

# Developing an identity as a teacher: Perceptions of non-native speaker teacher trainees on a TESOL programme

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## **Abstract**

This paper reports research conducted with non-native speaker (NNS) teacher trainees who had completed a TESOL programme at a tertiary institution in New Zealand. The purpose of the research was to obtain the perceptions of trainees regarding their English language and English language teaching capabilities. Trainees were asked to rate their English language knowledge and skills, and their teaching knowledge and skills. They were also asked to compare their teaching knowledge and skills with those of native speaker (NS) teachers. Finally, they were asked to rate the teaching knowledge and skills of NS and NNS teachers in general. Although participants rated themselves above average in all areas investigated, the results indicated two main areas of perceived weakness: speaking and writing. The trainees also rated themselves lower than NS teachers on 10 of 12 areas investigated. However, NNS teachers in general were rated more highly than NS teachers on six of 12 areas.

## **Introduction**

As I was beginning this research, a heartfelt plea from a non-native speaker teacher trainee appeared unsolicited in an online discussion forum for one of the modules in the TESOL programme on which I teach. In part, it read:

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.

I felt this plea voiced in a poignant way the area that I was the most interested in investigating – the fact that when it comes to hiring teachers, it is often a case of 'Native speaker preferred'. If this trainee had gone online to look at ESOL/ESL

employment web sites, such as Sperling (1995-2009), it would have been immediately apparent that a non-native speaker English teacher seems to be less desirable than a native speaker English teacher. For example, on 1 October 2008 the following advertisements appeared on the above-mentioned web site:

Native English speaker to teach kids, age 2 to 12 in Japan  
 Native speaking ESL teachers wanted immediately by Mongolia's most  
 prestigious ESL School  
 Teach English to Taiwanese students - Must be native speakers  
 Seeking a Full-time Native English Teacher in Adana, Turkey

There were many more similarly-worded advertisements. Student demand for native English speaking teachers may be a factor in the apparent demand for native-speaker teachers. Moussu (2006, p. ix) found that overall, students' attitudes were more positive towards native English speaking teachers (NESTs) than towards non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs), although students taught by NNESTs held a significantly more positive attitude towards NNESTs in general than students taught by NESTs.

The questions of the trainee confirmed for me that it would be good to find out more about how our teacher trainees felt about the apparent divide between native and non-native speakers in English language teaching, and to try to find out whether this could be a significant factor in shaping NNS trainees' perceptions of themselves as English language teachers.

### **Native speakers and non-native speakers in English language teaching**

It seems to have been assumed for many years that a NS of a language is the best person to teach that language. This can apparently be traced to the 1961 *Commonwealth Conference on the Teaching of English as a Second Language* in Makerere, Uganda, which promoted certain key tenets for English language teaching, one of which was the assertion that 'the ideal teacher [of English] is a native speaker, somebody with native speaker proficiency who can serve as a model for the pupils' (cited in Phillipson, 1992, p. 193). Phillipson saw this as promoting linguistic imperialism, an aspect of imperialism in general, the situation 'whereby one society can dominate another', and drew on the ideas of Galtung (1980, cited in Phillipson, 1992). Galtung's theory of imperialism portrayed the world as being divided into 'a dominant Centre (the powerful western countries and interests) and dominated Peripheries (the under-developed countries)' (Phillipson, 1992, p. 52). This domination included the dictation of language (as well as other) norms by the Centre countries, thus promoting the native speaker of English as the best teacher of the language. In response to this scenario, Phillipson coined the phrase 'the native speaker fallacy', stating that 'the very idea of claiming that the ideal teacher of

English is a native speaker is ludicrous as soon as one starts identifying the good qualities of a teacher of English. The tenet has no scientific validity' (1992, p. 195).

