



Kurdish EFL Students' Perceptions of the Merits and Shortcomings of Native and Non-native English-Speaking Teachers at the University of Duhok

Vian M. Poulis¹ - Sabrin Ali Ramadhan²

vian.mikhail@uod.ac - sabrin.ali@uod.ac

¹⁺² Department of English Language, College of Basic Education, University of Duhok, Duhok, Kurdistan Region, Iraq.

Abstract

This study aims to find the merits and shortcomings of Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers in teaching listening and speaking courses through gender and group analysis across five dimensions: teacher's personality traits, professionalism, pedagogical approach, cultural competence, and linguistic competence. To achieve this aim, a descriptive survey design was employed using a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 100 students, whereas qualitative insights were obtained from semi-structured interview with 10 students. All participants enrolled were third-year students in the Department of English Language, College of Basic Education, University of Duhok. The research collected both quantitative and qualitative data from participants of both genders who belonged to three different Groups. The quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS 24 to calculate percentage, Chi-square tests, and significance values (p), while thematic analysis was used for qualitative data. The findings show that both types of teachers have their own strengths; Native English-Speaking Teachers are more effective in pronunciation and natural fluency, while Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers are more effective in grammar and structural clarity. However, the contradiction between questionnaire results and interview insights

reveal that students have different attitudes towards the two types of teachers, which are influenced by the clarity of instruction and the accessibility of communication. Implications for teacher training and curriculum development are discussed.

Keywords: Native English-Speaking Teachers, Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers, perceptions, merits and shortcomings, EFL teachers.

بوچونین قوتابیین کورد یین زمانی ئنگلیزی لسه ر مفا و کیم وکاسیپن ماموستایین رهسه ن یین زمانی ئنگلیزی (Native English-Speaking Teachers) و ماموستایین نه رهسه ن (Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers) ل زانکوی دهوک.

فیان میخائیل پولص^۱ - صابرین علی رمضان^۲

^{۱+۲} بهشی زمانی ئنگلیزی، کولیژا پهروهردا بنیات، زانکوی دهوک، دهوک، هه ریمما کوردستان، عیراق.
پوخته

ئارمانجا سه ره کی یا ئی قه کولینی، قه کولینا مفا و کیم وکاسیپن ماموستایین رهسه ن یین زمانی ئنگلیزی (Native English-Speaking Teachers) و ماموستایین نه رهسه ن (Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers) گوتنا کورسین گوهداریکرن و ئاخفتن برتیا جه ندهری و گروپی لسه ر پینج بنه مایان: تایه تمه ندیپن که سایه تیا ماموستای، پروفشنالزما ماموستای، ریکین وانه گوتنی (پیداگوجی)، و شیانین که لتوری و زمانی. بو بده سته ئینانا ئی ئارمانجی، ریکا تیکهل هاته بکارئینان. داتایین بیرکاری ب ریکا پرسیارنامی هاته کوم کرن 100 داتایین کوالیته یتیف (جوری)، ب ریکا چافپیکه فتنان هاته کوم کرن 10. هه می به شداربوپین ئی قه کولینی قوتابیین قوناغا سیی بون یین بهشی زمانی ئنگلیزی ل کولیژا پهروهردا بنیات ل زانکوی دهوک. ئی قه کولینی هه ردو جورین داتا کوم کرن ئ قوتابیین هه ردو جه ندهرا (می و نیر) ژ هه رسئ گروپان . داتا برتیا SPSS 24 هاته شیکارکرن بو بده ست قه ئینانا ریژی و Chi-square و به هایین گرنج (p)، و شیکارکرن یاداتایین کوالیته یتیف (جوری) ب رتیا بابه تی (thematic) هاته کرن. ئه نجام هوسا دیاردکه ن کو هه ردو جورین ماموستایان شیانین تایه ت هه نه، ماموستایین رهسه ن یین زمانی ئنگلیزی (Native English-Speaking Teachers)

(Non-Native English Teachers) شیانین گوتی و زمانی یین سروشتی هه نه، و ماموستایین نه ره سه ن- (Native English-Speaking Teachers) پتر شیانین ریزمانی هه نه. لی، هه قدژی ناقه را نه نجامین پرسیارنامی و چافپیکه فتنا هوسا دیاردکه ن کو قوتابیان بوچونین جیاواز هه نه له سه ره دو جورین ماموستا کو کاریگه ری له سه ره فان بوچونا ژ لای چه وانیا سه ره ده ریا ماموستایه دگه ل قوتابیان و شیانین وان یین زمانی بو ئاخفتی. کاریگه ری ل سه ره راهیتانا ماموستایان و به ره پیدانا مه نه جی ژی هاتینه به حسکرن.

وشین سه ره کی: ماموستایین ره سه ن یین زمانی ئنگیزی (Native English-Speaking Teachers), و ماموستایین نه ره سه ن (Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers), بوچون، مفا، کیم و کاسی، ماموستایین زمانی ئنگیزی.

Introduction

The global demand for English language education has led to the use of both native English-speaking teachers and non-native English-speaking teachers. Native English-Speaking Teachers are often linked to authentic language use and cultural immersion, whereas Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers bring pedagogical expertise and relatable learning experiences. The improvement of teaching practices and learner outcomes requires a deep understanding of how both types of teachers are perceived by their learners.

Although both Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers contribute to enhancing students' listening and speaking skills, there is still limited understanding of how their distinct personal traits, professionalism, cultural and linguistic backgrounds influence adult learners' learning experiences. Earlier studies conducted globally have emphasized ongoing discussions about the relative effectiveness of Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers. However, as discussed in the related studies section, within the context of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, only two studies have been conducted in the universities of Sulaymaniyah and Erbil, while the context of the present study, the University of Duhok, has not yet been examined in this regard. Moreover, the

previous two studies did not address gender and demographic Groups among participants.

Hence, this study will bridge the gap in the literature and contribute to the growing body of knowledge on teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) within Kurdistan's universities. It will provide unique insights that can enrich the understanding of diverse educational settings, broad the scope of research and potentially lead to more inclusive educational practices.

The current study aims to explore the Kurdish EFL students' perceptions on the merits and shortcomings of Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers in teaching listening and speaking courses through gender and group analysis across five dimensions: teacher's personality traits, professionalism, pedagogical approach, cultural competence, and linguistic competence.

Research Question:

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do Kurdish EFL students' perceptions differ regarding the merits and shortcomings of their Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers in teaching listening and speaking courses based on gender in terms of teachers' personality traits, professionalism, pedagogical approach, cultural competence, and linguistic competence?
2. How do Kurdish EFL students' perceptions differ regarding the merits and shortcomings of their Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers in teaching listening and speaking courses based on group analysis in terms of teachers' personality traits, professionalism, pedagogical approach, cultural competence, and linguistic competence?

Context of the Study

This study was conducted within the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching at the University of Duhok, focusing on the comparison between Native

English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers. The research setting included instructors who teach listening and speaking courses. The participants were students from three Groups (A, B, and C) who had been taught listening and speaking by Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers during their three years in the English Language Department, College of Basic Education at the University of Duhok.

The Native English-Speaking Teachers in this study were three teachers whose first language is American English. They received their education in English-speaking countries and had a prior experience in teaching EFL in international contexts. In contrast, the Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers were three Kurdish teachers whose first language is Kurdish. They had achieved a high level of English proficiency and held academic degrees in English language teaching or applied linguistics. Most of them received their education locally or regionally and had several years of experience in teaching EFL for learners at different proficiency levels.

