

*The development of English teachers' professional identity beyond the NNESTs discourses: the case of Saudi Arabia*

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Abstract

While there has been an increasing number of second language programs taught by both native and non-native speaker teachers, the native speaker NS fallacy that native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) are inherently better teachers is still dominant, hindering the construction of the professional identities of non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs). Several studies have explored the (re)construction of the NNESTs' professional identity in their own country; however, little attention has been given to the professional identity of expatriate NESTs and NNESTs. Giving the fact that English has become the world's language and multilingualism has become the norm in the global society, the NEST/NNEST dichotomy needs to be reconceptualized by taking into account the multiple identities of English teachers within and beyond the NEST and NNEST categories. This qualitative study explores the discursive negotiation of the professional identity of three groups of English teachers (i.e., NESTs, Saudi NNESTs and expatriate NNESTs) using semi-structured interviews with 18 participants in the Preparatory Year Programs in two Saudi universities. The findings suggest that they constructed "self" and "other" using different labels and categories to place themselves in a powerful position in the program.

*Keywords:* English teachers; professional identities; NESTs; NNESTs; dichotomy; Saudi Arabia

## 1. Introduction

The status of English in the world is linked with power and advancement, and therefore it has “the potential to oppress and exclude” (Bright, 2012, p. 2). Moreover, the expansion of English has been viewed as practicing a form of colonialism by serving the agenda of English-speaking countries over those of other countries in the world (Phillipson, 1992). According to Kachru (1985, 1992), the worldwide use of English can be represented as three concentric circles: the inner circle, the outer circle and the expanding circle. The *inner circle* represents the countries where English is used as the first language such as the United States and Australia while the *outer circle* refers to the countries where English is spoken as an official language, such as India and Singapore. The *expanding circle*, on the other hand, is constituted by those countries where English is a foreign language such as China and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), the last of which provides the context for this study. The diversification of language use between and inside these circles has made the English teaching profession quite challenging, without even considering the issues around the non-native status of English teachers. Specifically, understanding of English teachers should not be limited to their NS/NNS status, but their identities should be described within the context in which their speakerhood status has been negotiated throughout their personal and professional trajectories. Being an English teacher in the Saudi context, although it might be somewhat similar to teaching in other contexts, has its own specific features that shape the teachers’ experiences and identity constructions. Therefore, it is highly important to reflect on teachers’ lived experiences in order to understand how they construct their professional identities and how they define themselves and how they are defined by others.

## 2. Literature review

The topic of English teachers’ identity has recently received increased attention in research due to the problematization of the overly simplified binary of NS versus NNS and the intricate connection between professional identity, professional knowledge and experience (Canh, 2013). Despite being a contentious issue, the NS/NNS dichotomy has become one of the key lenses through which the identities of English teachers are studied. This categorical, deficit framing of English language teachers as either NESTs or NNESTs perpetuates the notion of native-speakerism (Holliday, 2005) and the discourses of the NS fallacy (Phillipson, 1992). Such conceptualizations also fail to account for the complex identity formation of English teachers and lead to discriminatory practices in TESOL favoring NESTs and underestimating NNESTs (Kiczkowiak et al., 2016). Therefore, the NNEST movement (Braine, 2010; Mahboob, 2010) has problematized these

discourses and called for the establishment of a more inclusive intellectual platform that resists the persistently narrow monolingual, ethnocentric, "native-speakerist model" in English language teaching (ELT) and offers an inclusive ground for "multilingualism, multiethnicism, and multiculturalism" (Selvi, 2014, p. 2). In support of this movement, a great amount of literature has been devoted to critically reflecting NNESTs' experiences and challenging the sustained power of native English speakers (e.g., journal editors, administrators of test centers, and textbook writers) and NESTs in an attempt to create "a nondiscriminatory professional environment for all TESOL members regardless of native language and place of birth" (Braine, 2010, p. 4).

While these contributions have enhanced the profile of NNESTs in the field of teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL), in some ways, and although it may appear in part contradictory, they have also contributed to stigmatizing both NESTs and NNESTs. Most of these studies have tended to depict NNESTs as disadvantaged teachers and helpless victims of the ideological notion of native-speakerism and, by corollary, have depicted NESTs as "oppressors and the recipients of prejudicial advantage" (Rivers, 2017, p. 76). These publications have been strongly criticized as biased by many scholars (e.g., Houghton & Rivers, 2013; Llorca, 2016; Rivers, 2016, 2017; Selvi, 2010, 2014), because of their disregard for NESTs' personal and professional experiences and other kinds of identity ascriptions and because of their portrayal of NESTs as monolinguals, merely qualified for English language teaching (ELT) by birth. Most of these "critiqued" studies have focused only on one group of English teachers (i.e., NNESTs), and portrayed NESTs and NNESTs as rivals, neglecting the common ground both groups share, which is their interest in ELT. Therefore, there is a gap in the literature and this study attempts to fill it by looking at both groups of English teachers, NESTs and NNESTs.

