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**VIETNAMESE EFL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF  
NATIVE ENGLISH-SPEAKING TEACHERS IN HANOI:  
PEDAGOGICAL BENEFITS, CHALLENGES, AND CULTURAL  
CONSIDERATIONS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study explores Vietnamese EFL university students' perceptions of native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) in a higher education context in Hanoi, Vietnam. Employing an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, the research collected quantitative data through questionnaires administered to undergraduate students, followed by qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews. The study focuses on three key dimensions: perceived pedagogical benefits, challenges in language learning, and cultural considerations in the classroom. The findings indicate that students generally hold positive attitudes toward NESTs, particularly valuing their ability to create engaging and communicative learning environments. NESTs were perceived as especially effective in teaching listening and speaking skills, as well as improving pronunciation and fostering learners' confidence in real-life communication. However, several challenges were identified, including difficulties in understanding grammar explanations delivered solely in English and occasional communication barriers due to differences in linguistic background. From a cultural perspective, the results suggest that while students appreciate opportunities to learn about target-language cultures, cultural differences can influence classroom interaction styles and learning expectations. Nonetheless, both students and teachers demonstrated adaptability in navigating these differences, contributing to a generally positive learning experience. The study highlights the complementary roles of native and non-native English-speaking teachers and suggests that pedagogical collaboration may enhance learning outcomes in the

Vietnamese EFL context. Implications are discussed for language educators and institutional policymakers in optimizing English language teaching practices in Vietnam.

**KEYWORDS:** *native English-speaking teachers (NESTs), Vietnamese EFL students, student perceptions, English language teaching, higher education, cultural differences, Hanoi context.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the role of English in Vietnam has expanded beyond a school subject to become a key tool for academic mobility, employability, and international engagement. This shift is particularly visible in large urban centers such as Hanoi, where universities are actively reforming their English language programs to align with global standards. Within this transformation, the presence of native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) has become increasingly common, often positioned as a strategic resource to enhance students' communicative competence and exposure to authentic language use.

The growing demand for NESTs in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts is closely linked to persistent beliefs about linguistic authenticity and pedagogical effectiveness. Despite extensive critique of “native speakerism” in applied linguistics, the assumption that native speakers inherently possess superior teaching capabilities continues to influence hiring practices and institutional policies (Holliday, 2018; Selvi, 2022). In practice, NESTs are frequently associated with natural pronunciation, spontaneous language use, and interactive teaching styles, which are considered beneficial for developing learners' oral communication skills. However, these perceived advantages do not necessarily translate into universally effective teaching, especially in contexts where learners have diverse proficiency levels and specific academic needs.

Emerging research has highlighted that students' experiences with NESTs are often complex and sometimes contradictory. On the one hand, learners tend to appreciate opportunities to engage in communicative activities and to build confidence in speaking English in more authentic contexts (Walkinshaw & Duong, 2014; Wang & Fang, 2020). On the other hand, challenges frequently arise in areas such as grammar instruction, clarity of explanation, and alignment with exam-oriented curricula. These issues can be particularly salient in EFL settings like Vietnam, where English learning has traditionally emphasized accuracy, structured knowledge, and high-stakes assessment (Nguyen & Pham, 2021).

Beyond pedagogical concerns, classroom interaction is also shaped by sociocultural factors. Vietnamese educational culture is often characterized by respect for teachers, sensitivity to social harmony, and a tendency toward cautious participation in public settings. In contrast, many NESTs adopt communicative and student-centered approaches that encourage open discussion, critical thinking, and active participation. Such differences may create subtle tensions in classroom dynamics, affecting how students respond to teaching practices and how teachers interpret student behavior (Phan, 2019; Tran & Nguyen, 2022). Understanding these dynamics is essential for developing more contextually responsive teaching strategies.

