

**EFL Learners' Perceptions on Different Accents of English and (Non)Native English-Speaking Teachers in Pronunciation Teaching: A Case Study Through the Lens of English as an International Language**

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**Abstract**

Although Turkey is a country where English is taught as an international language (EIL), very few research studies have focused specifically on learners' attitudes toward different accents and pronunciations. Therefore, this paper attempts to highlight Turkish university preparatory school students' perceptions on different English pronunciations and accents and on native and non-native speakers' and teachers' English pronunciation. It also aims to point out the in-class/learning environment factors that impact pronunciation learning in English classes. Based on a review of the literature analyzing attitudes towards different pronunciation and accents, online surveys and focus group interviews with 10 volunteers were conducted to collect data for this study. The survey results revealed that a great number of participants believe that correct pronunciation is crucial in communication. Also, all the in-class/learning environment factors had significant impact on the participants' perceived pronunciation. Interview results indicated that most learners agreed that as long as a pronunciation is intelligible, it can be considered as good. In addition, despite admitting the positive effect of native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) on their pronunciation, most participants did not ignore the positive influence of non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) on their pronunciation improvement. Because most participants indicated that they wanted to receive more pronunciation-focused instruction, this study has some implications for the institutions and material designers that may reconsider the weighing and variety of pronunciation practice when compared to other language skills.

**Keywords:** English as an International Language, pronunciation, accent, native English-speaking teachers, non-native English-speaking teachers

**Introduction**

Around the world, we witness a dramatic increase in the number of people who speak English as a foreign language, and it is not surprising that this rapid increase, over the past centuries, has changed the importance given to

language teaching in countries. Canagarajah (2007) underlined that the population of non-native English Speakers (NNES) outnumbered the number of people who use English as their sole communication tool, traditionally known as native English speakers (NESs). In short, as Widdowson (1994) points out, English is no longer the property of native speakers, but of everybody who speaks it.

According to Kachru's categorization of Three Concentric Circles of English (see, Kachru, 1985, 1988, 1992), Turkey is in the Expanding Circle since in Turkey, English has no historical and official status and it is taught to maintain different functions in different areas in the country and to be able to communicate on international platforms (Selvi, 2011). Kızıltepe (2000) illustrated that Turkish learners mostly learn English for instrumental purposes such as finding a job after university and using the Internet. Regarding the information given earlier and imaging the same scenario for all the countries belonging to the Expanding Circle, it is understandable that as the number of NNESs keeps increasing, the perceptions of the learners toward the language and its components will not be the same as noticed decades ago.

There is some evidence as to why we do not refer to only one standard, norm-providing and dominant English. Jenkins (2006) discusses the terms related to this issue such as World Englishes (WEs) – which she defines as “an umbrella term covering all varieties of English” (p. 159) or new varieties appearing in Kachru's Outer Circle. There is also the notion of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) which refers to - “any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option” (Seidlhofer, 2011, p. 7). Due to the prevalence of many terms defining different contexts, it may not be pedagogically appropriate to support the power of British, American, Australian or Canadian English (Kachru's Inner Circle speakers) as the best English in language classrooms, when we consider meaningful language use. In other words, in a globalized world, while it is being discussed that we no longer have Inner Circle countries' language norms, it may be worth our while to investigate how learners feel about this shift.

As this is the case for some time, beside all the language skills that have been discussed for many decades, learners' perceptions of different pronunciation and accent has been an area that still requires deeper investigation. However, there has been less investigation of pronunciation so far when compared to other skills such as grammar and writing (Bai & Yuan, 2018). Sifakis and Sougari (2005) mention how crucial this area is since without adequate pronunciation, learners may experience communication breakdown in oral communication which then results in a decrease of self-confidence in language learning.

Although some research in different countries and in Turkey has been carried out on the learners' perceptions on native and non-native teachers (Çelik, 2006; Demir, 2011; Koşar, 2018; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005; Şahin, 2005; Todd & Pojanapunya, 2009), few studies have investigated the Turkish

learners' perceptions toward English pronunciation and accent as well as in-class/learning environment factors influencing their own practice in class.

Therefore, this paper attempts to explore Turkish learners' attitudes toward pronunciation and accent of English, the factors influencing their attitudes as well as perceptions on native and non-native speakers/teacher through the lens of the status of World Englishes and ELF. More specifically, this study aims to contribute to this growing area of research by exploring if changing trends in English that we discussed earlier has had any effect on learners' perception of "good" or "bad" English pronunciation. In light of this, the main research questions addressed in this paper are:

1. How important are pronunciation and accent to Turkish EFL learners?
2. What are their perceptions toward native speakers' and non-native speakers' pronunciation in English?
3. What are the external factors that impact pronunciation or accent in learning English?
4. What are their perceptions toward native and non-native teachers in terms of improving their pronunciation in English?

## **Review of literature**

### ***Importance of Pronunciation and Accent***

Pronunciation, which has also been referred to as a "Cinderella area" by Kelly (1969) due to its complexity, has been ignored in language classrooms for a long time while it is one of the skills that is required to communicate with people speaking that foreign language as the language itself needs to be understandable for the listener. Otherwise, it is quite probable to witness communication breakdowns with unintelligible and ambiguous expressions. Moreover, as Morley (1998) points out, limited proficiency in pronunciation will lead learners to lose their self-confidence, which will definitely affect them negatively.

