

5-2023

# Experienced Nonnative English-Speaking Teachers' Nonnativeness-Related Challenges, Coping Strategies, and Identity Construction

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Experienced Nonnative English-Speaking Teachers' Nonnativeness-Related Challenges, Coping  
Strategies, and Identity Construction

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum and Instruction

by

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## **Abstract**

Kamhi-Stein (1999) declares that little is known about nonnative English-speaking teachers (NNEST) who work in ESL settings also known as Inner Circle countries. Twenty years later, Fan and de Jong (2019) have echoed that view by stating that traditionally research on NNESTs focuses on Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) international graduate students and that little is known about professional nonnative English-speaking teachers in English-dominant environments such as the U.S.A. Therefore, to try to help fill this gap in the literature, I investigated the lived experiences of English teachers who speak English as an additional language, often called nonnative English-speaking teachers, through a critical phenomenological heuristic approach. More specifically, those teachers are experienced nonnative ESL teachers who have been working in Intensive English Programs (IEPs) in the U.S.A. for at least five years. Through open-ended interviews five participants, originally from Argentina, Brazil, The Philippines, and Russia, shared how they have navigated nonnativeness-related challenges and their coping strategies when dealing with such challenges. They also stated that the challenges and strategies they have had over their years of ESL teaching experience in the U.S.A. has influenced how they have transformed and reconstructed their Language teacher identities (LTI). The whole process has indicated an often-emotional journey into a more empowered, more confident, and prouder view of themselves as nonnative ESL teachers. In addition to help filling the gap in the literature mentioned above, the purpose of this research is also to contribute to raising awareness in the TESOL field by clarifying certain myths and bringing light to unknown facts related to nonnative English-speaking teachers in an Inner Circle country, the U.S.A.

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## Acknowledgements

My life has been an incredible journey with accomplishments that not even in my dreams I had thought of achieving. The latest is graduating from a Ph.D. Reaching this would not have been possible if it were not for the support of the special people I have in my life.

My endless gratitude to my dear husband, Manoel Franco, who has always believed in me and motivated me with his love and patience through words and actions. To my family, especially my parents, Elio and Teresa Matos, and my siblings, Rosemary, Roselene, and Elio Junior, who are far in the physical distance but super close at heart, my thankfulness to them and other family members for their love and encouragement. To my close friends, who kept checking where I was in the process and have always expressed how proud they were of me and of my decision to pursue a Ph.D., thank you! Thank you, Rondinelli Desteffani, Luciano Machado Silva, and so many others!

To the caring and competent professors that I had at the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Arkansas, thank you! Thank you, Dr. Jason Endacott! My very first class was with you and Gus, the Ph.Dog ([https://www.instagram.com/dr\\_gus\\_phdog/](https://www.instagram.com/dr_gus_phdog/)), and that made all the difference in helping me feel less anxious and welcome in the program, or as we say in the TESOL field, it lowered my *affective filter*. My heart is undoubtedly and forever grateful to my dissertation committee, Dr. Janet Penner-Williams, my advisor and committee chair, Dr. Freddie Bowles, and Dr. Christian Goering. First of all, thank you for happily accepting to be a member of this committee. Thank you for promptly saying yes and always answering my messages and my questions. Thank you for checking if I was on the right track and for providing thorough and very meaningful feedback and guidance. Thank you also for the many encouraging and sincere praising words that propelled me to continue.

To my classmates, Khlood Alshareef, Lester Jack Pharis, Judy Fields, Se He Hwang, and Riyadh Hakami, thank you for the study groups, assistance, and encouragement. To my participants, Clara, Janaína, Rosario, Sampaguita, and Timofey, I say that without your willingness to voluntarily participate, this dissertation would not have been possible. You did so with a smile on your faces, and that was very motivating to me. My deepest gratitude and appreciation to the five of you.

To all my former students and colleagues, especially the ones at Spring International Language Center, to all of you present in my experienced TESOL career, you have all contributed to my getting at this successful point in my life. I also thank my previously attended higher education institutions, Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo and West Virginia University, their professionals and my former classmates. You have helped me lay the first blocks to pave my way into graduate school at the University of Arkansas.

To conclude, as some of my participants said, one has to be grateful for the challenges and difficulties because they bring us development and growth. Therefore, I am thankful for those as well. This accomplishment was also possible because as a nonnative English-speaking teacher, I have had challenges in my life, and they made this journey an unforgettable and highly meaningful learning experience.

To all of you mentioned here, thank you very much. *Muitíssimo obrigada!*

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## Glossary

Here are some abbreviations, acronyms, and concepts used throughout this dissertation study.

They are presented in alphabetical order.

|           |  |
|-----------|--|
| Dasein    | A term used in phenomenological qualitative studies to indicate one's being in the world or being there.   |
| EFL       | English as a Foreign Language  |
| ESL       | English as a Second Language   |
| FL        | Foreign Language   |
| Gestalten | Related to the educational and psychological philosophy Gestalt, which sustains that idea that people bring different interpretations to the whole and its parts or to the relationship between a picture and its background. For example, is it a black spot on a white sheet of paper, or is it a black sheet of paper that was painted white and a small area was left unpainted? |
| IEP       | Intensive English Program  |
| L1        | First Language   |
| L2        | Second Language  |

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|           |  |
|-----------|--|
| Lifeworld | “Researchers using Lifeworld approach try to recognize the world in perspectives of their participants” (Peoples, 2021, p. 118). |
| LTI       | Language Teacher Identity  |
| MA TESOL  | Master of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages  |
| NES       | Native English Speakers  |
| NNES      | Nonnative English Speakers   |
| NNESTs    | Nonnative English-speaking teachers  |
| NNS       | Nonnative Speaker  |
| NS        | Native Speaker   |
| TESOL     | Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages  |

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

# **Experienced Nonnative English-Speaking Teachers' Nonnativeness-Related Challenges, Coping Strategies, and Identity Construction**

## **Statement of the Problem**

English is undoubtedly the world language. As Kachru (1996) stated, the English diaspora is a unique unprecedented phenomenon in linguistic history. Such dissemination has had its results not only in the language but also in the world. English itself has changed when, for example, it was introduced via colonization to places which already had their own language and culture. Conversely, English has reshaped those peoples and places. One of the consequences of this process of nativization and acculturation is that English is now spoken as a first language (L1), as a second language (L2), and as a foreign language (FL). Two thirds of the world population (Alatis, 2005) speak one of these kinds of English and are most commonly classified as native English speakers (NES) and nonnative English speakers (NNES). Both groups include English teachers who teach English as either a foreign language or as a second language, which means that nonnative speakers of English can also be English teachers.

Nonnative English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) face several challenges. For instance, in addition to dealing with employment discrimination (González & Llurda, 2016; Mackenzie, 2020; Ruecker & Ives, 2015), NNESTs may also face problems related to emotions and feelings, especially identity, self-esteem, self-confidence, and feelings of inadequacy or belonging to the field. Several studies have been carried out to investigate those emotions and teacher identity (e.g., Reis, 2010; Song, 2016; Wolff & De Costa, 2017) including feelings of identity loss (Solano-Campos, 2014). However, most of those studies have had their focus on NNESTs in

English as a foreign language (EFL) setting (e.g., Fan & De Jong, 2019; Hoang, 2018; Solano-Campos, 2014; Trent, 2016; Tseng, 2011). Studies conducted in English as a second language (ESL) settings have mostly investigated novice or preservice teachers in K-12 (Diniz de Figueiredo, 2011), graduate students who are not teaching assistants (Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999; Wolff & De Costa, 2017), and graduate students who are teaching assistants (Reis, 2010). However, there is a lack of research investigating experienced nonnative ESL teachers' coping strategies when encountering nonnativeness-related challenges and how such encounters have influenced their emotions, more specifically their identity construction.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the coping strategies of experienced nonnative ESL teachers when dealing with challenges related to their nonnative statuses and how such encounters have contributed to their language teacher identity (LTI) construction. LTI is complex, multiple, and multifaceted. It is social, fluid, dynamic, temporal, historical, situational, negotiable, enacted, performed, emotional, and ever evolving (Fairley, 2020). To provide a comprehensive definition of language teacher identity (LTI), Barkhuizen (2016) combined the definitions of 41 authors to try to define LTI.

Language teacher identities (LTIs) are cognitive, social, emotional, ideological, and historical – they are both inside the teacher and outside in the social, material and technological world. LTIs are being and doing, feeling and imagining, and storying. They are struggle and harmony: they are contested and resisted, by self and others, and they are also accepted, acknowledged and valued, by self and others. They are core and peripheral, personal and professional, they are dynamic, multiple, and hybrid, and they are foregrounded and backgrounded. And LTIs change, short-term and over time –

discursively in social interaction with teacher educators, learners, teachers, administrators, and the wider community, and in material interaction with spaces, places and objects in classrooms, institutions, and online. (Barkhuizen, 2016, p. 4)

Nonnativeness-related challenges may still exist due to the lingering linguistic prejudice and overspread fallacies in the Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) field, including the ideology known as the *native speaker fallacy* (Canagarajah, 1999; Cook, 1999; Phillipson, 1992). Using the lens of social constructivism combined with critical theory, the focus of this study is on NNESTs' lived experiences related to nonnative speakerism challenges, coping strategies, and identity construction.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Creswell & Creswell (2018) clarify that “consistent with emerging design of qualitative inquiry, the theory may appear at the beginning and be modified or adjusted based on participant views” (p.65). Therefore, I pursued this research with flexibility in relation to my conceptual framework because I believe that my research paradigmatic framework could change as the study progressed. To conduct this qualitative phenomenological study, I chose a combination of social constructivism with critical theory. This combination of a social constructivist framework with critical theory would fit my inquiry for several reasons. First, according to Creswell (2013) a social constructivist framework considers that meanings are negotiable, varied, multiple, and socially formed, and it tries to explain and understand the world where participants live and work. He also states that “researchers recognize how their interpretation flows from their own personal, cultural, and historical experiences” (Creswell, 2013, p. 25). Moreover, such framework was appropriate because this inquiry elicited from participants their multiple and complex views of the world. In addition, my research questioned the power relationships that

might still exist between the colonizers and the colonized (Kachru, 1996) or the oppressors and the oppressed (Freire, 2003). In that sense, this study has a critical theory framework for helping NNEST overcome the limitations that they might face simply for the fact that they speak a different variety of English. Therefore, a combination of social constructivism and critical theory was the most suitable.

In terms of ontology, I definitely see myself as a relativist. Being a NNEST who teaches international students from many diverse cultural backgrounds and seeing multiple realities that are shaped by different contexts is what occurs daily in my life. It is very clear to me that my professional and personal experiences have shaped and reshaped realities making truth evolve as new information and understandings emerged. In other words, as an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher, I cannot generalize reality because it is deeply enrooted in the multiple contexts that I observe in my classroom daily. I might transfer it to new situations with similar contexts but never generalize it. Therefore, as phenomenological studies should be, the findings of this study are not generalizable but transferrable.

Concerning epistemology, an emic approach is clearly seen because of my deep immersion in the phenomenon being studied. My relationship with this research is a very personal one. Creswell (2013) defines *axiological assumption* as one of the characteristics of qualitative research because “all researchers bring values to a study, but qualitative researchers make their values known in a study” (p. 20). Therefore, axiologically speaking, I openly discuss not only this research significance but also how my personal experiences and values may be biased and may guide me in interpreting participants’ views. All of that is expressed in a narrative style in which I use first-person pronoun and qualitative research language. To put it differently, this inquiry is rich in the depth of its details and contexts. It is very comprehensive in



the review of the literature and in the study description as well. One of my major goals was to provide a study that is convincing, credible, and trustworthy.

In conclusion, even though I had some anticipation on what my research would be like, I was open to embrace what was yet to come. Despite my plan, I happily accepted an emergent design. I took one day at a time to perform this investigation in a meticulous and high-quality manner. Hopefully, such extensive and in-depth qualitative work will contribute to a better TESOL field.

### **Significance of the Study**

As presented earlier, there has been a number of studies on NNESTs nonnativeness-related challenges and identity, but most of them focused on EFL settings. When investigating ESL settings, those previous studies were about either novice teachers or graduate students. Therefore, the present dissertation study has contributed to research developed so far by adding a different kind of NNEST profile, i.e., experienced nonnative ESL teachers, who have not been thoroughly investigated yet. Fulfilling this gap in the literature will contribute to the TESOL field and teacher education.

Voices of experienced teachers were heard as they shed a new light on the issues of nonnativeness-related professional challenges, coping strategies, and identity construction. As someone from the inner group, i.e., experienced ESL nonnative teachers, it was my intention to hear other members' voices and anecdotes related to this issue. By sharing their perspectives and narratives, I seek to provide opportunities for awareness in relation to challenges, coping strategies and professional identity construction to the readers of this research. Since I interviewed experienced teachers who shared how they have overcome nonnativeness-related challenges and possible identity issues that have taken them years to solve, hopefully readers of

this research will learn from those life experiences and solve their own issues, ideally, in a shorter time, which may mean that there will be general improvement in practice.

In terms of the Master of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (MA TESOL) curricula, several studies (e.g., Brown, 2002; Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999; Reis, 2010; Wolff & De Costa, 2017) have proposed exposing native and nonnative graduate students through elective or required courses about issues related to World Englishes, native speakerism, fallacies, and linguistic prejudice in TESOL to name a few. This study intends to contribute to this view and improvement of MA TESOL courses. Being exposed to what experienced nonnative ESL teachers have reported in relation to their challenges, strategies, and identity construction, might help prospective nonnative TESOL professionals realize that they are not alone and that they can overcome their own challenges.

Research has shown that there are several benefits when schools hire NNESTs. For instance, according to Pizorn and Bedea (2000), the most effective faculty arises when nonnative and native English-speaking teachers (NEST) collaborate. Relatedly, Murti (2002) states that a department that combines the contributions of NNESTs and NESTs is prone to be more successful because it offers its staff and students the opportunity to start questioning the idea that English has only one acceptable form. Besides, multiple perspectives are encouraged in this kind of setting. In fact, Murti (2002) highlights the importance of hiring people that speak different varieties of English so that the idea that English is a 'hegemonic structure' would change effectively because students and staff would be exposed to the nature of diversity that exists in the English-speaking world. Last, Alatis (2005) proposes that the E in the acronym TESOL should stand for Englishes instead of English. Therefore, this study might contribute not only to

encouraging further research in the field of TESOL and changes in MA TESOL curricula but also to improving employment policies to provide fairer opportunities to NNESTs.

In brief, the importance of this study lays on the fact that experience has played a very significant role on those nonnative ESL teachers' coping strategies and identity construction. Learning from their narratives and perspectives will help raise awareness and bring a new light to the changes that still need to be made in TESOL, to MA TESOL curricula, and to equal opportunity employment policies. Furthermore, raising awareness for a more widely accepted view of NNESTs in ESL settings prepares learners for intercultural and international communications, values all kinds of Englishes, their contexts and cultures, and helps debunk colonialism (Pennycook, 1998), oppressive power relationships (Freire, 2003), and English hegemony (Kachru, 1996; Murti, 2002). Most importantly, experienced nonnative ESL teachers participating in this study shared anecdotes and lived experiences that will most likely teach the readers of this research the importance of having inclusive education, one of TESOL's goals (Alatis, 2005), which is culturally responsive for including not only students' language diversity but also the teachers'. That also leads to the importance of more representation in education, and this study contributes to it.

### **Specific Research Questions**

1. How have experienced nonnative ESL teachers processed and made meaning of their nonnativeness-related professional challenges throughout their careers in the U.S.A.?
2. What coping strategies have experienced nonnative ESL teachers working in Intensive English Programs (IEPs) in the U.S.A. developed and used to address challenges associated with their nonnative status?

3. How has coping with nonnativeness-related professional challenges shaped the construction of nonnative ESL teachers' professional Language teacher identities (LTIs)?

### **Brief Overview of the Proposed Methods**

This research employed qualitative methods because “qualitative data, with their emphasis on people’s lived experiences, are fundamentally well suited for locating the meanings people place on the events, processes, and structures of their lives and for connecting these meanings to the social world around them” (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, p.11). I collected data through an open-ended interview in which experienced nonnative ESL teachers narrated their life stories in relation to the proposed research questions. All the oral recorded data was transcribed immediately after the interviews and revisited frequently thereafter. The data was analyzed following Saldaña’s first and second cycle codings (Saldaña, 2016).

This study had purposive and snowball samplings. They are nonnative English-speaking teachers who have been teaching ESL in Intensive English Programs (IEPs) in the U.S.A. for at least five years. Even though some (i.e., Blum and Johnson, 2012) use the term *English teachers who learned English as an additional language* instead of nonnative English-speaking teachers, for the purpose of this study, I will refer to Diniz de Figueiredo (2011) who recognizes the negativity and diminishment that the nonnative English-speaking (NNES) label may convey but still chooses to use the term nonnative speaker for its undeniably strong presence in several other research studies already published in the field. There have been several studies emphasizing the dichotomy of NESTs and NNESTs. Some studies have compared and contrasted both groups or even detailed the advantages and disadvantages of each category (Arva & Medgyes, 2000; Kim, 2011; Llurda 2009; McKay, 2003; Medgyes 1992, 1994, 1999; Tajeddin & Akeh, 2016). Yet, Medgyes (1992) states that the ideal teacher is not reserved to either group. I therefore will use

the most common terminology and acronyms used in the literature: native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and nonnative English-speaking teachers (NNESTs).

The definition of an experienced teacher varies greatly in the literature, but the most common definition of experienced teachers is in relation to the number of years taught and having five or more years of teaching experience is the most common identification in the literature (Rodríguez & McKay, 2010). Therefore, for the purpose of this study, the phrase “experienced teacher” refers to teachers with at least five years of teaching experience and who identify themselves as experienced.

The Commission on English Language Accreditation (CEA) has 314 accredited sites in the United States. From those, 22 accredited IEPs are located in the West South-Central States. I tried to contact and recruit potential participants who fit the profile of being an experienced nonnative ESL teacher who are teachers at those 22 sites. However, I faced great difficulty to recruit participants. Eventually, per the dissertation committee decision, I contacted three teachers that I knew and recruited them. Two of those teachers recommended two more participants, which allowed me to snowball sample. For the same difficulty, a pilot study turned to be unfeasible.

### **Assumptions**

There were four general assumptions in relation to this study, and they were all shown to be true. The first one was that the participants would be willing to participate effectively, honestly, and truthfully whenever being interviewed. Secondly, the time spent in the interviews was quality time that was used efficiently. Also, the requirements to be a participant in this study was appropriate and assured that all participants had experienced the same or similar phenomenon to be investigated. Lastly, participants were willing to participate voluntarily and

sincerely in this study and were not doing so because they might be seeking additional benefits such as impressing others, including job supervisors and students.

### **Limits on Generalizability**

This is a phenomenological study whose purposive and snowballing sample included experienced nonnative ESL teachers in Intensive English Programs (IEPs) in Arkansas, Colorado, and West Virginia. That sets some limitations on the generalizability of the study. The results may not be applicable to NNESTs who are novice teachers, who teach K-12, and/or who have been teaching in an EFL setting or in other areas of the U.S.A. In addition to the years of experience and the teaching setting, other variables such as age, country of origin, immigration status, and gender may limit generalizability even more. Also, even though the extensive experience of the participants is a fundamental factor in this study, this is not a longitudinal study.

### **Delimitations**

Even though the question of race is an aggravating factor within the prejudice that has been identified in TESOL, this study did not investigate how skin color or racial identity may influence NNESTs' challenges, coping strategies, and identity construction. This study is limited to the factors of language nativeness and nonnativeness. Another important delimitation is the worksite. This study is limited to IEPs that are located in the U.S.A and that are accredited by the Commission on English Language Accreditation (CEA). The five-year teaching experience factor is another delimitation.

## Chapter 2

### Review of the Literature

#### **Introduction**

To manufacture this review of the literature, I first used the University of Arkansas Mullins Library website to do an advanced search with keywords *and* NNESTs. Some of those key terms were teacher identity, challenges, coping strategies, World Englishes, self-perception, prejudice, discrimination, emotions, among others. I often used the top ten database the university has on its page. Mostly, I searched through ProQuest, JSTOR, and ERIC. I also used Inter-library Loan (ILLiad) whenever needed. I created folders in my own account on each database and started saving the publications I found suitable in those electronic files. Sometimes, I also emailed the publications to myself. Before saving, I skimmed and scanned the possible readings by reading the abstract, introduction, subtitles, and conclusions.

Once a decision was made about which articles, books, and dissertations I should use, I downloaded them to my computer. The following step was to organize the sources. To do so, I renamed them with words that would remind me which article or publication that was. The new name could be the author, the title, salient keywords, or whatever would easily let me know which publication it was. Then I organized them into subfolders according to topics such as LTI, discrimination, emotions, etc. These topic-renamed subfolders were then inserted into a folder named *Articles for Dissertation*, which was also saved on my Microsoft OneDrive.

In addition, I printed every single publication from my electronic folder. I also bought physical books from Amazon. Even though I know I could highlight and add notes electronically to those documents, because of my personality and learning style, I needed to use paper copies, physical highlighters, colorful pens and pencils, and sticky notes. That is how I interacted with

my sources. One of my professors suggested a software named PaperPile to help organize, paraphrase, and summarize sources. I tried PaperPile and others such as Zotero and RefWorks, but still my style is manipulative, and those were not for me. I needed to touch and physically annotate the articles and books. In the end, the cover of each printed document had a dotted list of main ideas and sticky notes. Books had sticking-out bookmark stickies adhered to relevant pages that were annotated. The interactive reading that I did brought light to new ideas and frequently cited authors, which became the leading themes of new searches for new sources.