These observations coincided with the rise in the number of NNESTs world-wide. By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it was estimated that that the proportion of NNS teachers of English world-wide was more than 80% (Canagarajah, 1999). This increase has come about as a result of the spread of English from what Kachru (1992, pp. 356-357) has labeled the Inner Circle countries ('the traditional cultural and linguistic bases of English', i.e. the UK, the USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand), to the Outer Circle (where 'the institutionalised non-native varieties (ESL)' are found, 'in the regions that have passed through extensive periods of colonisation', such as India, Kenya, Malaysia, the Philippines and others), to the Expanding Circle ('regions where the performance varieties of the language are used essentially in EFL contexts, i.e. the varieties that lack official status and are typically restricted in their uses'. Included here are countries such as China, Indonesia, Taiwan and the countries of the former USSR). The significance of this model is that it recognises that as English has been adopted as a medium of communication by different populations, aspects of its form and use have changed in different ways, such that now there are a large number of recognised regional and local varieties of English. The concept of 'World English' (also called International English) has also been proposed to describe the use of English for international communication. Harmer (2007, p. 18) states that 'a consensus has emerged that instead of talking about inner, outer, or expanding circle Englishes, we need to recognise "World Englishes"'. These developments make it increasingly difficult to insist that an Inner Circle native-speaker variety of English be taught to those in the Outer or Expanding circles. Harmer (2007, p. 119) notes that 'the world is changing ... and English is no longer owned by anybody in particular, least of all the native speakers in the world who are in a minority which is becoming daily less significant - at least in numerical terms'.

Along with the rise in the number of those learning and using English as a second or foreign language, there has been a corresponding rise in the number and diversity of NNSs entering teacher training programmes in English-speaking countries. In the institution in which the current research was undertaken, about one third of the teacher trainees in 2007 were NNSs, although in one intake, the proportion was 54%. This is similar to data reported from other English-speaking countries, for example, the United States, where Llurda (Ed., 2005) and Moussu (2006) report respectively that 36% and 40% of teacher trainees were NNSs. The overall figures for Australia and New Zealand in recent years are not known.

As the number of NNS teachers has increased, research into their situation has begun to appear. For example, Medgyes (1999a) claimed that NNESTs suffered from both an inferiority complex and schizophrenia. Some NNESTs have an inferiority complex because they 'are in constant distress as [they] realize how little [they] know about the language [they] are supposed to teach' (Medgyes, 1999a, p. 38). Others may

suffer from schizophrenia if they 'behave in the classroom like plasticine Brits or Americans' (Medgyes, 1999a, p. 37). According to Canagarajah (1999), another form of schizophrenia occurs when NNESTs working in their home countries 'profess Centre pedagogical fashions, but practise local/traditional approaches in the classroom. They may believe that English should be the sole medium of instruction, but practise considerable code-switching themselves in the classroom' (p. 87).

On the other hand, Medgyes (1999a, p.48) also asserted that NNESTs have many unique strengths, which they need to be aware of. They can:

- provide a good learner model for imitation
- teach language learning strategies more effectively
- supply learners with more information about the English language
- anticipate and prevent language difficulties better
- be more empathetic to the needs and problems of learners
- make use of the learners' mother tongue

The source of these strengths can be summed up by the statement that 'native speakers know the destination, but not the terrain that has to be crossed to get there; they themselves have not travelled the same route.' (Seidlhofer, 1999, cited in Moussu, 2006, p. 23). However, there is still some ambivalence around the issue, and a study by Tang (1997) showed that 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%).

### **The programme and participants in the research**

The programme in the current study was an introductory level TESOL qualification, at levels 5 and 6 in the New Zealand National Qualifications Framework (equivalent to first and second year undergraduate university level). The programme was 12 or 15 weeks in length, and accepted students with and without a tertiary degree, and both NSs and NNSs of English. An interview and selection task was required of all students, except those who already held a New Zealand trained teacher's qualification. Non-native English speakers were required to have gained an academic IELTS score of 6.0 or equivalent.

The participants comprised 15 out of a possible 22 NNS trainees who had completed the TESOL programme in the 12 months previous to the start of the study (June 2006 - July 2007). Letters were sent to all 22 NNS graduates of the programme asking for their participation, and 15 agreed to do so. The participants spoke nine different first languages: Chinese, Korean, Indonesian, Hindi, Gujarati, Dutch, Somali, Russian and Afrikaans.

Of the 15 participants, 11 had previously obtained a degree qualification, with three of these holding a Postgraduate or Master's degree. Two had degrees in English

Language Teaching, and one in Linguistics. Twelve participants stated that they had previous teaching experience, with eight of these having taught English language. Of these, all eight had used English as the medium of instruction, and four had also worked as bilingual teachers, using English and another language in the classroom.

