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Abstract

This study examines NNESTs' professional identities as classroom teachers by analyzing NNESTS' perceptions of their strengths and challenges. The study contributes to NNESTs forming their professional identity by recognizing, developing, and contesting authoritative discourse. A basic qualitative research design is employed to analyze the interview data. Participants are five NNESTs who teach in American classrooms. Three focused themes are identified; linguistic competence, cross-cultural competence, and pedagogical competence. NNEST superiority fallacy is added as the fourth theme. Additionally, the study briefly compares strengths and challenges of U.S. versus foreign graduates. NNESTs' strengths and challenges are reported in line with other NNEST researchers: dual-language acquisition and cross-cultural experience, grammar knowledge, linguistic theories, and coping strategies as strengths, poor command of English language, lack of sociocultural strategies, and lack of confidence as weaknesses. New findings include NNESTs' confidence as effective teachers with accent, intellectual competence in theories, and stronger credentials. This study asserts that the NNESTs' multilingual and multicultural backgrounds can become valuable assets with less linguistic prejudice, and the need for a policy that provides the benchmark to measure their credentials rather than depending on biased assumptions. Suggestions to shape NNESTs' professional identity are provided.

Keywords: professional identity, NNEST, linguistic prejudice, confidence with accent, foreign graduates

Identidad Profesional del Profesorado (NNES) en Aulas de Cultura y Lengua Diversas

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Resumen

Este estudio examina las identidades profesionales de los profesores angloparlantes no nativos (NNEST) por medio del análisis de sus percepciones acerca de sus fortalezas y desafíos. El estudio contribuiría a la formación de la identidad profesional de NNEST al reconocer, desarrollar, y disputar el discurso autoritario. Se emplea un diseño básico de investigación cualitativa. Los participantes son cinco NNEST de aulas americanas. Se identifican tres temas centrales; la competencia lingüística, intercultural, y pedagógica. Se añade la falacia de la superioridad de los NNEST como cuarto tema. Además, el estudio compara brevemente las fortalezas y los desafíos de los graduados estadounidenses versus los extranjeros. Las fuerzas y los desafíos de NNEST están en línea con los resultados de otras investigaciones en cuanto a: adquisición de dos idiomas y experiencia intercultural, conocimiento de la gramática, teorías lingüísticas y estrategias de manejo situacional como fortalezas; dominio bajo del lenguaje inglés, carencias de estrategias socioculturales y falta de confianza como debilidades. Los nuevos resultados incluyen la confianza de los NNEST como profesores eficientes con acentos, competencias intelectuales, en teorías y credenciales más fuertes. Este estudio afirma que los antecedentes multilingües y multiculturales pueden ser ventajas valiosas con menos prejuicios lingüísticos, y la necesidad de una política que provea el punto de referencia para medir las credenciales en vez de depender en las suposiciones prejuiciadas. Se aportan sugerencias para formar la identidad profesional de los NNEST.

Palabras clave: identidad profesional, NNEST, prejuicio lingüístico, confianza con acento, graduados extranjeros.

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I n order to understand teaching and learning, we need to understand teachers. We need "a clearer sense of cultural, political, and individual identities which teachers claim or which are assigned to them" (Varghese, Morgan, Johnson, & Johnson, 2005, p. 22), in order to understand teachers. A majority of trained English as a second or foreign language teachers in the world, about seventy-five percent, are NNESTs (Ma, 2012; Braine, 1999; Canagarajah, 1999). Non-native English speakers represent "40 to 70 percent of the North-American student teacher population" (Llurda, 2005 as cited in Moussu, 2006, p. 1).

Despite the increasing number of NNESTs prepared to teach in America and equal-opportunity policies for NNESTs, many school administrators use 'unaccented English' (Lippi-Green, 1997) as a major decisive criterion in hiring teachers. In the context of pervasiveness of native speaker authority discourse, the researches on NNESTs' identity issues need to contribute to the formation of their professional identity (Braine, 1999; Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999; Moussu & Llurda, 2008). Some publications address the native/nonnative speaker dichotomy as it relates to the disempowerment of NNESTs (Amin, 1997; Morita, 2004; Rajagopalan, 2005). The questions raised about disempowerment of NNESTs are: Can the fact that one displays pronunciation without accent be translated into a successful teacher criterion? Are there any objective criteria to measure NNESTs' professional qualification other than their accent and race (Clark & Paran, 2007)? Can the richness of NNESTs' backgrounds and experiences actually contribute to their professional identity?

Other works reflect on ways to modify teacher education programs to better serve the needs of NNESTs (Holliday, 2005; Kamhi-Stein, 1999; Medgyes, 1994, 2001). As Liu (1998) argues, even though nearly 40 percent of the students enrolled yearly in TESOL programs in North American universities are NNESTs, teacher education programs have failed to accommodate their needs. Similarly, Canagarajah (1999) asks some disturbing questions about the purposes for which universities train 'periphery' scholars for language teaching, while also subscribing to the native speaker fallacy that places NNESTs in a position of deficient professional identity.

