Northumbria Research Link

Abstract

Despite the demand for Native English Speaking Teachers (NESTs) by government and private, commercially driven programs worldwide, not much is known about NESTs' actual lived experiences. We aim to address the gap by exploring some issues faced by teachers living and teaching overseas. Analyses of interview data collected from 9 NESTs (aged 26–40) who taught in Hong Kong, Japan, Romania, Thailand, and Vietnam showed that participants' experiences are often complex and vary dramatically depending on locations and programs. Common to all are the shock and anxiety experienced when confronted with reality abroad. Socioprofessional otherization emerged as another key theme, alongside inadequate pre-job training and outside-work support. The native identity provides employment opportunities, but at times it also creates tension and led NESTs to be seen as eternally "foreign." We underscore the complexity of teachers' ethnic and professional identities. We also hope to provide a reality check and highlight the importance of preservice training and in-service support to better prepare and facilitate teachers considering a career abroad.

9

Reality Check

Identity Struggle and Experiences of NESTs Living and Teaching Abroad

Alex Ho-Cheong Leung and Timothy Yip

Introduction

Recent decades have seen the expansion and consolidation of knowledge base vis-à-vis how language is learned and taught globally. These research-informed developments facilitated critical appraisals of classroom practice (Kubanyiova, 2020), including active questioning of teacher-centered classrooms and of knowledge transmission model (see Wright, 2010). Another positive development in English Language Teaching (ELT) is the increasing professionalization of the field and the scrutiny of second language teacher education (SLTE) (Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Mann, 2005; Wright, 2010).

We now have a much richer base to draw on in terms of language acquisition theories, pedagogical approaches and techniques (Hall, 2017). However, surprisingly, little is known about the actual experience inside the language classroom, especially from the teacher's perspective. Although research in education about general classroom life does exist, the unique experiences and challenges faced by language teachers are not well documented. The profession of language teaching is often distinct from other academic subjects in that the subject matter taught, language, is often concurrently the medium of instruction (Marr & English, 2019). The limited existing research into language teachers' experiences often points to challenges

encountered, which include putting theories into practice, classroom management, and (novice) teachers' struggle to establish an identity as a professional. Adding to these, teachers living overseas have to navigate around and negotiate their lives in the host countries even though the career path abroad which comes with "privilege" and opportunities to travel can appear appealing.[1] This latter aspect of life outside the classroom is even less understood. Emerging work in Asia has begun to explore the complexity of native English speaker teachers' (NESTs) lives and their attempts to negotiate their roles and identities both in the classroom and the host countries (e.g., Houghton & Rivers, 2013; Rivers & Ross, 2013).

Against this backdrop, we explore the experience of NESTs, who are teaching and living abroad, inside and outside the classroom. We also hope to shed light on SLTE in the diverse global setting in which teachers often find themselves.

Literature Review

English is one of the most important lingua francas of modern times (Marr & English, 2019) with its estimated users reaching 2 billion by 2020 (British Council, 2013), and the ELT industry has continued to grow. This in turn provides unparalleled employment opportunities in foreign countries especially for NESTs (Govardhan et al., 1999). Apart from state-regulated programs, the demand for English teachers has led to massive expansion of the private sector whose practices are sometimes unscrupulous, exploiting the gullible (ibid.). Despite the ongoing professionalization of the field, ELT job advertisements that emphasize "no experience necessary, no degree required" can still be found (Marr & English, 2019, p. 10), packaging the job as a "gap-year" experience (Hallwood, 2011). In what follows, we underscore the insufficient attention paid to "out of classroom" elements, which we believe are indispensable for trainees pursuing a career abroad. We also provide a snapshot of the challenges faced by teachers including those brought about by the complex construct of teacher identity.

Professionalization, Teacher Training, and Development in TESOL

Professionalization in the field has fueled the growth of teacher development/training programs such as MATESOL (see Stapleton & Shao, 2014), the Cambridge English Certificate of English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA), and other similar TEFL/ESOL certification programs worldwide. The continuous evolvement and expansion of knowledge base (see Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Mann, 2005; Leung, 2009; Richards, 2010; TESOL, 2010; Wright, 2010) provides a strong foundation for aspiring teachers' development of methodological, pedagogical content, professional and linguistic knowledge. There is also an increased attention toward intercultural knowledge and sensitivity issues, but they often remain at the periphery.

Classroom Experience of Novice Language Teachers

Farrell (2012, 2016, 2019) has highlighted the relative paucity of studies about (novice) language teacher experience. Studies in educational psychology reveal that teachers are often under considerable pressure and stress, which are related to having to adjust to the difference between expectations and the reality of the classroom (Hagger, Mutton, & Burn, 2011), behavioral/classroom management issues, heavy workload, a lack of support (Chaplain, 2008), and a lack of personal and professional efficacy (Schaefer, Downey, & Clandinin, 2014). At times, teachers are so overwhelmed that they cannot even recall their own emotional state (ibid.). These issues, unfortunately, can lead to psychological distress and dropout (McInerney, Korpershoek, Wang, & Morin, 2018).

