

**HOW PROSPECTIVE ENGLISH TEACHERS PERCEIVE THEIR OWN
IDENTITY AS NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS OF ENGLISH**

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Abstract. *This study explores how prospective English language teachers perceive their professional identity as non-native speakers of English (NNESTs). In the context of increasing globalization of English language teaching, the distinction between native and non-native speaker teachers continues to influence self-perception, confidence, and pedagogical beliefs. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews and reflective narratives from prospective English teachers enrolled in teacher education programs. The findings reveal that participants hold mixed perceptions of their identity: while many view non-nativeness as a limitation in pronunciation and fluency, they also recognize it as an advantage in understanding learners' difficulties and applying effective teaching strategies. The study highlights the need for teacher education programs to strengthen positive professional identity formation and challenge native-speaker bias in English language teaching.*

Keywords: *teacher identity, non-native English speaker teachers, NNEST, English language teaching, professional identity, teacher education.*

Introduction

In the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), the identity of teachers has become an important area of research, particularly the distinction between native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs). In many educational contexts, prospective English teachers who are non-native speakers often face questions regarding their linguistic competence, professional legitimacy, and teaching confidence.

Despite the growing recognition that effective teaching is not determined solely by native-speaker status, the ideology of the "native speaker ideal" still influences how teachers perceive themselves. This perception can significantly shape their professional identity during teacher education programs.

Professional identity refers to how teachers perceive themselves in relation to their profession, including their beliefs, values, abilities, and roles. For prospective English teachers, identity formation is a dynamic process influenced by personal experiences, educational background, and institutional expectations.

This study aims to investigate how prospective English teachers perceive their identity as non-native speakers and how these perceptions influence their professional self-concept.

Literature Review

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Research on NNEST identity has expanded significantly in recent decades. Scholars such as Braine (2010) and Pavlenko (2003) argue that non-native English teachers often experience identity tension due to the dominance of native-speaker ideology in ELT.

Studies show that NNESTs frequently perceive disadvantages in pronunciation, fluency, and cultural knowledge. However, they also demonstrate strengths such as explicit knowledge of grammar, awareness of learning difficulties, and the ability to act as role models for learners.

Teacher identity is not fixed but socially constructed and continuously evolving. According to Norton (2013), identity is shaped through participation in social contexts and interactions. In teacher education settings, reflective practice plays a crucial role in shaping how prospective teachers view themselves.

Recent studies emphasize the importance of redefining NNEST identity from a deficit perspective to an asset-based perspective, highlighting multilingual competence as a strength rather than a limitation.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design to explore participants' perceptions in depth.

Participants

The participants consisted of 20 prospective English teachers enrolled in an English language teaching program at a university. All participants were non-native speakers of English.

Data Collection Instruments

Data were collected through:

- Semi-structured interviews
- Reflective written narratives

Procedure

Participants were asked to reflect on their identity as English teachers, focusing on how being a non-native speaker influences their confidence, teaching ability, and classroom performance.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns and themes in the data. Responses were coded and grouped into categories related to perceived advantages, disadvantages, and identity development.

Findings and Discussion

Perceived Linguistic Limitations

Many participants expressed concerns about their English proficiency, particularly pronunciation and fluency. They believed that native speakers have an advantage in producing "authentic" language.

Example response:



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“Sometimes I feel my English is not good enough, especially when I speak in front of others.”

This reflects the persistence of native-speaker ideology in shaping self-perception.

Professional Self-Doubt

Several participants reported a lack of confidence in their teaching abilities due to their non-native status. This self-doubt often emerged during classroom practice teaching sessions.

However, this does not necessarily reflect actual teaching competence but rather perceived legitimacy.

NNEST as a Pedagogical Advantage

Interestingly, many participants also identified strengths associated with being non-native speakers. These include:

- Understanding learners’ difficulties
- Ability to explain grammar explicitly
- Sharing the same learning experience as students

One participant stated:

“I know how difficult it is to learn English, so I can help my students better.”

This aligns with previous research suggesting that NNESTs can be effective empathetic teachers.

Identity Negotiation and Development

The findings show that identity is not static. Participants often shifted between feelings of inferiority and empowerment depending on context, such as classroom experience, feedback from mentors, and language proficiency development.

Teacher education programs played a significant role in shaping more positive identities through reflective practice and peer interaction.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that prospective English teachers’ identity as non-native speakers is complex and multifaceted. While many participants initially perceive non-nativeness as a limitation, they also recognize its pedagogical value.

The findings suggest that teacher education programs should:

- Challenge native-speaker bias in ELT
- Encourage positive NNEST identity formation
- Promote reflective practice in teacher training
- Emphasize multilingual competence as an asset

Strengthening positive professional identity can enhance both teacher confidence and classroom effectiveness.

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