Furthermore, given the fact that English has become the world's lingua franca and multilingualism has become the norm in the global society, the NEST/NNEST dichotomy needs to be reconceptualized by taking into account the multiple identities of the diverse population of English teachers within and beyond the NEST and NNEST categories. Research on the construction of NNESTs' professional identity has been mostly conducted in inner-circle countries where NESTs were identified as locals and NNESTs as outsiders; however, a number of non-inner circle researchers have tackled the same topic in their own country (e.g., Pablo, 2011; Riyanti, 2017) where NNESTs were perceived as insiders and NESTs as outsiders. Nevertheless, little attention has been given to the professional identity of expatriate NESTs and NNESTs in relation to the local NNESTs. By broadening the scope of inquiry to include these three groups of teachers, this study provides a better understanding of English language teachers' lived experiences under the pervasiveness of NS/NNS discourses in Saudi Arabia.

Through its focus on Saudi Arabia, this study also addresses the current dearth of research on educational contexts beyond the Inner-circle countries, particularly the US (e.g., Reis, 2012). The purposes of this study were to develop a better understanding of the identity formation and experiences of university English teachers in the Saudi PYPs and to investigate whether these experiences and identity negotiations could simply be explained through the lens of the NS/NNS dichotomy. The study aims to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. How do the participants position themselves and how are they positioned by others in the program?
2. How do the participants develop their identity as English teachers?

The concept of *othering* is central to this study as the only way individuals can recognize their own *self* is in relation to others (Bright, 2012).

### 3. Methods

#### 3.1. Participants

Data were gathered from 18 English teachers in two Saudi universities working in prestigious programs known as the Preparatory Year Programs (PYPs). The PYPs are English-medium university foundation years offered to all first-year undergraduates to prepare them for university life and the basic knowledge it requires. English is one of the subjects taught in these programs, and the teachers involved in the delivery of this subject are the focus of this study. Both NSs and NNSs were recruited, and in this latter category, two sub-groups: Saudi teachers and NNSs from elsewhere. This resulted in three groups, six teachers in each. Three groups were selected in an attempt to represent the diverse population of English teachers in the study context.

#### 3.2. Data collection and analysis

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were used as a research instrument and data were gathered mainly from their responses to seven questions, which covered reflections on career experiences; peer relations; in-service benefits and challenges (working conditions); intention to stay with their employer; impacts on teacher identity; and suggestions for improving their current job. As these questions were not specifically about their speakerhood status as NS or NNS, they were meant to open up the conversation to include identities other than the NS/NNS labels in the specific context of the Saudi PYPs. To ensure their full

awareness of their role in the research, participants received an explanatory statement outlining details of the study and information about their participation, and consent forms were obtained from them. To keep the identity of the participants confidential, special labels were assigned to each participant when reporting the data. For example, the label 1ANS was given to participant number one who is a NS from University A, the label 2BNNS was given to participant number two who is a NNS from University B, and the label 3AS was given to participant number three who is Saudi from University A. The numbers (1, 2 and 3) in the labels indicate the order of the interviewees from each university, the letters A and B indicate the two universities from where participants were recruited, and the last part can be NS for native speaker, NNS for non-native speaker, or S for Saudi.

Interviews were conducted in English and transcribed professionally by Pacific Transcription Services and entered the Nvivo 11 program for coding and thematic analysis. Themes were initially coded based on the interview questions which allowed the participants to provide insight into specific topics, and then themes were created based on the most significant issues raised by the interviewees. Each question formed a theme node in Nvivo by using the auto-coding feature, and each participant formed a case node. As some new prominent topics emerged from interviews, I looked for them through running a text search query and coded all their occurrences of at a new node which then became a new theme.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. The self versus the other

Data revealed that the English teachers experienced ongoing negotiation of different and multiple discourses in their jobs based on their individual experiences and personality and their sociolinguistic backgrounds, leading to the construction of their professional identities as English teachers.

