Research Article

University Students' Perceptions of Native and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers in Pre-Sessional Courses in Vietnam

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Following the increasing number of English medium programmes, the demand for pre-sessional language courses has risen sharply to assist university students who have yet to meet the English requirements. Given the situation in which native-speaker hegemony persists in emerging contexts like Vietnam, issues relating to native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) as English for Academic Purposes (EAP) practitioners have become a significant matter of discussion. This study aims to explore university students' perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs in pre-sessional courses based on the Competency Framework for Teachers of English for Academic Purposes (CFTEAP). Research data were collected using questionnaires and interviews with Vietnamese students at an English Medium Instruction (EMI) university. Findings revealed that they did not show an explicit preference towards either NESTs or NNESTs. While NESTs were perceived to have a high level of academic language, NNESTs were appreciated for their ability to understand students' needs. The study contributed to the research agenda of Llurda and Calvet-Terré (2022) which includes 1) challenging the persistence of native-speakerism and 2) emphasizing the differences between NESTs and NNESTs to eventually empower the position of NNESTs as English teachers.

Keywords: English for academic purposes; native English-speaking teachers; non-native English-speaking teachers; native-speakerism, student's perceptions

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, one of the most significant phenomena in higher education has been the unprecedented growth in the use of English to teach academic subjects in non-English speaking countries. In the context of Vietnam, English Medium Instruction (EMI), as a part of the internationalisation agenda, is closely linked to the Reform Agenda for Higher Education in Vietnam issued in 2005 (Hayden & Le-Nguyen, 2020) with the aim of improving graduates' English language proficiency and developing their employability in the globalised environment (Sahan et al., 2021; Tran & Nguyen, 2018). This, as a result, has emphasised the importance of academic language proficiency so that novices entering university can successfully operate in such an environment.

However, a number of Vietnamese students find themselves insufficiently prepared in terms of language for the transition to an EMI programme due to three main reasons, namely exam-driven learning approaches and shortages of well-qualified English teachers in primary and secondary education (Pham & Bui, 2019), as well as a lack of

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focus on academic language knowledge in the curriculum (Hoang et al., 2016). Thus, following the increasing number of EMI programmes, the demand for a pre-sessional course which provides training in academic language and skills for students who have yet to meet the English requirement has risen sharply in higher education institutions. In the context of EMI in Vietnam, enhanced academic mobility has allowed both native and non-native English-speaking teachers (NESTs and NNESTs) to participate in the delivery of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and content courses. This initially aims to foster collaborative opportunities for lecturers, as well as enrich student learning experience. However, given the situation in which Sahan et al. (2021) reveal an overall preference from students towards native English-speaking teachers in Vietnamese EMI programmes, questions have arisen as to how university students perceive the two groups of teachers in the teaching of pre-sessional English courses and will be further discussed in this present study.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Defining Native Speakers and Non-Native Speakers

Historically, there has been a preference for native speakers as English teachers. For instance, Phillipson (1992) termed "native-speaker fallacy" as a concept to describe the marginalisation of NNESTs in English Language Teaching (ELT). A decade later, Holliday (2006) coined the term "native-speakerism" to refer to the ideology in which NESTs are the ideals of the English language and the English language teaching methodology (p. 385). Discrimination based on the teachers' first language (L1) has been long rooted in the domain of ELT (Clark & Paran, 2007; Dervić & Bećirović, 2019). As a result, the discussion that centres on the dichotomy of native and non-native speakers (NSs and NNSs) have received considerable attention in the literature to investigate the backgrounds of such ideas.

In one of the first attempts to pin down a definition for NSs, Davies (2004) presented key features of nativeness, which include 1) language acquisition on childhood, 2) the ability to understand and produce idiomatic language forms, 3) the understanding of the difference between standard form of language and the language that they speak, and 4) the ability to produce fluent spontaneous discourse (p. 435). Medgyes (1994) provided a more English-focused definition of an NS, emphasising the fact that they were born and acquire English during early childhood in an English-speaking country. This, as a result, means that they possess "a native-like command of English […] and can produce fluent, spontaneous discourse in English, use the English language creatively, and have reliable intuitions to distinguish right and wrong forms in English" (Medgyes, 1994, p. 10).

