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WHICH ONE BETTER GUIDES ENGLISH LEARNERS: LOCALS OR NATIVES?

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates students' perceptions of native and non-native English teachers, addressing the ongoing debate over which group is more effective in English language instruction. The research aims to explore university students' and recent high school graduates' preferences and to examine the reasons underlying their views. Employing a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design, the study first collected quantitative data through a four-point Likert-scale questionnaire distributed via Google Forms, consisting of nine statements for each teacher category. Visual prompts were also included to elicit participants' assumptions about teacher effectiveness. Subsequently, qualitative data were gathered through picture-description tasks and semi-structured face-to-face interviews with five purposively selected participants whose responses were distinctive. Nineteen participants from diverse academic backgrounds took part in the survey, although not all had direct experience learning with native English teachers, meaning some responses reflected perceptions and expectations rather than lived experience. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively, while interview data were examined thematically to contextualize survey results. The findings reveal that students perceive non-native teachers as more effective in explaining grammar and creating a supportive learning environment, particularly for beginners, whereas native teachers are viewed as advantageous for improving pronunciation, fluency, and exposure to authentic language use. The study contributes to the discourse on English language teaching by highlighting the complementary strengths of both teacher types and suggesting a collaborative instructional model that maximizes pedagogical effectiveness.

Keywords: student perception; native English-speaking teachers; non-native English-speaking teachers; EFL instruction; mixed methods

1. INTRODUCTION

In many EFL contexts, particularly in Asia, native English-speaking teachers are often perceived as the ideal instructors. Language institutions frequently prioritize nativeness in hiring, assuming that it guarantees higher instructional quality. However, empirical research increasingly challenges this assumption as in the research of Kiziltan & Ayar, (2020). For a long time, many schools across Asia have put native English speakers on a pedestal when hiring teachers. They believed that hiring someone from an English-speaking country automatically meant better teaching. But recent studies are showing that this isn't necessarily true (Adelina, 2025).

Local English teachers share linguistic and cultural backgrounds with their students, which may allow them to explain grammatical concepts more explicitly and empathize with

learner difficulties (Charisma et al., 2025). Study from Putri & Damayanti (2025) once stated that, native teachers, in contrast, may provide more natural exposure to pronunciation and everyday language use. Understanding how students perceive these differences is therefore essential, particularly within the context of multimodal learning environments (Nurfaizah et al., 2024) and technology-enhanced instruction (Hendratno et al., 2025).

There's actually a real advantage to having teachers who come from the same background as your students. These local teachers know the language struggles firsthand because they learned English too. They can explain tricky grammar points in ways that make sense because they remember what it's like to be confused (Kiziltan & Ayar, 2020). Meanwhile, native speakers bring something different to the table. They speak naturally without thinking about it and they can help students get used to real English conversations and accents (Putri & Damayanti, 2025). What matters most is understanding how students actually view and respond to both types of teachers, especially now that we use different technologies and methods in the classroom. This research aims to find EFL students' perception on learning English with native teacher and local teacher, who is better in delivering English material and make impressive impression on students' English journey. We try to find answers of these following questions: 1) Who delivered English better? 2) Do teachers origin really matter in learning English? 3) Are there actually a plot twist answers of what matter most on students' English development?

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design. Quantitative data were collected using a Likert-scale questionnaire, followed by qualitative data collection through pictures describing and semi-structured interviews to contextualize the survey findings. We used a two-part research approach: first, we asked students to fill out surveys with rating scales and provide pictures to see their preference, and then we sat down with them for face-to-face interviews to hear their full thoughts.

Participants were university students and high school graduate from various academic backgrounds but have history in learning English or daily English user. From nineteen participants, we found five participants with unique answers and got interviewed with five of them. As not all participants had direct experience learning with native teachers, responses related to native teachers represent perceptions and expectations rather than solely lived experience. The research design incorporated both digital and traditional assessment methods as in Fadillah et al., (2024), recognizing the evolving nature of language instruction in contemporary educational settings.