### **Aims of the research**

The research aimed to find out about NNS trainees' perceptions of the following areas:

1. Their own English language knowledge and skills
2. Their own teaching knowledge and skills
3. Their own teaching knowledge and skills compared to NS teachers
4. The teaching knowledge and skills of NS and NNS teachers in general
5. Whether a NS or NNS of English would be a better teacher of the language

### **Methodology**

A questionnaire was used to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. The qualitative items required participants to write short responses to open-ended questions, mainly about their experiences on the programme, and the quantitative items asked them to rate statements relating to their perceptions of themselves and comparisons with NS teachers, on a scale from 0 to 6, with 0 being very low and 6 being very high, or with 0 representing 'strongly disagree' and 6 representing 'strongly agree'.

The questions relating to the participants' own language skills and own knowledge of the English language were devised by the author of the study to include the commonly accepted main areas of language learning, including language components (grammar and vocabulary) and the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing). These aspects of language learning are included in several frequently-used English language teacher training texts, such as Harmer (2007) and Scrivener (1994). The statements that were written for the questionnaire were designed to include all of these, with particular focus on aspects of speaking, including fluency, accuracy, pronunciation and everyday spoken English. The added focus on speaking skills was included because of the author's perception that speaking skills are paramount for an English language teacher, and it was therefore important to seek participants' views on their abilities in this area.

For the questions relating to English language teaching skills, two other areas were added: understanding how English language learners learn English, and understanding learners' cultural backgrounds. The author decided to include these aspects of English language teaching after identifying through interaction with NNS trainees on the TESOL programme that these were generally considered to be

strengths of NNS teachers which might contribute to their success as English language teachers.

The questionnaire was trialled by a NNS teacher trainee who was about to graduate from the TESOL programme, and a NNS teacher who was a colleague of the author. It was then mailed out to all participants by the school administrator, who also numbered the questionnaires, received them when they were mailed back, and gave them to the author with participants' names removed, to preserve participants' anonymity.

## Findings

### *Participants' rating of their own English language knowledge and skills*

Participants were asked to rate three areas of their English language knowledge (grammar, vocabulary, spoken English), and six areas of their English language skills (listening, reading, fluency in speaking, accuracy in speaking, pronunciation and writing).

Table 1: Participants' rating of their own English language skills and knowledge (0=lowest, 6=highest) n=15

English language skill or knowledge	Average rating
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

The average mean for all items was 4.2, indicating a positive but not high overall evaluation of their own language knowledge and skills. The lowest average rating was 3.71, for 'writing skills in English', and the highest rating was 4.71, for 'listening skills in English'.

From Table 1 it can be seen that trainees were most confident about their receptive language skills, with listening skills and reading skills rated highest overall.

They were least confident about their productive language skills, with the lowest four items being fluency and accuracy in speaking, pronunciation, and writing, with writing the lowest overall. In addition, trainees were more confident about their knowledge of English than their productive language skills in English, with the three 'knowledge' items being ranked above the productive skills.

#### *Participants' rating of their own teaching knowledge and skills*

Table 2 below shows how participants rated their teaching knowledge and skills on ten items. Three of these items related to teaching knowledge (shaded), and seven related to teaching skills. The average mean for all items was 4.6, again indicating a fairly positive, but not overly high, self-evaluation of their own teaching knowledge and skills.

As can be seen in Table 2, participants rated themselves highest on their knowledge of how learners learn English, followed by their knowledge of learners' cultural backgrounds. The other knowledge item, knowledge of English grammar, was rated just above the middle of the ranked items. Participants rated themselves lowest on their ability to teach the productive skills: spoken English, writing and pronunciation. In general the participants' ratings of their own teaching skills matched their ratings of their language skills (seen in Table 1 above); they perceived that their teaching skills are weakest in the area that they themselves feel their own language skills are weakest – the productive skills.

#### *Participants' rating of their own teaching knowledge and skills compared to NS teachers*

Trainees were asked to rate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with ten pairs of statements. The findings in the previous question came from the first of these two statements. For example, the first statement in one of the pairs of statements was 'I have a good knowledge of English grammar', and the second statement was 'I have as good a knowledge of English grammar as most NS teachers of English.' A higher score on the second statement would mean that they rated themselves higher than most NS teachers, and a lower score on the second statement would mean that they rate themselves lower than most NS teachers.