Particularly in Turkish contexts, learners experience great difficulties in acquiring English pronunciation due to their mother tongue effect (Demirezen, 2010) as in their mother tongue they pronounce each letter as it is. Among different perspectives of accent, in this study, accent will be accepted as "various types of speech patterning that all individuals possess when speaking a language" (p. 124) according to Ballard and Winke's (2017) interpretation of accent inspired by Derwing and Munro's (2009) definition. In short, pronunciation and accent will be used together and refer to very similar concepts.

A growing number of scholars (Derwing & Munro, 2009; Jenkins, 2006; Kachru, 1997; Levis, 2005) have underlined the significance of global intelligibility and have believed that intelligibility is more valuable than a particular native accent. More importantly, Jenkins (2000) is of the view that

NNESs do not need to sound like NESs, and rather than this approach, it is expected from them to speak the language by reflecting local linguistic and cultural identities. Levis (2005) links all these expectations to the classroom implications and underlines that pronunciation teaching should concentrate more on features that are crucial in understanding and focus less on those which are relatively “unhelpful” (p.371).

### ***Students’ Perceptions on Different Accents of English***

Although there have been relatively few studies on the perception of NNESs of different accents and pronunciations of English, some studies attempted to shed light on how EFL learners perceived different accents and pronunciation, and they have suggested that learners mostly held positive attitudes toward native-speaker accents and some of those studies have revealed that learners also had negative stereotypical attitudes toward NNES accents (Cenoz & Lecumberri, 1999; Hartshorn, 2013; Kim, 2008). In the Iranian context, Sa’d (2018) investigated perceptions of non-native English speakers toward accented speech in some part of his study. He found out that the participants perceived native-speaker accent quite positively, and that they had very clear negative attitudes as well as negative stereotypes toward non-native English speakers’ accent. The participants expressed that they wanted to sound similar to native speakers while speaking English since they considered them as “the best model of English accent”.

In a similar vein, Buckingham (2014) made an informed observation that Omani university students perceive pronunciation as an important component of English language, and that they prefer British and US accents and accept those as correct pronunciation due to the exposure of coursebooks presenting listening materials with British or US accents. This study is in keeping with a study conducted by Butler (2007), revealing that although the study did not find any significant difference in learners’ performance between American-accented English and Korean-accented English, it emerged that there were significant differences in learners’ attitudes toward both accents as they saw American accents as superior.

The studies of Yook and Lindemann (2013) in a Korean context and McKenzie (2008) in a Japanese context had similar results in terms of social attractiveness of the local accent (Korean and Japanese) as learners rated these local English accents most positively in terms of social attractiveness. However, in both studies, they demonstrated a clear preference for US and standard British English in terms of clarity and correctness when compared to their local English varieties.

Although studies note that EFL learners claim to prefer native speaker accents, they are not quite successful in differentiating those from non-native accents (Ladegaard, 1998; Timmis, 2002). In order to explain this contrast, Timmis (2002) states that learners rejected using the informal samples in the

study, probably because “those students who aspire to native-speaker spoken norms have an idealized notion of what these norms are” (p. 248).

### ***Native English-Speaking Teachers (NEST) and Non-native English-Speaking Teachers (NNEST)***

In his paper, Selvi (2011) explains how English has become a powerful tool used in almost every stage of a child’s education, in higher education and in people’s professional life. Therefore, it is quite an obvious reason why Turkey has become an attractive state for English language teachers both native and non-native.

Before delving into learners’ perceptions towards NESTs and NNESTs, it is crucial for us to define who the native and non-native-speaking teachers are. Although, there is an ongoing discussion to differentiate NESTs and NNESTs (Bonfiglio, 2010; Canagarajah, 1999; Davies, 1991; Medgyes, 1994), there is that one characteristic mentioned by Cook (1999) as “indisputable” in every definition made for native speakers and that is “the language learnt first” (p. 187). Saraceni (2015), in keeping with this differentiation, quotes Davies (2013) calling that characteristic as “unchangeable” (p. 175). Sharing the same view with him, in his chapter, Saraceni (2015) underlines that being born in the language and living with it does not guarantee the acquisition of some other language components such as fluency, creativity and ability to translate. These components change from speaker to speaker regardless of the fact that one is a native speaker or not. Alptekin (2002) supports the ideas mentioned above by stating that in contexts where we speak of WEs or ELF, language teachers should be successful “bilinguals with intercultural understanding and knowledge” (p. 63).

After discussing that the only “indisputable” and “unchangeable” characteristic of a native speaker is the language learnt first, in this study, NESTs are defined as English speakers who are born in the Inner Circle (Britain, the US, Australia and Canada) and, as expected, who acquire English as their L1. However, NNESTs are defined as speakers who are not born in an English-speaking country, in this context, Turkish teachers. These two definitions were made clear and carefully explained to the participant learners before they answered the questionnaire.

### ***Students’ Perceptions Toward NESTs and NNESTs Teaching Pronunciation***

Despite the ongoing discussions on ELF, WEs and the rapid increase of non-native English speakers especially in the Expanding Circle, this belief in native-speaker superiority is so much rooted among non-native language instructors that there are some recent studies that conclude even NNESTs perceive themselves as inferior in certain areas of English (Bernat, 2008; Ma, 2012; Rajagopalan, 2005; Suarez, 2000). There is no doubt that this feeling of

inferiority and the comparative evaluations by institutions will take some time to disappear with more awareness raising studies.

