

## The Effect of Native and Nonnative English Language Teachers on Secondary Students' Achievement in Speaking Skills

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**Abstract:** The present study aimed at investigating the effect of the native English language teachers in comparison with non-native English language teachers on students' achievement in speaking skills. The subjects of the study were six native English teachers (NESTs) and six non-native English teachers (NNESTs), and their 196 grade ten students in the Institute of Applied Technology in the UAE. The instrument of the study was a speaking test implemented at the end of term one of the academic year 2008/2009. The findings revealed that there was no significant difference among students' overall speaking achievement test scores amongst 10<sup>th</sup> graders at ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) due to the native-ness of the teacher. However, the in-depth analysis showed that there was a significant correlation between native-ness and pronunciation in favor of the NESTs and a significant correlation between accuracy and native-ness in favor of the NNESTs. (**Keywords:** Native English Teacher, Speaking Skills, Effective Teacher, Intelligibility).

### أثر مدرس اللغة الإنجليزية الناطق بها والناطق بغيرها في تحصيل طلبة المرحلة الثانوية في مهارة التحدث

عمر حسين النورسي، معهد التكنولوجيا التطبيقية، العين، الإمارات العربية المتحدة.

**ملخص:** لا يزال النقاش مستمراً منذ عقدين حول تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية من قِبل الناطقين بغيرها؛ فتهدف هذه الدراسة إلى التحقيق في تأثير معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية الناطقين بها لغةً أولى بالمقارنة مع معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية الناطقين بغيرها في مهارة التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية. وقد بلغ عدد أفراد الدراسة اثني عشر مدرساً (منهم ستة ناطقون بالإنجليزية والسنة الآخرون ناطقون بغيرها) بالإضافة للطلبة الذين يدرسونهم والبالغ عددهم 196 طالباً من الصف العاشر في معهد التكنولوجيا التطبيقية في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة. تكونت أداة الدراسة من اختبار تحصيلي مهاري لقياس مهارة التحدث، أُجري في نهاية الفصل الأول من العام الدراسي 2009-2010م. وجدت الدراسة أنه لا يوجد فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية بين المجموعتين في تحصيل الطلبة في مهارة التحدث العامة والتي يمكن أن تعزى للغة المعلم الأولى. ولكن التحليل لتناجح الطلبة في المهارات الفرعية أظهر أن هناك فروقاً ذات دلالة إحصائية بين اللغة الأولى للمعلم ومهاري اللفظ والدقة. (الكلمات المفتاحية: المعلمين الناطقين بالإنجليزية، مهارة التحدث، المعلم الفعال)

### Introduction

Numerous paradigms have been introduced to facilitate the learning of English as a foreign/ a second language over the last seven decades. Nowadays language teaching is based on the idea that the goal of language acquisition is communicative competence: the ability to use the language correctly and appropriately to accomplish communication goals. The desired outcome of the language learning process, then, is the ability to communicate proficiently. Consequently greater emphasis has been placed on teaching the productive skills, namely speaking skills. In fact, many students equate being able to speak a language as knowing the language and, therefore, view learning the language as learning how to speak the language, or as Nunan (1991) wrote, "success is measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the (target) language" (p.34).

Learning to speak English fluently is a difficult skill for students to develop and learn, especially in EFL context, where exposure to English is limited to few hours per week, and where chances to speak communicatively are also limited. Gass and Selinker (2001) refer to three primary sources of input for foreign language learners: "(a) teacher, (b) materials, and (c) other learners" (p. 311). In such context, teachers are frequently the only proficient English speakers with whom learners come into contact. Furthermore, EFL learners have limited interactional opportunities. When opportunities to practice the language arise, they are usually between learners in the classroom and the interaction is often filled with errors. The students in the UAE public schools, for example, learn English in their home country where the majority of the teachers are also from Arabic speaking countries. Although there is a little chance to learn English through natural interaction in the target language, due to the fact that there are some native speakers of English and many non-Arabic speaking people working and living there, the only way to learn the English language in the UAE is through formal instruction in the classroom where the teachers share their students the same mother tongue.

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UAE students, learning to speak English, struggle with many communicative issues. In order to speak effectively and have an impact on the success of any conversation, students must be able to produce the expected patterns of specific discourse situations. They must also manage discrete elements such as turn taking, rephrasing, providing feedback, or redirecting. In order to convey their message properly, learners must also choose the correct vocabulary, rephrase or emphasize words to clarify the description if needed, and use proper facial expressions to imply satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the service. Additionally, learners must produce the sounds, stress patterns, rhythmic structures, and intonations of the language, use grammar structures accurately, and assess characteristics of the target audience, including shared knowledge or shared points of reference, status and power relations of participants, interest levels, or differences in perspectives (Burns & Joyce, 1997).

As thus, some researchers in the profession argue that due to their superior command in the language, the native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) make the best and ideal teachers to teach English, in particularly in speaking whether in EFL or ESL contexts. Few people would doubt that the main advantage of native teachers is evidently to be found in their superior linguistic and communicative competence of the L2 (English), since it is their mother tongue and they can thus use it with greater spontaneity and naturalness in a considerable variety of situations. This idealization of native speakers is mostly attributed to the importance placed on spoken communicative competence in foreign language pedagogy since the 1960s. Native speaker intuitions about language are supposed to result in the production of correct, idiomatic utterances, as well as providing the ability to recognize acceptable and unacceptable versions of the language (Harmer, 1991).