In this study, the dichotomy of strengths and weaknesses of the NNESTs is examined. With that dichotomy data, the study explores how NNESTs develop their professional identities as teachers in America (Golombek & Jordan, 2005; Pavlenko, 2003), and how they could contribute to education of the linguistically and culturally diverse students in America. The researchers intentionally visited the NNESTs' 'disempowerment' questions and their contributing features while analyzing the data.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to examine NNESTs' professional identities as classroom teachers in the United States of America by analyzing NNESTS' perceptions of their strengths and challenges. This study would like to help the NNESTs form their professional identity by recognizing, acknowledging, and contesting "ideological discourses that position them as second-rate professionals" (Reis, 2011, p. 32).

Research Questions

Two main research questions guide the exploration of identifying and evolving NNESTs' professional identity along with the design of this study and the choice of methods used for data collection and analysis:

1. What are the perceived strengths of NNESTs in the U.S.?
2. What are the perceived challenges of NNESTs in the U.S.?

These two research questions are analyzed in terms of four themes, 1) linguistic competence, 2) cross-cultural competence, and 3) pedagogical competence. The NEST superiority fallacy is added as the fourth theme. Although it is not a part of the research questions, it is a very significant theme when dealing with NNESTs. Since three out of five participants of this study are foreign graduate NNESTs, the study briefly reports their strengths and challenges compared to the U.S. graduates.

Theoretical Background

Native English speaking teachers (NESTs) usually have been validated as role models for teaching the English language and content areas. That validation is called native speaker superiority fallacy (Phillipson, 1992). NESTs are often given preference in employment (Braine, 1999; Clark & Paran, 2007; Cook, 2005). The myth that NESTs are better qualified teachers than NNESTs, however, has been challenged (Phillipson, 1992) and questioned (Amin, 1997; Kirkpatrick, 2006). Kirkpatrick (2007) uses a phrase, "linguistically prejudiced" (p. 5) to express racial and ethnic prejudice toward NNESTs (in Reis, 2011). Effective teaching is often evaluated by sociocultural and linguistic perceptions rather than actual teaching experience, professional preparation, cross-cultural competence, content knowledge, and pedagogy (Kirkpatrick, 2006). For example, many students resent being taught by an NNEST even after the teacher proves her or his competence (Maum, 2002). A study conducted in Korea examined the effects of NNESTs' accents on their students' listening comprehension (Butler, 2007). The study did not find any difference in student outcomes based on the kind of accents used in the instructional practice. However, these same students expressed preference in regards to the instructor who was a native English speaker rather than a NNEST (Butler, 2007). The establishment of their own identity and authority as effective teachers is challenging for NNESTs. NNESTs with a deficient command of English, however, may have hidden advantages regarding their strengths and positive attributes (Medgyes, 1994). NNESTs can provide a good learner model for the ELLs in their classrooms; they may teach language-learning strategies more effectively; "be more empathetic to the needs and problems of learners; and make use of the learners' mother tongue" (Medgyes, 1994, p. 51).

Other researchers support NNESTs as effective teachers as well (Llurda, 2004; Maum, 2002). One advantage is that most NNESTs, especially those who are educated in the host country, may have adequate or native-like levels of English proficiency that are combined with their bilingualism (Moussu & Llurda, 2008). Davies (2001) argues that NNESTs can become native-like in the areas of "the intuition, grammar, spontaneity, creativity,

pragmatic control, and interpreting quality" (in Moussu & Llurda, 2008, pp. 315-316). Selecting one prestige dialect, for example, American Standard English, as the norm ignores NNESTs' intelligibility in the areas of linguistically and cross-culturally relevant teaching strategies (Derwing & Munro, 1997; Kachru, 1985). Phillipson (1996) questions NESTs' superiority because NNESTs can "have insight into the linguistic and cultural needs of their learners, and detailed awareness of how their mother tongue and the target language differ, and of what is difficult for learners" (p. 27), which NESTs may not have.

Another unique advantage NNESTs have is their grammar knowledge. According to Madrid and Perez Canado (2004), NNESTs can provide "scientific explanations for the constructions and uses of the English language" (p. 128), which most NESTs are not able to do for their ELLs. ELLs tend to focus on grammatical accuracy more than on communicative fluency. These ELLs often understand the concepts better with grammatical explanation of the difficult vocabulary and sentence structures. NNESTs can provide such grammatical support to their ELLs.

The advantages of NNESTs are accompanied by challenges that may lessen their effectiveness as teachers (Ma, 2012). A majority of NNESTs adopt a less flexible approach to teaching (Medgyes, 2001), and focus on grammatical accuracy (Subtirelu, 2011). NNESTs' most significant challenge is related to the English language command (Madrid & Perez Canado, 2004). NNESTs' language command challenges may be due to the way they have learned English. Because NNESTs often learn English through books rather than through language immersion, they are likely to experience problems with pronunciation, colloquial expressions, and contextual expression (Madrid & Perez Canado, 2004). Accent is another challenge for NNESTs, and various researchers have linked this to perceptions of NNESTs as less qualified teachers (Maum, 2002; Lippi-Green, 1997; Canagarajah, 1999).

