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## Teachers' responses to students' homework complaints in e-mailcommunication: A cross-cultural perspective

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### Abstract

While language teachers may assign additional homework based on their educational beliefs and institutional policies, learners' responses, particularly complaints, are shaped by underlying cultural norms and expectations. The way teachers respond to such complaints reflects culture-specific styles of teacher–student interaction. This study aims to explore the lingua-cultural factors shaping teachers' perspectives on homework, their complaint response strategies (CRSs), and the linguistic features of these strategies. Accordingly, this study examined the perspectives of 32 native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and 54 Turkish non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) on homework, as well as their strategies for addressing student complaints about homework in the Turkish educational context. Data were collected using a survey and a discourse completion task. Results indicated that both groups valued homework for reinforcing learning and improving achievement. NESTs prioritized student autonomy and self-directed learning, while NNESTs favored structured, guided assignments tailored to student needs. In responding to complaints, NESTs often used commiseration strategies, whereas NNESTs employed authoritative approaches, using imperatives, passive voice, and modal verbs. Despite these differences, both groups relied on guidance and explanation as their primary strategy, promoting constructive dialogue and resolving concerns. Results highlight the significance of considering the diverse pedagogical approaches adopted by NESTs and NNESTs, as well as the distinct linguistic choices they make in complaint responses, which reflect underlying cultural interactional norms and have implications for intercultural communication in language classrooms. It is important to appreciate these differences in order to foster a collaborative and culturally sensitive educational environment.

**Keywords:** *e-mail communication, teacher – student communication, speech act of complaint, complaint response, strategies, EFL*




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## **Ответ на жалобу на домашнее задание в электронной коммуникации преподавателя и студента: кросс-культурный аспект**

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**Аннотация**

Преподаватели иностранных языков задают студентам дополнительные домашние задания, исходя из своего профессионального понимания и институциональной политики. Реакция на них учащихся, особенно жалобы, как и ответная реакция преподавателей, формируются под влиянием базовых культурных норм и ожиданий и отражают культурно-специфические стили взаимодействия преподавателя и студента. Цель данного исследования – выявить лингвокультурные факторы, формирующие взгляды преподавателей на домашнее задание, их стратегии реагирования на жалобы студентов и языковые особенности реализации этих стратегий в турецком образовательном контексте. Респондентами явились 32 преподавателя-носителя английского языка и 54 турецких преподавателя английского языка. Сбор данных осуществлялся с помощью опроса и задания на завершение дискурса. Результаты показали, что обе группы считают домашние задания важным инструментом, так как они закрепляют знания и повышают успеваемость учащихся. При этом преподаватели – носители английского языка отдавали предпочтение автономии и самостоятельному обучению, а отвечая на жалобы студентов, часто использовали стратегию сочувствия. Турецкие преподаватели предпочитали структурированные и направляющие задания, соответствующие потребностям учащихся, а в ответах на жалобы применяли авторитарные подходы, используя пассивный залог, императив и модальные глаголы. В то же время обе группы полагались на объяснение как основную стратегию, способствующую конструктивному диалогу и разрешению проблем. Полученные результаты подчеркивают важность рассмотрения педагогических подходов, применяемых носителями и неносителями английского языка, а также исследования языковых средств, используемых в ответах на жалобы студентов. Выявленные различия определяются базовыми культурными нормами взаимодействия преподавателей и студентов. Их знание способствует межкультурной коммуникации и пониманию в мультикультурной образовательной среде.

**Ключевые слова:** *электронная коммуникация, общение преподавателя и студента, речевой акт «жалоба», ответ на жалобу, коммуникативные стратегии, английский язык как иностранный*

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## **1. Introduction**

Language teachers' cultural backgrounds can significantly influence their educational orientations, including their approaches to communicating with students from different cultures (Zbenovich et al. 2024, Zhou & Larina 2024), both during and outside class hours, whether in their native culture or a host culture (Deveci et al. 2023). These factors highlight the need for cultural awareness, which involves understanding how members of the host country think and behave.

Teachers' and students' attitudes toward educational practices like homework are strongly influenced by their cultural and educational backgrounds. For instance, research shows that native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) often differ in their perspectives on homework, reflecting broader distinctions between Western and Eastern educational values (Hassan & Jamaludin 2010, Kartal & Balçikanli 2019).

Cultural differences in perceptions of homework may lead to student resentment, prompting some to voice complaints. Cultural differences can influence how teachers respond to such complaints. Mishandling a student complaint can hinder effective communication (Aporbo et al. 2024, Kramsch 1993). Not only does this have the potential to negatively impact students' engagement and learning outcomes, but it also affects the teacher's positive face (the desire to be liked and respected) and negative face (the desire for autonomy and freedom from imposition) (Brown & Levinson 1987). Handling complaints sensitively, therefore, is crucial to maintaining a positive and effective communication dynamic between teachers and students. That is, teachers' utilization of Complaint Response Strategies (CRSs) can either threaten or save students' face. Thus, comparing how NESTs in a host country and NNESTs handle student complaints could provide valuable insights. Ultimately, communication is typically easier among individuals sharing the same socio-cultural background (Deveci & Midraj 2021). In addition, a speech act is a cultural act before it is a linguistic one and effective intercultural communication requires pragmatic competence to navigate and execute various speech acts appropriately in diverse cultural contexts (Litvinova & Larina 2023).