After the shift towards the communicative approach, in terms of pronunciation, intelligibility and functional communication have gained particular importance (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 1996). Considering this shift and recent definitions of NESTs and NNESTs and World Englishes, attaining a native-like pronunciation has lost its validity in the Inner and Expanding Circles. This change in learner goals is also pointed out in one of the fallacies mentioned in Kachru's (1996) work called *World Englishes: Agony and Ecstasy*. With these changes in mind, in order to make a contribution to the ongoing debate that focuses on strengths and weaknesses of NESTs and NNESTs, we need to use the lens of learners. More specifically, regarding accent and pronunciation, there are studies that conclude that learners prefer NESTs (Boyle, 1997; Coşkun, 2011; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2002).

Noting some studies that stand in favor of NNESTs, Samimy and Brutt-Griffler (1999) mention that NNESTs can not only acquire linguistic competence that NESTs have but also, they can make contributions to a better learning environment by considering the needs of L2 learners more realistically. By the same token, Phillipson (1992) claims that NNESTs have experienced the complex process of learning a foreign language, as a result, they are aware of how the two languages differ and what the problematic parts may be during the learning process. In the same vein, Seidlhofer (1999) contends that having a control over the two languages can be seen as an advantage, and this should lead to "teacher's confidence not insecurity" (p. 238). Further to this, Medgyes (1992) proposes a list where NNESTs are more advantageous: being a good learner model for their students, because of being once a language learner, teaching the learning strategies effectively, being aware of the possible learning problems that learners may face and using learners' mother tongue as a helping tool. In short, in the literature, both groups have their strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, it is always better to see NNESTs as different, not deficit as mentioned in Cook's (1999) paper who further asserts as to why this comparison is not healthy by arguing that "people who speak differently from some arbitrary group are not speaking better or worse, just differently" (p. 194).

## **Method**

### ***Research Design and Procedure***

The current study is an explanatory mixed-method study as it collects data first from a quantitative research tool (an online survey) and then from a qualitative research tool (focus group interview) to refine and elaborate the quantitative findings (Creswell, 2012). In order to keep the variability among the participants as limited as possible, participants were selected through criterion

sampling. There was one criterion for them to be included in the study; which is to be placed in an intermediate level classroom after their performance during English tests in the first semester as perceptions towards different accents and pronunciations might differ according to learners' proficiency level.

As mentioned before, the data were gathered for this study in two sessions: First, a 39-item online survey was used with learners of eight intermediate level classrooms during their lesson time. The items of the questionnaire were gathered from different studies but the ultimate categorization regarding the item numbers was as follows: importance of pronunciation in communication (items 1-13), in-class/learning environment factors that influence pronunciation (items 14-22) and pronunciation/accent and (non-)native speakers (items 23-39). Descriptive statistics analyzing the data of this survey reported means, modes and standard deviations of the items.

Following the administration of the questionnaire, focus group interviews were arranged to investigate the data gathered from the survey. Because the interview was structured, and questions were preset, the themes were used: definition of good pronunciation, negative or positive effects of NESTs and NNESTs on learners' pronunciation and expected attitudes of English learners toward teaching of pronunciation in lessons. This study focused mainly on these themes as these were the most common focus areas of the studies conducted in the field of pronunciations and accents from the learners' perspective. The data of this interview sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed for further analysis.

### ***Participants and Context***

This study was conducted in a preparatory school of a foundation university located in Istanbul, Turkey. Minimum 70% of the course content in the faculties is implemented in English and learners are required to pass the courses to graduate from their programs; therefore, language teaching in the preparatory school of the institution has particular importance.

The participants in the survey were 169 intermediate level EFL students drawn from eight classrooms of the preparatory school of the institution described above. The focus group interview, which is the second phase of the study, targeted 10 voluntary students from the eight classrooms that took part in the online survey. They received an email asking if they would volunteer to participate in a follow-up interview for the research. The volunteers who responded to the email were complete strangers to each other. They were all placed in intermediate level classes after their performance in the first semester. All the participants shared Turkish language as their common mother tongue. The participants had language learning experience with NESTs and NNESTs in different times and contexts. The study was

conducted at a language preparatory program and the age of participants ranged from 18 to 20.

### ***Instrument***

Quantitative data were collected by means of a 39-item online survey which was collated from two different studies. Some of the survey items were adapted from Feyér (2012) and others from Lefkowitz and Hedgcock (2006). The categorization of the questionnaire items was done with reference to the study conducted in the Iranian setting by Sa'd (2018) who additionally investigated the identity issue in his paper. The questionnaire which was translated into Turkish was designed by a 5-point Likert scale items (1 - Strongly disagree, 2 - Disagree, 3 - Neutral, 4 - Agree, 5 - Strongly Agree), and learners were asked to respond to those items.

For the purpose of collecting qualitative data, we carried out a 40-minute interview with a focus group (see Appendix A) of 10 participants using structured interview questions. The interview session was conducted in learners' mother tongue in order to send the message that their use of the English language was not being tested, and that their ideas were valuable. The whole interview was audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis.

## **Results**

### ***Results of the Questionnaire***

Table 1 below provides the summary of descriptive results of the survey as mean, mode and standard deviation. All the 169 participants responded to all the items included in the questionnaire. It is apparent from this table that, in general, participants regarded pronunciation important in communication as the mode is 5 (strongly agree) and 4 (agree) except for the items 7, 8, 10 and 12 where they could not express their opinions either positive or negative. Those items are related to understanding different accents of English and feeling uncomfortable about them.