Except for childhood acquisition of the English language, all of the tenets from the given definitions of NS can be learned post-childhood as long as the learners have remarkable talent and motivation for learning the language, are provided with sufficient

opportunities to practice, and have exposure to the language input (Walkinshaw & Duong, 2012; Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2014). Therefore, these definitions reveal a poor basis for discriminating between NS and NNS. Yet, the NS/NNS dichotomy persists in the field of ELT and perpetuates the inequality between these two groups (Canagarajah, 1999). In this present study, however, the two terms NS and NNS are used due to the ongoing debate surrounding the NS/NNS dichotomy and the reality that these two labels remain deeply rooted in the field of ELT; this research does not have any intention of legitimising the disempowering construct embedded in the NS/NNS division.

2.2 Research on EAP Teachers

English for Academic Purposes (EAP), as described by MacDiarmid and MacDonald (2021), is a subject that aims to provide academic language skills, literacies and acculturation to higher education contexts. Essentially, the pre-sessional course is designed to 1) improve students' language proficiency and 2) equip them with academic conventions and skills necessary for their study (Terraschke & Wahid, 2011). Indeed, the distinct differences between General English and EAP have required language teachers to possess specialised knowledge and skills. In this study, these competencies relating to EAP practice were introduced and used as a lens to look at students' perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs.

Recent scholarly work focuses on addressing essential competencies that allow teachers to work more effectively in EAP practice. For instance, the British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes (BALEAP) (2008) devised the Competency Framework for Teachers of English for Academic Purposes (CFTEAP) as "a description of the core competencies of a professional EAP practitioner" (p. 2). The framework consists of four overarching themes including academic practice, EAP students, curriculum development, and programme implementation (BALEAP, 2008, p. 3); and has been recognised by scholars as 'an invaluable resource' (Hamp-Lyons, 2011, p. 100) that can be used as a model of good EAP practice and reference documents for professional development (Ding & Campion, 2016).

In terms of empirical studies, while exploring UK teachers' views on transitioning from teaching General English to EAP, Campion (2016) found that teacher knowledge of academic context posed the biggest challenge for novice EAP teachers. Her findings suggested that this particular knowledge can be an important competency for a successful EAP practitioner. Similarly, the findings of Basturkmen's (2017) research further support Campion's (2016) conclusion as her interviews with EAP course developers and document analysts revealed three main areas of knowledge needed by EAP teachers, including knowledge of teaching, knowledge of language analysis and knowledge of discourse community. Later, Zand-Moghadam et al. (2021) investigated different components of EAP teachers' competencies in the context of

internationalisation in higher education in Iran. From semi-structured interviews and questionnaires with a number of EAP experts and teachers, the study proposed an extended version of the competencies stated in CFTEAP, adding disciplinary identity and technology competence.

For this study, it is vitally important to feature EAP-specific competencies to understand these two groups of teachers in a higher education EAP context. As CFTEAP was created by professional senior practitioners and considered "a reflection of professional consensus" (Ding & Campion, 2016, p. 553) in EAP practice within the UK, it provides a strong theoretical foundation to design the questionnaire and the key competencies for analysing the data. However, as the aim is to explore the students' perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs teaching pre-sessional English courses, only competencies that the students can observe were chosen to feature in the study. Aspects, such as personal development and curriculum development, were not included in the study as they are not observable in the course and students cannot share their reflections on them.

2.3 Research on University Students' Perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs

Holliday (2006) argued that the belief that the ideal English teachers are native speakers has been widely spread in the field of ELT and left strong impacts on many aspects of professional life for NNESTs. Similarly, Sung (2014) also pointed out an "unspoken assumption" in the language teaching profession that NESTs were considered to have more advantages, in relation to NNESTs (p. 33). However, as many scholars have found the NS/NNS dichotomy problematic and disempowering (e.g., Braine, 2010; Dervić & Bećirović, 2019; Suárez, 2000), questions have arisen as to whether NESTs are intrinsically better English teachers than NNESTs (e.g., Dervić & Bećirović, 2019; Medgyes, 1992, 1994). Thus, researchers have conducted empirical research on students, one of the stakeholders working closely with English teachers, and particularly those at the tertiary level, to inductively explore the problem in multiple contexts.