Considering these dynamics, this research compares NESTs' and NNESTs' perspectives on homework, CRSs, and the linguistic features of CRSs within the Turkish cultural context. By doing so, the study aims to explore culture-specific styles and strategies that shape teachers' perspectives on homework, their responses to student complaints, and the linguistic and communicative features of these responses in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings.

Research questions are as follows:

1. How do the opinions of NESTs and NNESTs on homework compare to each other?
2. How do CRSs used by NESTs compare to those used by NNESTs when faced with complaints about the amount of homework assigned?
3. How does the utilization of linguistic devices in CRSs differ between NESTs and NNESTs?

## **2. Theoretical background**

### **2.1. Homework and student complaints**

Supporters of homework view it as a tool for reinforcing previously learned material and preparing students for upcoming lessons (Hong & Milgram 2000). However, those skeptical about it contend that it may cause students to be bored with school and reduce the amount of time dedicated to leisure activities teaching important life skills (Cooper 1987). Such perceptions can be shaped by various factors, including cultural norms that define what constitutes valuable knowledge and appropriate behavior within educational settings (Qi 2024). Research indicates significant variations in teachers' perceptions of homework across different cultures. For example, Sayers et al. (2022) observed that while English and Swedish teachers shared some common views, they also held distinct opinions. The former typically regarded homework as crucial to educational practice, emphasizing its role in improving learning outcomes and fostering parental involvement. In contrast, the latter showed more ambivalence towards homework, influenced by cultural norms that prioritize educational equity and minimize parental influence on school-directed learning activities. In the Turkish context, Ogur et al. (2022) observed that teachers generally view homework as essential, citing its role in enhancing reading and writing skills, diversifying writing tasks, and supporting learning outside the classroom. Conversely, according to Yıldız and Kılıç (2020), some Turkish teachers are concerned that excessive homework burdens students and diminishes their enthusiasm for school.

Many students in various contexts have a negative attitude towards homework thinking it is not beneficial (Turanli 2009) and their needs are not necessarily reflected in the assigned homework (Deveci 2019). Also, the amount of homework students are assigned often creates stress (Morales 2019). Laden with such feelings, students may choose to express their negative thoughts to their teachers in the form of a complaint, a speech act where “the speaker (S) expresses displeasure or annoyance – *censure* – as a reaction to a past or going action, the consequences of which are perceived by S as affecting her unfavorably” (Olshtain & Weinbach 1993: 108). It can serve as a means for students to voice their concerns and seek redress for perceived injustices or problems. Given its nature as a face-threatening act, a complaint may challenge the positive and negative face of the interlocutor (Brown & Levinson 1987).

To complain, students may use various strategies and communication channels, influenced by cultural factors (Wierzbicka 1985), their understanding of politeness - both a universal concept and culture-specific phenomenon (Eslami et al. 2023), interpersonal dynamics (Cupach & Carson 2002), and the perceived severity of the issue (Fang et al. 2022). Additionally, students may express complaints in various ways, as outlined by Kasper (1997): direct verbal complaints during or after class, indirect verbal cues like sarcasm or hints, non-verbal expressions through body language, and written complaints via email.

Tsoumou (2024) points out that email has emerged as a primary mode of communication in academic contexts, particularly for interactions between teachers and students outside of the classroom. He notes that email communication encompasses communicative strategies, discursive practices, and interaction styles that are influenced by both situational and cultural contexts. In email communication between a teacher and a student, which involves an asymmetric interpersonal (and often intercultural) relationship, interactions can become quite sensitive, affecting the teaching and learning experiences of those involved. This sensitivity may particularly be evident when a face-threatening act, such as a complaint, is involved. Issues in intercultural communication, including communicative and linguistic variations, have become especially relevant with the rise of digital communication (Eslami et al. 2023).

## ***2.2. Teachers' strategies in response to students' complaints***

Despite its nature as a face-threatening act, a complaint plays a significant role in facilitating communication between students and teachers, allowing learners to express dissatisfaction with aspects of their learning experience (Deveci 2015, Murphy & Neu 1996), and seek clarification on issues related to coursework, assignments (Marbach-Ad & Sokolove 2001), and classroom dynamics. A student complaint can also offer valuable feedback to teachers, enabling them to address students' needs and improve instructional practices. In that sense, it creates teachable moments. By encouraging open communication through complaints, teachers can foster a supportive learning environment where students feel empowered to express their opinions and engage in constructive dialogue (Olshtain & Weinbach 1987), thus promoting a climate of trust and respect (Kowalski 1996).

Therefore, teachers' CRSs are of primary importance. Boxer (1993) identified six types of complaint responses among native speakers of American English: Joke/teasing, which is used to lighten the situation, often in service encounters, helping to establish rapport or make the conversation less serious; Nosubstantive Reply, consisting of minimal responses that either end the conversation or show disinterest, often due to social distance or status inequality; Question, which serves to clarify or challenge the validity of the complaint and encourages the speaker to elaborate; Advice/lecture, typically given by those of higher social status, offering suggestions or explanations, either before or after addressing the issue; Contradiction, where the responder disagrees with the complaint or defends the

criticized object; and Commiseration, the most common response, offering sympathy, agreement, or reassurance to help the speaker feel understood and supported.

Other research identified four categories: acceptance, partial acceptance, rejection, and disregard (Laforest 2002). More recently, Thongtong (2022) developed a CRS system based on previous literature, incorporating apology, explanation, appeal, offer, and guarantee, each with politeness strategies adopted from Brown and Levinson (1987), including direct, hedge, indirect approaches.

