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# Student Attitudes Towards Native and Non-Native English Speaker Teachers

A Quantitative  
Research Study

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## Abstract

The dichotomy between native English speaker teachers (NESTs) and non-native English speaker teachers (NNESTs), although having been challenged by current research, remains prevalent. To improve students' learning conditions, increase equality among teachers and combat unsustainable hiring practices applied by facilitators in the educational sector, a well-rounded understanding of attitudes towards NESTs and NNESTs is a necessity. Keeping in mind the importance of regional differences and local contexts, this study aims to investigate Swedish upper secondary learners who study English as a foreign language (EFL). A questionnaire comprising 57 statements regarding NESTs and NNESTs was answered by 55 students and responses were analysed via descriptive statistics. Findings show, among others, that participants do not generally favour NESTs or NNESTs. However, some significant differences are detected, such as NESTs being perceived as teaching oral skills more effectively and NNESTs being seen as better suited to teach novice learners. Overall, Swedish EFL students perceive that pedagogical qualities are more important than nativeness.

# Table of Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.1	Aim and purpose .....	1
1.2	Definitions .....	2
1.2.1	English as a foreign language .....	2
1.2.2	The notion of a native speaker .....	3
1.2.3	The native speaker fallacy .....	5
1.3	The Swedish context .....	6
1.4	Disposition .....	6
<b>2</b>	<b>Previous research on students' perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs</b> .....	<b>7</b>
2.1	Linguistic competence .....	8
2.2	Pedagogical competence .....	10
2.3	Cultural competence .....	12
2.4	Additional factors .....	13
<b>3</b>	<b>Method</b> .....	<b>14</b>
3.1	Research design .....	15
3.2	Participants .....	15
3.3	Instrument .....	17
3.4	Validity and reliability .....	18
3.5	Procedure .....	20
3.6	Ethical considerations .....	20
3.7	Data analysis .....	21
<b>4</b>	<b>Findings</b> .....	<b>22</b>
4.1	Student attitudes towards NNESTs and NESTs .....	22
4.1.1	Linguistic competence .....	24

4.1.2	Pedagogical competence.....	25
4.1.3	Cultural competence.....	28
4.1.4	Additional results .....	29
4.2	Miscellaneous statements .....	30
<b>5</b>	<b>Discussion.....</b>	<b>34</b>
5.1	Limitations.....	36
5.2	Pedagogical implications .....	37
5.3	Future research.....	38
<b>6</b>	<b>References .....</b>	<b>39</b>
	<b>Appendix A .....</b>	
	<b>Appendix B.....</b>	

# 1 Introduction

Teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) has become increasingly more important throughout the last decades. Globalisation, fluent job markets and fast developments in the communication sector have established the demand for a common tool for communication and accelerated “the flow of languages, people, and cultures” (Almegren, 2018, p. 239). Thus, mastering the English language is nowadays oftentimes a prerequisite for interaction in social as well as professional contexts, which in turn requires a focus on teaching practices and learner progression. Even though communication outside of the EFL classroom comprises interaction with both native and non-native speakers, it is still a widespread assumption that a native speaker is the ideal English teacher (McKay, 2012). Here, scientific research can play a crucial role to end employment discrimination based on false beliefs regarding native-speakerism and instead promote proper pedagogical education for EFL teachers. The following research study will consider the students’ perspectives on the issue showing that students and teachers alike can benefit from cultural diversity and linguistic equality.

## 1.1 Aim and purpose

This study aims to investigate students’ attitudes towards native English speaker teachers (NESTs) and non-native English speaker teachers (NNESTs). More precisely, the aspiration is to examine whether EFL students favour or disfavour EFL teachers based on the teachers’ attribute of being a native or non-native English speaker. Attitudes are in this case defined “as a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor” (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993, p. 15). The survey is conducted in two upper-secondary schools in Sweden, which offers a new perspective to previous research in the field. The objective is to add valuable insights to the existing body of research in order to increase the understanding of EFL teaching and learning environments.

The following research questions will be investigated:

- 1) What are Swedish EFL students’ attitudes towards NNESTs and NESTs?
- 2) Do Swedish EFL students show a preference for either NNESTs or NESTs?

## 1.2 Definitions

Before proceeding with the investigation, it is essential to discuss key notions used in this paper and define certain terms. Definitions are vital to avoid misunderstanding, overgeneralization or misinterpretation of findings presented in this paper. However, acknowledging that research in the field of EFL and native-speakerism is constantly evolving, the definitions of concepts offered below are prone to changes and it is therefore advised to consult current research regarding these notions at the time of reading.

### 1.2.1 English as a foreign language

In recent decades, a variety of terms have been introduced which intend to describe the English language in global and local settings. Acknowledging the fact that the traditional use of the term English often is hierarchically charged, alternative implications are debated, which value multilingualism and varieties that differ from the Anglo-English standard (McKay, 2012). From a global perspective, English is the most common language to be taught as a second language (ESL) or foreign language (EFL) (McKay, 2012). While some local contexts allow for the demarcation of ESL, the term EFL is more widely used given that it includes all learners of English no matter the number of languages an individual knows prior to learning English. Recently, the plural form of English has become popular, emphasising the innate plurality and rejecting an Anglo-centric authority. Almegren (2018, p. 239) explains further that the term ‘World Englishes’ denotes evolving indigenised or localised English varieties, especially those which have been created under the influence of the United States or the United Kingdom. Nevertheless, Kumaravadivelu (2012) argues that the flood of terms and their abbreviations complicate language teaching for teachers since differences between the definitions are often hard to understand or even non-existent. In the case of English as an international language (EIL), he remarks that the range of scholars’ opinions differs from the notion of EIL being paradigm-shifting to it being an empty phrase. Undoubtedly, the terminology surrounding the English language remains heavily discussed and is expected to further evolve as it is intertwined with complex global developments. Having addressed this issue, the context of the current study is defined to be within the frame of EFL due to local considerations that will be presented in more detail later on.

### 1.2.2 The notion of a native speaker

The term native speaker is frequently used in sociolinguistic and academic contexts as well as outside the academic sphere. Oftentimes, it is assumed that there is a clear understanding about the implications of the term and a type of common sense regarding the attributes which are prerequisite to define a native speaker (Lowe, 2020). However, it is of highest importance to critically reflect upon the criteria dividing a native speaker from a non-native speaker in order to explain discriminative practices stemming from a divisive colonial heritage (Holliday, 2006; Phillipson, 1992) and instead implement “systems that are sensitive to local historical, political, cultural, and educational exigencies” (Kumaravadivelu, 2012, p. 24). Defining nativeness in the current context challenges outdated hierarchical orders based on Western belief systems and promotes a discourse rooted in diversity and inclusion. Kumaravadivelu (2012) stresses that an epistemic change is required if teaching practices are to shift from reproducing culturally unsustainable habits to being sustainable for teachers and learners alike.

A central aspect of native-speakerism is the origin of the language user. Traditionally, it was widely accepted that native-speakerism is in large parts linked to where a person was born, grew up or which language was acquired as a mother tongue (Fang and Wang, 2020). Several models therefore described a native speaker with the help of nationality and citizenship. Selvi (2010) accentuates that a simplistic division between centre countries, like the UK and US, and peripheral countries, like Singapore or Nigeria, inevitably leads to the downgrading and exclusion of the members of peripheral countries by making these English varieties unsatisfactory. Kachru’s (1997) model of inner, outer and expanding circles also focusses on membership based on nationalities. However, this model has been adapted throughout the last decades to fit the current demands and advancements within the field of EIL.

Another approach to defining a native speaker is to consider the notion itself as a social construct. From this perspective, there are no objective criteria that include or exclude an individual from the group of native speakers, but rather the emphasis lies on other peoples’ perceptions about the individual. Nativeness is therefore a social construction which changes implications dependent upon the social context. In line with this approach, Braine (2005) declares that teachers of Caucasian appearance often are perceived as being English native speakers even though they are from other Northern European descent. Holliday (2006, p.385) affirms that the concept of nativeness represents a “Western culture”, in contrast to an English

culture, which allows for the assumption that the socially constructed classification of a native speaker includes a wider range of features than the traditional approach. Lowe (2020) adds that the assignment of the label native speaker is intricately linked to the self-perception of the individual that determines whether or not another individual is a native speaker.

An inevitable consequence of establishing an exclusive category like the native speaker is the formation of an opposing category, like the non-native speaker, which creates a dichotomy, implicating that members of one group are more capable while members of the other group are less capable (Selvi, 2011). In regard to this, the question of ownership of the English language has been raised. While ownership was traditionally appointed to the colonial powers, post-colonial discourse has emphasised that all countries stating English as a native or official language have an equal claim to ownership. Lowe (2020, p. 22, referring to Widdowson, 2003) observes though, that in reality Englishes from different parts of the world are still divided into a hierarchical order and it should be considered whether, for example, British English and Nigerian English even are the same language. In an EIL context, this issue must be extended further. Young and Walsh (2010, p. 125) dispute not only the existence of a hierarchical divide between different levels of native speakers but also the exclusion of language users that are not English native speakers, claiming that “every English speaker, not only the native, is actively involved in language development and therefore shares ownership”. It can be observed that the classification into native and non-native speakers has a negative impact on perception and self-perception of non-native speakers, which in turn has led to marginalisation and self-marginalisation (Fang & Wang, 2020; Kumaravadivelu, 2012).

As displayed by the discussion, the term native speaker is far from homogenous. Even though dictionaries provide a simplistic definition of nativeness by presenting certain criteria that an individual either meets or not, the reality proves to be significantly more complex. Firstly, the term can have different implications at distinct points in time, meaning that its definition adapts to the evolution of the surrounding world. This explains why a definition that was accepted as suitable in a certain historic era might not fit the societal requirements of the globalised world today. Secondly, the notion of a native speaker aims to define living subjects. Trying to create an umbrella term that is suitable to include only certain individuals as members and exclude others, builds on the false premise that human beings generally can be objectively divided into groups based on apparent characteristics. However, given that there is an inherent social-constructivist component to defining native speakers, it must be acknowledged that any attempt to label an individual is based on subjective assumptions and merely represents a simplistic version of said individual. Considering the fact that language

learning also is anchored in complex cultural surroundings, it becomes evident that the term native speaker, while popular and to certain extent useful, might not be a suitable concept in a globalised world. Therefore, it can be concluded that the static notion of nativeness does no longer reflect the complex reality of the field of investigation since “the term does not, in fact, represent an objective reality, and is instead flexible and porous; socially constructed and applied to speakers of a language at many different points along a continuum of actual ability or proficiency” (Lowe, 2020, p. 20). With this in mind, it must be explained that the terms native and non-native speaker are still used in this particular context. For this specific purpose, native English speakers are defined as those who grew up surrounded by the English language, or those who acquired English from early childhood rather than having learned it in an educational context. Since the objective is to analyse student attitudes, which are often based on socially accepted labels, the terms native and non-native speaker prove to be useful for the conduct of this study.