Our participants were students from different majors from various universities. It's worth noting that not all of them had actually studied with native English teachers, so some of their answers about native teachers were based on what they expected or assumed rather than real experience. We made sure to use both online and paper-based methods for collecting information, knowing that how we teach is changing and adapting to modern times.

We collected data via google form with nine points statement of students' perception for each native and local teacher. Respondent chose from scale 1 (strongly disagree), scale 2 (disagree), scale 3 (agree), and scale 4 (strongly agree). For data from picture describing, we provide two pictures of teachers at the beginning before respondent fill the questionnaire and asked them to choose which one is likely better in delivering English material. The first picture is a native teacher teaching in a classroom and the second one is a local teacher teaching in a classroom. We also provide four pictures at the end of the google form and asked respondents to sort it based on who they assume as best in teaching and delivering English material. The first

picture is a local female teacher teaching in classroom, the second picture is native female teacher teaching in classroom, the third picture is local male teacher teaching in class, and the fourth picture is native male teacher teaching in classroom. However, we only asked five interviewed respondents about the reason why they chose and sort the picture.

3. RESULTS

This section presents the findings on students' perceptions of native and local teachers based on the analyzed data. As shown in Table X, the results indicate notable differences across several learning aspects, with native teachers generally rated higher in speaking and listening development, while local teachers demonstrate comparable strengths in grammar instruction and understanding students' learning difficulties. Overall, teaching competence emerges as the most important factor regardless of teacher background.

Table 1. Student Perceptions of Native and Local English Teachers

No	Statement	Mean	Category
1	I understand English better with Native teacher	2,9	High
	I understand English better with Local teacher	2,4	Low
2	Native teachers explain English easier	3,0	High
	Local teachers explain English easier	2,7	High
3	Native teachers help better to improve speaking skills	3,4	High
	Local teachers help better to improve speaking skills	2,3	Low
4	Native teachers help better to improve listening skills	3,6	High
	Local teachers help better to improve listening skills	2,2	Low
5	Native teachers help better to improve grammar	2,8	High
	Local teachers help better to improve grammar	2,9	High
6	I am more adventurous to ask and have discussion with Native teachers	2,8	High
	I am more adventurous to ask and have discussion with Local teachers	2,7	High
7	I guess native teachers give more joyful learning circumstance	3,3	High
	I guess Local teachers give more joyful learning circumstance	2,6	High
8	I guess Native teachers are better to understand my learning struggle	2,7	High
	I guess Local teachers are better to understand my learning struggle	2,9	High
9	For me, the most important thing is teacher's teaching skill, not whether they're native or local	4,0	Very High

Table 1. presents students' perceptions of native and local teachers across several aspects of English learning, including comprehension, skill development, classroom interaction, and overall teaching effectiveness. The data are reported using mean scores and categorized levels to highlight differences in how each teacher type supports students' learning.Noise mapping involves visually depicting the noise levels generated at each observation point, producing a noise contour map. The benefit of noise mapping is identifying areas with noise levels exceeding the

noise level and enabling early prevention efforts by using ear protection devices, such as earplugs, based on the noise mapping results.

Table 2. Supporting Factors in English Language Development

Factor	Mean	Category
Peer environment	3.6	High
English music and films	3.7	High
English reading materials	3.6	High
Family support	3.4	High
Daily exposure to English	3.8	Very High

Based on the data presented in Table 2, all external factors are categorized as having a high influence on students' English learning. Daily exposure to English shows the strongest impact (Mean = 3.8, Very High), indicating that consistent interaction with the language plays a crucial role in improving proficiency. This is followed by English music and films (Mean = 3.7), suggesting that informal and enjoyable media significantly support language acquisition. In addition, peer environment and English reading materials (Mean = 3.6) also contribute positively, highlighting the importance of both social interaction and literacy resources. Family support, although slightly lower (Mean = 3.4), remains an important factor in facilitating students' learning. Overall, these findings emphasize that a supportive environment, both socially and contextually, is essential in enhancing English language development.