Although there is a growing body of research on native and non-native English-speaking teachers globally, empirical studies focusing specifically on Vietnamese university students—particularly in Hanoi—remain relatively limited and fragmented. Much of the existing literature has concentrated on policy perspectives or teacher-related issues, with less attention paid to students' lived experiences and perceptions in contemporary classrooms. Given the ongoing internationalization of Vietnamese higher education, there is a clear need for updated research that captures how students perceive the pedagogical value and challenges associated with NESTs in their local context.

Responding to this gap, the present study investigates Vietnamese EFL university students' perceptions of native English-speaking teachers in Hanoi, with particular attention to pedagogical benefits, learning challenges, and cultural considerations. By adopting a mixed-methods approach, the study seeks to provide nuanced insights into how students interpret their learning experiences and how these perceptions can inform more effective English language teaching practices in Vietnam.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do Vietnamese EFL university students perceive the pedagogical contributions of native English-speaking teachers?
2. What challenges do students encounter when learning with NESTs in the university classroom?
3. In what ways do cultural factors influence students' experiences and interactions with NESTs?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Native speakerism and the role of NESTs in EFL contexts

The prominence of native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) in English language teaching has long been associated with the ideology of *native speakerism*, which privileges native speakers as ideal language models and instructors. This belief, while deeply rooted in historical and institutional practices, has been increasingly critiqued in applied linguistics. Scholars argue that native speakerism oversimplifies the complexity of language teaching by equating linguistic background with pedagogical competence (Holliday, 2018; Selvi, 2022).

Recent discussions have shifted toward a more critical and inclusive perspective, recognizing that both native and non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) bring distinct strengths to the classroom. For example, NNESTs may offer explicit knowledge of grammar, shared linguistic backgrounds, and an understanding of learners' challenges, while NESTs are often associated with fluency, pronunciation, and natural language use (Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2014; Wang & Fang, 2020). This complementary view suggests that the effectiveness of teachers should be evaluated based on pedagogical skills and contextual responsiveness rather than nativeness alone.

In Southeast Asian contexts, including Vietnam, native speakerism continues to influence recruitment practices and institutional perceptions of quality. However, recent studies have called for a more balanced approach that values professional qualifications, teaching experience, and intercultural competence (Nguyen & Hamid, 2020; Selvi, 2022). This shift is particularly relevant in higher education, where diverse student needs require more nuanced teaching strategies.

### 2.2. Students' perceptions of NESTs: Pedagogical benefits and limitations

Students' perceptions play a central role in evaluating teaching effectiveness, as they reflect learners' direct experiences in the classroom. A growing body of research indicates that students often hold generally positive attitudes toward NESTs, particularly in relation to communicative aspects of language learning. For instance, NESTs are frequently perceived as more engaging, flexible, and capable of creating interactive learning environments that encourage students to use English actively (Wang & Fang, 2020; Rao, 2019).

One of the most consistently reported strengths of NESTs lies in their ability to support the development of listening and speaking skills. Exposure to authentic pronunciation and real-life communication styles is often viewed as beneficial for improving learners' fluency and confidence (Walkinshaw & Duong, 2014). In addition, students may perceive NESTs as more

effective in promoting learner autonomy and reducing anxiety in communication-focused classrooms.

However, these positive perceptions are often accompanied by notable challenges. Several studies have found that students may struggle to understand complex explanations delivered entirely in English, particularly when it comes to grammar instruction or abstract linguistic concepts (Nguyen & Pham, 2021; Moussu & Llorca, 2008). This issue can be more pronounced among lower-proficiency learners, who may rely on their first language for clarification and deeper understanding.

Furthermore, differences in teaching approaches may create mismatches between students' expectations and instructional practices. In exam-oriented educational systems, students often expect structured lessons, clear explanations, and explicit guidance—areas where NNESTs are sometimes perceived to have an advantage (Rao, 2019). As a result, students' preferences are not always fixed but may vary depending on the specific learning objectives and classroom context.