To paraphrase and summarize, I often times dictated the exact same words as the author into a Microsoft Word document. The dictation action happened after fully reading, annotating and understanding the passage. Dictating to the computer also activated my schemata. Then I electronically tried to retell the same idea with different words and structures. If I could not think of synonyms, I right clicked on the word to see Microsoft Word suggestions, or I used Google. Undoubtedly, my writing needed to follow APA style, and for that I used the seventh edition of the APA Publication Manual. If that was not enough to instruct me on how to proceed, I searched the Internet.

All of the steps above were performed with common sense, critical thinking, and ethics. That is how this chapter and its four sections were crafted. The sections are as follows. First, a review of historical facts, including the birth of TESOL as a profession and a professional association and the development of World Englishes as a theory with Kachru's Concentric Circles is presented. Second, the dichotomy of native and nonnative English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) is discussed. Next, the common nonnativeness-related challenges for nonnative English-speaking teachers and their influence on identity are considered. After that, the concept of language teacher identity (LTI) and the purpose of this study are explained.



## **Historical Facts: The Unique Phenomenon of English Language Diffusion and the Birth of TESOL**

According to Alatis (2005), in the late 1940s about 90,000 international students came to the U.S.A. to pursue university degrees, which made this post World War II need for special English classes clear. Back then, authorities asked professors from the English and foreign language departments for help in this matter. By the early 1950s, several institutions had already started special English programs for foreigners. Some of those adult international students either brought their children to the U.S.A. or had them born here [the U.S.A.], and therefore the need for special English classes was also a reality in elementary and secondary education. Increasingly, professionals were becoming aware that teaching English as a second language was emerging as a special academic discipline. Alatis (2005) states that the first U.S. conference dedicated to the teaching of English to speakers of other languages occurred in May of 1964 with approximately 800 attendees. A proposal for the creation of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) association was presented at the conference of 1965, and on the third conference, in 1966, the national association was born with the official name of TESOL (Alatis, 2005). The official website for the TESOL International Association, [tesol.org](http://tesol.org), states that at the NAFSA conference of 1963, TESOL started being developed, and it confirms what Alatis (2005) published by stating the same information that at its third conference, in March of 1966, “a constitution and bylaws were adopted and Teachers of English to Speaker of Other Languages (TESOL) was created” (TESOL International Association, 2023).

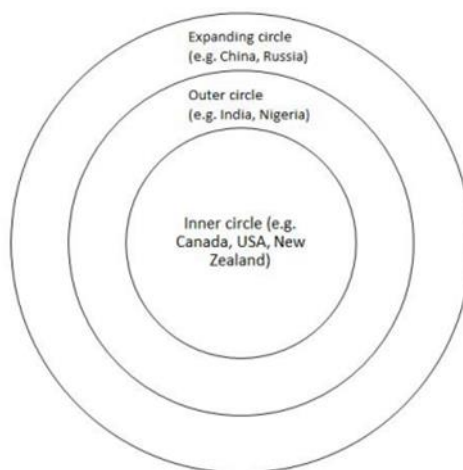
In 1984, at a TESOL conference, Braj Kachru and Larry Smith, renowned researchers, proposed that TESOL could also have an area devoted to English and all its varieties as an international language. The proposal by Kachru and Smith was rejected. Alatis (2005) reports

that Kachru and Smith's proposal included several ideas which were mostly related to recommending more research on the "social, regional, and functional varieties of the language" (p. 82). This meant studying the concept of standard English as well as its possible nonexistence since there are so many varieties of English in the world. According to Alatis (2005), Kachru and Smith proposed an idea that they had been investigating since the early 1980s, which was the concept of Englishes not just English. Their research findings pushed against several generally accepted ideas or fallacies at that time and highly recommended that TESOL should be neutral and consider the several varieties of English instead of associating it with only certain countries, i.e., England, the U.S.A., Australia, and Canada. "Another feature of the newly developing field was to debunk the theory that only native speakers could teach English to others." (p. 32).

Most importantly, in the mid-1980s Kachru's theory of the Concentric Circles of English (see Figure 1) also known as the Kachruvian three-circle model of World Englishes was presented to TESOL professionals (Schmitz, 2014). Kachru's (1982, 1985, 1986) revolutionary research classified all kinds of English spoken in the world into three major groups: 1. The Inner Circle (norm providing), which includes countries that speak English as a first language, 2. The Outer Circle (norm developing), which includes countries that speak English as a second language (ESL), and 3. The Expanding Circle (norm dependent), which is formed by individuals who speak English as a foreign language (EFL) (Schmitz, 2014).

Figure 1

*Kachruvian Three Concentric Circles of English* (Kachru, 1985, p. 12)



Al-Mutairi (2020) states that for the past 35 years, there has been extensive debate concerning Kachru's Three Concentric Circles Model of English Language. While many researchers have endorsed it as one of the most important theories of the English language, others have considered it oversimplified and unclear. Regardless of its criticisms, “Kachru's three concentric circle model is still considered among researchers and educators as an invaluable contribution regarding the spread and development of the English language worldwide” (p. 88).

One of the major contributions that Kachru's Concentric Circles had in the TESOL field is related to the definition of English itself. Due to its history and phenomenal worldwide spread (Kachru, 1996), English has often been considered an international language; however, such internationality has often been limited to what is usually defined as *Standard English*, which is mostly often considered either American or British English (Farrell & Martin, 2009). Consequently, the traditional definition of English, especially standard English did not have much of a diversity or plurality to it. Farrell and Martin (2009) question this conventional definition by saying that standard English varies dramatically not only from country to country

but also within each country. The authors exemplify their view by stating that a Canadian and an Irish person may have different definitions of what Standard English is. Most importantly, the Farrell and Martin study (2009) is based on Kachru's early research (1982, 1985, 1986), which presented the three concentric English circles and the field of *World Englishes* to TESOL. Similar to Kachru's, Farrell and Martin's work question the notion of Standard English while contrasting it to World Englishes.

Kachru (1996) reviews these, explains the history of the English language diaspora and its implications, and divides such spread, which he classifies as an unprecedented linguistic phenomenon, in three phases. The first phase happened in the British Island between 1535 and 1707, and it included places such as Wales and Scotland. The second phase involves the migration of English speakers across the globe, and it includes North America, Australia, and New Zealand. In the third phase, English was brought to South and Southeast Asia, African countries, and the Philippines. Kachru states that the third phase is the one that modified English sociolinguistically. In other words, English was implemented in communities which did not contain English speaking populations. Those communities had their own "diverse contexts, methods, and imparting English education, rather than one consistent pedagogical model, often with no serious input from native speakers of the language" (p. 136). Kachru concludes his considerations about this third phase by stating that English had in fact gone through a "process of acculturation" (p. 136) because of the cultural, linguistic, and literary influences it received from the local sociolinguistics contexts in which it was implemented.

As a result, the diaspora of English is a two-way road. If on one hand, some countries have received *Englishization*, which is the English influences on that given country language and culture, on the other hand, English has gone through *Nativization* and *Acculturation*, which are

the processes of the changes that English has gone through for being in contact with the local culture and language (Kachru, 1996). As an analogy, those linguistic and cultural changes are a two-way road or a double-blade sword. One has influenced the other and vice-versa.

English has become a “cross-cultural and cross-linguistic universal language” (p. 138). To put it differently, English has had the power to change nations and their peoples, including their behavior around the world. As an example, Kachru (1996) mentions that bilingualism majorly means knowing English and another language. However, “the elevated status of English across cultures came at a price. Its multicultural identities resulted in deep sociolinguistic shifts” (p. 144). Even though other languages such as Latin, Spanish, and French have been spread in the world, the English diaspora is a phenomenon which is unique “overwhelming and unprecedented in linguistic history” (p. 135).

In 2005, Alatis listed the areas on which English has had an impact as an international language. English is the most frequently taught foreign language in the world. Worldwide research in the most diverse fields is published more in English than in any other language. The media, including paper publications, radio and TV, records, tapes, and films, are mostly produced in English. English is the official language of international businesses and interactions in conferences, air traffic control, and shipping. Paper mail and electronic mail as well as interactions and publications on the Internet are massively produced in English. In addition, Kachru (1996) emphasized that there is “the hegemony of English across cultures in the domains of education, administration, literary creativity, and intranational and international interaction” (p. 139). In brief, the English extensive influence on “other cultures, languages and literatures is a unique phenomenon in the history of language diffusion” (p. 139), and it has undoubtedly

influenced its native and nonnative speakers, including teachers from the most varied backgrounds.

### **The Dichotomy of Native and Nonnative English-Speaking Teachers and Labels**

Therefore, today English is undoubtedly the language with more nonnative speakers than native speakers. In fact, Kachru (1996) estimates there are from two to four nonnative speakers for each native speaker. As a result, most worldwide interactions in English occur in fact between or among nonnative speakers. One of the fallacies in relation to English is that it is mostly learned so that nonnative speakers of the language can interact with its native speakers, when in fact, English is primarily intranational rather than international. As a result, the majority English learners around the globe are being taught by nonnative English-speaking teachers (NNESTs). Accordingly, it is naive to believe that a single standard correct English could be taught by all English instructors (Connor, 1996).

Edge (1988) provides a traditional definition of the term *native speaker* by stating that native speakers of a language are those who have learned it as their mother tongue or first language. Other authors have gone beyond the place of birth or the language that one acquires first to define the native speaker. For instance, Kramsch (1997) affirms that what defines a native speaker is the acceptance by the group which created such distinction, while for Davies (1991) confidence and identity is what distinguishes native from nonnative speakers. Boyle (1997) asserts that considering the birthplace and first language is not enough to determine nativeness or nonnativeness, making it difficult to define the native speaker. Similarly, Liu (1999) considers such labeling impossible since it is difficult to accurately define the terms native and nonnative.

In the recent years, the labels “native” and “nonnative” have been criticized and considered politically incorrect because of the “power relations imposed by the labels, the impact

of the labels on the hiring process, and the pedagogical implications of the labels” (Liu, 1999, p. 85). Furthermore, being a TESOL professional requires adequate training and competence, which goes beyond the native English-speaking teacher (NEST) and NNEST dichotomy. For the past recent years, several publications (Blum & Johnson, 2012; Holliday & Aboshiha, 2009; Schreiber, 2019) have stated that the labels of the NEST and NNEST dichotomy can be harmful for the racism, hegemony, linguistic imperialism, and power relationships they represent within TESOL. On the other hand, Medgyes (2001) proposes that the dichotomy should not be disregarded or denied but should be thoroughly examined. Even though the TESOL field has progressed in relation to the labels, there is still the possibility of some hidden racism (Holliday & Aboshiha, 2009) within the “fabric of Western TESOL professionalism,” which should be addressed to avoid the perpetuation of labelling “the Other” as deficient (Cook, 2016; Fan & de Jong, 2019; Holliday & Aboshiha, 2009; Nemtchinova, 2005; Schreiber, 2019; Solano-Campos, 2014).

Milner (2007) reinforces the importance of the plurality that NNESTs bring to the field when the author states that “there is value and promise in people who have had experience in life; *different*, in this sense, does not necessarily mean deficit or deficient” (p. 389). Even though Milner (2007) was mostly referring to people of color, the same concept applies to the NNESTs who have gone through the experience of learning the language and becoming teachers of it, and therefore, they bring to the TESOL field a variety of English accents and provide differences not deficiencies. The ideology known as the *native speaker fallacy* (Canagarajah, 1999; Cook, 1999; Phillipson, 1992), which indicates that the ideal English teacher is a native speaker of English, has contributed to racism in the TESOL field. Delanty, Jones, and Wodak (2008) explain that racism is not only related to color but also to any group who may be considered deficient. As

Kachru (1996) stated, “English is seen essentially as a colonizer’s linguistic instrument, without any local identity or name. Any non-English linguistic indicators – cultural, social, and religious – have been viewed as the markers of deficiency and not merely of difference” (p. 140).

As I have stated in chapter one, Blum and Johnson (2012) prefer to use the phrase *English teachers who learned English as an additional language* instead of NNESTs to fight the belief that NNES are deficient. Diniz de Figueiredo (2011), on the other hand, declared his full awareness of the “political construct” implicit in the labels “*native speaker* as opposed to *nonnative speaker*” and the problematization they have been causing in the field, but he still chooses to use such terms in his research because they are still strong in English Language Teaching (ELT) and several other authors have published using these very same terms.

For instance, Tajeddin and Adeh (2016) used the terms native and nonnative in their study which investigated NEST and NNSTs’ views of both groups’ levels of prestige as well as their benefits and detriments. In their study, they interviewed 100 native speakers in two Inner Circle countries, i.e., the U.S.A. and the U.K., and 100 NNESTs in two Expanding Circle countries, Iran and Turkey. Each country had 50 respondents to the two instruments used, a questionnaire and an interview. This study by Tajeddin and Adeh (2016) echoes not only the choice of the terms native and nonnative but also the results previously presented in other studies (Arva & Medgyes, 2000; Kim, 2011; Llurda 2009; McKay 2003; Medgyes, 1992, 1994, 1999). The reiterating results have shown the advantages of nonnative English-speaking teachers as being more empathetic toward their students, being a language learner role model to be followed, being bilingual, and being knowledgeable of cultural differences, difficulties of acquiring another language, and the students’ mother tongue. On the other hand, this study confirms the concerns or disadvantages that NNESTs may also have presented in previous research. The most



frequent ones were related to equity in the hiring process, payment, and treatment (Coskun, 2013) and to the “sociocultural aspects of teaching” (Tajeddin & Akeh, 2019, p. 50), language proficiency and native-like accent (Kim, 2011; Reves & Medgyes, 1994).

In conclusion, other studies (Blum & Johnson, 2012; Jenkins, 2009; Kirkpatrick, 2007; Morgan, 2004; Motha, 2006a, 2006b; Phillipson, 1992) have echoed the several ideas presented in this section. One of them is the belief in the apparent pedagogical superiority of native-English-speaking teachers because of another false belief that they are the most appropriate source of ‘proper English.’ Such vision is narrow because standard English is in fact a “myth, and abstract idealized accent that is often associated with White, middle-class speakers” (Blum & Johnson, 2012, p. 170). The *native speaker fallacy* fails to recognize the diversity of the several different kinds of Englishes that are spoken within a country and worldwide. Consequently, such favoritism reinforces the dichotomy and the labels, which have several repercussions including more professional challenges that the nonnative English-speaking teachers will have to confront.

### **The Nonnative English-Speaking Teachers’ Nonnativeness-Related Challenges and their Influence on Identity**

There are several nonnativeness-related challenges that NNESTs have to confront. One of them is related to equal opportunities. For example, Kumaravadivelu, (2016) shares his experience trying to publish a book on teaching methods and how he was treated unfairly by the publishers. Although the majority of English teachers are NNESTs, they still fight for equal job opportunities (Maum, 2002). For instance, NNESTs have been discriminated against in employment because historically the so-called ‘native speaker’ has been believed to be superior (Holliday & Aboshiha, 2009). As another example, Ruecker and Ives (2015) analyzed several

websites that advertise jobs to recruit English teachers and found that online recruiting spaces have in their rhetoric a language construction that privileges white native English-speaking teachers. Mackenzie's (2020) study on discriminatory job advertisements for English language teachers in South America found that there is still recruitment biases and the prevalence of native speakerism. Appleby (2016) concluded that there is definitely certain personal and professional privilege for white native speakers in ELT in Japan. Likewise, Lee and Simon-Maeda (2006) discuss the story of Mariah, a NNEST, who described facing discriminatory employment practice while she was looking for a job as an EFL teacher in Japan. The fact that there is employment discrimination in ESL and EFL settings is undeniable. The literature has numerous stories of those unfortunate events. Most importantly, facing job discrimination because of linguistic prejudice may influence the NNEST professional identity. As Blum and Johnson (2012) discuss, denying employment because of the way individuals talk violently and offensively forces them to modify their identities.

Another important nonnativeness-related challenge that NNESTs face is the one related to their emotions. Several studies have reported a strong connection between nonnative English-speaking teachers' emotions and identity (e.g. Amin, 1997; Aneja, 2016; Barkhuizen, 2016; Blum & Johnson, 2012; Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999; Diniz de Figueiredo, 2011; Fairley, 2020; Fan & Jong, 2019; Holliday & Aboshiha, 2009; Kasun & Saavedra, 2016; Liu, 1999; Morgan, 2016; Menard-Warwick, 2008, 2011; Mutlu & Ortaçtepe, 2016; Nieto & Meadows, 2015; Nguyen & Dao, 2019; Norton, 1997, 2000; Schreiber, 2019; Solano-Campos, 2014; Song, 2016; Swearingen, 2019; Tajeddin & Adeb, 2016; Trent, 2016). For example, Wolff and De Costa (2017) share the story of Puja, a NNEST who came to the U.S.A. to pursue her MA in TESOL. The authors report her emotional challenges that were eventually manageable and led

her through reflexivity into a more positive teacher identity development. The authors state that emotions play an important role on identity development and more especially for NNESTs, who according to Llurda (2005), are often identified as one whole group of teachers simply labeled as NNESTs who have no particular trait; only the lack of nativeness is what characterizes them. Wolff and De Costa (2017) define emotions not only as “cognitive individual difference” but also as “bearing a social dimension and argue that they are also associated with identity, agency, and power” (p.78). Furthermore, such emotions expand beyond the individual and involve sociocultural forces and identities. Benesch (2012) affirms that identity and emotions are inextricable. Godda (as cited in Danahy, 1986) writes that “to teach in a different tongue, about other people, about cultural advances, and about the greatness of ancestors requires a special self-image as a person, as a professional, and as a member of society” (p. 233). Murti (2002) argues that the element of self-discovery is vital for students and NNESTs. The author emphasizes that being able to teach another language and culture is a question of how much nonnative speakers want to learn about themselves.

The combination of those challenges posed by discrimination and emotions affects NNESTs’ self-image, their professional identities and consequently their classrooms. Kamhi-Stein (2002) claims that the NNESTs’ self-identification deeply influences how NNESTs construct their classrooms and the way they teach. Reis (2015) emphasizes that students who are constantly taught by insecure and fearful ESL/EFL teachers may get themselves trapped in this “vicious cycle of powerlessness” (p. 38) which is likely to continue. Medgyes (1994) defends that successful teaching has self-confidence in its ingredients. Relatedly, Danahy (1984) presented a paper at a conference whose title was “pedagogical self-image is the key to better student-teacher interaction” (p. 1). In sum, NNESTs’ emotions, including self-esteem and self-

confidence, directly affect their identity. To substantiate that, Medgyes (1994) indicates that professional self-esteem may be one of the problems that NNESTs might face. Beijaard, Verloop, and Vermunt (2000) observed that “teachers’ perceptions of their own professional identity affect their efficacy and professional development” (p. 750). As cited at the beginning of this paper, Davies (1991) remarks that nativeness is not purely related to the place of birth or mother tongue, but it is intersected with confidence and identity.

### **The Language Teacher Identity (LTI) and the Purpose of this Study**

The definition of an individual’s identity is not simple. Norton (1997) defines identity as how “people understand their relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how people understand their possibilities for the future” (p. 410). According to Banks (2019), ethnic identity is a crucial part of a person, and some individuals can see themselves belonging to more than one ethnic or cultural group. The author also states that this is particularly possible to occur to those who are racially and ethnically mixed and that they are able to sustain loyalty to both groups. Delgado and Stefancic (2017) are in accordance with Banks when they state that no one has a specific, effortlessly defined, unitary identity and that “everyone has potentially conflicting, overlapping identities, loyalties, and allegiances” (p. 11). As any other professional, experienced nonnative English-speaking teachers who teach ESL have multiple, dynamic, and ever-evolving ethnic identity. Regardless of how scholars define identity, there is general agreement that identity is fluid and not fixed.

*Intersectionality* is the concept that race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, and ability are interconnectedly shaping one’s identity (Hill, 2015). For Banks (2019), intersectionality or *Intersection of Diversity Variables* includes social class, ethnic identity, racial group, language, abilities and disabilities, religion, sexual orientation, and gender. One of the differences between

Banks's and Hill's models is that Banks included social class, disabilities, and language in his. Another interesting factor is that abilities and disabilities are plural nouns in Banks (2019), which leads to the question if language should be plural as well. To clarify, a person's race or gender, or country of origin, for example, does not define that person as a whole. Those aspects that form someone's identity are interconnected and influencing each other all the time, and are therefore, neither simplistic nor binary.

Even though Miller (2009) did not use the term intersectionality to define identity, she states that the literature has an array of terminologies to help define identity, for example, "social identity, ethnic identity, cultural identity, linguistic identity, subjectivity, the self, and voice" (Miller, 2009, p. 173). Miller (2009) also presents a table with seven different definitions of identity by seven different authors. In her opinion, what all the seven definitions have in common is the fact that identity is interpersonal, intrapersonal, negotiable, constructed, enacted, transformational, and temporary. This is related to teacher identity as context-dependent, conflicting, and contradictory (Miller, 2009). Similarly, Lee (2016) also presents a table in her doctoral dissertation composed of nine different definitions of *professional teacher identity* by nine different authors. The commonality here is that professional teacher identity construction constitutes the process of dynamically encompassing the professional and personal selves (Lee, 2016).

