

NATIVE EFL TEACHERS' SELF-PERCEPTION OF THEIR TEACHING BEHAVIOUR: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Abstract: Due to a recent upsurge in the popularity of English, there is a plethora of native (NS) and non-native (NNS) English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers worldwide. While a number of research projects were conducted to investigate NNS teachers' teaching styles, there is hardly any research available on the NS teacher. This paper presents a qualitative study that aims to explore how NS teachers experience teaching in a foreign language classroom and how their self-perception can be characterized. For the purpose of the investigation a group of NS teachers (n=18) were requested to fill in a questionnaire and participate in a semi-structured interview. The results show that although the NS teacher's inability to use the students' mother tongue is very favourable in fluency-developing tasks, it can be a disadvantage in certain vocabulary building tasks. The term "seasonal native teacher" was introduced by a participant, referring to someone who decides to teach English temporarily, as a way of finding easy income in a foreign country; these seasonal native teachers are, in almost every aspect, different from qualified NS teachers. It was also found that a closer cooperation between NS and NNS teachers would facilitate teaching for both groups.

Keywords: native EFL teacher, seasonal EFL teacher, teaching styles, teaching behaviour

1 Introduction

In recent years, English has become the *lingua franca* of the world. It is a commonly held belief that "more people speak English today than have ever spoken any single language in the recorded history of the world" (Medgyes, 1994, p.1). English is now the dominant language in many fields, ranging from business to diplomacy, from sports to pop music, and most of all, scientific discourse throughout the world. As Fisher wisely points out, "the sun never sets on the English language" (as cited in Medgyes, 1994, p.1).

The recent upsurge in the popularity of English has resulted in an increasing demand for English teachers. For learners who study English in a foreign language context (i.e. in an environment in which English is not spoken as a native language), the language teacher is one of the few resources students have access to in the language learning process. With the emphasis thus placed on the language teacher, the distinction between native speaker (NS) and non-native speaker (NNS) teachers has also been brought into focus. Even though several academics (Ferguson, 1982; Paikeday, 1985; Medgyes, 1994) doubt the relevance of such a division, the NS - NNS contrast is still in current use (Benke & Medgyes, 2005). Moussu and Lourda (2008) rightly claim that "even though a dichotomy vision of the NS - NNS discussion does not appear to be linguistically acceptable, it happens to be nonetheless socially present" (p.316). One could argue for or against the legitimacy of such a distinction; however, the fact that NS and NNS teachers are markedly different, both in their language use and teaching behaviour, cannot be questioned.

Though in recent years several research projects focusing on the NNS teacher have been conducted, relatively little attention has been paid to the NS teachers, to their methods, strengths and weaknesses, and their difficulties. The principal aim of this study is to explore the teaching behaviour of NS teachers of English as a Foreign Language, addressing the following major research questions:

- RQ1 How do NS teachers of English experience teaching in a foreign language classroom?
- RQ2 What strengths and weaknesses do NS teachers claim to have?
- RQ3 What difficulties do NS teachers experience in a foreign language classroom?
- RQ4 What differences do NS teachers perceive between NS and NNS teachers?

2 Review of literature

To be able to describe how NS teachers perceive their teaching style and teaching behaviour in the classroom, it is essential to clarify the concept of being a native speaker. According to Medgyes (1994), native speakers of English:

- were either born in an English speaking country or acquired English in their childhood in an English speaking environment
- speak English as their first language
- have a native-like proficiency in English
- are able to produce fluent and natural discourse in English
- are able to use the language in a creative way
- have reliable intuitions to make distinctions between correct and incorrect forms

Even though some of the above mentioned criteria are rather hazy and occasionally very simplistic, in the majority of cases they serve as a useful starting point.

A number of research studies were carried out to explore the way NS teachers differ from their NNS colleagues (Reves & Medgyes, 1994; Árva & Medgyes, 2000; Medgyes, 2001; Benke & Medgyes, 2005). The most comprehensive and detailed summary of the differences between NS and NNS teachers is offered by Medgyes (1994), based on several sources of data, including surveys and interviews. The description offered by Medgyes is the basis of the present study. In the following section an overview of the most substantial differences between NS and NNS teachers is provided.