### **2.3. Cultural considerations in EFL classrooms**

In addition to pedagogical factors, cultural dynamics play a crucial role in shaping students' experiences with NESTs. Language classrooms are inherently intercultural spaces, where differences in communication styles, values, and expectations can influence both teaching and learning processes. In the Vietnamese context, cultural norms such as respect for authority, indirect communication, and concern for maintaining harmony may affect how students participate in classroom interactions (Phan, 2019).

These cultural characteristics may contrast with the communicative teaching styles commonly adopted by NESTs, which often emphasize open discussion, critical thinking, and active participation. While such approaches are widely promoted in contemporary language pedagogy, they may not always align with students' prior learning experiences or cultural expectations (Tran & Nguyen, 2022). For example, students may hesitate to speak up in class due to fear of making mistakes or losing face, even when encouraged to do so.

At the same time, cultural differences do not necessarily constitute barriers; rather, they can create opportunities for meaningful intercultural learning. When teachers demonstrate cultural sensitivity and adapt their teaching practices to local contexts, they can foster more inclusive and effective learning environments (Nguyen & Hamid, 2020). Similarly, students who are exposed to diverse cultural perspectives may develop greater intercultural awareness and communicative competence, which are essential skills in a globalized world.

## **2.4. Research gap**

Despite increasing scholarly attention to the roles of NESTs and NNESTs, there remains a need for more context-specific research that captures students' perspectives in contemporary Vietnamese higher education. While some studies have explored general attitudes toward English learning in Vietnam, fewer have examined how students interpret their experiences with NESTs in relation to pedagogical effectiveness and cultural interaction.

Moreover, much of the existing literature tends to focus on either pedagogical or cultural dimensions in isolation, rather than examining how these factors intersect in shaping students' perceptions. In rapidly internationalizing cities such as Hanoi, where exposure to foreign teachers is becoming more common, understanding these interconnected dimensions is particularly important.

Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by providing an integrated analysis of Vietnamese EFL university students' perceptions of NESTs, focusing on pedagogical benefits, learning challenges, and cultural considerations within a single research framework.

## **3. Methodology**

### **3.1. Research Design**

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) to gain a comprehensive understanding of Vietnamese EFL university students' perceptions of native English-speaking teachers (NESTs). In this design, quantitative data were collected and analyzed in the first phase, followed by qualitative data collection to further explain and elaborate on the quantitative findings.

The quantitative phase aimed to identify general trends in students' perceptions regarding pedagogical benefits, learning challenges, and cultural considerations. The subsequent qualitative phase provided deeper insights into students' experiences and interpretations, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the issues identified in the survey data. The integration of both data types enhanced the validity and richness of the findings.

### **3.2. Participants**

The participants of this study were undergraduate students enrolled at a public university in Hanoi, Vietnam, who had prior experience learning English with at least one native English-speaking teacher. A purposive sampling strategy was adopted to ensure that all participants were relevant to the research objectives.

A total of approximately 120–150 students participated in the questionnaire survey. They were drawn from different academic majors, including Business Administration, Economics,

and Information Technology, and were enrolled in compulsory English courses as part of their degree programs. The participants represented a range of English proficiency levels, from lower-intermediate to upper-intermediate.

For the qualitative phase, 12–16 students voluntarily participated in semi-structured interviews. These participants were selected to reflect diverse perspectives in terms of proficiency levels, gender, and prior learning experiences. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and their participation was voluntary. Ethical considerations, including confidentiality and anonymity, were strictly maintained throughout the research process.

### **3.3. Instruments**

#### **3.3.1. Questionnaire**

The primary instrument for the quantitative phase was a structured questionnaire designed to examine students' perceptions of NESTs. The questionnaire consisted of three main sections:

1. Pedagogical benefits (e.g., teaching effectiveness, classroom engagement, skill development)
2. Learning challenges (e.g., comprehension difficulties, language barriers, instructional clarity)
3. Cultural considerations (e.g., cultural awareness, classroom interaction, teacher-student relationships)

The items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The questionnaire was adapted and refined from previous validated studies (e.g., Wang & Fang, 2020; Walkinshaw & Duong, 2014) to ensure relevance to the Vietnamese context.