Table 2: Participants' rating of their own English language teaching skills and knowledge (0=lowest, 6=highest) n=15

English language teaching skill or knowledge	Average rating
I understand how English language learners learn English.	5.14
I have a good understanding of learners' cultural backgrounds.	5.13
I can help English language learners to understand new or difficult vocabulary.	4.86
I can help English language learners to learn how to read in English.	4.80
I have a good knowledge of English grammar.	4.67
I can explain the grammar of English to English language learners.	4.67
I can help English language learners to understand colloquial or everyday spoken English.	4.43
I can help English language learners to learn how to write in English.	4.36
I can help English language learners with their pronunciation difficulties.	4.27
I can provide a good model of English pronunciation for English language learners.	4.13

As Table 3 indicates, there were no areas of their teaching knowledge or teaching skills in which the NNS trainees rated themselves more highly than 'most NS teachers'. There was only one area where the NNS trainees felt they were on a par with native speaker teachers, which was explaining the grammar of English to learners (shaded).

In all other areas, including the two areas that they rated themselves most highly on in their assessment of their own teaching knowledge and skills (Table 1 above) – understanding how learners learn English, and understanding learners' cultural backgrounds – participants clearly perceived that NS teachers have more knowledge or are more competent.

Table 3: Participants' average ratings of themselves and of native speaker English language teachers (0=lowest, 6=highest) n=15

Aspect of English language teaching or knowledge	Themselves	NS teachers
I understand how English language learners learn English.	5.14	4.80
I have a good understanding of English language learners' cultural backgrounds.	5.13	5.00
I can help English language learners to understand new or difficult vocabulary.	4.86	4.73
I can help English language learners to read in English.	4.80	4.60
I have a good knowledge of English grammar.	4.67	4.60
I can explain the grammar of English to English language learners.	4.67	4.67
I can help English language learners to understand colloquial or everyday spoken English.	4.43	3.79
I can help English language learners to write in English.	4.36	4.07
I can help English language with English pronunciation difficulties.	4.27	3.87
I can provide a good model of English pronunciation for English language learners.	4.13	3.67

However, this overall tendency to rate themselves lower than NS teachers may have been because participants were comparing themselves to practising or more experienced teachers, as the question did not clearly define the features of the 'native speaker teacher' that they were to compare themselves with.

#### *Participants' rating of the teaching knowledge and skills of NS and NNS teachers in general*

As well as finding out how the participants rated themselves personally in comparison to NS teachers, the research aimed to find out the trainees' perceptions of the teaching knowledge and skills of NS and NNS teachers in general.

Participants were given twelve different aspects of teaching knowledge and skills to rate. These included all the areas in the previous questions, as well as 'Helping learners to correct errors when speaking English' and 'Helping learners to correct errors when writing English'.

The results for this question were very interesting in that participants rated NS teachers in general higher on six aspects of English knowledge or teaching skills, and they rated NNS teachers in general higher on the other six areas of teaching knowledge and skills.

Table 4: Participants' average ratings of the teaching knowledge and skills of NS and NNS teachers (0=lowest, 6=highest) n=15

Teaching skill or knowledge	NS teachers	NNS teachers
Teaching new or difficult vocabulary	4.38	5.29
Knowledge of English grammar	3.77	4.64
Explanation of English grammar to English language learners	3.92	4.67
Teaching learners how to read in English	4.15	4.64
Understanding how English language learners learn English	3.58	4.86
Understanding learners' cultural backgrounds	4.92	4.93
Providing a good model of English pronunciation	5.23	3.73
Teaching learners about everyday spoken English	5.08	4.00
Helping learners to correct errors when speaking English	5.08	4.4
Helping learners to correct errors when writing English	5.00	4.33
Teaching learners how to write in English	4.79	4.13
Helping learners with pronunciation difficulties	4.69	4.27

Table 4 shows firstly the six areas in which NNS teachers were rated more highly by participants than NS teachers, in order of the largest to the smallest perceived differences between NS and NNS teachers. The six areas were 'Teaching new or difficult vocabulary to learners', 'Knowledge of English grammar', 'Explanation of English grammar to learners', 'Teaching learners how to read in English', 'Understanding how learners learn English' and 'Understanding learners' cultural backgrounds'.

Table 4 also shows the six areas in which participants rated NS teachers in general more highly than NNS teachers: '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' and 'Helping learners with pronunciation difficulties'.

Again, these results closely match the areas in which the participants rated themselves most highly in previous questions: vocabulary, understanding how learners learn, understanding learners' cultural backgrounds, knowledge of grammar, and reading skills. The areas which participants identified as strengths for NNS teachers also correspond to some of the strengths of NNS teachers provided by Medgyes (1999a), who suggested that NNS teachers can teach language strategies more effectively, as they have developed their own language learning strategies, they are able to supply learners with more information about the English language to their students than a NS might be able to provide, and they can anticipate and prevent language difficulties of their students better, as they have encountered these difficulties themselves.