Table 3. Picture Describing Part 1

Respondent	Picture	Reason
Ara (pseudonym)	1	-
Moe (pseudonym)	2	Teacher's tidy appearance with uniform seems professional and beautiful to look at
Freshtea (pseudonym)	1	Reminds me of my teacher back in elementary school. She really gave good impression for me
Azira (pseudonym)	2	Local teacher can teach better
Sisi (pseudonym)	1	Teacher's casual outfit built more relax atmosphere, so students will feel less stress while learning English

Based on the data presented in Table X, respondents show varied preferences toward the teacher's appearance as represented in Picture 1 and Picture 2, reflecting both professional and emotional considerations. Some respondents preferred Picture 2, associating it with professionalism and better teaching ability, as indicated by the perception of a tidy and uniformed appearance. In contrast, others favored Picture 1 due to its more relaxed and personal impression, which was linked to a comfortable learning atmosphere and positive past experiences with teachers. Overall, these findings suggest that students' preferences are not solely influenced by professional appearance, but also by emotional connection and the classroom atmosphere created by the teacher.

Table 4. Picture Describing Part 2

Respondent	Picture Sort	Reason

Ara (pseudonym)	2	I didn't see it from the race or gender side, instead I saw from the second picture seems to have fun and interactive class
Moe (pseudonym)	2,1,4,3	The second picture shows native teacher teaching but also teaches native students. Same as the first picture, local teacher teaching local students. I guess cause both are elementary students, they're more comfortable to study with the one who has the same mother tongue as them. As for the fourth and third pict, I put it last cause I'm more comfortable with female teacher.
Freshtea (pseudonym)	2,1,4,3	Second picture reminds me of my old teacher in elementary school, cause she was as cheerful as in the second picture. I put the first pict after that cause I ever get taught by a spouse teacher and the husband kinda cruel to us, so I put the female first. as for the fourth and third pict, i never really learn English with male teacher so I just put it last.
Azira (pseudonym)	1,2,4,3	For me from the picture, the male native teacher made me curious and seems fun. We have to bring up curiosity at the teacher first so that we can find interest and comfortable after that.
Sisi (pseudonym)	4	The fourth picture shows an interactive classroom atmosphere because the teacher not only sit down while teaching but try to reach out and built connection with students by walking through the class while explaining.

Based on the data in Table X, respondents show varied preferences in ranking the teacher images, influenced mainly by classroom atmosphere, personal experience, and perceived teaching style rather than race or gender. Picture 2 is often ranked highest due to its fun and interactive impression, while familiarity and past experiences also shape preferences. Additionally, some respondents favor female teachers for comfort reasons, and others value active teaching approaches, such as in Picture 4. Overall, preferences are driven more by engagement and comfort than teacher identity.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that student perceptions of native and local teachers are complementary rather than competitive. It shows from the questionnaire average score of students' perception on each native and local teacher, there were none of each statement indicate critical inequality. Local teachers are viewed as essential for foundational learning, particularly for vocabulary development, while native teachers contribute significantly to communicative competence as the paper from.

The results of the study, which are presented in Table 1 provide insights, into students' perception through participants feedback. From a perspective, it is worth nothing that 2.9 from

4.0 average answers state they understand English better with native speaker than with local teacher with 2.4 average score. However, it does not directly mean local teachers are less, in fact 2.9 average answers local teachers are better to help students improve their grammar and local teachers are better to understand students challenges during English lesson. The same thing stated in Rasyid et al., (2023) that state non-native or local teachers were seen as better able to understand students' learning problems and explain difficult concepts in ways that helped learners grasp vocabulary and language rules more clearly. Yet, perhaps local teachers must take a note from native teachers of how to build interactive and fun learning atmosphere so students can feel safe and adventurous to explore the material. For native teachers, most respondent agreed that they are helpful to improve their listening and speaking ability with average 3.6 and 3.4 answers just like stated in Herlina & Said, (2022) in their paper that also found 95% from 100% agreed that learning with a native English speaker improved their speaking skills,. Nevertheless, all of our respondents very agreed that the most important thing is not teachers' origin yet more to their teaching skill. We also discovered that there are other factors that help students improve their English such as peer environment, English music and movie, English reading material, family support, and the highest is daily exposure of English.

