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Teacher preferences in content and language-focused courses in higher education: The case of Turkish EMI students

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ABSTRACT

Turkish universities have adopted English as a means of instruction in teaching for quite some time now. Against such a linguistic transformation at universities, little research has been done on students' teacher preferences in EMI settings although researching students' teacher preferences has accumulated a bulk of literature in ESL/EFL research. Therefore, this study explores students' preferences for native and non-native English speaking teachers in content and language-focused courses. The data, gathered through questionnaires, indicate that most students do not make a specific preference for a particular group of teachers. Among the students showing a particular preference, more students were found to be geared towards native teachers to teach them content courses. The interview data, however, showed that many students overwhelmingly opted for non-native English teachers in content courses for various reasons, but with a marked preference for native English teachers in language-focused courses. The findings throw some light on the factors influencing students' preferences towards a particular group of teachers, offering some implications for teacher recruitment and the taken-for-granted assumptions about native and non-native English teachers.

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The English language has been playing a vital role in almost all non-English dominant countries for decades, firmly engraining its existence in several domains such as business, politics, technology and science. Of all the domains, its impact on educational platforms is far more manifest, principally as a school subject. In recent years, however, English has taken on a new role as the medium of instruction in the delivery of content courses, particularly at tertiary-level education. There is, thus, a high number of universities all around the world seeking to provide university courses through English (Dearden, 2014, 2015; Wächter & Maiworm, 2008, 2014). Despite the range of driving forces behind this instructional approach (see, Coleman, 2006), the adoption of English medium instruction (EMI) policies is, some scholars argue (e.g. Kirkpatrick, 2011; Wilkinson, 2013), a practical reaction to internationalization process. With this instructional change, institutions attempt to be part of the global higher education industry by raising qualified human resources who can easily secure jobs in the national and international markets (Björkman, 2008). Additionally, shifting to EMI has altered the socio-linguistic and demographic profiles of student population and teaching staff on university campuses. Many institutions have vied for employing English-speaking teachers from different nationality backgrounds as part of their staff hiring

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policy. Similar attempts have been made towards increasing the intake of international students into degree programs to achieve an intercultural mix on campus (Cho, 2012).

Comparably, the case in Turkey shows a rapid increase in the number of universities using English as the sole or partial medium of instruction. Almost 20% of all undergraduate programs in Turkish universities are now delivered via EMI (Arik & Arik, 2014). Although EMI programs draw on English as a pedagogical tool to be used for academic study, it is evident that language learning does not pause there, yet takes place in institutions' language support units where students receive one-year intensive English courses before starting their programs. Language support in the form of elective and obligatory courses continues even after students are transferred into their own disciplines.

EMI language policies have sparked off heated debates in many countries and hence attracted researchers' attention. Several issues surrounding the EMI phenomenon have been addressed by writers, columnists and researchers across the world, including Turkey. Among the addressed topics are macro-level issues such as whether universities should completely give up education in students' mother tongue, to what extent students can efficiently acquire disciplinary knowledge via English, and the impact of EMI on students' language improvement (e.g. Alptekin, 2003; Byun et al., 2010; Aguilar & Rodriguez, 2012; Ljosland, 2010; Preisler, 2009). Nonetheless, the findings of these studies were often contradictory, since the debates against and for EMI have grounded in different perspectives.

Recently, a new line of research has investigated academic language policies and practices of EMI universities (e.g. Hu, 2015; Jenkins, 2014, Karakaş, 2016a). As the linguistic aspect of EMI has recently started to be explored, there are still many questions waiting to be answered. One crucial question is what type of teachers EMI students would prefer in language and content-focused courses, i.e. native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) or non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs). This question has been thoroughly examined in EFL and ESL research (e.g. İnceçay & Atay, 2009; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2002; Mahboob, 2004; Ürkmez, 2015). After a thorough literature review, it was noticed that currently, very little is known about EMI students' teacher preferences due mainly to the limited number of studies having explored this matter hitherto (e.g. Inbar-Lourie & Donitsa-Schmidt, 2013; Karakaş, 2016a; Suviniitty, 2007). Furthermore, the extant exploration has mostly been done superficially owing to the nature of the data collection tools used, mostly questionnaires (e.g. Arvizu, 2014; Díaz, 2015). Consequently, there is still a lack of in-depth exploration of the issue in hand. Added to that, although students' probability of studying with NESTs is relatively maximal at EMI programs, most of their language and content teachers will be NNESTs (Canagarajah, 1999; Moussu & Llorca, 2008) given the fact that among all English speakers whose number now corresponds to about two billion, NNESTs have already outnumbered NESTs by as much as five to one (Crystal, 2010). Within such a mixed demographic profile of English-speaking teachers at the macro level and on university campuses at the micro level, students' perceptions and preferences about nativeness and non-nativeness of their content and language teachers are an intriguing aspect of EMI to explore. What also renders this aspect interesting is students' level of studies because students' teacher preferences for primary education and higher education might be different (e.g. Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005; Madrid & Pérez Cañado, 2004). It is for these reasons that the present study aims to answer the following research questions (RQs):

1. Do students prefer NESTs, NNESTs or both for content and language-focused courses?
 - 1.1 Do students' teacher preferences significantly differ according to the institution they are based in?
2. What factors influence students' preferences towards NNESTs and NESTs?