The Saudi identity was recognized as an empowering and sometimes disempowering self-representation. Some teachers manifested their Saudi identification in their answers and established their advantaged professional identities. All Saudi teachers from University A represented themselves in an advantageous position in the program. Their distinction lay in the fact that administrative roles, thanks to which they engaged in decision making and policy reform, usually fell to them. On the other hand, none of the Saudis in University B mentioned being involved in administrative work as part of their job as English teachers, unlike the participants from University A. 1AS, for example, positioned herself in a powerful stance in the program as she was a member of the recruitment committee:

*I am in a recruitment committee and we have to cover every single candidate's – her CV, her certificates, everything. We need to be sure that she is good for this facility because we have certain conditions that we have to follow.*

Regarding University A, 1AS explained her two roles in the program as she reported “I’m doing both. I’m teaching and I’m the Head of the Quality Assurance.” She believed that “Most of Saudi teachers are doing admin work” in the PYP. She added: “I think the university goals for the next coming years are that . . . the Saudi teachers should do the admin work, should be in charge of the whole . . . admin work.” This prompted a question about whether she was paid extra for the administrative work; her answer was: “No actually, I don’t. I finish at two, then I go home at two. I don’t just stay there.” Based on her answer, the benefit of doing the administrative work was to finish earlier than the rest of the teachers who stay “until 3:30 for the morning teachers and 4:40 for the afternoon teachers.” She described her identity as different from others and as advantageous. 3AS also acknowledged her specific self-image in the program as a local English teacher since she had been offered an administrative position and she had to decide whether to accept it or not:

*But I've been given a position, so . . . It's your choice, but nobody would say no if it means that you will grow, but that doesn't mean you will be freed from your classes, because this time I'm doing both [Admin and teaching]. Last year I've done both in the first term, the second term we had enough teachers, so I was taken off from the classroom.*

The data suggest that Saudi teachers were not only assigned different tasks compared to other teachers in the program, but they also were competing against each other to get positions that were specifically offered to local teachers. 3AS described how the program “encourages competitive rather than cooperative work” among “local teachers for getting positions.” She stated that “I need to work hard just to prove that I’m better than her [another local teacher], not for the whole intent to be good.” The competition among the local teachers, in the previous quote, was not perceived positively as a means to self-advancement; nevertheless, local teachers took part in it to be different from and “better” than other Saudi teachers.

In contrast with the empowering administrative Saudi identity, there was another way in which this identity was positioned. For instance, 2AS distinguished her own experience from other teachers and described having no power over the university which gives them different responsibilities compared to other teachers:

*I'm talking about my situation – Saudis give them admin work they [the university] randomly for example choose you – you have to work with them in the academic and electronic unit and you go with the students' affair. They [the university] don't – sometimes I wish they could see what's your skill; what do you prefer; your strengths and weaknesses.*

Besides their administrative responsibilities, some Saudi English teachers viewed their teaching practice as a key contribution to the future of their country, leading to the empowerment of their positions. 1AS explained "They're recruiting Saudi teachers now for direct-hire, but I don't know, after 10 years there's going to be 100 percent Saudi teachers." In support of this point about the long-term university plan to recruit more of her compatriots, another Saudi (3AS) stated:

*But it's for the long term, the plan is to Saudise [make Saudis in charge of] things, but we can take experience from other nationalities for the time being. The plan, only for Saudis, yeah, the vision for future. But sometimes they [teachers of other nationalities] can help.*

The university's desire to have more Saudis in the program was emphasized by teachers from University B as one NEST stated (1BNS):

*Because of course now Saudi has got the 2030 vision, which means that they'd like to have more Saudi natives teaching. I don't know the upsides and downsides of it, I can see some are visible at the moment because with this year we've hired much more . . . Saudis.*

The 2030 vision, mentioned in the previous quote, is a long-term plan announced by Prince Muhammad bin Suliman to make the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia a leading nation through diversifying its economy and creating dynamic job opportunities for its citizens in general and for women in particular in many fields, including the Higher Education sector (Freer, 2016). Another teacher from University B mentioned the increase in hiring Saudi teachers at the time, and the fact that most of them had government jobs which meant permanent employment (1BS):

*Most of them are government, and we have other Saudis working with companies. But we don't have big numbers of Saudis, but now it's increasing. We have now a lot of Saudis.*

A further possible explanation for the growing demand for Saudi teachers, as explained by a Saudi teacher (2AS), is that the university believed that investment in Saudi staff is worthwhile because they will stay in the country, as opposed to NESTs. 2AS commented: "Before, there were a lot of courses but the natives were taking these seats and then after a year or less than a year they go to their countries . . . and they took the certificate and they leave so there's no benefit. Who's going to fill this place – who's going to fill this position?". This, according to the participant (2AS), resulted in a shift in the university policy and more investment in local English teachers, through special training and professional development courses because they were the ones who would stay in the program and would give back to their community. In 2AS's quote, there is an opposition between Saudi teachers, "the self," and NESTs, "the other." The third

group, non-Saudi NNESTs, is completely ignored. The self-image of Saudi teachers was positive based on their sense of belonging to their Saudi community while NESTs were perceived as outsiders with no intention to stay more than a year in their job in the PYPs. From the above examples, it is clear that the membership of the Saudi community resulted in “othering” with respect to other teachers and to the university authorities, and different values and responsibilities were attached to the Saudi teachers; sometimes their positions were presented as more powerful than those of other teachers in the way they engaged in decision making and sometimes they seemed disadvantaged in the way they were chosen “randomly” by the university to do extra work.