Previous studies have discovered an overall preference for NESTs over NNESTs, which aligns with the concern of native-speakerism ideology raised by Holliday (2006). For instance, Lasagabaster and Sierra (2002) investigated the attitudes of 76 undergraduate students towards NESTs and NNESTs in a Spanish university. From the findings, the students expressed a general preference for NESTs, specifically in subjects connected to oral skills including pronunciation, listening and speaking, culture and civilization, and to a lesser extent, reading and vocabulary (ibid.). Díaz's (2015) study at a university in France yielded similar results in which the students generally showed their preference towards NESTs, despite acknowledging that NNESTs were appreciated the most in terms of teaching grammar. In the Asian context, Qian and Jingxia (2016) surveyed 50 English major students to explore their views on NESTs and NNESTs in EFL

classrooms. Their results indicated that the students generally preferred to be taught by NESTs due to the inherent advantages of native English in terms of social status. The findings from the study reflect Chinese students' long-held aspiration for the distinct social advantages of native-like English (Wang, 2013). Supporting previous studies in ESL/EFL contexts, Sahan et al.'s (2021) study of language norms and attitudes in EMI classrooms in Vietnam and Thailand revealed an overall preference towards NESTs in both EAP and content subjects. Their findings have raised concerns over the persistence of native speaker hegemony EMI education in these countries.

However, when Walkinshaw and Oanh (2014) examined the attitudes of 100 students from both Vietnam and Japan, the results showed a more balanced appreciation towards NESTs and NNESTs. While NESTs were believed to be superior in terms of pronunciation and knowledge of English-speaking culture, NNESTs were more valued regarding grammar, explaining complex languages and the use of L1 in class (Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2014). In fact, the two groups were considered to be complementary in the teaching of English. These findings resonate with their study on EFL learners' beliefs in 2012 in which Vietnamese university students were found to put greater emphasis on pedagogical, linguistic, and personal qualities, rather than the factor of nativeness (Walkinshaw & Duong, 2012). Similarly, in China, the research of Jieyin and Gajaseni (2018) and Wang and Fang (2020) also revealed that students were aware of specific areas of English teachers' competencies and did not explicitly express their preference towards one group of teachers. In these studies, despite the fact that NESTs were still highly appreciated for their native language proficiency, the findings challenged the notion that NSs are the ideal English teachers in the ELT profession.

In the teaching of EAP in higher education, previous literature has also attempted to record university students' perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs. In Turkey, Üstünlüoglu (2007) investigated 311 preparatory class students' perception of NESTs and NNESTs using a questionnaire as a data collecting tool. The study was guided by four major areas relating to general pedagogical skills, including in-class teaching roles, in-class management roles, in-class communication roles and individual features (ibid.). The findings did not elicit any clear preference towards one of the teachers, instead, they suggested that while NNESTs were praised for teaching activities and classroom management, NESTs were better at making the class enjoyable and energetic, thereby fostering better communication (Üstünlüoglu, 2007). More than ten years later, Ulu (2020) adapted the four themes used in the study of Üstünlüoglu (2007) to explore the issue relating to NESTs and NNESTs at the preparatory school of a foundational university in Istanbul. The research, similarly, suggested that the two groups of teachers were valued in all four aspects, which strongly supports the statement of Medgyes (1994) that NESTs and NNESTs are both good English teachers. Regarding language skills that are taught in the preparatory course, studies of Çakır and Demir (2013) and Al-Shewaiter (2019) revealed that Turkish students opined that while NESTs were better at teaching oral skills, NNESTS could explain grammar more effectively to

students. These findings are consistent with previously discussed literature (e.g., Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2002; Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2014) in ESL/EFL context.

However, from the existing studies in the context of preparatory English courses, there is a lack of a specific framework in the studies of EAP teachers. Multiple themes presented in these studies, namely general pedagogical skills (e.g., Ulu, 2020; Üstünlüoglu, 2007) or four macro skills (e.g., Al-Shewaiter, 2019), do not indicate clear differences between General English tevachers and EAP practitioners. Moreover, little research has been conducted and published in emerging contexts like Southeast Asia, particularly Vietnam, where the demand for EAP courses has significantly increased following the growth of EMI programmes. As a result, this study will use CFTEAP to explore Vietnamese university students' perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs through two research questions:

1) What are the students' perceptions of native and non-native English-speaking teachers in the teaching of pre-sessional English courses?
2) What factors affect the students' perceptions of native and non-native English-speaking teachers?

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Setting and Participants

The research was conducted at an EMI university in Ho Chi Minh City. The university has distinguished itself from other institutions as the first liberal arts university in Vietnam with a pre-sessional course offered to students who have yet to meet the English requirement to gain direct entry to their academic study. The course lasts seven weeks in which the students are intensively trained in terms of academic language, as well as academic study skills in preparation for studying in an EMI context in the coming academic year. Within the course, students also have several opportunities to book one hour of 1:1 support sessions with learning support staff, both NESTs and NNESTs, to address the difficulties they have in the course.