2. Native English Speaking Teachers and Non-native English Speaking Teachers

The research into students' perceptions of an ideal teacher in language classes has brought to the fore the notions of NESTs and NNESTs. From an ideological viewpoint, according to Doerr (2009) and

Pennycook (1994), the concept of *native speaker* represents being a citizen of a nation-state (i.e. membership to a homogenous speech community) and speaking its national language. In this view, the native speaker is regarded as the expert on language and is assumed to speak it as their mother tongue from birth. Contrariwise, a non-native speaker is considered to be “someone who has learned a particular language as a child or adult rather than as a baby” in an ESL or EFL environment (Cambridge Dictionary Online). Therefore, a non-native speaker is excluded from being a member of the speech community having acquired the language from birth. In a sense, such an understanding of the term deprives non-native speakers of the ownership of the language, leading to a deficit view of them, such as being described as eternal learners and failed or deficient native speakers (see, Mauranen, 2005, for a similar discussion).

The common view embraced by many scholars on NESTs and NNESTs does not regard them as being superior or inferior to each other but acknowledges them as “two different species” (Medgyes, 1994, p. 27), with their own strengths and weaknesses (Moussu & Llorca, 2008). According to this view, such differences let them satisfy a range of student needs and contextual demands. The strengths of NESTs lie, many scholars have argued (e.g. Canagarajah, 1999; Davies, 2003; Medgyes, 1994), in linguistic competence and target culture knowledge (e.g. norms, values, pragmatic knowledge). In contrast, NNESTs are perceived to be at a more privileged position in respect to sharing students’ mother tongue and culture. However, some degree of caution should be exercised here since the NNEST movement has started to move towards contextualized accounts of teachers’ personal and professional perceptions of their own self, e.g. who they are, where they come from, how they think of themselves, etc. (see, Rudolph, Selvi & Yazan 2015, for a criticism of the monolithic view of these constructs). Despite this slow-moving change, the constructs (NESTs/NNESTs) are mainly used in homogenised and essentialised manners in this paper. One reason for this is to draw a clear-cut line between students’ preferences. It is also because the current study precisely addresses a specific context where features of both types of teachers can remain identical to some extent. It should be mentioned here, for the sake of clarity, that the term, NESTs, is used to refer to those born in an Anglophone-context and speaking English as their first language, and the term NNESTs to represent those born in Turkey or somewhere else, but speaking Turkish as their mother tongue starting from birth onwards.

3. Students’ Perceptions of NESTS and NNESTs and Teacher Preferences

The existing research on students’ perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs has shown that both groups have been positively and negatively perceived by students with respect to various dimensions. For example, students’ perceptions of NESTs were remarkably favourable as regards their linguistic characteristics, e.g. oral skills (pronunciation, accent, fluency), vocabulary knowledge, correct and functional language use (Cheung, 2002; Karakaş et al., 2016; Mahboob, 2004; Mermelstein, 2015; Rao, 2010). Of the linguistic elements, it was primarily teachers’ accents which canalized students to prefer teachers with native-like accents (Kelch & Santana-Williamson, 2002). However, when the focus shifted to grammatical competence, previous EFL/ESL experience, ease of communication and knowledge of students’ domestic culture, negative perceptions prevailed among students about NESTs. Contrariwise, students perceived NNESTs to be the ideal teachers in teaching grammar (Cheung, 2002; Chit Cheong, 2009; Díaz, 2015; Mahboob, 2004). NNESTs were also perceived to be more sensitive to students’ needs and demands since they share the same lingua-cultural background with students, and can thus immediately switch to students’ first language when needs be (Clark & Paran, 2007; Mahboob, 2004; Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2014). However, the degree of favourable perceptions of NNESTs has decreased as to their command of spoken English, knowledge of target culture and accurate language usage (Moussu & Braine, 2006). Due probably to such perceived weaknesses of NNESTs in linguistic and cultural domains, most students sided with NESTs in their preferences for EFL/ESL teachers (Arvizu, 2014; Díaz, 2015;

Lasagabster & Sierra, 2002). However, the results were not always straightforward when it comes to some linguistic (e.g. reading, vocabulary) and non-linguistic aspects such as personality traits. In some studies (e.g. Wu & Ke, 2009), NESTs were perceived to be more friendly and supportive compared to NNESTs; nevertheless, in others (e.g. Rao, 2010), NESTs were not perceived as friendly and supportive. Similarly, NNESTs were shown a higher degree of preference compared with NESTs, particularly when considered for teaching reading and writing courses (Arvizu, 2014; Nafi, Qabaja & Al-Kar, 2016). Nevertheless, both groups were regarded as appropriate for teaching vocabulary and reading in other studies like that of Díaz (2015). Research has also indicated the fluid nature of perceptions and preferences in that students' approach to NESTs and NNESTs has tended to be more and more positive or negative through time. For instance, a few studies provided evidence for the materialization of positive perceptions about NNESTs among university students as time went by (e.g. Cheung & Braine, 2007; Moussu & Braine, 2006).

Research in Turkey showed a similar pattern of perceptions and preferences of NESTs and NNESTs. Generally, students considered NESTs to be good at performing successful in-class communication and have better linguistic qualities than NNESTs. Nonetheless, students saw NNESTs as more successful than NESTs in teaching and classroom management (Demir, 2011; Üstünlüoğlu, 2007). Among the factors that impacted upon students' positive perceptions of NESTs was their previous contact and experiences with these lecturers (Demir, 2011; Şahin, 2005). Students were also observed to believe that NESTs would make ideal teachers in advanced stages of language learning, yet NNESTs in the earlier stages as they can resourcefully use students' mother tongue as a facilitator (İnceçay & Atay, 2009; Ürkmez, 2015). These results also agreed with those found across different research contexts (e.g. Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2002, 2005; Madrid & Pérez Cañado, 2004).