Despite the negative image of NESTs in the example from 2AS, most Saudi teachers recognized the advantage of working with NESTs. For example, one Saudi teacher positioned herself as a NNEST when giving her opinion about the multicultural workplace and she described the experience of working with NESTs as “interesting” and “amazing” (1BS):

*Yes, I find it very interesting meeting different people. Because I worked with so many teachers but I didn't have the opportunity to work with natives, so I find it very interesting. It's good for me because hearing different accents is nice to know how people speak English because you have American, British, Irish, Scottish, all these Australia, so it's just amazing.*

Her answer promoted the privileged status of the NESTs as she mentioned only them and excluded the group of overseas NNESTs when discussing the advantage of working with teachers from other nationalities. She perceived the superiority of NESTs as a source of linguistic and cultural capital. The way she listed the nationalities of the native English speakers is in line with the perceived core countries of NSs (Pennycook, 2010). Most Saudi teachers acknowledged their NNS status when describing themselves in relation to the “idealized NEST;” however, they used the Saudi label rather than the NNS label. One Saudi teacher, for instance, acknowledged her status as a Saudi NNEST and described the advantage of having teachers other than Saudis in the program to practice the English language with the following comment (IAS):

*Yeah. I was pushed to be good at my language – to be good in the language level . . . Exactly. If you, teachers just only Saudi teachers you're not going to practice English, I'm going to forget the language.*

She attached value to working with teachers from elsewhere to have the opportunity to use high quality English. The explicit use of “Saudi teachers” as opposed to other teachers and the implicit nuance that Saudis are NNESTs suggest that the “opposite” of Saudi teachers of English is NESTs.



Although in the previous paragraph the only groups recognized were NESTs and Saudis, the group of NNESTs from overseas was mentioned by other participants. Some Saudi teachers also positioned themselves as different from other NNESTs in terms of teaching quality and power relation, so the decision to make a distinction between the local and the overseas NNSs in this research is paralleled by the participants' understanding of the groups to which they belong. 1AS, for instance, "othered" the group of NNESTs when discussing the new updates in the PYPs recruitment. She stated that recruitment in the PYP has changed from the past and now NNESTs need "to have CELTA or TEFL or TESOL because of the quality, now we are seeking the quality here and we have to have all teachers that are very qualified for this." In her interview, she associated the employment of NNESTs with quality issues. Although she implicitly affirmed the subordinate status of NNESTs through the opposition with NESTs, her identity as a Saudi-NNEST was still professionally unchallenged as she was part of the decision-making hiring team. Her answer suggested that Saudi teachers were different from other NNESTs and they were at a higher position in the program. Although this participant did not disregard her position as NNEST, she did not use the term NNEST to refer to herself. Instead, she used her Saudi identity which stood her in good stead in the program. Her membership of the Saudi community placed her at an advantaged professional status. The categories NS and NNS were used by the Saudi participants, and they were filled with linguistic and professional judgments which privilege the NS category and underestimate the NNS identity.

Apart from the Saudi identity in the program, another position open to some of the teachers was that of Islamic identity. One NEST (2BNS) classified the English teachers into two groups: Muslims and non-Muslims. She described her colleagues in her answer: "some people obviously are Muslim, so they're very excited about being in a Muslim land and meeting the students. Some people aren't, but they come and they're curious about the culture." Throughout her interview, she emphasized her Islamic identity and presented herself as part of the Saudi community, as being a Muslim in an Islamic country, which, from her perspective, placed her in an advantaged position, as seen in the description of her role with respect to her students (2BNS):

*Because Allah says (فأحسنوا، إن الله يحب المحسنون) [And do good; indeed, Allah loves doers of good] and it's really made me think, I have أمانة [reliability], I want to help them, so they can - so we can all build the Kingdom. You know, we all have a role. Some things I do, some things they want to go on to do. They want to go on and help, obviously if they become gynaecologists or that would be helping other Muslim women and the أمة [Muslim nation] is in need of this. A lot of them sometimes think about England and all these places, but I come from there, I know what it's like, you know? . . . So for me, it's really changed because I'm not just helping a student in the class, I'm helping a girl and she's from a family and that family's part of society.*