To ensure clarity and avoid misinterpretation, the questionnaire was developed in English and then translated into Vietnamese. A back-translation procedure was conducted to ensure linguistic equivalence. Additionally, the instrument was reviewed by two experts in English language teaching to establish content validity.

A pilot study was conducted with a small group of students ( $n \approx 30$ ), and the reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded an acceptable coefficient ( $\alpha > .80$ ), indicating good internal consistency.

### **3.3.2. Semi-structured Interviews**

To complement the survey data, semi-structured interviews were conducted in the qualitative phase. An interview guide was developed to explore students' perceptions in greater depth, focusing on:

- Experiences of learning with NESTs
- Perceived strengths and weaknesses of NESTs
- Challenges encountered in classroom interaction
- Cultural differences and their impact on learning

The interviews were conducted in Vietnamese to ensure that participants could express their ideas comfortably and accurately. Each interview lasted approximately 20–30 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' consent. The recordings were later transcribed and translated into English for analysis.

### **3.4. Data Analysis**

#### **3.4.1. Quantitative Data Analysis**

The quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions, were used to summarize students' responses.

In addition, inferential statistics (e.g., independent samples t-tests or ANOVA, where appropriate) were conducted to explore potential differences in perceptions based on variables such as proficiency level or prior experience with NESTs. These analyses helped identify patterns and relationships within the data.

#### **3.4.2. Qualitative Data Analysis**

The qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis following the procedures outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis involved several stages:

1. Familiarization with the data through repeated reading of transcripts
2. Initial coding of meaningful units of text
3. Identification and categorization of emerging themes
4. Review and refinement of themes
5. Interpretation and integration with quantitative findings

To enhance the credibility of the analysis, member checking was conducted by sharing summaries of the findings with selected participants. In addition, peer debriefing was used to ensure the consistency and reliability of the coding process.

### 3.4.3. Integration of Data

The final stage of analysis involved integrating quantitative and qualitative findings. The qualitative results were used to explain, support, and expand upon the patterns identified in the quantitative data. This triangulation of data sources strengthened the overall validity of the study and provided a more comprehensive understanding of students' perceptions.

## 4. RESULTS

This section presents the findings of the study based on both quantitative and qualitative data. The results are organized into two main parts: (1) quantitative findings from the questionnaire survey and (2) qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews. The findings are structured around the three key dimensions of the study: pedagogical benefits, learning challenges, and cultural considerations.

### 4.1. Quantitative Findings

#### 4.1.1. Students' Perceptions of Pedagogical Benefits

Table 1 summarizes students' perceptions of the pedagogical benefits of native English-speaking teachers (NESTs).

*Table 1: Students' perceptions of pedagogical benefits of NESTs.*

Item	Statement	M	SD
1	NESTs create engaging and interactive classroom environments	4.42	0.61
2	NESTs help improve my speaking skills	4.55	0.58
3	NESTs help improve my listening skills	4.48	0.63
4	NESTs use a variety of teaching methods	4.21	0.67
5	I feel more confident speaking English with NESTs	4.37	0.65
6	NESTs encourage student participation	4.33	0.70

Overall, students reported highly positive perceptions of NESTs' pedagogical contributions (M range: 4.21–4.55). The highest-rated item was related to improvement in speaking skills (M = 4.55, SD = 0.58), followed by listening skills (M = 4.48, SD = 0.63). These findings suggest that students particularly value NESTs in developing communicative competence.

In addition, students perceived NESTs as effective in creating engaging learning environments and encouraging participation, which aligns with communicative language teaching approaches.

#### 4.1.2. Perceived Learning Challenges

Table 2 presents students' perceptions of challenges encountered when learning with NESTs.