As is evident from the literature review, studies have exhaustively examined students' perceptions of NESTs/NNESTs and their teacher preferences in EFL and ESL settings. Therefore, students' expressed preferences and perceptions were confined to language teachers only. However, EMI settings are perfect-fit places for content learning. As such, content teachers' English use is utility-based and instrumental. Besides, students' nature of interaction with content teachers is largely instrumentally driven, since students' chief purpose is to attain subject matter knowledge delivered by content teachers via English. Against such a backdrop, there seems to be, however, relatively little research that has explored EMI students' perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs in content courses. The existing EMI research has discovered that many students favoured NESTs over NNESTs (Suviniitty, 2007). Students' choice for NESTs was largely prompted by NNESTs' foreign-accented speech in their linguistic behaviours. Similar reactions to NNESTs' English were reported in other EMI settings as well, such as in Denmark (Sercu, 2004). Equally, a more recent study with EMI students pointed to a native-speaker standard among students favouring NESTs over NNESTs in content courses for some reasons, e.g. accurate content knowledge transfer, high quality instruction, authentic language use, posh accent (Inbar-Lourie & Donitsa-Schmidt, 2013). As the number of empirical studies on students' EMI teacher preferences is relatively few at present, this study seeks to contribute to the existing research by particularly exploring Turkish EMI students' teacher preferences in language and content courses.

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Design

In this paper, students' preferences towards being taught by NESTs, NNESTs or both are examined adopting a case study approach and using Turkish EMI universities as a case (Luck, Jackson & Usher, 2006). As noted by Yin (2003, p. 2), 'the distinctive need for case studies arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena'. That is, a case study deals with 'a detailed, intensive study of a

particular contextual, and bounded phenomena that is undertaken in real life situations' (Luck et al., 2006, p. 104). The socially complex bounded phenomenon in this research is students' engagement with NESTs and NNESTs when studying content and language-specific courses in English. This case study is characterised by the embedment of quantitative and qualitative data to scrutinize a particular issue, i.e. students' teacher preferences. The quantitative data is secondary to the qualitative data since the research is primarily qualitatively driven.

4.2. *The Setting*

The study was conducted at three EMI universities in Turkey: Bilkent University, Middle East Technical University (METU) and Bogazici University. Of the three, Bilkent and METU are located in the capital of Turkey, Ankara whilst Bogazici University is situated in Istanbul. These universities use English as the medium of instruction. They also host a vast number of international students and academic staff compared to other Turkish universities. According to the recent figures, Bogazici has roughly 700 students from over 70 countries and nearly 100 full-time academic staff from 22 nationalities (Council of Higher Education, 2015a). Higher education statistics on students by nationality indicate that METU has over 1800 international students enrolled at its various programs along with around 50 full-time international academic staff (Council of Higher Education, 2015a, 2015b). The case of international students and academic staff in Bilkent is a bit different from those of Bogazici and METU, as Bilkent is a private university. Currently, its international academic staff corresponds to one-fourth of its total number of teaching staff. Its international student body equals to 10% of the total student population, which is now about 13,000 (Council of Higher Education, 2015b). In these universities, the international academic staff consist of teachers working as language instructors and content teachers. Those hired to teach language courses are mainly from a native-English-speaking background, whereas content teachers come from various English-speaking and non-English speaking countries (Karakaş, 2016a).

4.3. *Participant Profiles*

The participants of the questionnaire study were 351 students studying international relations, mechanical engineering and history at the time of data collection. Their breakdown according to their institutions is as follows: 132 students from Bilkent University, 106 students from Bogazici University and 113 students from METU. Of these students, 20 students also partook in the interview sessions, the main data collection instrument. Purposive sampling was used in the recruitment of participants to carry out the study with "individuals who can provide rich and varied insights into the phenomenon under investigation" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 126). The phenomenon in this study was the act of studying in an EMI university in Turkey together with Turkish and non-Turkish content and language teachers.

4.4. *Data Collection and Analysis*

The data was collected through questionnaires and interviews. In the questionnaires, students were asked a single question: who do you think is an ideal teacher for EMI content courses? The questionnaires aimed to identify students' teacher preferences for content courses only. The item on the questionnaire was answered on a four-point-Likert-type rating scale The questionnaire statements ranged from (1) '*with Turkish lecturers who can deliver the courses in English*', (2) '*it does not matter whether they are native English or Turkish lecturers*', (3) '*with native English speaking teachers*' to (4) '*other*'. The students agreeing to discuss their answers to the questionnaires were later interviewed. The interviews lasted between 30 to 70 minutes and were digitally recorded. The interviews included discussions of students' content and

language teacher preferences along with their justifications for the expressed preferences towards a particular group of teachers.

To analyse the data, quantitative and qualitative methods were utilized. The data collected through questionnaires were subjected to descriptive statistics on SPSS to calculate the frequencies and percentages of the given responses to the questionnaires. To analyse the qualitative data, qualitative content analysis was used. The purpose was to make a ‘subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns’ (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). To this end, the recordings were converted into text data through transcriptions, which was later transformed into Nvivo, a software for qualitative analysis, to initiate the actual analysis. The statements in the questionnaire were used as a guide in the process of data coding. The coding was carried out by the researcher with a purpose to identify the recurring themes in students’ accounts. At the end of the coding process, the categories were determined.

5. Results

5.1. Students’ Teacher Preferences in Content Courses

In response to the first RQ, the analysis of the quantitative data indicated that nearly 50% did not explicitly express a sharp preference for the nativeness or non-nativeness of their lecturers, choosing the middle ground. Many of those showing a specific preference had tendency towards NESTs to teach content courses. Turkish lecturers were merely preferred by around one-fifth of the students (see Table 1 below).