This context provides a rich environment to explore how the teachers' linguistic backgrounds and educational experiences shape their classroom practices, students' perceptions, and overall teaching effectiveness.

Literature Review

Native and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers: Strengths and Challenges

This section reviews existing literature on English language teaching, emphasizing student perceptions and examining the comparative strengths and challenges of Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers, with attention to linguistic and pedagogical competence, cultural awareness and learner preferences.

Regarding linguistic competence, Native English-Speaking Teachers are often viewed as embodying authentic or natural language models because of their deep intuitive mastery of idiomatic expressions, pronunciation, and fluency (Medgyes,

1994). The exposure to native pronunciation, intonation, and rhythm can enhance EFL learners' listening and speaking (Jenkins, 2006; Matsuda, 2003). However, critics argue that linguistic competence does not necessarily translate into effective language teaching. Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers, who have learned English as a second language, are prepared better to understand learners' struggles and provide explicit grammar instruction (Braine, 2010; Davies, 2007); as Medgyes (1992) stated "What is weakness on one side of the coin, is an asset on the other" (p.346). Llurda (2005) added that Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers often succeed more in explaining complex language rules because they have mastered them in formal studying conditions.

The global English language teaching industry often privileges Native English-Speaking Teachers, perpetuating a "native speaker fallacy" that regards nativeness as teaching superiority. Many in English language teaching professions uphold the belief that "The ideal teacher of English is a native speaker" (Phillipson, 1992, p.13). This causes Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers to frequently face bias from students and colleagues who perceive them as less competent compared to native speakers, which aligns with Braine's (1999) observation that "Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers are often considered as by-products" (p.13). Consequently, this can impact the Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers' confidence and their teaching effectiveness because the concept of "non-nativeness" might undermine their authority in the classroom. Additionally, such biases may create a divide between Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers, which further complicates collaboration and professional development within teaching institutions (Medgyes, 1994; Selvi, 2014).

Moreover, initiatives that advocate for equitable treatment and recognition of Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers emphasize the importance of qualifications and teaching experience over nativeness (Mahboob, 2010). Having a conceptual framework that transcends the binary opposition between Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers emphasizes their complementary strengths, which can lead to effective English language teaching that requires collaboration and mutual respect, leveraging Native English-Speaking

Teachers' linguistic authenticity and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers' empathetic teaching strategies (Medgyes, 1994). Similarly, scholars argue for a shift towards plurilingual competence and intercultural awareness as key indicators of teaching effectiveness, rather than nativeness alone (Cook, 1999).

It is worth mentioning that Native English-Speaking Teachers are mostly viewed as cultural ambassadors who provide students direct insights into the culture and social contexts of English-speaking countries, which in return can assist students to understand the broader context of language use that transcends grammatical structures and vocabulary (Holliday, 2006; Medgyes, 1994). Nevertheless, this advantage can be restricted by a lack of understanding of the learners' sociocultural background, as Native English-Speaking Teachers are often unaware of the difficulties involved in acquiring a second language because they have acquired these skills intuitively (Braine, 1999; Medgyes, 1994). For this reason, Native English-Speaking Teachers could be less effective in addressing issues associated with grammar, syntax, and language learning strategies. Conversely, Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers share cultural proximity with their students, which can foster better rapport and teaching (Canagarajah, 1999; Medgyes, 1994; Jenkins, 2006). Davies (2007) and Phillipson (1992) added that successful teaching transcends native-like language skills to include more cultural sensitivity and the ability to design lessons for diverse classroom contexts and backgrounds.

Learners' perceptions of Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers are varied and often context-dependent. For instance, EFL learners' value Native English-Speaking Teachers for their pronunciation and conversational skills, while Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers are preferred for their ability to explain grammar and anticipate common errors. Notably, learners' preferences are influenced by their educational goals; the learners who focus on international communication may prioritize Native English-Speaking Teachers, while others preparing for academic examinations might favor Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers (Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2014).

Related Studies

A number of studies have examined learners' perceptions of Native English-Speaking Teachers' and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers' effectiveness, highlighting both positive and negative aspects of these teacher Groups. The analysis of relevant studies in this section creates a unified understanding of student evaluations of these teachers across different educational settings.

To begin with, Varol and Bayyurt (2017) investigated pre-service English teachers' views about Native English-Speaking Teachers versus Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers in English language teaching practice. A questionnaire was used to collect responses from 94 students who were freshmen and senior students of the Foreign Languages Teaching Department at a state university in Istanbul, Turkey. The descriptive statistical analysis showed that both freshmen and senior students believed Native English-Speaking Teachers excelled at teaching speaking, pronunciation, and culture, but Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers excelled at teaching grammar and English basics.

Additionally, Wulandari, Rosnaningsih, and Sintawati (2021) studied students' attitudes towards Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers in an Indonesian non-formal educational setting, employing questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and documentation tools to gather information from 20 participants. Students appreciate Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers, because they demonstrate empathy towards learners while using first-language experiences to explain complex ideas and maintain classroom order and discipline consistency. Students gain motivation and confidence through their exposure to natural pronunciation and fluency and cultural authenticity which Native English-Speaking Teachers provide. Native English-Speaking Teachers deliver fast-paced speech while providing restricted vocabulary support, yet Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers struggle with pronunciation clarity and create less engaging classroom environments.

In a similar vein, Wulandari, Fitria, and Maryanti (2022) explored how students in the agriculture program at Riau State Islamic University in Indonesia perceive Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers. A

quantitative survey design was used to gather data from students enrolled in the Agriculture Faculty. The research results showed that both Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers possess high levels of competency and professionalism. Native English-Speaking Teachers bring native fluency and accurate pronunciation and deep cultural knowledge to teaching, but they may not have received formal training about language learning processes. Nonetheless, NNETs may have language fluency and pronunciation challenges, but they have a better grasp of learner challenges, as they explain grammar and vocabulary because of a shared first language.

Moreover, Deng, Zhang, and Mohamed (2023) studied how Native English-Speaking Teachers, Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers, and Chinese English-major students viewed the characteristics of effective EFL teachers at four mid-tier universities across China. Their research used a semi-structured interview tool to gather data from 16 students and 7 teachers (4 Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers and 3 Native English-Speaking Teachers). The results showed that Native English-Speaking Teachers highlighted affective qualities including flexibility and student engagement, which mirrored student-centered teaching methods. Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers received more positive evaluations from students because they demonstrated teaching skills, subject knowledge and professionalism which stemmed from their experience with teacher-centered instruction. The study encountered problems because Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers struggled to establish emotional bonds with students whereas Native English-Speaking Teachers faced difficulties with cultural adaptation and linguistic accuracy.

Furthermore, Xu and Xiao (2023) studied Chinese tertiary students' views about Native English-Speaking Teachers and local Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers' competencies in English as a Medium of Instruction teaching (EMI). The research data was obtained through semi-structured interviews with seven third-year or fourth-year undergraduates who had studied EMI courses at Chinese universities. The research results showed that students' opinions regarding

Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers depended on their self-reported language skills and observed classroom practices. Students with higher English proficiency levels preferred Native English-Speaking Teachers because they provided fluent instruction and interactive teaching methods including discussions and brainstorming. Students with lower proficiency levels preferred Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers because they explained concepts clearly through teacher-centered instruction and detailed presentation slides. The Native English-Speaking Teachers were seen as engaging by students but their minimal use of structured materials caused difficulties for certain learners. The research indicates that teaching preferences result from the combination of student competence and their understanding of instructor priorities.