Some challenges are shared by ELT teachers, e.g., in a study of 47 US M.A. TESOL graduates (53% living abroad), Johnson, Harrold, Cochran, Brannan, and Bleistein (2014) identify loneliness suffered by some participants, which is significantly related to perceived stress. Shi (2017) documents the sense of disenfranchisement experienced by two NESTs in Chinese universities who feel otherized and stereotyped. Focusing on five novice Hong Kong English teachers who have quit the profession, Trent (2017) discusses the discrepancies between expectations and reality, which often constrains the way participants can act and behave in class. They struggle to implement knowledge learned partly due to the lack of autonomy and the need

to maintain "positive" relationships with colleagues who do not necessarily share their teaching beliefs or practice. These sentiments are echoed by some in Hennebry-Leung et al.'s study (in press). The 21 Chinese teachers of English trained in China, HK, and the UK were teaching in various cities in China. Findings reveal once again a sense of isolation, the lack of support, sink-or-swim approach, and the culture of overwork leading participants to revert to "safe practice." They also suffer from a sense of weak self-efficacy undermining their professional identity development.

A few studies have documented positive perceptions among novice teachers when adequate support systems are in place (e.g., Brannan & Bleistein, 2012; Faez & Valeo, 2012). These highlight the importance of in-/preservice support for teachers, another area we hope to address.

Problematizing the NEST/Non-NEST Dichotomy

NEST is a value-laden term which has been exploited to favor some and exclude others in the field. Recent critical work problematizes the NEST/Non-NEST dichotomy and foregrounds the inadequacy of such binary in capturing the multifaceted nature of individuals' professional and linguistic identities (Faez, 2011; Rudolph, Selvi, & Yazan, 2015; Yazan & Rudolph, 2018). The dichotomy is commonly used to categorize and essentialize teachers in ways that are at odds with or even contradict a person's self-identification. In reality, identity is a complex, dynamic, and multifaceted construct (Lowe & Kiczkowiak, 2016). As a result, teachers are boxed into certain roles and excluded from others, e.g., a homeroom teacher (Rudolph, 2018). These practices based on unwarranted assumptions about who NESTs/Non-NESTs are and what they can/should do inevitably shape teachers' experience, e.g., creating disparity among employment contracts and causing identity struggles both linguistically and professionally, with Non-NESTs constantly having to "prove" themselves (Amin, 1997), while NESTs are being otherized as forever "foreign" (Shi, 2017). Studies have documented attempts to overcome these impositions, e.g., Non-NESTs embracing their identity (Park, 2012) and resistance to hegemonic categories (Brutt-

Griffler & Samimy, 2001), while others have charted the difficult line to tread in contexts where identity and positionality negotiation are not always welcomed (Rudolph, Yazan, & Rudolph, 2019). Clearly, identity (and labeling) is a difficult concept to untangle, and its impact cannot be underestimated.

Through this review, we revealed the sparse systematic discussions of challenges and opportunities provided for by the unique context of teaching overseas and diverse multicultural settings. Little is known about teachers' experience abroad. A look at some of the seminal and recent texts in SLTE (e.g., Carter & Nunan, 2001; Burns & Richards, 2009; Marr & English, 2019) indicates a lack of attention toward the life and experience of teachers outside the classroom, especially abroad. As mentioned, ELT opportunities reside overseas at least for some teachers, and this knowledge gap is therefore rather alarming. We also noted the knotty NEST/Non-NEST dichotomy and its relationship with teachers' identity and experience. We aim to explore experiences of participants who are living and teaching abroad. In doing so, we also hope to provide a scholarly platform for teachers to tell their stories (Farrell, 2012; Schaefer, Downey, & Clandinin, 2014) which will hopefully create more awareness around the complexity of life both in and out of the classroom and thereby inform teacher training and development programs, and the provision of in-/preservice support that benefit teachers considering a career overseas.

Methodology

Being a TESOL lecturer/researcher (first author) and an ELT teacher (second author), we adopted a co-participatory approach with the aim of generating research questions bottom up. In his eight years of teaching both B.A. and M.A. TESOL students in the UK, Alex, bilingual in English and Cantonese, has interacted with candidates who wish to pursue a career overseas. However, we noticed that students' experience abroad can be drastically different from their expectations in complex and intricate ways. Tim is one of those students who ended up teaching