Table 1. Students’ teacher preferences for emi content courses

Statements	f	%
It does not matter whether they are native English or Turkish lecturers	175	49.9
With native English speaking lecturers	111	31.6
With Turkish lecturers who can deliver the courses in English	56	16.6
Other	5	1.4
Total	347	100

Note: Four students’ answers were excluded from the analysis, as they did not fill out the questionnaire completely.

In the interviews, the students were asked to expand on their answers to the questionnaire items for two particular purposes: (i) to explore students’ preferences in more depth and (ii) to determine the factors affecting their preferences in response to the second RQ (i.e. *what factors influence students’ preferences towards NNESTs and NESTs?*). The categories that emerged from the interviews with 20 students (see Appendix 1 for the student profiles) were hierarchically organized based on the extensiveness of the codes grouped in a given category. The following table outlines students’ teacher preferences in content courses.

Table 2. Categories and sub-categories for students’ accounts regarding their content-teacher preferences

a) It does not matter

- Fluency and intelligibility
 - Expertise in the subject matter
- b) Native-English Speaking Teachers
- Better command of English
 - Quality of education system
- c) Turkish Teachers
- Better communication opportunities
 - Better comprehension of courses & lectures
-

The interviews identified that the majority (N=14) showed a preference for Turkish lecturers to teach them content courses. This result does not support previous research into EMI students' teacher preferences as most students in previous studies favoured NESTs over NNESTs to teach content courses due to the deficit approach shown to NNESTs' English, often described as faulty, incomplete and inaccurate (e.g. Inbar-Lourie & Donitsa-Schmidt, 2013; Sercu, 2004; Suviniitty, 2007). The number of students going for NNESTs was four. There were, however, a few students inclined towards both types of teachers only if these teachers can meet some certain criteria, i.e. having fluent and intelligible English and subject matter expertise on the course content.

To start with the neutral-looking students, they emphasized not the native or non-native status but using English in an intelligible manner and fluently when building content knowledge. The following extracts clearly illustrate students' opinions on this issue:

1. **S14:** I don't care much about which one of them teaches content courses as long as they are fluent. What matters is, however, being a fluent speaker. I mean *fluency in relation to the communication of the field knowledge*. One can speak quite well but is to be able to do so while lecturing on a given course topic as well.
2. **S18:** it does not matter to me who teaches the courses. I'd like to get courses from whoever has specialized field knowledge. However, the Turkish lecturers' level of English proficiency needs to be higher than that of his/her students. They should be able to follow the publications and transmit up-to-date knowledge to us.

What stands out in the above extracts is that these two students brushed aside teachers' native and non-native background. Instead, they underscored that one's specialisation in his/her field and the effective delivery of the specialised knowledge to students take precedence over who delivers the content knowledge. These findings corroborate the findings of earlier ESL/EFL studies in which students placed a great emphasis on teachers' didactic knowledge and skills rather than their being a NEST or NNEST (e.g. Demir, 2011; Üstünlüoğlu, 2007), yet contradict what has been found in EMI-related studies, indicating that most students chose NESTs for content courses (e.g. Sercu, 2004; Suviniitty, 2007).

As for students showing tendency towards NESTs, their main arguments were twofold: (i) NESTs have a better command of English and (ii) NESTs have a better educational background as they come from and get educated in the developed countries where educational standards and the quality of teaching are far ahead compared to the educational setting(s) where most Turkish content teachers were trained. In this regard, one student explained his preference as follows:

3. **S3:** I'd definitely prefer a Canadian teacher over a Turkish teacher to teach content courses to students in my university. The reason is that their education system is very similar to the one in Europe. For they have the qualified education, I believe someone from Canada would make a better content teacher for us.

Turning to another aspect of NESTs, one student emphasized that since NESTs have no language barrier in the communication of intellectually demanding courses, the classes given by them will not be limited to surface level learning, characterized by memorization of course content, and the lack of understanding and deeper learning (Entwistle, 2001). S10 noted regarding this matter:

4. **S10:** I'd definitely go for a NEST. It is because they have nothing to do with language issues while NNESTs experience troubles in delivering courses. With NESTs, it is possible for us to go deeper into the content of the courses and develop a deeper and more effective understanding on the courses. As a result, we can reach much better comprehension levels in the courses. However, this is not quite likely with Turkish teachers or NNESTs as they tend to struggle with academic English use and often remain incapable of delivering courses in accordance with our expectations.

These results seem to be consistent with other research which found that students perceived NESTs to have stronger linguistic strengths compared to NNESTs, and thus considered NESTs to be more suited to teach content courses (e.g. Sercu, 2004; Suviniitty, 2007). It was obvious that students submitted themselves to the assumption that being a NEST is equated with having the specialized content knowledge and its communication to students. This finding corresponds to what Jensen et al. (2013) have recently observed with EMI students who perceived lecturers with strong English skills to also have effective teaching skills.

Those showing preferences for Turkish lecturers in content courses referred to a few reasons, among which the oft-cited one is that students can easily grasp the content of the courses when delivered by Turkish teachers. As one student elaborated on this issue in the following extract, Turkish teachers deliver the courses with a slower pace of speech and use commonly known words in classes. Most importantly, S2 noted that Turkish teachers share the same first language and culture, which helps teachers enrich students' learning on the subject matter.