On the other hand, nonnative English speaking teachers (NNESTs) usually display a poorer competence, acquired through study and effort, which disallows spontaneity. In addition, they normally experience problems with pronunciation, colloquial expressions (particularly slang), and certain types of vocabulary. Their linguistic competence is also slightly outdated and very much influenced by textbook language, as they use the latter to provide linguistic models to their students. Nevertheless, a good number of researchers in the field argue that "it is not enough to speak a language to be qualified to teach it" (Lado, 1964, p.9); other teaching credentials should be required of all English language teachers, regardless of being a native or non-native English speaking teacher (Nayar, 1994 & Phillipson, 1996).

### **The purpose of the study**

Numerous are the studies that have investigated the dichotomy between the NESTs and NNESTs on students' language learning. It is widely believed that,

due to their command in English language as a mother tongue, NESTs are more effective in teaching speaking skills as a foreign language. The present study intends to investigate the effect of the NESTs and the NNESTs on secondary students' achievement in speaking skills.

### **Significance of the Study**

The debate about the ideal teacher has been going on for more than twenty years now and is expected to continue. Most current research in this area has focused on teachers' self-perceptions as NESTs or NNESTs, teachers' perceptions of their colleagues and their advantages, and teachers' perceptions of their students' perception (attitudes) of them (Liu, 1999b). Other researches have centered on hiring practices, work conditions and supervisor or administrator preferences for native and non-native English teachers (Mahboob, 2003). Furthermore, most of these studies have been done in the ESL context, mainly in the USA; and all the subjects involved in these studies were participating in academic language programs. Of the handful studies examining the differences between the two groups, to date, though, the researcher is not aware of any studies that sought to investigate the impact of both groups on their students' achievement. It seems, though, that a critical element of the issue is missing: the effect of the native-ness of the language teacher on students' speaking ability in a school setting in an EFL context. Another motive for conducting the current study, although there have been a number of studies conducted on the effect of the native-ness of the teacher in different countries, is that there are fewer studies carried out in the Arab context. Therefore, it is necessary in the researcher's view to conduct similar studies on the effectiveness of the NESTs and NNESTs in the Arab EFL context.

### **Review of Literature**

The reviewed literature showed noticeable preference of NESTs over the NNESTs in teaching English in general, and the oral communication in particular. However, all the studies that have investigated the role of teachers' native-ness used surveys as a study tool and aimed at assessing students' and teachers' perceptions about the native-ness of teachers of English. Tang (1997) tried to describe, compare, and contrast the advantages and disadvantages possessed by both NESTs and NNESTs as perceived by nonnative ESL teachers. She used a survey to assess 47 NNESTs' perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs in Hong Kong. She found that her participants believed that native ESL teachers were superior to non-natives in speaking (100 per cent), pronunciation (92 per cent), listening (87 per cent), vocabulary (79 percent) and reading (72 per cent).

In another attitudinal study on university students in Hong Kong, Clayton (2000) using a questionnaire to elicit the participants' views and opinions of both

groups, pointed out that students felt strongly stressed out in classes run by NESTs due to their efforts on figuring out the meaning of new or unfamiliar words and in making sense of what is being said in the classroom instead of concentrating on learning. He also found that NESTs spend much time trying to convey their messages to the students in a reasonable time.

Luk (2001) reported on a study she carried out in two secondary schools in Hong Kong on the Native English Teacher Scheme by soliciting feedback on the project from the students. Her findings showed that the NESTs were viewed as a valued commodity to the students. Native-speaker teachers were welcomed because of the linguistic model and interaction opportunities they provided. The majority of the subjects in her study felt that being taught by NESTs enriched their linguistic resources and personal experiences.

Kelch & Santana-Williamson (2002) aimed to determine if ESL students could identify a native from a nonnative accent and if they held a more positive attitude towards teachers with 'native' accents. The researchers used audiotape recordings of three native speakers of different varieties of English and three nonnative speakers reading the same script. Fifty-six students identified each reader as NESTs or NNESTs, and rated them with an attitude questionnaire on issues of teacher education and training, experience, teacher likeability, teaching expertise, desirability as a teacher empathy for students, and overall teaching ability. The results showed that students were able to correctly identify native and nonnative speakers of English in only 45% of the occasions, and that their perception of the teachers' nativity strongly influenced the attitudes they held towards them. Additionally, teachers who were perceived as native speakers were seen as more likeable, educated, experienced, and overall better teachers, especially for speaking/listening skills. However, students also mentioned the importance of NNEST teachers as role models, source of motivation, and language learners who understood students' learning difficulties.