Although NNESTs could utilize their own multi-lingual experiences to help create a global community of learners, many do not have the confidence needed to utilize this valuable asset with their students. NNESTs' lack of confidence may come from their limited access to teaching resources and strategies, poor command of English, and accent. However, NNESTs' lack

of confidence could come from the perception of being considered less qualified by students, colleagues, and/or administrators (McDonald & Kasule, 2005).

In the analysis of studies on language teacher identity, Varghese et al. (2005) identify three areas central to current understandings of NNESTs' professional identity formation. The first area refers to identity as crucially related to social, cultural, and political contexts (Duff & Uchida, 1997; Toohey, 2000). The second area refers to identity as constructed and negotiated through language as discourse (Weedon, 1997). The third area refers to identity that is not fixed, stable, or unitary but instead multiple, shifting, and in conflict (Norton, 2000). These three areas become central to theorizing professional identity of NNESTs who are learning English and teaching at the same time.

This study aims to empower and support NNESTs so they can reconceptualize their professional identity in Varghese et al's (2005) three areas to be academically, socially and culturally confident teachers in linguistically and culturally diverse American classrooms (Reis, 2011). Researchers also want to explore the similarities and differences between NNESTs who are U.S. graduates and foreign graduates as it affects their strengths and challenges since the number of foreign-graduate NNESTs in the U.S. is increasing (Rao, 2002).

Methods

Research Design

Following Green and Preston (2005) who state that the choice of methods in a research study should be needs-based, three areas are considered in this study's design: (1) research questions, (2) audience, and (3) relevance of research to personal experience and training (Creswell, 2012). The research questions of this study can be best answered using a basic qualitative research paradigm because participants' experiences vary and because capturing the variety of participants' perspectives will assist researchers in understanding the issues of NNESTs (Patton, 2002). In addition, according to Creswell (2012), a qualitative research study allows exploration of a

phenomenon from the perspective of those who are involved in it. In this study, the two researchers take the roles of participants, interpreters, and advocates as they identify strengths and weaknesses of NNESTs based on the grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Participants

A purposeful sampling technique is used to assist with the selection of individuals who are able to provide the researchers with rich information regarding the issue under investigation (Patton, 2002). Five NNESTs were selected to participate in this study. While this sample size may be considered small, as Patton (2002) points out, the size of the sample in qualitative work is not as important as the selection of information-rich cases.

   To select study participants, the researchers contacted public school districts in St. Louis, Missouri, in order to identify NNESTs. The participants in this study were selected based on the following criteria: (1) non-native English-speakers, (2) educators currently teaching in the U.S., and (3) voluntary participants in the study. There were thirteen NNESTs who met the first two of the three criteria above; the researchers contacted them. Three of them agreed to participate in the study. Both researchers were added as participants since they also fit the selection criteria.

   All five participants came to the U.S. as adults and speak English with an accent. Three out of five are leading teachers, one elementary and two secondary schools where more than 20 percent of the student population is ELLs. The fourth participant is a TESOL professor. The fifth one is the instructional coordinator and coach at an elementary school where 25 percent of students are ELLs. Regarding their oral proficiency levels, it appears that they are intermediate to superior according to the guidelines of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) (1996). There are two participants whose English proficiency levels are superior, one participant advanced-low and two participants intermediate-high. Among the five participants, two are U.S. trained NNESTs and three are foreign graduate NNESTs; four participants have advanced degrees, and one is seeking a master's degree. Their oral proficiency levels, i.e., intermediate high to superior, ensure that they can communicate with

students using English as their teaching medium (Hadley, 2001).

Participant 1 (P1) is a female in her late 50s. Her native language is Bosnian. She teaches Physics in a high school with ELLs, many of who speak Bosnian. She taught in Bosnia for a number of years before coming to America, and uses Bosnian (ELLs' L1) when introducing new concepts. All of her education was completed in her native country. Her English language proficiency level is intermediate high. She is a NNEST foreign graduate.

Participant 2 (P2) is a female in her early 50s. She teaches Biology in a high school with ELLs. She is originally from Eritrea. She is enrolled in a graduate program. Her language proficiency level is intermediate high. She is an NNEST foreign graduate.

Participant 3 (P3) is a female in her early 40s. Her native language is Mandarin. She is originally from China. She is a special education teacher in an elementary school with ELLs. All of her teacher education training was completed in America. Her English proficiency level is advanced low. She is a U.S. graduate NNEST.

Participant 4 (P4) is a female in her 50s, and she is one of the researchers for this study. Her native language is Korean. She is a teacher educator with a doctoral degree in education. Her language proficiency level is superior. She is a U.S. graduate NNEST.

Participant 5 (P5) is a female in her 30s. She is the other researcher for this study. Her native language is Russian, and she speaks four other languages including English. She is currently pursuing her Ph.D. in TESOL. Her language proficiency level is superior. She is a foreign graduate NNEST.