### 1.2.3 The native speaker fallacy

The native speaker fallacy is a concept that derives from the dichotomy between native and non-native speakers and is based on the false premise that native speakers are generally better suited to teach English than non-native speakers. Accordingly, this overgeneralization upholds the assumption that English native speakers are superior to teach English merely due to their linguistic competence without accounting for possible flaws in other competences, such as cultural or pedagogical (Phillipson, 1992). Fang and Wang (2020, p. 5) emphasise that “[t]he entrenchment of nativeness fosters native speakers’ overwhelming privilege in the field of ELT.” This problematic privilege entails several consequences for EFL teachers and their students.

EFL teachers that are considered native speakers from peripheral countries or not native English speakers at all are confronted with work-place discrimination that affects their careers as well as their self-perception negatively. Even though international organisations like Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) clearly promote the idea that employment of EFL teachers should be based on professional qualifications, many qualified NNESTS are still rejected due to the perceived superiority of nativeness (Mahboob, 2004; Selvi, 2010). This decreases not only the teacher’s possibility to become successful in the field of education but also causes a feeling of insufficiency which leads to self-marginalisation. McKay (2012) accentuates the correlation between language and identity,

arguing that repeated discrimination due to inaccurately claimed linguistic insufficiency hinders the teacher to perform to their potential.

In addition to the potential consequences for the teachers, EFL students can possibly be negatively affected by the native speaker fallacy. Due to impeded self-esteem, teaching performance in the classroom regresses, which has a detrimental outcome for the learner (Alseweed, 2012; Selvi, 2011). Furthermore, Young and Walsh (2010) see the necessity for a shift in focus. Instead of recreating an outdated ideal of an EFL teacher that suggests the existence of an archetype English speaker, the individual learner's context should be considered. By aiming the attention at the students' actual use of the English language, individual needs are prioritised, which is beneficial to student motivation and learning progression (McKay, 2012).

### 1.3 The Swedish context

The official language spoken in Sweden is Swedish, yet various national minority languages exist (SFS 2009:600) and many people list additional languages as their mother tongues. Diversity, linguistic as well as cultural, is advocated in the educational system and implemented by law (Skolverket, 2011; SPS 2009:600). English is spoken and understood by the majority of inhabitants because of its wide availability via television, internet and other media and is frequently used in professional contexts. Thus, it can be stated that EFL students have broad access to English outside of the classroom environment. In formal education, English is taught from the first grade of primary school and progression of proficiency is based on seven general stages of language competence (Skolverket, 2017). English 7 is the most advanced course in upper-secondary education, corresponding to the level B2.2 of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) (Skolverket, 2021). Since the purpose of the research project was to investigate students' attitudes towards NESTs and NNESTs, a participation criterion for the current study was established by limiting participation to students of the course English 7 in order to augment the likelihood that students have been taught by several different English teachers throughout their prior education.

### 1.4 Disposition

This research paper is divided into several sections to make the research design and findings accessible to professionals in the educational and the research sector as well as other readers

who have a particular interest in the field. Section 2 presents previous research, which is meaningful for the integration of the current study into a wider context. In section 3 the methodology, including research design, data collection and instrumental as well as procedural aspects are provided. Furthermore, a detailed description of the data analysis is offered. Section 4 contains a presentation of the results of the current study on students' attitudes towards NESTs and NNESTs in a Swedish context and section 5 discusses the implications of these findings. Finally, the limitations of this research are considered and an outlook on future research given.

## **2 Previous research on students' perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs**

EFL students play a crucial role in the field of EFL education. As opposed to teachers and administrative actors who are the facilitators of education, students are the receivers of education and therefore their opinion on an ideal learning environment should be taken into consideration. In recent decades, research on teaching EFL has started to become student centred, now including extensive studies investigating students' views and roles in the educational context. Considering the perceptions of all actors involved in teaching, facilitating and learning EFL provides well-rounded scientific data, which in turn allows for significant conclusions to be drawn. These inferences enable us to take action towards improving existing systems to ensure the best possible teaching and learning environment, thereby benefiting all actors involved, not least the students.

One of the first studies focussing on student attitudes towards NESTs and NNESTs was conducted by Medgyes (1992). His findings about teaching EFL in a Hungarian context laid the groundwork in the field and his research design has since then been duplicated in many other international settings. Analysing the results of the studies, Medgyes observes that students seem to value both NESTs and NNESTs as teachers, however based on different grounds. NNESTs are generally perceived as having worse oral skills, whereas NESTs are valued for their pronunciation, flow of speech and range of vocabulary (Medgyes, 1994). The benefits of NNESTs, on the other hand, are their ability to relate to their students' difficulties with language learning and their natural presence as a role model, since NNESTs previously have undergone the same learning process (Medgyes, 1992). According to Medgyes (1992), this personal EFL learning experience allows NNESTs to anticipate learner struggles,

enabling the teacher to adapt their teaching strategies in order for the students to achieve the best possible learning outcome.

Considering previous research, analysing students' perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs tends to reveal several competences that differentiate NESTs from NNESTs (Chun, 2014; Hadla, 2013; Mahboob 2004; Medgyes 1992). However, many studies conclude that even though there seems to be a significant difference in how NESTs and NNESTs are perceived by students, neither the one nor the other type of teacher is generally preferred by students or seen as more competent (Atamturk, Atamturk & Dimililer, 2018; Chun, 2014; Hadla, 2013; Medgyes 1992; Sevy-Biloon, 2017). This is an important finding in as much as being able to draw conclusions from the existing studies is concerned. While NESTs seem to be preferred for certain attributes and NNESTs for others, students do not seem to draw narrow conclusions about the teachers' suitability solely based on nativeness. Rather, they seem to differentiate in a more complex manner.

The following section will present findings from previous research. To illustrate the results, findings will be divided into four categories, namely linguistic competence, pedagogical competence, cultural competence and additional factors.

## 2.1 Linguistic competence

In keeping with Medgyes' findings in the early '90s, linguistic competence, including oral and grammatical skills, is repeatedly found to be a divisive feature in students' perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs. As previously stated, NESTs are frequently favoured for their innate ability to speak English and their spontaneous use of expressions (Fang and Wang, 2020; Morita, 2004). Their fluency and natural use of a wide range of vocabulary are factors that students praise (Karakas, Uysal, Bilgin & Bulut, 2016; Sevy-Biloon, 2017). In regard to pronunciation, Chun (2014) and Ramíla Díaz (2015) find that EFL students prefer teachers with a native speaker accent, whereas NNESTs' non-native dialect is perceived as being disadvantageous (Morita, 2004). However, Chun (2014) questions if a native accent actually has a positive impact on the learners' pronunciation since her findings do not indicate a direct correlation between learner preferences and learner adaptation. Given that nearly 50% of students state that they do not fear that their own accent will be negatively affected if the teacher has a non-native dialect, a teacher's pronunciation that is possibly perceived as bad should not be used to draw conclusions about the teacher's overall ability to teach EFL.

When investigating the amount of time in which the target language is spoken in the EFL classroom, NESTs seem to stick to English much more rigidly than NNESTs. European policy documents as well as national curricula advocate the importance of the use of the target language throughout the entire EFL lesson (Council of Europe, 2001; Skolverket, 2011; Skolverket, 2021). The overall timespan where students are exposed to the foreign language significantly impacts learner progression, which is why Alseweed (2012) advocates the need for extensive teacher training to promote NNESTs' oral proficiency, thus increasing their actual use of English. As reported by Amaya (2015), students perceive a faster advancement of their own conversational skills when being taught by a NEST. In the same study, 82% of participants favoured if communication in the EFL classroom was entirely held in the target language. However, other studies reveal a significant disadvantage of the exclusive usage of English. Morita (2004) warns that miscommunication and frustration can arise if a NEST lacks the ability to communicate with learners in their mother tongue. In agreement with this, Hadla (2013) accentuates the importance of giving clear instructions to students. He notes that a NNESTs' ability to use another language to speak to the learner decreases the language barrier because the NNEST is capable of explaining the meaning of vocabulary or instructions in different ways. Not all studies investigating this factor can present conclusive findings though. Chun (2014) concludes that 43% of participants stated that they do not mind a certain degree of miscommunication due to the EFL teacher's inability to speak their mother tongue, while 32% voiced frustration over this. Given the variation in results, Amaya (2015) suggests the probability that the manner in which the instructions are presented is of higher importance to learners than the actual language they are given in.

Apart from oral skills, grammatical skills form an intricate part of linguistic competence. The survey conducted by Morita (2004) revealed that EFL students often have a negative attitude towards NNESTs because they appear to focus primarily on teaching grammar. Simultaneously, Morita emphasises that the perceived excessive focus on grammatical rules can stem from an advantage that NNESTs possess because of their explicit understanding of the linguistic system of the target language. Several studies draw the conclusion that NNESTs have an advantage when teaching grammar due to their individual experience with learning English (Atamturk, Atamturk & Dimililer, 2018; Hadla, 2013). While NNESTs have had to put an effort into learning English, NESTs acquired the language in a more automatic or natural manner, which can implicate that NNESTs have a greater awareness of language structure, enabling them to pass on grammatical knowledge to their students (Amaya, 2015, Rámila Díaz, 2015). Nonetheless, a greater language awareness does

not necessarily mean that students prefer NNESTs for teaching grammar, as can be seen in Aslan and Thompson's research from 2017, where students voiced indifference over the question of who is better suited to teach grammar.