Lee, (2004) investigated how native language background influenced the speech intelligibility of nonnative Korean and Saudi Arabian accented speakers, and native speakers to various listeners with the same or different mother tongues. A word recognition test was performed using keywords embedded in carrier sentences with the recordings from 5 talkers (2 Korean, 2 Saudi Arabian, 1 Native English) to 4 groups of listeners (L1s: Korean, Saudi Arabian, Native English and Mixed). The results indicated that the degree of intelligibility was greater in the case where speaker and listener shared the same L1 than where they did not. The high -proficiency NN talkers were more intelligible than the low-proficiency NN talkers to all listeners. These high-proficiency NN talkers' intelligibility was

even greater than that of the native speakers when the native languages were matched between talker and listener. The finding of this study has important implications for TEFL/TESL.

In the same vein, Butler (2007a) assessed the effects of Korean elementary school teachers' accents on their students' listening comprehension. The study examined students' attitudes towards teachers with American-accented English (a native speaker model) and Korean-accented English (a nonnative speaker model). A matched-guise technique was used. A Korean American individual recorded texts in both American-accented English and Korean-accented English. The study randomly assigned 312 Grade 6 Korean students to listen to one of these two-recorded oral texts and their comprehension was examined. Next, all of the students listened to both accented-English tapes and their attitudes towards the two speakers (which were in fact the same speaker) were examined. Although the popular belief appeared to assume that nonnative accented English would produce a negative effect on students' oral skills, the results failed to find any differences in student performance in terms of comprehension. However, the Korean children thought that the American-accented English guise had better pronunciation, was relatively more confident in her use of English, would focus more on fluency than on accuracy, and would use less Korean in the English class. The students also expressed a preference to have the American-accented English guise as their English teacher.

### Research Questions

The present study aimed at examining the effect of the NESTs and the NNESTs on secondary students' achievement in the speaking skill and to examine whether or not the native-ness of the teachers affected the communicative range, accuracy, fluency and the pronunciation of the learners' speech acts.

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. What is the effect of non-native English speaking teachers in comparison with the native English-speaking teachers on students' achievement in the overall speaking skill?
2. What is the effect of non-native English speaking teachers in comparison with the native English-speaking teachers on students' achievement in the communicative range, accuracy, fluency and pronunciation?

### Research Approach

The present study used the Ex Post Facto design to explore possible effects of the teachers' native-ness on students' achievements in speaking skills. It was felt that this design was the most appropriate one since the independent variable in this study was an attribute rather

than an active variable. This design then focused first on the effect, and attempted to determine what caused the observed effect.

**Subjects of the Study**

The targeted population consisted of 6 NESTs (2 Australians, 2 Canadians, an American and a British), 6 NNESTs (2 Egyptians, an Iraqi, a Jordanian, a Tunisian, and a Moroccan), and their students (196 10th graders) in the Institute of Applied Technology (IAT) in the UAE. All non-native teachers hold bachelor degrees in the English language in addition to a diploma in teaching English while the native English teachers hold also the same degree, but not necessarily in English language. Like the non-native English teachers, the

native teachers have TEFL certificates; and have been teaching in the UAE for three years at least. All teachers agreed to take part in the study and responded positively to the researcher’s invitation.

However, in order not to disturb the teaching and the school schedule, it was decided to use the cluster sampling and use all grade 10 sections as a sample of the study. Then sections that were taught by native English teachers (1,3,4,6,7 and 10) with a total number of 103 students were considered as one group. The second group consisted of all sections that non-native teachers taught; these were 2,5,8, 9,11 and 12. Table 1 below stipulates the number of the subjects and their percentage to the total number of 10<sup>th</sup> graders.

**Table (1): Numbers and Percentages of the Subjects of the Study**

Native groups: taught by native speakers					Nonnative Groups: taught by non-native speaker					Total	
Teacher	Nativity	Sections	No. of students	%	Teacher	Nativity	Sections	No. of students	%	Teachers	Students
1	N1	10.01	17	8.7%	1	NN1	10.02	16	8.2%		
2	N2	10.03	16	8.2%	2	NN2	10.05	16	8.2%		
3	N3	10.04	17	8.7%	3	NN3	10.08	17	8.7%		
4	N4	10.06	18	9.2%	4	NN4	10.09	16	8.2%		
5	N5	10.07	17	8.7%	5	NN5	10.11	15	7.7%		
6	N6	10.10	18	9.2%	6	NN6	10.12	13	6.6%		
Sum	6	6	103	52.6%	Total	6	6	93	47.4%	<b>12</b>	<b>196</b>

**The Context of the Study**

As indicated earlier, the study took place at the Institute of Applied Technology (IAT), which is a group of six public sector secondary schools located in the UAE; the second largest school is in Al Ain. In order to mark the solidity and the uniqueness of the syllabus of the English program, which is one of the most important core subjects at the institute since English is the language of instruction in all other subject areas, only qualified teachers are recruited to implement constructively the standard based curriculum, which has been developed locally. The successful implementation of the English curriculum involves thoughtful planning and hard work at different levels. At the school level, the “English” lead teacher through weekly team meetings and constant classroom visits enforces the integrity and equality of the curriculum delivery in all sections and ensures that all classroom rules apply to all students, curriculum content and standards are also delivered to all students, teaching materials are shared and same assessment tools are used to evaluate students’ performance. The school principal along with the lead teachers also ensures that all teachers will conduct their class with the utmost respect, and sense of community. Furthermore, teachers are constantly enrolled in in-house training sessions to augment their teaching

strategies, to unify the teaching approaches that the teachers use, to meet all evolving needs of the teachers and to ensure the success of the program. At the directorate level, the curriculum specialist designs the curriculum, selects the textbooks, writes the major exams and visits classes for evaluation of teachers and the program. To conclude, across all campuses, teachers of English hold comparable degrees, use same materials and content, implement comparatively same ways of delivery and finally conduct formative and summative assessment forms that the assessment unit at the directorate decides.