The choice of response “can significantly promote further interaction. That is, depending on the type of response elicited, the complaint sequence can affirm or reaffirm solidarity among the interlocutors or alienate them from each other” (Boxer 1993: 286). This, then, suggests that how a teacher handles student complaints can influence students’ willingness to engage in classroom activities and participate in discussions (Manes 2013). Zhou et al. (2023), too, note teachers’ linguistic choices and communication styles impact students’ emotional responses and engagement in a multicultural contexts; teachers’ discourse including the tone, politeness strategies, and use of specific linguistic features, can significantly influence students’ emotional states, such as motivation, comfort, and receptivity to learning. A teacher’s positive response to complaints, therefore, shows commitment to addressing concerns, boosting emotional engagement and academic success (Li 2018). A welcoming demeanor fosters positive student-teacher relationships (Sabir 2015). Conversely, dismissive responses can damage these relationships and hinder communication, affecting students’ motivation and social development (Kahveci 2023). Studies show that learners who face contradictions may resort to demanding solutions or criticizing teachers, which is inappropriate (Deveci 2010). Effective teacher responses lead to higher student satisfaction and persistence (Noble et al. 2021). Teachers also model communication and conflict resolution skills (Martínez 2016), teaching valuable life skills like listening, empathy, and problem-solving.

Accordingly, EFL teachers’ choice of linguistic devices when responding to student complaints is an important area of investigation. As the global demand for English language instruction increases, so does the need for both native and non-native English teachers (Fitria 2023). This increase has caused comparisons between NESTs and NNESTs. NESTs, for instance, are often argued to have a superior command of the language, including idiomatic expressions, slang, and cultural nuances (Walkinshaw & Duong 2012). Although NNESTs may not possess the same level of fluency, they are frequently said to have a deeper understanding of grammar and a stronger ability to relate to students’ learning challenges (Zhang & Solarz 2022). These differences likely influence their language use when responding to complaints as well. Investigating specific linguistic devices could reveal important differences in how NESTs and NNESTs use these tools, thus impacting student-teacher interactions and perceptions of teacher approachability and authority. For example, implicit politeness strategies like hedging may soften

responses and be perceived as more appropriate in some cultures, whereas direct language, such as using the pronoun “you” with a modal verb (e.g., “should”) or the passive voice, may establish an authoritative stance (Almahameed et al. 2022), potentially creating distance between the teacher and the student. The understanding of such devices in CRSs could inform teacher training programs, helping both NESTs and NNESTs better handle student complaints and enhance students’ learning in multi-cultural settings in particular.

### **2.3. Rationale for the study**

Although there has been much research on complaints and CRSs in various sectors, including online businesses (Ziro 2019), medical call centers (Dajem 2023), and the hospitality and tourism industry (Nghiêm-Phú 2019), the education sector has mainly focused on student complaints (El-Dakhs & Ahmed 2023) and student CRSs (Sulastri 2014). However, research on language teachers’ opinions regarding homework assignments and their use of CRSs, particularly in the Turkish context, remains limited. This highlights a clear gap in understanding the factors influencing teachers’ use of CRSs, with culture emerging as an important, yet under-explored factor.

Cultural attributes shape individuals’ communicative behaviors and strategies, including their approaches to situations like student complaints. Larina (2020) argues that these cultural factors influence the use of linguistic features in communication. For example, she suggests that the “sense of privacy” in English-speaking cultures leads speakers to favor indirectness, hedging, and formality. In contrast, Russian-speaking cultures, with their “sense of elbow,” tend to prioritize directness and openness. This contrast in cultural orientations can significantly affect how teachers respond to complaints, providing further insight into the need to investigate these strategies in teacher-student interactions.

Other research has also explored the linguistic choices made by native and non-native speakers of English when issuing complaints (Chen, Chen & Chang 2011, Wei 2024). While some studies have focused on CRSs used by native speakers of English, these have not generally focused on teachers (Eslami 2005). Notably, such studies often concentrated on strategic choices rather than the specific linguistic devices employed by interlocutors. Consequently, there is a significant gap in the literature concerning the comparison of CRSs between NESTs and NNESTs, particularly in terms of the linguistic choices made by the two groups. The current study addresses this gap by investigating the linguistic devices employed by NESTs and NNESTs in responding to student complaints. This focus on specific linguistic features provides valuable insights into the role of language use in shaping teacher-student interactions in EFL settings and has implications for teacher training programs aimed at enhancing intercultural communication and pedagogical effectiveness.

### **3. Method**

#### **3.1. Participants**

Eighty-six EFL teachers participated in the study. Among them, 54 (63%) were NNESTs, while 32 (37%) were NESTs. Regarding gender, 64 (74%) of the participants were female and 22 (26%) were male. In regard to age groups, 46 of the teachers (53%) were in the age group of 41–60, 28 (33%) were in the 17–40 age bracket, and 12 (14%) were in the age group above 60.

#### **3.2. Data collection tool and analyses**

A survey, comprising three sections, was developed to collect data for this study. The first section gathered demographic information, and the second section requested a brief explanation of the participants' general perspective on homework. The final section included a Discourse Completion Task (DCT), asking participants to imagine receiving an email from a student in their pre-intermediate class complaining about the amount of weekend homework assigned. They were then asked to consider how they would respond and write the exact words they would use in their email reply to the student in a provided box.