We try to dive deeper to know the reasons why most of our respondents felt they get better English comprehend through native teachers. From five respondents we interviewed, three of them assume that English is not a subject where we just focus on learning the material and rules. Yet, it is about how we manage the communication skills such as listening and speaking, so it is better if we got direct exposure from the native English speakers in order to train our pronunciation closer to how it supposes to sounds. Of course it does not mean local teacher have bad pronunciation, in fact they are the foundation before we stage to advance level of English. They stated that local teachers are better to understand their struggle because local teachers must have been in the same situation so they can arrange strategies to explain the material easier by not cutting the material itself. They are able to provide students with familiar analogy, for example our respondent Moe state, "Back in elementary school, my teacher used to teach about Possessive with 'alone, ice, and cold' analogy. For example, the sentence 'This is Ami's book'. We always remember to put the 's after a person name because we think of 'Ami is alone, she felt cold, and it caused by ice (in Indonesia ice is translate to 'es' or same as we pronounce 's')". Local teachers have deeper understanding in grammar as the result of national curriculum more focus on Fajariyah et al., (2025), so for grammar improvement they agreed local teachers lead. But this does not mean native teacher completely neglected grammar rules, our respondent Ara who ever studied in international school for ten years state that she has no idea that there are things called 'Verb 1', 'Verb 2', and 'Verb 3' until she entered public senior high school and taught by a local English teacher about it. Beforehand, her native English teacher just introduce it as infinitive, past form, past participle, and present participle.

In picture sorting, four of our interviewed respondents put the female teacher as rank one and three of them put the native female teacher on rank one. We explored the reasons and find out there is a same reason. The native female teacher (second picture) seems to have interactive class and students seems to follow the class very well, the teacher also looks cheerful while teaching in the class. This is the same reason that came out when one of our respondents chose the fourth picture (native male teacher) as first option because from the picture, he seems try to build connection with students by walking around the class while explaining the material which will make the class more interactive. We also find out that four out of five respondents felt more comfortable to get taught by female teacher. Although they were not explicitly state the reason, one of our respondents admit that she was never learn English with a male teacher and back in

her elementary school male teacher seems to have more assertive or even cruel personality, so male teacher be the last option for her. Interestingly, in sorting pictures all of our respondents were not really chose it based on teachers' origin, instead all of them emphasize what's matter most is how do the teacher build safe space for students to learn, expand, and express their opinion without afraid of judgement? how is the teacher' personality and emotional intelligence? And how creative they are in delivering English material.

What we got from the interviewed led us to conclusion that there are plot twists in learning English, the things that also matter to improve EFL students English skill. Things such as teacher's outfit, gender matter, and financial factor play a role too. Our respondents said, teacher that wears casual outfit somehow make the learning environment felt more chill and less stress while formal outfit built the professionalism atmosphere. Gender matter same as our respondent stated previous, that she has a bad memory of a male teacher so it'll be her second choice. Mostly they feel comfortable learning with female either local native. The most unique one said that male native teacher gives curiosity and interesting to learn with. By curiosity, students will feel excited to obtain material from the teacher.