Building on this, Dombaycı and İpek (2025) conducted a mixed-methods study to examine pre-service Turkish EFL teachers' views on Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers, employing questionnaires and interviews to gather data from 41 participants. The findings showed that both groups possess different strengths and weaknesses. The study highlighted Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers' strengths in empathy and common experiences and their ability to understand student challenges, whereas Native English-Speaking Teachers excelled in pronunciation and fluency and cultural understanding.

Furthermore, in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, two studies have examined students' perceptions of Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers, as outlined below.

The study by Barany and Zebari (2018) conducted a quantitative study to examine Kurdish EFL learners' opinions about Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers at universities in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. A questionnaire instrument was used to gather data from 100 English students at four universities: Qaragh University in Sulaymaniyah, Kurdistan University in Erbil, Lebanon-French University and Cihan University in Erbil. The results demonstrated

that students preferred Native English-Speaking Teachers for developing speaking, listening, pronunciation and cultural understanding skills. Whereas, Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers excelled in grammar instruction and language rules explanation.

Additionally, Ahmed and Osam (2022) examined how students and instructors in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq perceive Native and Non-native EFL Teachers. The research employed a mixed-methods data collection through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to gather information from 354 university students and 24 EFL teachers across five universities in Sulaymaniyah, Iraq: University of Sulaymaniyah, Komar University of Science and Technology, Cihan University of Sulaymaniyah, Qaiwan International University, and the American University in Sulaymaniyah. The research revealed that students preferred Native English-Speaking Teachers because of their engaging teaching methods and strong language skills although experienced cultural differences and performance anxiety. Furthermore, students held mixed opinions about Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers' language abilities but appreciated their linguistic connection, teaching approach and empathetic nature. The teachers considered Native English-Speaking Teachers to be popular and motivating, yet they lacked pedagogical depth and cultural understanding. However, Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers were seen as more qualified, hardworking and better attuned to student needs.

While previous studies have examined general perceptions of Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers in terms of effectiveness, limited attention has been given to how these views vary across gender and demographic groups, particularly within the University of Duhok in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Thus, this study seeks to address that gap.

Methodology

Research Design

This study is a descriptive survey design to collect the Kurdish EFL students' perceptions of the merits and shortcomings of Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers. To achieve this aim, a mixed-methods

approach is used, which integrates quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a deeper understanding of complex research questions by combining numerical trends with contextual details (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018).

Participants

A total of 100 students participated in this study; 100 students responded to the questionnaire, and 10 students participated in the interview. All participants were third-year students in the Department of English Language, College of Basic Education, University of Duhok. The participants were divided into three Groups; Groups A and B, were treated as a single group in the study because they both were taught the Listening and Speaking course by Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers; however, they had previously been taught the same course in their second year by Native English-Speaking Teachers. Group C was taught by a NEST and had prior experience being taught by Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers.

Table 1

Demographic Profile of the participants

Group	Data Collection Method	Total participants	Male (M.)	Female (F.)
Groups A & B	Questionnaire	55	18	37
Groups A & B	Interview	6	3	3
Group C	Questionnaire	45	10	35
Group C	Interview	4	0	4
Total	All Methods	110	31	79

Data Collection Instruments

This study employed two data collection tools: a questionnaire and semi-structured interview, which were developed by the researchers. The questionnaire contained five dimensions that assessed teachers' personality traits, professionalism, pedagogical approach, cultural competence, and linguistic competence. It contained four closed-ended items for each dimension, which used a five-point Likert scale ranging from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (disagree). The interview contained three open-

ended questions that explored both positive and negative aspects of Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers in teaching listening and speaking courses. Two TESOL expert professors reviewed the tools to confirm their validity and ensure they matched the aim of this study. Additionally, a pilot study with (n=5) third-year students was conducted to evaluate the clarity of items and questions and determine data collection time and research instrument reliability. The results indicated that some words needed clarification so the researchers used simpler language to revise them. The questionnaire took between 15 and 20 minutes to complete, while the interviews lasted between 20 and 30 minutes. The Cronbach's Alpha values for the questionnaire ranged from (0.620 to 0.748), which demonstrated the reliability of the instrument for measurement purposes, as shown in Table 2 below:

Table 2

Reliability Coefficients for Each Dimension of the Questionnaire

personality traits	Professionalism	Pedagogical approach	Cultural Competence	linguistic Competence
0.620	0.714	0.620	0.656	0.748

Procedures

Both instruments included a consent form to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. The participants were asked to read the consent form carefully and sign it if they agreed to participate. The questionnaire was administered in the classroom in the Department of English Language at the College of Basic Education, University of Duhok. Students were asked to carefully read the questionnaire items and tick the appropriate response next to each item. The interviews were conducted in one of the researchers' offices, and all sessions were audio-recorded. Data from both instruments were collected at the end of the 2023-2024 academic year to get students' insights after completing two listening and speaking courses taught by Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers.

Data Analysis

The SPSS (version 26) software processed the questionnaire data. The analysis included calculating descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percentages, to present students' responses across five dimensions, including teachers' personality traits, professionalism, pedagogical approach, cultural competence, and linguistic competence. To examine gender and group differences, Chi-square tests of independence were used to determine if student perceptions differed by gender and Groups A, B and C. Additionally, the semi-structured interviews data were recorded before transcribing it for thematic analysis, which produced qualitative findings based on the five questionnaire dimensions. Triangulation of both data sets enhanced the validity and contextual richness of the research results.

Results and Discussion

Results

This study used descriptive statistics to evaluate how Kurdish EFL students viewed the merits and shortcomings of Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers in listening and speaking courses through gender and group analysis across five dimensions: teachers' personality traits, professionalism, pedagogical approach, cultural competence, and linguistic competence. The analysis of collected data produced multiple essential results which are presented in the following sections:

Dimension 1: Teachers' personality traits

The results below in Table 3 and Table 4 present the distribution of Kurdish EFL students' perceptions of the merits and shortcomings of Native English-Speaking Teachers' and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers' personality traits according to gender and group. The results show how students view their teachers' approachability, empathy, confidence, and patience.

Table 3

Differences in Students' Perceptions of Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers Personality Traits by Gender

Item No.	Questionnaire Item	Gender	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	χ^2 (Chi-square)	p (Sig.)
			%	%	%		
1.	Native English-speaking teachers are more approachable.	F.	65.2%	22.2%	12.5%	5.462	0.243
		M.	60.7%	28.5%	10.7%		
2.	Non-native English-speaking teachers are more empathetic and understanding	F.	43.03%	27.7%	29.1%	2.318	0.677
		M.	46.4%	17.8%	35.7%		
3.	Native English-speaking teachers are more confident in teaching listening and speaking.	F.	72.2%	13.8%	13.8%	2.403	0.662
		M.	64.2%	21.4%	14.2%		
4.	Non-native English-speaking teachers are more patient with students.	F.	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%	8.197	0.085
		M.	53.5%	17.8%	28.5%		

As shown above in Table 3, the results of item 1 showed a higher proportion of female students' disagreement (65.2%) than male students (60.7%). However, the difference was not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 5.462$, $p = 0.243$). For item 2, (46.4%) of males showed more like to disagree compared to females (43.03%), yet again no significant difference was observed ($\chi^2 = 2.318$, $p = 0.677$). In item 3, (72.2%) of females and (64.2%) of males showed disagreement with this item. Despite this difference, it was not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 2.403$, $p = 0.662$). In item 4, a higher proportion (53.5%) of males showed disagreement, while females' responses to this item were evenly split between disagreement and neutral (each at 33.3%), suggesting that perceptions on this issue are divided and lack clear consensus. However, no significant difference was found ($\chi^2 = 8.197$, $p = 0.085$). Despite these contrasts, none of the four items revealed significant gender-based differences in students' perceptions of Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers' Personality Traits.