in Japan for two years. Being born and bred in the UK to a family of Asian descent, Tim is an English dominant NEST who can also speak Cantonese and understand Hakka. Though his experience is similar to Caucasian colleagues to an extent, his Asian physical appearance also gave him a favor of the host country distinct from Caucasian NESTs (see later). In the spirit of the co-participatory approach, we first actively reflected on our life, experiences, and challenges faced while teaching English in a foreign country. Tim's iterative reflective diaries (cf. auto-ethnographic data (Yazan, 2019)) provided data that form the basis of questions and lines of enquiries. Next, through a process of dialogic conversation, we interrogated these reflective data critically to identify areas we believe require further attention. Informed by this exercise and our reading of the literature, we decided upon the aim of exploring the actual lived experience of NESTs who are currently teaching abroad or who have recently completed their contract. To achieve this, we devised an interview scheme that taps into six key areas: *reasons for choosing the profession*, *training and preparation* (Farrell, 2012, 2019), *identity* (De Costa & Norton, 2017; Varghese, Motha, Park, Reeves, & Trent, 2016; this volume), *expectations and reality* (Farrell, 2016; Veenman, 1984), *critical/significant moments* (cf. Farrell, 2008), and *support and pastoral care* (Brannan & Bleistein, 2012).[2]

The instrument was piloted with two UK MATESOL students who taught abroad. Wording issues identified in the process were rectified through clarifications of individual questions before the actual data collection.

Participants

We directly recruited the interviewees from our network for their unique and diverging experiences in terms of places where they have worked (Table 9.1).

Table 9.1 Details of participants

Name	Country of birth	Ethnicity	Age	Extended experience abroad (i.e., gap year, study abroad, work etc.)	Number of companies worked for	Number of contracts completed	Prior teaching qualifications	Work experience related to teaching prior to 1st ELT employment	Teaching context	Currently teaching
Mary	Jamaica	Black	30+	No	1	3 (annual)	None	College tutoring	Japan	Yes
Thomas	USA	Caucasian	26	No	2	3 (annual)	None	None	Japan	Yes
Jeff	USA	Caucasian	26	No	1	2 (annual)	None	None	Japan	No
Mel	USA	Caucasian	28	No	1	2 (annual)	TEFL Cert	Cover teacher in the States	Japan	No
Chris	USA	Caucasian	28	No	1	2 (annual)	TEFL Cert	Soccer Coaching to young children	Japan	No

Sarah	Ireland	Caucasian	26	Yes	2	2 (3-month)	CELTA	Volunteer at language school	S. America, Japan	Yes
Simon	UK	Caucasian	26	No	3	6 (annual)	BA English studies with TESOL	None	Thailand, China, Hong Kong	Yes
Oliver	UK	Caucasian	40	Yes	4	7 (annual)	CELTA, subsequently PGCE	None	Vietnam, China, Thailand, Romania	Yes
Michelle	USA	Caucasian	32	No	4	7.5 (annual)	TEFL, subsequently PGCE	None	China, Thailand, Romania	Yes

Consent and Ethical Procedures

The research received ethical approval from Northumbria University, UK. All names presented are pseudonyms.

Data Collection and Analysis

We conducted semi-structured interviews with nine individuals through Skype, with the exception of two couples who were interviewed as dyads. We gave participants the chance to discuss issues salient to them in depth. We deliberately allowed for discursive narration to take place by not interrupting them unless necessary. We believe such an approach provided the platform to explore matters in depth and generate rich data needed for the highly fluid and complex life of a teacher both in and out of the classroom. The dyads, on the other hand, jointly co-constructed their narrative, adding to each other's stories and highlighting events of

significance to their overall experience. Interviews ranged from 1 hour 7 minutes to 2 hours 26 minutes, totaling 12 hours 41 minutes of data with over 110,000 words. We recorded and transcribed the interviews. We individually read the transcript iteratively to identify themes and commonalities. We then listened to the interviews together and engaged in critical reflections and discussions with and through the data to explore and uncover themes that are "hidden" between the lines. While coding, we retained most of the original themes but data pertaining to "critical/significant moments" were used to visualize and depict other themes instead. Furthermore, "otherization" emerged as another important theme.

Findings and Discussion

Findings reveal a highly complex picture with vast variations vis-à-vis actual experiences inside and outside the classroom. Participants' wide-ranging experiences are partly shaped by where they work and which program/school they work for; but even within the same country, their experiences vary dramatically, e.g., how much support they received, their roles inside the classroom, etc. This section reports and discusses aspects of our data related to the themes we identified. Interview excerpts are included to illustrate the intricacy of experiences and the layered nature of them. We also highlight the intense, staggering, and alarming experiences that some participants have shared.[3]

Training and Preparation

Qualifications required differ depending on the workplace and hiring company. As seen in Table 9.1, not everyone had received formal teacher training; those who did often partook in a short duration TEFL/CELTA course. Simon, Oliver and Michelle, have all commented on how they became disgruntled with being treated the same as non-/minimally qualified co-workers despite their formal hard-earned qualifications. This lack of regulation is rarely paralleled in other formal

education settings where relevant accredited qualifications are pre-requisites (cf. Govardhan et al., 1999; Marr & English, 2019).