Medgyes established four categories to describe NS and NNS teachers. The first aspect, the NS and NNS *teachers' own use of English*, provides a description of their level of proficiency and general language use. The author claims that NS teachers doubtless speak better English and are much more confident in their language use, whereas NNS teachers are less sure of their language knowledge and tend to speak poorer English. Medgyes (1994) also found it significant that whereas NNS teachers' English tends to be 'bookish', NS teachers focus on 'real' language instead.

Concerning the second category, *general teaching attitudes*, Medgyes and Reves (1994) and Medgyes (1994) both claim that NNS teachers tend to adopt a more guided attitude to teaching, they are usually more cautious and more emphatic. NS teachers, on the other hand, are much more flexible, casual and informal. NNS teachers are generally more informed

about the practical aspects of language teaching, such as the education system or different language exam requirements. Therefore, they tend to have real expectations and attend more effectively to learners' immediate needs. Such immediate needs include preparing for a language exam or getting admitted to a university abroad. NS speaker teachers, though, are likely to have much more far-fetched expectations and they attend to learners's perceived needs. NNS teachers are said to be more cautious both with their language use and with the teaching methods they apply, while NS teachers are more innovative and like to experiment with new ideas or methodologies. It is also emphasized by both Medgyes (1994) and Árva and Medgyes (2000) that NS teachers have a tendency to be less committed to teaching than their NS colleagues.

The third category created by Medgyes (1994) describes teachers' *attitude to teaching the language*. The most prominent dissimilarities between NS and NNS teachers' teaching styles derive from the fact that NS teachers tend to focus on such aspects of language use as fluency, meaning, oral skills and the colloquial register, whereas NNS teachers are more likely to put more emphasis on accuracy, form, grammar rules and the formal register. NNS teachers usually prefer controlled tasks and frontal teaching contrary to NS teachers, who favour groupwork and pairwork. While NNS teachers tend to rely on the set coursebook, NS teachers use a richer variety of materials, ranging from newspaper articles through leaflets and brochures to real-life prompts, such as public transport tickets or invoices. NS teachers are also much more tolerant of mistakes, since they tend to focus on the message rather than the form. Considering the practical aspects of teaching the language, NS teachers usually give less homework and set fewer tests than their NNS speaker colleagues. Finally, one of the most significant differences is arises from the teacher's ability or inability to use their students' mother tongue; NNS teachers are more likely to use L1 and resort to translation if the message does not get across.

The fourth category Medgyes (1994) established is the *attitude to teaching culture*. The author's claim that NS teachers tend to bring more culture in the lessons is easily explicable. NNS teachers have a tendency to put less emphasis on culture, either because they themselves do not possess appropriate cultural information, or they believe it is not so important. According to Alptekin (1993), though, culture involves "a socially acquired knowledge" (p. 136), which plays a crucial role in ELT teaching, and Valdes (1986) and Stewart (1982) also claim that it is practically impossible to teach a foreign language without its cultural content.

Medgyes (1994) points out the widespread agreement that NS teachers, by default, have a better and more fluent command of English. Nevertheless, concerning the other features detailed above, he implies that the differences in the teaching behaviour can, on the whole, be explained with the dissimilarity of the two groups in terms of their language proficiency. The present study discusses other major discrepancies observed between NS and NNS teachers more in detail.

3 Methodology

In order to answer the research questions, this qualitative research project investigated 18 native English speaking teachers working in different institutions in Budapest, Hungary with the help of a questionnaire survey and follow-up interviews.

3.1 Description of the participants and teaching contexts

The participants for the study were selected according to convenience sampling strategies. Members of the target population were included if they were easily accessible and willing to participate. Snowball sampling was also used, whereby selected participants were invited to identify further members of the target population (Dörnyei, 2007).

The respondents of the survey were NS teachers of English (n=18), nine of whom were from the United States, seven from the United Kingdom (four from England, two from Scotland and one from Northern Ireland) and two from New Zealand. For more information about the participants' background see Table 1.