5. **S2:** i think if it is an engineering course i would probably prefer a Turkish lecturer /.../ last summer I took a course with an American teacher erm the American teacher provides so many opportunities because of his overseas academic network but when i consider it from the aspect of their English and comprehension i can understand <the courses> better if lectured by a Turkish teacher because the other one is a "native speaker" he often speaks too fast without realizing it /.../ especially he frequently uses unfamiliar terms

S2 considers Turkish lecturers to be more ideal for content courses due to his perception that they can offer more assistance to students in the process of content knowledge acquisition. The use of a conditional clause (*if it's an engineering course*) suggests that he would not probably prefer Turkish lecturers if the course is a language-focused one. What is also noteworthy is that while describing his American teacher's attributes, S2 did not bring his linguistic advantages to the fore, yet his scholarly connections with people and schools abroad. Probably, he judged that his lecturer might help him as a reference if he decides to go abroad for further education. As is evident from the above account, S2 was critical of the American teacher's language traits regarding the delivery of the content courses, which is normally perceived to be linguistic superiority of NESTs to NNESTs in language courses.

There were some supplementary reasons to the main one explained above. Three students (S4, S15 and S20) drew, for example, attention to the fact that they can ask questions for clarification in Turkish when studying with Turkish teachers, yet this is out of question with NESTs. They unanimously agreed that coping strategies, like asking questions in Turkish, enabled them to obtain deeper understanding of the complex and theory-based courses. This finding indicates that students' sharing the same L1 with content teachers creates an optimum condition for effective learning, as was recently reported in a study on the use of L1 in classes (Karakaş, 2016b).

5.1.1 Differences in Teacher Preferences according to Students' Institutions

To gain a better understanding of students' tendency towards NESTs and NNESTs in content courses and to answer the sub-research question (*Do students' teacher preferences significantly differ according to the institution they are based in?*), the distribution of their preferences by their institutions was determined and inspected closely. By doing so, the aim was to determine the existence of a statistically significant association between students from different universities and their preferred type of teachers. To this end, the Pearson Chi-Square test was done on SPSS (see Table 3).

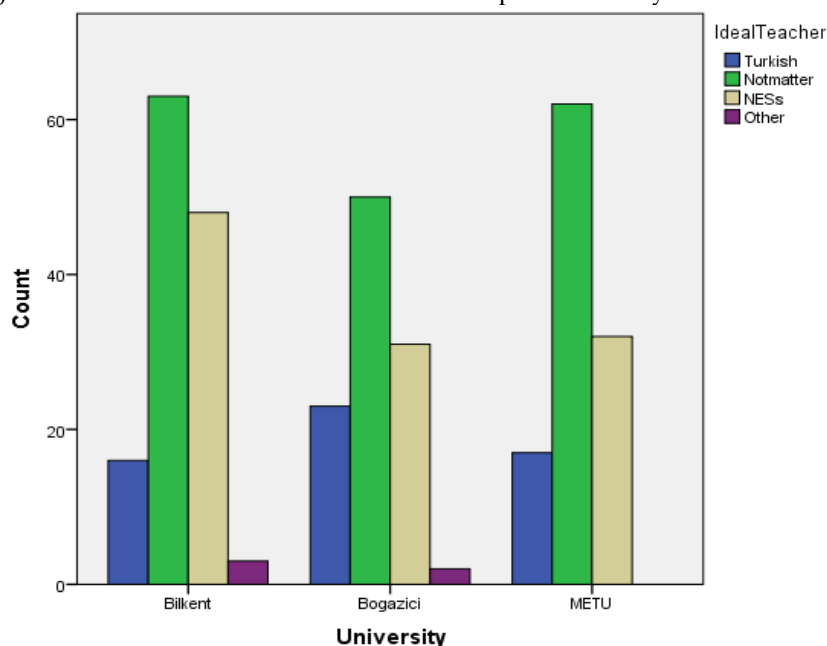
Table 3. The pearson chi-square test results

	Teacher preferred (N=347)				χ^2	P
	Turkish	Doesn't matter	NESTs	Other		
Bilkent	16	63	48	3	8,239	0,21
Bogazici	23	50	31	2		
METU	17	62	32	0		
Total	56	175	111	5		

The above test results indicate that $\chi(2)$ is 8.239, and p is 0.21. These figures indicate that there is no statistically significant association between students' institutions and their preferences towards nativevevess and non-nativeness of their content teachers. That is, students from the three universities displayed similar patterns of preferences towards Turkish lecturers, NESTs and both (it does not matter).

The graph below also plainly shows how similar preferences students from the three different universities reflected for Turkish lecturers, NESTs and both groups of teachers through featuring the group categories and the frequency counts. The figure is also quite revealing in some respects in comparing students' preferences across their universities. Figure 1 illustrates that fewer Bilkent and ODTU students gave preference to Turkish lecturers compared to Bogazici students. It seems possible that this result is due to the high number of Turkish academic staff employed in the institution, with previous EMI college experiences and long-term abroad stays. As Karakaş (2016a) earlier reported, the majority of the Turkish lecturers at Bogazici graduated from leading private EMI colleges, such as Robert College and Uskudar American College and had a long-term overseas background. Thus, their long-standing exposure to English at an early stage and in English-speaking environments could have made their English likened to that of NESTs. Accordingly, many students might have perceived the resemblance of lecturers' English to native English favourably.

Figure 1. The distribution of students' teacher preferences by their universities



Another revealing point in Figure 1 is Bilkent students' greater tendency towards NESTs compared to METU and Bogazici students. This finding can be attributed to the fact that a vast majority of the lecturers employed in Bilkent are from either native-English speaking countries or officially English-speaking countries (Karakas, 2016a). As reported earlier by some researchers (e.g. Demir, 2011; Şahin, 2005), students' painful or fascinating learning experiences with teachers play a crucial role in the formation of their perceptions and preferences of their teachers. The Bilkent students studying with NESTs might have developed a liking for them through time in consequence of pleasantly shared experiences.