Data Sources

In this study, interview is the main source of data collection used to capture teachers' perspectives regarding their strengths and challenges. Using open-ended questions (Creswell, 2012), the researchers provide study participants with the structure that allows them to share their extensive views. According to Merriam (2009), the open-ended question format "allows the researcher to

respond to the situation at hand" (p. 90). The interview questions help keep the interview on the topic (Appendix A).

Interview Protocol

Stake (2010) suggests no more than eight questions to be used during a one-hour interview to elicit an appropriate amount of information for each research question. The interview protocol of this study has eight questions. For example, question items two and three are designed to examine NNESTs' strengths of bilingual advantage, and linguistic and pedagogical competence. Items four and five prompt study participants to share their challenges in the areas of accent, language proficiency, and NEST superiority fallacy. Items six and seven ask participants to identify strengths as well as challenges of their teaching strategies, and items one and eight are used to explore the differences and the similarities between the U.S. graduates and the foreign graduates. Each of the eight question items has probing questions in case more information is needed (Appendix A).

Data Collection and Analysis

Upon receipt of e-mail confirmations from those who wanted to participate in the study, researchers continued communication via e-mails to establish time and locations for the interviews. The researchers made arrangements to accommodate participants' time and location preferences regarding each of the data collection steps. With the participants' permission, all interviews were recorded to "insure that everything said is preserved for analysis" (Merriam, 2009, p. 109) for about an hour long. An open-coding system was employed for the textual and categorical analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Once the data was collected, researchers prepared it for analysis by transcribing and organizing it. The coding process started with the coding of the first interview transcript. During coding, each of the two researchers read the transcript line by line with the notes of the researchers' thoughts in the right margins, divided the texts into meaningful units or categories, and assigned codes to these units (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Both researchers agreed to use in-vivo coding when participants' words were used for labeling concepts and phenomenon described. The researchers also used

their own words when they described code titles applying their knowledge of concepts and research on this topic (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Upon completion of the initial coding of the first transcript, both researchers met and looked at the codes they were assigning to each of the meaningful units within the first transcript. By comparing and contrasting the assigned codes, the researchers were able to refine their coding approach. When the codes were similar to each other, the researchers discussed the best code title to reflect a given concept. When the code titles were different, researchers shared their thinking and negotiated the code title selection. By negotiating the code titles, researchers were able to refine their coding system, which was then applied to other interview transcripts by each researcher independently. When researcher 1 and researcher 2 coded all of the transcripts, both researchers met to look at the coding of all the transcripts. At this time, researchers began looking at the themes that were common across the transcripts. Using constant comparative method, the researchers were examining each individual code to identify to which theme the code belonged. By negotiating the themes in which individual codes fit best, the researchers were able to group the data into four categories. These four categories are supported by the literature dealing with the strengths and challenges of NNESTs (Maum, 2002; Medgyes, 2001; Ma, 2012; Phillipson, 1996; Derwing & Munro, 1997; Kachru, 1985; Madrid & Perez Canado, 2004). Three competence categories were identified: 1) linguistic competence, 2) cross-cultural competence, and 3) pedagogical competence. Native speaker superiority fallacy that was obviously reported by the participants was added as the fourth category (See Tables 1 and 2).

Results with Interpretation

Research Question 1. What are NNESTs' perceived strengths?

Linguistic competence. Interviewed NNESTs appeared to be aware of their linguistic strengths. Grammar and vocabulary knowledge along with listening and vocabulary skills were commonly identified as the strongest areas for NNESTs. "Strength I have is listening skill. I learned how to listen better than native speakers" (P1). "I am pretty good at reading. I could guess

vocabulary words in reading text easily because of my multilingual backgrounds" (P4). One interviewee pointed out how her knowledge of linguistic concepts could be helpful when teaching ELLs. "My grammar is stronger than that of NESTs. I can explain why the errors happen to the ELLs in my classroom" (P3). "Knowing more than one language is helpful because you can associate with what you have already acquired, and transfer more concepts from different languages" (P5). These ideas were reiterated by another participant, "I know two language systems and understand which English sounds may be difficult to the ELLs. I have 7 ELLs of 20 students. Mandarin does not have the /f/ phoneme, nor the perfect tense (P3). Such responses demonstrated participants' awareness of how linguistic knowledge could be transferred from the known language to the new language.

Cross-cultural competence. The second category recognized during the coding process was cross-cultural competence. One participant reported, "I can understand the ELLs better whether they are from my culture or not. ELLs identify themselves with me better" (P3). This is an indication that the concept of role models may be central to the relationship between NNESTs and ELLs. NNESTs understand the challenges of acquiring English because of their own personal language acquisition experience, and can share the strategies that work well for them. NNESTs can present themselves as real examples of successful language learners whose strategies can be replicated by their students, so they can lead the learners to academic and personal success.

Pedagogical competence. The third category developed by clustering initial codes deals with pedagogical strategies used by the interviewees in their instructional practices. One participant (P5), who did not see any differences in instructional strategies used by NNESTs and NESTs, said, "It depends on their training." Another interviewee (P4) pointed out, "I am stronger in terms of pedagogy. I utilize more than one way of teaching and pull examples in a way for the students to understand." One participant reiterated this advantage saying, "Teaching experience in different countries helps me develop multiple teaching strategies. I choose the proper ones depending on the situations and students' needs" (P5).

