondents also found item 1 and 11 to be relatively more important (M=66 and M=64, respectively) than did the teacher respondents, the difference was not statistically significant (p=0.078 and p=0.101). This could potentially be due to a very small sample size of the recruiter cohort (n=5).

The discrepancy between the views of the three cohorts observed in the quantitative findings is not evident in the qualitative findings, however. First, only one student interviewee, out of a total of fifty-two who took part in focus groups or interviews, said it was important for them that their teacher is a 'native speaker':

I think that whether the teacher is a 'native speaker' is very important, for example to pick up the accent. […] And it can help me to understand different 'native speaker' accents. […] This is why I'm studying English - to understand the 'native speakers'. And I really like British accent. [S2]

It is also quite clear from the comment above that this student's preference for a 'native speaker' teacher was due to the student's specific language goals. However, some student interviewees pointed out that it was of much lesser importance to them whether their teacher was a 'native speaker' as they valued other skills and qualities much more highly:

I think that for me it doesn't matter at all whether the teacher is a 'native speaker' or not. I need to speak grammatically correct, and the teacher must be able to pick out my mistakes and correct them. And whether he's a 'native speaker', is irrelevant. [S1]

It is also noteworthy that out of the forty-nine student informants not a single one mentioned 'nativeness' or L1 as an important quality of an effective English teacher. In fact, one student informant specifically pointed out that their current teacher, who is Polish, was the best teacher they had ever had:

I have found the best teacher in my opinion, Mr Christopher [Polish teacher], maybe he has some faults, but I don't see them, because he's very polite, very professional, it means during the lesson he has individual approach to every student. [S20]

These qualitative results reflect those obtained by Ali (2009), who interviewed 31 Arab students about the qualities and skills of effective English teachers. None of the respondents in that study listed 'nativeness', or the teacher's L1 as an important skill.

Teacher interviewees also emphasised that being a 'native speaker' does not make someone a better teacher, and that what is important are teaching skills and qualifications:

The fact that you're a British or American citizen doesn't mean that you're going to be a good teacher. I've seen that. [T1]

You don't have to be a 'native speaker' to teach English, or any other language. [T2]

In addition, all recruiter interviewees also pointed out that while being a 'native speaker' might be a valuable addition, it is not the most important trait, which is evidenced by the comment below:

> *From my perspective it's not the most important difference, being a 'native' or a 'non-native speaker'. […] It's about language awareness, methodology, and the way they teach, rather than whether we are or are not a 'native speaker'. [R2]*

These qualitative findings seem to contradict the quantitative ones in which the recruiter respondents found 'nativeness' to be relatively important. It is possible that the anonymity of the questionnaire might have allowed for more honest answers than those in face-to-face interviews, where the social desirability bias (Edwards, 1957) could have come to the fore. In other words, the recruiter interviewees answered the questions in a way they thought would be viewed favourably by the researcher. A hint to this might be seen in the comments below where two recruiter interviewees stated that having 'native speaker' teachers is important for marketing purposes, and that their school does mostly hire 'native speaker' teachers:

> *Of course, you've also got to leave some room for marketing. Polish market is not an easy one, so every school builds its brand and tries to sell itself in its own way. You know, I'm not going to pretend in front of the customers that I don't have British teachers. [R3]*

> *In our school the majority of the teachers we hire come from English-speaking countries. [R5]*

In addition, some 'native speaker' teacher interviewees pointed out the privilege that they had enjoyed in ELT, casting some doubt on the sincerity of the recruiter interviewees' comments above:

> *I've seen and experienced as well that the schools would hire 'native speakers' more based on their first language rather than qualifications. [T2]*

> *I think a lot of 'native speakers' have a very easy ride into teaching. It's quite smooth at the beginning. You do a 4-week course, pick a country and off you go. [T5]*

This favouritism that 'native speakers' still enjoy was echoed by one of the recruiter interviewees who highlighted that:

I know from experience, not as a director, but as a former teacher, that if a school does not want to hire a 'non-native speaker', they won't hire them. [R5]

All in all then, while the qualitative data might indicate that recruiters are not concerned about the teacher's L1, the quantitative data suggest that 'nativeness' is still an important hiring criterion. These findings further corroborate those obtained by Mahboob et al. (2004) and Clark and Paran (2007), which show that the recruiters place significantly greater importance on teacher's 'nativeness' than their pedagogical qualifications and skills.

With regards to students, it is encouraging that none of those who took part in the focus groups, and only one during the interviews, out of a total of fifty-two who participated in both, mentioned that 'nativeness' was an important quality of an effective English teacher. Nevertheless, the quantitative data presented in this section does show that students find 'nativeness' and L1 significantly more important. Finally, it seems that it is the teacher participants who recognise most readily that being a 'native speaker' is not a qualification and does not make one a better teacher.

Conclusion

The research presented in this article aimed to investigate which qualities and skills students, teachers and recruiters in Polish language schools considered important for effective English teachers. In addition, it also aimed to identify how important was 'nativeness', or the teacher's L1, in comparison to these skills and qualities. Since the study is based on a small group of participants, it is unclear whether the results are generalisable. Nevertheless, triangulation of sources and the MMR utilised here can provide some tentative conclusions. First, the skills and qualities of effective English teachers identified in this study match to a large extent those found in the literature. Especially as far as students are concerned, it seems that proficiency, ability to convey knowledge effectively, and to motivate students are valued most highly.

Second, the data indicates that there are some important differences between the three cohorts. Namely, student and recruiter participants find proficiency to be significantly more important than do the teachers. On the other hand, the latter group placed significantly more importance on maintaining rapport. Consequently, this information can be used by teachers to better tailor their teaching style to the learners.

Finally, similarly to the results obtained by Walkinshaw and Duong (2012), and Levis et al. (2017), 'nativeness' as well as the L1 were the least important qualities according to all three cohorts. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the student and recruiters attached considerably more importance to these qualities than did the teacher participants. This suggests that native speakerism is still present in some students' and recruiters' beliefs and can explain the preference some students exhibit for 'native speakers', as well as the discriminatory recruitment policies noted by numerous authors (Mahboob & Golden, 2013; Ruecker & Ives, 2015; Selvi, 2010).

All in all, however, it is encouraging that all three cohorts do not view 'nativeness' as a very important quality of an effective English teacher. This suggests first that in research the question of the preference for 'native' or 'non-native speaker' should not be framed as a binary, but should rather be viewed in context bearing in mind the teacher's pedagogical preparedness for the job. Second, the results of this study also suggest that if recruiters would like to base their hiring policies on students' preferences, they might need to focus on a broader range of skills and qualities, rather than 'nativeness'.

Biodata

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