### **Teacher Identity**

Teacher identity is usually viewed as how each teacher sees him/herself in the professional context and in society (Morgan, 2004). In addition, Yazan (2018) states that teachers see themselves as those who professionally perform teaching, and their identities are affected and constructed by such self-perception, by the perceptions of others, by social

interactions, and by professional development activities. Therefore, experience in the field as a teacher and as a learner, and how a teacher values and interprets such experiences play an important role in a teacher's identity construction (Flores & Day, 2006). Thus, past, present, and future experiences (Zacharias, 2006) directly contribute to a teacher's feelings and emotions in relation to the profession such as self-efficacy, motivation, commitment, and satisfaction (Kelchtermans, 2009). Professional teacher identity is crucial for the profession because it dictates a teacher's way of teaching and due to its continuous conflicts and contradictions, it can also be a source of personal and emotional struggles (Lee, 2016). Several authors (e.g., Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999; Miller, 2009; Samimy et al., 2011) have referred to the idea that identity entails conflicts and contradictions by citing Peirce's (1995) definition of identity as "multiple, a site of struggle, and changing over time" (p. 14).

Language teacher identity (LTI) expands teacher identity (Swearingen, 2019), and it includes "cognitive, social, emotional, ideological and historical" aspects (Barkhuizen, 2016, p. 4). Fairley (2020) went beyond this definition when defining LTI, she not only provided a similar definition of identity as a process of becoming, changing, conflicting and contradicting, i.e., 'a site of struggle,' but she also questioned what the sources of such conflict and struggles would be. According to the author, the tensions can be internal and external. Internal tensions or conflicts occur, for instance, when one's performed identity (who a person is at the moment) confronts that person's imagined identity (who that person would like to be), or when one's conceptual knowledge (theory) is in conflict with that person's procedural knowledge (practice). External tensions occur when there is a mismatch between the self and others, for example the different beliefs of a teacher and a mentor, a teacher and a student, or a teacher and the educational policies and curricula. In other words, everything that is external and beyond that

teacher's control can be a source of external tension. This is also the place where claimed identities and ascribed identities confront (Fairley, 2020).

One might question if the language teacher identities (LTIs) are somewhat different from any other subject-teacher identities. As I cited on page 24, language is one of the aspects in the Bank's (2019) model of intersectionality, which includes ethnic identity, racial group, language, abilities and disabilities, religion, sexual orientation, and gender as interrelated components of identity. Trying to connect each aspect of intersectionality to the teaching profession, one will realize that almost all of those intersectionality aspects are not school disciplines, which means that they are not formally taught in schools. For example, there is neither a social class teacher nor a gender teacher. Yet, there are language teachers. Language and identity go hand in hand. Anzaldúa (2004) defines ethnic identity as "twin skin to linguistic identity – I am my language" (p. 105). According to Gay (2018) there is a favorable interconnection among culture, language, identity, and learning. Gay (2018) asserts that recognizing students' language and cultural diversity is fundamental to their current and future successes, and Gay (2018) depicts the importance of language diversity by affirming that multiple languages make schools more welcoming environments. In brief, languages are not only some content that a teacher teaches. Languages are part of the teacher's and the students' ethnic identities, and that would be what differentiates language teachers from other subject teachers the most.

In addition, good language teaching should have a commitment to ethical self-formation, to the promotion of social equality, and social change (De Costa & Norton, 2017). Students from marginalized communities are often present in ESL classrooms, and therefore teaching a language would also require that a language teacher brings to the classroom processes of empowerment and liberation from marginalization (Varghese et al., 2016). However, numerous

studies (e.g., Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999; Fan & Jong, 2019; Flores & Aneja, 2017; Golombek & Jordan, 2005; Kamhi-Stein, 2009; Nguyen and Dao, 2019; Pavlenko, 2003; Samimy et al., 2011; etc.) have proven that graduate students, especially NNESTs, in MA TESOL programs in English-speaking countries have suffered marginalization themselves. These studies mostly depict the trajectory of NNESTs who were either novice or experienced EFL teachers in their countries and became students in an MA TESOL program in an Inner Circle country, mostly Britain, Australia, New Zealand, or America (the U.S.A.), also called BANA countries. In other words, the research related to NNESTs' identity construction through conflicts and tension is almost always related to their journeys before, during, and after being an international graduate student in a BANA-based teacher education program for TESOL.

Most NNESTs become aware of their identities as nonnative speakers of English when beginning a BANA-based MA TESOL program of study. Many say that before moving to the U.S.A., for example, they had never seen themselves as a nonnative English-speaker (Kim, 2017; Solano-Campos, 2014). Their identities as any other person's identity are built in this new social and academic context. By being directly contrasted to their native English-speaking peers, international students look at themselves as deficient instead of bilingual or multicompetent (Kim, 2017). The inevitable comparison added to the feelings of limited linguistic competency (Nemtchinova et al., 2010) will directly affect their emotions such as their self-esteem and confidence (Diniz de Figueiredo, 2011; Reis, 2010). Some feel frustrated, ashamed, powerless, and inferior (Pavlenko, 2003).

There are various other academic clashes these students usually face (Swearingen, 2019). Some shift from a position of privilege in their countries to marginalization in their teacher education programs. Others feel that their competence level decreases and start questioning the



career they have chosen. They start becoming more silent in class because their contributions to class discussion are often rejected. They may also feel failure-like, infantilized, embarrassed, incompetent, and invisible. There is a great divergence between their language and ability expectations, i.e., their imagined identities, and who they see themselves being as participants and contributors in class (Swearingen, 2019).

Nonetheless, such tensions and identity conflicts are part of identity development of teachers (Wolff & De Costa, 2017). They can be constructive or destructive. These tensions can be consciously identified and examined, and students can learn how to react to them. They can become an opportunity for pedagogical intervention. Negative tensions can be challenged and defeated. The international graduate students in MA TESOL programs may replicate or modify them (Fairley, 2020). For example, Wolff and De Costa (2017) narrate the story of Puja, an international MA TESOL student, who learned how to navigate her emotions from a negative perspective into a more positive one as part of her identity development. In the end, Puja was able to see the advantages of graduating overseas. Kim's (2017) case study reports the identity transformation of Eunji, a student who initially had low self-esteem and devalued herself as an English teacher because of her nonnative status but was able to transform her identity into a confident language teacher. Eunji's case confirms the importance of critical pedagogy interventions as a means to help future teachers develop a more positive self-image and identity.

Other researchers (Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999; Fan & Jong, 2019; Golombek & Jordan, 2005; Kamhi-Stein, 2009; Nguyen and Dao, 2019; Pavlenko, 2003; Samimy et al., 2011; etc.) have published successful identity construction stories that are similar to Puja's and Eunji's stories. Unfortunately, there has not been much published research about the identity constructions of experienced nonnative ESL teachers who immigrate to English-speaking

countries or who after graduating decided to stay in that country and switch careers from EFL to ESL teachers. Fan and de Jong (2019) narrate the story of Wan, a former EFL teacher in China who graduated from MA TESOL in the U.S.A. but after graduation decided to stay in the U.S.A. and work as a Chinese as a Foreign Language teacher. Even though her narrative is about her identity during and after graduate school, its focus is on the fact that she transitioned from seeing herself as a competent EFL teacher to becoming a student, losing her confidence completely and giving up teaching EFL/ESL, and becoming a Chinese teacher.

Like any other person's identity, NNESTs' identity is co-constructed, and several internal and external factors contribute to it. Past and present experiences (including professional development), interactions with others and the environment, emotions and feelings, and all the elements in Bank's (2019) intersectionality influence an individual's co-constructed identity. NNESTs may go through this process facing different struggles and challenges that Swearingen (2019) defines as competing forces such as incompetency versus expertise, valuing multilingualism while surrounded by monolingualism, EFL setting positionality while assimilating ESL setting views, being a teacher and learner at the same time, wanting to participate but being muted by self and others. The literature has shown that most TESOL education programs have ascribed identities to NNESTs through oppressive ideologies such as native speakerism (Holliday, 2005) and by trying to melt the unmeltable (Banks, 2019) into BANA melting pots, i.e., "homogenizing linguistically, culturally, and socially diverse users of multiple varieties of English" (Swearingen, 2019, p. 11). On the other hand, TESOL programs which have offered their students the opportunity to explore counter-narratives have seen an almost therapeutic effect and the transformation of their negative identities into more positive ones (Pavlenko, 2003).

## **Researching NNESTs' Teacher Identity**

Since professional teacher identity develops along the years, and it is context dependent (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004), it is important to investigate experienced language teachers' identity construction. Despite the extensive research on numerous issues related to NNESTs' identity, it seems that only a few studies have investigated experienced NNESTs' challenges and coping strategies, and how such encounters have influenced their identity construction in ESL settings, i.e., teaching English as a Second Language in countries in the Inner Circle. Most research published has dealt with NNESTs' challenges and identity construction in EFL settings, i.e., teaching English as a Foreign Language in countries in the Expanding Circle. Research conducted in ESL settings have mostly investigated NNESTs who are graduate teaching assistants, graduate students, or novice teachers. For example, Swearingen (2019) reviewed 17 other articles that investigated the language teacher identity (LTI) of nonnative English-Speaking teachers who were attending graduate school in the United States, Canada, and Australia, and therefore had no experience teaching ESL.

Further research is needed to determine if after graduating from MA TESOL programs, nonnative TESOL professionals are able to overcome identity struggles and become agents of change. Kamhi-Stein (1999) declared that little is known about NNEST who work in Inner Circle/ESL settings. Twenty years later, Fan and de Jong (2019) have echoed that view by stating that traditionally LTI research on NNESTs focuses on MA TESOL international students and that little is known about professional nonnative English-speaking teachers in English-dominant environments such as the U.S.A. Considering this gap in the literature, I investigated experienced NNESTs in university pre-academic Intensive English Programs. I explored the

nonnativeness-related challenges they have confronted over time, their coping strategies, and how those encounters have influenced their professional LTI.

In general, all teachers face some difficulties and challenges in their profession that might influence their teaching performance and effectiveness. A teacher's professional authority and acceptability are deeply knitted into his/her values and praxis (Reis, 2015). In the case of nonnative English-speaking teachers (NNESTs), being considered deficient not different (Kachru, 1996) is an extra challenge or difficulty influencing their instructional practices. Due to its extensive history of colonization, English, as a colonizer's linguistic tool has been used to spread the fallacy that non-English sociocultural elements from the colonized are indicators of deficiency and not difference (Kachru, 1996). In other words, teaching is already a complex enough activity and when the fact of being a nonnative English speaker, or being different, or 'deficient' is added to that equation, not only the complexity increases but nonnativeness-related challenges may also occur.

Based on Kachru's vast research (1982; 1985; 1996; 2005; etc.) and *World Englishes*, an area of research and academia within the Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) field, it is undeniable that the prevalence of English in so many different countries and cultures has yielded at least three kinds of English speakers. As it was explained in chapter one of this study, there are those who speak English as a first language (L1), as a second language (L2 or ESL), and as foreign language (EFL). Also, at the beginning of this review of the literature (chapter two), I explored that since English is such an overwhelming widespread language phenomenon (Kachru, 1996), it is irrefutable that English teachers come to their worksites and classrooms with a variety of Englishes to be taught. In fact, it is estimated that

75% of English teachers in the world are nonnative speakers of English who work either at ESL or EFL settings (Canagarajah, 2005).

Nonetheless, due to several misconceptions, including the *native speaker fallacy* ideology (Canagarajah, 1999; Cook, 1999; Phillipson, 1992) and the belief in the superiority of native speakers (Holliday & Aboshiha, 2009), NNESTs are often victims of linguistic prejudice (Mackenzie 2020; Ruecker & Ives, 2015) and have been discriminated against, especially in employment (González & Llurda, 2016; Maum, 2002). For example, there are job opening advertisements that require “native speakers only” to apply (Ruecker & Ives, 2015). In addition to the employability challenges, other studies (e.g., Fan & De Jong, 2019; Hoang, 2018; Trent, 2016; Tseng, 2011) have investigated the emotional challenges, including feelings and beliefs related to professional adequacy and identity (Reis, 2015; Wolff & De Costa, 2017) of NNESTs.

Even though previous research on NNESTs’ professional challenges has included both EFL and ESL settings, prior research on ESL settings has mostly investigated novice teachers who are either graduate teaching assistants (e.g., Brutt-Griffler & Samimy 1999; Reis, 2010; Wolff & DeCosta, 2017) or K-12 student-teachers (Diniz de Figueiredo, 2011). It has not investigated experienced NNESTs in ESL settings. Extensive research has defined experienced teachers as those who have at least five years of teaching experience (Rodríguez & McKay, 2010). Therefore, this phenomenological study investigated experienced NNESTs over novice teachers for two major reasons. First, that is the gap in the literature. Experienced nonnative ESL teachers have not frequently been the subjects of previous research. Second, as any other phenomenological study, its major goal is to investigate individuals’ lived experiences, and experienced nonnative ESL teachers have that because they have been living and working in a cultural context which is not the same as their country of origin for at least five years.

## Chapter 3

### Conceptual Framework of the Model

#### **Introduction**

This phenomenological study investigated nonnativeness-related challenges that ESL experienced teachers have encountered in their ESL teaching careers in the United States of America (U.S.A.), and which coping strategies they have used or developed when facing such challenges. In brief, the focus of this study is experienced nonnative English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) teaching ESL in Intensive English Programs (IEPs) in the U.S.A., their challenges, coping strategies, and identity construction.

#### **Research Questions**

1. How have experienced nonnative ESL teachers processed and made meaning of their nonnativeness-related professional challenges throughout their careers in the U.S.A.?
2. What coping strategies have experienced nonnative ESL teachers working in IEPs in the U.S.A. developed and used to address any challenges associated with their nonnative status?
3. How has coping with nonnativeness-related professional challenges shaped the construction of nonnative ESL teachers' professional language teacher identities?

#### **Qualitative Framework**

One of the simplistic definitions of qualitative research is that it is used when the research findings cannot be quantified or expressed statistically (Yilmaz, 2013). In fact, more recent qualitative research definitions have gone beyond this dualism of simply being the counterpart of quantitative research. To define qualitative inquiry, one needs to take into consideration not only the fact that the findings are not quantified but also its other aspects such as procedures, data

collection, data analysis, theoretical framework, methodology, researcher's positionality, and so on. For many years, other researchers have agreed that comprehensively defining qualitative research is not an easy task because it is multifaceted and ever-evolving (Creswell, 2013); however, most recently, there has been some consensus on what qualitative research is and what its characteristics are (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The first characteristic is that qualitative research is most likely to occur in natural settings. Also, the researcher is the key instrument to collect and interpret data, which may come from varied sources such as interviews, observations, and documents. Another characteristic of qualitative research is that researchers will firstly analyze data inductively and then deductively. Next, one of the foci is to learn from participants the meanings that they bestow upon the problem being studied. In addition, qualitative research has an emergent design. In other words, even though researchers may have a plan upon approaching their fields of study, the plan is flexible and may change accordingly. Furthermore, qualitative researchers are open to both present how they position themselves in their studies and to reflect on such positions and biases to depict their influence on how the study may be shaped and interpreted. Last but not least, qualitative research is holistic in the sense that it studies the situation, problem, or phenomenon as a whole with its pieces dynamically interacting and influencing one another (Creswell, 2018).

Concerning its purposes, qualitative research should be used when the object of study and its variables are not quantifiable and should be explored as a deeply detailed investigation. Such investigation generates multifaceted understandings that can only be achieved through letting participants tell their stories freely and/or by observing them in their places of residence, work, and school to name a few. In fact, contexts are crucial in qualitative research because they are rich with information on how participants give meaning to a problem or issue. Another goal to be

achieved by the qualitative researcher is the co-construction of knowledge and of the research itself. There should be an empowerment of the individuals participating in the study by deconstructing the power relations that might occur between researcher and subjects.

Theoretically speaking, qualitative research will either develop new theories or ameliorate existing theories by exploring processes that people experience in given contexts as well as their profound feelings, opinions, narratives, and behaviors. To put it differently, qualitative research is also used when existing theories do not satisfactorily explain the rich complexity of the issue being investigated (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In brief, qualitative research should be the researcher's choice when it is the best fit for a given study because individuals' uniqueness and struggles are too sensitive to be captured by existing measures and because using solely quantitative research will neglect these rich complex and detailed differences provided by the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

For the purposes stated above, a qualitative method of research has proven to be the best option for my study because I investigated the uniqueness of nonnative English-speaking teachers who have immigrated to the U.S.A., a new cultural setting for them, to teach ESL. More specifically, through open-ended interviews, I let those teachers tell their stories, their nonnativeness-related challenges and coping strategies as well as how those influenced their identity construction. Another reason for my qualitative choice was that this kind of research matches my personality. A full explanation of why I see myself as a relativist who will use an emic approach was given in chapter one. I am a relativist because as a professional who teaches ESL to international students in the U.S.A., I am convinced that contexts shape and reshape reality and as new knowledge is absorbed, truth evolves. I am a firm believer that realities cannot be generalized because of the deep influence different contexts have on them. Realities may be



transferred to new situations, but generalization does not apply to them. For this reason, and as phenomenological studies should be, the findings of this inquiry are not generalizable but transferrable.

My choice for an emic approach is due to my close personal relationship with the phenomenon being investigated. I see myself as an insider, and for this reason, I clearly and openly discuss my axiological assumptions (Creswell, 2013), i.e., I made my values and biases known. As I stated in chapter one, I chose to use the singular first-person pronoun, I, throughout this qualitative dissertation study to also intensify my expression of how my own experience and principles may bring biases to my interpretation of the findings.

As I explained in the introductory chapter of this dissertation study, I embraced an emergent design to execute this qualitative phenomenological study. Even though I had the freedom to change my research paradigmatic framework along the study, that was not necessary. I chose a combination of social constructivism and critical theory. Social constructivism was appropriate because it leads to the exploration, understanding, and explanation of the social context in which participants live and work. It also supports that the research should trust the participants' meaning making of their lived experiences. Those meanings are negotiable, varied, multiple, and socially formed (Creswell, 2013). In other words, eliciting from participants their rich and multifaceted views and meanings of their *lifeworlds* (van Manen, 2016), i.e., the lived experiences or phenomenon investigated here, justify the appropriateness and relevance of my choice of social constructivism and critical theory framework.

Concerning the critical theory aspect, it was one of my goals to investigate possible power relationships, such as English language colonization and acculturation (Kachru, 1996) and pedagogical oppression (Freire, 2003), in the participants' lived experiences. Therefore, a critical

theory framework, more specifically critical pedagogy (Freire, 2003) combined with social constructivism was the most appropriate for this critical phenomenological investigation, which was performed in a meticulous and high-quality manner.

### **Methodological Framework**

From Husserl to Sartre and to several subsequent scholars, as a philosophy, phenomenology has been proven to be “not one thing” but “many things” (Vagle, 2018, p. 10). There are multiple phenomenological philosophies, and such plurality has informed and contributed to the formation of several phenomenological research methodologies, which are not finite and are ever evolving. Phenomenological research cannot be conducted following one single way. While some phenomenologist researchers may welcome such diversity of research approaches, others may argue that such variety may be too removed from phenomenological roots (Vagle, 2018). Regardless of this disagreement, phenomenological research multiplicity and the several possibilities they bring are a fact in the research realm. For example, van Manen (2014) presents approximately 60 different methods of conducting phenomenological research. In contrast, in a chapter entitled Possible Methodological Approaches, Vagle (2018), indicated that in lieu of briefly presenting several methods, his choice was to present more comprehensive information on three of them. They are “Giorgi’s (2009) Husserlian approach to descriptive phenomenology; van Manen’s (2001) hermeneutic (pedagogical) phenomenology; and Dahlberg, Dahlberg, and Nystrom’s (2008) reflective lifeworld approach” (Vagle, 2018, p. 10).

The three above mentioned methods are as follows. First, Giorgi’s Husserlian approach to descriptive phenomenology embraces and emphasizes bracketing, the search for one invariant essence, and the significance of aiming at the descriptions provided by others. However, in Giorgi’s most recent work he recognized that transferring that philosophical essence to research

can be very challenging. He assumed so despite his devoted fidelity to Husserl's descriptive phenomenology. Giorgi still defends data analysis that is very well structured and that contains invariant and eidetic meanings (Vagle, 2018). Second, van Manen's interpretive pedagogical approach not only searches for what being human means, but it also poeticizes such activity. It seeks to fully interpret descriptions of lived experiences by explaining the phenomena as they are presented to consciousness as individuals live them. It also studies essences, and it practices conscientious thinking (Vagle, 2018). Freire (2003) states that even though humanization and dehumanization are concrete options for an individual, being human is one's ultimate vocation, which is often denied. It is crucial that people recover their lost humanity. Lastly, Dahlberg, Dahlberg, and Nystrom's reflective lifeworld research approach can neither be categorized as descriptive nor as interpretive. It works across or even outside the original methods of phenomenology using a technique called "bridling" or "bridle attitude", which calls for being open throughout the entire process. Such openness is core to their proposed research approach.