P1 and P3 talked about the coping strategies to compensate for challenges they experienced. P1 said, "I provide accommodations. I repeat it and spell

it. How many points is it worth? I say fifteen. I say one, five, not five, zero." P3 stated, "Most of my ELLs do not have accurate pronunciation; I have to use the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) to try to help them articulate the sounds."

Another important concept within the pedagogy category deals with lesson preparation. NNESTs put a lot of time into planning their instruction to insure success. P4 stated, "I spend sometimes 20 hours for one class. I record my presentations, and even include humor intentionally." The other element mentioned as a prerequisite of success is the use of multiple teaching aids. "I prepare visual aids such as video clips and PPT when teaching essential concepts. I use them to compensate for my accent" (P4).

NEST superiority fallacy. The forth category deals with the NEST superiority fallacy and NNESTs' credibility. This concept is of interest in the area of linguistics and sociopolitics. One participant (P3) cited a district policy as one thing that could help improve attitudes towards NNESTs. She acknowledged, "The more NNESTs in the district, the better chance the district may show a fair policy and attitude toward us. Other teachers and the principal would support us better." This quote not only shows the evidence that coworkers and administrators should be better supporters for NNESTs, but also it indicates that current policies regarding NNESTs are unfair and/or unclear.

NEST superiority fallacy could be related to time and to personal and professional qualities associated with NNESTs. P5 shared, "NEST superiority fallacy is there, but once NNESTs focus on work ethics, pedagogy, collaborative work, content knowledge, and other valuable qualities, the fallacy assumption disappears." This suggests that the NEST superiority should be a concept used as a first resort when little information is known about the NNESTs. Learning more about NNESTs may change first impressions and refocus attention on quality rather than on false and stereotypical assumptions about NNESTs (Table 1).

Table 1
NNESTs' Perceived Strengths Reported by Participating Teachers

Categories	Perceived Strengths
Linguistic Competence	• Being bilingual and multilingual • Knowledge of linguistics, e.g., phonology, grammar, vocabulary, reading and listening comprehension skills • Using L1 for explanation • Understanding ELLs' various accents • Cognitive intellectuality
Sociocultural Competence	• Understanding ELLs' cultures • Role model for ELLs • Open-mindedness to other cultures • Better rapport with ELLs • Understanding ELLs' challenges in their lives
Pedagogical Strategies	• Multitude teaching strategies to meet ELLs' needs based on their language acquisition experiences • Repeating the oral utterance using other aids (writing) • Use IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) to compensate accent • Mimicking NESTs speaking and colloquial language • Being aware of the errors and correct them • Take time to prepare the lessons • Utilizing cross-cultural experiences in teaching • Using visual and audio aids, grouping strategies
Native Speaker Superiority Fallacy	• More NNESTs to have a more fair policy • Support from other NEST colleagues and principals • Strong credentials in work ethics, pedagogy, content knowledge, problem solving, and etc.

Research Question 2. What are NNESTs' perceived challenges?

Linguistic competence. Under the category of linguistic competence, one interviewee (P4) stated, "Oral fluency is challenging like vowel production, intonation and idioms. Writing, especially academic writing is my challenge." Being very critical of her skills, this participant was very specific when naming her area of challenge, e.g., vowel articulation. Speaking was named as an area of difficulty due to the colloquial nature of social language for NNESTs. "The challenge is speaking in day-to-day conversation and colloquial language to explain concepts. It may not be weakness but difference, but students may see that as weakness" (P5).

Accent was presented as another challenging concept. "English intonation is difficult. Students do not understand me because of that. I repeat and use gestures. I cannot change my accent" (P2). "People assume that I am not as good as NESTs due to the accent. My challenge is to prove them who I am and what I can do" (P3). Accent issues mentioned were also expressed in relation to the age they arrived in America. "The accent depends on when we came to America. It is age attributed" (P4). When talking about 'acquired versus learned' language skills, interviewees also brought up issues related to speaking skills. "Speaking, of course, is more natural to NESTs. My speaking is like you are reading a book. Speaking is an ability that is acquired. I do not use slang in a way how other teachers use it" (P3).

Cross-cultural competence. Within the category of cross-cultural factors, one interviewee responded, "Since I was brought up with British English, the pronunciation and spelling of American English are hard to understand. 'It is /hot/', to me it's the hat that you wear. In America, /hot/ means it's hot in temperature or spice" (P2). Having exposure to English within the context of English-learning was another element stressed by the study participants. "I feel a bit anxious when I teach the native speaking students and some ELLs who have spent more time in English-speaking environments" (P2).