**Instrument of the Study**

The instrument used to collect data was a speaking skill achievement test that was in a form of an oral interview between the student and an examiner, and took between 10 and 15 minutes. During the interview the student answered questions asked by the interviewer, spoke at length on a topic selected by the interviewer, gave, and justified his opinions on a range of issues related to that topic. The speaking sessions were also recorded for better and accurate evaluation.

### Validity of the Speaking Test

The researcher developed a speaking test to be used at the end of the first term of the academic year 2008/2009; in other words, the study lasted for 18 weeks. Initially, the speaking test covered everyday life questions that engaged subjects with “question and answer” interview. The test was given to a jury of three TEFL professors, four lead teachers (supervisors) and the English curriculum specialist to decide whether or not the test measured what was planned to test, and whether or not the test was appropriate for the target students. Upon their feedback and suggestions, the final version of the speaking test was proved as described above.

### Reliability of the Speaking Test

The reliability of the speaking test was verified through selecting a sample of 15 students to be assessed by the researcher and, side-by-side, a certified IELTS examiner. Grades given by the researcher and the IELTS examiner were computed to find the correlation degree between marks given by the two assessors. The Pearson correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) was calculated for the speaking test and found to be 0.87.

### Scoring of the Speaking Test

Specific analytical scoring procedures were used to identify smaller units in the students’ speaking achievement test such as communicative range, fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation.

Analytical scoring rubrics were used to assess the achievement in the speaking skill (Appendix A, p. 32). In assessing the students’ speaking skill, the examiner considered this ability in four areas (sub-skills): the maximum mark of each skill was four and the total for the speaking test was out 16 marks. These sub-skills were:

#### a. Communicative Range

This measures the ability to speak without too many pauses and hesitations. It is also to do with how easily and clearly ideas are presented by the examinee.

#### b. Overall Fluency

This refers to the ability to express oneself intelligibly, reasonably accurately and without undue hesitation.

#### c. Accuracy

The interviewer judges the variety of grammar the candidate uses and how correctly s/he uses it. So, the range of tenses as well as the appropriate use of them is important in all parts of the Speaking Test.

#### d. Pronunciation

Here, it is not only individual words or minimal pairs but also the whole sentences are considered. The interviewer considers how easily he can understand what the student is saying.

### Procedures of the study

Below is a step-by-step description of the procedures followed in the study.

1. The researcher reviewed the literature related to native and non-native English speaking teachers in the non-English speaking countries.
2. The researcher defined the population of this study.
3. The sample of the study was divided into two groups as per their teachers’ nativity students who were taught by NESTs and those who were taught by NNESTs. It is important to point out here that the subjects of the study were distributed in their sections according to their achievement in the placement test that was conducted in the school at the beginning of the year in early September. The researcher is confident that students across the classes were at the same level of English as the mean scores of all sections in the placement test is relatively close as shown by the school records.
4. The speaking achievement test was developed in the light of the objectives of grade ten curriculum and in coordination with the Evaluation and Assessment Department and other lead teachers. Analytical scoring rubric was developed to assess students’ achievements in speaking skills. Analytical scoring rather than holistic rubric was used so that a separate score was given for each number of features of a task. The scoring rubric was introduced to the teachers at the beginning of the semester to familiarize students with such a method of assessment.
5. The speaking test was conducted at the end of term I of the academic year 2008/2009, the study lasted for 18 weeks. The speaking sessions were carried out in the school and recorded for further assessment. The researcher and the IELTS certified examiner attended the speaking sessions. Students were informed about the instructions and procedures of the speaking test; they were also assured that all answers would be anonymous and totally confidential. Based on the analytical scoring rubric, each subject was assessed in each skill, and an overall mark was also given.

### Statistical Analysis of the Data

The researcher used the appropriate statistical measures to analyze the collected data. The Statistical Package for Social Studies (SPSS) was used to calculate and find any significant statistical difference between the mean scores of the students who were taught by NESTs, and those who were taught by NNESTs. Inferential statistics (t-test) for two dependent samples was utilized in order to test if there were any significant differences between the achievement and the teachers’ linguistic background (NNESTs Vs NESTs). Descriptive statistics including mean scores and standard deviations were used to measure the

achievement in speaking of the respondents. Means and standard deviation were computed to answer the research questions.

**The results of the study**

The results of the study are presented below in accordance with the questions of the study.

**Results Related to Question One:** *What is the effect of non-native English speaking teachers in comparison with the native English-speaking*

*teachers on students' achievement in the speaking skill?*

The study showed that there was no statistically significant difference among students' speaking achievement test scores amongst 10<sup>th</sup> grade students at  $\alpha = 0.05$  due to the teacher's mother tongue.