To ensure the reliability of the survey, a pilot study was conducted with a small group of educators to test the clarity and coherence of the questions. Based on their feedback, the survey was refined to eliminate ambiguities and improve the overall flow. Although DCTs do not gather naturally occurring data, they enable researchers to collect data that may be challenging to obtain in real-life scenarios (Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig 1992) at a rapid pace.

To establish a comprehensive coding system for CRSs produced by teachers in response to student complaints, prior literature, specifically the frameworks proposed by Boxer (1993), Laforest (2002), and Thongtong (2022), was synthesized, along with integrated politeness strategies from Brown and Levinson (1987). Possible variations occurring in the data sets of the current study were also considered. The established coding system is presented in Table 1.

The content validity of the coding scheme was established by employing two experts in applied linguistics and discourse analysis who reviewed the scheme to ensure that it adequately covered the range of possible teacher responses to student complaints. To ensure the reliability of the coding scheme, an inter-rater reliability test was employed. To that end, following a training session with an independent coder, we coded teacher responses independently. The inter-rater reliability was calculated using Cohen's kappa to measure the level of agreement between the coders. An initial value of 0.80 was achieved, followed by a meeting to discuss divergences until agreements were reached. Items without consensus were excluded from the data set.



**Table 1. Components of complaint response strategies**

Components		Explanation	Examples
Humor and teasing		Light-hearted or humorous response to diffuse tension	Well, if you do all the homework quickly, you might just become the next <i>Shakespeare</i> !
Substantive replies	Acceptance	Fully acknowledging the complaint	You're right, I was too ambitious with the amount of homework I assigned last week.
	Partial acceptance	Acknowledging part of the complaint	The homework I have assigned may be demanding, but it really is not unmanageable.
	Rejection	Denying the validity of the complaint	I don't think that much homework is too much.
Engagement and inquiry	Nonsubstantive reply	General, non-committal response	Thanks for your email.
	Appreciation	Acknowledging student's communication and the significance of his/her input	Thank you for your email and for sharing your concerns.
	Disregard	Ignoring the complaint with no response	
	Question	Seeking more information or clarification about the complaint	Can you tell me which specific assignments you're finding too challenging?
Support and solidarity (Commiseration)		Expressing empathy or sympathy towards the complainer	I know it can be overwhelming, but I am here to help you get through it.
Guidance and explanation	Advice/lecture	Offering guidance or instructive feedback	It's important to manage your time well. Try breaking down the tasks into smaller, more manageable pieces.
	Explanation	Providing a rationale or reasoning behind the issue	Homework is important and will help in understanding the work and to satisfy the course outcomes.
Rectification	Offer	Proposing a solution or compensation	How about we have a study session tomorrow to help you catch up with the assignments?
	Guarantee	Assuring the student that the issue will be resolved	I assure you, I will review the homework schedule to ensure it's fair and manageable for everyone.
	Permission	Allowing, or giving freedom to do (or not do) something	You are allowed not to do your homework because it is your own learning journey.
Disengagement- Warning		Issuing a cautionary statement to deter the complainer from repeating their behavior	You had better think twice before making a complaint.

A similar methodology was used to analyze teachers’ opinions on homework and the linguistic devices present in their CRSs. Initially, emerging themes and linguistic devices were identified within the data sets separately. Subsequently, we held a meeting to compare the results. Cohen’s kappa, used to assess the inter-rater reliability, resulted in a value of 0.82. We held further discussions to resolve discrepancies until we reached consensus.

A Z test for two population proportions was performed to statistically compare the data sets regarding opinions on homework, CRSs, and linguistic devices employed by the teachers. A p-value of less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

#### 4. Results

The first research question asked how the opinions of NESTs and NNESTs on homework compare. Table 2 describes the six themes that emerged from the teachers’ statements.

Table 2. Opinions on homework

Themes	NESTs (N=32)		NNESTs (N=54)		Z	p**
	Absolute frequency (n)	Relative frequency (%)*	Absolute frequency (n)	Relative frequency (%)*		
1. Importance of homework for learning and reinforcement	24	21	40	30	-1.543	0.1235
2. Purposefulness and intentionality of homework	22	19	35	26	-1.2402	0.21498
3. Customization and suitability of homework	20	18	24	18	-0.0482	0.9601
4. Student responsibility and accountability	20	18	12	9	2.0332	0.0423
5. Balancing homework with other responsibilities	16	14	10	7	1.7039	0.0891
6. Role of homework in assessment and feedback	12	11	14	10	0.0401	0.9681
<b>Totals</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>100</b>		

\*Percentages are calculated from the total number of responses as the participants often expressed more than one opinion.

\*\* p < .05

There were 114 responses from NESTs and 135 responses from NNESTs. The two most prevalent themes in both groups were the “Importance of homework for learning and reinforcement” and the “Purposefulness and intentionality of homework.” For the first theme, NESTs provided 24 responses (21%), while NNESTs provided 40 responses (30%). Both groups acknowledged the importance of homework, with NNESTs slightly more likely to emphasize this point. However, the Z-test revealed no statistically significant difference between the groups ( $Z=-0.543$ ,  $p=0.1235$ ). For the second theme, both groups stressed that homework should be purposeful, meaningful, and aligned with classwork, rather than being mere busy work. This alignment was seen as essential to deepen students’ understanding and prepare them for future lessons. NESTs contributed 22 responses (19%), and NNESTs provided 35 responses (26%). Although NNESTs were more inclined to highlight the importance of purposeful homework, the difference was not statistically significant ( $Z=-1.2402$ ,  $p=0.21498$ ).