## 2.2 Pedagogical competence

In addition to linguistic competence, pedagogical competence is a key factor for learner advancement in the EFL classroom. Well-educated teachers have a wide range of competencies which help them to adapt their lessons to the students' needs on both individual and group level. When investigating students' attitudes in view of pedagogical competence, one ought to keep in mind that the students will likely only have met a limited number of teachers throughout their formal education. Thus, while these results can give a certain indication, making the inference that they are generalisable for the entire body of teachers is unreliable.

As mentioned earlier, one of the main differences between NESTs and NNESTs is the circumstance that NESTs acquired the English language from early childhood, whereas NNESTs put an active effort into learning English after having acquired their own mother tongue. Due to this, research suggests that NNESTs overall show higher empathic skills when teaching EFL (Hadla, 2013; Karakas, Uysal, Bilgin & Bulut, 2016; Morita, 2004). Empathy can help students stay engaged in their own learning and keep them from giving up when obstacles arise. Karakas, Uysal, Bilgin and Bulut (2016) argue that NNESTs possibly have a higher awareness of language learning difficulties since they struggled themselves to learn the language. This gives them the advantage of being capable to, on the one hand, foresee potential hurdles enabling them to act in advance and, on the other hand, react appropriately when students experience trials. However, a survey carried out in the US did not detect a difference in students' perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs concerning empathy or attentiveness (Aslan & Thompson, 2017). Fang and Wang (2020) report that 67% of students perceive encountering some kind of learning difficulty when the teacher is a NEST, whereas 50% do not report any difficulties when being taught by a NNEST. These difficulties can, among other factors, be due to miscommunication, cultural differences or differing teaching styles. This indicates that the specific educational context is crucial to understanding students' attitudes, meaning that all results must be viewed in relation to the settings in which the studies have been carried out.

Another area of interest when investigating pedagogical competence is the use of authentic material. Teachers of EFL and other foreign languages are requested to provide extensive access to authentic material in order to present students with ample opportunities to encounter genuine language as used in the real world as opposed to a classroom scenario (Council of Europe, 2001, Skolverket, 2017). NESTs seem to have an advantage when including authentic materials in the classroom given their own connection to and knowledge of genuine language use (Karakas, Uysal, Bilgin & Bulut, 2016; Morita, 2004; Sevy-Biloon, 2017). Hadla (2013) presents that as much as 72% of participants say that NESTs use a greater range of material, adding to authenticity in the classroom setting. In turn, NNESTs are disliked for their excessive use of textbooks (Amaya, 2015, Morita, 2004). Even though authenticity is beneficial when learning EFL (Skolverket, 2017), the implications of said term should be critically reflected upon. Firstly, using textbooks does not oppose using authentic materials. In many countries teaching materials are developed in close relation to steering documents and national curricula, which often encourage the use of authentic materials (Skolverket, 2017). This entails that many EFL textbooks nowadays contain a large amount of material that is not produced for a specific teaching context, providing both NESTs and NNESTs with a variety of genuine samples of language in use. From an EFL perspective, it can even be detrimental if the material used exclusively contains samples of native speaker communication. Phothongsunan (2017) acknowledges the importance of including non-native English varieties and multicultural scenarios in order to broaden the students' perspectives of how English is used outside of the classroom while simultaneously being able to identify their own communicational needs. Secondly, it can be assumed that the expansion of the English language towards a global language alters the definition of authenticity itself. Considering that only a fraction of communication in English worldwide nowadays includes a native speaker (McKay, 2012), the notion of authentic interaction should be redefined. In keeping with this, Chun (2014) advocates that communication between non-native English speakers is entitled to be seen as authentic as well when occurring in, for example, EIL settings.

Other attributes that constitute pedagogical competence are linked to personal characteristics and individual teaching styles. Amaya (2015) argues that there is no significant difference in the perception of how well the teachers prepare learners for exams or how harshly these tests are graded. However, NNESTs appear to put a greater effort into lesson planning. In contrast, Aslan and Thompson (2017) describe that there is no apparent difference in perception between NESTs and NNESTs concerning the teachers' methodology, strictness or preparedness. Further contradictory results concern teaching styles. While some

studies report that NESTs are perceived as being more casual and adopting a more entertaining teaching style (Alseweed, 2012; Chun, 2014; Karakas, Uysal, Bilgin & Bulut, 2016), others conclude that NNESTs are seen as more creative (Aslan & Thompson, 2017; Karakas, Uysal, Bilgin & Bulut, 2016). And whereas Alseweed (2012) and Amaya (2015) report that students display a positive attitude towards NESTs because they are thought to be more fun, in addition to providing more interesting content and being able to improvise, Morita (2014) emphasises that being taught by a NEST can lead to elevated stress levels in students because they worry about never reaching up to the teacher's expectations and language level.

Evaluating these varying findings, the presumption can be made that the aspect of being a NEST or NNEST has a lower impact on whether students have a positive or negative impression of a teacher than individual attributes (Aslan & Thompson, 2017). This becomes evident in Atamturk, Atamturk and Dimililer's (2018) research, where 73% of participants stated that they would rather want to be taught by a NNEST with professional teaching skills than a NEST who is lacking pedagogical competence.

## 2.3 Cultural competence

Language is never used in a completely detached manner. Instead, our use of language is dependent on social norms, local customs and individual upbringing. The pragmatic use of language is crucial to avoid misunderstandings and to express details of communication, such as sarcasm or irony (Council of Europe, 2001). Cultural aspects have a strong impact on language use and thus are worth exploring when trying to understand students' attitudes towards their EFL teachers. It must be established though, that it is often impossible to delimit cultural features to a certain national, societal or ethnic tradition, since these as such are frequently based on simplistic stereotypes instead of complex reality.

Oftentimes NESTs are assumed to give better insights into the culture of the society where the target language is spoken (Amaya, 2015; Chun, 2014; Mahboob, 2004), while NNESTs are seen as less capable to introduce a culture that they are not born into (Amaya, 2015). Some students even declare that being taught by a teacher who does not share their own cultural background makes them more open-minded to learning about the teacher's culture (Karakas, Uysal, Bilgin & Bulut, 2016). Other studies however do not detect any significant distinctions between NESTs and NNESTs regarding the issue of cultural education (Hadla, 2013; Rámila Díaz, 2015).

Still others provide findings that allow them to approach the cultural aspect in a more contrastive manner. Alseweed (2012), for example, sees an advantage in establishing a multicultural, blended team of teachers. He assumes that through regular collaboration, teachers from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds can learn from each other. Cultural negotiation contributes to reciprocal understanding and thereby raises “cross cultural awareness” (p.50). Congruent with this, Karakas, Uysal, Bilgin and Bulut (2016) affirm that students benefit from both NESTs and NNESTs in a cultural context. Their survey revealed that NNESTs are valued for having a natural understanding of the local culture and therefore being able to implement the teaching of cultural differences and similarities in a way that is relatable for the learners. By contrasting local and target culture, students are able to find their own approach to cultural integration. Instead of trying to argue about whether a NEST or NNEST is better equipped to introduce cultural content, the aim should thus be to consider the students’ individual, possibly multicultural, environment as well as the teachers’ cultural background and elect suitable methodologies and lesson content according to the learners’ needs and promote “pluricultural competence” (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 175).

## 2.4 Additional factors

Since we are investigating language learning in a complex educational context, it is of prime interest to provide a well-rounded insight into students’ attitudes towards NESTs and NNESTs. To achieve this, a number of additional factors, such as previous experience with NNESTs, age or level of English, that have been presented in previous research must be acknowledged. Given that these factors are only investigated in a limited number of surveys with small participant populations and in singular educational contexts, it is important not to draw unreliable conclusions. Nonetheless, research suggests a significant correlation between several variables, which is why further exploration is desired.

Chun’s (2014) findings indicate that previous attendance of EFL lessons taught by NNESTs can positively impact their perception, prompting students to prefer NNESTs over NESTs. While most research in the field has been conducted at upper-secondary or university level with a limited age-span, Amaya (2015), whose study included participants aged 18-60, discovered that the age group of 31 to 60 years was significantly more positive towards NNESTs than the participants between 18 and 30 years of age.

In contrast to this observation, several studies suggest that the level of English is a more important factor than age (Alseweed, 2012; Karakas, Uysal, Bilgin & Bulut, 2016;

Sevy-Biloon, 2017). Here, findings indicate that beginner level learners generally prefer to be taught by a NNEST that shares their own mother tongue. The NNEST can effortlessly provide explanations in a different language than the target language, while at the same time showing empathy when learners have difficulties progressing. Conforming to this, several studies display that language students with a prior knowledge that exceeds an intermediate level prefer a NEST over a NNEST (Alseweed, 2012; Chun, 2014). However, one study reports opposite findings, concluding that beginner and intermediate English level participants have more positive attitudes towards NESTs than NNESTs, whereas proficient speakers of the English language prefer NNESTs (Amaya, 2015).

In conclusion, several competencies and additional factors have been discussed pertaining to the investigation of students' attitudes towards NESTs and NNESTs. In spite of the correlation between nativeness and student preference in certain areas, such as linguistic competence, findings from previous research suggest that the learners' attitudes towards their EFL teachers are based on a more complex evaluation system. Although Phothongsunan (2017) remarks that the participants generally favour NESTs over NNESTs because the learners feel more motivated to show their real competences when being taught by a NEST, the majority of studies conducted conclude that both NESTs and NNESTs are seen to have the potential to be excellent EFL teachers (Atamturk, Atamturk & Dimililer, 2018; Fang & Wang, 2020; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2002; Mahboob, 2004; Medgyes, 1994; Morita, 2004). Chun (2014) reflects that 81% of participants would preferably experience both NESTs and NNESTs as teachers and Atamturk, Atamturk and Dimililer (2018) find that 84% of students neither prefer a NEST nor a NNEST, but instead base their judgement on other factors, like pedagogical competence or personal character traits. The analysis of previous research has even manifested the increased need to focus on the specific context in which learning and teaching take place. The studies investigated here were conducted in a wide range of countries and focussed on several aspects. Because results concerning attitudes towards NESTs and NNESTs display a broad variation, cultural factors as well as differences in educational systems and national curricula have to be taken into consideration when investigating the teaching of EFL (Chun, 2014; McKay, 2012; Young & Walsh, 2010).

### **3 Method**

In this section the methodology used for the empirical research and the analysis of the acquired source data will be presented.