Table 2 below presents the means, standard deviation and the results of the t-test of the students' scores in the speaking test for all sections in both groups.

**Table (2):** t-test Results of the Students' Means Scores and Standard Deviation in the Speaking Test

Source	No.	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	DF	t-value	Sig
Native	103	13.81	3.89	0.38			
Non native	93	13.70	4.17	0.43	194	0.186	0.628

Table 2 showed that there was no statistically significant difference ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) between the mean scores of the sections that were taught by NESTs and those that were taught by NNESTs (T-value= 0.186, sig = 0.682). The mean score of the former was 13.81 with a standard deviation of 3.89 while the latter was 13.70 with a standard deviation of 4.17.

**Results Related to Question Two:** *What is the effect of non-native English speaking teachers in comparison with the native English-speaking teachers on students' achievement in the communicative range, accuracy, fluency and pronunciation?*

Table 3 below shows the analytical assessment of the speaking test for each of the sub-skill in the scoring rubrics. Scores in bold represent the highest score in the row, and scores in *italic* are significantly lower scores within the sub skills.

**Table (3):** t- test Results of the Students' Mean Scores and Standard Deviations in the Speaking sub skills

Sub skills	Groups	No.	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	DF	t-value	Sig
Communicative- range	N	103	3.84	1.05	0.10	194	-0.658	0.962
	NN	93	<b>3.95</b>	1.11	0.11			
Fluency	N	103	3.67	1.08	0.11	194	0.274	0.619
	NN	93	3.57	1.18	0.12			
Accuracy	N	101	2.73	0.80	7.95E-02	191	-3.314	0.005
	NN	92	3.09	0.67	7.02E-02			
Pronunciation	N	103	3.61	1.05	0.10	194	3.314	0.018
	NN	93	3.16	0.82	8.55E-02			
<b>Sum</b>	N	103	13.81	3.89	0.38	194	0.131	0.701
	NN	93	13.73	4.07	0.42			

A close look at the data in Table 3 reveals that there was a significant correlation between native-ness and accuracy in the speaking test in favor of the NNESTs and a significant correlation between native-ness and pronunciation in favor of the NESTs. However, the results showed that there was no statistically significant difference ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) between the mean scores of the native group and those of the non-native group in the rest of the sub skills: communicative range (T-value= -.658, sig = 0.962) and fluency (T-value= 0.274, sig = 0.619) of speaking test. The mean scores for the native group in the communicative range was 3.84 with a standard deviation of 1.05, while it was 3.95 with a standard deviation of 1.08 in the non-native group.

**Discussion**

The native speaker of English is defined as the one whose first language is English which s/he learned in their earliest childhood and have spoken it since then. In contrast the non-native speaker teacher is identified as the one whose first language is other than English (in the context of this study it is Arabic) and learned English as a second language.

As seen earlier, the results presented in Table 2 revealed that there was no statistically significant difference between the students' mean scores in the speaking achievement exam between the groups that were taught by the native English speaking teachers and those that were taught by the non native English speaking teachers. Another interesting finding was that with an overall average of more than 13 (out of 16), the general performance of the subjects was pretty good as

indicated in the holistic assessment, but their performance in the discrete areas was slightly varied. In other words, they performed somehow successfully in certain skills but in others they seemed to struggle. However, by analyzing the speaking skills discreetly and discretely, a better evaluation of the subjects' oral proficiency could be achieved.

Based on these results, one may conclude that the super communicative competency of the NESTs does not put them in advantage over their non-native colleagues, as there was no significant difference between students' scores in both groups due to the teachers' nativity. In other words, the super level of proficiency of the NESTs in the study did not benefit their students to have better speaking skills than those who were taught by the NNESTs. As such, this finding defuses one of the most central advantages of the native speakers that have been reported by many researchers (Árva and Medgyes, 2000; Madrid 2004). That is the ability of NESTs to speak English better than their nonnative counterparts and use it as a natural means of communication in class does not have a significant impact on their students' speaking abilities. This also echoes in Braine (1999), where none of the participants who were NNESTs felt competent enough to teach speaking, pronunciation, and listening in an ESL context. Tang's (1997) participants also expressed the same discrepancy, indicating that the native speakers were superior to NNESTs in speaking, pronunciation and listening.

Unexpectedly, this finding is also inconsistent with many studies that are based on students' and teachers' perceptions. These study imply that the NESTs play a major role in facilitating and improving the learners' communicative competence. For example, Luck 2001's study, which was conducted in two secondary schools in Hong Kong and used a survey to solicit judgmental feedback from students, revealed that NESTs were viewed as a valid commodity to students' communication ability. However, in this study the overall analysis of the students' speaking test showed that both groups almost had the same level of the language proficiency as shown on the students' results.

The finding supports Mydges' (1992) argument about the correlation between proficiency and efficiency. Medgyes thinks that the statement "The more proficient, the more efficient" is illogical because if the language competency were the only variable involved in the teaching skill, NESTs (even without qualifications or proper training) would always be better than non-NESTs. Many studies all over the world and every day practices have shown that this is not the case; other variables and credentials should be considered in teaching. He believes that a non-native speaker's competence is limited, and that only a reduced group can reach near-native speaker's competence. Then if the teacher's efficiency is judged only on their linguistic

proficiency, only NESTs are capable of teaching English; the status of English teaching all over the world at different levels does not reflect that. There are many successful NNESTs in both EFL and ESL contexts.