Interviewees mentioned the quality of contextual resources used for teaching English overseas. P3 shared, "Among NNESTs, there is a difference in preparing resources. Foreign graduates have limited resources

for listening and speaking, and exposure to English language and culture." The issues of confidence are contributing factors to how NNESTs feel about their cross-cultural competence. "I am self-conscious about mistakes when speaking and writing. I have low confidence and feel anxious and inadequate" (P2). This might be rooted in the fact that native speakers judge NNESTs by their language abilities. "It is hard to be accepted by the students, but it is easier to deal with the students than adults. Adults such as teachers, parents and administrators are less patient and more judgmental" (P3). P5's statement shows how NNESTs should deal with the concept of acceptance, "You should be comfortable and confident with your accent." P4 added, "I am confident about preparing contextual resources because of my bilingual and bicultural experiences and competence. Challenges are becoming strengths" (P4).

Pedagogical competence. When discussing pedagogical competence, interviewees focused on the lack of communicative teaching strategies, which, together with previously mentioned lack of exposure to authentic materials, caused difficulties. "Teaching methods used in my native country are not communicative and do not allow for practice in speaking" (P2). "I have learned a lot of theories at the teacher education programs in my country, but not much on teaching the communicative language in the classrooms" (P1). "It is not only a problem of my language proficiency, but also I am lack of knowledge about school culture. The school system is very different from ours" (P1). Expressing doubts regarding the ability and competency of teaching native English speakers attests to low confidence and possible lack of strategies needed to deal with challenges NNESTs might experience in mainstream American classrooms.

NEST superiority fallacy. Under NEST superiority fallacy category, one interviewee mentioned assumptions held by native English speakers. "At first sight, people automatically have the assumptions by the names and accent that I do not have intellectual capability and language competence" (P5). These assumptions sometimes lead to situations where NNESTs don't feel confident. "The district people need to accept NNESTs with the same attitude they have toward NESTs. Administrators do not believe I can do a good job. They correct my English in front of the students" (P3). "Not all NES colleagues are open-minded. They make assumption that the NNESTs

are not as good" (P1). These statements are examples of attitudes that some NESTs may have towards NNESTs (Table 2).

Table 2
NNESTs' Perceived Challenges Reported by Participating Teachers

Categories	Perceived Challenges
Linguistic Competence	• Academic writing with lengthy sentences, without natural flow • Writing is harder because I cannot use non-verbal language • Social and colloquial language/ speaking • No fluency in speaking – bookish nature of conversation • Speaking in a topic that the NNESTs are not familiar with • Accent and intonation • More challenge to Foreign graduated NNESTs • Slangs, idioms, special topics like sports, music, arts are challenges to foreign graduates
Sociocultural Competence	• Challenges with British English • Not contextual • Anxiety to teach native speaking students • Lack of resources connected to the target culture • Self-conscious about mistakes • NESTs are not patient or try to understand NNESTs • Easier to deal with the students than with the adults at school
Pedagogical Strategies	• Weak command of English prohibit delivering lesson effectively • Lack of communicative approach skills • Weak at hands-on, practice-oriented methodologies • Weak at preparing resources • Lack of the target culture knowledge to adopt to the teaching strategies
Native Speaker Superiority Fallacy	• Fallacy assumption about effective communication without evidence • Fallacy assumption about intellectual capability • Discrimination against NNESTs • Low expectations from students, colleagues, administrators including the district personnel • Low self-confidence • Identity crisis – "They want me to be like NESTs."

Foreign versus U.S. educated NNESTs.   Similarities and differences between foreign and U.S. NNEST graduates were explored. One foreign graduate (P2) shared, "U.S. graduates are stronger in speaking; their pronunciation is without much accent. The younger you came, the better." This comment supports the linguistic strengths of U.S. graduates who came here at young ages. The participants expressed ideas regarding the differences between the U.S. and foreign graduate NNESTs in terms of their focus on theories and traditional grammar methods. "Foreign graduate NNESTs are stronger in theories of linguistics, especially grammar" (P4). A foreign graduate (P2) said, "Because of the limited resources for speaking and listening in my country, NNESTs tend to use the traditional grammar methods to teach English language." "In many foreign countries, they focus on grammar. The U.S. graduates use colloquial English language, and the foreign graduates use more formal, grammatically correct but bookish language" (P5). Looking at the cross-cultural strengths, interviewees shared how the amount of culturally relevant information would differ within classrooms taught by U.S. prepared NNESTs and those taught by foreign NNESTs. "The U.S. graduate NNESTs bring more culturally relevant resources to the class that they have learned in their teacher education programs than the foreign graduates" (P2). When it comes to instructional and assessment practices, foreign graduate NNESTs also seem to have certain disadvantages. "The foreign graduates do not have lots of knowledge about hands-on strategies, contextual and cultural resources; we are weak at assessments" (P1). Based on the information shared by participants, some of their difficulties within classrooms could result from how language learning and teacher preparation are delivered in their country of origin (Table 1 and 2).

Discussion

There are two research questions in this study. They are: 1). What are the perceived strengths of NNESTs in the U.S.? and 2) what are the perceived challenges of NNESTs in the U.S.? The researchers identified the four common themes or categories, i.e., 1) linguistic competence, 2) cross-cultural competence, 3) pedagogical competence and 4), native speaker superiority fallacy. When the results were reported, these four categories

were used under each of the two Research Questions. The findings of this investigative study show that NNESTs have distinctive strengths and weaknesses (Jenkins, 2011) influencing their effectiveness in the U.S. classrooms.