AGE GROUP	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
21 – 30	2	6	8
31 – 40	2	2	4
41 – 50	1	2	3
51 – 60	3	0	3
	8	10	18

Table 1. Distribution of participants according to age groups and gender

The respondents' teacher-training background showed significant variation. Seven completed BA and MA courses to qualify as EFL/ESL teachers, obtaining a degree in applied linguistics or English language teaching. Nine were trained as EFL/ESL teachers for six to twelve months, whereas two were practically unqualified.

The participants' English language teaching experience also differed considerably. The mean length of teaching experience was 6.2 ± 5.4 years (mean \pm standard deviation). About one quarter of the respondents had been teachers of English for more than five years, half of them between one and five years, and another quarter for less than a year. More than half of the participants (n=10) teach in state schools (two at primary, six at the secondary level and two at the university level). The remaining eight work for private language schools and offer one-on-one tuition at the same time.

Nearly half of the respondents (n=7) had a weekly teaching load that was more than 20 hours a week, only three participants were teaching less than ten hours; the remaining eight teachers were teaching between 16 and 20 hours a week. Despite the different teaching contexts, group size showed considerable homogeneity, ranging between fewer than 10 to 15 students. This fact can be explained by the language education policy in Hungary, according to which foreign languages cannot be taught successfully in large learning groups, not even within the public sector.

3.2 Data collection and analysis

A questionnaire was distributed among 25 NS teachers electronically. Out of these, 16 surveys were returned, constituting a response rate of 64%. The survey questions were adapted from Reves and Medgyes's (1994) study focusing on non-native English speaking teachers' self-image. Irrelevant questionnaire items were excluded and some new questions

were added. The first part of the survey, consisting of mostly close-ended items, aimed at collecting biographical data about the participants. In the second part, participants were asked to express their opinion on topics such as teaching aims and methods, strengths and weaknesses, and the difficulties they experience. For more details about the questionnaire, see the Appendix.

At the end of the questionnaire, the participants were asked to indicate their willingness to participate in a follow-up interview; out of the 16 participants three agreed. In the follow-up interviews participants were invited to give a more detailed answer to questions 8-14 from the questionnaire as well as to highlight other important aspects of the topic. During one of the interviews I had the opportunity to be introduced to two NS colleagues of my interviewee. Those teachers were willing to fill in the survey on the spot and to discuss some of the questions in more detail. Thus, in total, 18 questionnaires were filled in and five follow-up interviews were carried out.

In this research study, data collection and data analysis were simultaneous and cyclical activities, following the steps of the constant comparative method (Maykut & Morehouse, 2001). Before conducting the interviews, answers given to the survey questions were analysed and categorized. Besides that, new topics emerging from the interviews were also included in the subsequent ones.

4 Results and discussion

4.1 Teaching aims and methods

In most of the cases, the primary motive for becoming a teacher (n=14) was for the participant to be able to travel around the world and work at the same time. One of the participants drew attention to the fact that generally, when looking for a job abroad, it is considered to be a disadvantage if one does not speak the language of the country in question. Considering EFL teaching, the situation is completely different. For NS teachers it is a clear advantage (and for most teaching positions even a prerequisite) if they do not speak the local language.

Only in one case had the participant initially wanted to be a teacher. He first realized his wish to become a teacher of English as a foreign language when he was teaching English academic writing to non-English speaking university students participating in English language programmes and he was displeased by the incorrect spelling students demonstrated. He says,

“Language is to communicate, but if you can’t spell it correctly, if you cannot use the language correctly, then you are not communicating effectively. So I decided that I couldn’t let that happen. I couldn’t let bright, intelligent, but poorly taught people fail, simply because they have not learnt how to use the language correctly.” (interview data)

One of the participants introduced the term *seasonal native teacher*, which he defined as someone “who decides to teach English as a means of finding an income relatively quickly, upon arrival in a new country”. He claims that seasonal native teachers and qualified native teachers are not in the same league, and such seasonal teachers often bring disgrace to the ELT profession.

Considering teaching aims, most of the participants stated the importance of enabling students to communicate effectively and to feel confident speaking to foreigners. One participant, a university lecturer, also pointed out the significance of gaining a wider impression of the world through the use of the English language and equipping learners with a level of proficiency that they need to function successfully in their chosen academic area. Interestingly enough, only one of the respondents expressed the fact that he enjoyed doing his job, and a very important aim for him to become an English teacher was entertainment. This, however, does not imply that the other participants did not enjoy their jobs.