Notwithstanding the above-stated points, this table presents/notes that the overall response and tendency with regard to the second part of the questionnaire which investigated the in-class factors on their pronunciation were quite high with modes of 4 (agree) and the mean scores of each item. That means all the factors mentioned in the questionnaire have had a strong impact on learners' pronunciation.

The last part of the questionnaire illustrates the highest means and modes obtained for items 31 and 37. In other words, while participants strongly agree that it is acceptable to see English uses different accents around the world, they would like to sound like a person whose native language is English (inner circle citizens). With the lowest mean and mode, item 36, confirms to us that the participants do not judge a Turkish speaker speaking



English with a very strong Turkish accent, and that they do not show negative attitudes towards those speakers.

Table 1

*Descriptive statistics of questionnaire items*

| Item No   | N   | Mean | Mode | Std. Deviation |
|---|-----|------|------|----------------|
| <b>Part 1: Importance of pronunciation in communication</b>                       |     |      |      |                |
| Item 1  | 169 | 4,23 | 5,00 | 0,91           |
| Item 2  | 169 | 3,90 | 4,00 | 0,85           |
| Item 3  | 169 | 3,99 | 4,00 | 0,93           |
| Item 4  | 169 | 4,57 | 5,00 | 0,78           |
| Item 5  | 169 | 4,07 | 4,00 | 0,86           |
| Item 6  | 169 | 3,34 | 4,00 | 1,25           |
| Item 7  | 169 | 3,11 | 3,00 | 0,99           |
| Item 8  | 169 | 2,91 | 3,00 | 1,18           |
| Item 9  | 169 | 3,24 | 4,00 | 1,17           |
| Item 10   | 169 | 3,32 | 3,00 | 1,04           |
| Item 11   | 169 | 3,38 | 4,00 | 1,04           |
| Item 12   | 169 | 3,04 | 3,00 | 1,08           |
| Item 13   | 169 | 3,79 | 4,00 | 1,09           |
| <b>Part 2: In-class/learning environment factors that influence pronunciation</b> |     |      |      |                |
| Item 14   | 169 | 3,75 | 4,00 | 1,06           |
| Item 15   | 169 | 3,78 | 4,00 | 0,98           |
| Item 16   | 169 | 3,98 | 4,00 | 0,98           |
| Item 17   | 169 | 4,05 | 4,00 | 0,91           |
| Item 18   | 169 | 3,87 | 4,00 | 0,93           |
| Item 19   | 169 | 4,00 | 4,00 | 0,87           |
| Item 20   | 169 | 3,78 | 4,00 | 1,03           |
| Item 21   | 169 | 3,87 | 4,00 | 1,03           |
| Item 22   | 169 | 3,77 | 4,00 | 1,01           |
| <b>Part 3: Pronunciation/accents and (non-)native speakers</b>                    |     |      |      |                |
| Item 23   | 169 | 3,91 | 4,00 | 0,95           |
| Item 24   | 169 | 3,09 | 4,00 | 1,20           |
| Item 25   | 169 | 4,08 | 4,00 | 0,86           |
| Item 26   | 169 | 3,06 | 2,00 | 1,14           |
| Item 27   | 169 | 2,99 | 2,00 | 1,17           |
| Item 28   | 169 | 2,72 | 2,00 | 1,16           |
| Item 29   | 169 | 2,79 | 2,00 | 1,15           |
| Item 30   | 169 | 2,58 | 2,00 | 1,13           |
| Item 31   | 169 | 4,28 | 5,00 | 0,94           |
| Item 32   | 169 | 2,55 | 2,00 | 1,23           |
| Item 33   | 169 | 2,71 | 2,00 | 1,19           |
| Item 34   | 169 | 2,38 | 2,00 | 1,22           |
| Item 35   | 169 | 2,16 | 2,00 | 1,12           |
| Item 36   | 169 | 2,37 | 1,00 | 1,36           |

|         |     |      |      |      |
|---------|-----|------|------|------|
| Item 37 | 169 | 4,09 | 5,00 | 1,09 |
| Item 38 | 169 | 3,20 | 3,00 | 1,25 |
| Item 39 | 169 | 3,33 | 4,00 | 1,17 |

*Importance of Pronunciation in Communication*

Table 2 below illustrates how important the participants consider pronunciation in communication in detail with related items and their percentages.

Table 2

*Importance of pronunciation in communication*

| Statements  | 1<br>Strongly<br>Disagree<br>% | 2<br>Disagree<br>% | 3<br>Neutral<br>% | 4<br>Agree<br>% | 5<br>Strongly<br>Agree<br>% |
|---|--------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Pronunciation is important for communication.  | 0.6                            | 6.5                | 9.4               | 36.5            | <b>47.1</b>                 |
| 2. I look up the pronunciation of words.  | 2.4                            | 4.1                | 15.3              | <b>57.6</b>     | 20.6                        |
| 3. Good pronunciation is valued and encouraged in my English class.                                     | 2.4                            | 4.7                | 14.7              | <b>47.6</b>     | 30.6                        |
| 4. If I have good pronunciation, I will be more confident in English.                                   | 0.6                            | 3.5                | 3.5               | 22.9            | <b>69.4</b>                 |
| 5. I make an effort to have good English pronunciation.   | 1.8                            | 2.4                | 15.9              | <b>47.1</b>     | 32.9                        |
| 6. I try to guess where a speaker is from based on their pronunciation.                                 | 8.2                            | 19.4               | 24.1              | <b>26.5</b>     | 21.8                        |
| 7. I can understand different English accents and pronunciation.  | 4.1                            | 22.9               | <b>38.8</b>       | 25.9            | 8.2                         |
| 8. It bothers me if someone's pronunciation is different from someone whose native language is English. | 12.4                           | 26.5               | <b>28.8</b>       | 22.4            | 10.0                        |