Vagle (2018) emphasizes that phenomenological philosophies have not been very political, and he calls for the need of making phenomenological research for social change by making it informed by critical theories and its variations. He proposes a method called post-intentional approach which is comprised of five steps, one of which is producing a text that contains a phenomenon in context(s) around a social issue with its constructions and provocations. For doing so, a researcher should identify one or two theories that have a clear focus on questioning, debunking, and "disrupting social norms, discourses, traditions, etc." (Vagle, 2018, p. 147). Guenther (2020) echoes Vagle's thoughts by stating that classical phenomenology is unsatisfactorily critical because it fails to recognize how historical and social structures also have an effect on an individual experience, and those same structures are not prior

to the experience but happen in a way that helps constitute or model the experience itself. For example, the conscious or unconscious living experience of the property of “whiteness” will bring up a different understanding of the world depending on that individual’s historical, cultural, and social structures (Guenther, 2020).

Therefore, for some studies, classical phenomenology should be paired with critical theories. For example, *Intersection of Diversity Variables* (Banks, 2019) refers to the concept that social class, ethnic identity, racial group, language, abilities and disabilities, religion, sexual orientation, and gender interact or intersect to influence a person’s behavior. To put it differently, *intersectionality* refers to the “critical insight that race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but rather as reciprocally constructing phenomena” (Collins, 2015, p. 1). Davis (2020) proposes that Collin’s remarkable work on intersectional theory should be combined with phenomenology to supplement classical phenomenology and that this is the piece of the puzzle that a researcher intending to conduct a critical phenomenological inquiry should add.

Likewise, Lopez and Willis (2004) explicate that one more application of interpretive phenomenology is critical hermeneutics or hermeneutics of suspicion, whose goal is to make voices of unprivileged groups heard. As these groups obtain self-perception and the opportunity to ‘name their realities’ (Freire, 2003), they take action for social and political changes that will help them heal their own oppressive and damaging conditions. In other words, becoming critically aware of their own positions in society is a way for marginalized groups to begin their liberating processes (Lopez & Willis, 2004). In addition, Thompson (1990) states that for its eye-opening characteristics to show reality in a fresh and helpful way, critical hermeneutics is often considered as emancipatory research. Thompson (1990) also alerts that interpretations are

consistently based on views that are vastly accepted in society for reflecting the standards of the privileged groups; conversely, the lived experiences and voices of those who are not privileged are discarded. Choosing critical hermeneutics means to choose critiquing dominance ideologies and deeply analyzing how they form and control the lives of research subjects. It also means confronting and removing systemic beliefs that are used to cover up, make up, disregard, or devalue the participants' realities (Lopez & Willis, 2004).

Concerning my own dissertation, my goal was to investigate the lived experiences of English teachers who speak English as an additional language, often called nonnative English-speaking teachers (NNEST). More specifically, my participants are experienced nonnative ESL teachers in the U.S.A., which means that they live and work in a cultural context that is not the same as their country of origin. Therefore, the context has played an important role in my inquiry. My choice of researching experienced nonnative ESL teachers in the U.S.A. was influenced by the differential that the context, i.e., a country in the Inner Circle, plays when contrasted to nonnative EFL teachers who are in fact teaching in their countries of origin. It was my goal to understand more deeply and more entirely "what the phenomenon means to those who experience it in their own social-cultural contexts and realities, including how the experiences alters their entire being" (Matua & Van Der Wal, 2015, p. 24). In this specific case 'their own social-cultural contexts and realities' have shifted for at least the past five years from an EFL to an ESL setting. For the high importance that the ESL setting has in my research, I could not choose a descriptive or transcendental phenomenological approach, in which the researcher positions him/herself as an outsider whose biases are suspended (Peoples, 2021). As a qualitative researcher who is an experienced nonnative ESL teacher, I am an insider, and I could

not simply strip my background knowledge and achieve the transcendental subjectivity suggested by Husserl.

Therefore, my research is one of the several variants of a hermeneutic approach, most specifically, van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry because it sought to investigate the *lifeworld*, i.e., "the world of lived experiences" (van Manen, 2016, p. 53) of individuals as they see themselves in the world and actively shape their own world, mainly in pedagogical or educational settings. In addition, I believe that van Manen's interpretive pedagogical approach (Vagle, 2018) also fits my research for the importance he gives to language and the multiple meanings it conveys.

Despite the ever-changing nature of phenomenology, van Manen (2016) presents six dynamically interrelated procedures to be considered when a researcher uses his hermeneutic or interpretive pedagogical approach. They are (a) choosing a phenomenon in which the researcher is genuinely interested and that deeply connects him/her to the world, (b) making concrete lived experiences, not conceptualized ones, the object of the inquiry, (c) making the actions that are not easily noticed and valued rise and become the essential and emergent themes, (d) writing and rewriting to describe the phenomenon, (e) keeping a pedagogical relationship, a teacher-learner connection with the phenomenon in every phase of the research, and (f) both considering the phenomenon as a whole and its parts.

My inquiry matches all of those aforementioned activities. I am highly interested in the phenomenon I proposed to investigate. Asking the nonnative experienced ESL teachers to share their lived experiences in the U.S.A., more specifically their challenges and coping strategies has made this phenomenon a very concrete one. Since they are experienced teachers, they presented many hidden or taken-for-granted actions in their daily lives which were illuminated through this

research. The last three activities match my personality as a scholar. It was my pleasure to write and rewrite to describe and interpret the phenomenon, to learn from this process, and see it from a Gestalten perspective by considering the whole and its parts. In fact, the teacher-learner phrase reminded me of Freire (2003) saying that in education there are teacher-students and student-teachers.

Moreover, Vagle (2018) defends that in addition to being a foundational philosophy that informs a research methodology, phenomenology can and should be an agent of social change. He also emphasizes that phenomenological studies should be combined with critical theories so that this social change agency can be established. Although nonnative English-speaking teachers are the majority worldwide, there is still some differences in their access to opportunities when compared to native speakers. I added this social change factor to my research, and for this reason, my dissertation combines van Manen's interpretive pedagogical approach with critical pedagogy (Freire, 2003). Thus, this was a very successful choice that have enabled me to define my study as a critical phenomenological one.

### **Subjectivity Statement and Membership Role**

In 2002, I moved to the United States to pursue a master's degree in TESOL. Prior to that, I had been teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Brazil for 10 years. When I arrived in the United States, I learned several new features about me as an English teacher. One of them was that I had a foreign accent and that I would never get rid of it. Today, some of those self-discoveries have become debunked beliefs, but back then, they were big emotional monsters that made me even question whether I had chosen the right profession or not. I simply felt inadequate and not good enough even though I had been successfully teaching EFL in Brazil for a decade.

As the days passed, and as I attended my master's degree classes, I started reading more and more in my field and learned about an area of TESOL called *World Englishes*. These readings were not required. I read them on my own because of my interest in the area. My contact with World Englishes was very comforting because it opened my eyes to the internationality and plurality of English. As a result, I started understanding my role as a NNEST better and was able to accept and embrace the enriching differences that every TESOL professional, including me, brings to the TESOL field. It has taken years for me to accept and forgive myself for having a foreign accent and develop feelings of belonging and adequacy. In brief, getting well-informed on these issues has helped me raise my consciousness, name my own reality (Freire, 2003), and engage myself in the on-going process of self-acceptance and identity construction.

Defining my identity had always been a challenge for me because I am not only a mixed-race Brazilian woman but also an immigrant to the United States of America. Moreover, I am an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher, i.e., I am teaching a language and culture that are not my original ones. In the past this ambivalence bothered me tremendously, and I was always demanding a precise definition of my ethnic identity from myself. It was not until recently that I understood that my identity is dynamic, multi-faceted, and ever evolving.

As a NNEST who has been teaching ESL in the U.S.A. for more than 20 years now, my interest in investigating other nonnative ESL teachers' challenges and coping strategies is a very personal one. This is a topic about which I am passionate. My experiences as an international student in the MA TESOL program, as an immigrant, and as a NNEST in the U.S.A. have informed my beliefs in relation to this study. Personally, I have had several challenges as a nonnative ESL teacher. For example, I have encountered and overcome feelings of professional



inadequacy and identity crisis. Despite my two master's degrees, my extensive teaching experience, and the fact that I speak three languages, getting hired was a challenge. Hence, my understanding of NNESTs' challenges and their impact on one's life reflects my own lived experiences which have formed my deep beliefs and vision of what it means to be a nonnative ESL teacher in the U.S.A. As a researcher, I acknowledge how my own personal, cultural, and historical experiences will influence my interpretation (Creswell, 2013).

Since I am an experienced nonnative ESL teacher living and working in the U.S.A., I consider myself an insider, and that probably helped me get the confidence of participants and provided me with the capability of deeply understanding the stories that they shared. On the other hand, being a co-creator of this research project, I wondered if my own lived experiences would influence how I interpreted the results or how participants answered the questions. Even though I did not want my own life story and experiences to influence participants' answers in any way, two of the participants knew me and great part of my life story. The other three knew superficial information about me. For this reason, I was extremely committed to keeping my own story hidden and not to bringing it up while interviewing participants from a neutral standpoint. In brief, despite the possible influence I might have had, I focused on my participants and their life experiences for this study. Hopefully, this extensive and in-depth qualitative phenomenological work will contribute to a better TESOL field, and consequently a more just society for all.

## **Research Design**

### **Participants**

Purposive and snowball samplings were used to gather participants with specific characteristics. Creswell (2003) emphasizes that purposefully selected participants in qualitative

research bring light to the understanding of the research problems being investigated.

Participants are experienced nonnative English-speaking teachers who have been teaching English as a second language at Intensive English Programs (IEPs) in the United States for at least five years. The Commission on English Language Program Accreditation (CEA) has 314 accredited IEPs in the U.S.A. Fifteen percent of those are in the in the West South-Central States, i.e., Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas. My initial goal was to find participants who work in CEA-accredited institutions in those states. However, as I explain in the Research Procedure section, I had to expand my participant recruitment geographically and ended up with participants who live and work in Arkansas, Colorado, and West Virginia..

### **Data Generation**

Creswell and Creswell (2018) state that one of the characteristics of qualitative research is that the researcher is the key instrument because he or she is the one who collects data and interprets it. To collect data through interviews, I used *Microsoft Teams* as my videoconference platform. I worked around participants' schedules so that they could be in a place where they felt most comfortable and at a time that was convenient and less stressful for them. With proper consent from participants, I videorecorded the oral interviews. I also used email, text and audio messages for communication. The oral interviews lasted an average of 46 minutes. For the oral interviews, I used an open-ended questionnaire. Participants were also asked to answer a demographic questionnaire in writing.

### **Research Procedure**

The research procedure involved six phases. Phase one included the following steps. First, I created a list of CEA-accredited institutions located in the West South-Central States of the United States of America. The information for the list was retrieved from the CEA website at

<https://cea-accredit.org/accredited-sites>. According to the World Atlas, Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Arkansas form the US division of West South-Central states. From the CEA website, I learned that there were 17 accredited institutions in Texas and three in Arkansas. Louisiana and Oklahoma had no CEA-accredited IEPs. With the list in hands, during the spring of 2022, I called the three CEA-accredited Intensive English Programs located in Arkansas and the 17 in Texas; however, I learned that one of the institutions in Arkansas had closed down, which reduced the number to 19 institutions where I could recruit experienced nonnative-English speaking ESL instructors.

The process to contact those 19 IEPs had the following steps. First, I visited each school website prior to placing phone calls. For this part of the process, I kept a diary where I wrote down relevant information from their websites as well as the phone call steps and results. The website visits were important because some of them listed their instructors' bios and stated the country of origin of NNESTs. Thus, with this background knowledge, when I called, I already had in mind for whom to leave a detailed message and sequentially send emails. However, not all websites provided that information.

I contacted the 17 CEA-accredited IEPs in Texas multiple times. I called and left messages, and I also emailed potential participants in Texas numerous times, but no one returned my calls nor replied to my e-mail messages. The first attempt to contact NNESTs in Texas was made on March 22, 2022. Following attempts were made during the month of April 2022. Unfortunately, that granted zero possible participants for this research. Table 1 represents a summary of my several attempts to try to recruit experienced NNES ESL teachers in Texas to participate in this study.

**Table 1***Contacts with IEPs in Texas and the Respective Results*

| IEP | Number of NNEST   | My action   | Their promise  | How many NNEST was I able to contact and interview? |
|-----|---|---|----------------|---|
| 1.  | The website stated two, but when I called the person who answered the phone said they had none.   | In addition to visiting their site and calling, I tried to set an appointment via their website by clicking a button; however, the answer was “no times available” for the next several months. | Non-applicable | None  |
| 2.  | One   | I called the school, left a detailed message, and I also emailed the potential participant but never heard back from her.   | Non-applicable | None  |
| 3.  | Unable to determine.  | Unable to reach them because their voicemailbox was full and emails were not replied.   | Non-applicable | None  |
| 4.  | Unable to determine.  | Called and emailed but no returns nor replies.  | Non-applicable | None  |
| 5.  | “We have quite a few,” said the front desk person. She asked me to email the director, who would provide me with the contact information of the NNESTs. | I called and emailed the director but never heard back from her.  | Non-applicable | None  |

| IEP | Number of NNEST      | My action   | Their promise  | How many NNEST was I able to contact and interview? |
|-----|----------------------|---|--|---|
| 6.  | None                 | I called and learned that they had no NNESTs and was informed of a school which should have some. This school is number nine on this list.  | Non-applicable   | None  |
| 7.  | Unable to determine. | I called. The receptionist was reluctant to give me the information I needed. She took notes of my name, phone number, and email address.   | The receptionist said that she would give my contact information to the NNESTs at her institution. | None  |
| 8.  | Unable to determine. | I called the school and left a detailed message, but I never heard back from them.  | Non-applicable   | None  |
| 9.  | Unable to determine. | There was no contact us link on their website. I had to scroll down to be able to find a phone number. I called and also emailed the director and academic coordinator, but no one replied or called me back. | Non-applicable   | None  |
| 10. | None                 | I called and was informed that their teachers are all native speakers.  | Non-applicable   | None  |
| 11. | Unable to determine. | I called and talked to the front desk person, who was very helpful. He  | Non-applicable   | None  |

| IEP | Number of NNEST      | My action  | Their promise  | How many NNEST was I able to contact and interview? |
|-----|----------------------|--|----------------|---|
|     |                      | wrote down all my contact information and also talked to the administrators. He emailed me a couple of days later and asked me to send the consent form, which I did. Even though this was the most helpful of all schools in Texas, I never heard back from the potential participants. |                |   |
| 12. | Unable to determine. | I called the school and left a detailed message, but I never heard back from them.   | Non-applicable | None  |
| 13. | None                 | The front desk person informed me that they did not have any NNEST.  | Non-applicable | None  |
| 14. | None                 | According to the instructors' bios listed on their website, all instructors are native speakers.   | Non-applicable | None  |
| 15. | None                 | I called and talked to the front desk person. I also emailed her but never heard back from this school.  | Non-applicable | None  |
| 16. | None                 | I called the school and left a detailed message, but I never heard back from them.   | Non-applicable | None  |

| IEP | Number of NNEST | My action  | Their promise  | How many NNEST was I able to contact and interview? |
|-----|-----------------|--|----------------|---|
| 17. | None            | I called the school and left a detailed message, but I never heard back from them. | Non-applicable | None  |

With the unsuccessful results from the IEPs in Texas, my last resource was to contact the two IEPs in Arkansas. One had only two instructors who were both native English speakers. The other institution in Arkansas had three experienced nonnative English-speaking teachers. From those three, two became participants in this study.

Due to the difficulty I had to find participants, my dissertation committee advised me to expand the research geographically and to contact the experienced nonnative ESL teachers whom I knew independently of the state where they were located in the U.S.A. Based on their advice, I kept all other requirements for participants to be in this research. The institution had to be CEA-accredited, participants would have to have at least five years of experience teaching in an IEP in the U.S.A., and they had to be NNESTs. However, being in the West-South Central states was not a requirement anymore.

Since this is a study with an emergent design, I saw no problem in expanding it geographically. I contacted a potential participant whom I knew in West Virginia. She not only agreed to participate but also referred a colleague, who also said yes; that was when my snowball sampling naturally started. Later, one of the participants in Arkansas suggested an experienced nonnative ESL instructor in Colorado. She also accepted to participate. In addition, I was able to contact one more participant, but she did not completely fulfill the requirements. She had been

teaching in the U.S.A. for five years, but only two of those years were as an ESL instructor in an I.E.P. setting.

In brief, I could not achieve from five to 25 subjects, which is the number of participants suggested by Creswell (2013) for a phenomenological study, in the West South-Central states. By following my dissertation committee's advice, I expanded the geographical region and contacted a potential participant whom I knew in West Virginia, and I also accepted participants via snowball sampling. After these adjustments, I was able to recruit five participants: two in Arkansas, one in Colorado, and two in West Virginia.

Phase two occurred during the summer of 2022. I contacted participants via email to schedule the interviews. The email message contained the consent form attached. After participants officially accepted to participate by signing the consent form, I replied to them with a thankful message which had the demographic and the open-ended questionnaires attached. With both the consent form and the demographic questionnaire filled out and in hands, I exchanged some more email messages with them to schedule the interviews. The interviews were scheduled and performed via *Microsoft Teams*. Participants were oriented that answering the open-ended questionnaire in writing was not required and that the goal of sending them the open-ended questionnaire in advance was to familiarize them with the questions and to activate their background knowledge.

Video calls are not the same as face-to-face interviews, but due to the current new coronavirus pandemic and costs, this alternative was the most suitable. Even though video calls may have some limitations, they still show more body language and other clues than voice calls.

As stated previously, this study has an emergent design, which means that the research questions may have been modified during the interview to generate better questions that were



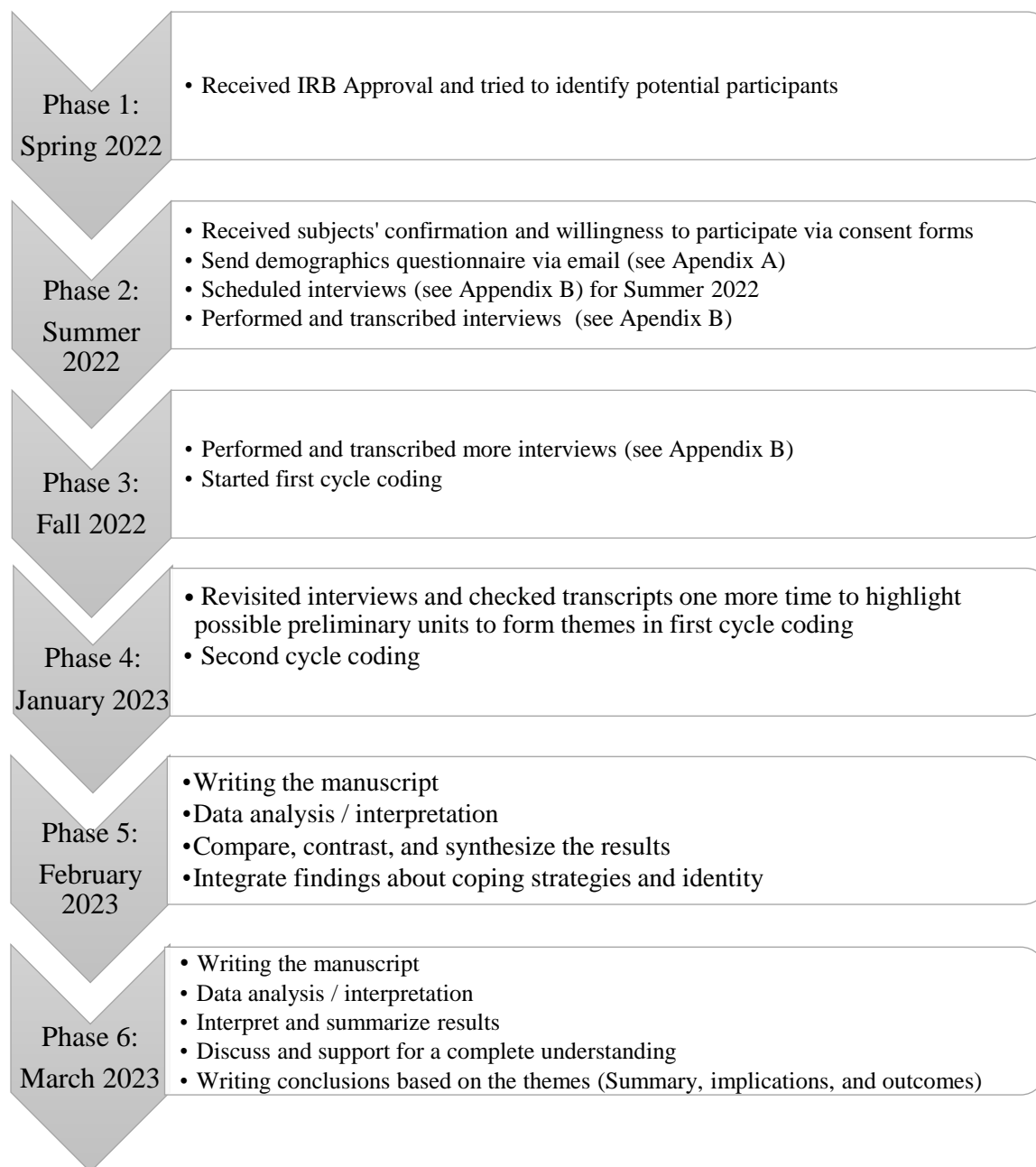
needed to better investigate and understand the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Based on the answers provided in the open-ended questionnaire, other questions emerged, and they mostly asked the participants to expand what they had just said by providing examples. This way, follow-up interviews were not necessary. The very last question of the interview was if participants had anything that the questions did not cover that they would like to add or ask. They were also advised to contact me at any time in case they had anything else to be added or wanted to share more information or details that did not occur to them during the interview.