Table 4

Differences in Students' Perceptions of Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers Personality Traits by Groups

Item No.	Questionnaire Item	G(Group)	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	χ^2 (Chi-square)	p (Sig.)
			%	%	%		
1.	Native English-speaking teachers are more approachable	A & B	61.8%	25.4%	12.7%	1.668	0.797
		C	66.6%	22.2%	11.1%		
2.	Non-native English-speaking teachers are more empathetic and understanding	A & B	45.4%	20%	34.5%	6.494	0.165
		C	42.2%	31.1%	26.6%		
3.	Native English-speaking teachers are more confident in teaching listening and speaking	A & B	72.7%	14.5%	12.7%	4.433	0.351
		C	66.6%	17.7%	15.5%		
4.	Non-native English-speaking teachers are more patient with students	A & B	41.8%	25.4%	32%	6.227	0.183
		C	35.5%	33.3%	31.1%		

As shown above in Table 4, the results of item 1 revealed that (66.6%) of GC, who were taught by Native English-Speaking Teachers showed more disagreement than (61.8%) of G(A&B), who were taught by Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers. However, the difference was not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 1.668$, $p = 0.797$). For item 2, (45.4%) of G(A&B) and (42.2%) of GC disagreed with this item. The results showed no statistically significant difference ($\chi^2 = 6.494$, $p = 0.165$). Regarding item 3, a higher percentage (72.7%) of G(A&B) disagreed compared to (66.6%) of GC, yet again no significant difference was observed ($\chi^2 = 4.433$, $p = 0.351$). Finally, in item

4, (41.8%) of G(A&B) disagreed compared to (35.5%) of GC. Findings of the four items did not show statistically significant differences in the students' perceptions of G(A&B) vs. GC regarding the Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers' personality traits.

Interview data provided additional perspectives. (42%) of female students and (33.3) of male students, as well as, (50%) of G (A&B) and (25%) GC reported that Native English-Speaking Teachers are supportive, friendly, kind, helpful, and encouraging, "NETs are kind, supportive, friendly" (St1, F, GA), "Native English-Speaking Teachers are kind and helpful" (St5, F,GB). Whereas, (33.3) of females and (25%) of GC mentioned that Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers are not approachable and they demotivate students, "they grade students based on appearance and looks....Some of them correct students' mistakes in an offending way, which makes them not wanting to participate or speak English language in their class." (St10, F, GC).

Dimension 2: Professionalism

The results below in Table 5 and Table 6 show the distribution of Kurdish EFL students' perceptions of the merits and shortcomings of Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers' Professionalism, categorized by gender and group. The responses highlight attributes, such as being more professional in teaching, having a deeper understanding of teaching challenges, being more competent in classroom management, and better at managing classroom activities.

Table 5

Differences in Students' Perceptions of Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers' Professionalism by Gender

Item No.	Questionnaire Item	Gender	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	χ^2 (Chi-square)	p (Sig.)
			%	%	%		

5.	Native English-speaking teachers are more professional in teaching listening and speaking”	F.	68.4%	20.8 %	9.7%	11.399	0.022
		M.	67.8	1.3%	28.5 %		
6.	Non-native English-speaking teachers demonstrate a deeper understanding of language learning challenges in listening and speaking skills	F.	36.1%	37.5 %	26.3 %	0.129	0.998
		M.	39.2%	35.7 %	25 %		
7.	Native English-speaking teachers are more competent in classroom management	F.	68%	22.2 %	9.7%	4.535	0.338
		M.	50%	32.1 %	17.8 %		
8.	Non-native English-speaking teachers are better at managing listening and speaking activities in the classroom	F.	38.8%	38.8 %	22.2 %	5.908	0.206
		M.	39.2%	17.8 %	42.8 %		

As shown above in Table 5, the results of item 5 revealed a subtle percentage of disagreement between females (68.4%) compared to males (67.8%). Notably, a statistically significant difference was detected between female and male students ($\chi^2 = 11.399$, $p = 0.022$). In item 6, the results revealed that (39.2%) of male students disagreed compared to (37.5%) of female students, who provided neutral responses, yet no statistically significant difference was observed ($\chi^2 = 0.129$, $p = 0.998$). Although the results of item 7 showed a higher proportion (68%) of female participants disagreed compared to (50%) of male students, no significant difference was shown ($\chi^2 = 4.535$, $p = 0.338$). In item 8, (42.8%) of males agreed with this statement compared to females who showed neutral and disagreement (each at

38.8%). However, the results showed no significant difference ($\chi^2 = 5.908$, $p = 0.206$). Findings of the four items of professionalism dimension revealed a significant gender-based difference regarding the content of the fifth item in Table 5.

Table 6

Differences in Students' Perceptions of Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers of Professionalism by Group

Item No.	Questionnaire Item	G(Group)	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	χ^2 (Chi-square)	p (Sig.)
			%	%	%		
5.	Native English-speaking teachers are more professional in teaching listening and speaking	A & B	72.7%	16.3%	10.9%	1.907	0.753
		C	64.4%	15.5%	20%		
6.	Non-native English-speaking teachers demonstrate a deeper understanding of language learning challenges in listening and speaking skills	A & B	40%	32.7%	27.2%	3.784	0.436
		C	33.3%	42.2%	24.4%		
7.	Native English-speaking teachers are more competent in classroom management	A & B	61.8%	29%	9%	2.874	0.579
		C	64.4%	20%	15.5%		
8.	Non-native English-speaking teachers are better at managing listening and speaking activities in the classroom	A & B	34.5%	38.1%	27.2%	9.777	0.044
		C	44.4%	26.6%	28.8%		

According to Table 6, the results of item 5 revealed that a higher proportion of (72.7%) of G (A&B) showed more disagreement than (64.4%) of GC. However, this item did not achieve a significant difference ($\chi^2= 1.907$, $p = 0.753$). In item 6, (42.2%) of GC were proportionally more liked to provide neutral responses compared to (40%) of G (A&B) who showed disagreement to this item, yet no statistically significant difference was observed ($\chi^2= 3.784$, $p = 0.436$). In item 7, (64.4%) of GC disagreed compared to (61.8%) of G(A&B). Despite this difference, no significant difference was shown ($\chi^2= 2.874$, $p =0.579$). The results of item 8 revealed that (44.4%) of GC showed disagreement, while (38.1%) of G (A&B) provided neutral responses. Notably, the results demonstrate a statistically significant difference between the Groups ($\chi^2 = 9.777$, $p = 0.044$). The analysis of the four items of professionalism dimension revealed a significant group-based difference regarding item 8 in Table 6, which is related to Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers competence in classroom management activities.