The theme “Student responsibility and accountability” ranked fourth in frequency and was the only theme to show a statistically significant difference between the groups ( $Z=2.0332$ ,  $p=0.0423$ ). NESTs provided 20 responses (18%), compared to NNESTs’ 12 responses (9%). NESTs emphasized student autonomy and responsibility in completing homework, viewing it as a self-directed activity. In contrast, NNESTs focused more on the need for guidance and structured assignments to maintain student engagement and ensure the benefits of homework.

Lastly, the “Role of homework in assessment and feedback” was the least frequently occurring theme, with a similar distribution across both groups. NESTs provided 12 responses (11%), while NNESTs contributed 14 responses (10%). Both groups acknowledged the role of homework in assessment and the importance of immediate feedback. No statistically significant difference was observed for this theme ( $Z=0.0401$ ,  $p=0.9681$ ).

The second research question aimed to compare CRSs employed by NESTs and NNESTs. The results are given in Table 3.

Table 3 shows that the most common component used by both NESTs and NNESTs was “Guidance and explanation,” with “Explanation” being slightly more frequent among NESTs (43%) than NNESTs (41%). NNESTs often emphasized the role of homework in improving language skills and reinforcing lessons, while others focused on assessing understanding and providing feedback. Similarly, NESTs highlighted homework’s importance for learning and practice but also noted the effort required for effective outcomes. A new theme mentioned was homework’s preparatory role.

NNESTs offered “Advice or lectures” more often than NESTs (12% vs. 5%), employing strategies like encouraging engagement, flexibility, and goal setting. Persistence, effort, and routine were also emphasized. NESTs, by contrast, focused on time management, breaking tasks into manageable parts, and maintaining balance. Despite these differences, a Z-test revealed no statistically significant

difference in the use of “Explanation” or “Advice” between the groups ( $Z=0.2039$ ,  $p=0.8814$ ;  $Z=-1.5599$ ,  $p=0.1187$ ).

The second most common component was “Rectification,” with the subcomponent “Offer” accounting for 18% of responses from NESTs and 12% from NNESTs. Although not statistically significant ( $Z=1.2859$ ,  $p=0.197$ ), NESTs were more direct in offering solutions, while NNESTs adopted a detailed and empathetic tone, focusing on alleviating stress and providing personalized support. NESTs prioritized immediate assistance, while NNESTs offered long-term plans, such as feedback sessions.

*Table 3. Complaint response strategies*

		NESTs (N=32)		NNESTs (N=54)		Z	p**
		Absolute frequency (n)	Relative frequency (%)*	Absolute frequency (n)	Relative frequency (%)*		
Guidance and explanation	Explanation	33	43	53	41	0.2039	0.8814
	Advice/lecture	4	5	15	12	-1.5599	0.1187
Rectification	Offer	14	18	15	12	1.2859	0.197
	Guarantee	1	1	0	0	1.2925	0.197
	Permission	0	0	5	4	-1.7558	0.0784
Support and solidarity (Commiseration)		13	17	16	13	0.8721	0.3843
Engagement and inquiry	Question	5	6	6	5	0.5557	0.5754
	Appreciation	2	3	3	2	0.114	0.9124
	Nonsubstantive reply	0	0	1	1	-0.7775	0.4354
	Disregard	0	0	0	0	-	-
Substantive replies	Partial acceptance	3	4	1	1	1.5615	0.1187
	Rejection	2	3	11	9	-1.7061	0.0872
	Acceptance	0	0	1	1	-0.7775	0.4354
Disengagement- Warning		0	0	1	1	-0.7775	0.4354
Humor and teasing		0	0	0	0	-	-
<b>Totals</b>		<b>77</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>100</b>		

\*Percentages are calculated from the total number of components in CRSs as the participants normally utilized more than one component.

\*\* $p < .05$

Empathy was notable in NNESTs’ “Permission” responses (4%), while NESTs occasionally used “Guarantee.” Neither difference was statistically significant ( $Z=-1.7558$ ,  $p=0.0784$ ;  $Z=1.2925$ ,  $p=0.197$ ). Both groups expressed “Commiseration,” though NESTs used it slightly more often (17% vs. 13%,  $Z=0.8721$ ,  $p=0.3843$ ). Teachers from both groups demonstrated empathy and understanding, often paired with justifications for homework.

For “Engagement and inquiry,” “Question” was similarly frequent in both groups (6% vs. 5%,  $Z=0.5554$ ,  $p=0.5754$ ). Teachers used questions to understand students’ perspectives and collaborate on improving homework experiences. “Appreciation” appeared in comparable proportions (3% vs. 2%,  $Z=0.114$ ,  $p=0.9124$ ).

In “Substantive replies,” “Acceptance” and “Partial acceptance” were rare, with no significant differences between the groups ( $Z=-0.7775$ ,  $p=0.4354$ ;  $Z=1.5615$ ,  $p=0.1187$ ). However, “Rejection” was more frequent among NNESTs (9% vs. 3%), though this difference was not significant ( $Z=-0.7775$ ,  $p=0.4354$ ). NNESTs’ tone was more authoritative, stressing students’ responsibilities, while NESTs maintained an institutional tone, encouraging time management and rationalizing homework policies.