|   |     |      |             |             |      |
|---|-----|------|-------------|-------------|------|
| 9. It is much better that English language learners learn English with a native accent. | 8.2 | 20.0 | 25.3        | <b>32.4</b> | 14.1 |
| 10. I often hear English spoken by non-native speakers.                                 | 3.5 | 18.2 | <b>34.7</b> | 29.4        | 14.1 |
| 11. It is enough if I understand the gist of a text.                                    | 4.1 | 17.1 | 27.6        | <b>38.8</b> | 12.4 |
| 12. I can guess where a speaker is from based on their pronunciation.                   | 8.2 | 22.9 | <b>34.7</b> | 25.3        | 8.8  |
| 13. I do not care about someone's pronunciation as long as I can understand.            | 4.1 | 8.8  | 20.6        | <b>36.5</b> | 30.0 |

As seen in Table 2, there are two items that have the highest agreement by the participants: items 1 and 4, which imply that most learners consider pronunciation important and good pronunciation makes them feel confident while speaking. In keeping with these two statements, items 2, 3, 5 are reported to be agreed by most of the participants. These items also reinforce the results that came out of the previously mentioned two items. Correct pronunciation of words and in-class encouragement are highly appreciated.

The results appear to suggest that learners do not believe that they can differentiate different accents and pronunciations easily as they expressed their uncertainty with items 7, 10 and 12. As regards item 6, although the percentage is the highest with “agree”, almost the same number of participants said that they did not try to guess speakers’ nationalities. And finally, in this part of the questionnaire, item 9 reveals that most participants would like to learn English with a native accent. However, the total number of participants who are either neutral or negative to this statement is greater. Additionally, items 8, 11 and 13 reveal that although the participants believe pronunciation is very important in communication, they do not regard it superior to the main idea of the speech. In other words, as long as the message of the speech is understandable, they do not pay attention to pronunciation.

#### *In-Class / Learning Environment Factors That Influence Pronunciation*

In this section of results, Table 3 illustrates whether pronunciation of participants is particularly influenced by in-class/learning environment factors such as teachers and peers.

Table 3

*In-class / learning environment factors that influence pronunciation*

| Statements   | 1                   | 2          | 3         | 4           | 5                |
|--|---------------------|------------|-----------|-------------|------------------|
|  | Strongly Disagree % | Disagree % | Neutral % | Agree %     | Strongly Agree % |
| 14. My pronunciation in English sounds best when I am repeating after the teacher with the whole class.  | 4.1                 | 8.8        | 20.0      | <b>42.4</b> | 24.7             |
| 15. My pronunciation in English sounds best when I am alone.   | 2.9                 | 8.8        | 17.6      | <b>48.8</b> | 21.8             |
| 16. My pronunciation in English sounds best in the presence of both my instructor and my peers.  | 3.5                 | 5.3        | 12.4      | <b>47.6</b> | 31.2             |
| 17. My pronunciation in English sounds best when I am reading from the textbook or a worksheet.  | 2.4                 | 4.1        | 11.8      | <b>49.4</b> | 32.4             |
| 18. My pronunciation in English sounds best in the presence of peers/classmates whose pronunciation and oral skills are not quite as good as mine. | 2.9                 | 4.7        | 18.8      | <b>49.4</b> | 24.1             |
| 19. My pronunciation in English sounds best in the presence of peers/ classmates whom I do not know very well.                                     | 1.8                 | 4.1        | 14.7      | <b>51.2</b> | 28.2             |
| 20. My pronunciation in English sounds best in the presence of peers/ classmates whom I know very well (i.e., friends and acquaintances).          | 4.7                 | 7.1        | 17.1      | <b>48.2</b> | 22.9             |
| 21. My pronunciation in English sounds best in the presence of members of the opposite sex.  | 2.9                 | 10.6       | 10.6      | <b>48.2</b> | 27.6             |
| 22. My pronunciation in English sounds best in the presence of members of the same sex.  | 2.9                 | 10.6       | 15.9      | <b>47.6</b> | 22.9             |

It can be seen from the data in Table 3 that none of the items in this part illustrates a negative attitude towards the in-class / learning environment factors. In other words, this table appears to be a relatively stable one when compared to the other tables.

The participants strongly agreed on the statements suggesting that their instructors, peers who they (don't) know well or classroom members of the same or opposite sex influence their pronunciation positively since both "agree" and "strongly agree" responses make up the majority of the participant group. It may be worth noting that item 14 has the highest percentage with "neutral" comprising 20%, which means that there is a relatively big number of learners who question the efficiency of the use of choral repetition in class to improve pronunciation.

*Pronunciation/Accent and (Non)Native Speakers*

This section of the questionnaire required respondents to provide information on their attitudes toward different pronunciations or accents and NESs and NNESSs and Table 4 illustrates the related results.