The results of the interview indicated that (42.8%) of female and (66.6%) of male participants, as well as, (66.6%) of Groups A and B indicated that Native English-Speaking Teachers are engaging and answer questions effectively. They create a relaxed and supportive environment that encourages students to speak without fear. Rather than correcting students' mistakes directly, they choose a gentler approach to avoid causing embarrassment, "native teachers do not embarrass us...they do not make comments" (St3, F, GA). In contrast, (14.2%) of females and (66.6%) of males, as well as, (33.3%) of G(A&B) and (25%) of group C pointed out that Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers sometimes overcorrect and expect full proficiency from students "They just want us to use very advanced words and they will give us a higher mark" (St 7, M, GB). Some students said that the Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers don't treat everyone equally and has difficulty managing class time and keeping order. They also feel that grades are sometimes given based on how students look, not how well they perform, "they grade students based on their appearance and look" (St10, F, GC)

Dimension 3: Pedagogical approach

The results below in Table 7 and Table 8 present the distribution of Kurdish EFL students' perceptions of the merits and shortcomings of Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers' pedagogical approaches, categorized by gender and group. The responses highlight attributes, such as using more innovative teaching methods, explaining grammar rules more clearly, being more creative in planning lessons, and giving more informative instructions.

Table 7

Differences in Students' Perceptions of Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers' Pedagogical Approach by Gender

Item No.	Questionnaire Item	Gender	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	χ^2 (Chi-square)	p (Sig.)
9.	Native English-speaking teachers use more innovative teaching methods in listening and speaking classes	F.	65.2%	26.3%	8.3%	1.405	0.843
		M.	57%	32.1%	10.7%		
10.	Non-native English-speaking teachers provide clearer explanations of grammar rules when teaching listening and speaking	F.	38.8%	30.5%	30.5%	3.716	0.443
		M.	50%	25%	25%		
11.	Native English-speaking teachers are more creative in planning listening	F.	75%	22.2%	2.7%	5.548	0.235
		M.	67.8%	17.8%	14.2%		

	and speaking lectures						
12.	Non-native English-speaking teachers provide more informative instructions in listening and speaking classes	F.	38.8%	31.9%	29.1%	3.487	0.480
		M.	57.1%	17.8%	25%		

According to Table 7, the results of item 9 indicated that (65.2%) of female students showed more disagreement than (57%), of male students, yet no statistically significant difference was observed ($\chi^2 = 1.405$, $p = 0.843$). Item 10 showed that a higher percentage of males (50%) disagreed compared to (38.8%) of females. However, no statistically significant difference was shown ($\chi^2 = 3.716$, $p = 0.443$). The results of item 11 revealed a higher percentage of female students (75%) disagreed compared to male participants (67.8%), yet the difference was not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 5.548$, $p = 0.235$). In item 12, (57.1%) of males showed more disagreement compared to (38.8%) of females. Statistical comparison of the four items yielded non-significant results between both genders regarding the pedagogical approach dimension.

Table 8

Differences in Students' Perceptions of Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers of Pedagogical Approach by Groups

Item No.	Questionnaire Item	G(Group)	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	χ^2 (Chi-square)	p (Sig.)
9.	Native English-speaking teachers use	A & B	61.8%	29%	9%	3.595	0.464
		C	64.4%	26.6%	8.8%		

	more innovative teaching methods in listening and speaking classes.						
10.	Non-native English-speaking teachers provide clearer explanations of grammar rules when teaching listening and speaking.	A & B	45.4%	29%	25.4%	13.624	0.009
		C	37.7%	28.8%	33.3%		
11.	Native English-speaking teachers are more creative in planning listening and speaking lectures.	A & B	63.6%	29%	7.2%	7.331	0.119
		C	84.4%	11.1%	4.4%		
12.	Non-native English-speaking teachers provide more informative instructions in listening and speaking classes.	A & B	43.6%	29%	27.2%	14.872	0.005
		C	44.4%	26.6%	28.8%		

The results of item 9 in Table 8 indicated that (64.4%) of GC showed more disagreement than (61.8%) of G (A&B). However, no meaningful significant difference was observed ($\chi^2 = 3.595$, $p = 0.464$). In item 10, (45.4%) of G (A&B)

disagreed compared to (37.7%) of GC. Remarkably, a significant difference was detected between the Groups ($\chi^2 = 13.624$, $p = 0.009$). The results of item 11 revealed a higher percentage (84.4%) of GC disagreed compared to (63.6%) of G (A&B), yet no significant difference was shown ($\chi^2 = 7.331$, $p = 0.119$). In item 12, (44.4%) of GC showed slightly more disagreement compared to (43.6%) of G (A&B). Notably, group responses to this item differed significantly ($\chi^2 = 14.872$, $p = 0.005$).

Findings of the four items of pedagogical approach dimension by group showed there is a statistically significant difference between the students' perceptions of G (A&B) and GC regarding item 10 and item 12, which represent Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers explain grammar rules more clearly and provide more informative instructions.

Results of the interview revealed that (42%) of female and (33.3%) of male students, as well as, (50%) of G (A&B) and (25%) of GC indicated that Native English-Speaking Teachers make learning easier by explaining ideas clearly and using synonyms to help students understand "he simplifies concepts and provide synonyms" (St3,F,GA). Besides, Native English-Speaking Teachers use effective teaching strategies, such as group work, games, role play, and so on. They use real-life examples and encourage natural discussion in class, because they know everyday conversation well "Their familiarity with conversational contexts allows them to provide authentic examples and engage students in real-life discussions" (St10, F, GC). This makes learning more fun and useful. Additionally, Native English-Speaking Teachers give quick feedback on pronunciation and word use, speak slowly when needed, and help students learn how to communicate in real situations.

Moreover, (42%) of female students, as well as, (16.6%) of G(A&B) and (25%) of GC stated that some of Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers have good skills in grammar and language structure. They use clear and simple English, which helps students understand lessons more easily, especially students who have low English proficiency level. Besides, they simplify concepts by using students' first language when necessary. Whereas, (71%) of females and (33.3%) of males along with (50%) G (A&B) and (75%) of GC indicated that Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers use

challenging questions and rigid teaching methods that can discourage students when they make mistakes. They may complicate the material and give unclear instructions, which makes learning harder. Although Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers possess strong subject knowledge, they often struggle to communicate ideas effectively. Additionally, their focus on presentation and delivery sometimes creates more stress than learning benefits for students.

Dimension 4: Cultural competence

The results in Table 9 and Table 10 show the distribution of Kurdish EFL students' perceptions of the merits and shortcomings of Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers' cultural competence, categorized by gender and group. The responses highlight attributes, such as possess a deeper understanding of Western cultural aspects, being more sensitive to cultural differences in the classroom, being more effective in cultural exposure, and being better at facilitating multicultural communication.

Table 9

Differences in Students' Perceptions of Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers' Cultural Competence by Gender

Item No.	Questionnaire Item	Gender	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	χ^2 (Chi-square)	p (Sig.)
			%	%	%		
13.	Native English-speaking teachers typically possess a deeper understanding of Western cultural aspects	F.	50%	41.6%	8.3%	1.349	0.853
		M.	50%	35.7%	14.2%		
14.	Non-native English-speaking teachers are	F.	38.8%	27.7%	33.3%	8.926	0.063
		M.	60.7%	25%	14.2%		

	more sensitive to cultural differences in the classroom						
15.	Native English-speaking teachers are more effective in teaching English through cultural exposure	F.	56.9%	26.3%	16.6%	2.427	0.658
		M.	57.1%	17.8%	25%		
16.	Non-native English-speaking teachers are better at facilitating multicultural communication among students	F.	43%	33.3%	23.6%	8.381	0.079
		M.	46.4%	35.7%	17.8%		

As shown above in Table 9, the results of item 13 revealed equal responses between female and male students, with both genders displaying a similar distribution of disagreement (50%), yet there was no meaningful variation between genders ($\chi^2=1.349$, $p = 0.853$). In item 14, (60.7%) of male participants were proportionally more like to disagree compared to (38.8%) of female students. However, no statistically significant difference was shown ($\chi^2= 8.926$, $p = 0.063$). In item 15, despite there was a subtle difference of disagreement between (57.1%) of males and (56.9%) of females, no statistically significant difference was observed ($\chi^2= 2.427$, $p = 0.658$). In item 16, (46.4%) of males disagreed compared to (43%) of female participants yet no statistically significant difference was found ($\chi^2 = 8.381$, $p = 0.079$). Findings of the four items of cultural competence dimension suggest that gender does not significantly affect students' perceptions in this regard.