She described her job of teaching English as a community duty and a way to help Muslim girls to “build the Kingdom [Kingdom of Saudi Arabia].” Her emic positioning is clearly seen through the multiple use of the pronoun “we” and when she referred to others as “from outside” (2BNS):

*If we all work together, then إن شاء الله [God willing] أمة [Muslim nation] will be strong and the Muslims should be strong, you know, we shouldn't have to necessarily always rely on help from outside. So I think it's changed me personally in terms of my work, my preparation, the fact that I really – Allah knows best about what's in our hearts, but I think I genuinely want to help them get ahead, you know?*

According to 2BNS, the Arabic language was a tool to deepen her understanding of the Islamic religion and to assert Muslim identity. She mentioned that one of the reasons why she wanted to be part of the Saudi community was to learn Arabic in order to get access to Islamic knowledge:

*Well, if you obviously want to know ما شاء الله [as Allah wills], Arabic is the language of the Quran and you know, being raised in England and not coming from a very religious family and then الحمد لله [praise be to Allah] Allah guiding me, I loved the fact that I can read the Quran and understand what Allah is saying. I can speak – I can read حديث [a collection of traditions containing sayings of the prophet Muhammad] and understand, you know, obviously not everything. I can communicate with different people, different levels, have a different culture. When I speak in Arabic my whole body language changes, my intonation, become a different person. So many different reasons, you know الحمد لله [praise be to Allah] that's why I moved to Saudi and I consider it home.*

It is interesting to see the way this NEST foregrounded her Muslim identity to reflect on her experience in the program. She established her sense of self as part of the Saudi community and referred to Saudi Arabia as her “home.” Throughout her interview, she used many religious Arabic phrases such as الحمد لله [praise be to Allah], إن شاء الله [God willing] and ما شاء الله [as Allah wills]. She, however, categorically denied having Arabic origins when she was asked if this was the case:

*Yeah, everyone says that. Absolutely no, I don't, no. I have an Arabic name and I look Arabic, my students sometimes think I am . . . My parents were raised in Asia and then migrated under [their country] Government in the 70s to England and we were all born there.*

In response, she was asked, “Now you are British?,” and in her answer below she showed her ambivalence about being “British”:

*That's the thing, I don't know what I am anymore. I've been here شاء الله [as Allah wills] for so many years, you know? Of course, I will always have that inside of me,*

*you know, you can never really change who you are. But الحمد لله [praise be to Allah], I really appreciate being in this Kingdom, so I think I'm a mix.*

Her identity pushes the boundaries of what we may traditionally think of NEST and NNESTs. It instantiates the complexity of identity formation and hence the simplicity of categorization. That is, the NEST identity is often defined in the literature within the parameters of monolingual white Caucasian, and yet these parameters fail to include 2BNS. Interestingly enough, the literature often talks about "passing for a native speaker" and yet here the data showed a NS who managed to pass as a local and therefore as a NNS. Even though the indicators of her apparent NNS status – name, appearance – were not primarily linguistic, they are taken to indicate something about her linguistic identity, her presumed identity as an Arabic speaker.

Identity as an Arabic speaker, which may or may not be associated with Muslim identity, was stressed by other participants as well. In addition to 2BNS, two other NESTs were learning Arabic and gave reasons why they were interested in the language. In the case of these three NESTs, learning Arabic did not seem to add to their teaching practice but it was the key to Islamic knowledge and culture besides presenting the interest of its own linguistic features. In particular, the interview of a Muslim NEST (1BNS) originally from an Asian country presents another instance of how speaking the Arabic language is combined with having access to the Islamic culture (1BNS):

*I learned Arabic as a child because my father was very insistent in not losing the culture and not losing the Islamic values so even when we would be in England, we would come back to Egypt, Saudi Arabia and for a period of four years, we've stayed in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia to actually learn Arabic properly . . . I can read it – I'm a little bit worried about writing it in case I get it wrong because obviously I've done it so many years ago but I read it no problems. I'm worried when I write that my handwriting is wrong, or things just go wrong but yeah.*

Her experience of learning the Arabic language was linked to the KSA where she spent four years of her childhood to maintain Islamic culture and values. Her quote suggests she had a personal attachment to the KSA. Another non-Muslim NEST studied the Arabic language to learn more about Islam as her brother "came to Saudi Arabia in 2001. He's Muslim. So, he sort of planted the seed and that's how I knew about Saudi Arabia, I knew about Arabic and knew about Islam and just wanted to know more." She also was interested in the language itself (2ANS):