Good interview procedures by Creswell (2013) were applied. Pre-interview included obtaining signatures on the consent forms, going over the purpose of the study, informing the subject the amount of time expected to complete the interview. During the interview, I always took notes even though the subjects allowed video and audio recordings. I took notes of body language, facial expressions, and any other non-verbal cues. During all phases, I assured my interviewees of the confidentiality of their responses and of potential follow-up meetings.

Interviews were performed and transcribed during phase three which occurred during the summer and part of fall 2022. Even though I coded as I went, the coding process started in the second half of the fall and continued during spring 2023, when phase four started. Saldaña (2016) advocates the idea of first and second cycle codings, in which codes are recoded into pattern codings or focused codings. During phase four, I revisited the interview videos and transcripts to elicit more codes and themes and assure that what I had done so far was consistent and valuable. I followed Saldaña's method, and I analyzed data along with data collection (Saldaña, 2016), i.e., I did not accumulate data and code only at the end. However, this "revisit" was important to make sure I could move on to the next phase without any steps pending.

Based on the codes, themes, and patterns, data was organized, analyzed, and synthesized in phase five. The last phase was similar to phase five, but it also included the conclusion of the study with a summary, implications, and outcomes. Figure 2 depicts the six phases of this phenomenological study in a summarized fashion. Chapter five of this manuscript includes statements and explanations on the study limitations and on how the findings and the literature review agree and differ. Also, recommendations for future studies and the implications for the field are discussed within that same chapter.

Figure 2

*Timeline of the Study*

## Data Analysis

As I stated before, to form conclusions, I used Saldaña's first and second cycle coding method (Saldaña, 2016). For the first cycle coding, I used a combination of In Vivo Coding, Process Coding, Emotion Coding, and Value Coding for the following reasons. My choice to use In Vivo is because it was my ultimate goal to make the participants' voice a priority. I think that In Vivo codes contain the core of what participants have to say, and that should be honored. Second, even though I did not observe teachers' classes or behavior, Process Coding became a possibility because when the participants told their stories, they gave light to the cyclic process of their feelings and actions, i.e., which feelings and beliefs triggered certain actions and more feelings and beliefs. This process is described at the end of chapter four with a diagram. According to Saldaña (2016), Process Coding is also applicable when participants navigate inner thoughts of discrimination, identity, memory, and confidence. Next, Affective Methods such as Emotion Coding and Value Coding occurred because participants talked about their experiences being a nonnative ESL teacher in the U.S.A. Their emotions related to their careers and experiences as well as their values, beliefs, feelings, thoughts, and actions emerged in the data analysis, and so did my inferences. To transition from first to second cycle coding, I themed the data through code charting and tabletop categories (Saldaña, 2016). Both were done manually and electronically on Microsoft Word by highlighting codes on the transcripts and copying and pasting them into themes.

For second cycle coding, I used two other coding methods. Pattern Coding was the most used; it helped me arrange themes and give meaning to those arrangements. It was inevitable for me not to infer some patterns that organized the codes and categories generated during first cycle coding into patterns. Second, even though this is not a longitudinal study, minor Longitudinal

Coding occurred because interviewees answered questions related to their experiences as nonnative ESL teachers in the USA as well as their related challenges and coping strategies. Due to their extensive experience in the field, they have gone through changes and developments, especially in their professional identity construction and transformation over the years. There were fluid, dynamic, and overlapping processes that generated major core themes that identify the cornerstones of the experienced ESL teachers' identity construction and the phases that they have gone through to achieve who they are today.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) advise using a figure that displays the interrelations and interconnections of the results in a qualitative study write-up. Even though Saldaña (2016) suggests this kind of diagram for Theoretical Coding in grounded theory studies only, I still think it was applicable to this phenomenological study, so I decided to follow Merriam and Tisdell (2016)'s advice. On page 89, there is a comprehensive diagram that shows core categories from second cycle coding, their major processes, their interrelationships and interconnectedness. Most importantly, during the whole process of first and second cycle codings, I wrote memos upon which I constantly reflected and analyzed. I also constantly read and reread the Saldaña's coding manual to refer to it and to analyze my own practice.

### **Reciprocity and Ethics**

To assure participants safety, comfort, and confidence, I took the following steps before, during, and after the study (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Prior to conducting the study, I applied for an Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval at the University of Arkansas. With the approval in hands, I contacted potential participants for a pre-screening conversation, during which I explained the requirements to be a participant in the study, i.e., being a NNES ESL teacher in the U.S.A. for at least five years, and I also explained the informed consent form

to be signed. The informed consent, which was sent via email, contains my information as a researcher, the institution's information, the possible risks and benefits of the study, what is expected from me, the researcher, and from the participants. The informed consent also states that their participation is voluntary and confidential and that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. I guaranteed that they had the freedom to contact me with any questions they might have had pertaining the entire process. I also disclosed the purpose of the study, and I did not force their participation (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Prior to recording and transcribing the interviews, I asked for their permissions to do so. I have their consents in written and oral form. I repeated the information provided in the pre-screening conversation. For example, I assured them of the confidentiality of the study. Throughout the whole process, it was my ultimate goal to have clear communication with participants and not to deceive them in any type or form. For this reason, I once again explained the purpose of the study and certified that participants understood it because a mismatch between my understanding and their understandings of such purpose could have been extremely frustrating. I emphasized and explained one more time that their participation was voluntary. Also, if at any moment participants did not feel comfortable to answer a specific question or questions, they had the freedom to not answer it, and I would move on to the next question. In fact, they had the right to withdraw from the study at any moment.

There was no monetary compensation for it. The benefits of participating in this study included but were not limited to contributing to the literature and to the TESOL field as well as having the opportunity to reflect on their professional lives. Those are also the benefits that I, the researcher, had. Definitely, one benefit that I had, and they will not have, is that this study is my dissertation, but I humbly recognize that fulfilling this graduation requirement would not be

possible if I had not had the participants. I explained to them that participants and researcher would be working collaboratively. I tried to minimize any possible power relationships between myself and participants by explaining my positionality and reflexivity. I wanted them to realize and understand that even though power imbalances are often present in research, we were a team and should be at the same level. My role was to collect data and analyze it, and participants also had the important role to provide data and confirm, approve, or disapprove my interpretations (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

During the data analysis, I was loyal to the codes and themes that emerged and reported not only those that could have satisfied my own biases and preconceived ideas. I used pseudonyms for participants, their coworkers, and their worksites. I kept the raw data in a safe place. As per the American Psychology Association (APA) recommendation, I will destroy all raw data after five years. Their privacy is my priority. However, if by any reason, a participant had demonstrated that his or her participation should not remain confidential, I would have talked to him or her to try to understand the reasons, and I would have explained the possible risks of such choice (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I would also seek help from my advisor and dissertation committee on how to proceed. Lastly, proceeding ethically is ultimately in the researcher's hands. Following the IRB guidelines may not be enough. For that reason, I guarantee that I was and still am committed to conducting this investigation in the most ethical manner possible in relation to both the above-mentioned ethical issues and to those issues that may emerge before, during, and after the research process.

### **Trustworthiness and Rigor**

Creswell (2013) suggests eight validation strategies that a qualitative researcher may use to validate his or her procedures. From the eight, I used four. First, *peer review and debriefing*

*messages* inevitably occurred because this is a dissertation, and therefore, the dissertation committee members constantly reviewed the study and provided feedback. Second, *clarifying researcher bias* is a step that I have taken from the onset of the present study. I have commented on my previous experiences, biases, preconceptions, and inclinations that were likely to shape my interpretation and approach to this investigation. Third, this qualitative phenomenological study has *rich thick descriptions*. Lastly, to ensure that there was *internal validity* and to help identify any biases and misunderstandings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), I used *member checking* as my fourth validation strategy. I asked participants to read and analyze the findings and results of this research. They expressed their opinions on how trustworthy they considered the findings and my interpretations. Only Sampaguita suggested that I added the adverb “necessarily” to one of her sayings. Other than that, I can state that all five participants stated that my interpretations rang true and that no actions or changes were needed.

Reliability or rigor were enhanced because I wrote detailed notes and used good quality video recordings for the interviews, which were transcribed immediately. I also kept a research journal as a way to have an audit trail in which I kept notes on the processes of data collection, categories derivation, and decision making (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To test the instruments, i.e., the demographics and open-ended questionnaires, the quality and effectiveness of their questions and of video call quality and recording system, a detailed analysis and evaluation after interviewing the first participant was implemented. There was no pilot study due to my difficulty in identifying and recruiting participants. For the coding process, I coded each interview as I went. After transcribing the first interview, I highlighted the possible codes and took notes, and so I did for the following interviews. I also took notes on a code notebook dedicated to this part of the process. Part of it was done on *Microsoft Word* and part of it was done handwritten.



## Chapter 4

## Findings

**Introduction**

In this chapter, I present the research findings and connect those to the heuristic phenomenology philosophy that I have chosen for this dissertation. Peoples (2021) advises adding a table of participants' demographics and tables of themes to the chapter four of a phenomenological dissertation. I followed her advice, and that supported great part of how I constructed this chapter. First, I present participants' demographic facts in Table 2. Then I present and discuss the data analysis through two table of themes, one for nonnative-related challenges and the other for coping strategies. They are Tables 3 and 4 respectively. Later, I also explore how the two first categories of themes, i.e., challenges and strategies, have influenced the experienced nonnative ESL teachers' identity construction. I use quotes from participants' interviews and a richly detailed text with situated narratives to present the findings. I conclude with a general narrative and with Figure 3, which presents a comprehensive chart of the findings.

**Table 2***Participants' Demographics*

| Participant's Pseudonym and Age | Country of Origin | Gender | Years teaching in an I.E.P. in the U.S.A. | Age when moved to the U.S.A. | Highest Degree of Education | I.E.P. Location | Participant also occupies or has occupied an administrative position |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|--------|---|------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|--|
| Clara, 40                       | Brazil            | Female | 11 years                                  | 17                           | Master's                    | West Virginia   | Yes  |
| Janaína, 40                     | Brazil            | Female | 15 years                                  | 25                           | Master's                    | West Virginia   | Yes  |
| Rosario, 63                     | Argentina         | Female | 30 years                                  | 31                           | Master's                    | Arkansas        | Yes  |
| Sampaguita, 62                  | The Philippines   | Female | 38 years                                  | 26                           | Master's                    | Colorado        | Yes  |
| Timofey, 58                     | Russia            | Male   | 22 years                                  | 25                           | Master's                    | Arkansas        | No   |

## **Findings**

The following tables of themes show experiences that participants have lived and mentioned it in their interviews. Tables 3 and 4 show challenges and strategies respectively. After the challenges and strategies are presented, I explore them in relation to the participants' identity transformation and construction. There is also a graphic that shows the continuous, dynamic and ever-evolving phenomenon participants have been going through to build their professional identities.

I looked for salient themes or patterns (Madison, 2005) in the light of my research questions. In other words, the formation of codes and themes, or codes and recodes, was guided by my research questions. Creswell (2013) suggests that the identification of five to seven general themes is a common way of analysis. The author recognizes that if there is a very large database, data reduction to five, six, or seven 'families' may be a challenge; however, following this process of sorting the data by reducing that to smaller and more manageable groups is definitely doable, and that is what I did. My data is in fact subdivided into three groups: challenges, strategies, and identity. I was able to follow Creswell's advice to have from five to seven general themes in each of those groups. Therefore, that is how I compared, contrasted, and integrated the findings, and how I aggregated the codes to form common ideas.

## **Challenges**

As stated above, the first group of themes are the nonnativeness related challenges. The most prominent themes in relation to challenges are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3***Nonnativeness-related Challenges*

| Themes   | Clara         | Janaína | Rosario | Sampaguita    | Timofey                            |
|--|---------------|---------|---------|---------------|------------------------------------|
| Insecurities and feelings of inadequacy, especially at the beginning of the career | Yes           | Yes     | Yes     | Yes           | Yes                                |
| Perfectionism that leads to excessive preparation                                  | Yes           | Yes     | Yes     | Not mentioned | Yes                                |
| Cultural and language challenges   | Yes           | Yes     | Yes     | Yes           | Mentioned Multicultural Challenges |
| Assumptions and facts on how others perceive NNESTs                                | Not mentioned | Yes     | Yes     | Yes           | Yes                                |
| Prejudice or discrimination at the job place due to nonnative status               | No            | Unsure  | No      | No            | No                                 |
| Immigration status   | Yes           | Yes     | Yes     | Not mentioned | Not mentioned                      |

**Insecurities and Feelings of Inadequacy**

All participants reported insecurity and feelings of inadequacy, especially at the beginning of their careers in the U.S.A. Some viewed all other challenges as a result of this insecurity. One participant mentioned that his biggest challenge was internal. Clara says that at the beginning of her career she used to often question herself if she had chosen the right field and if she was doing something that did not belong to her. She also doubted her abilities to teach a language that was not her first one and the ability to learn the culture. This participant often expressed that being a nonnative English-speaking teacher would entail an extra burden and weight on her back.

Janaína expressed that because of her nonnativeness, she felt the pressure and burden to perform in a certain way to prove to herself and to others that she deserved to have that opportunity. She also mentioned to be always second guessing herself. Rosario expressed that often times when she was offered a promotion at her job, she would ask, “Why me?” This reflected her feelings of inadequacy because she felt that she was not the most suitable or adequate candidate for the position. She said that her insecurities made her feel that she was given positions that she did not believe that she deserved and that the feelings of inadequacy maybe come from years of being told that she was a nonnative speaker, which, in her opinion, is the truth.

Sampaguita considered that her own insecurities were not because of her fellow teachers because she never really experienced any challenges from them; however, she *assumed* that her insecurities could have been caused by the students’ perspectives. Sampaguita confessed that when she was teaching, she would always feel that the students would say, “Why did I come to the States just to get a nonnative speaker?” She acknowledged this was her “own thing” because if she were a student, she would probably question why she was being taught by a person who had an accent when she wanted to have a U.S.A. accent. In the end, Sampaguita concludes by saying, “that was my own insecurity.”

Timofey said that one of his major challenges was internal because, especially at the beginning of his career, he felt like he was constantly being held up with his native speaker colleagues and that he had a huge disadvantage. Timofey said, “I had the feeling of insecurity, and if I can use this term imposter’s syndrome. Now, so many years have gone by. I would say, Roseli, that’s pretty much mostly internal challenges due to the lack of experience.”

### **Perfectionism that Leads to Excessive Preparation**

Three of the participants mentioned that one of their challenges is to be super prepared for their daily tasks, which could be teaching a class, participating in a meeting, or sending an email or a report. This excessive caution or preparation is a result of the perfectionism these teachers seek because of their own insecurities and feelings of inadequacy.

Sampaguita says that she has a “designated editor.” Even though her action could be seen as a challenge related to perfectionism, it will be explored as a strategy to avoid showing imperfections in the Strategies section of this chapter. Clara expressed how stressful it is having to deal with all the preparation before she teaches. She considers that she needs to take the time to look over the material in more detail than a native speaker would. The stress of having a lot more preparation is not only limited to the classes but also to “something as simple as sending an email. If we are speaking in a professional environment, we are constantly thinking of our grammar and using the correct words and making sure that we sound professional” (Clara). She assumes that she is probably not the only one that bears this challenge, which she calls a burden. She also recognizes that

It's hard for me knowing that I am a nonnative speaker to write emails to do anything at the best I could be at my job... It takes me a lot longer. It takes me a lot of thinking and looking for the right synonyms (Clara).

In Clara's opinion, nonnative speakers try to embellish their writing a little bit more just because they “are looking to compensate for something, and that adds to the stress.” Frequently, Clara catches herself saying, “Come on, just send it. Is this sending the right message? Am I saying what I wanna say here?” She expressed that reading emails from native speakers makes her kind of overthink what she is writing or saying. Even though this excessive preparation is

stressful and a burden for Clara, she admits that it helps her feel more comfortable, which would make it a challenge and a strategy at the same time. Clara concluded by saying that nonnative speakers are in a way very critical and that a lot of her positionality is her trying to look for some sort of perfection.

Janaína said, “one way that I cope is like I make sure that I dot all my is and I cross all my ts...that I'm not giving anyone any reason to doubt my ability to get the job done.” Just like Clara, preparation is a challenge and a coping strategy. Janaína also labeled this as a stressful burden. She recognized that with experience, she currently does not need as much as extra time as she needed at the beginning of her career because now, she is immersed in the culture and has improved her vocabulary considerably. At the beginning, Janaína admits she was always unsure and wanted to double check and triple check and make sure that she was not saying something that was not accurate. Even though Janaína expressed needing much less time now, she also said the following in relation to her administrative duties.

I'm never the last one to submit something. I never wait till the last minute. I always make sure that I'm not the one that, “oh, there's a mistake here. We need to send it back. Janaína, you need to fix this.” ... [I] always try to make sure that I do the best work that I can. I don't want like... because I feel like if a native speaker submits an OK report of something with some type of some mistakes and stuff, “OK, that happens to everybody. They weren't paying attention, whatever.” But if I were to submit something with mistakes. “Ohh, wow, she hasn't learned this yet. Ohh, wow, she's still making this kind of mistake” you know, so, I always feel like my writing has to be impeccable (Janaína).

Rosario expressed her frustration in “reading something or writing something and rewriting it 20 times to make sure that it was absolutely correct.” She even expressed regrets

when saying something in a meeting and then thinking, “Ohh! How dumb! Why did I say that? I used that word incorrectly.” In Rosario’s view, these show how she has often been overly critical and very demanding of herself. She also thinks that this may be a challenge for her and others because of that type of insecurity that she feels and that she had said before.

Apparently, Timofey has achieved an understanding that nonnative speakers should not try to be seeking perfection. He considers that he will never be perfect, and at the same time, he has not reached the top of his career. In his perspective, nonnative speakers should not be perfectionists because if they try to put excessive effort into their teaching, it can backfire. Timofey used to think that “the more energy, the more dynamic I put in my classes, the better off I am, and the more students will take from it.” Now, Timofey sees that this stance is wrong.

### **Cultural and Language Challenges**

The teachers expressed that they have had or had challenges in relation to the language and the culture. The insecurities and perfectionism mentioned previously may occur because nonnative teachers have language and cultural challenges. “I have to pay a lot of attention to the cultural aspect of the material, and because I didn't grow up here, there are a lot of things when it comes to culture, folklore, or even vocabulary” (Clara). Janaína explained that not having grown up in the U.S.A. made her unaware of several cultural aspects such as popular beliefs and pop culture, especially at the beginning. “When I first started, I guess it was kind of like just me trying to do the best I could, based on research or book knowledge” (Janaína), which did not always depict culture as it really is, in her opinion. Now Janaína recognizes that her years of experience have brought her familiarity and comfort “with the cultural aspect of the American way of things.” She feels that this is a challenge that has been overcome, but because of that she expressed having a new challenge. “I can't recognize when students maybe need some assistance

because of cultural differences and things like that because now I'm very familiar and comfortable” (Janaína).

In terms of language, Rosario believes that her language-related challenges, such as mispronouncing something or using grammar incorrectly, are more a result of her own insecurities. In her opinion, having had her insecurities and overcoming them over time has been a great challenge. Sampaguita expressed that sometimes she hesitates when having to choose a specific preposition or grammatical structure. Sampaguita expressed that this feeling is also for not having what she calls a “native speaker’s intuition,” in which certain language usage choices just come naturally. Sampaguita said, “One of the challenges might be my not having a native speaker's intuition. I always call it my nonnative English intuition...there are just different things that if I had been a native speaker, it would come automatically.”

Last but not least, Timofey shared his difficulties at the beginning in dealing with multiculturalism in the classroom and how much he has learned by himself in his years of experience.

Considering our population, I have learned what not to bring up with Japanese students, what not to bring up with Saudi students, with just certain cultural backgrounds, and it's not like somebody warned me. I have learned it myself because I have made terrible mistakes about making some kind of comments, and they damaged my rapport with my students. For example, I learned never say no to a Japanese student, you just have to say, uh, well, that's not quite true. You have to be really careful to point out their mistakes. Students from Saudi Arabia, you have to be really direct, so again, the not knowing things, what to say and what not to say, what to do and what not to do really reshaped how I changed (Timofey).



### **Assumptions and Facts on How Others Perceive NNESTs**

Most teachers had assumed how others perceive them as nonnative English-speaking teachers. However, except for Timofey, none of the teachers have had proof of how others feel in relation to nonnative speakers teaching English in the U.S.A. Their reports include solely their own assumptions on how students, colleagues, and individuals outside the work perceive them and their careers.

Janaína wondered how her advanced students, who are really good in her opinion, feel about the fact that “they came all the way here to study with another nonnative English-speaking person when they're so good themselves... these people are traveling all this distance, spending all of this money just to come here and have a class with me?” She also shared having similar concerns in relation to her colleagues when they are in a teachers’ meeting that she is the only nonnative speaker participating or leading a project. “Are people really comfortable with that, or are the students? I guess you always have those doubts or concerns in the back of your mind... I guess maybe the challenge is just getting over our own insecurities sometimes” (Janaína). In addition, Janaína stated feeling uncomfortable at social gatherings in which the topic of people’s jobs is the subject of their interactions.