### 3.1 Research design

For the current study, a quantitative research design was elected. This approach, which consists of the collection of numerical data and uses statistical methods for the analysis (Hadla, 2013), has been chosen for various reasons. Firstly, the current research aims to investigate learners' attitudes towards NNESTs and NESTs and said research design is suitable to gather "information about affective dimensions of teaching and learning, such as beliefs, attitudes, motivations, and preferences" (Brown, 2001, p. 90, referring to Richard & Lockheart, 1994). Secondly, methodology always has to be compliant with the research question (Hadla, 2013). In this particular case, the research questions seek to illuminate students' attitudes concerning a wide range of issues. Thus, an extensive questionnaire is deemed appropriate to collect the data necessary for answering the questions. The close-response format in form of a 5-point Likert scale is chosen to reduce complexity and increase design consistency. For the participant this reduces the impulse to skip questions and for the researcher it simplifies data evaluation and result interpretation (Brown, 2001). Thirdly, the current study follows previously conducted research (Medgyes, 1992, Amaya, 2015) and the research design is thus kept in close relation to the original studies. Replicating research can enhance reliability (Abbuhl, 2012), which is why an existing questionnaire has been adopted for this purpose.

Recent research in the field oftentimes includes a mixed-method research design, including a qualitative interview section with randomly chosen participants to get a deeper understanding of the motives students base their perceptions on (Atamturk, Atamturk & Dimililer, 2018; Chun, 2014; Hadla, 2013). While a qualitative section certainly provides valuable additional insight into students' motives (Brown, 2001), the narrow timeframe and resources limiting the current survey did not allow for a mixed-method research design. Instead, the researcher opted for a quantitative approach, presenting the opportunity for a more detailed analysis of the data collected and thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings.

### 3.2 Participants

The study was conducted in two Swedish upper secondary schools with students from the course English 7. Since this course is the last course in upper secondary school, the likelihood

was maximised that pupils will have been taught by a variety of teachers, maybe even both NESTs and NNESTs, throughout their years of English education. Participants were elected through non-probability sampling, meaning that the researcher sent out the questionnaires based on convenience due to prior contact with the two teachers with English 7 students.

School one had two separate English 7 classes with a total amount of 51 students in spring 2021, whereof 37 participated in this study. School two had one English 7 class with a total amount of 21 students, whereof 18 participated. Of the 55 participants, 65,4% (36 students) were female, 30,9% (17 students) male, 1,8% (1 student) stated “Other” and 1,8% (1 student) preferred not to say. 45 (81,8%) students reported Swedish as their mother tongue, 5 students (9%) reported both Swedish and another language as their mother tongue and one student each (1,8% each) stated Arabic, Aramaic, Bisaya, Bosnian and Norwegian as their mother tongue. All students were of legal age whereof 48 (87,2%) were 18 years old, 6 (10,9%) were 19 years old and 1 student (1,8%) was 20 years old. Regarding their previous knowledge of English, 54 students said that they had received between 6 and 12 years of teacher-lead English education, the remaining student had received three years. When asked about previous EFL teachers, the majority of participants specified that they were exclusively taught by NNESTs and had never been taught by a NEST (see table 1).

Table 1. Participants’ general profile

	Number of participants
<b>Total</b>	55
<b>Number of NNESTs</b>	
0	-
1-2	2
3-4	14
5 or more	39
<b>Number of NESTs</b>	
0	32
1-2	15
3-4	6
5 or more	2

### 3.3 Instrument

The current study makes use of a questionnaire (Appendix A) adapted from Benke and Medgyes (2005) who investigated students' perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs in a Hungarian context. Their research was duplicated throughout the years in many different international contexts by using their questionnaire or a similar survey tool (Amaya, 2015). The questionnaire is divided into four parts. Part one aims to collect demographic data like participants' age or years of English education. Part two, three and four investigate students' attitudes towards NESTs and NNESTs by giving a statement that the student then answers with the help of a 5-point Likert scale. On this scale, 1 signifies "I strongly disagree", 2 = "I disagree", 3 = "I neither agree nor disagree", 4 = "I agree" and 5 = "I strongly agree". No open-ended questions are included. Part two and three consist of the exact same 23 statements where part two is angled towards NESTs and part three is angled towards NNESTs. Finally, part four includes 11 general statements of a more comprehensive and comparative character.

Taking into consideration the impact of the global pandemic in 2021 and ensuring suitability in the Swedish EFL context, the questionnaire was modified to some extent. Firstly, the original questionnaire is designed to be paper based. In view of the global pandemic, the Swedish educational sector decided to solely provide online-education for all upper-secondary pupils at the time of the survey. This situation required certain adaptations, such as the translation of the questionnaire from paper-based to computer-based. The original questionnaire was technologically adapted with help of the programme google forms. This programme was chosen due to a simple layout which helps students to answer questions in an easy manner and therefore ensures reliability (Brown, 2001). It is crucial not to test the students' knowledge of a computer system, but rather to focus on the content and the functionality. In this case, the realisation of an online survey is deemed suitable, because the tool is frequently used for these types of surveys and page layout and design are adapted to be as user-friendly as possible, thereby eliminating the chances of errors which would negatively affect the significance of results of the study (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010). However, any change of layout and implementation can have a possible impact on the outcome. Therefore, a pilot survey was conducted.

Secondly, certain alterations needed to be made considering the language used in the questionnaire. In order to ensure that the students understood the language used in the statements in part two, three and four and therefore were able to answer truthfully, the academic level of English used in the original questionnaire was adapted to a level equivalent

to that of the participants. This was achieved by adding a synonym of intermediate level English in brackets after the original vocabulary, as can be observed in statement 2. “Is too harsh (strict) in marking (grading)”. Brown (2001) explains the integral process through which good questionnaires are created and remarks that factors such as word count, ambiguity of content, how personal a question is, and the students’ language proficiency are crucial to ensure the significance of the retrieved results. In addition, as Dörnyei and Taguchi (2010) point out, translation of items into different languages is an intricate process, which can entail a variety of issues, such as misunderstanding or misinterpretation. Since the researcher was familiar with the participants’ language skills, it was elected to not change or translate the original questions to Swedish but rather to add clarifications in English in brackets. Prior to the survey, the teachers at both schools were invited to read the questionnaire and comment on it. Moreover, a pilot version was sent out to 5 individuals with different English levels. The feedback was carefully considered, and changes were made to the original questionnaire where necessary. Lastly, the computer-based study design allowed for additional clarification of central terms where seen fit, such as *NESTs/NNESTs* or *native speaker*. As previously mentioned, native speakers were for this purpose defined as speakers of English who grew up surrounded by the English language. Non-native English speakers, on the other hand, were defined as individuals with different first languages, such as Swedish, who learned English at a later stage in life. Enhancing clarity by providing definitions can prevent misunderstandings and thereby ensure construct validity and evade response bias (Amaya, 2015; Mackey & Gass, 2011).

### 3.4 Validity and reliability

In addition to construct validity, internal and external validity need to be discussed. The current study investigated student attitudes towards NESTs and NNESTs. These attitudes are the dependent variables. In the demographic section of the questionnaire, data was collected that included several independent variables, such as age, years of formal English education and gender. Due to the fact that all participants attended an English 7 course at Swedish upper secondary schools, the answers regarding the variables age and years of formal English education are fairly homogeneous. All three independent variables, however, could have an impact on the dependent variable. This research did not further control for or analyse the impact of these variables and thus an uncertainty of internal validity remains (Abbuhl, 2012; Mackey & Gass, 2011).

External validity, on the other hand, is concerned with the aspect of representation and generalisability (Abbuhl, 2012; Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010). In the current study, not only is the number of participants limited but also the spread and heterogeneity. All participants studied at two schools in Western Sweden, took the same course and were taught by the same teachers. To draw significant conclusions applicable to a broader population (Mackey & Gass, 2011), it would thus, to increase external validity, be necessary to include a greater variety of participants from different schools and areas of the country.

Moving on from validity to reliability, it is an integral part of the study's accuracy to account for its internal consistency. To calculate internal consistency of the current data, Cronbach's alpha was performed with the help of Excel. To achieve this, the questionnaire was divided into three separate sections, namely, questions concerning NNESTs (23 items), questions concerning NESTs (23 items) and miscellaneous statements (11 items). The use of descriptive statistics confirmed a high reliability (Dörnyei, 2007) with  $\alpha = 0.89$  for the NNEST section,  $\alpha = 0.89$  for the NEST section and  $\alpha = 0.97$  for the miscellaneous statement section.

Another way to account for high reliability is the consideration of mean scores and standard deviations (Dörnyei, 2007). These indicate the average scores and the dispersion around the mean. These statistical measures can be meaningful when analysing data collected with an interval scale. In this case, however, the 5-point Likert scale is an ordinal scale, meaning that the distances between the points are not definitely described. The answer "I strongly disagree" does not infer that a participant disagrees twice as much with a statement as a participant who responds "I disagree". For this reason, central tendencies such as mean score and standard deviation do not express meaningful, reliable value for the current research project (McKay, 2006). It needs to be considered though that "even in a study with a statistically significant finding, there is a risk, albeit small, that the results were due to chance" (Abbuhl, 2012, p. 296). Sample sizes in this study were relatively small, which entails that all descriptive statistical analysis has its limitations regarding the significance of the results and interpretation should be done tentatively.

### 3.5 Procedure

The collection of data for this research project was carried out at two Swedish upper secondary schools during March and April 2021. Prior to data collection, the headmasters were informed of the upcoming research project and agreed on student participation. An English 7 teacher from each school was approached and both teachers volunteered to invite the researcher to participate in an online class to conduct the survey. During the online session, the teachers were not present in the online classroom to avoid bias. All students were verbally informed about the topic of the upcoming questionnaire and the researcher answered questions. Prior to answering the questionnaire that the researcher had published on the computer based educational classroom platform called *classroom*, all students read an informed consent sheet (Appendix B). To continue to the questionnaire, all students were asked if they understood the information and consented to participate.

The students were then asked to click on the button on the bottom of the page and answer the questions. During the entire duration of the survey, the researcher was present in the online classroom and ready to answer questions that participants may encounter to enhance construct validity. All students who agreed to participate answered the questionnaire within 15 minutes and the results were automatically collected by the tool google forms. The data is permanently available online to the researcher and has been downloaded and saved separately to avoid a loss of data due to technical issues that may arise in the future. The link was closed for further answers by the researcher directly after all participants finalised their answers. This ensured that each student only answered the questionnaire once, thereby eliminating invalid source data.