The third research question asked how the utilization of linguistic devices in CRSs differ between NESTs and NNESTs. The results are given in Table 4.

*Table 4. Linguistic features in complaint response strategies*

Linguistic features		NESTs (N=32)		NNESTs (N=54)		Z	p*
		Absolute frequency (n)	Relative frequency (%)*	Absolute frequency (n)	Relative frequency (%)*		
Personal pronouns	‘you’	62	44	117	42	0.3388	0.7278
	‘I’	38	27	43	15	2.7928	0.0052
	The inclusive ‘we’	7	5	6	2	1.5584	0.1187
The simple present tense for factual information		10	7	34	12	-1.6312	0.1031
The future tense for factual information		6	4	7	3	0.9625	0.337
Imperatives		6	4	22	8	-1.4249	0.1556
Adjectives as intensifiers		8	6	3	1	2.7722	0.0056
Modal(like) verbs		5	4	22	8	-1.7281	0.0836
Hedging		0	0	18	6	-3.0936	0.0022
The passive voice		0	0	6	2	-1.7601	0.0784
Adverbs as intensifiers		0	0	1	0	-0.7143	0.4777
<i>Totals</i>		<i>142</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>279</i>	<i>100</i>		

\*  $p < .05$

The most notable finding in Table 4 is the varying frequency of personal pronoun usage between the two groups. The pronoun “you” was used 62 times (44%) by NESTs and 117 times (42%) by NNESTs, with no significant difference ( $Z=0.3388$ ,  $p=0.7278$ ). “I” appeared more frequently in NESTs’ responses ( $f=38$ , 27%) compared to NNESTs ( $f=43$ , 15%), a statistically significant result ( $Z=2.7928$ ,  $p=0.0052$ ). The inclusive pronoun “we” was slightly more common in NESTs’ responses ( $f=7$ , 5%) than NNESTs’ ( $f=6$ , 2%), but the difference was not

significant ( $Z=1.5584$ ,  $p=0.1187$ ). Both groups used "we" to express collaborative problem-solving.

Both groups employed the simple present tense to justify homework, with NESTs using it 10 times (7%) and NNESTs 34 times (12%) ( $Z=-1.6312$ ,  $p=0.1031$ ). The future tense was similarly used (NESTs:  $f=6$ , 4%; NNESTs:  $f=7$ , 3%;  $Z=0.9625$ ,  $p=0.337$ ).

Imperatives were more common among NNESTs ( $f=22$ , 8%) than NESTs ( $f=6$ , 4%), though the difference was not significant ( $Z=-1.4249$ ,  $p=0.1556$ ). NESTs often softened imperatives with "please," using it to invite students to meetings. NNESTs used "please" less often, typically to mitigate the directness of imperatives.

Three devices were exclusive to NNESTs, but infrequent. Hedging was used 18 times (6%) and was statistically significant ( $Z=-3.0936$ ,  $p=0.0022$ ). The passive voice appeared six times (2%), and an adverb intensified an adjective once. Neither passive voice nor modal verb use showed significant differences ( $Z=-1.7601$ ,  $p=0.0784$ ;  $Z=-0.7143$ ,  $p=0.4777$ ).

Modal-like verbs were used five times (4%) by NESTs and 22 times (8%) by NNESTs. While NNESTs varied their usage, NESTs only used "need to." The difference was not statistically significant ( $Z=-1.7281$ ,  $p=0.0836$ ).

## 5. Discussion

In response to the first research question, the analysis of teachers' opinions on homework highlighted several key themes common to both NESTs and NNESTs, both of whom recognized the importance of homework for reinforcing learning and improving student achievement, reflecting a shared pedagogical belief in homework as a valuable educational tool. For instance, one NEST described homework as "the glue between the class input sessions," emphasizing its role in connecting classroom instruction to independent practice. Similarly, a NNEST noted that "homework [is] a chance for students to practice what they have already learned," highlighting the practical benefits of repetition.

This belief is supported by Hong and Milgram's (2000) observation that homework tasks allow students to expand, elaborate, and deepen their understanding of previously acquired knowledge, as well as to preview and prepare for upcoming lessons. The NESTs' focus on reinforcement aligns closely with this perspective, as evidenced by one teacher's view that "homework reinforces and practices a point taught in a previous class." Similarly, Ogur et al. (2022) found that Turkish teachers typically regard homework as essential since it contributes to improving literacy skills by diversifying writing assignments and reinforcing learning beyond the classroom environment. This aligns with the NNESTs' emphasis on practice and revision, as one teacher stated, "The more they revise, the more they improve their English."

From this perspective, NESTs and NNESTs had similar views on homework in the local EFL context. This is particularly relevant for intercultural

communication in an educational setting; the convergence of educational values and practices suggests that effective teaching methodologies can transcend cultural differences, promoting smoother communication and collaboration among teachers from diverse backgrounds, thus contributing to unified educational standards and expectations. Teachers' sharing of similar beliefs about homework can also foster a collaborative environment where strategies, resources, and insights are easily shared. This can lead to improved professional development and a more supportive educational community. From the students' perspective, such consistent views can ensure a cohesive learning experience, reducing confusion and discrepancies in instructional approaches.