As is also apparent from the purple highlighted columns in Figure 1, only a few students provided their own answers, choosing the 'other' option in the questionnaire. One student showed a preference for Turkish lecturers on the proviso that their English should be clear and easily comprehensible (S43, Bogazici). Another student emphasised her wish to have courses with NESTs but with a condition that they should be capable of teaching content courses (S68, Bilkent). Namely, the student underlined the importance of pedagogical and didactic skills of teachers in teaching content courses. One reason for this clarification might be that employers and university managements tend to hire NESTs without considering whether they already have the required qualifications, just basing their hiring policy on teachers' native status (see, Arvizu, 2014, for a similar argument). In line with this discussion, the student probably did not equate being a NEST with being qualified enough to teach content courses. The other students did not mind having Turkish teachers or NESTs, but one said that courses with Turkish teachers can be productive because students would have less concentration problems with Turkish teachers (S305, Bogazici).

To recap briefly, the findings support the propensity among EMI students towards being taught content courses by NESTs. Furthermore, the findings seem to be consistent with other research which found, irrespective of the contextual differences, that even if NNESTs' English was judged to be good at times, most students displayed a tendency to prefer NESTs to teach them content courses (e.g. Inbar-Lourie & Donitsa-Schmidt, 2013; Sercu, 2004; Suviniitty, 2007). The findings were partly in agreement with those found by Díaz, (2015), in which students were inclined to prefer both groups of teachers avoiding the native and non-native contrast as most students did in this study. As one would expect, the

findings in relation to students' overall preferences for NESTs in content courses matched those observed in previous EFL/ESL research (e.g. Arvizu, 2014; Díaz, 2015; Karakaş et al., 2016). However, the focus was on language teachers in the EFL/ESL studies, while it was on content teachers in the present study. Therefore, the preference among the participants of this study was not as strong as the ones observed in EFL and ESL studies because, in this study, around one-fifth of the participants showed a clear preference for Turkish teachers and the majority did not show an actual favour to either type of teachers.

5.2 Teacher Preferences in Language-focused Courses

It emerged from the interviews as to the first RQ that students differed in their preferences with respect to language-focused courses. Below is the synopsis of how students are orientated towards the native-ness and non-native-ness of their language teachers.

Table 4. Categories and sub-categories for students' accounts regarding language teacher preferences

-
- a) Native-English Speaking Teachers
 - Linguistic feature: Fluency, intelligibility, nice accent
 - Expertise in the subject matter
 - Feeling obliged to use English
 - b) It does not matter
 - Pedagogical skills
 - c) Turkish Teachers
 - Familiarity of their English – increased intelligibility
 - Qualified teaching
 - d) Mixed: Turkish teachers for beginner and NESTs for advanced students
 - Language related concerns
 - Meeting students linguistic demands
-

More than three-fourths of the interviewees (N=15) showed a marked preference for NESTs in language courses, which gave sound evidence of the prevalence of a native English standard among students, as was confirmed by earlier research into EFL/ESL students' orientations to NESTs (e.g. Arvizu, 2014; Cheung, 2002; Díaz, 2015; Karakaş et al., 2016; Mahboob, 2004; Mermelstein, 2015; Rao, 2016). However, as previous EMI research lacks a prime focus on students' preferences for language teachers at their institutions, there has not been a point of comparison against which the results of this study can be discussed. Relating to the second RQ, many students, when invited to explain their tendency towards NESTs in language courses, raised the positively perceived attributes of NESTs (e.g. real accent, nice accent, fluent speech, natural speech). The hidden agenda behind students' orientations to NESTs lies in their perception that Turkish lecturers' English does not bear the same linguistic features as that of NESTs does. The deep-seated belief among most students was, as S8 expressed below, that when students study language-focused courses with NESTs, students can easily embrace the linguistic traits of NESTs, such as near-native-like pronunciation, fluency, and proficiency.

6. S8: at least er:m first of all since English is their native language you know we try to speak with a native accent we're trying to use language more effectively /.../ apart from these it's helped me speak English fluently

S8 appears to believe that not only himself but also his friends ('we') will take a great opportunity to assimilate their English into native English when taught by NESTs. Likewise, S4 underscored the importance of studying with NESTs, claiming that as they are the best model of English use, students can mimic the way they use English, especially the aesthetic linguistic elements, e.g. accent, intonation, pronunciation. From S4's and S8's aspirations, one can infer the implicit reference to the prestige factor attached to NESTs, since 'prestige is not primarily a property of a linguistic form or variety – it is a property of speakers, or groups of speakers, some of whom are accorded higher social prestige than others' (Milroy, 2007, p. 137). It is probably for this reason that NESTs are perceived to be expert users of the language and thus the owner of the authentic voice, a reminiscence of the ideology of authenticity which 'locates the value of a language in its relationship to a particular community' (Woolard, 2005, p.2). The reason for S4's and S8's aspirations to speak English with a native accent possibly stems from their desire to sound like NESs as much as possible so that they can make a claim to the valued identity, which belongs to the perceived owner of the language, i.e. NESs beyond question. Based on these results, one can come to the conclusion that the particular favour shown towards NESTs by most students is prompted by students' ideological constructs about the notion of NESTs (see, also Díaz, 2015, for a similar discussion).

Another common belief was that with NESTs, students would have more chances to practice English in real life situations. S5 elucidated on this matter, noting that 'the benefit of studying with NESTs is that students put more effort into using English in classes'. That is, when students have Turkish lecturers in classes, students are believed not to put as much effort as they could to use English because they might be tempted to take the easy way out by switching to Turkish in the face of any perceived challenges. These arguments were also raised before by some EMI lecturers who expressed that when students' Turkish use is tolerated in classes, they tend to avoid using English (Karakaş, 2016b).