Table 4  
*Pronunciation/accent and (non)native speakers*

| Statements  | 1                   | 2           | 3         | 4           | 5                |
|---|---------------------|-------------|-----------|-------------|------------------|
|   | Strongly Disagree % | Disagree %  | Neutral % | Agree %     | Strongly Agree % |
| 23. I believe my English instructor's production provides me with an excellent model of native/native-like pronunciation.   | 2.4                 | 5.9         | 18.2      | <b>45.3</b> | 28.2             |
| 24. Sometimes I feel uncomfortable trying to sound like a native speaker of English in the presence of peers/classmates whose pronunciation and oral skills are better than mine. | 9.4                 | 25.9        | 24.7      | <b>26.5</b> | 13.5             |
| 25. My pronunciation in English sounds best in the presence of native speakers of English.  | 1.2                 | 5.3         | 10.6      | <b>50.6</b> | 32.4             |
| 26. Sometimes I feel uncomfortable trying to sound like a native speaker of English in the presence of classmates I do not know very well.  | 7.1                 | <b>28.2</b> | 27.6      | 25.3        | 11.8             |
| 27. Sometimes I feel uncomfortable trying to sound like a native speaker of English in the presence of both my instructor and my peers.   | 10.6                | <b>27.1</b> | 25.3      | <b>27.1</b> | 10.0             |

|  |             |             |             |             |             |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 28. Sometimes I feel uncomfortable trying to sound like a native speaker of English in the presence of peers/classmates whose pronunciation and oral skills are not quite as good as mine. | 14.7        | <b>32.9</b> | 25.9        | 18.8        | 7.6         |
| 29. Sometimes I feel uncomfortable trying to sound like a native speaker of English in the presence of members of the opposite sex.  | 12.4        | <b>34.1</b> | 23.5        | 22.4        | 7.6         |
| 30. Sometimes I feel uncomfortable trying to sound like a native speaker of English in the presence of peers/classmates whom I know very well (i.e., friends and acquaintances).           | 18,2        | <b>33.5</b> | 25.3        | 17.6        | 5.3         |
| 31. It is very important for me to develop excellent pronunciation in English so that I can sound like a native speaker.   | 1.8         | 2.9         | 14.7        | 26.5        | <b>54.1</b> |
| 32. I sometimes cringe when my classmates sound very nonnative-like when they speak English and/or when they make little effort to sound English.  | 24.1        | <b>29.4</b> | 20.0        | 20.6        | 5.9         |
| 33. Occasionally, I deliberately avoid sounding like a native speaker of English.  | 16.5        | <b>32.9</b> | 21.2        | 22.4        | 7.1         |
| 34. It bothers me if someone speaks English with a Turkish accent.   | 28.2        | <b>32.4</b> | 19.4        | 12.9        | 7.1         |
| 35. It bothers me if someone speaks English with an accent other than Turkish accent.  | 33.5        | <b>35.9</b> | 14.7        | 12.9        | 2.9         |
| 36. I laugh inside when I hear somebody speak with a Turkish accent.   | <b>34.7</b> | 28.2        | 13.5        | 12.4        | 11.2        |
| 37. It is acceptable that learners of English have different pronunciations.   | 5.3         | 4.1         | 10.6        | 36.5        | <b>43.5</b> |
| 38. I think native speakers of English are the best model of the English accent.   | 10.0        | 20.6        | <b>27.6</b> | 22.9        | 18.8        |
| 39. I think we need to sound like native speakers of English when we speak English.  | 7.6         | 17.6        | 25.3        | <b>32.9</b> | 16.5        |

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If we try to subcategorize the items in Table 4, we can see that items 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29 and 30 investigate how the participants perceive their own pronunciation next to people with different pronunciations. More specifically, they demonstrate their preferences of trying to sound like a native speaker of English under different circumstances with different listeners. Interestingly, with the exception of item 25, the most dispersed results belong to this subcategory, and it is quite difficult to say that, although these are the highest ratings for each item, students have a strong preference of one specific response since the results are very close to each other.

In regard to item 24, although 26.5% of participants agreed that they felt uncomfortable trying to sound like a NES while they are with friends whose pronunciation skills are reportedly better than them, 25.9% of them disagreed with this statement. In response to item 25, a large number of respondents “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that their pronunciation sounded best when they were with NESs. It indicates that learners believed their pronunciation to be at its best when they are next to a native speaker of English.

Items 26 and 27 reveal very similar results considering participants’ pronunciation with classmates they do not know very well and with both their instructors and peers. These are the same and almost the same number of learners who agreed or disagreed with each of the two statements. When considering items 28, 29 and 30, most participants disagreed with the items suggesting that they felt uncomfortable trying to sound like a NES with classmates with lower pronunciation skills, members of opposite sex and with classmates they know well.

Another subcategorization relates to accepting different English accents and pronunciations, which includes items 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37. All the mentioned items, as we see in Table 4, reveal that learners are not biased against different pronunciations of English as they mostly “disagree” or “strongly disagree” with statements that have negative attitudes toward different accents (item 32, 33, 34, 35,36) while they “agree” or “strongly agree” with the statement that they appreciate different accents and pronunciations of English (item 37).

Last but not least, although the results of item 38 and 39 are dispersed, they point to us that 27,6% of learners were neutral about the statement that tells NESs are the best model of English accent, but 32,9% of them expressed the need of sounding like a NES.