As for the NNESTs' strengths (Research Question 1), the participating NNESTs reported that they have better cross-cultural and language acquisition experiences, and pedagogical theories that help ELLs acquire the target language and content. Being able to speak two or more languages is a strength, not a deficit. The findings also support that NNESTs can be role models to ELLs; NNESTs are more empathetic and compassionate to them. These results echo previous research studies, such as Kamhi-Stein (1999), Llurda and Huguet (2003), Medgyes (1994), Moussu (2006), Reves & Medgyes (1994), Ma (2012), and Tang (1997).

In regard to the challenges of NNESTs (Research Question 2), lack of English language proficiency was cited most (Reves & Medgyes, 1994; Ma, 2012). The challenges reported by the participants in linguistic competence include academic writing, colloquial and idiomatic expression in social context, fossilized accent, bookish nature of speaking, and difficulty about current topics such as politics, sports, and arts. In the pedagogy category, the three participating teachers (P1, P2, and P3) state that they have difficulty preparing contextual resources relevant to the local culture (Medgyes, 1994) and in developing hands-on activities. This is especially true for foreign graduate NNESTs who are accustomed to using the prescribed curriculum in their native countries.

There were new findings from this study about the NNESTs' strengths. The results from this study showed that the NNESTs' strengths included the participants' bilingual competence, cross-cultural experiences, and advanced degrees. It seems that while NNESTs are acquiring a new language, they continue to develop their cognitive domains (Cummins, 2000) and teaching credentials more than the monolingual NESTs. As a result of this cognitive capacity, NNESTs can prepare more insightful and creative lesson activities (Medgyes, 2001) and higher-order thinking materials (Table 1). One of the participants (P5) said that her teaching pedagogies might be better when compared to NESTs because of her teaching experiences in many different

countries. All five participants in this study are seeking or have acquired advanced degrees, i.e., master and doctoral degrees, as well as state teaching certificates. Their study for advanced degrees could have also fostered effective teaching behaviors and strong theoretical knowledge. Even though further study on the credentials is needed, perhaps NNESTs are more inclined to seek additional credentials.

The foreign graduates indicated lack of field experiences in their own countries. Some of them had only one-month or less field experience in their four-year teacher education programs. They also felt challenged in the area of self-confidence because of deficiencies in their command of language and "fallacy" assumptions from others (Moussu, 2006). These challenges could impact their teaching. NNESTs usually display low confidence, but at the same time, P4 and P5 in this study reported that their linguistic challenges did not hinder their ability to teach in U.S. classrooms (McDonald & Kasule, 2005) due to their lesson preparation and multilingual and multicultural experiences.

One participant (P1) in this study shares the same L1, Bosnian, with her ELLs. She is able to code-switch to Bosnian with her ELLs when she introduces difficult concepts (Ma, 2012). Using L1 as a resource is a great instructional tool as Echevarria, Vogt, and Short (2008) suggest in their SIOP Component 5, Interaction, i.e., giving ample opportunities for students to clarify in their L1. In Gómez, Freeman and Freeman's (2005) study, bilingual immersion instruction is supported. Participating students in their study following the dual-language education model have shown higher levels in reading and mathematics (Gómez, Freeman & Freeman, 2005). The dual language education model has not been implemented in the schools in which this study was conducted. However, this small example of using L1 for explaining new concepts is well supported by researchers. NNESTs, however, need more training about the code switch for effective content teaching.

Implication and Future Direction

Knowing the strengths and the challenges of NNESTs is of vital importance not only for the NNESTs themselves, but also for school administrators who make hiring decisions and evaluate the performance of their NNESTs. In

addition, such information may assist school leaders in providing proper support for NNESTs in making working experiences more positive.

One unique contribution of this study is that it uncovers and centers on the positive impact that NNESTs could have on interrupting NESTs' superiority fallacy. Both P4 and P5 carry advanced degrees and have superior levels of oral proficiency. P4 has lived in this country for over 32 years, and P5, for about 12 years. P5 speaks more than four languages including English. Both of them consider their competence in academic content, pedagogical strategies, linguistics, and cross-cultural contexts to be as good as NESTs even with their accents.

The results from the other three participants (P1, P2, and P3) are supported by the general findings of other empirical researches (Canagarajah, 1999; Lippi-Green, 1997; Llurda, 2004; Maum, 2002; Moussu, 2006). These three participants have not reached the superior level in their oral fluency. Awareness of their strengths and weaknesses as NNESTs is not as specific as that of P4 and P5. The three of them are concerned about teaching native speaking students and are not confident yet about themselves as effective teachers in the U.S. classrooms.

Based on the findings from this study and research on NNESTs, the authors would like to conclude with several suggestions to NNESTs and school administrators. As Pavlenko (2003) sees, NNESTs' appropriation of newly imagined identities is an important aspect of a learning journey, and the teacher education programs need to offer identity options that allow NNESTs to imagine themselves as legitimate members of professional communities (Ilieva, 2010). The foreign graduate teachers "displayed multiple and conflicting identities as legitimate speakers" (Ilieva, 2010, p. 349) as classroom teachers of native speaking students.