Inasmuch as teaching methods are concerned, more than half of the participants advocated the importance of open discussions and communication activities, some of them using visual prompts, others current events as starting points. Four of the participants agreed on the significance of motivating students by using materials which are relevant and interesting for them. One respondent acknowledged the importance of creativity, of “getting the students out of the textbook”, since real life language use is also spontaneous and requires a certain amount of creativity. These results are in harmony with Medgyes’s (1994) findings which describe NS teachers as individuals who prefer free activities, focus on fluency and oral skills and use a great variety of materials.

4.2 Strong points

With regard to the strong points of NS teachers, several respondents mentioned the fact that, as native speakers of English, they serve as a perfect example for their students to get the right pronunciation and correct intonation of the language. Some of the participants highlighted the fact that as native speakers, they possess a wide range of expressions, especially the idiomatic vocabulary, which, in real-life communication, is much more useful for students than what textbooks can offer.

In terms of motivating learners, one of the participants stated the fact that a personal example is usually the best way of motivating students. He himself claimed to be motivated to do his job, and he thought this factor was a great help inspiring students.

“I love the language. I am motivated and that is infectious in the class. Students can spot a motivated teacher a mile away. Honestly, I enjoy what I do and the students can see that I care about what I am doing, and about them and what they are producing.” (questionnaire data)

Though, on the whole, the participant’s claim that a teacher has a very important role in motivating learners is well-established, it cannot be decided whether in his case being motivated is a personality trait or a feature that comes from being a native speaker of the language. If one considers the already mentioned *seasonal native teachers*, who can be called anything but motivated to teach English, it seems evident that the teacher’s personality is not only, or not primarily influenced by the native tongue.

A grammar school teacher promoted the importance of getting the students interested in the subject in the following way:

“I found that if I can get them interested in the subject, then they start to teach themselves. If I can make the class interesting, then they want to learn English outside the classroom. If there is something boring and painful... you know, I can sing and dance, and they still don’t want to do

it. And if they're interested, even if I somehow don't explain something properly, they tend to go and find out." (interview data)

These attitudes seem to contradict Medgyes's (1994) view in claiming that NS teachers are less committed to teaching than their NNS colleagues. As the above data shows, commitment to teaching is also a personality attribute, not something which comes from being a NS or a NNS teacher. There are highly motivated and committed NS teachers as well as poorly motivated or even demotivated NNS teachers.

Considering error correction, most of the participants claimed to do error correction only if it is absolutely essential, i.e. when students make the same mistake several times, commit a grave error in pronunciation or use the target grammar structure in the wrong way. They asserted that their NNS colleagues are much more critical of the grammatical mistakes students make, whereas in real-life communication, according to one respondent, "life is too short to worry about such issues as whether one uses the 'going to' or the 'will' future structure". On the other hand, one participant highlighted native teachers' ability to spot mistakes easily, especially errors of pronunciation and intonation.

"We can pick up mistakes... identify them before they become a problem. So a native speaker is very good for error correction. So people don't get into a bad habit. For example, pronunciation. To get the flow of the language. Because English has a spoken pattern, a stress pattern. Native speakers automatically use it. Non-native speakers follow their native stress patterns. For the Hungarians, that's the first syllable stress on the words." (interview data)

On the one hand, it is a clear advantage that NS teachers are more tolerant of their students' mistakes and shift the focus onto fluency and real-life oral communication. However, the viewpoint of advocating the importance of fluency expressed by the participant is in contrast to NNS teachers' opinions that correcting mistakes is crucial, as specified by Noonan (2004). He claims that learners who acquire the language through a natural approach, tend to develop errors which do not improve, despite a considerable amount of exposure to the target language. Therefore, NS teachers should not neglect correcting mistakes either, since, when uncorrected, mistakes can easily become fossilized.