Similarly, the availability of pre-job training/induction and their duration varied. Oliver and Michelle reported receiving no induction/training before starting in two workplaces. For others who received some form of orientation, the duration and content coverage differed, ranging from two days to a month. The content mostly included some basic skills for running classroom activities and a very scripted, "cookie cutter, one-size-fits-all" (Thomas) approach to the classroom rundown. Others received training that "had nothing to do with teaching" (Oliver and Michelle) and struggled to see its relevance. Often participants expressed how frustrated and overwhelmed they felt during the induction as they tended to be very intense, day-long sessions on arrival at the foreign country while still jetlagged. Mary, Mel, and Chris also discussed how the training was completely different from the approach adopted by the bureau of education where they were assigned. Also, the "prescription" did not allow them to cater to the actual classroom where class size and abilities vary as Chris explains.

> Understanding things like class sizes, time management for those, um,
> understanding how you might need extra supplies, right? . . . But you've got 40
> kids, maybe you don't have enough to go around, you know . . . I think that
> understanding the nitty gritty like that might have been more helpful than just,
> "here's a bunch of games do them exactly like this."

(Chris)

The mechanical and indiscriminate approach fails to cater to actual needs on the ground. Participants therefore found the training to be inadequate if not irrelevant as Chris suggested, which is a sentiment shared by most participants. Moreover, those staying on for multiple contracts with the same company were nonetheless forced to attend identical training every time.

In terms of pre-departure preparation, all participants but Mary and Jeff researched the company they were going to work for and the place they were relocating to. These include reading blogs on experiences of past NESTs and general reading on cultural etiquettes and taboos. But information is not consistently available, depending on how remote or well-known the location is. Furthermore, blogposts only provide a snapshot and sometimes "romanticized" version of the actual experience as participants working in Japan recalled the partiality of one blog they all read and the blogger's negative opinions in person. Most but Mary and Sarah started learning the language of the country. It is noteworthy that, though participants remarked on the usefulness of these readings, they were unable to gauge the scale of how prepared they were or the magnitude to which they might be affected until they actually started living and experiencing them in person.**4** These experiences serve to prompt a rethink about how teachers are recruited and how to facilitate the transition into their job at destination.

Identity, Expectations, Reality, and Otherization

The issue of identity (as NESTs and as teachers), race, and ethnicity featured prominently in our data. There is a unanimous acknowledgement of the "privilege" that the native identity provides, i.e., employment opportunities that are too good to "pass up" (Simon) (cf. Reucker & Ives, 2015). This is probably due to the prevalent discourse in the industry and how such positions and programs are advertised, capitalizing on the notion of native-speakerism (Holliday, 2006). Nevertheless, the native identity can come with baggage and stereotype that are not always desirable. The native "straightjacket" at times undermines one's professional identity, e.g., limiting the extent to which NESTs can/are allowed to contribute to the classroom and whether they are able to establish constructive work and personal relationships with local colleagues (Rudolph et al., 2019). Participants also referred to co-workers who exploit this "privilege" and did not care about their job (cf. Appleby, 2017). Oliver, for instance, drew our attention to colleagues who missed work due to hangovers.

Derogative terms were used by various participants to describe how they are perceived and saw themselves in and around the classroom, e.g., "white monkey" (Michelle), "clown" (Thomas; Oliver), "caricature," and "glorified babysitter" (Thomas). They spoke of how they were "shuffled around" from one classroom to another to showcase their "whiteness," which some students/parents believe is what they are paying for. Michelle's experience in China exemplifies this perfectly:

> I . . . really felt like this white monkey at that school. They didn't want me to teach anything. Really, they just wanted me to pop in the last 10 minutes of lessons and just talk with the kids and be stupid. . . . Like, come on, guys, I have a master's degree I would like to teach and like, learn something about teaching. . . . [They asked her to fall off a chair] They showed me a video of like, a foreign guy, like just joking and falling off the chair and the kids laughing and I was like, I can't do that, sorry.
>
> (Michelle)

As Michelle's quote demonstrates, the reality can be a far cry from the expectation of a teaching professional. The assigned "joker" role perhaps explains the indiscriminate employment contract that does not reward teaching qualifications (see earlier) because NESTs are not expected to be "real" teachers. Participants varied in the extent to which they could rectify such discrepancy between reality and expectation, some such as Michelle was able to move to another country/workplace where she is treated as a professional, others quit the profession altogether after their initial/ongoing struggle (e.g., Jeff, Mel, Chris). Participants were also seen as the personification of the English culture. This was often the stereotypical "fun," "animated" Westerner image portrayed in the media, summarized succinctly by Thomas:

> Even watching, like, interviews on TV of like foreign, like foreigners in Japan . . . I noticed that like, even if, like the people would be really relaxed and answering

> the questions in a very like, dignified and like chill manner, the subtitles and the
> like, the overdub is always like, a lot more bombastic and um just over the top.
> . . . I feel like . . . there's two types of shoes, Japanese shoes and clown shoes.