### ***Results of the Focus Group Interview***

#### *Definition of good pronunciation*

When the interviewees were asked to define good pronunciation, two divergent and often conflicting definitions emerged. The majority of the interviewees (70%) argued that good pronunciation is intelligible. If they can

understand what the person is saying, that means good pronunciation. One participant expressed his opinion as presented below:

I think good pronunciation should reflect a person's nationality, well, British or American, etc. I'm Turkish and we were not raised with this language (English). So being intelligible is the biggest factor.

The rest of the group (30%) indicated that good pronunciation is a British accent because "we can learn how to pronounce the words 'better' and 'correctly' from Oxford dictionary" and "English was born in Britain, so British accent is good and appropriate for learners". There was one participant who regarded the British accent superior because it sounded much better when compared to other accents.

#### *Effects of NESTs and NNESTs on learners' pronunciation*

In response to interview questions 2 and 4, which investigated the role of NESTs in Turkish learners of English, almost all the focus group participants, except two, 80% of the interviewees said that NESTs have positive effects on their pronunciation. Common expressions that came out of the data are "it's that teacher's mother tongue and s/he knows pronunciation better", "s/he can't speak Turkish, we will have to pronounce words correctly so that s/he understands us" and "NESTs are more relaxed while correcting our mistakes as they don't correct our pronunciation mistakes too much". These utterances illustrate a common view amongst interviewees which is that NESTs definitely influence learners' pronunciation positively. Also, as one interviewee believed that hearing the language in that (native) accent will surely influence their pronunciation positively as the learner will sound more similar to the NESTs.

Conversely, as mentioned before, one of the two participants who said that NESTs influence them negatively stated that when she pronounces English imperfectly, a listener who is also Turkish can understand what she means. According to her, it is acceptable to make pronunciation mistakes with her Turkish peers and teachers, however; it is not advisable with a native speaker. Similarly, the other respondent mentioned the negative impact of a NEST on his pronunciation by adding that a NEST does not know how difficult it is for us (Turkish learners) to learn pronunciation as s/he did not pass through the same paths as we do, but a NNEST knows the difficulties we have and teaches us pronunciation accordingly.

When the interviewees were asked question 3, if NNESTs influence their pronunciation negatively or positively, a majority agreed that they also had a positive impact. One common concept, just like mentioned in the "definition of good pronunciation" part, was uttered by the majority in this section, which was "*intelligibility*". Learners believed that NNESTs affect their pronunciation positively because they could understand their NNEST teachers and could follow the lesson easily. The reasons are because they "can



miss some parts in the lesson when a NEST is speaking although we (they) listen to him/her very carefully, but with a NNEST, we (they) don't" and they "can see that we (they) can also pronounce words correctly when we (they) see a NNEST speaking English correctly, they encourage and motivate us, we know that we can do it, too".

On the contrary, 3 participants disagreed with the ideas mentioned above saying that their NNESTs, in the past, taught some words with incorrect pronunciation and integrated Turkish words in their speech (although not fully pronunciation-related) and one of them expressed her opinion as follows:

... I had a teacher who pronounced "wilderness" as /waɪldərnəs / instead of /'wɪldərnəs/ and when I learned the correct pronunciation from a NEST, it was too late, I had already learned it incorrectly.

#### *Expected attitudes of English learners toward pronunciation teaching in lessons*

The results of interview question 5 revealed that none of the learners believed that current approaches to teaching pronunciation in a lesson are adequate. All the participants had different ideas on teaching pronunciation, and they agreed that teaching pronunciation should be more incorporated in lessons. If we combine similar responses, we see some common ideas coming from a total 10 participants. One idea is that they do not believe that pronunciation is practised enough explicitly.

Another idea came from quite a few participants, and it was about correction and feedback. They stated that they wanted to be corrected and shown the correct pronunciation immediately when they spoke. One of them suggested a way to do it by telling that "... Actually, it would be much better if they took notes while we speak so that they could guide us about the areas we can improve". One opinion coming from one participant was about the poor quality of pronunciation despite very long years spent learning English in primary and secondary schools.

#### **Discussion**

The data in this study were collected in an attempt to shed light on the significance of pronunciation of Turkish learners, in-class factors that impact learners' pronunciation, their perceptions toward pronunciation of NES and NNESTs and their perception toward NESTs and NNESTs regarding improvement of their pronunciation. In order to investigate these issues, a 39-item-questionnaire and a focus group interview were designed for learners to respond.

The first part of the survey investigating the significance of pronunciation revealed that a great number of participants agree that pronunciation has a big importance in communication as well as correct

pronunciation, which is consistent with the results of Sa'd (2018). Although the learners stated they could not identify different accents and pronunciation, which lends support to the study conducted by Timmis (2002), almost half of the participants said they would like to have a native accent while the rest remained neutral or in disagreement with this statement. This mismatch was also found in the study conducted by Scales, Wennerstrom, Richard and Wu (2006).

After analyzing data related to the in-class/learning environment factors influencing learners' pronunciation, it could be confirmed that all the mentioned factors, including peers, teachers, teacher pronunciation teaching activities, had high impact on the participants' perceived pronunciation. They said they were affected by their teachers, same sex / opposite sex-peers, and peers with different proficiency levels, and while repeating with the class and reading words from the books and worksheet. Explicit pronunciation received from the teacher appears to have prompted appreciation and it is seen to be significant for the learners. This corroborates with previous results mentioned by Saito (2011) who noted that explicit phonetic instruction and repetitive practice improved learners' pronunciation.