Table 10

Differences in Students' Perceptions of Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers' Cultural Competence by Groups

Item No.	Questionnaire Item	G(Group)	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	χ^2 (Chi-square)	p (Sig.)
			%	%	%		
13.	Native English-speaking teachers typically possess a deeper understanding of Western cultural aspects	A & B	58.1%	32.7%	9%	7.444	0.114
		C	17.7%	48.8%	11.1%		
14.	Non-native English-speaking teachers are more sensitive to cultural differences in the classroom	A & B	54.5%	27.2%	18.1%	12.742	0.013
		C	33.3%	26.6%	40%		
15.	Native English-speaking teachers are more effective in teaching English through cultural exposure.	A & B	54.5%	23.6%	21.8%	0.826	0.935
		C	60%	24.4%	15.5%		
16.	Non-native English-speaking teachers are better at facilitating multicultural communication among students	A & B	56.3%	30.9%	12.7%	14.186	0.007
		C	28.8%	37.7%	33.3%		

According to Table 10, the results of item 13 revealed that more students of G (A&B) (58.1%) disagreed compared to (48.8%) of GC who showed neutral responses, yet no statistically significant difference was observed ($\chi^2= 7.444$, $p = 0.114$). Item 14 showed that (54.5%) of G (A&B) were proportionally more like to disagree compared to (40%), of GC, who showed agreement to this item. Markedly, a statistically significant difference was observed ($\chi^2= 12.742$, $p = 0.013$). Regarding item 15, a high percentage of GC (60%) disagreed with (56.9%) of G (A&B). Despite this difference, a statistically significant difference was not shown ($\chi^2= 0.826$, $p = 0.935$). In item 16, a higher proportion of G (A&B) (56.3%) disagreed compared to (37.7%) of GC, who provided neutral responses. Notably, a statistically significant difference was detected ($\chi^2 = 14.186$, $p = 0.007$). The results presented in Table 10 revealed significant group-based differences regarding item 14 and item 16 in the cultural competence dimension.

Results of the interview revealed that (14.2%) of female students and (25%) GC indicated that Native English-Speaking Teachers have a strong grasp of cultural expressions and idiomatic language, but they less directly mentioned the cultural aspects, “they have deeper understanding of cultural references and idioms” (St 10, F, GC). However, Native English-Speaking Teachers were seen as detached from local context. Whereas, (42.8%) of females, as well as (16.6) of G (A&B) and (50%) of GC indicated that Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers share same students’ culture and more familiar with students’ lives “they understand our background, village, and family situations” (St6, F, GC).

Dimension 5: Linguistic competence

The results below in Table 11 and Table 12 show the distribution of Kurdish EFL students’ perceptions of the merits and shortcomings of Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers’ linguistic competence according to gender and group. The results present features, such as teachers’ pronunciation, providing explanation of complex language structure, providing richer vocabulary usage, and explaining ambiguous language.

Table 11

Differences in Students' Perceptions of Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers' Linguistic Competence by Gender

Item No.	Questionnaire Item	Gender	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	χ^2 (Chi-square)	p (Sig.)
			%	%	%		
17.	I find Native English-speaking teachers' pronunciation more useful than non-native English-speaking teachers	F.	76.3%	19.4%	4.1%	3.687	0.450
		M.	85.7%	7.1%	7.1%		
18.	Non-native English-speaking teachers provide better explanations of complex language structures	F.	33.3%	40.2%	26.3%	10.718	0.030
		M.	32.1%	28.5%	39.2%		
19.	Native English-speaking teachers offer richer vocabulary usage	F.	72.2%	19.4%	8.3%	1.505	0.826
		M.	77.7%	21.4%	3.5%		
20.	Non-native English-speaking teachers are better at explaining ambiguities in the English language	F.	33.3%	38.8%	27.7%	3.766	0.439
		M.	35.7%	28.5%	35.7%		

As shown above in Table 11, the results of item 17 demonstrated that (85.7%) of male students and (76.3%) of females disagreed to this item. Gender did not show a significant effect on this item ($\chi^2 = 3.687$, $p = 0.450$). In item 18, the females' highest response was neutral (40.2%); in contrast, (39.2%) agreed to this item. Notably, the results showed a significant difference between both genders ($\chi^2 = 10.718$, $p = 0.030$). Item 19 revealed that (77.7%) of male students and (72.2%) of female students showed comparable levels of disagreement. However, no significant difference was observed ($\chi^2=1.505$, $p = 0.826$). In item 20, (38.8%) of females revealed neutral response, while the majority of male students showed equal proportions agreeing and disagreeing (each at 35.7%), reflecting a lack of unified opinion among respondents. Findings of the four items of linguistic competence dimension revealed that the variation between genders reached statistical significance in item 18, which represents Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers provide better explanations of complex language structures.

Table 12

Differences in Students' Perceptions of Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers' Linguistic Competence by Group

Item No.	Questionnaire Item	G(Group)	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	χ^2 (Chi-square)	p (Sig.)
17.	I find Native English-speaking teachers' pronunciation more useful than non-native English-speaking teachers	A & B	78.1%	18.1%	3.6%	2.81	0.58
		C	80%	13.3%	6.6%	5	9
18.	Non-native English-speaking teachers	A & B	36.3%	30.9%	30.9%	10.988	0.027

	provide better explanations of complex language structures	C	28.8%	44.4%	26.6%		
19.	Native English-speaking teachers offer richer vocabulary usage	A & B	67.2%	29%	3.6%	8.47	0.07
		C	80%	8.8%	11.1%	1	6
20.	Non-native English-speaking teachers are better at explaining ambiguities in the English language	A & B	36.3%	32.7%	30.9%	9.77	0.04
		C	31.1%	40%	28.8%	6	4

As shown above in Table 12, the results of item 17 indicated that the majority of GC (80%) and G (A&B) (78.1%) showed disagreement to this item. However, no significant difference was observed ($\chi^2 = 2.815$, $p = 0.589$). In item 18, the highest response of GC (44.4%) was neutral, while (36.3%) of G (A&B) showed disagreement. Notably, a significant difference was detected between Groups ($\chi^2 = 10.988$, $p = 0.027$). For item 19, a higher percentage of GC (80%) and G (A&B) (67.2%) showed disagreement, yet no significant difference was observed ($\chi^2=8.471$, $p = 0.076$). Item 20 revealed that a higher proportion (40%) of GC provided neutral responses, while (36.3%) of G (A&B) disagreed with this item. Statistical comparisons revealed a significant difference ($\chi^2 = 9.776$, $p = 0.044$). Findings of the four items of linguistic competence dimension indicated significant group-based differences regarding item 18 and item 20, which highlight Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers provide explanation for complex language structure and clarify ambiguous language.

The qualitative data added deep insights, as (85%) of females and (66.6%) of males, as well as (83%) G (A&B) and (75%) of GC reported that Native English-Speaking Teachers speak clearly and slowly, which helps students understand better. Their good pronunciation and accent make it easier to teach listening and speaking skills “they are better in teaching listening and speaking because they have good pronunciation” (St6, F, GC). However, (33.3%) of males and (16.6%) of G (A&B)

indicated that when Native English-Speaking Teachers speak too fast during listening activities, some students find it hard to write down what they hear.