First, NNESTs should be proactive in classrooms, construct positive professional identities (Ilieva, 2010), and improve their language proficiency. Based on specific diagnosis of their weak areas, the NNESTs need to improve their language proficiency in the diagnosed specific phonemes, competence of certain topics, and academic writing rather than accepting the deficient assumptions. NNESTs need to immerse themselves into the host culture and its contextual resources, and integrate what they

acquire into their teaching practice. School administrators need to establish competency benchmarks, which are based on teaching competence and performance rather than on NNESTs' accent and appearance, so that NNESTs can grow together with the teaching and learning community in America. Our hope for NNESTs is that people in America become aware of NNESTs as educational resources, who can contribute to their understanding of the culturally and linguistically diverse world. Pavlenko (2003) argues that the teacher education programs need to afford the imagination of new teacher identities and suggests that such programs may provide opportunities for NNESTs to develop alternative instructional practices compatible with positively imagined identities. As a result, NNESTs could become more intuitive, spontaneous and creative as well as utilize their linguistic and cross-cultural resources to help our linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms (Davies in Moussu & Llurda, 2008,).

As for the foreign graduates, they may hold entirely different views on how to approach teaching in their professional contexts. U.S. educators need not to push them to the way they think best, i.e., creative inquiry-based instruction vs. prescribed and direct instruction. The foreign graduates are used to the prescribed and direct instruction, which resulted in richness of content and theories in linguistics, but might not be well equipped with contextual pedagogies. It takes time for the foreign graduates to become more proficient in English language, and integrate their richness of content knowledge and theories (product) into the inquiry-based pedagogies (process), with the socioculturally appropriate resources in American classrooms.

This study needs to be replicated and/or expanded to include more participants in diverse educational settings. It was difficult to get volunteers for the study in an area in which there are not many certified NNESTs. Some NNESTs were not sure if their English was good enough to participate in this study even though they had been teaching in American classrooms for a while. Observation data could be added to the interview transcription to determine the actual teaching effectiveness of study participants. A longitudinal study is also recommended so that any change or improvement in the four categories of the study can be measured with more significance. Having NESTs in the study could also provide the data to compare to that of

NNESTs. In addition, researchers would like to stress that while this study was able to shed some light on how NNESTs perceive their strengths and challenges in the American education, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to all NNESTs. First, since participating was voluntary, only women participated in this study, thus only female perspective is brought into this analysis, which may or may not be reflective of the male NNESTs' experience. Second, the nature of qualitative research studies does not suggest generalizability of findings. Therefore, the current research can be viewed as a pilot study of the interview questions or as a preliminary research, which can be replicated with more participants that may represent the norm of NNESTs in America.

Even with its limitations, it is obvious that this study contributes to understanding NNESTs' identity in terms of their strengths and weaknesses, so the other teachers, administrators, students, and parents could hear 'their' voice, utilize their strengths, and support the weak areas by providing mentorship to develop their potentials. The new finding regarding NNESTs' confidence, i.e., testimonials from P4 and P5 with their accents, could encourage other NNESTs who may be struggling to find their professional identity as teachers in the U.S. classrooms. It may take a lot of effort and awareness for NNESTs to reach a superior English proficiency level, and to acquire confidence to become effective teachers in the U.S. classrooms. Accent, if NNESTs reach the superior English proficiency levels, should not be counted as weakness; it should be considered a contribution because the accent represents multilingualism and multiculturalism in this global era. This process of acquiring confidence will be shortened with a more specific policy such as the validated measure of evaluating NNESTs' credentials.

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Appendix
Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about your teacher education program, and where and how were you prepared to become a teacher?
    Possible probe: How did your course work at the university prepare you to teach in a language that is not your first language?

2. How would you describe your strengths as a bilingual/trilingual educator?
    Possible probe: What are your linguistic strengths as a bilingual?

3. In what ways do you think your pedagogical and cross-cultural competence differs from NESTs?
    Possible probe: What are your pedagogical strengths compared to the NESTs? What are your cross-cultural strengths compared to the NESTs?

4. How would you describe some of the challenges you have or had in the past that are related to you being a NNEST in the areas of language proficiency?
    Possible probe: What do you attribute these challenges to?

5. What are challenge you have from your students, parents and administrators toward you as a NNEST?
    Possible probe: What are sociocultural challenges you have when you deal with the students, the parents and administrators? Do you think they practice equity to the NNESTs?

6. What are the compensating strategies to conquer your challenges as a NNEST?

> Possible probe: Can you specify the specific challenges when you teach? How have you conquer the challenges? Any specific coping strategies?

7. In your opinion, what makes an effective NNEST?
   > Possible probe: What are some of the linguistic, cross-cultural and pedagogical characteristics you have that contribute to being an effective educator?

8. What similarities and differences do you see between NNESTs who received their teaching credentials in the U.S. and those who graduated from a foreign university?
   > Possible probe: What could be the strengths and the weaknesses of the foreign graduate NNESTs compared to the U.S. graduates?