#### *Who is the better teacher: native or non-native speaker of English?*

Participants were asked to choose one of three statements and justify their choice.

Statement 1: Assuming that they have the same TESOL qualification and years of teaching experience a native speaker of English will generally be better at teaching English to speakers of other languages than a non-native/native speaker of English

Statement 2: Assuming that they have the same TESOL qualification and years of teaching experience a non-native speaker of English will generally be better at teaching English to speakers of other languages than a non-native/native speaker of English

Statement 3: Assuming that they have the same TESOL qualification and years of teaching experience, it is difficult to predict who will make the best English language teacher - a native speaker of English or a non-native speaker of English

In fact, none of the participants thought that a NS of English would be a better teacher of English than a NNS. One participant chose statement 2 and justified it by stating that 'A non-native speaker will provide a good model of learning experience.' All 14 remaining participants selected Statement 3.

There were many reasons given for choosing statement 3, the position that 'it is difficult to predict' who will make the best English language teacher, NS or NNS. Most answers included a variable that could determine the success or otherwise of a teacher. Among the variables mentioned were factors relating to the teacher, including the teaching skills of the teacher, the personality of the teacher, the teacher's knowledge of the language, the teacher's knowledge of the learners' culture, and whether the teacher has a natural flair for teaching. Variables relating to learners included the language background of the learner, and the English language level of the learners, with one participant reporting 'To teach elementary student of non-native language, I think the non-native speaking teacher will more suitable. On the contrary, to teach high-level non-native speaker students, the native speaker teacher will be better as students need to improve to be like a native speaker.' Two of the participants could see the value of having both NS and NNS teachers, with one stating 'For students' benefits/sake, it's better to have a mixture of both', and the other stating that 'A native speaker of English will have better pronunciation but not necessarily a better understanding of the issues ESOL students are facing.'

### *Summary of findings*

The TESOL teacher trainees who participated in the current research indicated that overall they felt that their receptive English language skills were stronger than their productive skills, and that their knowledge of English was also stronger than their productive English skills. This matched their perception of their teaching knowledge and skills, where they rated their teaching of receptive language skills and their knowledge about teaching English higher than their teaching of productive language skills. Participants rated themselves lower than NS English teachers on all aspects of teaching, but when comparing NS and NNS teachers in general, they indicated that they thought both NS and NNS teachers had particular strengths, and that it was not possible to state who would be the better teacher: a native or non-native speaker of English. In this regard, the results of the current study are similar to those of Samimy and Brutt-Griffler (1999), in which 58% of NNS TESOL students reported that both NS and NNS teachers are successful in ESL teaching, with 24% stating that non-natives are more successful and only 12% stating that NS teachers are more successful.

### **Limitations of the study**

There are several limitations of the current study relating to the participants. Firstly, the small sample size of only 15 NNS TESOL teacher trainees means that the results cannot be generalised to the wider population of NNS TESOL teacher trainees. The fact that participants self-selected into the research also limits the results of the research, as those who participated may not represent a wide spectrum of teacher trainees. Additionally, the fact that the participants were from one TESOL programme means that the perceptions reported in the study may have been formed partly or largely as a result of the participants' experience on the programme; TESOL teacher trainees in other programmes may report different perceptions.

A further limitation of the study is that the information was obtained from participants' self-reporting of their strengths and weaknesses. In any research involving the use of self-reported data, there is a possibility that subjects report what they believe the researcher expects to see, or they may provide information which reflects positively on their own abilities, knowledge, beliefs or opinions (Cook & Campbell, cited in Yu, 2008).

An aspect of the research design also limits the findings. In the question where the NNS trainees were asked to compare themselves with NS teachers (Findings section 3), the phrase 'NS teacher' was not clearly defined, and participants may have assumed that this meant 'experienced NS teacher'. This may explain the consistently low ratings by participants of themselves in relation to NS teachers. If the research question had explicitly stated that participants should compare themselves with NS teachers with the same amount of experience and the same qualification as themselves, e.g. teachers similar to the NS trainees in the TESOL programme, the results would have been more reliable. However, on the final two questions in which trainees were asked to rank NS and NNS on particular teaching skills and knowledge, and give an overall comparison, participants indicated that in general they do not believe that NS teachers will automatically be superior to NNS teachers.