### 3.6 Ethical considerations

Several measures were taken in order to ensure that the present study is ethically sound. Prior to distributing the questionnaire, detailed information about the nature of the study and request for permission was sent out to the headmaster and the intended participants' English teacher. Once they had given their consent, the questionnaire was piloted on peers and subsequently modified according to their feedback.

The final version of the questionnaire that was distributed to the participants opened with a statement containing information as prescribed by established research norms (McKay, 2006; Swedish Research Council, 2017). The information outlined the author's background as

a teacher student, the purpose of the study, and an assurance that any participation would be voluntary and confidential. It was also stated that their participation would have no effect on their grades. In keeping with the recommendations given by the Swedish Research Council (2017), no information linked to a specific individual, like name, address or personal identity number was requested or stored in any way. Finally, participants were requested to be honest in their responses. When orally informing the participants about the questionnaire, the author also stressed that should they change their minds after having started filling out the questionnaire, they could withdraw their consent at any point without there being any repercussions.

### 3.7 Data analysis

The method chosen for this study was a quantitative approach, which demands the employment of certain analytical and statistical measures. For the current purpose, google forms was used to gather data via an online questionnaire. The data collected was automatically presented by this tool through distribution percentages and charts. Yet, further analysis to determine reliability was required. Data was therefore extracted from the answers of the questionnaires, coded and listed in an Excel spreadsheet, which allowed for descriptive statistical analysis to be performed.

During the analysis process, it became evident that participation when answering the questionnaire was fluctuant to some extent. While 54-55 students responded to the statements in section 1 regarding NNESTs, only 41-43 participants submitted responses in section 2. However, in section 3, concerning miscellaneous statements, 49-52 responded (see tables 2, 3 and 4). It can only be speculated about the reasons behind these fluctuations, but a plausible cause might be that 33 students (58,9%) reported to never having been taught by a NEST, which may have prevented them from being comfortable to voice their attitude, even though the researcher clarified prior to the execution that attitudes can be pre-existent without ever having been taught by a certain type of teacher. Nevertheless, the fluctuations need to be considered when comparing the scales for NNESTs and NESTs because it shows a significant difference in participation number.

## 4 Findings

In this section, the data collected will be presented and the results will be analysed. The analysis aims to answer the research questions:

- 1) What are Swedish EFL students' attitudes towards NNESTs and NESTs?
- 2) Do Swedish EFL students show a preference for either NNESTs or NESTs?

In order to present the findings in a transparent manner, we will first report and compare the data regarding NNESTs and NESTs (section 4.1). Here, the results will be structured in concordance with the presentation of the literature review, applying the categories of linguistic, pedagogical and cultural competence. Thereafter, in section 4.2, we will focus on the part of the questionnaire that contains miscellaneous statements about both NNESTs and NESTs.

### 4.1 Student attitudes towards NNESTs and NESTs

The collection of source data concerning NNESTs and NESTs can be seen in table 2 and table 3 respectively. Here, the statistical results of the level of agreement are shown in relation to the number of participants. As stated previously, there was a significant fluctuation in number of participants between the questions concerning NNESTs and NESTs. It thus needs to be repeated that the total number of participants answering questions regarding NNESTs (table 2) is between 54 and 55. Concerning NESTs (table 3), the total number of participants is between 41 and 43.

Table 2. Students' attitudes towards NNESTs

Question number	Level of Agreement*				
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Sticks more rigidly (exactly) to lesson plan	2	0	16	27	10
2. Is too harsh (strict) in marking (grading)	1	13	25	10	6
3. Prepares learners well for the exam	0	4	16	22	13
4. Applies pair work regularly in class	0	10	12	23	10
5. Applies group work regularly in class	1	4	14	19	17
6. Prefers traditional forms of teaching	2	5	22	16	10
7. Speaks most of the time during the lesson	1	12	20	17	5
8. Sets a great (large) number of tests	2	13	17	17	6
9. Directs me towards autonomous (independent) learning	1	8	20	18	8
10. Is impatient	14	21	14	4	1
11. Is happy to improvise	1	15	20	14	5
12. Focuses primarily on speaking skills	4	16	27	5	3
13. Puts more emphasis on grammar rules	0	7	13	25	10
14. Prefers teaching 'differently'	9	17	24	4	1
15. Relies heavily on the coursebook	4	9	17	16	9
16. Prepares conscientiously (properly) for the lessons	0	1	12	28	12
17. Corrects errors consistently	1	7	15	25	7
18. Runs interesting classes	4	12	19	14	6
19. Assigns a lot of homework	4	20	21	8	1
20. Uses ample (a lot of) supplementary material	1	12	30	10	2
21. Assesses my language knowledge realistically	2	4	18	23	8
22. Provides extensive information about the culture of English-speaking countries	2	10	22	16	5
23. Is interested in learners' opinion	2	4	23	15	11

Note. 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

\* Level of agreement shown in number of participants.

Table 3. Students' attitudes towards NESTs

Question number	Level of Agreement*				
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Sticks more rigidly (exactly) to lesson plan	0	11	15	12	5
2. Is too harsh (strict) in marking (grading)	1	10	15	9	8
3. Prepares learners well for the exam	1	2	16	17	6
4. Applies pair work regularly in class	0	5	13	20	4
5. Applies group work regularly in class	0	4	17	18	4
6. Prefers traditional forms of teaching	0	10	18	10	5
7. Speaks most of the time during the lesson	0	6	22	13	2
8. Sets a great (large) number of tests	0	11	24	6	1
9. Directs me towards autonomous (independent) learning	0	7	14	17	3
10. Is impatient	11	11	13	6	1
11. Is happy to improvise	0	2	15	21	4
12. Focuses primarily on speaking skills	3	2	24	9	4
13. Puts more emphasis on grammar rules	0	5	12	22	2
14. Prefers teaching 'differently'	0	12	17	10	3
15. Relies heavily on the coursebook	7	13	16	2	4
16. Prepares conscientiously (properly) for the lessons	0	2	18	18	4
17. Corrects errors consistently	1	5	14	16	6
18. Runs interesting classes	3	2	11	20	6
19. Assigns a lot of homework	1	11	22	7	1
20. Uses ample (a lot of) supplementary material	0	6	19	13	4
21. Assesses my language knowledge realistically	0	4	18	15	5
22. Provides extensive information about the culture of English-speaking countries	0	3	11	16	12
23. Is interested in learners' opinion	1	3	19	12	7

Note. 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

\* Level of agreement shown in number of participants.

#### 4.1.1 Linguistic competence

The analysis suggests that learners do not perceive NNESTs to focus more on speaking skills than NESTs do (item 12), since 29,1% disagree with this statement and 49,1% report a neutral attitude. Interestingly, students do not perceive NESTs as focusing primarily on speaking skills either. Although 30,9% agree or strongly agree with this notion, the majority remains neutral (57,1%). When asked about whether the teacher speaks most of the time during the

lesson (item 7), no conclusive results can be reported, given that the majority of students remain neutral towards the statements about both NNESTs and NESTs and that no significant difference in agreement or disagreement can be observed. In regard to the teaching of grammar no significant difference can be observed between students' perceptions of NNESTs and NESTs. Both are perceived as putting an emphasis on grammatical rules with 63,7% of participants agreeing or strongly agreeing in the case of NNESTs and 58,6% agreeing or strongly agreeing in the case of NESTs.

#### 4.1.2 Pedagogical competence

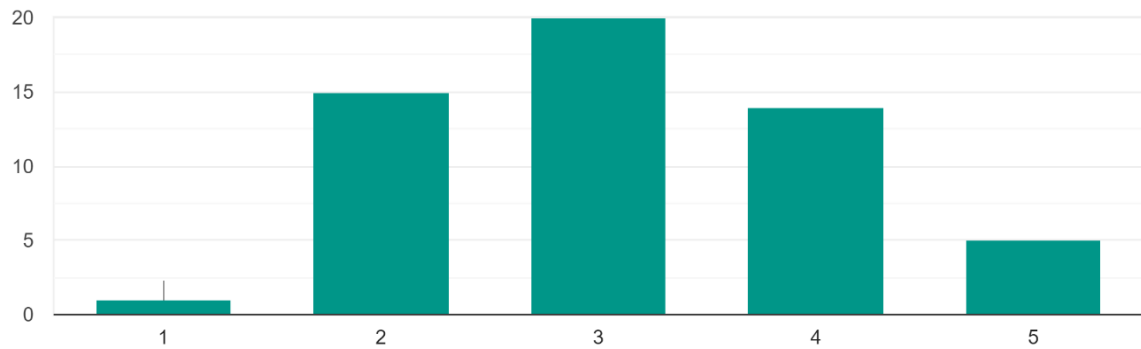
The majority of items in the questionnaire investigate attitudes towards the teachers' pedagogical competence. When asked whether a NNEST prefers to teach 'differently' (item 14), only 9,1% accepted this notion. In opposition to this, 30,9% agreed or strongly agreed that NESTs' teaching styles are seen as different. However, in both cases, almost a third of students disagreed with the statement, indicating that numbers have to be interpreted cautiously. Additionally, item 6 does not reveal a significant difference between learners' perceptions of teachers' preferences to apply traditional teaching styles, with the majority of participants neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

When investigating the teachers' willingness to improvise, items 1 and 11 show that students voice a stronger agreement in regard to NESTs than NNESTs. Generally, students perceive that NNESTs prepare their lessons more conscientiously than NESTs (item 16). In item 1, 57,3% of learners perceive that NNESTs stick more rigidly to the lesson plan, whereas only 3,6% voice an opposing attitude. Regarding NESTs, a quarter of participants disagree with this statement and 34,9% neither agree nor disagree. In continuation, item 11 shows that around a quarter of participants agree that NNESTs are happy to improvise. Equally many, however, disagree with this (figure 1). In comparison, half of the students agree that NESTs are happy to improvise, while only 4,8% disagree (figure 2).