> (Thomas)

As a result of such stereotyping, participants did not feel that they were taken seriously and struggled to establish the authority and identity as a teaching professional (cf. Lowe & Kiczkowiak, 2016). This was often compounded by the top-down approach that individual companies prescribe, allowing little room for teachers' real engagement. Participants saw themselves as "human tape recorders" delivering the same script repeatedly which also undermined their teacher efficacy. Nevertheless, the polar opposite had also happened where participants had to come up with their own lesson plans and materials with little or no guidance or support (Simon, Oliver, Michelle).

Furthermore, though not universally true, in some cases when participants did not "fit" the "imagined" NEST image, often white (cf. Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 2001; Kubota & McKay, 2009), students/parents would complain as Oliver illustrated:

> In Vietnam, actually, where, I worked with several colleagues who were Asian
> . . . but they were not Vietnamese by birth. So they were, one's from New
> Zealand, one's from California, and often they will get complaints. "No, we don't
> want that one, like we pay for the foreigner". . . . There was this prestige and in
> Thailand as well, I think.

> (Oliver)

This discriminatory practice/ideology is deeply rooted in the problematic NESTs/Non-NESTs dichotomy discussed. Unfortunately, its effect is felt even outside the classroom; Tim's

experience of being in a meeting with colleagues alongside Caucasian NESTs without being addressed or even looked at once is a case in point.

Interviewees also commented on how their "foreign-ness" are often foregrounded (Thomas, Michelle, Oliver) as if this legitimizes their presence and concurrently gives the companies/schools some "currencies."

> As an English teacher . . . there's this expectation to just, you know, really sell how different you are, and really exemplify how, you know, how foreign you are . . . in everything that you do . . . at least I feel like, I've been expected to create this opportunity, where it's like, "ha oh my gosh, that's just so different from how we do things". And you know, it's just evoking those responses all day, every day, when it's just like . . . Okay, I'm just washing my hands, people, nothing to see here.
>
> (Thomas)

Employers' and students' expectation of NESTs to "perform" their foreignness is essentially an act of otherization, which creates barriers for NESTs to fit in or become accepted as "real teachers." Although some participants did not necessarily frame this in a negative light, their subsequent elaborations revealed internal conflicts and uneasiness about such episodes.

To elaborate on the connotation associated with the native identity, participants detailed being stereotyped as "another white guy who comes for the party and women" (Oliver). Although as alluded to earlier, there are indeed those who do not care about teaching nor students, our participants are unhappy being immediately boxed together with them. Even when extreme stereotypes were not apparent, participants were received with skepticism, as they were perceived as inexperienced and perhaps incompetent teachers who have no business in the classroom (Sarah). Similar to teachers in Shi (2017), participants felt judged before they were given a chance to prove themselves and demonstrate their dedication. We should add that some participants managed to establish a good rapport with their local colleagues and gained their trust

and recognition after serving multiple contracts (Simon, Michelle, Oliver, Jeff, Mel). The flipside of this is that they became "disliked" by NESTs who were not trying (as hard) (cf. Trent, 2017).

Moreover, participants (Jeff, Thomas, Oliver, Michelle) did not feel valued by the hiring company. They characterized themselves as "disposable" and "replaceable" and the business as a "revolving door" (Simon, Thomas) limiting their voice, the development of teacher self-efficacy and identity, as Sarah's sharing illustrates:

> You're very much just a cog in the system. Um, you're not, you're nothing special, really. . . . So it's very much, "this is what we want you to teach, go teach it, don't try and do anything different to it, just leave it the way it is, and teach that". So in terms of having creative license, you didn't really have that.
>
> (Sarah)

As seen through this quote, participants were frustrated by the mold imposed on them, they therefore felt demoralized/disenfranchised, struggled to achieve teacher self-efficacy, and found it challenging to develop or negotiate a professional identity beyond that of a "recorder." In another shocking extreme where the ELT business is sensualized, teachers are "valued" for rather sinister reasons. Oliver's sharing about how programs are sold made very uncomfortable reading:

> It was pretty well known that they would sell, sell it on, "if you sign up for this school, maybe you will meet a husband, or maybe you will meet uh one of the teachers," you know, and we actually had problems there with a few kind of stalker-ish students who were obsessed with certain teachers . . . one of the feedbacks I got was like, the students said you were very handsome. This was a feedback from my direct head-teacher there, it's like, this is not feedback on a lesson.

(Oliver)

This quote highlights the troubling reality whereby NESTs were not treated as teachers but rather objectified assets that attract business. Admittedly, the notion of "white charisma man" is utilized by some to gain employment (Appleby, 2017; see also Rudolph et al., 2015), but for those like Oliver who indeed wish to develop as a teacher, being sensualized is blatantly at odds with their expectation.