A lot of people would think it's awkward like I actually don't like when I meet strangers at parties and stuff. We always come with the question, “Oh, what do you do for the university? Where do you work?” Honestly, I'm not very comfortable telling everybody because I feel like how is this person gonna react when I tell them that I teach English? (Janaína)

Rosario said, “Maybe if I felt that a student maybe sought advice from somebody who was a native speaker rather than me, I would say, ‘Oh, that's because I'm a nonnative speaker’

When it may not have been the case.” Sampaguita, as stated above under *Insecurities and Feelings of Inadequacy*, assumed that her students would question, “Why did I come to the States just to get a nonnative speaker?” or “Why am I being taught by this person who has an accent?” Sampaguita’s assumptions were based on her own possible reaction if she were to come to the U.S.A. to study English with a nonnative English-speaking teacher. In the end, Sampaguita recognized that her assumptions were because of her own insecurities.

Timofey shared the following anecdote, which correlates with Janaína’s assumptions of interacting at social gatherings.

Once I was... it was just a party. There was a person. He was kind of direct, and he asked what I was doing for a living, and I said, “I teach.” And he said, “What do you teach?” And I said, “English.” He said, “English in the United States, and you’re a nonnative speaker? How did they hire you? That doesn’t make any sense.” And that was kind of hard to take, and I thought to myself... Well, I didn’t confront him. I didn’t start to prove anything. I just said, “Well, so far, they’ve been keeping me, and nobody said anything bad about it.” “But you make mistakes” he said, and I said, “Yeah, I do. Everybody does.” “And they don’t say anything to you?” “Well, the mistakes are different, and as long as they don’t reflect my attitude, in fact, mistakes are okay.” (Sighing) Just because this person didn’t have any teaching experience or any international experience, he did not understand this. He was really negative towards this kind of career (Timofey).

### **Prejudice/Discrimination due to Nonnative Status**

Almost all participants reported having had no prejudicial or discriminatory challenges because of their nonnative status. Only Janaína was unsure. She used the phrase “I don’t know” three times in her answer. “No, not discrimination. I don't recall” (Clara). “No. No, I have never.

That's the thing. I've never felt that [discrimination due to nonnative status]" (Sampaguita). "I haven't had any. I haven't felt any discrimination at the workplace, but outside of the workplace, I have had" (Timofey). "No. No. Never. On the contrary, I've had millions of opportunities. Never. I've never felt discriminated. I can never say that I was subject of discrimination because on the contrary, I was given opportunities that I felt I didn't deserve" (Rosario). Rosario added that in her experience, discrimination has never been part of the equation.

I don't know if it would be discrimination necessarily or just tactics, but we've had students who are not doing so well, or they know they're gonna fail a class, and then after they find out that you are not a native speaker, they all of a sudden become the inquisitive ones. "Oh, is this like this, but are you sure?" OK, you never wondered before if I was sure. Why is that an issue now?... I don't know. Comments not directed at me necessarily, but comments that include me because of who I am and where I'm from. So again, I don't know if that was the intention, or if they just let it slip or something. But clearly what makes me think is that clearly, they have those thoughts... (Janaína).

### **Immigration Status**

The two participants from West Virginia reported having issues related to their immigration statuses. When asked if she had faced any discrimination due to her nonnative status, in addition to saying no to this question, Clara added that the problems she had encountered were mostly because of her immigration status and that those have certainly happened. She shared having applied for about 20 jobs after her working permit had expired. About half of those offered her an interview, but none of those employers offered to sponsor her work visa or authorization to work. Therefore, she was denied several opportunities in which she was at least one of the applicants in their final pool of potential candidates to be hired.

Yeah, so, I definitely came across a lot of that, a lot of bad... exchanging emails with that same text that just broke my heart every time I read; and here... when I got my job here as a full-time faculty they offered the job as a J1 visa status. Even at that point, even when I was able to come back, it was a J1 visa, which tied me to my contract because of my immigration status, so that was pretty difficult to just to work every day knowing that anything that happened to my contract reflected on my stay here and my family and my...so, that was very high-stake and very stressful (Clara).

When I asked Janaína if she had been denied an opportunity because of her nonnativeness, she answered, “Yes and no.”

I was definitely denied an opportunity that became available later again luckily, but I can't say that it was because of my nonnativeness necessarily. It was definitely because of my immigration status, which is connected to the fact that I'm a nonnative person. I can't say for sure that all the paperwork was the only reason (Janaína).

Surprisingly, according to Rosario, her employer went through a lot of trouble [immigration processes] to be able to hire her, and that is something she considers very interesting. Even though this is not specifically related to the research questions for this dissertation study, Rosario shared being denied an opportunity in Japan because she did not have a passport issued by the U.S.A. or England (See appendix D).

### **Coping Strategies**

The second category of themes are the coping strategies that the experienced NNES ESL teachers have developed and used over the years. The most prominent themes in relation to strategies are shown in Table 4.

**Table 4***Strategies*

| Themes  | Clara | Janaína       | Rosario | Sampaguita    | Timofey |
|---|-------|---------------|---------|---------------|---------|
| Avoiding situations that can lead to showing imperfections: The beginning and now | Yes   | Not mentioned | Yes     | Yes           | Yes     |
| Dealing with questions  | Yes   | Not mentioned | Yes     | Not mentioned | Yes     |
| Continuing to learn   | Yes   | Not Mentioned | Yes     | Not mentioned | Yes     |
| Reflection (therapy, talking to self and others)                                  | Yes   | Not mentioned | Yes     | Yes           | Yes     |
| Debunking the correlation between nativeness and good teaching                    | Yes   | Not mentioned | Yes     | Not mentioned | Yes     |
| Focusing on the other Side: Gratitude and positive factors                        | Yes   | Yes           | Yes     | Yes           | Yes     |

**Avoiding Situations that can Lead to Showing Imperfections: The Beginning and Now**

Many teachers shared that avoidance was one of their strategies. For example, Clara used to avoid sharing her own experience as a language learner or as a nonnative speaker. Today, she is proud of her journey.

And now I've gotten to a point where I am OK with letting them know what I've gone through... show them that they're not so many steps behind because they're not native of that specific language. And that's something that I am proud to share with them. Whereas in the past, I would try to hide it as much as I could, so they wouldn't see me as someone who has flaws or that should not be teaching them the language because I am a nonnative speaker, and I've gone through those struggles (Clara).

Rosario said that she used to feel that she should not ask a question because she should know the answer. She used to believe that asking a question would mean that she was not very well prepared. Rosario questioned, “Why would I be doing the job that I was doing if I didn't know the answer to that?” She recognizes that always thinking that she needed to know everything was one of her challenges; today Rosario acknowledges that “it is ok to learn that you do not need to know everything. What you need to have is the willingness to learn it and to ask for advice and opinions and seek the knowledge that you do not have.” Rosario sees a change in her coping strategy and consequently in her language teacher identity (LTI) over time. Because she used to believe that she needed to figure out things by herself, or she did not allow her to ask for help or for an opinion, Rosario made many mistakes. Today, she is certain that including others by asking questions, asking for their opinions and advice is not only allowed, but it is also a much better and more successful way to work.

Sampaguita has avoided using certain language structures or vocabulary because she knows she will probably make mistakes. As a strategy, she replaces them with what she knows how to use.

Which I don't like is then I have to hesitate, “Ohh, is that an *in, on, at*?” And then I just switched to something different... I have learned to cope with it. I have become a master of avoiding those things and then just replacing them with things that I know...I try to avoid structures that I know I might not say correctly, and so I know that there's another way of saying it without saying that word or that preposition (Sampaguita).

Like Rosario, Sampaguita used to think that because she was a nonnative speaker, she would not ask questions. Sampaguita also tried to avoid teaching Listening and Speaking classes because she thought that students would rather benefit from a native speaker. She often asked the

academic coordinator to not give her those classes. Another strategy that Sampaguita used to try to hide her possible language flaws is having a designated personal editor. “OK, you are going to be my personal editor, and you will look at whatever I write here. Edit this for me real (*sic*) quickly. That's how I sort of work on my nonnativeness” (Sampaguita). Sampaguita added that the advancement of technology has made it easier for her to cope. “Because when I am unsure, I don't really specifically need a living, breathing teacher because Mr. Google is there. I think in a way, I've become more confident” (Sampaguita).

### **Dealing With Questions**

In this part, I present the teachers' strategies in dealing with students' and other's questions. Strategies exist because once there were challenges that the teachers had to face. Therefore, because dealing with questions is a challenge, it entails strategies that are presented next. To explain her strategy, Clara referred to her excessive preparation, the second challenge presented in this chapter, as a way to help her predict and answer her students' questions.

I pretty much teach myself before I go into the classroom. There is a lot of things that I have to think of and questions that I have to predict that will come from the students so that I am ready for. I do not really have a problem with students asking questions that I don't know. Well, my critical self does have a problem with it. But as a nonnative speaker, we do carry that weight on our back... We wanna make sure that we are able to predict those questions so that we're able to answer them at least to a certain extent and then follow up with the student later if we need to (Clara).

Clara said that depending on the word and its context, she works collaboratively with the students by asking follow-up questions that are related to the students' familiarity with the word

and its meaning. If necessary, they look up the word at the moment or later. She has learned how to share the burden of the unknown words with them.

Rosario shared once again that one of her challenges was “the difficulties of making sure that I was the best I could be, that I could learn as much as I could that I could give correct information to the students.” She exemplified this by sharing that approximately fifteen years ago, the executive director had told her that she was going to be leading the faculty meetings, which was to her a great opportunity. She remembers that her first meetings were difficult for her because she thought that she had to have all the right answers to the teachers’ questions, and sometimes she did not have them. She felt either bad or disappointed. In her opinion, because of that, maybe she toughened up. Rosario says, “I know myself very well, so I think that over the years, that's softened up a bit.” Her strategy in dealing with questions whose answers were unknown to her was, like Clara, sharing the burden and working collaboratively with others. Through conversations and exchange of ideas, her job became much more successful as she stated in the previous section.

Timofey shared that it took him a while to learn this answer, “I don't know right now. I will find out, and I will check.” He recognizes that it was difficult, especially in the first years of his career. Timofey used to dread this kind of questions whose answers were unknown to him because he thought it was a clear demonstration of incompetence and lack of knowledge. At the beginning of his career, Timofey sometimes answered some questions whose answers he was not sure of. He guessed the answers. Timofey confesses, “I was turned out to be wrong when I came home and did some research and then it was even more difficult.” Then Timofey had to start his next class by saying, “I'm sorry there was this question, and I answered it, and I was completely wrong, and here is the correct answer, so I'm sorry.” According to Timofey, this was sometimes



very debilitating emotionally, and as the years went by, he says that he has learned that it is a good strategy to say, “I don't know.”

### **Continuing to Learn**

Even though this is an unsaturated theme, it is worth exploring it. Only two of the participants clearly stated and emphasized the importance of continuing to learn as a strategy to cope with the challenges. The fact that the others did not openly point out this as a strategy does not mean they disagree with it. They expressed the desire to continue learning but did not associate this with a strategy. For example, Clara said, “I have done tons of presentations and tons of conferences and webinars. This is my career now, and I still don't speak the language perfectly. I still have tons of things to learn.” Timofey emphatically stated,

Another coping strategy is never, never stop learning from your students and from your colleagues.... It may not apply to the situations or to the aspects that you can be teaching at this moment, but then you can recognize it and maybe put it in your bank for some future years and draw the conclusions... I believe that I cannot be teaching if I'm not learning something. Maybe it's not even language related, but I wanna be learning something along with because that's how I express the bond with my students. It can be learning something new like gardening or some yoga or any kind of exercise, but just be learning something. Be a learner and then transform it into your teaching, and sometimes I like to tell my students, “Ohh, I didn't know that. It feels great to learn something from my students;” that's one of the things that my job comes with (Timofey).

Rosario corroborated with Timofey's ideas. Rosario said, “Continuing to learn and study and improve. I've always said that you never know everything. You always need to learn. Every day is a learning experience as a teacher if you have your eyes open and your ears open.” In

Rosario's opinion, in order to correct those things that she did not feel comfortable with or happy about, "the best thing to do was to do them again, to do them better, to learn more, to seek advice, to observe how respected and successful people did those things and see how those things could be done." She concluded by saying,

I believe in learning. I believe in learning as much as we can. [I believe] in continuing to learn and never thinking that this is the way I did for 20 years. I continued doing it like that. No, we need to find a better way to do it. And so those things are helpful. And also learning more or finding knowledge about what I didn't do right also makes me feel that I'm doing my best to cope or to improve and so that to me is very important (Rosario).

### **Reflection: Talking to Self and Others**

Participants shared that reflecting on their own practice and talking to themselves and others was a successful coping strategy. To help her reflect, Clara stated that she does "a lot of therapy." She also talks to herself. For example, Clara says that she reminds herself constantly that "sending the message is the important thing here when it comes to communicating in the professional environment. Getting things done is better than looking for perfection, sending something perfectly done." Clara also thinks that she has to remind herself that "perfection is, in my mind, and people have different definitions and perceptions of perfection. There's a lot of auto reflection that comes in with the daily tasks."

Rosario shared that she walks very frequently and talks to herself during her walks. To exemplify, Rosario talked about the day that she walked and kept saying to herself, "Why do you worry so much about this? You've proven that you are reasonably decent. You know you have been proficient at what you do and all of that. Why are you so tough on yourself?" Sometimes Rosario thinks that being tough on herself is simply who she is. That is her personality because

she wants to do everything well; therefore, Rosario concludes that “it is difficult to deal with feelings that because you're a nonnative speaker, you're making mistakes.” Another strategy that helps Rosario reflect on her own practice and professional choices is talking with other people. “I think talking with people and listening to people was a very successful thing for me because when I talk to Lilian or I talk to Marcy or I talk to any of the teachers, Daniel, whoever, I always felt reassured” (Rosario). She defends that this is a very good technique for people with insecurities because in her case it worked, and she could always feel the support and the help from others whenever she had a question. To Rosario, this was very helpful. “I would say always bounce off ideas off of people for learning...One thing is to learn by myself and another one by observing others, by listening to others, and by sharing with others, bouncing ideas off of others” (Rosario).

Timofey reflects upon concepts that he listens from others. In his answers he often had anecdotes of concepts that he put into practice in his classes, and then he would share these experiences with colleagues and vice-versa. For example, Timofey said, “I was just listening to the radio, and they were talking about this psychological concept of fuel and friction...I thought I should apply it to my teaching, and I realized that I had already applied it a few times.” Then he keeps explaining how that helped him in his class and how he shared it with his colleagues. In his reflections and conversations, Timofey has realized that “most of the difficulties that we encounter have repeated themselves, and we can address them in more than one way.” That shows he has been reflecting upon the challenges, has learned from them, and has shared his insights and experiences with others. At another moment Timofey said, “that's the idea of fuel and friction, and I've been thinking about it a lot. How to be more efficient by not adding more

effort but by not working hard but smart.” He also shared the following interaction he had had with a native speaker colleague.

One of them [native speaker colleagues] said if you feel like they don't trust you because you are nonnative, you can just tell them, “Yes, I’m nonnative speaker, and I teach English. I don't know everything, but I know so much more than you do. Please recognize this, and I'm willing to share this with you.” So, that was pretty direct and was very encouraging (Timofey).

Sampaguita is a firm believer that collaboration and exchanging knowledge and experiences with each other is a great strategy to foster respect and understanding. “I also believe in supporting each other and collaborating and helping each other so that we can grow together... and develop our own skills professionally and personally” (Sampaguita).

### **Debunking the Correlation between Nativeness and Good Teaching**

All teachers discussed that their views have changed with experience. At the beginning, they all felt like they believed that being a native speaker was necessary to be a good teacher. However, over the years, their view has changed into being a good teacher was important regardless of (non)native status, and they were able to see some of the advantages that being a nonnative speaker could bring. As the years passed, these teachers were able to debunk beliefs and transform and reconstruct their identities in a more positive way.

Slowly, I've changed that into the language is still not mine, but teaching it is in a way. Like I might not belong to the native speaker group, but I belong to I can teach this [group]. I can teach this just as well or if not better. I think that gives the nonnative teachers a lot of confidence. If you think of it. If you think of the fact that you do not have to be a native speaker to have the skills to teach well... What I feel is that when I

started teaching the language, I thought that the skill that I needed was to be a native speaker. Ten years later, I've noticed that that's not the skill I needed. What I'm trying to say is that being a native speaker is not one of the skills that I needed to teach well. The whole speaking like a native speaker or writing like a native speaker, pronouncing like a native speaker has been put on the back burner. What I'm focusing on now is on what really matters to me, the methodology, the approaches that I use in the classroom, the relationship I have with my students and with my coworkers and what I can contribute to the field. So, my focus has shifted a lot because of the experiences I've gone through... There are strengths that we can bring into the job that a native speaker probably would have a hard time doing that. There are the experiences of learning a second language that we're familiar with and that we can sympathize in a way and transfer that into our teaching (Clara).

I feel like when I first got here, I definitely saw myself as a nonnative English-speaking teacher only. That was like something that was always, always, always on my mind. If I had a spectrum, I would [say that] I'm definitely moving closer, much, much closer to just being an ESL teacher and not necessarily feeling like the entire time that I'm a nonnative English-speaking ESL teacher... That's a good evolution that hopefully is gonna keep happening, right? I don't think I'll ever be like 100% comfortable with that, but I feel like I will always have these concerns, but I feel like in terms of identity, I feel like my identity at the beginning was much more defined by my nonnativeness than it is now. It [the nonnative label] is in the background now. It's not front and center anymore. That's a good way to put it. It's not front and center anymore. It's a footnote somewhere (Janaína).

Inadequacy comes from years of feeling that the native is a standard, and we know that native speakers are not necessarily good teachers. You need to be a good teacher regardless of what language you speak... I think nonnative speakers as teachers have a unique and magnificent potential and possibility to do enormous good to the students because of all that we carry with us because all that we have been through and because of the techniques that we have learned that we can pass on to others to continue learning (Rosario).

And at that time at the IEI [Intensive English Institute], they didn't have any nonnative speakers who were TAs [teaching assistants], so it was such an honor to be the first nonnative, so in a sense it's sort of ... well, I don't really have to be scared of my being a nonnative. I was just a little insecure. So, in a sense that was the strength for me, but it also allowed me to go past that "Oh, I'm a nonnative. I should be a little worried, you know?" ... I always just believe that the advantages and disadvantages, the pluses and minuses of being a nonnative speaker have influenced my efficacy as a language teacher, but I have not truly considered it as a transforming agent to define my professional identity. I don't really think of myself like "I'm a nonnative English teacher." Because I think of that more as a positive so that it should not identify me as a teacher more than the successes that I have. I do what I do, and the effectiveness of my qualifications, my experience, those are the factors that identify me and my nonnativeness just helps and contributes to that. Because I still think that nonnatives should not think that that's what identifies them (Sampaguita).

At the beginning of my career, I felt like I was constantly being held up with the native speakers, with my native speaker colleagues, and I had a huge disadvantage, and I

had the feeling of insecurity... Now, so many years have gone by I would say, Roseli, that's pretty much mostly internal challenges due to the lack of experience... Maybe one of the advantages of not being a native speaker is that you can feel what they feel. I always remind myself that it's good that you have learned a lot, and you know a lot, but don't forget what not knowing feels like; and for us nonnative English teachers, that's more vivid in our memory and perception because I know what you feel like. And here is how you do it, and you may not get it soon, and you are very confused, but that's part of learning (Timofey).

### **Focusing on the Other Side: Gratitude and Positive Factors**

These teachers have had numerous challenges and have developed and used coping strategies or insightfully solved their internal and external difficulties. After having had years of experience teaching a language that was not their original one and living in an initially foreign context, they have learned and shared that there were also many incredibly good accomplishments occurring in their lives. Being grateful and having the ability to appreciate the positive side of their once very challenging career was also a strategy.

From the very beginning, every time that thought of "Am I in the right place or am I in the right field?" came across my head, there was something else to counterbalance. Those thoughts... there are tons of other things that made me doubt myself more and more. But the other side is that there was always something there... graduating... From the very beginning, scholarships that are offered and professional doors that open... students' evaluations with suggestions for improvement, but also a lot of compliments or good things that they said. There are not only just thank you, but there's always a student here and there that will say, "I really enjoyed when you did this, or this teacher made me feel a

certain way, and it has really shifted my thought when it comes to learning a second language or gave me some sort of motivation to continue to come back to live here in the US or to learn more about the language.” It could be something as small as just a comment or small for some people. For me, pretty influential, really, and then the job offer definitely. I'm very involved in a lot of things in my school, and I've been selected to codevelop programs and pathways, programs online, develop online courses and things like that. So those are not only things that give me professional development and get me to continue to learn a lot of things, but they also help me... So, in the classroom and outside the classroom, there are all these things here and there that help me just kind of solidify [the answers to] those questions that I've always asked myself (Clara).