The participants were chosen based on purposive samples which deliberately focus on a specific group that helps the research meet its goal purpose (Cohen et al., 2017). For the questionnaire survey and interviews in this study, the researcher recruited students who attended the pre-sessional English course at the university from the Cohort 2020 and 2021.

3.2 Data Collection Instruments

In this research, an anonymous online questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were adopted to investigate university students' perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs in

the teaching of pre-sessional English courses. The researcher gained general knowledge on the students' perceptions through the questionnaire, and through the follow-up interviews developed an in-depth understanding of the students' views over NESTs/NNESTs in the course, as well as key factors that influence the students' perceptions of the research problem.

When recruiting the participants, a 5-point Likert scale survey was sent out to 160 students who once attended the course to collect quantitative data. As previously discussed in the literature reviews, the questionnaire was based on CFTEAP as the theoretical foundation to draw a clear understanding of the role of teachers in the pre-sessional English course. The questions asked about how students perceived their teachers under three overarching themes, including academic practice, EAP students' needs, and programme implementation in the pre-sessional course. In total, out of 160 students, the researcher received 30 responses. Among the participants, 60% of them belonged to Cohort 2020 and the remaining 40% was from Cohort 2021. At the end of the questionnaire, a group of 6 students, 4 students from cohort 2020 and 2 from cohort 2021, contacted the researcher for a follow-up interview to further share their learning experience on the pre-sessional English course with NESTs and NNESTs, as well as factors that affect their views on the issue. All participants were in their Core Curriculum phase in which students were building a breadth of knowledge and skills through a set of core courses of liberal arts and science before declaring their majors. The students had all been taught English in the Vietnamese school system, whose focus is to enhance the ability of Vietnamese students to use English to communicate in multicultural contexts (Tran & Tanemura, 2020). The level of proficiency among the interview participants bordered on a B1 level in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR).

Table 1. Information of the interview participants

Pseudonym	Cohort
Dave	2020
Clara	2020
Terry	2020
Tessa	2020
Liz	2021
Quinn	2021

3.3 Data Analysis Procedures

Quantitative data were analysed on SPSS using descriptive and inferential statistics. While mean scores and standard deviations of aspects measured on a Likert scale were

calculated to measure the central tendency and dispersal of the quantitative data to explore the general perceptions of university students of NESTs and NNESTs in the teaching of the pre-sessional course, an independent sample t-test was adopted to examine the differences between students' perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs in the pre-sessional course.

Qualitative data were analysed on NVivo 12, following thematic analysis. With CFTEAP as the study's framework, the researcher deductively analysed the qualitative data, assigning the three main competencies, i.e., academic practice, EAP students' needs, and programme implementation as themes while using the requirements for each competency as codes (see Table 2).

Table 2. Coding scheme based on CFTEAP

Themes	Codes
Competencies relating to academic practice	Academic conventions
	Academic language
Competencies relating to EAP students' needs	Students' needs
	Critical thinking
	Student autonomy
Competencies relating to programme implementation	Teaching practice
	Assessment and feedback

However, instead of following a linear process, the researcher also approached the data in an inductive manner, in which new themes emerged from the transcripts, including benefits and challenges when studying with NESTs and NNESTs in the course, as well as the factors that shape the students' view on the issue to help address the research problem.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Quantitative Results

Results from descriptive statistics suggested that all mean scores shown in Table 2 were above 3.40. This indicated that the participants generally expressed a favourable attitude towards both NESTs and NNESTs in the pre-sessional course at the university.

Table 3. Independent T-Test Results for University Students' Perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs in the Teaching of Pre-Sessional Course

Question Content	Group	Mean	Standard Deviation	P-Value
Ability to deliver academic convention	NESTs	4.03	0.67	0.11
	NNESTs	4.27	0.83	
Knowledge of academic language	NESTs	4.27	0.91	0.01
	NNESTs	3.77	0.77	
Ability to understand students need	NESTs	3.87	0.73	0.01
	NNESTs	4.23	0.73	
Ability to teach critical thinking	NESTs	3.57	0.97	0.85
	NNESTs	3.53	0.73	
Ability to develop student autonomy	NESTs	3.73	0.78	0.50
	NNESTs	3.63	0.76	
Ability to adopt teaching methods	NESTs	3.83	0.91	0.50
	NNESTs	3.97	0.81	
Ability to assess students' language and skills	NESTs	3.87	0.78	0.74
	NNESTs	3.93	0.78	

The respondents strongly agreed that NNESTs were able to help them to follow academic conventions at the university (mean score of 4.27). However, as the p-value (0.11) was higher than the significance level (0.05), the difference between these two groups was not significant. Moreover, NESTs were strongly believed to possess a high knowledge of academic language (mean score of 4.27). Based on the p-value (0.01), it could be concluded that there was a significant difference between these two groups.