Despite their common ground, differences emerged in how teachers viewed the purpose and customization of homework. NESTs often emphasized student autonomy, promoting homework as a tool for fostering self-directed learning and academic independence. As one NEST stated, "Homework should be a duty of the student," reflecting a belief in encouraging responsibility and intrinsic motivation. Another highlighted its broader purpose, asserting that "in the end, homework should instill the principle of life-long learning." In contrast, NNESTs favored structured assignments designed to address specific student needs, reflecting a pedagogical approach that prioritizes guidance and support. For example, one NNEST noted, "Students need to be autonomous, yet unfortunately, they are not. Homework must be given regularly to follow the students' progress." This perspective underscores a pedagogical approach that prioritizes providing clear directions and consistent oversight to support student development.

These findings are consistent with cultural differences in educational philosophies, with Western norms typically valuing individual initiative and self-regulation (Hassan & Jamaludin 2010), while Eastern cultures focus on collective effort and guided learning experiences (Galip & Balçikanlı 2019). The divergence in perspectives highlights how cultural contexts shape educators' approaches to fostering student learning through homework.

Moreover, the concern over balancing homework with other responsibilities was more pronounced among NESTs, highlighting cultural perceptions of workload and time management (Omosehin & Smith 2019). One NEST emphasized this concern by stating, "Students have to manage other things in their life apart from your homework," while another cautioned against assigning "busy work or meaningless tasks, as it limits students' time to carry out other responsibilities in their lives." These perspectives reflect a broader awareness of students' holistic development, recognizing the importance of balancing academic and non-academic aspects of life.

In contrast, NNESTs focused more narrowly on academic progress within the immediate learning context, emphasizing the role of structured and regular homework to monitor and support student progress. This disparity may have implications regarding the educational impact of homework and the broader societal expectations influencing educational philosophies. This is supported by

Juvonen and Toom (2023: 121), who argue that, “Society sets both explicit and implicit expectations for teachers... through a national curriculum, current policy aims, and the surrounding culture and norms.” Taken together, these divergences, no matter how small, require cross-cultural sensitivity and adaptation to the local culture. Both local and non-local teachers may also need to align their teaching approaches with local educational philosophies and norms to effectively engage with students and meet academic and societal expectations.

The second research question focused on the utilization of CRSs. In addressing student complaints about homework, both NESTs and NNESTs used various CRSs to foster constructive dialogue and resolve student concerns. The analysis revealed that guidance and explanation were the predominant CRSs employed by both groups. NNESTs often emphasized the importance of homework in improving language skills and reinforcing classroom learning. For instance, one teacher stated, “I aim to extend my students’ language contact time by assigning homework to reinforce the aspects covered in class,” while another encouraged students by saying, “You will thank me later when you notice that your English has got better thanks to this extra work.” Other NNESTs highlighted their role in assessing students’ understanding, providing feedback, and tracking progress, as evidenced by remarks like, “Both you and I need to be sure whether the concepts were understood well or if any of them need to be repeated” and “This will give detailed feedback about your current proficiency and identify your needs.” Similarly, NESTs acknowledged the necessity of homework for practice and skill improvement, aiming to motivate students to engage with their assignments. For example, one teacher stressed the preparatory role of homework, noting, “Doing the draft [homework] now will make it easier later.” Others highlighted the time and effort required for effective learning, with statements such as, “For this class, you need to work for 1 to 3 hours a week outside of class.” These findings support the literature indicating that complaints provide students with an opportunity to express concerns about coursework and seek assistance (Marbach-Ad & Sokolove 2001). They also illustrate how teachers use such moments to create teachable opportunities, engaging students in the learning process while clarifying the role and value of homework in their academic development.

Nevertheless, subtle differences emerged in how CRSs were deployed. NESTs were more likely to use commiseration as a strategy, showing empathy and solidarity with students’ challenges while validating their concerns. For instance, NESTs expressed support through acknowledgment of communication, such as saying, “Thank you for your email about the homework. I am glad you told me your concerns.” They also demonstrated understanding and empathy by recognizing the difficulties students face with homework, with statements like, “I know that many students don’t like to do homework, and I understand their feelings about it.” Boxer (1993) identifies this as a supportive attitude in responding to a complaint. Such an approach demonstrates a commitment to addressing students’ concerns, which can enhance their emotional engagement and academic success (Li 2018). Hwang (2016: 161) notes that active listening and reflective empathy, which “focus on



being more verbally direct and speaking in ways that are understanding and supportive,” are components of Western communication embedded in commiseration. Commiseration is also an Eastern concept and present in teacher-student interactions (Ilaltdinova et al. 2017). However, it was used less frequently by the Turkish participants in the current study, who often responded to complaints with advice or lectures. This more authoritative strategy, however, can be regarded as a pedagogical approach that values mentorship and guidance in addressing student grievances (Brueggeman 2022), aligning with cultural expectations of authoritative teaching roles in educational settings. Although authoritative teachers try to control students, they listen actively and explain the reasoning behind their demands (Scarlett, Chin & Singh 2019). In this sense, the control is through positive encouragement, and the teacher is responsive, which may be perceived as a form of commiseration to some extent.