*Because I think it's just so beautiful; like the writing. I wanted to learn what all those squiggles meant . . . Working with international students and just hearing their*

*language, I just think it's so beautiful. As I got more involved, I realized the language is so complex and it's so beautiful. I love the root system and how if you know how it works you can make all these different words and combinations.*

These self-affiliations with the Arabic speaking community implicitly make a claim to a Saudi identity in the way in which they described their personal attachment to the KSA. On the other hand, one Muslim NNEST (1ANNS) learned the Arabic language because she believed that it is “one of the most wonderful languages. It's a really beautiful language. As a Muslim I believe it's also really important to know and understand the Quran from its original language.” Rather than linking learning Arabic to Saudi Arabia, she related her experience of learning the Arabic language to the students' experience of learning English as a second language:

*I think [the multicultural experience which is her life] opens you a little bit up to understanding the students a little bit more. Because I also challenge myself with languages, and I try to learn, or I try to improve the languages I speak, I really understand what struggles the students go through. Because learning Arabic is really not easy. Then I put myself into their shoes and I think okay, that's what they are going through with their English.*

She expressed her belief in the advantage of sharing the process of learning a new language with the students and how this helps in understanding the struggle these students are going through. Interestingly, none of these teachers (who learnt Arabic) acknowledged the impact of sharing the students' language on their language teaching. The literature usually depicts the (local) NNEST as having the advantage of the shared language, when in fact many NESTs also know the language of the students. The value of sharing the same language with the students seems to be disregarded not only by these teachers but also by the literature which sometimes ignores the bilingualism of NESTs and seems to operate within an exclusively monolingual model.

One Arabic NNEST talked about how being an Arab or a second language speaker of English can be an advantage. She stated: “Another thing is I personally believe that Arab people, or people who have Arabic as the first language, and they acquired English through study, maybe they would be closer or better to teach those students.” She identified her privileged professional status as an Arabic speaker explaining that (2ANNS):

*Because we know “what does it mean to learn a new language?,” while you have another mother tongue or are Arabic, or whatever is the language. Acquiring English as a second language is itself an experience that you can relate to, you can reflect even on your students.*

Her justification in the above excerpt does not seem to specifically support her argument that being an Arabic speaker means being a better teacher in the

Saudi context; rather, it would support her NNEST identity on the basis of sharing the same experience of learning a new language with the students (similar to the point made earlier by 1ANNS). She could have emphasized the advantage of sharing the students' mother tongue for English language teaching through translanguaging, code-switching or translation, but she did not. Speaking Arabic does not seem to lead to power although it gives access to the context of the study. Only one non-Saudi Arabic NNEST (2ANNS) – quoted above – explicitly constructed her identity as an Arabic speaker; yet, it did not seem to place her in a privileged position in the program. Drawing on the data, the identities of Saudis, Muslims and Arabic speakers sometimes overlapped but were not identical, and the participants often saw them as advantageous in the context of the PYPs. Some of these identities, however, are ignored in the literature.

Another set of identities raised spontaneously by the participants in discussing their employment were NESTs and NNESTs. 2ANNS, for example, described the negative impact of categorization based on speakerhood status on the teachers' professional identity: "Putting the priority, or giving the priority to those teachers [NESTs] over those who studied English is not actually a good thing, you know? It's just stressful also for us as teachers." In this quote, she first took a neutral position when describing both NESTs and NNESTs by using *those* and then she used *us* when referring to English teachers in order to reinforce her professional identity. Her interview shows her struggle to resist her inferior standing as an English teacher because of her non-native status. Considering herself professionally disadvantaged, the participant highlighted the false assumptions attached to the NEST and NNEST labels:

*So, acquiring a language is different from getting the language from the moment that you're born. So, for this I see that it is unfair actually, because hiring natives just because they are natives, it doesn't mean that they are good teachers. Because if you are a non-native, it doesn't mean that you are a bad teacher. [emphasis mine]*

Her answer suggested the negative impact of the NS fallacy on her professional status as a NNEST. The data from 2ANNS lend support to the argument made earlier regarding the different positions of the two groups of NNESTs: Saudi-NNESTs and non-Saudi NNESTs. The group of NNESTs from overseas had the least professional standing based on the interview data because they were neither perceived by the study participants as the future of the Saudi education nor the gold standard of the English language. The results from 2ANNS support the argument about the inferior standing of this group of teachers in the program and their struggle to assert their own professional identity.