Moreover, a number of students, including (57.1%) of females and (33.3) of males, along with (50%) from G (A&B) and (50%) from GC showed that several NNETs have good skills in pronunciation and language structure. Their good accent and ability to explain English structure clearly support learning, especially for students with lower English proficiency. They added, Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers speak fast at times and use different accents and pronunciations “Some of them speak in American accent, the others British accent” (St2, F, GC). However, some students liked this variety, as it can improve their listening skills and help them adapt to real-world conversations. In contrast, (28.5%) of female and (33.3%) of male participants, (33.3%) from G (A&B) and (25%) from GC referred to Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers’ mispronunciations and inconsistencies, as well as their heavy focus on advanced vocabulary.

Discussion

This study aimed to explore the EFL students’ perceptions of the merits and shortcomings of Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers in teaching listening and speaking courses through gender and group analysis across five dimensions: teachers’ personality traits, professionalism, pedagogical approach, cultural competence, and linguistic competence. The discussion section concentrates on these five dimensions, as follows:

Teachers’ personality traits

The questionnaire findings showed that while female, male, and group students expressed higher disagreement regarding Native English-Speaking Teachers’ personal traits across items related to approachability and confidence, none of the differences across gender or Groups were statistically significant. However, the qualitative data from the interviews provided deeper insights, revealing subtle gender- and group-based differences in student experiences. More of female and G (A&B) participants showed a strong preference to Native English-Speaking Teachers, describing them as encouraging, motivating, friendly, approachable, capable of

creating a supportive learning environment, and reducing students' fear of making mistakes. These results are consistent with those of Wulandari, Rosnaningsih, and Sintawati (2021) and Ahmed and Osam(2022), who found that Native English-Speaking Teachers motivate students and inspire confidence and enthusiasm among them.

Referring to the empathy and patience demonstrated by Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers, a high level of disagreement suggests that both genders and group students do not widely perceive these qualities in their instructors, which may reflect a gap in emotional support or mismatched expectations in teacher-student dynamics. This adds support to the interview findings, as a small portion of males and group C participants revealed that Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers are unapproachable and do not inspire students to achieve.

Professionalism

Although female and Groups A and B students in the questionnaire expressed greater disagreement towards two items regarding Native English-Speaking Teachers' professionalism and classroom management, only female and male students' responses towards Native English-Speaking Teachers' professional skills item yielded a statistically significant difference. However, interview data offered a contradictory view, as both genders and G (A&B) students indicated that Native English-Speaking Teachers create a welcoming and engaging classroom atmosphere where students feel confident to participate, as they correct students' mistakes indirectly, which protects students from embarrassment. These contradictory results nonetheless align with the findings of Ahmed & Osam (2022), as students' results reported that Native English-Speaking Teachers create engaging classroom environments, and motivate students and encourage active participation; whereas, teacher interviews highlighted concerns about Native English-Speaking Teachers' lack of instructional structure and classroom control.

Additionally, quantitative findings showed more disagreement among male students towards two items related to Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers' deeper understanding of language learning challenges and managing classroom activities. However, group C participants showed notable disagreement on the item

of Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers' managing classroom activities, resulting in a statistically significant difference. These results support the interview findings, as more male and group A and B participants reported that Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers' approach lacked effective classroom organization and placed unrealistic demands on fluency, resulting in frequent correction of student errors. This combination may undermine learner confidence, disrupt motivation, and hinder overall engagement in the learning process. These results partially contradict with the findings of Baranyand Zebari (2018) and Wulandari, Rosnaningsih, and Sintawati (2021), who reported that Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers understand students' learning challenges. Although most students preferred Native English-Speaking Teachers, one student in group C praised Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers for effectively balancing time between speaking and listening. This result is consistent with Wulandari, Fitria, Maryanti (2022) who found Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers as competent and professional. This might suggest that Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers may have underexplored strengths, which have not explored in this study.

Pedagogical approach

The quantitative data showed no significant differences between genders or Groups regarding their belief that Native English-Speaking Teachers teach listening and speaking more innovatively and creatively. Students generally disagreed with these items. However, qualitative data from interviews presented a contrasting view. More female students and students in Groups A and B described Native English-Speaking Teachers as dynamic and impactful. These students highlighted instructional strategies, such as collaborative tasks, interactive simulations, and practical illustrations. Native English-Speaking Teachers were praised for their ability to simplify questions, demonstrate accurate language use, and create realistic classroom experiences. Although students disagreed with these items in the questionnaire, their interview responses revealed more positive views. This difference may be due to the data collection methods, as interviews allowed deeper reflection and clarification of opinions.

Despite this contradiction, the qualitative insights show the depth of student perceptions and support previous research on the effectiveness of Native English-Speaking Teachers in listening and speaking instruction (Varol & Bayyurt, 2017; Barany & Zebari, 2018; Wulandari, Rosnaningsih, & Sintawati, 2021; Dombaycı & İpek, 2025). Similarly, Xu and Xiao (2023) reported that Native English-Speaking Teachers frequently employ engaging techniques such as discussions and brainstorming to enhance classroom interaction.

Regarding Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers, the questionnaire data revealed no meaningful statistical differences between students' ratings of grammar explanations and informative instruction. Female students showed slightly less disagreement with these items. The reported use of first language by Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers to explain complex concepts during interviews by 28.5% of female students and 25% of GC participants might explain this pattern. This supports the study by Wulandari, Rosnaningsih, and Sintawati (2021) which demonstrated the educational benefits of using the first language in grammar teaching.

However, student responses regarding grammar clarity and informative instruction showed a notable difference between the two Groups. The students from GC showed less disagreement with Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers' grammar clarity but expressed more disagreement with their informative instruction in listening and speaking classes. The interview data showed that female students and GC participants acknowledged Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers' excellent grammar understanding and their ability to explain concepts clearly through simplified language or first language assistance, which proved beneficial for students with lower proficiency levels. The research findings align with the previous studies which demonstrated Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers' ability to deliver clear grammar instruction (Varol & Bayyurt, 2017; Barany & Zebari, 2018; Wulandari, Fitria, & Maryanti, 2022; Ahmed & Osam, 2022; Dombaycı & İpek, 2025).

Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers received praise for their subject matter expertise, yet students criticized their teaching methods as rigid and their question difficulty level as excessive and their error response as discouraging. Students

acknowledged Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers' subject matter expertise but some students experienced increased classroom stress due to unclear explanations and excessive focus on presentation which did not improve learning results.

Cultural competence

Although no statistically significant gender or group-based differences were found regarding the items related to Native English-Speaking Teachers' perceived understanding of Western cultural aspects and effectiveness in teaching English through cultural exposure, more group C students exhibited relatively neutral responses on the Native English-Speaking Teachers deeper Western cultural understanding item, and more disagreement to culture exposure. This may be attributed to the fact that their Native English-Speaking Teachers demonstrated a deeper knowledge of Western cultural contexts. Interview data added further depth: students of both genders acknowledged Native English-Speaking Teachers limited familiarity with the local context. Additionally, responses of both Groups indicated that they rarely addressed cultural aspects explicitly and appeared somewhat disconnected from local cultural dynamics, as mentioned during the interviews. These are not in alignment with the findings of Varoland Bayyurt (2017), Baranyand Zebari (2018), Wulandari, Rosnaningsih, and Sintawati (2021), Ahmed and Osam (2022) Wulandari, Fitria, and Maryanti(2022), Deng, Zhang, and Mohamed (2023), Xu and Xiao (2023), Dombaycıand İpek (2025), who emphasized Native English-Speaking Teachers provide authentic exposure to English-speaking cultures.