Table 3 also shows that there was a strong agreement that NNESTs were able to understand their needs and help them to achieve what they need for academic study (mean score of 4.23). It was also shown that the p-value (0.01) was lower than the significance level, which indicated a significant difference between NESTs and NNESTs.

In the remaining aspects, including critical thinking, student autonomy and programme implementation, as the p-value was smaller than the significance level (see Table 3), no considerable difference was found between these groups.

4.2 Qualitative Results

4.2.1 Students' Perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs in the Teaching of Pre-Sessional Course

Three core competencies of an EAP practitioner used in the questionnaire, i.e., competencies relating to academic practice, EAP students' needs, and programme implementation were assigned as the main themes guiding the analysis of the interview data. In this section, commonalities and differences regarding students' perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs were established.

4.2.1.1 Competencies Relating to Academic Practice

In the interviews, quite prominent were comments relating to the ability to help students follow academic conventions and the knowledge of academic language. Five out of six participants were in favour of both NESTs and NNESTs with respect to this area. In particular, when asked about this factor, Dave argued that there were no differences between NESTs and NNESTs.

Extract 1:

> Because we actually learned the academic language, and I believe they have a standard way of using English in an academic setting, the country from which the teachers come does not really make any difference. […] I think at my university, NESTs and NNESTs were equally good in terms of academic and linguistic knowledge and how they delivered that knowledge in class.

His comments demonstrated that he was well aware of the fact that the academic English language is not the native language of any group of teachers, but a product of intensive training and development. His ideologically loaded words, such as "does not make any difference", and "equally good" suggested that the "native" factor did not significantly affect the teachers' professionalism in providing academic support to the students in the course.

Quinn, on the other hand, was initially under the impression that NESTs are better than NNESTs. Her comments reflected a traditional view on non-native English teachers, which was heavily influenced by the ideology of native speakerism, - NNESTs are not as good as NESTs. However, after the course, there was a marked change in her viewpoint on NNESTs, wherein she switched from a strong preference for NESTs to a recognition of NNESTs' expertise when regarding the two groups of teachers as equally capable in academic practices.

Extract 2:

> In the beginning, I also had a bias towards NESTs, thinking that studying with NNESTs would not be as good as NESTs. However, I was surprised to see how good they were at helping me adapt to this academic transition.

Terry also mentioned in her interview that although NESTs were a great help in an EMI environment, she would prefer NNESTs slightly more at that time because she believed NNESTs would empathise more with her in this context. As can be inferred, Terry acknowledged both NESTs and NNESTs were both of great help to her in terms of academic practices, yet her lack of confidence in her language proficiency rendered her more reliant on NNESTs–who shared the same mother tongue. In other words, resonating with previous students' point of view, she agreed that the two groups of teachers were qualified in this certain aspect.

Extract 3:

> From my experience, in terms of academics, NNESTS are a bit better, because they are Vietnamese, they already learned the academic language, so they have the strategies to help me to adapt quickly to the environment. But NESTs are also helpful, they were very careful in terms of plagiarism. More than that, in an EMI context where I need to use English in my study, learning with NESTs is a beneficial experience to assist me in adapting to the EMI environment.

4.2.1.2 Competencies Relating to EAP Students' Needs

In this regard, while Dave still maintained his stance on the two groups of teachers, arguing that "there was not much difference between NESTs and NNESTs" (Extract 4), other participants expressed varied opinions towards NESTs and NNESTs in these aspects. In terms of students' needs, three participants commented that NESTs and NNESTs were highly appreciated in the course:

Extract 5:

> NESTs were very attentive; they knew what my mistakes were and identified my language level so that they could come up with activities that were suitable for me at that time.

Extract 6:

> NNESTs helped me to develop effective strategies to study English, as well as succeed in my study during the academic year because they understood my difficulties and gave me better advice or directions.