It is not possible to discuss the finding of the study without going back to the definition of the native English-speaking teacher. The term "native speaker" itself is elusive, and fails to take into account the different varieties of the language and of its users. In fact, localization of the English language has already occurred in 'outer circle countries' such as China, Korea, Japan and Russia (Kachura, 1992). These developments suggest that new avenues of opportunity may be opening not only as speaking teachers but also as language assessors. This finding emphasizes the perception that NNESTs can serve as a role model of successful language learners and that the context in which English is taught as an international language should be taken into consideration when decisions are made on the efficiency of the teacher.

Another interesting finding of the study is that the subjects' speaking ability is good. The feasible explanation of this finding would be the fact that the communicative language teaching approach is widely embraced at the school. A second reason may be attributed to the fact that English is the medium of instruction in all other core subjects. This has enforced and motivated the learners to use and practice English, and maximized their exposure to the English Language in a set of daily life situation. The school policy that enforces "English Only" environment may also contribute to the good scores in the English-speaking test. This notion is also echoed and was characterized by Phillipson (1992, p. 185) as subscribing to the notion that "implicit in the monolingual tenet is the belief that an exclusive focus on English will maximize the learning of the language, irrespective of whatever other language the learner may know". However, enforcing monolingual learning environment does not mean that L1 should be completely banned as many studies have recently revealed the benefits and the necessity of the efficient use of L1 in English speaking classes. However, it is not the aim of the study to investigate the effect of using L1 on students' performance.

In order to improve speaking skills, speaking must be structurally taught in the classroom. Opportunities for speaking in and out of the classroom should be secured constantly and systematically, and they require structure and planning from the part of the teachers. English language teachers at the IAT are required to present an outline for creating effective speaking lessons and for assessing the students' speaking skills; they are well qualified and well trained. They hold bachelor degrees plus diplomas in teaching English; they are also systematically supervised and coached by the team leader, which most probably enable them to

engage students effectively in the speaking classes. Additionally, the NNETS in the study seemingly have an excellent command of English (*They sat for language tests and were interviewed prior to recruitment*). Probably, working side-by-side with NESTs has also enhanced their linguistic and communication skills. Then, this mixture of English teachers provides the students with a reproduction model that further their students' comprehension and help them to become more attentive observers of language users. This may explain why the subjects of the study scored good marks in the test and assumingly better than their counterparts in other schools.

Several educators assert that what teachers, regardless to whether they are native or non-native, know and can do has the most important influence on what students learn. Beyond enhancing students' motivation and attitudes, language teachers play a key role on students' achievement in all skills, but most importantly in the productive skills, specifically speaking. The teachers in the study are competent and use modern trends in teaching; they usually use communicative materials and activities that enhance students' speaking abilities, guide the learners to speak comprehensibly in a way that is appropriate for one's purpose and the target audience, and are able to coach the students to use the proper idioms and expressions that reinforce their speaking ability. The language teacher must know the target language sound system well enough as s/he provides the example and to be imitated by his/her students. This means that the teacher must use freely the significant sounds, syntactic constructions, good repertoire and many of the details of pronunciations and idiomatic expressions of the target language.

Assessing speaking systematically with a clear-cut method also enhanced students' performance in the study. Students were provided with the criteria for evaluating their speaking skills; so they understood ahead of time what was expected from them. Knowing the method and the criteria for assessing the speaking skill, teachers of the study most probably planned well for the speaking lessons and had prepared their students for the speaking test. Perhaps, this had a great impact on students by making them enjoy taking the test and feel comfortable in the speaking test.

### Sub-test Analysis

The results of the sub-tests of the speaking test, which are shown in Table 3 showed that there were slight differences between the two groups regarding the communicative range and grammatical range and accuracy. The mean scores for the native group were higher than these of the non-native group in the communicative range, while the mean scores of the students in non-native group were slightly higher than that of the native group in the grammatical range and accuracy.

This is in line with what Samimy and Brutt-Griffler (1999) reported on the difference between the two groups of teachers. Their study reported that NESTs used authentic English in interacting with students and emphasized communication rather than exam preparation. In other words, they used the fluency-oriented approach. The NNETS, on the other hand, reported to be aware of the psychological perspectives of learning, more efficient in teaching, but emphasizing exam preparation; the emphasis here is on the accuracy. This may explain why students in the study who were coached by the NNETS scored higher in grammar and accuracy.

In the next section, the researcher will present the results of the sub-skills and a brief discussion on each skill.

### a. Communicative range

Communicative range tends to measure the ability to speak without too many pauses and hesitations and how easily and clearly the subjects of the study present ideas. The analysis showed that there was no significant difference between the group taught by the NNETS and the other group. Since the IAT adopts communicative syllabus and enforces good communicative teaching practices such as student-centered approach, seating arrangements that encourage co-operative, communicative pair-work and group-work, students internalized the communicative strategies and were able to communicate effectively. The communicative strategies are well taught and learned; this, in my opinion, is what extended the communicative range of the subjects of the study and in particular the NNETS group, as the NNETS usually follow the syllabus (the textbook) and are good at preparing students for exams. It is not enough to speak English in the classroom to guarantee that student communicative competency will improve; communicative teaching strategies are what make the difference.