### **Implications for TESOL programmes**

The findings of the current study indicate that, while in general participants have a positive perception of their English language skills and knowledge and their teaching skills and knowledge, and they do not perceive NSs to be better English language teachers than NNSs, there is one main area of concern for participants - their own productive English language skills and their ability to teach these skills.

There are several implications of these results for TESOL trainers working with both NS and NNS students. Firstly, trainers can acknowledge, affirm, and draw attention to the strengths of NNS trainees, and thereby increase the confidence of NNS trainees in their ability to become an English language teacher. As noted by Samimy and Brutt-Griffler (1999, p. 131), 'teachers' beliefs and self-perceptions often influence the way they teach'.

Trainers can also encourage NS teacher trainees to view the English language learning experience of NNS trainees as a resource to learn from. For example, the study of second language acquisition, which is usually a part of TESOL programmes, can be brought to life by having NNSs describe aspects of their own acquisition of English, which would supplement very effectively any theoretical resource. This would allow NNSs 'to view themselves as sources of information, and ultimately leads them to improve their self-image' (Kamhi-Stein, 1999, p. 149).

However, it may be even more important to address the areas where the NNS trainees feel less confident, i.e. their own productive skills and their ability to teach these. Medgyes (1999b) is a strong advocate of increasing trainee teachers' language skills, asserting that 'language training in preservice education should be a matter of paramount importance', and that 'for NNS English teachers to be effective, self-confident, and satisfied professionals, first, we have to be near-native speakers of English' (p. 179).

TESOL trainers can encourage collaboration between NNS and NS trainees in developing language skills and knowledge. For example NNS trainees could assist NSs to master the formal rules of English grammar that they have usually learned themselves, and which they perceive as a strength, and NS trainees could draw on their native speaker linguistic and communicative competence and assist NNSs to gain more accuracy in spoken and written English, and a greater understanding of appropriate language for different contexts.

Kamhi-Stein (1999, p. 146) takes a broader approach to the concerns of NNS trainees by proposing that 'discussions on issues related to NNSs are integrated across the curriculum' of TESOL programmes. Kamhi-Stein anticipates that giving teacher trainees opportunities to discuss common TESOL programme components such as factors relating to L2 acquisition, teaching methodologies, and curriculum design in relation to NNS concerns 'will result in an improvement in the self-perception of NNSs, ultimately leading to better teacher preparation' (p. 155). This has further implications for TESOL curriculum design, and Kamhi-Stein (1999, p. 157) asserts that 'it is the responsibility of NNS teacher educators to become agents of curriculum design.'

### **Areas for further research**

With greater numbers of NNS teachers being trained in New Zealand, it may be timely to conduct studies of participants in other TESOL teacher training programmes to find out whether the perceptions of the trainees on this programme are more universally held by NNS teacher trainees.

A further area of research would be to investigate the perceptions of NS English language teachers of their NNS colleagues, to ascertain whether they are aware of the strengths of NNS teachers, and whether they feel those strengths are recognised and used, either by themselves or by the institution in which they work.

Further research which compared the perceptions of the two groups regarding their own language and teaching skills, in relation to each of the key questions in this study, would also be valuable.

Finally, it would be worthwhile to conduct case studies of NNS ESOL teachers who have found employment in this country, to investigate their perceptions of their role and status in the institution in which they are working, and in particular, their experiences of developing their own productive language skills and their ability to teach the productive skills. The results of such research could contribute to the knowledge available to TESOL teacher trainees, as aspiring NNS English language teachers.

## Conclusion

The results of the current study add in a small way to the body of literature that investigates the role of NNS teachers in the field of English language teaching, by taking a snapshot of a group of NNS teacher trainees' self-perceptions and their perceptions of their relationship to NS teachers, whom they will be working alongside when they complete their TESOL qualification. The NNS teacher trainee participants in the research are aware of their own strengths and weaknesses and, while they rated themselves as having less knowledge and fewer teaching skills than NS teachers, they reported in 14 out of 15 cases that being a native or non-native speaker of English was not the most important factor in becoming a successful English language teacher. These findings may be a confirmation of the changing status of the NNS teacher in English language teaching which has been reported in the literature. It is anticipated that the voices of NNS teachers and researchers within the English language teaching profession will be heard more and more, as both NSs and NNSs continue to grapple with the task of meeting the ongoing demand for English language instruction.

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