When the students' answers on the teachers' competencies relating to understanding students' needs and challenges in the course were analysed, a similar pattern emerging from the extracts suggested that both NESTs and NNESTs were understanding towards the students' difficulties, thus being able to provide academic support to those in need.

Regarding building critical thinking, Quinn expressed a fairly strong preference towards the group of NESTs. When asked about this matter in the pre-sessional courses, she emphasised the aspect of how NESTs raised questions in the classroom, which she described as thought-provoking and encouraging. Her ideologically loaded words, including "could have done better" when referring to NNESTs, implied that from her experience, NESTs were considered better at motivating students to be more critical in the learning process.

Extract 7:

> I would say that compared to NESTs, what NNESTs could have done better was how they posed the questions. I loved the way NESTs asked us questions because it really was thought-provoking and motivated me to think creatively to answer their questions.

As to increasing student autonomy, Quinn also showed a similar preference towards NESTs while implying in her answer that NNESTs did not help her to develop much in this area.

Extract 8:

> In terms of learning autonomy, we were quite dependent on NNESTs, we just did what we were assigned to do, and we did not get enough motivation to study at home.

This was echoed by the point that Tessa made which argued that NNESTs spoon-fed them with a detailed study plan which could be counterproductive.

Extract 9:

> Although my NNESTs are very good at making learning plans and learning strategies, I sometimes found them quite formulaic. They tried to list all of the steps in detail and expected me to follow them step by step. For example, NESTs would only give the main steps – and then there would be smaller things that we needed to figure out ourselves in order to complete the assignment. In contrast, my NNESTs wrote down every single step and note to be done, which sometimes made me feel overwhelmed, or even passive, like I am a machine and must follow the instructions.

The two extracts suggested that the experience of being taught by NNESTs was valuable for the students' study. NNESTs were strongly believed to empathise with students' difficulties, thereby tailoring more focused learning strategies however, at the same time exerting unwanted negative effects on their growth, one of which related to learning autonomy. Some of the keywords recorded from the interview such as formulaic strategy, robot-like, and passive learning were an indication of the students' concerns about their over-reliance on NNESTs, which possibly impeded them from developing their autonomous learning skills.

4.2.1.3 Competencies Relating to Programme Implementation

As is the case with competencies relating to programme implementation, 2 participants highly praised NNESTs for their teaching methods in the classroom. For instance, one student – Liz complimented NNESTs on their creative approach to teaching the course. From her answer, she assessed the teachers based on their implementation of different tools and activities to increase the students' engagement, which she referred to as the use of technology and gamification.

Extract 10:

> In terms of the teaching style, they were more energetic and creative. For example, they knew a lot of interactive websites where we could play some games or hold discussion activities or call students out for sharing.

Similarly, Quinn also gave comments on the teachers' creativity in the classroom. However, Quinn further developed her peer's viewpoint by adding the factor of cultural relevance. She acknowledged that NNESTs were aware of updated trends and pop culture prevailing among the Vietnamese young generation, which in turn helped them incorporate more engaging activities into the classroom.

Extract 11:

> They were very creative in terms of teaching methods. For example, they incorporated a number of games and activities that were relevant to our culture, so we felt more connected and thus got more engaged with the class.

In terms of assessment practices, all 6 participants believed that NESTs and NNESTs were well trained in terms of evaluating the students' performance in class. However, Tessa elaborated her view on this competency by referring to the practice of giving feedback. In particular, she pointed out the difference in which NESTs were described to offer "favourable" and motivational feedback that could guide the students forward, while NNESTs were believed to focus more on her limitations and the "scary scenario" she might face in her academic year. Her concern about what kind of feedback she received from the two groups of teachers indicated her preference towards NESTs over NNESTs in this regard.

Extract 12:

I think compared to NNESTs; NESTs would give me more favourable feedback on my study. For example, reading NESTs feedback made me believe that I was on the right track, I did make some progress, while NNESTs' feedback made me feel pressured and think that I need to work harder, otherwise, I would be left behind, which sometimes could add more stress on me. [...] I think maybe because they know the problem too well, the scenario that they told me kind of scared me out, while NESTs gave me more favourable feedback and offered more motivation to me.

4.2.2 Factors that Influenced the Students' Perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs

While explaining how NESTs could help them in the pre-sessional course, the participants claimed that nativeness was one of the factors that influenced their views on this group of teachers. In particular, all the participants emphasised the native factor, for example "because they are native speakers" (Extract 13) or "they have spoken the language since they were born" (Extract 14) when they addressed how NESTs could assist them in improving their language proficiency in the course.