Additionally, the findings of this dimension revealed no statistically significant gender-based differences on the items related to Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers' sensitivity to cultural differences in the classroom and their effectiveness in facilitating multicultural communication among students. In contrast, a significant difference was observed across student Groups, with GC reporting higher rates of agreement and neutrality. This may be attributed to that Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers are more familiar with students' culture and background, as reported by both genders and Groups in the interview, as they may explain these aspects in students' first language especially for low-level English proficiency.

Linguistics competence

Although a high percentage of both genders and Groups showed disagreement with the items related to Native English-Speaking Teachers' better pronunciation and richer vocabulary, no statistically significant difference was seen. However, their responses in the interview contradicted with this concept, as they reported that Native English-Speaking Teachers provide more accurate pronunciation and clear accents. The interview findings support the findings of Varoland Bayyurt (2017), Baranyand Zebari (2018), Wulandari, Rosnaningsih, and Sintawati (2021), Wulandari, Fitria, Maryanti(2022) Ahmed and Osam(2022), Deng, Zhang, and Mohamed (2023), Dombaycıand İpek (2025), who found Native English-Speaking Teachers provide authentic fluency and accurate pronunciation.

Additionally, a significant gender-based difference emerged regarding perceptions of Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers' ability to explain complex language structures, with male students showing greater agreement and female students expressing neutrality. Interviews supported these trends, as more females and half of Groups participants showed that Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers have good skills in grammar and language structure. These results are consistent with the findings of Wulandari, Fitria, Maryanti (2022) who found that Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers explain language structure effectively.

However, no significant difference was found on the item concerning Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers' explanation of linguistic ambiguities, despite males expressing higher disagreement and females maintaining neutral responses. Notably, interview responses revealed concerns about the Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers' inconsistent pronunciation and variable accents, which may contribute to students' difficulty understanding intricate language points and ambiguous expressions. This is consistent with the findings of Varoland Bayyurt (2017), Wulandari, Rosnaningsih, and Sintawati (2021), Wulandari, Fitria, Maryanti(2022), Dombaycı and İpek (2025), who reported that Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers are not strong in developing speaking fluency or authentic pronunciation.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study highlight important implications for English language teaching and teacher development in EFL contexts. Both Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers bring complementary strengths that enhance classroom learning. Educational institutions should value diversity and pedagogy over nativeness. Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers model attainable proficiency, while Native English-Speaking Teachers provide authentic exposure to natural language and culture. Teacher education programs should equip both Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers with the necessary skills to address their respective weaknesses, such as pronunciation practice for Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers and cross-cultural awareness workshops for Native English-Speaking Teachers. Encouraging collaboration and peer observation between the two Groups of teachers promotes mutual growth and professional development. Student feedback should guide curriculum and staffing improvements. Ultimately, effective English teaching depends more on competence and cultural awareness than linguistic background.

Conclusion

This study investigated Kurdish EFL students' perceptions of the merits and shortcomings of Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers across five dimensions: teachers' personality traits, professionalism, pedagogical approach, cultural competence, and linguistic competence based on gender and group. By integrating quantitative and qualitative data, the research revealed both converging and diverging perspectives that offer a nuanced understanding of teacher effectiveness in TESOL contexts.

Quantitative analysis, in the teacher personality traits dimension, revealed no statistically significant differences across gender or group participants. However, qualitative interviews, particularly with female participants and those from Groups A and B, challenged this finding. These participants consistently described Native English-Speaking Teachers as exhibiting greater kindness, supportiveness, and approachability compared to Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers.

Regarding the professionalism dimension, a statistically significant gender difference was found in perceptions of Native English-Speaking Teachers'

professional skills, with male students and Groups A and B favoring their relaxed, non-direct corrective approach. Interview data broadly supported this, emphasizing Native English-Speaking Teachers' interactive classrooms. However, perceptions of Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers revealed a more complex picture. While quantitative data showed significant disagreement, especially from Group C qualitative responses added more depth with male and Groups A and B students criticizing Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers' methods as rigid and overly focused on error correction. This contradiction suggests that while survey data captures general dissatisfaction, interviews revealed specific pedagogical concerns that may vary by context.

The pedagogical dimension analysis showed no statistically significant difference between gender or group questionnaire responses because both genders and Groups disagreed regarding Native English-Speaking Teachers teaching listening and speaking with innovation and creativity. The interview participants described Native English-Speaking Teachers as energetic and effective teachers who used teamwork-based activities and hands-on strategies in their teaching methods. The teachers demonstrated accurate language use while establishing practical learning spaces which simulated real-world scenarios. Female and Group C students appreciated Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers' grammar explanation abilities; whereas their task design sometimes struggled to match students' learning needs and preferences.

Findings from the cultural dimension indicate that students perceive Native English-Speaking Teachers as teaching listening and speaking classes without integrating directly cultural context or Western cultural elements. Although Group C students believed their instructors might possess a stronger understanding of Western culture, they did not provide concrete evidence to support this view. Across all Groups, students consistently felt that the English culture was not mentioned directly in the classroom. Regarding Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers, both male and female students expressed disagreement with the idea that the teachers showed cultural sensitivity or supported multicultural communication. However, students in Group C responded more neutrally or positively. This may be attributed

to the shared cultural background and first language between Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers and their students.

The analysis of the linguistic competence dimension data shows that students do not agree with the notion that Native English-Speaking Teachers have better pronunciation and accent. However, this view is contradicted by interview findings, where students consistently affirm that Native English-Speaking Teachers demonstrate clearer pronunciation and a more native-like accent feature. This discrepancy suggests a divergence between students' survey responses and their spoken reflections, possibly influenced by context or interpretation. Moreover, male students agree that Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers have a strong command of grammar and language rules. Nonetheless, when it comes to explaining linguistic ambiguity, students in Groups A and B express uncertainty about Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers' effectiveness. This concern is echoed interview data, where students report difficulty understanding explanations due to Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers' use of advanced vocabulary and inconsistent pronunciation clarity.

The findings show that both Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers contribute significant strengths to the classroom. Native English-Speaking Teachers are preferred for their pronunciation and natural fluency, while Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers are often praised for their clear grammar instruction and exam preparation. These insights indicate that educational impact depends more on pedagogical skill and learner-centered approaches than on native status.

To enhance outcomes, it is recommended that greater emphasis be placed on pedagogical collaboration between Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers to combine their strengths and the need for teacher training programs that address pronunciation and grammar instruction gaps. These findings lead to a more inclusive and strategic method of English language education. Future research could examine teacher self-perceptions alongside student feedback could offer a more holistic view of instructional dynamics in the classroom.

Limitations of the Study

Although this study provides useful insights into Kurdish EFL students' perceptions of the merits and shortcomings of Native English-Speaking Teachers and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers, certain limitations should be acknowledged. First, the sample was limited to students from the University of Duhok/ College of Basic Education/English Language Department, which might restrict the generalizability of the findings to other universities in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Second, the data relied primarily on self-reported perceptions through questionnaires and interviews. Also, the study did not include the teachers' own perspectives, which could provide a more balanced understanding of classroom interactions and instructional effectiveness. Finally, time and resource constraints limited the possibility of including a larger sample size.

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