Developing an identity as a teacher:

Perceptions of nonnative speaker teacher trainees on a TESOL programme

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“Half students in our class are non-native speakers. Many of us including me want to be an English teacher. However, as non-English native speakers, are we able to become a good English teacher here? What are the advantages and disadvantages of it? What should we do to achieve this goal?

I'd like to know about your opinions.”
Overview

- NS and NNS in ELT
- The research
- Findings
- Reflections
NS and NNS teachers in ELT


Differences between, and status of, NS and NNS teachers addressed in late 80s/early 90s.

The ‘native speaker fallacy’ (Phillipson, 1992)
NNS teachers (NNESTs) in ELT

More than 80% of ELT professionals internationally are non-native speakers.

The number of NNESTs has been larger than the number of NESTs for some time.

(Canagarajah, 1999)
Unique strengths of NNESTs

- Can serve as imitable models of the successful learner of English
- Can teach language-learning strategies more effectively
- Can provide learners with more information about the English language
- Are more able to anticipate language difficulties of their students
- Can be more empathetic to the needs and problems of their learners
- Can benefit from sharing the learners’ mother tongue.

(Medgyes, 1999)
Non-native speakers in ELT

NNESTs suffer from:

– Inferiority complex
– Schizophrenia (Medgyes, 1999)

“NNESTs struggle for equal treatment in the ELT profession” (Maum, 2002)

A high percentage of NNS teachers believed that NS teachers were superior in all language skills areas: speaking (100%), pronunciation (92%), listening (87%), vocabulary (79%), and reading (72%). (Tang (1997)
The TESOL programme

- Introductory level TESOL qualification:
  - Cert in ELT (Level 5 NZQA)
  - Grad Cert TESOL (Level 6 NZQA)
- 1 semester (12/15 weeks) full-time
- Accept those with and without a degree
- Accept NS and NNS students
- Interview and selection task
- IELTS level 6 or equivalent required
The participants

15 out of 22 NNS trainees who had completed a TESOL programme in the previous 18 months (2006-2007)

9 different L1

Previous Qualifications: Certificate to Masters

Previous Teaching Experience: 12 of 15

(8 had used English as medium of instruction)
The Methodology:

Questionnaire:

- Qualitative items: Experiences (8)
- Quantitative items: Perceptions (4)
Aims

1. English language knowledge and skills
2. Teaching knowledge and skills
3. Teaching knowledge and skills compared to NS teachers
4. Comparison of NS and NNS teachers in general
Findings (1)

Participants’ rating of their own English language knowledge and skills
Participants' rating of their own English language knowledge and skills

- **Listening skills in English**: 4.71
- **Reading skills in English**: 4.57
- **Knowledge of English grammar**: 4.36
- **Knowledge of English vocabulary**: 4.29
- **Knowledge of everyday spoken English**: 4.20
- **Fluency in speaking English**: 4.07
- **Pronunciation of English**: 4.00
- **Accuracy in speaking English**: 3.93
- **Writing skills in English**: 3.71
Findings (2)

Participants’ rating of their own teaching knowledge and skills
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I understand how English language learners learn English</td>
<td>5.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a good understanding of English language learners' cultural backgrounds</td>
<td>5.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can help English language learners to understand new or difficult vocabulary</td>
<td>4.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can help English language learners to learn how to read in English</td>
<td>4.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can explain the grammar of English to English language learners</td>
<td>4.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a good knowledge of English grammar</td>
<td>4.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can help English language learners to understand colloquial or everyday spoken English</td>
<td>4.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can help English language learners to learn how to write in English</td>
<td>4.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can help English language learners with their English pronunciation difficulties.</td>
<td>4.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can provide a good model of English pronunciation for English language learners</td>
<td>4.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participants' rating of teaching skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>4.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>4.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spoken English</td>
<td>4.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>4.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronunciation</td>
<td>4.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model pronunciation</td>
<td>4.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average ratings range from 4.13 to 4.86.
Findings (3)

Participants’ rating of their own teaching knowledge and skills compared to NS teachers
Comparison with NS teachers

- Understand how learners learn English
- Understand learners' cultural backgrounds
- Help learners to understand new or difficult vocabulary
- Help learners to read in English
- Knowledge of English grammar
- Explain the grammar of English to learners
- Help learners to understand everyday spoken English
- Help learners to write in English
- Help with English pronunciation difficulties
- Provide a good model of English pronunciation

Comparison with NS teachers

Participants' rating of themselves
**Discussion:**

**Rating of teaching skills compared to NS teachers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Own teaching skills</th>
<th>Comparison with NS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Vocabulary</td>
<td>1) Vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Reading</td>
<td>2) Grammar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Grammar</td>
<td>3) Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Everyday spoken English</td>
<td>4) Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Writing</td>
<td>5) Pronunciation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Pronunciation</td>
<td>6) Everyday spoken English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Providing a good model of English pronunciation</td>
<td>7) Providing a good model of English pronunciation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings (4)

Participants’ rating of the teaching knowledge and skills of NS and NNS teachers in general
NS teachers rated more highly

Providing a good model of English pronunciation for learners
Teaching learners about everyday spoken English
Helping learners to correct errors when speaking English
Helping learners to correct errors when writing English
Teaching learners how to write in English
Helping learners with pronunciation difficulties
NNS teachers rated more highly

Teaching new or difficult vocabulary
Understanding how English language learners learn English
Understanding learners’ cultural backgrounds
Explanation of English grammar to English language learners
Knowledge of English grammar
Teaching learners how to read in English
Who is the better teacher – NS or NNS?

- A native speaker of English will generally be better at teaching English
- A non-native speaker of English will generally be better at teaching English
- It is difficult to predict who will make the best English language teacher
Themes emerging from the results

A fairly high degree of confidence in their ability to do the job of an ESOL/EL teacher.

Clear areas where participants feel that NNSs are more proficient than NSs, and others where they feel they are less proficient.

They do not see NS teachers as being automatically better than NNS teachers.
Reflections

- How many NNS teachers work in your institution?
- What is the proportion of NS/NNS teachers?
- Do NNS teachers experience discrimination from employers in NZ?
- How do NS teachers view NNS teachers?
- What are the attitudes of NS teachers towards NNS teachers?
Recommendations from previous research regarding the training of NNS teachers (cont.)

- Provide English language training for NNS trainees. “...for NNS English teachers to be effective, self-confident, and satisfied professionals, first, we have to be near-native speakers of English” (Medgyes, 1999)

- Provide NNS trainees with instruction and support in key areas (Liu, D., 1999)

- Provide a separate course for NNS trainees, focusing on EFL teaching in non-Western/their home country settings (Carrier, 2003)

- Provide a forum to discuss issues and concerns relating to ELT professionals from diverse backgrounds (Samimy and Brutt-Gifler, 1999)
Are we drawing on “the unique insights Periphery professionals can provide from their experience and background”?

(Canagarajah, 1999, p. 87)
Recommendations regarding the training of NNS teachers

Offer classes that would increase the confidence NNS have of their language and teaching skills (Berry, 1990)

Both NS and NNS could benefit from courses in grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary and culture (Cullen, 1994)

Teach the value of collaboration between NS and NNS teachers

Show NS and NNS how to take advantage of their respective strengths and weaknesses (Matsuda & Matsuda, 2004)

Integrate instruction on issues related to NNS across the whole teacher training curriculum (Kamhi-Stein, 2004)