We have evaluations at the end of every semester, and my evaluations are always really great. I can't complain. I always have really great evaluations and students don't write a lot, but the ones who do write always make some very, very positive comments. Of course, there are those who make some negative comments if they know they're not getting a good grade, and all that stuff, but they've never ... no comments have ever been about my nonnativeness like ever... In terms of my kind of like efficiency as a teacher, I feel like the comments are always very positive, and I have students who come visit me afterwards. You know, they move on to their majors and things like that, and a semester later, a year later, sometimes they come back for a visit. And I love that...Actually their [Brazilian students from Sciences Without Borders Program] evaluations at the time were fantastic... I guess this feeling of or this realization that, “OK, they accept me as I am, so I should too,” and my colleagues as well. I feel for the most part, for most people, I really feel like I'm being treated as an equal, and I really appreciate that... I feel like the fact



that I've been able to witness acceptance from students and my colleagues has helped me start accepting my nonnativeness myself (Janaína).

I think that that is part of learning. I believe that it is the challenges. If everything is too easy, maybe the opportunities for growth are not there so much. I think that because we've had challenges, we have grown, and what I am very grateful for is for having had those difficult experiences so early on that allowed me to place it, maybe put or give a lot of importance to what the students needed and how the students reacted... The challenges bring you opportunities if you are able to see them. And I must have missed a lot of them. I know, but I also know that I've seen a lot and taken advantage of a lot of them. And thanks to that, grown (Rosario).

One of my Fulbright students said, "I really like the idea of having nonnative English teachers. I like your class. I like Yolanda's class, and I like talking to Rosario, and they understand... the school should hire more teachers like that." So, that was a single remark that I will remember... It is a fascinating career, which is based on hard work, learning from experience, constant learning, constant adjustment, and personally, it's the career that found me, and I am very satisfied with what I am doing... I have made a lot of mistakes throughout my teaching career, and I have learned how to capitalize on them. And I had to make some major adjustments. And by the way they're still underway... I have learned how to hope that things will get better in my teaching, and it wouldn't have been possible without all the challenges that I have encountered before, and sometimes my nonnativeness made them even more acute, and I still managed to hold my own. So, they made me more patient, more dedicated, and sometimes I notice that "Ohh, this thing has happened before, and now it's happening again, and I know what

to do. It may not work, but I know what to, how to, how to overcome it.” And the only time when I was really lost is when this COVID started and we had to go online, but even then, there was some kind of hope that I owe to my previous challenges. Because I had gone through this idea, “Oh my goodness, I'm gonna sink,” that's the time when I really thought, “I'm not gonna make it,” and I still made it, and it wasn't just adjustment, it was the transformation because I could not believe that I was able to get through this, so my nonnativeness made me stronger (Timofey).

Sampaguita shared that her students' evaluations “were/are all very good.” She also says that she has been in fact rewarded when she got promotions and positions that she did not necessarily ask for. Today Sampaguita states, “I'm proud to be a nonnative ESL teacher in a native English-speaking country...As a teacher, I feel like I am an experienced professional, committed to providing an interactive and a comfortable learning environment for our students.”

### **General Narrative**

All of the participants had feelings of insecurity and inadequacy that they experienced, especially at the beginning of their careers. They stated those emotions and internal conflicts were their biggest challenges. Probably because of that, all participants sought perfectionism and tried to hide their possible flaws due to nonnativeness, especially during their first years of teaching ESL in the U.S.A. With such choice, one of their challenges was the excessive preparation to perform daily tasks. One of the participants even mentioned that preparation was a challenge but also a strategy because it made her more confident. Participants also shared facing some cultural and/or language challenges. Despite the fact that most participants had assumptions on how others perceived their presence and efficacy in the field, none of them ever faced prejudice or discrimination at the job place because of their nonnativeness.

In addition to the avoidance tactic, in which they avoided or tried to avoid situations that would lead them to showing their possible flaws due to their nonnativeness, participants shared other coping strategies. Two of them were to be constantly learning and reflecting on their practice. They explained that learning could be from colleagues, from students, or from formal professional development. Reflection could be from a professional therapist, from talking to self and/or to others. From those conversations and sharing moments, from collaboration with colleagues, some participants shared that they learned how to deal with questions whose answers were unknown. At the beginning saying “I don’t know” was unacceptable. Later, they learned from their interactions with their peers that this was not only doable but also a positive route.

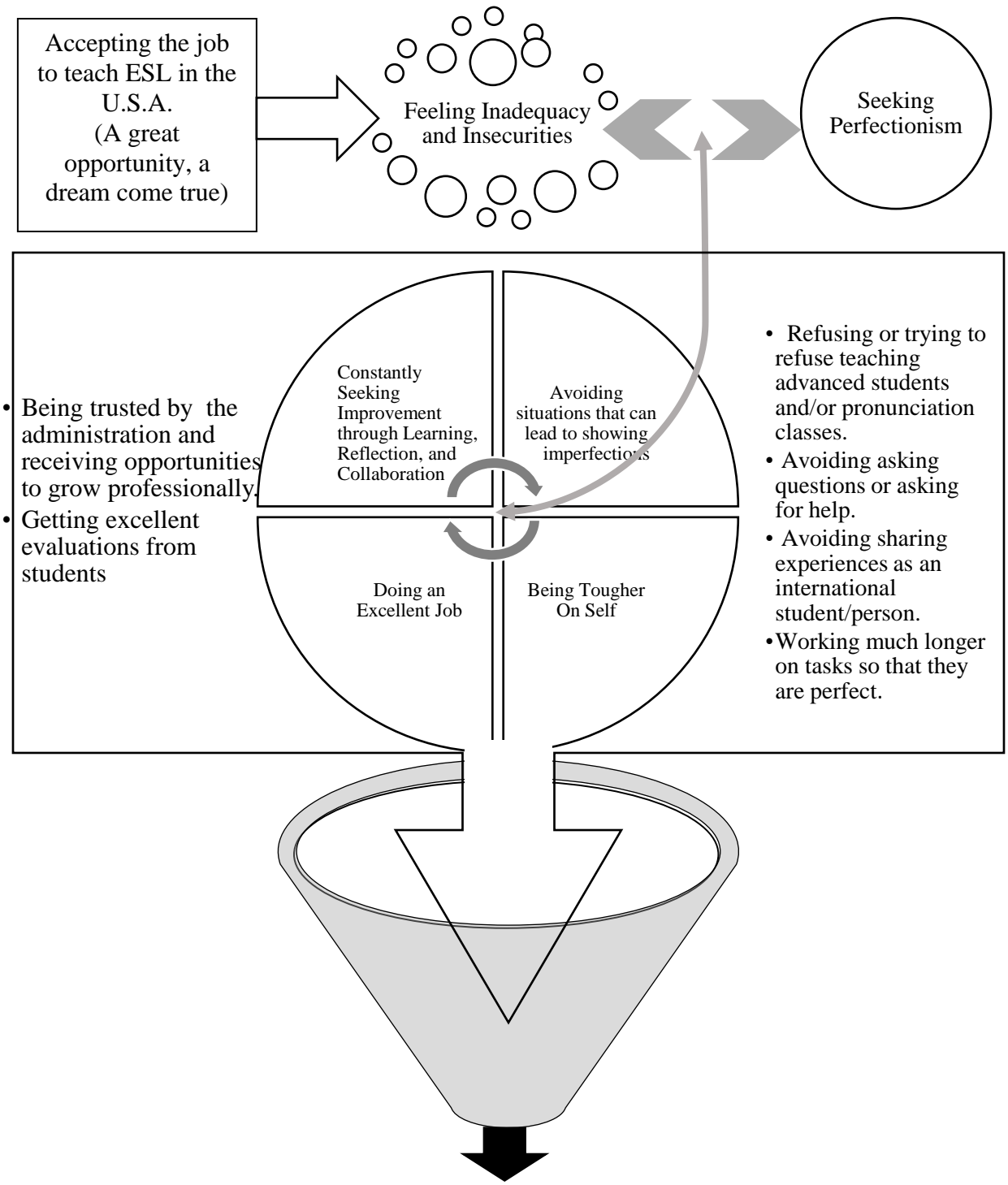
Another strategy was to be grateful and to focus on the positive side of their journey. A few participants demonstrated gratitude for having had challenges that made them grow and become the professionals that they are today. All participants recognized that the challenges that they have had along the years of experience associated with the coping strategies that they developed and used contributed to a positive transformation of their professional language teacher identities (LTIs). They were able to move from feeling insecure and inadequate to feeling accepted, recognized, and more confident. The challenges that they successfully faced have made them firm believers that their nonnativeness has had a positive role in their lives and the lives of their students. Moreover, they have empowered themselves to debunk the fallacies they believed at the beginning of their careers. For example, now they understand that being a native speaker does not necessarily make a person a good teacher. They all see themselves as professionals who have several abilities and skills to be high quality ESL teachers. They see their nonnativeness as an advantage because among other aspects, they are able to understand and

sympathize with students who are going through the second language learning process which they have all faced one day.

Figure 3 depicts a comprehensive view of this study findings. Initially, because Swearingen (2019) defined the challenges NNESTs face when constructing identities as competing forces (e.g., incompetency versus expertise, monolingualism versus multilingualism, ESL versus EFL, etc.), I had debated if I should have used *Versus Coding*. Later, I realized that even though some themes may be dualistic, they are in fact additional and simultaneous and not necessarily opposing forces. They contribute to each other or even counterbalance and influence each other. In other words, I see this dualism more as an *and* than as a *versus* process. Therefore, I decided to focus on the unique process or phenomena in which multiple facets occur dynamically, back and forth, influencing each other simultaneously rather than occurring linearly. As I have referred to in chapter three, qualitative research is holistic in the sense that it studies the situation, problem, or phenomenon as a whole with its pieces dynamically interacting and influencing one another (Creswell, 2018).

Figure 3

*Comprehensive View of Findings*



The Empowerment of a New Language Teacher Identity:  
More Confident and Prouder. Being Nonnative is an Advantage.

## Chapter 5

### Results

#### Conclusions

The specific research questions for this study asked the following.

1. How have experienced nonnative ESL teachers processed and made meaning of their nonnativeness-related professional challenges throughout their careers in the U.S.A.?
2. What coping strategies have experienced nonnative ESL teachers working in Intensive English Programs (IEPs) in the U.S.A. developed and used to address any challenges associated with their nonnative status?
3. How has coping with nonnativeness-related professional challenges shaped the construction of nonnative ESL teachers' professional language teacher identities (LTIs)?

The results of this study have successfully answered the three research questions above.

They show that its five participants, who define themselves as experienced nonnative ESL teachers, expressed that mostly due to their challenges and strategies, their language teacher identities have gone through several transformations and adjustments over the years, which led to more a positive and prouder view of themselves.

At the beginning of their careers, in order to cope with their feelings of inadequacy and insecurities, experienced ESL teachers sought perfectionism which split their *lifeworlds* (van Manen, 2016) into two. Although such splitting is distinct, it is also interactive, overlapping, dynamic, and simultaneous. On one hand, their perfectionism caused by their insecurities majorly yielded ESL professionals who had been super strict on themselves and worked extremely hard. They had done so to try to hide their possible flaws due to nonnativeness and to prove to themselves and to others that they were competent and deserved to be where they were.

On the other hand, this stressful choice has contributed to the formation of professionals who are exceptional in what they do because of their excessive preparation and decision to be constantly learning and reflecting upon their own practices. In other words, while their strictness and perfectionism had given them a limited vision of self in which they believed they were inadequate, insecure, and not good enough, they kept growing professionally by doing their absolute best in the classroom and outside of it. Their excellence has been proven by their outstanding students' evaluations and the trust the schools' administrations have placed on them by constantly offering them promotions and leadership positions. Most participants are or have been academic coordinators, teacher trainers, course and curriculum designers, and directors at their IEPs. Their years of experience teaching ESL in IEPs in the U.S.A. has reshaped and transformed their split *lifeworld* into a unified more positive professional identity. Today, they define themselves as more confident and prouder to be nonnative English-speaking teachers because they are able to see their nonnativeness as an advantage. Their professional journey, full of challenges and strategies, has turned them into not only extremely competent but also empowered nonnative ESL teachers in the U.S.A.

This does not mean that the challenges are over. It means that the participants of this study have learned how to successfully cope with their mostly emotional and internal challenges. Their life stories should inspire others to be successful too. In other words, experienced nonnative ESL teachers have had to be juggling multiple positive and negative feelings, beliefs, and factors while coping with internal and external challenges in order to succeed at their jobs. One may say that every professional or every teacher goes through the same; however, experienced nonnative ESL teachers have had more balls to juggle that had been added to their almost acrobatic mission. From immigration statuses to the extreme need of acceptance and

having to prove to themselves and sometimes to others that they are capable of doing their jobs not simply well but with excellence.

### **Revisiting the Literature Review and Suggestions for Future Research**

This research brings a new light on how teaching experience has moved these experienced nonnative English-speaking ESL teachers from an insecure or emotionally oppressive positionality to a freer and more confident one. Similar to the story of Puja (Wolff & De Costa, 2017), the participants have been overcoming their initial emotional challenges and navigating into a more positive identity. In the case of Puja, she did so with reflexivity and as an international student at the MA TESOL recognized the advantages of graduating overseas. In the case of this study participants, they used reflexivity and other strategies to be able to recognize the advantages of being nonnative English-speaking ESL teachers. They are also different from Puja because of their extensive professional experience, which has played an important role in their emotional recovery and identity construction.

Interestingly, both Puja and this study participants went through emotional battles at the beginning of their academic and/or professional lives in the TESOL field in the U.S.A. Like Farley (2020) explored, there are internal and external tensions that influence language teacher identity (LTI). Since as Puja's, the participants' initial challenge or tension was internal, it is worth questioning what might have triggered those internal tensions in them. Were there external factors and tensions that caused the internal conflicts? For example, Janaína, Rosario and Sampaguita shared that being a NNEST was a non-issue in their home countries. They started seeing themselves as nonnative speakers once they started their journey in the U.S.A. This initial conflicting view of self was also reported in research (Kim, 2017; Solano-Campos, 2014). Therefore, having internal tensions once they start living and studying and/ or working in the



U.S.A. is a common point that they all share. What is still unknown is if external tensions (Fairley, 2020) are responsible for the internal tensions in NNESTs when they move to the United States of America.

Earlier research (Kim, 2017) has revealed that some of the MA TESOL international students switch from a position of successful English teachers with recognition and privilege in their home countries to downgrading themselves (Swearingen, 2019) because of their inevitable comparison to their native peers (Nemtchinova et al., 2010). Consequently, they start questioning the career they have chosen (Swearingen, 2019). Most participants in this study faced the challenge of questioning their professional choices. The difference is that these participants were already employed in the U.S.A. and were not starting their MA TESOL programs. Apparently, these self-questionings about their English teaching careers have lingered through graduate school and kept going through the first years of their ESL teaching. It is important to investigate what can be done so that these teachers are able to see themselves as bilingual or multicompetent instead of deficient (Kim, 2017) since the beginning of their MA TESOL programs. How could an intervention curriculum empower international students in MA TESOL programs so that their identities and consequently their current academic and future professional lives are influenced positively?

Previous research has shown that there are advantages of being a nonnative English-speaking teacher (Arva & Medgyes, 2000; Kim, 2011; Llurda 2009; McKay 2003; Medgyes, 1992, 1994, 1999; Tajedin & Adeb, 2016). The participants of this study demonstrated being knowledgeable and proud of those advantages such as feeling empathy toward their students, being a language learner role model, and having a special awareness of the levels of difficulties in certain language aspects. However, the same previous research also presented advantages that

nonnative English-speaking teachers in ESL settings most likely do not have, for example, knowing the students' mother tongue. Unless their ESL students speak the same language as their nonnative instructor, these NNESTs will not have this advantage. Concerning the disadvantages, this investigation participants share similar language challenges with the participants of previous research. Both groups, this study participants and the ones in previous research, have faced different challenges or have had different disadvantages in relation to finding a job and its hiring process. Further research is needed to bring light to these differences and similarities. For example, how do the language and cultural challenges compare and contrast in ESL and EFL settings?

It is worth analyzing the fact that TESOL professionals, mostly overseas, have reported numerous cases of discrimination against them when looking for employment in the field (Appleby, 2016; Maum, 2002; Holliday & Aboshiha, 2009; Mackenzie, 2020; Ruecker & Ives, 2015; Simon-Maeda, 2006, etc.), but in the case of the five participants of this study, four of them reported not having facing discrimination at the job place, and one was unsure. On the contrary, they have all reported having numerous opportunities that they initially felt that they did not deserve. While some reported having issues related to their immigration statuses, others mentioned that their employers went through the immigration procedures to be able to hire them. Future research is needed to further investigate the cases of employment of nonnative ESL teachers in Inner Circle countries such as the U.S.A. For example, it would be worth investigating how influential the possibility of changing these teachers' immigration statuses is in the hiring processes. In other words, do NNESTs face difficulties being hired by employers in Inner Circle countries because employers do not want to go through the immigration processes to be able to contract those nonnative ESL teachers, or are the hiring difficulties because they do

not want a nonnative speaker teaching English at their institutions? It would be interesting to investigate how willing employers are to go through the immigration processes to sponsor these workers a work visa, and eventually their permanent residency that leads to naturalization. Probably, the employer's decision to sponsor this visa or not would influence how these teachers feel and consequently their emotions, i.e., feelings of adequacy and acceptance, and their identity. It may also be pertinent to seek deeper understanding on how these nonnative teachers were hired in the U.S.A., i.e., if they were able to obtain permission to work through marriage, asylum status, employment, and so on.

In brief, future research may investigate among other intriguing inquiries the four situations mentioned above. They are 1) Since suffering from insecurity and inadequacy is a negative feeling that international MA TESOL students and nonnative ESL professionals share when starting their journeys in an English-speaking country, what triggers these initial internal challenges and tensions? What is the role of external tensions on internal tensions (Fairley, 2020)? 2) What can be implemented in the MA TESOL curriculum so that the negative feelings and self-questioning on having chosen the right field can be softened and treated in graduate school aiming not having such doubts and emotional loads linger throughout their professional lives? 3) How do looking for a job and getting hired differs in ESL and EFL settings? 4) How heavy/light is a nonnative English-speaking teacher's immigration status influence on getting a job in an ESL context? Despite their nonnative status, would they be hired if they had authorization to work?

For the other intriguing inquiries, one of them would be if these same challenges are faced by any other teacher. If so, would their coping strategies be the same or different? For example, would native speakers who teach their native language have the same challenges and

coping strategies as NNESTs? Would nonnative English-speaking teachers who teach a different subject, not English, for instance, a Chinese teacher who teaches statistics, face the same challenges and coping strategies? Would nonnative speakers who are teachers of other languages have the same feelings, for example, a native German speaker who teaches French or a native English speaker who teaches Spanish? Lastly, in those scenarios, how would their teacher identity be constructed and transformed?

### **Limitations on Generalizability**

In addition to the four future research suggestions mentioned above, it is important to notice that this research was done with a small sample of very experienced teachers in Intensive English Programs in the U.S.A. Therefore, it did not cover experienced ESL teachers in K-12 or experienced nonnative professors in MA TESOL programs and other TESOL-related higher education settings in Inner Circle countries. Therefore, the ESL setting in which this research was implemented is one of its limitations. Moreover, the five teachers studied here are located in three different states of the U.S.A., Arkansas, Colorado, and West Virginia. In addition to the geographical limitations, this study did not investigate how skin color or racial identity may influence NNESTs' challenges, coping strategies, and identity construction. This study is limited to the factors of language nativeness and nonnativeness. These factors, including the size of the sample, set some limitations on the generalizability of this phenomenological study. However, "Generalizability is not the purpose of a phenomenological study" (Peoples, 2021, p. 103). Accordingly, the results of this research may be transferrable to other contexts and situations which may guide future research, but they should not be generalized.

## Implications

As stated in chapter two, little was known about NNEST in ESL settings (Kamhi-Stein, 1999), and traditionally research on NNEST has focused on MA TESOL international students and NNEST in EFL settings (Fan & De Jong, 2019). Therefore, by investigating experienced NNESTs in the U.S.A., this dissertation study uncovered unknown factors about NNESTs who have been working as ESL teachers in an English-dominant environment, an Inner Circle country. The findings of this study are the initial step into filling this gap in the literature. For instance, now it is known that teaching experience has contributed to these NNESTs moving from an insecure or emotionally oppressive positionality to a freer and more confident one, in which they are proud to be a NNEST.

This dissertation participants' stories about their challenges corroborate with several previous studies (e.g. Amin, 1997; Aneja, 2016; Barkhuizen, 2016; Blum & Johnson, 2012; Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999; Diniz de Figueiredo, 2011; Fairley, 2020; Fan & Jong, 2019; Holliday & Aboshiha, 2009; Kasun & Saavedra, 2016; Liu, 1999; Morgan, 2016; Menard-Warwick, 2008, 2011; Mutlu & Ortaçtepe, 2016; Nieto & Meadows, 2015; Nguyen & Dao, 2019; Norton, 1997, 2000; Schreiber, 2019; Solano-Campos, 2014; Song, 2016; Swearingen, 2019; Tajeddin & Adeh, 2016; Trent, 2016) that have reported there is a powerful correlation between NNESTs' emotions and identity.