Beyond the confines of the classroom, identity and physical appearance played a part in shaping experience as well. All participants experienced people staring at or taking pictures of them; some had been asked to share their phone numbers. Simon recounts an episode when a boy stroked his hair and touched his arm six years ago:

> Um, well, yeah, the fact that I can still remember that. I remember where I was
> . . . and all the surrounding you know, issues around that, I guess, is testament to
> that kind of experience, because I'd never had that before. You know, I, I'm
> blonde haired, white male, and in England that's, that's nothing particularly out of
> the ordinary, in Thailand. . . . I regularly get . . . stared at walking down the street,
> um approached by strangers. And, and on that occasion, you know, an inquisitive
> little boy wanted to, to feel what blonde hair felt like I guess, and touch what a
> white person felt like.

(Simon)

Some enjoyed being "the talk of the town" and "almost a local celebrity" initially (Simon). But over time, the novelty ran out, similar events became unwanted attention prohibiting them from leading a normal life. Interviewees also expressed difficulty in making real friends as some befriended them only to practice English. On reflection, though some participants seemed to embrace being foreign (e.g., Mary, Thomas), their narratives sometimes contradict the surface framing of their experience, in a sense similar to how participants "tell the easier-to-tell stories"

in Schaefer et al. (2014). These underscore the complexity of life outside the classroom and the internal conflicts participants experienced.**5**

Support and Pastoral Care

We alluded to the inconsistent on-the-job support earlier. But what is more worrying is the haphazard approach to the support offered outside the classroom and the lack of transparency in handling real life contingencies. Participants working for the same company received drastically different treatment; Mary described being well supported by the company when she had chickenpox. On the other hand, Mel, who worked for the same company, though at a different locale, lamented the lack of transparency and information when she was hit by a car. We included almost the entire excerpt to underline the alarming state of affairs:

> Like I got hit by a car while cycling to work one day, yeah, that was fun. . . . And no one told me that the insurance for the person who hit me was paying for my days off. I thought the days I was taking off for work were coming out of my paid holidays, which I only had five, and at the time, I only had three leftover. And so I thought I had to go back to work. . . . And they COMPANY never told me this, which was ridiculous. They basically tried to push me to go back to work sooner than I should have. I spent an entire month not being to stand or sit properly because of it. Like I didn't, my neck still has problems. . . . And it was ridiculous, honestly. Um like in this scenario, they're like "we're training you how to do it so that you respond to the scenario and do this specific way." But all of it fell apart because it was slightly too early for the, for the people who work in the office to answer morning call. So they didn't get it. I called my branch manager, he didn't answer his phone, I had called the Board of Education. . . . So literally at one point I was sitting there. Ha like after being hit by this car. Um I had like literally a group of eight people . . . like no one telling me at all what was going on whatsoever. Like, I was also like, having been raised in America, getting into an ambulance costs you a minimum of $100. And so I didn't take an ambulance to the, like the hospital. . . . No one told me it would be free. Um, so when we ended

up getting to a hospital, I had to wait for almost eight hours or was it like five and a half hours until I finally got seen. . . . I could have had like internal bleeding. And no one would have known because I had to wait in the queue. But if I showed up with an ambulance, like I would have been seen more early, honestly. And because I had been hit by a car all my muscles tense so I had this terrible migraine. So of course in my mind, aw I got like bleeding in my brain, which was fun. Thankfully, that didn't happen. I was really lucky in this situation, I didn't break anything. . . . Um, but like it's like, it's literally epitome of showing how little support you have because my company literally didn't want me to take days off to get better because then it fucks with their reputation.

(Mel)

This event epitomizes how shambolic the support structure can be. Despite the company drilling the message that employees should contact them when encountering problems, in actuality the message is nothing more than an empty slogan and a "disclaimer." The company's priority was never on the welfare of their employees but their own reputation. They withheld information from Mel which would have allowed her more time to recuperate, and instead they "tricked" her into going back to work almost immediately. Interestingly, Mary had not contacted the company even once after the chickenpox incident because it was too troublesome to go through the paperwork. Tales of going to work sick are common, participants did not feel that the company really cared about their wellbeing and would rather go to work sick than deal with the company (Thomas, Jeff).

In a different context, Oliver discussed how no one knew how to deal with colleagues who passed away under mysterious and questionable circumstances. No support or counseling was provided to either teachers or students. On one occasion, the company was so disorganized that they simply smuggled the children of the deceased teacher out of the country. It is worth mentioning that these are big and well-known companies; one hires hundreds of teachers each year, the other has a formal accreditation from one of the most recognized education

organizations in the ELT field. All of these call for an urgent overhaul of the support provided to NESTs overseas where they can be vulnerable because of the vast difference in how emergencies are handled.

Conclusion

Through the previous exploration, it is clear that identity is at work inside and outside the classroom. Despite the continued professionalization of the ELT profession, opportunities still exist for minimally qualified teachers to join. Unlike other education settings where a postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE) or similar qualification is a pre-requisite, NESTs are able to attain employment with little or no formal qualification and training. Yet, it is over-simplistic to think that the native identity is all door-opening. In fact, trainees in a PGCE program would have received better on-the-job support at least during their placement. In contrast, the availability and appropriateness of on-the-job support for our participants is best characterized as "hit-and-miss." We have also uncovered the struggles they encountered due to the baggage of being a NEST, e.g., their lack of agency in the classroom and the difficulty in developing/negotiating a professional identity in line with their expectations.