Surprisingly, only one student (S16) reported that it does not matter whether language courses are given by NESTs, Turkish lecturers or any other NNESTs provided that they display good teaching practices in classes. S16 concluded his preference as follows: "what matters most is teachers' in-class performance, i.e. whether they can contribute to students' linguistic development or not. Otherwise, whether they are NESTs or Turkish teachers becomes more of a trivial issue for me'. This finding aligns with the findings of previous studies (Demir, 2011; Üstünlüoğlu, 2007) in which teachers' teaching skills and commitment to student learning were not overshadowed by their native and non-native status.

Students' preferences for Turkish teachers in language courses was not as strong as they were for NESTs. There were just two students who had a preference of Turkish teachers. One student (S6) cited the difficulty of following NESTs' English, especially that of British teachers. The underlying justification for this is, to borrow her own words, that 'British accents exhaust students a lot. The way it sounds is ear-splitting. I could in no way get used to it'. The difficulty of understanding NESs has been reported elsewhere, especially in relation to the use of English as a lingua franca (ELF). For instance, Reis (2012), citing from his personal communication with Prof. Jennifer Jenkins, a leading ELF scholar, stated that 'it is often native speakers whose English is hardest to understand because of their inability to adjust their style, tempo and idioms to a mixed audience' (para. 8). The other student (S9), however, made a different point, highlighting teacher qualifications. Regarding the case in Bilkent's preparatory school, S9 noted 'honestly speaking, the Turkish teachers in Bilkent's prep school are considerably good. I mean relatively qualified at least those I've had classes with. For this reason, their being Turkish is not a big deal'. As is evident from S9's explanations, the focus is thrown not on language teachers' native or non-native status but on whether the teachers in question are equipped with the pedagogical skills and know how to use these skills to teach the language (Díaz, 2015).

Among the students who differed in their preferences according to the level of studies, it became apparent that students wanted Turkish teachers to teach English at beginner's level whereas NESTs to

teach language courses at advanced levels, as was also observed in some studies (İnceçay & Atay, 2009; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2002, 2005; Madrid & Pérez Cañado, 2004; Ürkmez, 2015). For instance, S9 argued 'it is better to start studying language courses with Turkish teachers. I believe that's very useful because you reach a certain level of English with Turkish teachers'. However, the same student made a different preference relating to advanced level language courses, stating that

7. **S9:** after reaching an intermediate level of English, I'd like to continue with NESTs. I believe it would be more beneficial to continue with them in terms of improving my English skills. I mean it can be useful for improving pronunciation because some of my Turkish teachers have faulty pronunciations.

Similarly, S13 cited the following reasons in support of why she considers Turkish teachers more convenient to teach students at the beginner level:

8. **S13:** it's quite unreasonable to assign NESTs to students at elementary levels. The criterion while assigning them should be students' level of English proficiency. It is because students don't know much about English at the onset. Also, the vast majority of students are Turkish. How can they understand a NEST, especially while learning grammatical structures? That's why, elementary language courses should be given by Turkish teachers /.../ for students to improve their speaking skills, listening comprehension and expand their vocabulary, NESTs can be assigned at later stages.

6. Conclusion and Final Remarks

This research set out to analyse EMI students' preferences for the nativeness and non-nativeness of their teachers in content and language-focused courses. Answering the first RQ, the research identified that most students in the questionnaires did not indicate a specific preference towards being taught content courses by NESTs or Turkish teachers. This neutral approach to teachers indicates that both NESTs and Turkish lecturers were thought to be equally capable of teaching content courses. However, the follow-up interviews made it clear that students expect lecturers to be equipped with subject-matter knowledge and to use English fluently and comprehensibly. Among the students making a nationality contrast in their preferences, the questionnaire findings demonstrated that more students showed a preference for NESTs than Turkish lecturers in content courses. Nevertheless, the interview findings revealed the strong preference for Turkish teachers to teach content courses for some practical reasons, e.g. the increased comprehension of the course content and ease of communication between and among students and Turkish teachers. As for the language teachers, students' overall preference was found to be for NESTs due to the ingrained beliefs and ideological constructs about them: they are expert in the use of English and the best role model for students to mimic in linguistic behaviours; sounding like NESTs bespeaks being of high prestige among other speakers; as students feel obliged to use English only in their presence, it is for the benefit of students to study with NESTs in order to improve their linguistic competence, and due to their educational background and linguistic strengths, NESTs can teach language courses more effectively compared to NNESTs. On the other hand, the students showing tendency to Turkish teachers to teach language courses argued that NNESTs' English in their institutions is easier to comprehend compared to that of NESTs, and that NNESTs are armed with better teaching qualifications as they hold, at least, a degree in language teaching, which most NESTs lack.

Answering the sub-research question, no statistically significant difference in students' preferences towards NESTs and NNESTs was identified in content courses across their institutions. That is, regardless of the institutions students are based in, they showed a similar pattern of choice, with the

exception that Bilkent students' preferences were a bit more skewed towards NESTs than those of METU and Bogazici students. In relation to the second RQ, several factors were identified to impact upon students' preferences for being taught by NESTs or Turkish teachers in content and language-focused courses. Among the factors, the most prominent are students' beliefs and ideological constructs about the type of teachers. Driven by the ideologies of native-speakerism and authenticity (Doerr, 2009, Woolard, 2005), many students presumed that when they are instructed language courses by NESTs, they will be able to use English in line with their norms and in the way English is used by its native speakers, e.g. fluently, intelligibly, with a posh accent, appropriately and accurately. EMI students' such assumptions about NESTs in language-focused courses are not new, as already mentioned (e.g. Sercu, 2004; Suviniitty, 2007). For students preferring Turkish teachers in content and language-focused courses, the underlying reasons were primarily practical, since they prioritized the effective acquisition of course content, teachers' subject matter's knowledge, classroom performance and didactic skills over teachers' native or non-native status. To be precise, teachers' linguistic and nationality origins were seen to be subordinate to the attainment of the content and linguistic knowledge. Another factor influencing students' preferences was the level of studies, especially when it comes to students' orientations to language teachers. NESTs were perceived to be more suited for teaching students whose level of English is rather high whereas NNESTs for students who are just starting or have recently started to learn English. This divergence in their preferences was, as was already reported in other research (e.g. İnceçay & Atay, 2009; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2002, 2005; Madrid & Pérez Cañado, 2004; Ürkmez, 2015), a sign of deficit mind-set about NNESTs, according to which NNESTs are not perceived as being qualified enough to teach advanced-level courses.