The linguistic analysis of CRSs, which was the focus of the third research question, revealed distinctive patterns in language use between NESTs and NNESTs. NNESTs’ authoritative nature was evidenced by their use of certain linguistic devices. For example, their use of the passive voice appeared to reinforce their authority by emphasizing rules and procedures, as seen in statements like “Language is learned through practice” and “You need to be exposed to English through HW.” This aligns with the observation that the passive voice can be used to impose regulations on students (Almahameed et al. 2022). Additionally, the frequent use of modal verbs by NNESTs, such as “You had better think twice before making a complaint,” enhanced their authoritative tone by expressing necessity and obligation (Leech & Svartvik 1994). NNESTs also used imperatives more frequently, with statements like “Please attend a faculty course held in an auditorium, try and see if you can take notes effectively,” conveying a sense of control and establishing authority and confidence in their directives. In contrast, NESTs used modal-like verbs less frequently, typically employing “need to” (e.g., “For this class, you need to work for 1 to 3 hours a week outside of class”). Their approach to authority was generally softer, as reflected in their use of commiseration and empathy in statements like “I know it isn’t much fun to complete homework on the weekend,” and “I know that many students don’t like to do homework, and I understand their feelings about it.” While NESTs also emphasized the importance of homework for learning and improvement, their tone suggested a more collaborative approach to student learning, emphasizing understanding of students’ struggles while maintaining academic expectations.

Interesting to note is that hedging devices were used exclusively by NNESTs. Examples included phrases such as “It seems,” and “probably,” The use of hedging may be a strategy for NNESTs to soften their authoritative stance when providing explanations and guidance for homework. By doing so, they may have tried to avoid seeming too rigid and dismissive of students’ feelings, an approach that helps maintain a positive atmosphere, makes students more receptive to feedback, and fosters mutual respect (Brown & Levinson 1987).

The simple present tense was used by both groups to emphasize the role of homework. NESTs' response, "I give homework so students practice grammar, memorize vocabulary, and practice speaking," and NNESTs' statement, "Out-of-class activities help you in improving your English," reflected the use of factual information to justify the educational purpose of homework. However, the groups also demonstrated differences in how they framed this information: NESTs often employed a direct and practical approach, while NNESTs highlighted the broader impact of homework on students' learning progress.

Personal pronouns were used by the two groups at varying frequencies. For instance, "I" was employed more frequently by NNESTs than by NESTs. This reflected NESTs' greater emphasis on personal engagement with students (e.g., "I know it isn't much fun to complete homework on the weekend, but ..."), while NNESTs more often framed their responses in terms of students' learning processes (e.g., "The homework I gave has an important role in your learning progress"). Both groups frequently addressed students directly with "you," particularly when giving guidance and explanations, though NESTs used it slightly more often. Important to note is that the use of "you" pronouns in advice has been shown to be associated with a lower likelihood of it being followed and a lower rating of its quality (Van Swol, Erina & Andrew 2017). Lastly, the inclusive pronoun "we" was used more frequently by NESTs than by NNESTs, with both groups employing it to offer guidance and express a willingness to collaborate with students in resolving homework-related issues. For example, "We can discuss this at our next class" (NEST) and "Would you like to talk about the ways we can make it more interesting and motivating for you?" (NNEST). Indeed, framing advice in a more cooperative and inclusive manner using the pronoun "we" may reduce resistance to it (Van Swol, Erina & Andrew 2017).

Despite the importance of the findings from this study, certain limitations should be acknowledged. First, it focused on a specific cultural context and involved a relatively small sample size, which may have contributed to the statistical insignificance of some results and limits the generalizability of the findings. Future studies could address this by including a more diverse range of cultural settings and a larger participant pool to enhance statistical reliability. Additionally, examining how teachers' years of experience in the profession and their gender influence their approach to homework and CRSs could offer valuable insights. Furthermore, exploring students' perceptions of NESTs' and NNESTs' discourse in realizing CRSs, along with their linguistic choices, could shed light on how these factors affect students' engagement in dialogue with teachers and their overall learning experience. Lastly, the use of a DCT as a data-collection tool presents certain limitations, primarily because it fails to capture naturally occurring data, which may present a more accurate picture of real-world interactions. Future research could consider collecting such data to enhance the validity and applicability of the findings.

## 6. Conclusion

With its focus on the importance of understanding both intra-lingual and intercultural aspects of communication within EFL settings, the study showed that the perspectives of NESTs and NNESTs on homework reflect their respective cultural and educational backgrounds, which influence their approaches to teaching and responding to student complaints. Results showed that while NESTs often emphasize student autonomy and use strategies like commiseration to address complaints, NNESTs tend to prefer structured guidance and authoritative responses. These differences are not indicative of one approach being superior to the other. Instead, they highlight the need for an approach that considers local cultural characteristics to foster effective communication and encourage student engagement. By appreciating and integrating these diverse perspectives, educators can create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment that respects and leverages the strengths of both NESTs and NNESTs.

The linguistic analysis of CRSs highlighted both similarities and differences in language use between NESTs and NNESTs. While the former tended to employ linguistic features such as commiseration, the latter adopted a more authoritative tone, using passive voice, modal verbs, and imperatives to emphasize rules and necessity. Both groups utilized the inclusive pronoun “we” to signal a willingness to collaborate, with NESTs using it more frequently. This focus on inclusivity and collaboration through language can cultivate a more supportive learning environment, encouraging student engagement and reducing resistance to feedback. Similarly, training EFL students to understand the distinct linguistic orientations of NESTs and NNESTs can help them become more open to communication and more engaged in learning, both inside and outside the classroom. Exposing students to varied language approaches allows them to develop a deeper appreciation for diverse teaching methods and linguistic styles. This awareness promotes flexibility in their learning attitudes, fostering greater receptiveness to feedback and enhancing overall engagement with both teaching styles.

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