Extract 13:

Because they are native speakers, they can spot our mistakes when we say something incorrectly. About listening, every time I did not understand what they said, I would ask them to repeat it. This, as a result, helped me to improve my listening skills.

Extract 14:

Because they have spoken the language since they were born, the way they speak English is natural and effortless, and I think I can practice listening and pronunciation when learning with NESTs.

Moreover, Quinn claimed that the teachers' background was also a key factor that influenced the way students perceived the differences in terms of critical thinking, or feedback practices. This, in fact, was an indication of a preference towards "more developed" backgrounds from native English-speaking countries.

Extract 15:

I think it may be the differences in terms of culture and educational background. In Vietnam, traditionally, we do not appreciate others' ideas, or even our own ideas very much. In my university, I think that even NNESTs are trying to do so, but I feel like NESTs are more genuine – I guess maybe because they have been taught so in their countries.

In terms of NNESTs, similar culture and experience as language learners were the two factors that the participants attempted to justify their perceptions of NNESTs. Their accounts revealed that the teachers and the students were both Vietnamese so they shared a number of sets of cultural values which could be featured in the localised contexts of learning, making the teachers more relatable to the students.

Extract 16:

Because they are Vietnamese, so they can provide examples which are closely related to Vietnamese contexts.

Furthermore, since both of them had experiences learning the language, the participants agreed that NNESTs fully understood the students' needs as well as where the students struggled in the learning processes, thereby accordingly adapting their teaching practices and offering effective learning strategies.

Extract 17:

They also went through the process of learning English, so they would know as a Vietnamese person, what challenges we often face in learning the language. And I think what they share is more relatable to me.

Extract 18:

I feel like NNESTs were more empathetic because English is also their second language; they understood my problems and had more insight into how to solve them than NESTs.

These two factors, in fact, were mentioned frequently in the previous section where the students discussed the competencies of NNESTs regarding EAP students' needs and programme implementation.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Question One: What are the Students' Perceptions of Native and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers in the Teaching of Pre-Sessional English Courses?

According to the quantitative results, the students generally expressed a favourable attitude towards both NESTs and NNESTs in all aspects of CFTEAP. What stood out was that while the respondents strongly agreed that NESTs had a high level of language knowledge including discourse features and sub-technical vocabulary, they highly praised NNESTs for the ability to bridge the gap between the students' levels and what they need to function in academic study. Likewise, the qualitative results confirmed that the participants did not show an explicit preference towards either of the two groups of teachers in the pre-sessional course. Instead, they acknowledged what the teachers did successfully and what they could have done better in certain aspects of the pre-sessional course discussed in the study.

Looking at the competencies relating to academic practice, the students believed that both NESTs and NNETSs were able to assist them in better adapting to academic study. As Bruce (2011) and Campion (2016) claimed that knowledge of academic conventions and academic language was the key characteristic of EAP teachers that differentiated them from General English teachers, this can explain why the students thought that all teachers in the course were well trained in this regard. In terms of competencies relating to EAP students' needs, results from the surveys and interviews revealed that NNESTs were regarded to be relatively better at diagnosing students' needs and thus helping them to improve their English proficiency. The findings align with some previous studies in the field of EFL (e.g., Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2014; Wang & Fang, 2020) suggesting that understanding students' needs and difficulties was one of NNESTs' advantages. Regarding developing critical thinking and student autonomy, although there was no significant difference between these two groups in the survey data, in the interviews, some students were aware that these aspects were not the strengths of

NNESTs. The result bears a certain similarity to that reported in Ling and Braine's study (2007) where NNESTs were traditionally found spoon-feeding students with learning plans and materials in preparation for exams, which likely leads to their overreliance on teachers in class. Concerning competencies relating to programme implementation, the quantitative data showed no significant difference between the two groups. However, some students praised NNESTs for being more creative and engaging in teaching performance in relation to NESTs. Despite contrasting the findings of previous studies where NESTs were admired for adopting a variety of engaging activities (e.g., Jieyin & Gajaseni, 2018; Wang & Fang, 2020), this result strengthens the findings of Üstünlüoglu (2007) that NNESTs fulfilled in-class teaching better than NESTs in the pre-sessional course.