Figure 1. Students' attitudes towards NNESTs

11. Is happy to improvise

55 svar

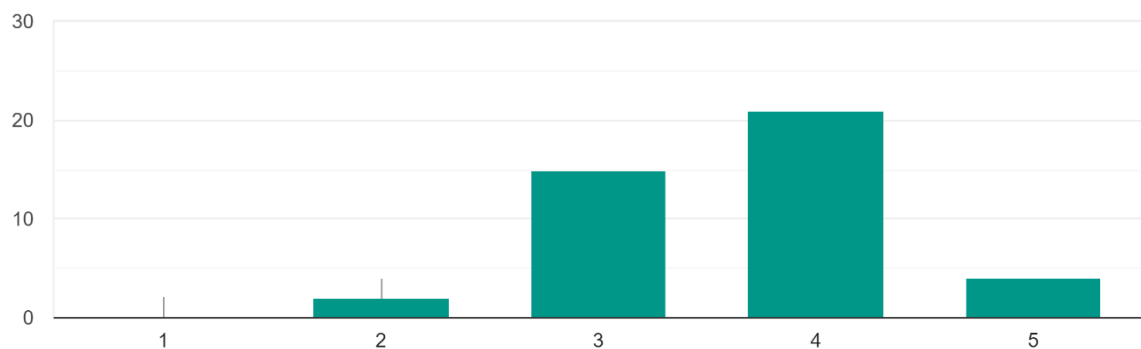


Note. Y-axis: Number of participants. X-axis: Level of agreement. 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

Figure 2. Students' attitudes towards NESTs

11. Is happy to improvise

42 svar



Note. Y-axis: Number of participants. X-axis: Level of agreement. 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

Several statements aimed to illuminate students' perception of teachers' pedagogical practice with respect to testing and assessment. In general, both NNESTs and NESTs are perceived as capable of preparing students well for exams (item 3), with more than half of the participants agreeing or strongly agreeing and only around 7% expressing disagreement.

Furthermore, students express positive attitudes towards both NNESTs' and NESTs' ability to assess language knowledge realistically (item 21). The analysis of item 8 reports that NNESTs are perceived as testing learners' knowledge more frequently, whereas 57,1% of students neither agree nor disagree when asked the same question about NESTs. Even though NNESTs seemingly provide a larger number of tests, item 2 suggests that NESTs are thought to be stricter when grading, given that 39,5% agree or strongly agree with this as opposed to only 29,1% in regard to NNESTs. Nonetheless, due to the spread of answers in items 8 and 2, it should be refrained from overgeneralizing these indicative results.

When it comes to the students' perception of the application of pair or group work in the EFL classroom, the results demonstrate that students perceive NNESTs as well as NESTs to frequently make use of pair exercises (item 4), with 60% of and 57,1% respectively declaring agreement or strong agreement. While the findings for item 4 do not indicate a difference in perception between NNESTs and NESTs, item 5 reveals that NNESTs are seen as using significantly more group work in class. 30,9% of participants state that they strongly agree with this notion and 34,5% agree. In comparison, only 9,3% voice strong agreement with this in respect to NESTs, while 41,9% agree. Despite a stronger agreement with the statement that NNESTs apply group work regularly, these numbers do not allow for the conclusion to be drawn that NESTs, in turn, do not use group exercises during EFL lessons. Instead, high agreement and low disagreement can be detected even for NESTs' use of group work, which indicates that the method itself is popular in the Swedish context.

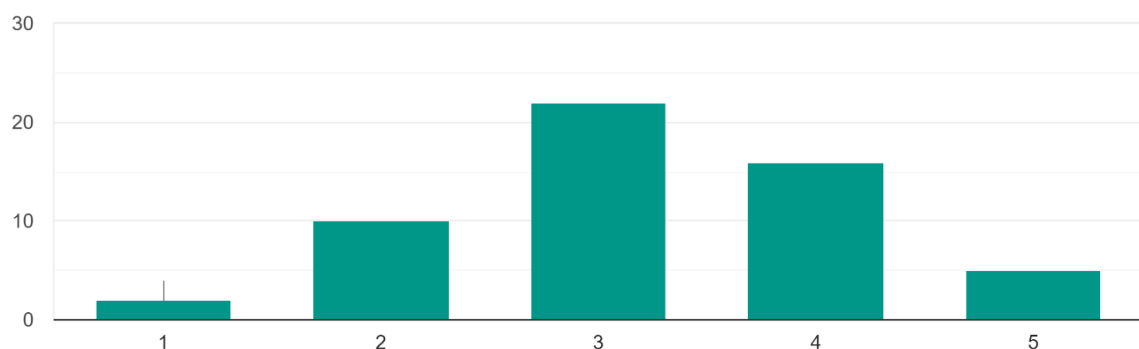
Focussing on teaching materials, it can be observed that NNESTs are perceived as relying heavily on course books, as 45,5% of participants agree or strongly agree with item 15 *Relies heavily on coursebook*. NESTs, on the other hand, are not perceived as sticking rigidly to textbooks given that 47,7% of students disagree or strongly disagree with item 15. It is noteworthy that a relatively high number of participants neither agree nor disagree with NNESTs (30,9%) or NESTs (38,1%) relying heavily on course books. Associated with this aspect is the use of supplementary teaching material (item 20). While numbers regarding NNESTs remain indecisive due to the spread of answers and the large number of neutral responses (54,5%), results indicate a slightly more positive correlation between the use of supplementary material and NESTs, where 40,5% of participants articulate agreement or strong agreement. However, even in this case the majority of students neither agree nor disagree (45,2%), which impacts the significance of the indicated discrepancy.

### 4.1.3 Cultural competence

Continuing with aspects concerning cultural competence, item 22 suggests a significant difference in students' perceptions of NNESTs and NESTs. While the majority (40%) of participants report a neutral attitude towards NNESTs' provision of information about English-speaking countries (figure 3), 66,7% of students declare that NESTs provide ample insights into cultural aspects (figure 4). This indicates the students' perception that NESTs put more emphasis on teaching about culture in the classroom. Nevertheless, 38,2% of learners agree or strongly agree that NNESTs also provide cultural insights, which means that non-native English speakers are still perceived as capable of providing extensive information about English-speaking countries.

Figure 3. Students' attitudes towards NNESTs

22. Provides extensive information about the culture of English-speaking countries  
55 svar

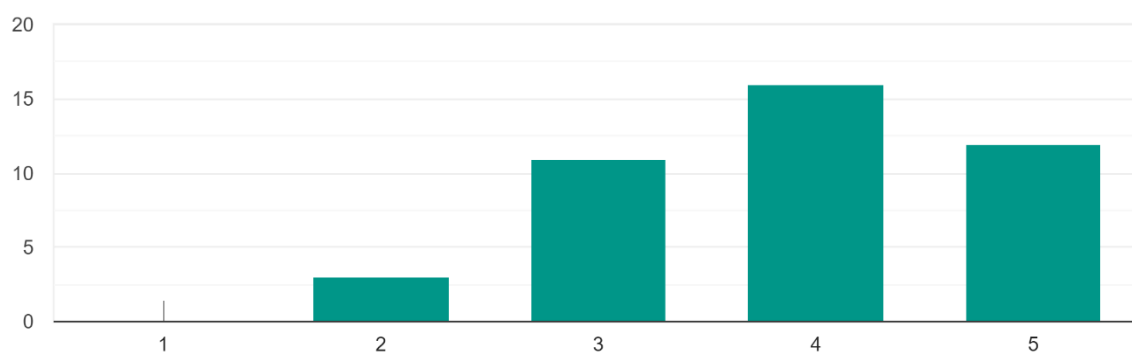


Note. Y-axis: Number of participants. X-axis: Level of agreement. 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

Figure 4. Students' attitudes towards NESTs

22. Provides extensive information about the culture of English-speaking countries

42 svar



Note. Y-axis: Number of participants. X-axis: Level of agreement. 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

#### 4.1.4 Additional results

Lastly, the analysis of students' attitudes towards NNESTs and NESTs showed that several items provide conclusive results for NNESTs and NESTs but no differences between NNESTs and NESTs can be detected. When asked whether students think if NNESTs and NESTs are impatient (item 10), the investigation reveals that 64,8% and 52,2% respectively, disagree or strongly disagree with this statement. This indicates that both are generally valued to be patient. Regarding whether the teacher promotes autonomous learning (item 9), it can be seen that 36,4% of students neither agree nor disagree with this notion concerning NESTs, while 47,3% agree or strongly agree. Similarly, as the data about NNESTs suggests, 34,1% express a neutral attitude and 48,8% agree or strongly agree, demonstrating that autonomous learning is generally promoted in Swedish EFL classrooms as advocated by the CEFR and the Swedish National Agency for Education (Council of Europe, 2001; Skolverket, 2011). Moving on to item 23, both NNESTs and NESTs are perceived as being interested in learners' opinions, even though the relatively large number of neutral responses (41,8% for NNESTs and 45,2% for NNESTs) calls for a cautious interpretation. In item 17 students were asked to rate the teachers' error correction. 58,3% of students agree or strongly agree that NNESTs consistently correct errors, in comparison to 52,4% in respect to NESTs. This implies that both teacher groups use error correction in order to aid students in their language learning progression. Finally, one item showed inconclusive results. The spread of the responses for

item 19 concerning NESTs does not allow for any significant conclusions to be drawn, meaning that it cannot be established whether NESTs assign a lot of homework or not. Looking at item 19 in regard to NNESTs, a tendency can be detected that students reject the premise that they assign a lot of homework because of the higher number (37%) of participants disagreeing with it. Nonetheless, this is merely to be interpreted as a tendency, not a significant difference since 38,9% of learners neither agree nor disagree and 16,7% agree or agree strongly.

## 4.2 Miscellaneous statements

The questionnaire handed out to the students included eleven questions concerning general and comparative statements about NESTs and NNESTs. Analysing the participants' answers in this section aims to illuminate whether Swedish EFL students report a general preference for NESTs or NNESTs and thus helps to answer research question 2: Do Swedish EFL students show a preference for either NNESTs or NESTs?