We also revealed a glaring lack of support for teachers especially around and outside the workplace with harassing behaviour, exploitative practice normalized, and life-changing incidents swept aside—as if the price to pay for "easy employment" is to endure the shambolic support infrastructure. We belabored the need to understand the out-of-classroom experiences because teachers do not exist in a social vacuum; ethnic and professional identities interact in complex ways to shape their experience both inside and outside the classroom. Unfortunately, our data show that there is a need for the ELT industry to scrutinize its practices. We fear that NESTs are lured into the profession without understanding fully what they are signing up for. We have a duty of care to people who wish to pursue a teaching career; it is therefore crucial to

enhance preservice and in-service support, including for those who are working and living away from the comfort and safety of home.

Acknowledgments

Notes

References

Amin, N. (1997). Race and identity of the nonnative ESL teacher. *TESOL Quarterly*, *31*(3), 58–583.

Appleby, R. (2017). Dealing with controversial findings. In J. McKinley & H. Rose (Eds.), *Doing research in applied linguistics: Realities, dilemmas, and solutions* (pp. 203–213). London, England: Routledge.

Brannan, D., & Bleistein, T. (2012). Novice ESOL teachers' perceptions of social support networks. *TESOL Quarterly*, *46*(3), 519–554.

British Council. (2013). *The English effect*. London, England: British Council.

Brutt-Griffler, J., & Samimy, K. K. (2001). Transcending the nativeness paradigm. *World Englishes*, *20*(1), 99–106.

Burns, A., & Richards, J. C. (Eds.). (2009). *The Cambridge guide to second language teacher education*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Carter, R., & Nunan, D. (2001). *The Cambridge guide to teaching English to speakers of other languages*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Chaplain, R. P. (2008). Stress and psychological distress among trainee secondary teachers in England. *Education Psychology*, *28*(2), 195–209.

De Costa, P. I., & Norton, B. (2017). Introduction: Identity, transdisciplinarity, and the good language teacher. *The Modern Language Journal*, *101*(s1), 3–14.

Faez, F. (2011). Reconceptualizing the native/non-native speaker dichotomy. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, *10*(4), 231–249.

Faez, F., & Valeo, A. (2012). TESOL teacher education: Novice teachers' perception of their preparedness and efficacy in the classroom. *TESOL Quarterly*, *46*(3), 450–471.

Farrell, T. S. C. (2008). Critical incidents in ELT initial teacher training. *ELT Journal*, *62*(1), 3–10.

Farrell, T. S. C. (2012). Novice-service language teacher development: Bridging the gap between preservice and in-service education and development. *TESOL Quarterly*, *46*(3), 435–449.

Farrell, T. S. C. (2016). Surviving the transition shock in the first year of teaching through reflective practice. *System*, *61*, 12–19.

Farrell, T. S. C. (2019). "My training has failed me": Inconvenient truths about second language teacher education (SLTE). *TESL-EJ*, *22*(4), 1–16.

Freeman, D., & Johnson, K. E. (1998). Reconceptualizing the knowledge-base of language teacher education. *TESOL Quarterly*, *32*(3), 397–417.

Govardhan, A., Nayar, B., & Sheorey, R. (1999). Do U.S. MATESOL programs prepare students to teach abroad? *TESOL Quarterly, 33*(1), 114-125.

Hagger, H., Mutton, T., & Burn, K. (2011). Surprising but not shocking: The reality of the first year of teaching. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, *41*(4), 387–405.

Hall, G. (2017). *Exploring English language teaching: Language in action* (2nd ed.). London, England: Routledge.

Hallwood, J. (2011). Gap year options: Working as a TEFL teacher. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from www.theguardian.com/careers/careers-blog/tefl-gap-year

Hennebry-Leung, M., Gayton, A., Hu, A. M., & Chen, X. H. (in press). Transitioning from master's studies to the classroom: From theory to practice. *TESOL Quarterly*. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.505

Holliday, A. (2006). Nativespeakerism. *ELT Journal*, *60*(4), 385–387.

Houghton, S. A., & Rivers, D. J. (Eds.). (2013). *Native-speakerism in Japan: Intergroup dynamics in foreign language education*. Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Johnson, K. R., Harrold, L. M., Cochran, J. D., Brannan, D., & Bleistein, T. (2014). An examination of the first years: Novice ESOL teachers' experiences with loneliness and stress. *Pure Insights*, *3*, 1–10.

Kubanyiova, M. (2020). Language teacher education in the age of ambiguity Educating responsive meaning makes in the world. *Language Teaching Research*, *24*(1), 49–59.

Kubota, R., & McKay, S. (2009). Globalization and language learning in rural Japan: The role of English in the local linguistic ecology. *TESOL Quarterly*, *43*(4), 593–619.