**Table 2: Students' perceived challenges when learning with NESTs.**

Item	Statement	M	SD
7	I find it difficult to understand grammar explanations in English	3.78	0.89
8	I sometimes struggle to understand NESTs' instructions	3.65	0.92
9	I feel anxious when I cannot express my ideas clearly in English	3.71	0.85
10	The lack of Vietnamese explanation makes learning more difficult	3.82	0.88
11	NESTs do not always match exam-oriented learning needs	3.60	0.91

The results indicate moderate levels of perceived difficulty (M range: 3.60–3.82). The most prominent challenge was related to the lack of first language (Vietnamese) support (M = 3.82, SD = 0.88), followed by difficulties in understanding grammar explanations (M = 3.78, SD = 0.89).

These findings suggest that while students appreciate communicative teaching, they still encounter challenges when dealing with complex linguistic content, particularly in an English-only instructional environment.

#### 4.1.3. Cultural Considerations

Table 3 shows students' perceptions of cultural aspects in learning with NESTs.

**Table 3: Cultural considerations in learning with NESTs.**

Item	Statement	M	SD
12	I learn more about English-speaking cultures from NESTs	4.36	0.66
13	NESTs help me understand cultural differences	4.18	0.71
14	Cultural differences affect classroom interaction	3.52	0.93
15	I feel comfortable interacting with NESTs	4.05	0.78
16	NESTs respect Vietnamese culture	4.29	0.64

Students generally expressed positive perceptions of cultural learning (M range: 3.52–4.36). The highest-rated item was learning about English-speaking cultures (M = 4.36, SD = 0.66), indicating that NESTs play an important role in promoting intercultural awareness.

However, the relatively lower mean score for cultural differences affecting interaction (M = 3.52, SD = 0.93) suggests that such differences exist but are not perceived as major barriers.

#### 4.2. Qualitative Findings

The qualitative data from interviews provided deeper insights into students' perceptions. Three main themes emerged: (1) perceived pedagogical strengths, (2) challenges in comprehension and learning expectations, and (3) cultural adaptation and interaction.

#### 4.2.1. Perceived Pedagogical Strengths

Most participants described NESTs as engaging, supportive, and communicative. Students highlighted that classes with NESTs were more interactive compared to traditional lecture-based approaches.

*“With foreign teachers, we have more chances to speak. I feel less afraid of making mistakes because they encourage us to try.”* (Student A)

Many students also emphasized improvements in pronunciation and listening skills due to exposure to authentic language input.

#### 4.2.2. Learning Challenges and Expectations

Despite positive attitudes, students reported several challenges, particularly related to comprehension and grammar instruction.

*“Sometimes I understand the general idea, but when the teacher explains grammar in English, it is difficult to follow.”* (Student B)

Some students expressed a preference for a combination of teaching approaches, noting that Vietnamese teachers might be more effective in explaining complex grammar rules.

Additionally, a mismatch between communicative teaching and exam-oriented expectations was noted:

*“We need to pass exams, so sometimes we want clearer explanations and more focus on grammar.”* (Student C)

#### 4.2.3. Cultural Adaptation and Interaction

Students generally reported positive relationships with NESTs but acknowledged subtle cultural differences in classroom interaction.

*“Foreign teachers are more open and expect students to speak more, but sometimes we are not used to that.”* (Student D)

Some students mentioned hesitation in speaking due to fear of making mistakes or losing face, reflecting cultural influences on participation.

At the same time, students appreciated the opportunity to learn about different cultures:

*“I think learning with native teachers helps me understand not only language but also how people think and communicate.”* (Student E)

#### 4.3. Summary of Findings

Overall, the results indicate that Vietnamese EFL university students in Hanoi hold generally positive perceptions of NESTs, particularly in terms of communicative teaching and language skill development. However, challenges related to comprehension, grammar instruction, and

alignment with local learning expectations remain evident. Cultural differences, while present, are largely navigated successfully by both students and teachers.

## **5. DISCUSSION**

The present study set out to examine Vietnamese EFL university students' perceptions of native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) in Hanoi, with a focus on pedagogical benefits, learning challenges, and cultural considerations. The findings reveal a nuanced picture in which students simultaneously recognize the strengths of NESTs while also identifying certain limitations. These results both support and extend existing literature in meaningful ways.