Table 4. Students' attitudes regarding miscellaneous statements

Question number	Level of Agreement*				
	1	2	3	4	5
24. A non-native teacher can give more help for a beginner.	1	6	15	17	13
25. A native speaker teaches speaking skills/conversation more effectively.	0	4	15	24	7
26. It does not matter what the teacher's native language is, the only thing that matters is how they teach.	0	3	10	18	21
27. In an ideal situation both native and non-native teacher teach you.	1	6	9	16	20
28. It is essential that everything should be in English in an English lesson.	2	6	11	17	16
29. A non-native speaker teaches writing skills more effectively.	2	9	26	8	4
30. I wish I had only non-native teachers of English.	16	15	15	5	0
31. There is no harm in the teacher using Swedish every now and then.	1	14	12	12	13
32. It is important that we should be able to translate.	2	1	11	15	23
33. Native speakers should teach at a more advanced level.	2	10	21	14	5
34. I would be ready to trade a non-native teacher for a native any time.	8	8	24	7	5

Note. 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

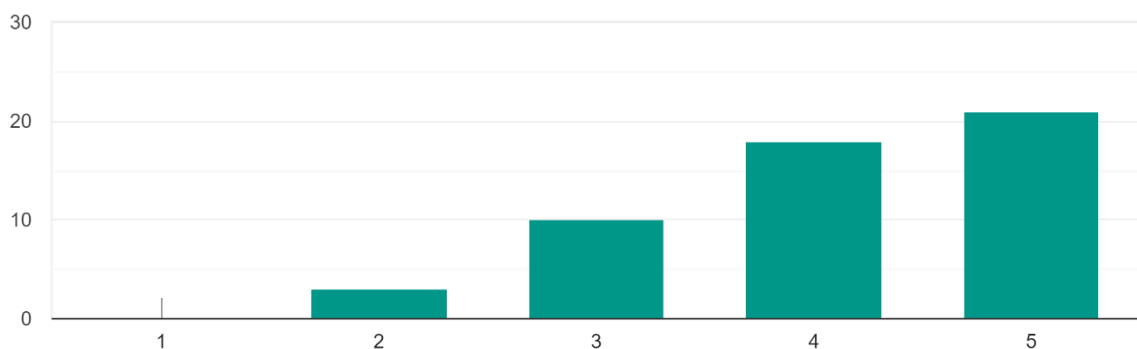
\* Level of agreement shown in number of participants.

The findings suggest that students generally do not prefer either NESTs or NNESTs. Item 26 shows that the majority of learners value teaching skills over the fact whether the teacher is a native or non-native English speaker (figure 5). This indicates that nativeness is not the main determiner of good EFL teaching. Instead, teaching education and pedagogical competence seem to be decisive for this matter.

Figure 5. Item 26

26. It does not matter what the teacher's native language is, the only thing that matters is how they teach.

52 svar



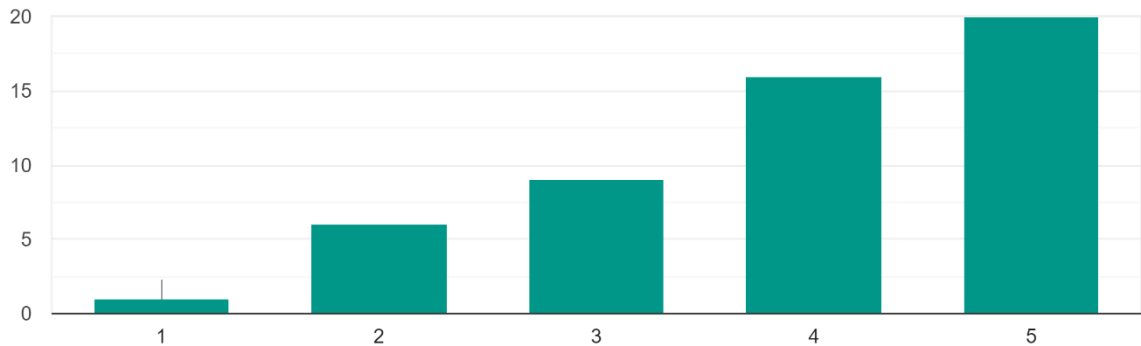
Note. Y-axis: Number of participants. X-axis: Level of agreement. 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

According to the analysis of item 27, 69,3% of students would prefer to be taught by both NESTs and NNESTs (figure 6). This demonstrates that EFL learners see a value in diversity. Instead of generally valuing one type of teacher higher than the other, a cooperation or mix of both is seen as ideal. In consonance, item 30 shows that only 9,8% of students want to be exclusively taught by NNESTs. And item 34 reveals that learners would not trade a NNEST for a NEST if given the chance, given that 46,2% neither agree nor disagree with the statement.

Figure 6. Item 27

27. In an ideal situation both native and non-native teacher teach you.

52 svar



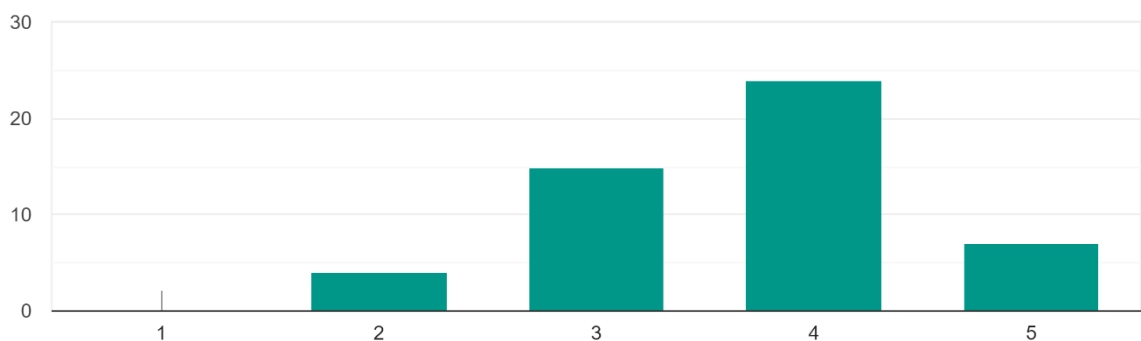
Note. Y-axis: Number of participants. X-axis: Level of agreement. 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

Although findings do not show that students generally prefer NESTs or NNESTs, the results indicate that NESTs are perceived as better suited to teach certain skills. As item 25 reveals, 62% of participants state that NESTs are perceived to teach oral skills more effectively, while 30% have a neutral opinion on this (figure 7). It can however not be concluded that NNESTs, in turn, are perceived as being better at teaching writing skills. As seen in item 29, 53,1% are neutral towards this statement, while 22,5% disagree or strongly disagree and 24,5% agree or strongly agree.

Figure 7. Item 25

25. A native speaker teaches speaking skills/conversation more effectively.

50 svar



Note. Y-axis: Number of participants. X-axis: Level of agreement. 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

A notable finding is the indicated perception that NNESTs are better equipped than NESTs to teach EFL to beginners. Item 24 demonstrates that only 13,4% of learners oppose this statement, whereas 57,7% voice their agreement (figure 8). While the results do not provide information about the students' motives behind their attitudes, in comparison with previous research, it can be assumed that the students value the fact that NNESTs have undergone the same processes as they have when learning English. Additionally, NNESTs often speak the same mother tongue as the majority of the learners, which can be helpful when trying to explain certain linguistic features. Therefore, they might be perceived as more capable to teach EFL to beginner learners. Interestingly though, the participants do not come to the conclusion that NESTs generally should teach at a more advanced level (item 33). 40,4% have a neutral attitude towards this, while 23% disagree or strongly disagree and 36,5% agree or strongly agree (figure 9).

Figure 8. Item 24

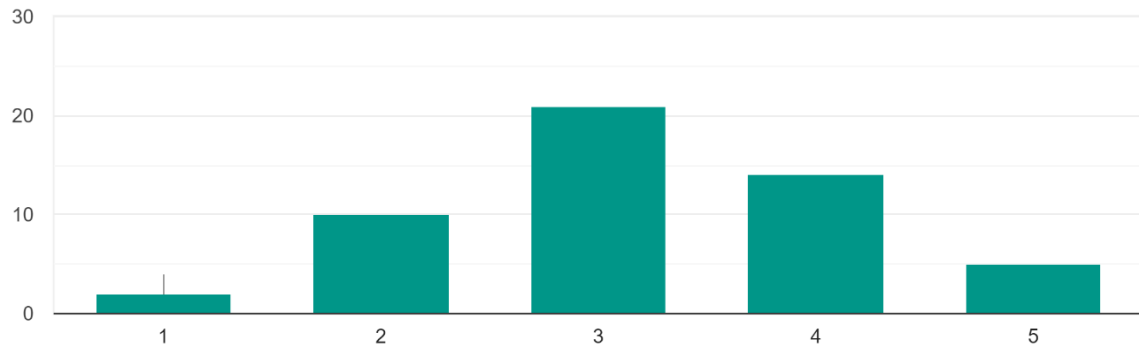


Note. Y-axis: Number of participants. X-axis: Level of agreement. 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

Figure 9. Item 33

33. Native speakers should teach at a more advanced level.

52 svar



Note. Y-axis: Number of participants. X-axis: Level of agreement. 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

Additional results from this section regards the use of the target language in the EFL classroom. The majority of participants (63,5%) prefer if the lesson is held entirely in English (item 28). However, item 31 *There is no harm in the teacher using Swedish every now and then* does not permit valid conclusions to be drawn due to the even distribution of answers. In spite of the inconclusive findings from item 31, the clear agreement on item 28 indicates that Swedish EFL learners prefer English lessons to be held in English. Here, it is noteworthy that English in Sweden is taught from an early age and students are frequently exposed to the language outside of the classroom via media use or communication tools. This frequent exposure can be beneficial for their language development and might affect the students' inclination towards lessons being entirely held in the target language. Ultimately, 73% of learners report a positive attitude towards the importance of translation (item 32), suggesting that contrastive language teaching is perceived as valuable for the advancement of language learning.