When subjects' perceptions toward pronunciation of NES and NNEs were analyzed, we found that there is no significant result in terms of their self-perceptions of pronunciations with people who have different proficiency levels of English as the results are quite dispersed with the exception of only one instance. They believed their pronunciation was at its the best when they were with a NES. In their context, a NES is usually a NNE. Thus, this finding will be referred further in our discussion.

Interestingly, there is a very strong finding that reveals learners are not biased against different pronunciations and accents, and they accept them as they are. These findings are promising and encouraging when considering English as an International Language and the principles World Englishes. Contrary to numerous studies presenting results where learners show preference to standard English (Buckingham, 2015; Butler, 2007; McKenzie, 2008), this study demonstrated that in this particular case, native accents were not the most favored ones.

It is also striking that learners could not decide if NESs are the best models of English as half of the participants said that they wanted to sound like a NES. These findings also reflect what literature says regarding accent identification and preferences.

Taking into consideration the interview results, the majority of responses received for the first question emphasize the importance of pronunciation as long as it is intelligible and understandable by either a native or non-native speaker. These findings concur with what Çakır and Baytar (2014), Pourhosein Gilakjani (2012) underscored in their studies along with Morley (1991), who specifically stated that "intelligible pronunciation is an essential component of communication competence" (p. 488). In particular, mutual intelligibility has a primary role to play between speakers and listeners

from the angle of World Englishes (Kang, 2010). As emphasized by two proponents of World Englishes such as Kachru (1997) and Jenkins (2000, 2006), we believe that this result reflects how significant is intelligibility when compared to a particular native accent.

Questions investigating how NESTs and NNESTs affect learners' pronunciation deeper acknowledge that a majority of learners believe NESTs have a positive impact on their pronunciation. As in seen the literature, it is also underscored that language learners find NESTs stronger in teaching pronunciation when compared to NNESTs (Coşkun, 2013; Milambiling, 1999; Sung & Poole, 2016) because: they can hear correct pronunciation from NESTs (Dweik & Al-Barghouthi, 2014; Torres, 2004), they have to speak in English as NESTs cannot use their mother tongue (Andrews, 2007), and they find NESTs less strict and more relaxed during speaking lessons (Medgyes, 1992; Üstünoğlu, 2007).

While admitting the positive effect of NESTs on their pronunciation, most learners did not reject the positive influence of NNESTs on their pronunciation improvement. Although very few criticized NNESTs' "incorrect" and "non-authentic" English pronunciation just like Chang (2016) illustrated, they said they appreciate NNESTs as they know how difficult it is to learn a new language, and this reflects what Dweik and Al-Barghouthi (2014) and Gurkan and Yuksel (2012) have demonstrated in the results of their studies

In short, both groups of teachers received positive comments addressing their different strengths, which tallies with what Moussu (2002) and Cheung and Braine (2007) have discovered after investigating perceptions of university students. Just as Medgyes (1994) highlighted different strengths of both groups of teachers by stating they are just "two different species" (p. 25), it is not quite acceptable to see one group as superior to the other in a world where native speakerism is not promoted as before. As Tong and Cheng (2006) conclude, both NNES and NNES groups should be treated and respected equally.

Last but not least, learners expressed that they wanted to concentrate on pronunciation more in lessons by suggesting need for different error correction techniques.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of our study have important implications for language teachers about their in-class practices. Although this specific group of participants was not biased against different accents and pronunciations, teachers need to introduce not only British and American but more pronunciation models so that learners can hear, compare, and analyze different varieties of English. This approach will definitely refer to intelligibility and will increase "communicative flexibility and respect for accent diversity" (Scales et al., 2006).

Our study has also some implications for materials designers and institutional language curriculum. When considering the listening activities in these learners' coursebooks, *New Language Leader* and *Pathways* are the most frequently used coursebooks in that institution. Even though the books use very few listening tracks with different varieties of English such as Indian or Spanish, learners are mostly exposed to standard English instruction with British or American English. The in-house listening materials are recorded by both NESTs and NNESTs, which are in consonance with WEs and ELF perspectives. However, these efforts may not be enough. As Buckingham (2014) suggests in her conclusion, we need to expose learners with more didactic materials that will help them appreciate other accents and pronunciations by referring to similar implications (Jenkins, 2005; Lindemann & Subtirelu, 2013).

As all the learners indicated that they wanted to receive more pronunciation-focused instruction, the institutions may reconsider their curriculum and weekly syllabus to see how much space is allocated to pronunciation given that this study suggests that learners are quite eager and enthusiastic about practising pronunciation. Since learners had different "ideal" error-correction techniques with some favoring immediate feedback, while some favoring more relaxed attitude toward correcting pronunciation errors, further investigation on this issue can be carried out to see how/if the feedback given to the learners can actually match with what they expect in reality.

This study, to our knowledge, is the first study investigating two crucial areas in one study from EIL's perspective: Learners' attitudes towards different accents and pronunciations and towards (non)native English-speaking teachers in pronunciation teaching with young adults in the language preparatory school of a foundation university in Turkish context. Although, a mixed-method approach was used to increase the validity of the findings, there is a need for further research to be done in a similar context with university preparatory school learners with intermediate level of English proficiency. Hopefully, this study will inspire many teachers who want to make their learners "more aware" of other English accents and pronunciations.

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