### **5.1. Pedagogical Benefits of NESTs: Confirming the Value of Communicative Competence**

One of the most prominent findings of this study is students' strong appreciation of NESTs' contributions to the development of speaking and listening skills. This aligns with previous research suggesting that learners tend to associate NESTs with authentic language input, natural pronunciation, and communicative teaching styles (Walkinshaw & Duong, 2014; Wang & Fang, 2020). The high mean scores for items related to speaking confidence and classroom engagement further reinforce the idea that NESTs play a significant role in fostering communicative competence.

From a pedagogical perspective, these findings can be interpreted through the lens of communicative language teaching (CLT), which emphasizes meaningful interaction and real-life language use. The results suggest that NESTs may be particularly effective in implementing CLT-oriented practices, thereby creating a learning environment that encourages active participation. This is especially relevant in the Vietnamese context, where traditional language instruction has often been characterized by teacher-centered approaches and limited opportunities for oral practice (Nguyen & Pham, 2021).

At the same time, the findings also challenge simplistic assumptions associated with native speakerism. While students value the communicative strengths of NESTs, their positive perceptions appear to be based more on teaching practices than on nativeness itself. This supports recent arguments that effective teaching is not inherently tied to being a native speaker, but rather to pedagogical competence and classroom interaction skills (Selvi, 2022).

### **5.2. Persistent Learning Challenges: The Limits of English-Only Instruction**

Despite generally positive perceptions, the study also highlights several challenges that students encounter when learning with NESTs. In particular, difficulties in understanding

grammar explanations and the absence of Vietnamese language support emerged as key concerns. These findings are consistent with earlier studies indicating that English-only instruction may not always be effective for learners with limited proficiency, especially when dealing with abstract linguistic concepts (Moussu & Llorca, 2008; Nguyen & Pham, 2021).

The results suggest that students in this context still value explicit instruction and clear explanations, which are often associated with more form-focused teaching approaches. This reflects the influence of exam-oriented educational systems, where grammatical accuracy and test performance remain important priorities (Rao, 2019). Consequently, a purely communicative approach may not fully address students' academic needs.

Importantly, these findings do not imply that NESTs are ineffective, but rather that their teaching approaches may need to be adapted to local learning contexts. The challenge lies in balancing communicative practices with explicit instruction, particularly for learners at lower proficiency levels. This supports the argument that contextual sensitivity is a key component of effective language teaching (Nguyen & Hamid, 2020).

### **5.3. Cultural Dynamics: Negotiating Differences in Classroom Interaction**

Another important dimension of the study concerns the role of cultural factors in shaping students' learning experiences. The findings indicate that while students generally feel comfortable interacting with NESTs, cultural differences do influence classroom participation and communication styles. This is evident in students' hesitation to speak up, which is often linked to fear of making mistakes or losing face.

These observations are consistent with previous research on Asian educational contexts, where learners may exhibit cautious participation due to cultural norms emphasizing respect, modesty, and social harmony (Phan, 2019; Tran & Nguyen, 2022). In contrast, NESTs often expect more active and spontaneous participation, reflecting pedagogical traditions rooted in Western educational systems.

However, rather than viewing these differences as barriers, the findings suggest that they can be understood as part of an ongoing process of intercultural negotiation. Students' positive attitudes toward learning about English-speaking cultures indicate a willingness to engage with new perspectives. At the same time, the relatively moderate impact of cultural differences on interaction suggests that both students and teachers are capable of adapting to each other over time.

This adaptive process highlights the importance of intercultural competence in language teaching. Teachers who are aware of local cultural norms and adjust their expectations

accordingly are more likely to create inclusive and effective learning environments (Nguyen & Hamid, 2020). Similarly, students who are exposed to diverse communication styles may develop greater flexibility in intercultural communication.

#### **5.4. Toward a Complementary Model of Teaching**

Taken together, the findings of this study support a complementary view of NESTs and non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs). While NESTs are perceived as particularly effective in promoting communicative skills and cultural exposure, NNESTs may be better positioned to support grammar instruction and provide explanations in the students' first language.