## 5 Discussion

As discussed earlier, previous studies conducted in the field report that linguistic competence is a divisive issue between NNESTs and NESTs. A general preference for NESTs for teaching oral skills due to their innate language use, their fluency, pronunciation and wide range of vocabulary can be seen (Fang & Wang, 2020; Karakas, Uysal, Bilgin & Bulut, 2016;

Medgyes 1994; Morita, 2004; Sevy-Biloon, 2017). Data collected in the current study suggest that NESTs are thought to be more effective when teaching oral skills than NNESTs. Swedish EFL students also voice slightly more agreement with NESTs primarily focussing on speaking skills as opposed to NNESTs doing so. Yet, due to the fact that most students neither agree nor disagree regarding NESTs as well as NNESTs, this is merely a tendency. Equivalently, no difference between NESTs' and NNESTs' focus on grammar rules is detected, given that both are reported to focus on teaching grammar. Contrary to Morita's (2014) findings, where NNESTs are disliked for their excessive focus on grammatical rules, no such connection between student attitudes and the teachers' grammar instructions can be detected in this study. In line with European and Swedish policy documents (Council of Europe, 2001; Skolverket, 2011; Skolverket 2017; Skolverket, 2021), students find it valuable that the entire lesson should be held in the target language, indicating that frequent exposure to English can be beneficial to learner progression and should thus be a focal point when teaching EFL (Alseweed, 2012; Amaya, 2015).

Analysing students' opinions on pedagogical competence, the main finding previously discussed is that students hold the perception that teaching skills are decisive when evaluating good teaching practice, not nativeness (Aslan & Thompson, 2017; Atamturk, Atamturk & Dimililer, 2018). This presumption can be confirmed by the current research, with 75% of learners stating that pedagogical competence is more important than a native-speaker background. In accordance with Amaya (2015), NNESTs are seen as putting more effort into lesson planning and sticking more rigidly to the lesson plan, something that was not detected by Aslan and Thompson (2017). Additionally, current findings indicate that NESTs are seen as keener on improvising than NNESTs as also observed by Alseweed (2012) and Amaya (2015). Furthermore, the investigation of the use of teaching materials as perceived by the students reveals that NNESTs seemingly rely more on textbooks, while NESTs are seen as slightly more willing to use supplementary material. This number is considerably lower than the one presented in Hadla's (2013) research. Yet, the implications of these findings are limited due to the large quantity of responses that neither agreed nor disagreed.

With respect to cultural competence, findings of the current study are in keeping with previous research, which states that students show stronger agreement with the notion that NESTs provide more extensive information about the culture of English-speaking countries than NNESTs (Amaya, 2015; Chun, 2014; Mahboob, 2004). Nonetheless, Alseweed (2012), Karakas, Uysal, Bilgin and Bulut (2016) and Selvi (2011) emphasise that a multicultural approach, where students are exposed to teachers from different backgrounds, is beneficial for

educational as well as individual development. In agreement with this, results from the Swedish context show that the vast majority of students (69,3%) prefer to be taught by both NESTs and NNESTs if given the choice, which was also discovered by Chun (2014).

As presented in the literature review section, previous research suggests a correlation between the level of language proficiency and students' attitudes towards NNESTs and NESTs. Alseweed (2012) and Chun (2014) report that advanced language learners prefer NESTs over NNESTs. The results of the current study cannot make assumptions about these issues given that all participants were at a similar proficiency level. However, when viewing the students' perceptions about whether NESTs are generally more suitable to teach at a higher level, the majority of participants neither agree nor disagree. Nevertheless, current findings can confirm that students perceive NNESTs as being more suitable to teach beginner learners (Alseweed, 2012; Karakas, Uysal, Bilgin & Bulut, 2016; Sevy-Biloon, 2017).

Overall, students articulate a positive attitude towards NESTs and NNESTs alike, as both are perceived as being patient, capable of preparing students well for tests and eager to promote autonomous learning. In addition, both use pair and group work in the EFL classroom. In agreement with a large number of studies conducted (e.g. Fang & Wang, 2020; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2002; Mahboob, 2004; Medgyes, 1994), this investigation shows that students do not generally prefer being taught by a NEST or NNEST. Instead, their attitudes seem to be dependent on more complex, personal evaluation schemes. This, in turn implies that there is no perfect EFL teacher that suits all individual learners' needs equally. However, a continued focus on professional pedagogical teacher education and the promotion of the benefits of diversity can have a positive effect on learner outcome.

## 5.1 Limitations

To perform the current research several decisions had to be made concerning research design, methodology and data analysis. The selection entailed several limitations, impacting the scope of the study.

Firstly, the sample size is relatively small, which adds a risk of overgeneralization when trying to apply the findings to a larger cohort. Here, it must even be considered that the participants were sampled from only two schools in the same region, attending the same course (English 7). Thus, the group must be rated as homogeneous in aspects like age, teacher and location. Even though the limited spread does not allow for general assumptions to be made, the findings are still significant and reveal meaningful results for the current context.

Secondly, the research design is purely quantitative. While it is certainly suitable since it enables the researcher to collect and evaluate significant data on a larger scale, it does not enable us to draw conclusions about the motives behind the students' attitudes. To achieve more detailed insights, a different method should be applied in addition to the quantitative approach.

Thirdly, this study is set in a specific cultural context. Being carried out in a city in Sweden, the results are intricately linked to the local conditions and therefore have to be interpreted with this background in mind. Differences in school system, first language, exposure to English, cultural premises or proximity to native and non-native communication partners, can all impact students' attitudes. The results from this research are therefore valuable because they consider the Nordic context.

Lastly, it can be debated whether the subject of this study itself is reproducing a problematic dichotomy. The notion of a native speaker has been critically discussed, leading to the conclusion that the term itself is of divisive nature, being that it entails colonial values and replicates an outdated, discriminative hierarchy. As such, it is advised to use the term carefully and under consideration of possibly unwanted implications. However, in lack of better alternatives, the usage of the term might be inevitable.

## 5.2 Pedagogical implications

Understanding students' attitudes towards their teachers can be beneficial for their education and reveal areas that can possibly be improved. When focussing on students' perceptions of NNESTs and NESTs, two main aspects can be registered as having an impact on pedagogical practices. On the one hand, findings indicate that both NESTs and NNESTs are seen as being suitable to becoming excellent EFL teachers. Nativeness does not affect the students' overall perceptions of their teachers. Rather, teaching skills and personality are appreciated by learners. This leads to the conclusion that efforts to improve teacher education and the teachers' pedagogical competence should be enhanced. On the other hand, this research has shown that diversity is a key factor in positive learner experience, meaning that students should have the possibility to be taught by NESTs as well as NNESTs. In order to facilitate a diverse work environment, employers should be encouraged to re-evaluate their hiring practices and establish a setting where variety is a strength, which can combat workplace discrimination. Encouraging cooperation between employed teachers also enables the teachers to learn from each other's strengths, which in turn has a positive outcome for the EFL learner.

### 5.3 Future research

As the literature review presented in this paper shows, there are still areas within the field that would benefit from further research. As indicated, the motives behind students' attitudes towards NESTs and NNESTs remain uncertain and need to be explored in more detail to be able to constitute a link between attitudes and the reasoning that leads to perceptions being established. It would also be of interest to focus on independent variables, such as age, previous knowledge of English or previous exposure to either NESTs or NNESTs to examine whether they have a significant impact on learners' attitudes towards NESTs and NNESTs.

Considering the current study, it would even be of interest to further investigate the discrepancy of attitudes towards NESTs and NNESTs between those students who have been taught by NESTs before and those who only have been taught by NNESTs since 50% of participants reported never having been taught by a NEST. Recalling that EFL is often taught in local contexts without any access to NESTs or native English speakers outside of the classroom environment, it would add to the understanding of students' attitudes, to analyse the impact of previous contact with NESTs on students' perception of NESTs and NNESTs.

Surveying previous studies conducted in the field also revealed the need to further investigate the link between nativeness and student motivation. Given that motivation seems to be impacted by whether a teacher is a NEST or a NNEST, it is desirable to clearly define motivation in this context. Thus far, it is also inconclusive if being a NEST or NNEST enhances motivation or decreases it. Examining the specific causes and effects that one variable has on the other could help to identify significant correlations and enhance EFL-learner motivation and their language learning progress.

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# Appendix A

## Complete questionnaire

### Section1: Questions regarding the participants' demographic background

1. How old are you?
2. Gender.
3. Years of English studies.
4. What is your native language?
5. How many NNESTs have you had?
6. How many NESTs have you had?

### Section 2/Section 3: Questions regarding students' attitudes towards NNESTs/NESTs

1. Sticks more rigidly (exactly) to lesson plan.
2. Is too harsh (strict in marking (grading)).
3. Prepares learners well for the exam.
4. Applies pair work regularly in class.
5. Applies group work regularly in class.
6. Prefers traditional forms of teaching.
7. Speaks most of the time during the lesson.
8. Sets a great (large) number of tests.
9. Directs me towards autonomous (independent) learning.
10. Is impatient.
11. Is happy to improvise.
12. Focuses primarily on speaking skills.
13. Puts more emphasis on grammar rules.
14. Prefers teaching "differently".
15. Relies heavily on the coursebook.
16. Prepares conscientiously (properly) for the lessons.
17. Corrects errors consistently.
18. Runs interesting classes.
19. Assigns a lot of homework.
20. Uses ample (a lot of) supplementary material.
21. Assesses my language knowledge realistically.
22. Provides extensive information about the culture of English-speaking countries.

23. Is interested in learners' opinion.

Section 4: Questions regarding students' attitudes towards miscellaneous statements.

24. A non-native teacher can give more help for a beginner.

25. A native speaker teaches speaking skills/conversation more effectively.

26. It does not matter what the teacher's native language is, the only thing that matters is how they teach.

27. In an ideal situation both native and non-native teacher teach you.

28. It is essential that everything should be in English in an English lesson.

29. A non-native speaker teaches writing skills more effectively.

30. I wish I had only non-native teachers of English.

31. There is no harm in the teacher using Swedish every now and then.

32. It is important that we should be able to translate.

33. Native speakers should teach at a more advanced level.

34. I would be happy to trade a non-native teacher for a native any time.

# **Appendix B**

## **Participation consent form**

Dear student,

My name is Jill, and I am a teacher student at the University of Gothenburg. I am conducting a research project which will be presented in the form of a written research paper for my final degree in June 2021. The purpose of my research is to investigate students' attitudes towards native and non-native English speaker teachers.

I would therefore be grateful if you would help me by filling out the following questionnaire. Your participation is voluntary and will not affect your grades. You can end your participation at any time during the survey without having to provide a reason. Responses are confidential and will only be used for the purpose of this particular research. Your answers cannot be tracked back to your person.

There are no right or wrong answers. I kindly request that you be honest when filling in the questionnaire.

Thank you for your participation!