However, it is now recognized that English is used for international communication and spoken by more non-native speakers than native speakers (Jenkins, 2000). This means that the focus has shifted away from the intelligibility of non-native speakers to native speakers towards intelligibility in the interaction between non-native speakers. In fact, the current status of English as a language of international communication has caused language professionals to reconsider whether native speakers should be the only acceptable standard and the only "norm maker" to be emulated by the learners. Jenkins (1998, p. 119) pointed out that 'the acquisition of a "native-like" accent would be no longer the ultimate objective". Instead, the objective has become to be able to communicate successfully with other non-native speakers of English from different L1 backgrounds.



The present study adds to previous evidence (Flege and Fletcher, 1992, Bent and Bradlow, 2003) that intelligibility depends not just on the talker's speech, but is also dependent on the listener. Thus, the measure of intelligibility should be considered in terms of the talker-listener relationship (Bent and Bradlow, 2003). In other words, the fact that a speaker may be more or less intelligible depends on who the listener is, rather than solely basing on the speaker's utterance. What this does imply for EFL classroom is that NNEST with high level of proficiency can be as effective, if not more, as NESTs in teaching speaking English. This should be reflected on TEFL/TESL curricula and materials although no significant changes have been made so far in practical sense.

Thus, we need to show our students that a reasonable level of English proficiency with a bit of an accent does function in the global community. There are many Arabs (NNESTs) in business and academic circles who are professionally successful using their command of English. We should emphasize that they are the products of English language teaching in UAE or/ and any other Arab countries. The number of successful EFL learners is still small, but they can inspire other learners. Arabic speaking EFL teachers themselves have wonderful opportunities to serve as role models through team teaching with NESTs as it is the case at many public and private institutes in the UAE and other Gulf countries. It is also important for the NNESTs to convince students and parents of their qualifications and abilities by improving their linguistic and communicative competencies. It is very crucial to define the goal of language learning as partial fluency, not as native proficiency; yet students' desire to speak as fluently as native speaker should be respected and considered because it is part of integrative motivation. However, under the circumstances where English is a de facto compulsory subject at the school level, we should set an achievable goal for the majority of students (Takada, 2000). It will give students a sense of accomplishment and allow teachers a fair evaluation of their job performance.

Teaching speaking skills in English as an international language should be based on a whole set of different assumptions of those used in English speaking countries. The narrow view of intelligibility which focuses on one standard variety of English tied to British or English have been broaden to include all varieties as long as international intelligibility is achieved. This means that EFL learners attempt to make themselves understood not only to other non native speakers, but also to native speakers of English. Jesry (2005) argued that it is vital that students learning English for international communication learn to speak it as intelligibly and comprehensibly as possible – not necessarily like natives, but well enough to be understood. And, it is equally important that they learn to understand it when spoken by people with different

accents speaking in natural conditions. In the same vein, Jenkins (2000) recently claimed that the 'research on intelligibility of L2 accents has been approached mainly or entirely from the perspective of NS' (p. 94). Thus, many important issues regarding speech intelligibility, such as how various L1 backgrounds influence intelligibility to listeners of the same or different L1 backgrounds, remain to be discovered. On the other hand, this does not mean that teaching non native learners to sound non-native but more time should be spent in improving the communicative competencies and strategies rather than spending much time imitating the teacher and to make them sound like native speaker. As Lado (1964) pointed out that a good model does not guarantee a good imitator.

## **b. Pronunciation**

The analysis of the scores showed that students of the NESTs performed significantly better than those of the NNESTs. This may be attributed to the fact that NESTs represent the best model for students to imitate, and learners usually like to sound like native speakers. On the other hand, it is obvious that the NNESTs are marked by a foreign accent that many of their learners are likely to internalize. According to Mydges (1992), each NNEST has his/her difficulties when using or teaching English; the most frequent difficulty is pronunciation and speaking. Pronunciation is often an area of teaching that is generally neglected by both groups of teachers, and is also avoided by the NNESTs for different reasons. Medgyes states that they avoid using alternative sources to teach pronunciation such as radio, video, cassette recorder, etc. The reason is that they try to hide their deficiencies; it is a way to save face in the classroom.

Furthermore, there are a number of reasons that make teachers avoid teaching pronunciation. Firstly, many features of pronunciation are difficult to teach (or at least that is the perception). Secondly, unlike a grammatical or functional area of language, it can be quite difficult to build a lesson around a pronunciation point and, therefore, such points are add-ons to a unit in most of the textbooks or a lesson in the class. Thirdly, teachers often feel under prepared to teach pronunciation, and many seem to struggle to learn the phonemic alphabet (although this is certainly less true of many non-native-speaker teachers).