One might question the importance of studying not only identity or teacher identity but *language teacher identity* (LTI) of NNESTs. It is common sense that in addition to being of high quality, education should be offered in a welcoming environment where professionals and students feel good about themselves and can develop the skills needed to succeed in life. The review of the literature, chapter two, has explored such questioning in depth. As displayed in

chapter two, how teachers, in this case NNESTs, self-identify directly affects their classrooms and the way they teach (Kamhi-Stein, 2002). More specifically, as Reis (2015) has stated, insecure and fearful ESL/EFL teachers perpetuate powerlessness in their students instead of empowering them with tools to be successful. All participants in this research reported feeling insecure and inadequate at the beginning of their careers and even questioned if they belonged to the field. This initial internal emotional challenge triggered all other challenges and strategies (e.g., perfectionism, overpreparation, assumptions, avoidance, etc.). Being aware of these factors should implicate in TESOL field changes which should start in the MA TESOL curricular and attitude change.

Since one of the goals of critical hermeneutics phenomenology is to make voices of minoritized groups heard as well to confront and remove labels and assumptions that may devalue participants' realities (Lopez & Willis, 2004), this study has accomplished this objective. It is indeed a small sample, but telling the participants 'stories may help others in the same conditions start their healing processes and progresses. Despite the fact that most participants shared not having faced discrimination at the job place, it was clear that these participants were initially their own oppressors and discriminators because of their feelings of inadequacy and unbelonging. Raising critical awareness of how valuable nonnative ESL teachers are may be the first step into their own liberating process (Lopez & Willis, 2004) and to constructing a better TESOL field. This would then be an emancipatory research as critical hermeneutics is often considered (Thompson, 1990).

Thus, this study contributes to raising awareness of the fact of how NNESTs will probably feel when starting their careers in an ESL setting; however, being aware is not enough to contribute to better TESOL and Educational fields. Actions are also needed to promote

successful ESL learning and teaching since the very beginning. The first step would be educating others in the field. To do so, changes to the MA TESOL curricula are fundamental. It is imperative that TESOL programs offer their students, native and nonnative, opportunities to discuss narratives that value multilingualism and multiple varieties of English. As Pavlenko (2003) reported, the TESOL programs which have done so have been therapeutic in converting negative identities into positive ones. In addition to adding those awareness courses to the MA TESOL curriculum, it may also be pertinent to implement a mentoring program in which experienced teachers may coach novice ones. Such mentoring could be done in-person or remotely, which would involve experienced English teachers from a variety of states or even countries.

Starting the change with MA TESOL curricula, which includes classes on English diversity and its importance as well as a mentoring program, is a very pertinent step because recent graduates will take this view to their new job places and this way will help conscientize administration and colleagues who did not have the opportunity to attend MA TESOL programs in which this liberating view was promoted. Hopefully, this would ignite a new cycle of awareness, better self-image, better classrooms, and better fields. Once again, teachers who are empowered to confidently identify themselves as successful will perpetuate this feeling to others, while the opposite is also true. To me, the secret is awareness, awareness, and more awareness. This will trigger impactful actions to improve TESOL and Education in general by debunking and deconstructing toxic fallacies, assumptions, and stereotypes that have been perpetuated and harming and impairing many professionals and students.

## **A Final Personal Note**

As the researcher who is also an experienced nonnative ESL teacher in an IEP in the U.S.A., this inquiry has helped me clarify many of my own feelings, challenges, strategies, and self-perceptions that I have had over the years. Even though I can definitely relate to this study findings, I have to admit that I personally had never been able to pinpoint that my own *Dasein*, my being in the world, involved perfectionism pursuit, toughness on self while achieving excellence at my job. As Freire (2003) states, to be free, the oppressed has to name its own reality. My preconceived knowledge had, for example, enhanced my expectation to find cases of prejudice and discrimination at the job place. Such cases were almost nonexistent from these five participants' points of view. Their major challenge had been their own insecurities. In other words, coping with themselves, their feelings, beliefs, and assumptions is what had led them to more challenges, strategies, and what helped form who they are today. Hopefully, the same way this study results have put a new light on nonnative ESL teachers' issues for me, it will also clarify the view of its readers being them native or nonnative professionals in TESOL.

On a personal note, I would like to report two very recent experiences that I have had as an experienced NNEST in the U.S.A. The Intensive English Program where I had been working for the past 16 years is closing down. I and my colleagues have been in the process to look for a new job. In the past few months, I visited two booths of potential employers. One of them was a public school district booth, and it was placed in the university building where the teacher education classes are held. This is where I have attended many of my Ph.D. classes. The other was a charter school booth, and it was placed in a community center in a neighboring town.

I visited the two employer booths at different moments and in different towns, and I received the same reaction from both. I handed in my resume which states among other details



that I am a Ph.D. candidate, and I have two master's degrees and twenty years of experience teaching ESL in the U.S.A. The recruiters from both booths, again at different moments and in different towns, received my resume with a smile, and reacted to it by happily telling me that they had openings for Spanish teachers.

I was shocked to hear from these education professionals something similar to, "You know, we have an opening for a Spanish teacher." Their assumptions and lack of awareness are at least disturbing and, in the past, would have affected my LTI. Interestingly, even though I am fluent in Spanish, that is not my native language, but they assumed so, which might mean that to them being a native speaker is what is needed to teach a foreign language. Probably, for this reason and for assuming that Spanish was my first language, they also presumed that teaching Spanish would have been a better fit for me and their students. I have never taught a single Spanish class in my life, but still in their view, that would have been better than my extensive twenty-year ESL teaching experience. To make matters worse, a blonde blue-eyed native speaker colleague was with me, and they never told her that there was a Spanish teacher opening. They were happy to collect both of our resumes; however, their intention was to collect hers for a possible future ESL position if they ever have one, while mine was for a current opening to be a Spanish teacher.

For these reasons and my personal experience, I do not know how much more emphatic I can be on the need of educating others in terms of raising their awareness in relation to the value and the excellence NNESTs bring to the field. My rich experience did not let the reactions of those uninformed recruiters discourage me. Were I a novice teacher, I would have been feeling the same emotions that I and the five participants of this research had at the beginning of our careers. Today, I know that experienced nonnative ESL teachers have had to be dealing with

multiple positive and negative emotions while acquiring experience at their jobs. This emotional roller-coaster has made them stronger and led them to excellence. I am glad my dissertation study results have confirmed this knowledge within me and have strengthened me to keep fighting for awareness and equal rights. Hopefully, others will be inspired, too.

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**Appendix A**  
**Demographic Questionnaire**

Name:

Age:

Gender:

Country of origin:

First language:

Language(s) spoken at home:

Age when moved to the USA:

Teaching experience in number of years and months. (Please, specify your teaching experience overseas and in the U.S.A.):

Highest level of education (degree and major):

How many ESL teaching jobs have you had in the U.S.A. and for how long?

## Appendix B

### Open-Ended Questionnaire

1. What does it mean to be a nonnative ESL teacher in the U.S.A.?
2. Do you define yourself as an experienced teacher? Yes or no? Why or why not?
3. What are the nonnativeness related challenges that you have encountered in your career as an IEP instructor in the U.S.A.?
4. In your teaching experience, do you recall any moments in which you felt discriminated against because of your nonnative status? If yes, please elaborate.  
(Note: If the answer is no, skip the two next questions and go to question seven.)
5. Whom are these prejudicial acts usually from? (Supervisors, coworkers, students, etc.)
6. Have you ever felt that you were denied an opportunity at your job such as a promotion because of your nonnative status?
7. What have been your coping strategies in dealing with nonnativeness-related challenges at the job place? Which strategies do you consider the most successful?
8. Since you are an experienced teacher, do you think your coping strategies have changed over time? If so, how? Can you provide examples?
9. How do you define your professional identity? How do you see yourself professionally?
10. Has your professional identity changed or been reshaped over the years?
11. Which factors have influenced your professional identity development?

12. Do you think that having encountered nonnativeness related challenges at the job place and being able to cope with them have contributed to your professional identity construction or transformation? Please, elaborate.

## Appendix C

### Institutional Review Board Approvals




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**To:** Roseli M. Matos Franco  
**From:** Douglas J Adams Justin R Chimka, Chair  
 IRB Expedited Review  
**Date:** 02/08/2022  
**Action:** **Expedited Approval**  
**Action Date:** 02/08/2022  
**Protocol #:** 2111372490  
**Study Title:** Experienced NNESTs Nonnativeness-Related Challenges, Coping Strategies, and Identity Construction  
**Expiration Date:** 12/02/2022  
**Last Approval Date:**

The above-referenced protocol has been approved following expedited review by the IRB Committee that oversees research with human subjects.

If the research involves collaboration with another institution then the research cannot commence until the Committee receives written notification of approval from the collaborating institution's IRB.

It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval before the expiration date.

Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without Committee approval. Please submit continuation requests early enough to allow sufficient time for review. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in the automatic suspension of the approval of this protocol. Information collected following suspension is unapproved research and cannot be reported or published as research data. If you do not wish continued approval, please notify the Committee of the study closure.

Adverse Events: Any serious or unexpected adverse event must be reported to the IRB Committee within 48 hours. All other adverse events should be reported within 10 working days.

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of this study, such as the procedures, the consent forms, study personnel, or number of participants, please submit an amendment to the IRB. All changes must be approved by the IRB Committee before they can be initiated.

You must maintain a research file for at least 3 years after completion of the study. This file should include all correspondence with the IRB Committee, original signed consent forms, and study data.

cc: Janet Penner-Williams, Investigator



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**To:** Roseli M. Matos Franco  
**From:** Douglas J Adams, Chair  
IRB Expedited Review  
**Date:** 04/04/2023  
**Action:** **Expedited Approval**  
**Action Date:** 03/31/2023  
**Protocol #:** 2111372490R001  
**Study Title:** Experienced NNESTs Nonnativeness-Related Challenges, Coping Strategies, and Identity Construction  
**Expiration Date:** 03/30/2023  
**Last Approval Date:** 03/31/2022

The above-referenced protocol has been approved following expedited review by the IRB Committee that oversees research with human subjects.

If the research involves collaboration with another institution then the research cannot commence until the Committee receives written notification of approval from the collaborating institution's IRB.

It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval before the expiration date.

Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without Committee approval. Please submit continuation requests early enough to allow sufficient time for review. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in the automatic suspension of the approval of this protocol. Information collected following suspension is unapproved research and cannot be reported or published as research data. If you do not wish continued approval, please notify the Committee of the study closure.

**Adverse Events:** Any serious or unexpected adverse event must be reported to the IRB Committee within 48 hours. All other adverse events should be reported within 10 working days.

**Amendments:** If you wish to change any aspect of this study, such as the procedures, the consent forms, study personnel, or number of participants, please submit an amendment to the IRB. All changes must be approved by the IRB Committee before they can be initiated.

You must maintain a research file for at least 3 years after completion of the study. This file should include all correspondence with the IRB Committee, original signed consent forms, and study data.

cc: Janet Penner-Williams, Investigator

## Appendix D

### CONSENT FORM

**Research Title:** Experienced NNESTs' coping strategies in confronting nonnativeness-related challenges and how such encounters have contributed to their professional identity development

#### **Researcher's Statement**

I am asking you to take part in a research study of experienced nonnative English-speaking teachers who have been working in an Intensive English Program in the U.S.A. for at least five years. Involvement in this study has no connection with your employer or your students. Before you accept to participate in this study, it is important that you understand the purpose of this research and what it entails. This consent form will provide the necessary information you need so that you can make an educated decision about your participation. You may contact me, Roseli M. Matos Franco, at any time with any questions or concerns. After you read this document carefully and answer all the questions, you should be able to decide if you want to participate. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you.

#### **Researcher's Contact Information**

*Roseli M. Matos Franco, Ph.D. student at the University of Arkansas*

*rfranco@uark.edu*

( ) -

#### **The Purpose of this Study**

The study will investigate how experienced nonnative English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) cope with nonnative-related challenges and how such encounters have influenced their language teacher identity (LTI) construction. With this research, I intend to better understand how NNESTs who have been living and working in the U.S.A. have coped with nonnative speakerism challenges and how they have developed their LTIs. The goal of this investigation is also to add new information to the literature and hopefully contribute to the improvement of both MA TESOL curricula and TESOL employment policies.

#### **Study Procedures**

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to:

1. Answer a confidential demographic survey.
2. Participate in a recorded open-ended questionnaire interview that will be performed via video conference call. In the interview, you will be asked about nonnative-related challenges that you have confronted, your coping strategies, and your language teacher identity development. You will not be asked to disclose information you want to remain private, nor will you be asked to continue in the study if you decide to withdraw from it

#### **Risks and Discomforts**

There are not anticipated risks from participating in this research. Therefore, all subjects have permission to answer the questions they choose and stop participating at any time.

**Benefits**

You may benefit from the structured reflection on your experiences available through the open-ended interview. Being a language teacher is a challenge and reflecting on the questions may lead you to reflect even more on your professional life, your thoughts and feelings, and what being NNEST may entail.

**Audio/Video Recording and Anonymity**

The interviews will be recorded on Zoom and will be transcribed immediately after. Any information that might help future research readers identify the subjects will be either anonymized or removed. The interview transcriptions will be for data analysis purposes. They are the sole data source for this study.

**Privacy and Confidentiality**

All identifying information, including but not limited to names and school information, will be anonymized in future publications; names and other identifying information will be changed.

Interview

transcripts will be securely stored and protected by a password. The research data records will be reviewed by three professors in the dissertation committee. The committee members are committed to keeping your participation private and confidential. Identifiable information will not be released to anyone other than the committee members without your written consent unless required by law.

**Voluntary Participation**

Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or choose to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified as yours will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information.

**Questions or Concerns**

This research will be conducted by Roseli M. Matos Franco, a Ph.D. student at the University of Arkansas. You may ask questions now or later, but please do not sign this consent form if you do not understand it fully. For later questions, you may contact me at any time at [rfranco@uark.edu](mailto:rfranco@uark.edu) or at my mobile phone number (████) █████ - █████. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research subject in this study, you may contact the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Office of Research and Innovation

205 Administration Building

1 University of Arkansas

Fayetteville, Arkansas 72701

Office: (479) 575-5901

**Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research (For Subject to Keep):**

To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, please initial and then sign below. Your initials and signature below indicate that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, have had all of your questions answered, and you want to participate.

Please initial applicable statements as proof that you understand and consent yourself to participate in this research project.

Initials

\_\_\_\_\_ I understand that my participation in the study defined in this consent form has no connections with my employer nor with my students.

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree to allow the recordings of my interviews.

\_\_\_\_\_ I understand that all data will be anonymized for future analysis and publication.

\_\_\_\_\_ I understand that I am not obliged to answer all the questions in the interview. I can choose which questions I would like to answer.

\_\_\_\_\_ I understand that I can choose to withdraw from this study at any time.

By signing below, you are consenting to participate in the study.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Roseli M. Matos Franco

Researcher's Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Subject (Please, print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's Subject Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Please sign both copies of the final sheet of this three-page consent form. Please remove the final page and return it to Roseli M. Matos Franco. Please keep the first three pages of this consent form for your records.



**Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research (For the researcher to keep):**

To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, please initial and then sign below. Your initials and signature below indicate that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, have had all of your questions answered, and you want to participate.

Please initial applicable statements as proof that you understand and consent yourself to participate in this research project.

**Initials**

\_\_\_\_\_ I understand that my participation in the study defined in this consent form has no connections with my employer nor with my students.

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree to allow the recordings of my interviews.

\_\_\_\_\_ I understand that all data will be anonymized for future analysis and publication.

\_\_\_\_\_ I understand that I am not obliged to answer all the questions in the interview. I can choose which questions I would like to answer.

\_\_\_\_\_ I understand that I can choose to withdraw from this study at any time.

By signing below, you are consenting to participate in the study. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Roseli M. Matos Franco

Researcher's Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Subject (Please, print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's Subject Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Please sign both copies of the final sheet of this three-page consent form. Please remove the final page and return it to Roseli M. Matos Franco. Please keep the first three pages of this consent form for your records.

## Appendix E

### Unrelated Themes That are Worth Mentioning

#### Advice to Novice Nonnative ESL Teachers

My door is always open to GTAs, and they're always coming in and out, especially the ones that are nonnative speakers. So sharing that experience with them has been rewarding experience for me, too. They are going through the same struggles that I've gone through (laughing) to the same mindset, and you know it's fortunate and unfortunate to see that. I just wanna shake them up and say, "Don't do this. Just move on from that and get to the next step," but it's part of their journey, and I think that's gonna help them in the future. So yeah, it's just like anything else in life, really (Clara)

The growth that I have seen or experienced in myself, that's because very early on in my career since 1982 or 83, I was able to look at my students and see them and see how they were responding to me. See them as an audience, see them as my participants and how they were responding to what I was doing. And so that is why I always when I see a new teacher teaching, I say, "You're not aware of your audience. You're teaching to the wall. You're not teaching to the people that you have in front of you," and that to me is so so very important. If I have become accomplished as an English instructor, which I think I am because I'm able to teach teachers, I'm able to teach students, I think it's because very early on I was able to see what response I was getting or not from my students... You know the audience could be your students, but your audience could also be the teachers that you're working with and seeing how they're reacting many times (Rosario).

I always remind myself that not everything you say will be heard. Don't feel irritated if you have to repeat, don't expect that the students will do homework every day. These kinda things that only years of experience can bring. I sometimes I hear the conversation, they don't do anything at home. Well, of course that's true, and I know how frustrating it is. But then I wanna say look, don't expect them to do that. That's a given. Only the selected few will do that, and yes, not everything sinks. What we teach, not everything will be retained, so that's something really valuable, and I think this idea of students not being focused and not paying attention has increased since the time cell phones became... since life thrust in these children's hands cell phones, and I have learned how to be really more patient with this (Timofey).

### **Rosario's Anecdotes Outside of the U.S.A.**

#### **Anecdote 1: An Incredible Challenge in Argentina**

I started my first job as an English teacher in Argentina was in an evening school, a school for adult people who worked every all day long and then went in the evening to school to try to finish high school. I was fresh out of university, and I thought, "ohh because I am so good. I'm gonna just walk into this classroom and everybody's just gonna speak English to me." I could not have been more wrong. I walked in, and I had veterans of the Malvinas Falklands War in my classroom who didn't want to learn English because they hated England. You remember the Falklands War, right? I had people who had been working in a factory 10 hours and could not wait to get to bed. I had people who had not even finished elementary school, so they're reading and writing skills were so poor. So, I walked in the first day and my class was a disaster. But a disaster, Roseli!!! A complete disaster!!! I think I left the school crying because I said, what am I gonna do? I didn't

sleep that night and I was teaching twice a week, And I remember walking back to my house at 11:00 o'clock at night after teaching because the school was until 11:15 and thinking this is wrong. This is not what I trained to do. And so, in the next month, I changed my entire perspective of teaching because it was clear to me that I could not teach people like that. My ideas about teaching that are brought from the university were for people with a high degree of literacy, high degree of motivation and high degree of learning, not for the people I was teaching. And that was my very first lesson. And I am so glad that it was early on and that it was tough because thanks to that, I learned that you need to look at the people that you're teaching. And you need to see what they're doing and how they're responding to you. Because of that, I changed everything. And by the end of that school year, I had those students learning with me much fewer objectives than I thought they would be learning, but they were learning. They were happy in my class, and they were coming along with me. And so, when I finished that school year, I felt very rewarded. But it had been cruel. It took me many nights of not sleeping and many nights of thinking. What can I do? What can I do? And when I realized that I was able to look at them and see them and see what they needed and see how much they could give me. What I was asking them to do was just not possible. They couldn't do what I wanted. They needed to do what they could. And then they did it. And so, they didn't learn as much as I wanted, but they learned. And so that is why I consider myself accomplished because I was able to look at the students and always see whether they were responding to me or not. And that is a very great learning lesson for a teacher, I think. Because there was a challenge. Yeah, there was an incredible challenge. It was in Argentina. So, you know, it didn't matter. We are all nonnative speakers there. My supervisors were too. It

was just that I felt the opportunity to learn is there for the teacher who wants to see it and sees it, and that is what it is to be a teacher. If you're teaching to the wall, you should not be in the classroom. And I always said the day that I do not want to be in the classroom and look at the students and see what they need that day. I should leave and... but the day has never come so... (Rosario).

### **Anecdote 2: Not Being Hired in Japan**

When I was in Japan, my husband, who is NOT an English teacher, was teaching English in an English school with a job and everything. And I wanted a job in that same school, so, I went and applied for a position. And they interviewed me. They gave me a teaching demo on the spot, you know, like I didn't know what the topic was. They said you teach this, you have 15 minutes, blah, blah. I did it. I finished the demonstration in front of the three directors who said, "Ohh, that's wonderful. We would love to hire you." I give him my passport in those days, my passport was an Argentinian passport. They looked at my passport and they said, "You're from Argentina. We can't hire you. You're not a native speaker." This was in 1995, but my surprise was I went through an interview. I went through a teaching demo, and they never thought I was a nonnative speaker. They thought I was American when they saw my passport. I mean, of course, with my accent, right? They saw my passport then... Ohh, they realized that I was not American. They didn't give me the job, Roseli. Well, I think that discrimination was because of my passport, because my nonnative status didn't bother them because they didn't even realize that I was a nonnative speaker. It was just because they said no, they couldn't hire me with an Argentine passport if I went today, they would hire me. It was... It was just that in their school they could not say they had a teacher who was not American. I needed to

be American. It was the school said they were hiring only American or British, but not other countries who spoke English (Rosario).