4.3 Weak points

As far as NS teachers' weak points are concerned, in accordance with Medgyes's findings (1994), NS teachers acknowledged that they tend to pay less attention to accuracy and grammar rules. Moreover, they even admitted to having occasional problems in explaining grammatical rules to students. As a reason for these difficulties, one participant claimed that, as native speakers of English, the way they had been taught grammar in English lessons during their primary and secondary school years is completely different from what would be expected from them in the foreign language classroom. The participants all agreed that this aspect of the language requires careful and thorough preparation on their part.

On the other hand, though, there is another possible explanation for NS teachers' difficulties in clarifying grammar rules, which is closely related to their inability to speak the students' mother tongue. Medgyes (1994) explains that whereas NNS teachers might be very successful at teaching grammar and explaining delicate grammar points, these grammatical explanations are mostly provided in the students' first language.

One respondent mentioned the problem of lower level groups not having the appropriate level of proficiency to make themselves understood and to fully comprehend what the NS teacher is saying. Especially in such groups, “having a patient tone and talking clearly is very important”. (questionnaire data)

4.4 Difficulties

4.4.1 Culture-based difficulties

Several respondents agreed that one of the most complex culture-related problems is the Hungarian school system being totally different from Anglo-Saxon education systems, especially from the American one. An American-born grammar school teacher says:

“My first couple of years here [...] I don’t think I realized how different the American education system and the Hungarian education system are. So [...] I didn’t really realize what students here needed and nobody really explained it to me, so I made it up. I probably made a lot of mistakes in those few years and maybe had different expectations of what the students could or couldn’t do.” (interview data)

This inadequate amount of information is a global problem, which affects all NS teachers upon arrival in a new country, especially the ones who intend to teach within the public sector. Without the appropriate information, without getting acquainted with the Hungarian education system and the requirements of both the school-leaving examination and the most popular language exams, it is very difficult for NNS teachers to teach effectively. On the other hand, Hungarian teachers and headmasters may not always be aware of what information the NS teacher needs, so the transmitting of information should be an ongoing and interactive process.

As far as Hungarian culture is concerned, the majority of the participants agreed that in the European context, cultural background as such is not a major problem, compared to teaching in Asian countries such as Japan or Korea, where the students’ cultural background is completely different from the European culture. A private tutor from New Zealand claims:

“Hungary is and has a primarily European culture. It has a lot of individual aspects which are not European as such, but which fit in the European context. Hungary interprets things in a very similar way to the rest of Europe.” (questionnaire data)

One of the American participants called attention to another issue worthy of note:

“Adapting to a student’s culture can be a challenge. Specifically, the problem that I found to be the most challenging for me while working in Hungary has been the shyness of the average student. This lack of communication sometimes has been a hindrance to my effectiveness as a teacher and has made me a bit uncomfortable.” (questionnaire data)

The shyness referred to above can be explained by the fact that Hungary had previously belonged to the Soviet bloc, which left a huge impact on language teaching and learning practices. The traditional grammar-translation method, the method that dominated foreign language teaching for almost a century, is still engraved in people’s minds and it is a challenging task for both NS and NNS teachers to open up students to new (and possibly more effective) ways of learning a language. Since today’s primary and secondary school students were born after the changing of the regime in 1989 and have attended a much more

open school system, this reserved attitude is probably becoming a less significant personality trait.

4.4.2 Language-related difficulties

Although the fact that NS teachers do not speak (or speak very little of) the learners' first language has already been mentioned by some participants as an advantage for the students, it undoubtedly causes considerable (though not insurmountable) difficulties for the teacher.

“Sometimes there is misunderstanding, maybe with the lower-level groups. I have to really make sure they've understood what it is I want them to do. So maybe I'll ask them two or three times or tell them two or three times. Sometimes I'm giving them an assignment. I thought they understood it, because they all said 'yeah, we understand it', but they didn't quite do what I thought they were supposed to do.” (interview data)

Explaining the tasks in a clear and efficient way demands constant effort on the teachers' part, who sometimes is forced to rephrase instructions in three or four different ways.

Considering vocabulary, one respondent mentioned the problem of explaining the meaning of abstract concepts to students.