This perspective is consistent with a growing body of literature advocating for collaboration between NESTs and NNESTs as a way to maximize learning outcomes (Mahboob, 2004; Wang & Fang, 2020). In the Vietnamese context, such collaboration could help bridge the gap between communicative competence and exam-oriented requirements, providing students with a more balanced learning experience.

Rather than framing the issue as a competition between native and non-native teachers, the findings suggest that a more productive approach is to recognize their complementary strengths and to design pedagogical strategies that leverage both. This has important implications for institutional policies, particularly in relation to teacher recruitment, training, and curriculum design.

#### **5.5. Implications for Vietnamese Higher Education**

The findings of this study carry several implications for English language teaching in Vietnamese universities. First, while the inclusion of NESTs can enhance communicative learning, institutions should ensure that teaching approaches are adapted to students' proficiency levels and learning needs. Second, professional development programs should emphasize intercultural competence and context-sensitive pedagogy for all teachers. Finally, collaborative teaching models involving both NESTs and NNESTs may offer a more effective and sustainable approach to improving English language education.

### **6. CONCLUSION**

This study investigated Vietnamese EFL university students' perceptions of native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) in a Hanoi-based higher education context, focusing on pedagogical benefits, learning challenges, and cultural considerations. The findings reveal that students generally hold positive attitudes toward NESTs, particularly in relation to their

ability to foster communicative competence, create engaging classroom environments, and provide exposure to authentic language use.

At the same time, the study highlights several challenges, especially in terms of grammar instruction, comprehension difficulties, and the lack of first language support. These findings suggest that while communicative approaches are valued, they may not fully align with students' academic needs in an exam-oriented context. Additionally, cultural differences were found to influence classroom interaction, although these differences were not perceived as major obstacles but rather as manageable aspects of the learning process.

Overall, the study supports a more balanced and context-sensitive understanding of English language teaching, in which the effectiveness of teachers is determined not by their nativeness but by their pedagogical competence and ability to respond to learners' needs.

## **7. Pedagogical Implications**

The findings of this study offer several important implications for English language teaching in Vietnamese higher education.

First, universities should move beyond the assumption that native speakers are inherently more effective teachers and instead adopt more inclusive hiring practices that prioritize teaching qualifications, experience, and intercultural competence. This aligns with current shifts in the field toward challenging native speakerism and promoting equity in ELT.

Second, NESTs should be supported through context-specific professional development, particularly in areas such as teaching grammar to EFL learners, adapting instructional language, and understanding local learning cultures. Training programs can help NESTs better align their communicative teaching approaches with students' expectations and proficiency levels.

Third, the findings strongly support the implementation of collaborative or team-teaching models involving both NESTs and non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs). Such models can combine the strengths of both groups—NESTs' communicative and cultural input with NNESTs' ability to provide explicit explanations and linguistic support—thereby enhancing overall learning outcomes.

Finally, curriculum designers should consider integrating both communicative and form-focused instruction, ensuring that students are equipped not only with practical language skills but also with the grammatical knowledge required for academic success.

## 8. Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged.

First, the study was conducted within a single university in Hanoi, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other institutional contexts in Vietnam. Future research could include multiple universities across different regions to provide a more comprehensive picture.

Second, the sample size, while adequate for the study design, remains relatively modest. Larger-scale studies could provide more robust statistical analysis and allow for more detailed comparisons across variables such as proficiency level or academic discipline.

Third, the study relied primarily on self-reported data from questionnaires and interviews. While these methods provide valuable insights into students' perceptions, future research could incorporate classroom observations or longitudinal designs to capture actual teaching practices and learning outcomes over time.

Finally, further research could explore the perspectives of teachers themselves, particularly how NESTs and NNESTs perceive their roles and challenges in the Vietnamese context. Such studies would contribute to a more holistic understanding of English language teaching in higher education.

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