Preferences to NESTs in teaching is also echoed in Zacharias's 2003 study in which he investigated the teachers' beliefs about the role of the native speakers in English language teaching. He found out that the respondents believed that pronunciation and speaking skills were those for which native speakers were preferable, with 93% and 88% of responses respectively. This favoring of native speakers to teach pronunciation and speaking skills might reflect common misconceptions about native speakers; many people believe that NESTs from the Inner Circle speak perfect

and standard English. This conviction is most probably stemmed from a lack of awareness about Standard English. The results of the present study indicated that achievement in speaking test was not attributed to the teacher variable, but rather to the teaching behaviors.

As matters stand, perfect pronunciation is only marginal in the globalized world; intelligible communication is the goal (Morley, 1991). Instead of focusing on reproducing native or a native like utterance, the researcher calls for shifting the teaching towards equipping the learners with communication strategies by making them aware of these strategies and use them in their communication. Limiting pronunciation skills to stress, intonation and tone can damage learners' self-confidence, impede social interactions, negatively affect estimations of a speaker's credibility and abilities, and restrict our students' chances for success on the whole (Rababah, 2001). This means that teachers (whether NESTs or NNESTs) should possess the knowledge and skills to deliver effective pronunciation lessons. They should be able to identify that depending on their first language; students have different requirements, difficulties and probably strategies in learning pronunciation.

No doubt that pronunciation affects intelligible communication, yet Lee's (2004) study showed that the degree of intelligibility was greater in the cases where the speaker and listener shared the same L1 than in those cases where they did not. The study also highlighted the importance of the level of proficiency on the intelligibility; the higher the level of proficiency is, the more understandable the speaker is. The high-proficiency non native talkers' intelligibility was higher than that of the native speakers when the native languages were matched between talker and listener. This matched L1 benefit could be explained by the fact that their overall shared phonetic and phonological knowledge cover both languages -their native language and target language, whereas NN and NS pair or different L1 pair covers only the target language. Also, this is possibly because the NS uses more assimilation, elision, and maybe speaks faster than the NNS.

#### **c. Fluency**

Fluency sub-test aims at measuring the subjects' ability to express oneself intelligibly, reasonably accurately and without undue hesitation. The analysis revealed that there was no significant difference in students' performance in fluency sub-test due to the nativity of the teachers. A feasible justification could be that both groups of teachers of the study used communicative language strategies in their teaching which, according to Brown (2003), can help learners communicate fluently with whatever proficiency they happen to have and at any given time, including the ability to use speed, pauses, and hesitations efficiently. Another reason that may contribute to this result is the teachers' perceptions of fluency; they do understand

that fast speed does not necessarily mean fluency and seemingly have communicated this to their students. The students then must realize that it is fine to speak slowly as long as it is done at a reasonable rate.

One of the biggest challenges in teaching ESL is finding ways to assist learners develop their oral fluency. This is particularly true in EFL contexts where students tend to share a common language and have little or no exposure to English outside the classroom (Bresnihan & Stoops, 1996). However, teachers can play a significant role in encouraging students to speak in English through engaging activities that assist them in bridging the gap between their written materials and speaking fluently in English.

#### **d. Accuracy**

Accuracy is the ability to produce correct sentences using correct grammar and vocabulary. The study revealed that there was a significant difference in students' achievement in the accuracy sub test in favor of the NNESTs. This is not surprising as that grammar is the favorite field for the NNESTs. This is reflected in Tang's (1997) study who concluded that "NNESTs were felt to be associated with accuracy rather than fluency" (p. 578). They use different language activities and work where the primary purpose is to help students achieve accurate perception and production of a target item that can be a sound, a word, or a sentence structure. Many teachers and researchers believe that focusing on accuracy does not help the learners to improve their communicative competency. However, though overuse of accuracy activities can cripple the language development and may make the students lose their confidence because of the teachers' overcorrection, accuracy is essential in language development. What teachers need to know is where accuracy should be stressed over fluency and vice versa.

#### **Conclusion**

The English language is a common language and is spoken in many countries. It is considered as a universal language that many people, institutions and countries are competing to learn and use it as lingua franca. In fact, many people view learning a language as learning how to speak it. Hence, emphasis has been shifted to teaching the speaking skills, especially with the raise of the communicative approach. Then, it is widely accepted that native English speaking teachers are better than the nonnative English-speaking teachers in teaching speaking. This study illustrates that the nativeness of teachers does not have a significant impact on students' performance in speaking. In terms of pronunciation, it is the researcher's view that students can largely benefit from exposure to all sorts of accents and that in the globalized world what matters is the intelligibility of the speech acts rather than the perfect pronunciation.

What becomes apparent in the literature is that both groups of teachers bring distinct and beneficial attributes as professional in the language classroom. In studying the impact or the differences between the two groups, or asking who makes a better teacher, we assume to an extent that teaching quality depends on whether teachers are native or non-native speakers, as if one group is naturally better able to teach. If this is accepted, why should teachers gain a qualification or enroll on professional development activities if they are naturally more or less skilled than others? The conclusion is that a trained, proficient and kind teacher who enjoys his/her job will be effective and popular with students, regardless where they are from. Equally, a teacher who does not understand his/her students' needs, uses traditional methods, and is unable to provide interesting, fun lessons will be unpopular and will not enjoy their job.

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