“With abstract concepts, we definitely do have problems. With concrete concepts, it's pretty simple [...] For concrete things, you can point at an object and say, 'this is this'. But how do you define honour? Courage? Cowardice? Fear? You can only describe it by showing an example. But you cannot be certain that the example translates correctly.” (interview data)

Since NS teachers are not able to use translation as a means of explaining words, preparing for reading, listening and vocabulary building tasks demands a much more thorough and conscious preparation from them. Communicative language teaching, on the other hand, insists that even NNS teachers should use as little of the L1 as possible, as their learners will not be able to resort to translation when using the target language in an authentic situation with foreigners. However, there are certain cases when giving the L1 equivalent of a word is more effective, or less time-consuming. If one considers abstract concepts as in the quotation above or vocabulary related to different professional fields, it is easier to give the equivalent of certain words than to get into a rather lengthy and complicated explanation which probably not many of the students would understand.

4.5 The NS / NNS dichotomy as seen by NS teachers

Considering NS and NNS teachers' attitudes to language teaching, most of Medgyes's (1994) findings were confirmed by the results obtained from this study. Some of the claims Medgyes made were that as opposed to NS teachers, NNS teachers tend to focus on accuracy and form, rely heavily on the textbook, are less flexible and are much less tolerant of errors, especially grammar-related errors. They also tend to use students' first language as a tool to explain difficult problems.

However, as one of the participants pointed out:

“The reality is that native teachers command more respect from their students when they first enter a new class. Non-native teachers feel the need to work harder in order to prove themselves.” (questionnaire data)

This statement is in accordance with Medgyes's opinion, who claims that "non-native teachers of English invariably feel uncomfortable about using the language they have to teach" (1983, p.2). This demand to prove themselves is, in my opinion, also related to the NNS teachers' level of proficiency in English. NNS teachers live under the constant threat of being asked something they do not know the answer for. It is easy for NS teachers to judge NNS teachers' teaching style, claiming that NNS teachers tend to rigidly stick to the textbook. However, for NNS teachers this technique is one of the few ways of making sure that the lesson and the flow of the conversation are kept under their control. Needless to say, it is easy for a NS teacher to be flexible, to 'go off topic' with no trouble. If a message does not get across, it is not considered to be their fault or their lack of knowledge, but their students'. In this respect, NS teachers are safe.

Another aspect, which relates closely to NS teachers' lack of knowledge of the learners' native language, is the use of translation in language teaching. Here is how an Irish grammar-school teacher views the use of translation in the language classroom:

"There is one huge issue which I feel is quite divisive in language learning. That is the use of translation as a means of understanding new language. I am against it, in almost any form. A lot of teachers think it is acceptable, if it is controlled and not over-used. I just feel that students are too quick to use a dictionary and that weaning them off dictionaries can be quite difficult. There are always difficulties in teaching non-native students but, this, for me, is the recurrent one, the issue that pops up time and again." (interview data)

The use of the students' mother tongue and translation are also pointed out by Medgyes (1994) and Árvai and Medgyes (2000). Students tend to rely too strongly on their first language when learning a second one. Therefore, if NNS teachers overuse L1 during the lessons, the students will also feel encouraged to do so. However, as it has already been quoted, one of the participants claimed that in certain cases a limited, controlled and conscious use of translation can be a benefit.

Most of the participants listed some differences they perceive in the teaching styles of NS and NNS teachers, concluding that these two groups adopt distinctly different teaching attitudes. However, the majority of the participants admitted that NNS teachers are much more aware of their learners' practical needs, such as exam requirements. They highlighted the importance of close cooperation between NS and NNS teachers, which is in accordance with Benke and Medgyes's (2005) findings.

5 Conclusion

The objective of this study was to conduct research on how NS teachers experience teaching English as a foreign language, focusing mainly on their strong and weak points and the difficulties they have to overcome. For this purpose qualitative data was collected from survey questions and follow-up interviews. The results obtained in the present study were, then, contrasted with findings of previous research, with the aim of uncovering features of NS teachers' teaching styles which had not yet been paid enough attention to in earlier research projects. Though the qualitative nature of the study does not permit generalizations, a few implications may be formulated.