Our data shows something pretty important: students don't see local and native teachers as competitors. Instead, they see them as having different strengths that go together. When it comes to build the foundation such as learning new vocabulary and understanding the basics, students really value having local teachers. Based on our respondents, they agreed that local teachers tend to be more emphatic towards students struggle in learning English because they had faced the exact situation, as the result, local teachers are able to provide easy analogy for students. For getting good at actually speaking, communicating, and advanced English learner, native teachers seem to make a bigger difference. One more thing we noticed: students who stick with English studies even when it gets tough tend to do better. This determination, combined with good teaching and encouragement from teachers, really makes a difference.

So if the research suggests we're overvaluing nativeness, what should schools, parents, students and hiring committees actually do?

In the classroom: Stop pretending it's an either-or choice. Bring in both types of teachers when possible. Native speakers excel at modeling fluency and cultural context; non-native teachers excel at explanation and accessibility. Design programs that leverage both. If budget is tight, even rotating guest sessions can make a difference. Some of the most interesting classrooms combine both. Learners get exposure to authenticity and also clarity.

In hiring: Start by actually looking at what someone can do. Have they got solid teaching training? Can you see evidence they're effective in the classroom? Do they have credentials in language teaching? Use that as your baseline, not nativeness. Put real weight on actual qualifications and results instead of defaulting to "native speaker = better." And here's the thing. Pay needs to match the job, not the person's passport. That's just basic fairness. Even one of our respondents said that native teacher is quite lacking in explain the material. If you're going to value hiring qualifications equally, salaries should reflect it too. Right now, natives often get paid more for doing the same job. That's hard to justify on merit.

In professional development: Native speakers coming to teach need actual training in pedagogy and classroom management—being fluent at home isn't the same as knowing how to teach. Many native speakers arrive with zero pedagogical preparation. One of our respondents said that she felt Native English teacher teach in non-English speaking country just for travelling, not actually teaching from their heart. Non-native teachers need space to develop their speaking and gain confidence. A lot of the weird misalignments researchers have spotted would probably shrink if both groups got better professional support. The institutions need to invest in this.

For parents: Parents who expect their kids to be good in English highly advice to prepare more budget for their kids expanding in English. Introduce them about English since the young age for getting used to. Such as talk with them in English even just little words or vocabulary. One of respondent which is Sisi says ''buy a lot of books in English for children since their young age''. This also helps children to practicing reading habit, secure more English vocabularies, and observe their brain for more good achievement in the future. Furthermore, apply the kids to a good school that can provide learning foreign language impeccably. One of our respondents, Ara. Said that she was in international school that is why her English is good.

For students: Don't just rely your English improvement to teacher in school. Start to seek another learning English tool. Such as read book, journal, and article in English. If you are beginner, learn how to do basic conversation from internet. Search basic vocabularies in English and memorize it to day and day. Furthermore, watch English movie with English subtitle in order to practice your listening and know how to write a word that comes from actors mouth in movie. If the student doesn't understand the word, write the word in your notebook and search the meaning later. With this attempt, student can achieve new English vocabularies. Moreover, watch content creator weather local or native that makes English learning content for more knowledge. In addition, be confident. Try to speak in English even the grammar still not correct yet. Just like one of our respondents said which is Sisi, ''as long as we can understand what are you saying, it's totally okay''. Pursue more friends whether in real life or social media that can practice your English (speaking, writing, listening, etc.). With peer environment that most likely use English, student can practice their English better and getting used to about English in daily basis.

5. CONCLUSION

Both native and local English teachers play vital roles in EFL instruction. Educational institutions are encouraged to move beyond native-speakerism and adopt integrated teaching models that emphasize pedagogical competence. Future research should continue to explore how complementary teaching approaches, supported by contemporary instructional tools and culturally responsive materials, can best serve diverse learner populations in EFL contexts. The bottom line? You really do need both types of teachers. It's time for schools to stop thinking that native speakers are automatically better and instead focus on hiring teachers who actually know how to teach well, whether they're native speakers or not. Going forward, researchers should dig deeper into how to get the best results when you combine different teaching styles, use modern technology wisely, and make sure students can see themselves reflected in the materials they study.

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