Another teacher also described her NNES identity as a disadvantage in her professional life when she was asked about the negative aspects of her experience (2BNNS):

*Basically, the negative is non-native discrimination basically. Even if we have the qualifications they're looking for, they usually prefer native speakers. Although we speak well and we have degrees related to our field, but they usually ask for native speakers. This is the only negative thing. They prefer them.*

Her answer presents clear evidence of her beliefs about the distinction between the two groups of teachers; NESTs and NNESTs, as she referred to NESTs as “them” in opposition to “us,” talking about NNESTs in general. Her defensive reasoning when she commented: “We speak well and we have degrees related to our field” shows her willingness to reject her “perceived marginal” identity in the profession. In the quote, there is also another kind of othering which is clear in the use of “they” four times to refer to the university or administrators. The participant seemed to have limited agency over her own positioning in the program, and she constructed through her discourse the role of the university in creating unequal positions for NESTs and NNESTs categories.

#### 4.2. The development of the teacher identity

Beyond the binary classification of English teachers, a number of participants (e.g., 1BS, 1ANNS, 1ANNS, 2ANNS, 3BS, 1AS) spoke of a “good English teacher” based on her linguistic and teaching ability and pedagogical efficacy. They specifically defined the characteristics of effective English teachers as having “knowledge about language itself,” “enough experience to teach,” “the right skills” and “teaching strategies,” and being “aware of what responsibility comes with teaching.” They agreed that teaching is “not a matter of native or non-native or nationality or what passport you’re holding” (1BS). According to 1ANNS, “Being a teacher means so much more.” In addition to these qualities, qualifications were recognized as an important element in developing the teacher’s identity. 2ANNS stated:

*First of all, teaching is a career and it's a major that you should study, fully study. You should study theories, look at the acquisition of a new language, how it is acquired . . . You need to learn how to teach first and how to teach English second. So, being a teacher is something and teaching a foreign language is something that you need to study for.*

Despite the prejudice against NNESTs, and their inferior position, they managed to gain a better standing in the program by being confident English teachers. Drawing on the data, the teachers can resist marginalization and construct their professional identity through having teaching experience, linguistic competence and proper teaching qualifications. The interview with 3ANNS provides evidence of the NNESTs’ endeavors to resist their marginalization by others and to develop their “teacher” identity:

*But now it's been almost eight years. So I feel very comfortable and I feel like I've learned a lot over the years . . . So, I feel I've matured as a teacher, in my profession and my overall experience, I would say, is very good. It's going very good so far.*

From the quote, professional and personal satisfaction are clearly present. The teacher's teaching experience contributed to the construction of her identity as a TESOL professional as she claimed that "I think I have kind of gained a lot of experience and kind of mastered this profession. So it's good for now." In addition, her high English competence played an important role in her self-esteem and her professional identity as she emphasized how English was "easy," "good" and "comfortable" for her in the quote below (3ANNS):

*Since I studied in English medium schools – so school – so I developed interest in the English language. It seemed easy. It seemed good, as a profession, so I went into teaching English and here I am today . . . I chose English, even in my master's. So English just seemed very comfortable and easy for me. I felt like if I can make a profession out of this, so why not? It's very good. I enjoy it.*

As the teacher identity of NNETs is often challenged on the basis of their English linguistic competence, claiming ownership of English was seen as significant in 3ANNS's professional identity. She asserted her ownership over the English language as she described how English was not only the medium of instruction in her teaching practice, but also the language of communication in her private life:

*I use around 60 to 70 percent of English in my – other areas of my life, apart from my teaching. Because at home, I interact with my daughter in English, with my husband in English – especially if I'm angry somehow [laughs], everything comes out in English instead of [her first language]. So that's how it is. Yeah . . . So English naturally comes as a first language, along with [her first language]. Yeah.*

The legitimization of her professional identity was evidently developed through her lived experience as a teacher and her ownership of the English language.

The interview with 1ANNS is another example of the successful construction of the teachers' professional identity. During the interview no challenges were reported as she stated: "I got lots of offers [of employment as a teacher] actually from outside [the institution] as well." She asserted her competence in the English language and ownership of English as a tool for communication:

*Then with time, with the experience I had here in international schools and stuff, it just got a little bit deeper, yeah . . . Might be, because for us when I learned English, it was not just a language used in school as a school subject. It was still taught in a way that we were able to speak and communicate.*

Her immersion in the English language was reported in her interview as she explained:

*I have friends, I'm within an English-speaking community. I live here in on-campus, most of the teachers speak English . . . I use it with my daughter at home. I use it with my husband, my husband is Arab. So when my Arabic is not enough, I just complete it in English. So, we use both languages at home here.*

She drew her strength and confidence from the power of English as the world language: "It [English]'s an international language, yeah, you can do so many things when you speak English." Drawing from her interview, being highly competent in English along with having extensive experience in language learning and teaching are regarded as influential factors for NNESTs to gain professional standing in the English language profession.