Overall, these findings have significant implications for the understanding of why students are inclined towards NESTs and NNESTs in the way they did in content and language-focused courses. A possibility elucidating students' strong preferences for NESTs in content and language-focused courses is students' former language learning experiences at formal learning environments where they were most probably exposed to NESTs as the sole role model for language use. According to Llurda (2009), such favourable orientations to NESTs in language courses actually reveal the strong prevalence of native-speaker models among the stakeholders involved in language education. However, the findings of this study presents evidence that the pervasiveness of the native-speaker models is true for subject matter education too. It is, hence, relatively important to raise students' awareness of other alternatives like being a successful communicator, a competent intercultural speaker, or a skilled language user in their own rights (Jenkins, 2006). The choice regarding which model to follow should be left to students themselves. For this, teachers should be willing to make changes in their teaching practices, attending to a few key points, i.e. where and with whom students will use English, how they can adapt to their interlocutors' divergent ways of using English (e.g. their pace, tempo, pronunciation, styles) and whether/how they can cope with the linguistic and cultural burden in high-stakes communication situations by using some communication strategies.

The findings also offer some suggestions for the university management in terms of teacher hiring policy for content and language-focused courses. As suggested by several students, regardless of whether the courses are content or language-focused, teacher qualifications are the key to adeptly performing the task of teaching content and language courses. A similar argument was developed quite a long time ago by Árvá and Medgyes (2000), maintaining that teachers 'should be hired solely on the basis of their professional virtue, regardless of their language background' (p. 358). Although they proposed this argument vis-à-vis language teachers, it also applies to content teachers. Therefore, it is advisable for the university management to be attentive to the importance of hiring well-trained language and content teachers capable of fulfilling students' linguistic and content-based expectations and demands.

It should be mentioned here that the study is limited in some respects. The major limitation relates to the research design, a case study. It is not possible to generalize the findings to students from other EMI universities. The findings are indeed limited to the participants involved in the study. Probably, the results would have been different had other students who did not take part in the study been involved in the study. Nevertheless, since the main aim of this research is not to make generalizations about EMI students' teacher preferences but to gain a better understanding of students' teacher tendencies in content and language-focused courses in their own contexts, the issue of generalizability does not constitute a big concern. One reason for this is that the implications of the findings can still be relevant to EMI students and recruitment officers in different parts of Turkey and the world. Another limitation was about the questionnaire item which asked for students' preferences in content teachers only, as the research was initially designed to explore students' preferences for content teachers. However, it was noticed in the interviews that students often referred to language teachers when expressing their preferences for content teachers for purposes of clarity. Seeing that students differed in their preferences based on the subject in question, students' preferences for language teachers were also included in the analysis for comparison. Moreover, the questionnaire item was too general, only asking which type of teachers students would prefer in content courses. More detailed answers would have been obtained if the questionnaire had included more items, especially items on students' preferences for major language skills (e.g. reading, speaking, writing) and sub-skills (e.g. recognition of connected speech, understanding gist in listening, intonation in speaking, vocabulary).

Considering the limitations mentioned above, it seems necessary to explore EMI students' preferences towards being taught by NESTs and NNESTs in content and language-focused courses through future work from several aspects. For instance, a further study can examine teacher recruitment policy of EMI universities, if possible, by consulting with human resources and recruitment officers responsible for EMI university's recruitment strategy. An examination of this kind can allow researchers to discover the extent to which students' teacher preferences overlap with the teacher recruitment strategies of EMI universities. Additionally, further research should be undertaken to investigate EMI students' preferences and perceptions of NNESTs who do not share students' mother tongue. More research on EMI students' preferences would help us establish a greater degree of understanding on how students perceive the types of teachers they interact with while pursuing the acquisition of content knowledge and linguistic competence.

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APPENDIX 1

Interviewee profiles

Students	G	University	Discipline	Study at preparatory school	Studying in EMI before
S1	F	METU	IR	Yes	No
S2	M	METU	ME	Yes	No
S3	M	METU	History	No	Yes
S4	M	METU	ME	Yes	No
S5	M	METU	ME	Yes	No
S6	F	METU	History	Yes	No
S7	F	Bilkent	IR	No	Yes
S8	M	Bilkent	ME	Yes	No
S9	M	Bilkent	IR	Yes	Yes
S10	M	Bilkent	ME	No	Yes
S11	F	Bilkent	History	No	No
S12	M	Boğaziçi	ME	Yes	No
S13	F	Bilkent	History	Yes	No
S14	F	Boğaziçi	IR	No	No
S15	M	Boğaziçi	IR	Yes	No
S16	M	Boğaziçi	IR	Yes	No
S17	F	Boğaziçi	ME	Yes	No
S18	F	Bilkent	History	Yes	Yes
S19	M	Boğaziçi	ME	Yes	No
S20	M	Boğaziçi	ME	Yes	No