Leung, C. (2009). Second language teacher professionalism. In A. Burns & J. C. Richards (Eds.), *The Cambridge guide to second language teacher education* (pp. 49–58). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lowe, R. J., & Kiczkowiak, M. (2016). Native-speakerism and the complexity of personal experience: A duoethnographic study. *Cogent Education*, *3*(1), 1–16. doi:10.1080/2331186X.2016.1264171

Mann, S. (2005). The language teacher's development. *Language Teaching*, *38*(3), 103–118.

Marr, T., & English, F. (2019). *Rethinking TESOL in diverse global settings: The language and the teacher in a time of change*. London, England: Bloomsbury.

McInerney, D. M., Korpershoek, H., Wang, H., & Morin, A. J. S. (2018). Teachers' occupational attributes and their psychological wellbeing, job satisfaction, occupational self-concept and quitting intentions. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *71*, 145–158.

Park, G. (2012). "I am never afraid of being recognized as an NNES": One teacher's journey in claiming and embracing her nonnative-speaker identity. *TESOL Quarterly*, *46*(1), 127–151.

Reucker, T., & Ives, L. (2015). White native English speakers needed: The rhetorical construction of privilege in online teacher recruitment spaces. *TESOL Quarterly*, *49*(4), 733–756.

Richards, J. C. (2010). Competence and performance in language teaching. *RELC Journal*, *41*(2), 101–122.

Rivers, D. J., & Ross, A. S. (2013). Idealized English teachers: The implicit influence of race in Japan. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, *12*(5), 321–339.

Rudolph, N. (2018). Essentialization, idealization, and apprehensions of local language practice in the classroom. In B. Yazan & N. Rudolph (Eds.), *Criticality, teacher identity, and (in)equity in English language teaching* (pp. 275–302). Switzerland: Springer.

Rudolph, N., Selvi, A. F., & Yazan, B. (2015). Conceptualizing and confronting inequality: Approaches within and new directions for the "NNEST movement". *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, *12*(1), 27–50.

Rudolph, N., Yazan, B., & Rudolph, J. (2019). Negotiating "ares", "cans", and "shoulds" of being and teaching in English language teaching: Two teacher accounts from one Japanese university. *Asian Englishes*, *21*(1), 22–37.

Schaefer, L., Downey, C., & Clandinin, D. (2014). Shifting from stories to live by to stories to leave by: Early career teacher attrition. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, *41*(1), 9–27.

Shi, L. (2017). Two expatriate English instructors in China: Their experiences, and perspectives of local students and teachers. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, *73*(1), 1–23.

Stapleton, P., & Shao, Q. (2018). A worldwide survey of MATESOL programs in 2014: Patterns and perspectives. *Language Teaching Research*, *22*(1), 10–28.

TESOL International Association. (2010). *TESOL/NCATE standards for the recognition of initial TESOL programs in P-12 ESL teacher education*. Alexandria, VA: TESOL International Association.

Trent, J. (2017). Discourse, agency and teacher attrition: Exploring stories to leave by amongst former early career English language teachers in Hong Kong. *Research Papers in Education*, *32*(1), 84–105.

Varghese, M., Motha, S., Park, G., Reeves, J., & Trent, J. (2016). Language teacher identity in (multi)lingual educational contexts: In this issue. *TESOL Quarterly*, *60*(3), 545–571.

Veenman, S. (1984). Perceived problems of beginning teachers. *Review of Educational Research*, *54*(2), 143–178.

Wright, T. (2010). Second language teacher education: Review of recent research. *Language Teaching*, *43*(3), 259–296.

Yazan, B. (2019). Toward identity-oriented teacher education: Critical autoethnographic narrative. *TESOL Journal*, *10*(1), 1–15.

Yazan, B., & Rudolph, N. (2018). Introduction: Apprehending identity, experience, and (in)equity through and beyond binaries. In B. Yazan & N. Rudolph (Eds.), *Criticality, teacher identity, and (in)equity in English language teaching* (pp. 1–19). Switzerland: Springer.

---

[1] We should note that the majority of English teachers are non-NEST who do not live overseas. Nonetheless, we see the need for better academic documentation of both non-NESTs' and NESTs' experiences. This chapter focuses on the latter.

[2] Due to word limitation, we excluded "reasons for choosing the profession" in our analyses.

---

3 We truncated quotes to manage our word count, certain repetitions/fault starts, and hesitation markers, which we felt can be a window into the intensity and complexity of emotions that participants experienced are retained.

4 This is exemplified by the experience of Tim's co-worker who left the job within a week because "there wasn't even a Starbucks."

5 Temporal elements might also play a role in how experiences are remembered and described. Simon's comments took on a more reflective tone, packaged as a positive, eye-opening experience, in stark contrast with when the story was first told six years ago. The over-arching sentiment, then, was that of shock. Participants' recollection could have been affected by nostalgia and their growing classroom and life experience.