First, let us consider the fact that NS teachers are (usually) not able to speak their students' first language. It was emphasized by the participants that even though this inability can be exceptionally useful for learners to develop their communicative competence, occasionally the lack of this medium of communication imposes a heavy burden on the NS teachers themselves. Some participants stressed the difficulties they have to resolve with lower-level groups, whose level of proficiency is not adequate to fully understand grammatical explanations in English. Other respondents highlighted the difficulties with more advanced groups, where the topic of discussions is often an abstract concept, such as *courage* or *honour*. It is not easy to clarify the meaning of these concepts without using the mother tongue, let alone hold a discussion with them. This implies that NS teachers have to consider their students' level of proficiency very carefully when selecting materials and prepare thoroughly for clarifying the meaning of unknown vocabulary items.

Secondly, one of the major culture-based difficulties for NS teachers is the differences between the Hungarian education system and the system of their own country. Even though in most schools new NS colleagues are usually given a brief overview of the school system, curriculum and requirements, there is definitely more to this than having an information session for the new colleague. It may even be hard for the local colleagues to fathom what information the NS teacher needs as they do not have comparative knowledge of their (educational) cultures. Informing the NS colleague must be more comprehensive, more detailed and more interactive than informing a new local colleague who has knowledge about the local context, and most of all it must be an ongoing and cyclical process.

The third important implication is based on the assumption that NS and NNS teachers' teaching styles are entirely different. This apparently evident statement carries no value judgement; on the contrary, these two distinct teaching styles could easily complement each other in language education. Close cooperation and appropriate job-sharing between NS and NNS teachers would facilitate teaching the language for both groups of teachers, and provide students with better learning opportunities.

Since this research project was a small-scale qualitative study, it has to be emphasized that its scope is obviously limited as it included only a limited number of participants from different backgrounds, qualifications and teaching experience. Also, the findings are based on self-report data; no first-hand information was collected about actual teaching styles and practices. At the same time, the fact that the participants represent such a wide range of backgrounds, their experience and perceptions are also wide ranging and offer insight into situations that may be relevant to many others. Doing classroom observation to supplement the questionnaire and interview data could be a possible direction for future research in the area.

To conclude this inquiry, a quote by one of the respondents, a Scottish primary school teacher can be used, who sums up the issue of NS and NNS teachers in a very telling way:

"I believe that truly great teachers are those that have a gift [...] the ability to communicate and make people interested in what they are learning. There are great teachers, both native and non-native; the principal reasons for professional success or failure in teaching EFL lie elsewhere."

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APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE TO NATIVE SPEAKER TEACHERS

Dear Participant,

Please complete this survey about your experiences as a native teacher of English in a non-English speaking environment. It should take about ten minutes of your time. Your responses are completely anonymous and confidential, and will only be seen by the researchers.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at +36..... or at juhasz_andi@yahoo.co.uk.

Thank you,

Andrea Juhász
PhD student (Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest)

- 1 Age: 21-30 31-40 41-50 51-60

- 2 Gender: male female

- 3 How long / at what academic level did you study to qualify as a teacher of English as a foreign language?
.....

- 4 How many years of experience do you have as an English teacher?
.....

- 5 Type of school in which you teach (comprehensive, vocational, academic, private, etc.):
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- 6 What is your average teaching load per week?
 less than 10 hours a week
 10-15 hours a week
 16-20 hours a week
 more than 20 hours a week

- 7 On average, how many students are there in your classes?
 less than 10 10-15 16-20 21-25 26-30 31 - 35
 36-40 more than 40

- 8 What was the primary motive for you to become a teacher of English as a foreign language?
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- 9 What do you consider the main aims of teaching English as a foreign language?
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- 10 Describe briefly the teaching methods you apply when teaching English as a foreign language.
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- 11 What do you consider to be your strong points when teaching English as a foreign language?
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12 What do you consider to be your weak points when teaching English as a foreign language?

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13 Describe briefly the difficulties you have experienced when teaching students from a non-English speaking background.

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14 What differences do you see between native and non-native speaking teachers of English in the way of their teaching the foreign language?

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15 Further comments:

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Thank you for your cooperation. If you are willing to take part in a follow-up interview, please provide your e-mail address.

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