In general, although this present study adopted EAP teacher competencies as a lens to explore students' perception of NESTs and NNESTs, the results are still consistent with those observed in earlier research that showed appreciation towards both NESTs and NNESTs in preparatory courses (e.g., Ulu, 2020; Üstünlüoglu, 2007). The study, in fact, also verifies the statement that Medgyes (1994) put forward relating to NESTs and NNESTs in ELT in an EAP context: both NESTs and NNESTs can be beneficial towards students' learning process.

5.2 Question Two: What Factors Affect the Students' Perceptions of Native and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers?

As has been discussed in the previous section, one of the characteristics of native-speakerism is the belief that NESTs are the ideals of the English language (Holliday, 2006). A number of previous studies found similar findings that revealed the persistence of this ideology, especially in terms of oral skills in multiple contexts (e.g., Al-Shewaiter, 2019; Çakır & Demir, 2013; Jieyin & Gajaseni, 2018; Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2014; Wang & Fang, 2020). Likewise, the results indicated that nativeness was still the key factor explaining why students expressed preference towards NESTs in oral skills, as well as praised NESTs' high level of language proficiency. In addition, the teachers' backgrounds in English-speaking countries were also seen as the factor that influenced the views of the students on NESTs in the teaching of EAP in the course. Generally speaking, NESTs' native speaker identity is believed to result in such benefits that the students appreciated in the course.

In terms of NNESTs, similar culture and similar experience as a language learner were the two key factors that shaped the students' perceptions of this group of teachers. While the former explained why students appreciated the use of their first language in class or the localisation of the learning content, the latter was closely associated with the perceptions that NNESTs can understand students' needs and empathise with their difficulties and thus offer a sense of encouragement, as well as providing effective

learning strategies in the course. These findings are consistent with numerous research that pinned down similar results in EFL/ESL programmes (e.g., Ling & Braine, 2007; Wang & Fang, 2020) where advantages of NNESTs were primarily attributed to having shared similar learning experiences with the students.

6. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The aim of the study was to investigate university students' perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs in pre-sessional courses in Vietnam. As discussed, while NESTs were praised for their knowledge of the academic language, NNESTs were highly appreciated for their ability to understand students' needs. Furthermore, the findings showed no significant difference between students' perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs in the remaining aspects of CFTEAP. This suggested that in general, both teachers can complement one another and thus be beneficial towards the students' improvement of English proficiency for their academic study. The study also explored the factors that influenced their views. While native speaker identity was deemed to justify the students' praises on NESTs in terms of language proficiency, shared culture and previous experience as language learners were believed to help NNESTs understand the students' needs and difficulties, thereby developing effective learning strategies for their study in the course. Although signs of native-speakerism were still shown, there was no clear preference towards NESTs and awareness of different features of NESTs and NNESTs in teaching practices was identified in the study.

This study carries a number of implications in practice. Firstly, the study aims to contribute to the agenda that Llurda and Calvet-Terré (2022) put forward in their study, which includes 1) challenging the persistence of native-speakerism and 2) emphasising the differences between NESTs and NNESTs to eventually empower the position of NNESTs as English teachers. In addition, this research holds practical implications for teacher recruitment in the teaching of EAP in the Vietnamese EMI context. The study provides thoughtful insights into the university students' perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs in the teaching of pre-sessional courses, which, in turn, informs other stakeholders, including the institutions and recruiters of issues relating to these two groups of teachers. In light of the results, NNESTs were proven to be proficient and effective in the teaching of EAP. Hence, it raises the employers' awareness of native-speaker fallacy in their hiring decisions, emphasising the ultimate importance of considering the skills, experience and qualifications, rather than the native-speaker identity of language educators.

Finally, a number of important limitations need to be considered in this study. First of all, the sample size was relatively small in comparison with previous studies and the findings were not applicable to the general context of Vietnamese EMI universities. Thus, future research should cover a larger and more diverse population of participants to verify the results of this study. Secondly, as the study was conducted before the

admission of the academic year, the researcher was unable to contact the latest cohort for the research; rather, students who already attended the pre-sessional course in previous years were recruited. There was a possibility that the participants 'perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs in the pre-sessional course were skewed. Therefore, a follow-up study with a group of students who are currently attending the course may help to confirm the perspectives provided in this study.

Overall, it can be said that this study can only be indicative, rather than conclusive, however, it still showed consistency and further supported what had been reported in previous literature in the research area. The study called for the use of an EAP-specific framework to investigate issues relating to NESTs and NNESTs in EAP practice, as well as the need for future research to examine and re-examine university students' perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs to empower NNESTs as EAP language educators in emerging EMI context like Vietnam.

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