Similarly, 3BNNS claimed her professional legitimacy as a qualified experienced English teacher. She aspired to get a better position in the future as she stated "I grew as a teacher," and added: "I have an experience with a PYP, so now I'd love to be moved to the university itself" in order to "teach courses, English courses themselves, because this is my specialty, and I can handle it." She also said: "The PYP, it's only preparing the students, I want to do something like – yeah, linguistics, literature." She was a very confident English teacher as she reported:

*I'm a published author by the way . . . I published one book. It's about poetry and prose poetry. So my second book it's in progress to be published soon, so yeah, so I just want to go to writing, poetry, translation, something like – I have many certificates, I want to use them . . . I also have two certificates, level five, coaching, mentoring, management and leadership.*

The emphasis on the construction of a "good teacher" and "good teaching practice" beyond the NS/NNS labels has a positive impact on these NNESTs' professional standing. One of them (2ANNS) further commented: "I think that we are both equally, let's say, professional enough to teach the language. It doesn't matter what is your mother tongue is. What matters is, can you teach now, English or not?" This quote rejects the problematic conceptualization of English teachers based on NS status. Similarly, a Saudi teacher (3BS) reported her perception of how she was being treated in the program: "Equally. So this is what I am happy about because they have to evaluate you according to your experience you have. Not according to your nationality." She insisted on the fact that teachers need to be identified by employers and institutions based on their teaching skills and experience, which is the key to an equitable profession.



## 5. Discussion

The findings in this study contribute to research on language teacher identity using the poststructuralist view of identity as multiple, contradictory and changing over time and place (e.g., Aneja, 2016a, 2016b; Park, 2012; Rudolph et al., 2015). They uncovered other types of membership ascriptions, beyond NS/NNS, impacting participants' lived experiences post-recruitment. The self-representations of the teachers' identities illustrate the complex process of identity formation and thereby the oversimplified nature of the NS/NNS categories. The teachers from various linguistic, cultural and national backgrounds negotiated multiple identities when positioning themselves in the PYPs; they selected their identities strategically to position themselves as opposed to other key stakeholders such as employers and other teachers in the program. The teachers in the PYPs used different categories to identify themselves in opposition to others; some of these categories are rooted in the given context, such as Saudis, Muslims and Arabic speakers, some are widely prevalent, such as NESTs and NNESTs, and some are related to workplace roles beyond the classroom context, such as holding an administrative position or being an employee.

Moreover, current arguments about the professional legitimacy of English teachers in the literature, grounded in simplistic and stereotypical interpretations of the NS/NNS divide, tend to overlook one significant group of teachers particularly important in the KSA – NNESTs who are not locals. This group was identified as the least advantaged category in the Saudi PYP context, and their professional legitimacy underwent many challenges. The group of NNESTs from overseas positioned itself and was positioned by other teachers and employers as inferior because this group of teachers was recognized neither as the future of the Saudi education system nor the arbiter of the English language. This distinction between local and non-local NNESTs illustrates another self/other dichotomy that is not completely linguistic but also socially and politically oriented. The experiences of the less-favored group problematized the NS/NNS dichotomy by going beyond its linguistic nature and by acting as a reproduction of the colonial relations of power and marginalization.

The study makes an original contribution to the literature by contesting the reification of NEST/NNEST identities and by embracing the sophistication of negotiating the translinguistic and transcultural identity of English teachers while "crossing borders in glocalised representations of TESOL" (Selvi, 2014, p. 15). Representing a diverse population of English teachers in this study was significant in order to contest the oversimplified divide between NESTs and NNESTs. The study gives examples of English teachers who disturb the NEST/NNEST categories. The representations of NNESTs as locals sharing the students' sociolinguistic background, recurrent elsewhere,

did not account for all the NNESTs in this study (i.e., the group of NNESTs from overseas). Some of them also did not share the students' mother tongue (e.g., 3ANNS). The literature usually depicts the (local) NNEST as having the advantage of the shared language, when in fact many NESTs also know the language of the students. The value of sharing the same language with the students, in general, was not raised by the participants. The literature also sometimes ignores the bilingualism of NESTs and seems to operate within an exclusive monolingual model. Therefore, the study challenged the monolingual NS stereotype by providing evidence of NESTs who speak the students' first language such as 2ANS, and some NESTs (such as 1ANS and 2BNS) also share the students' religion and culture. The image of the NES as white Caucasian also fails to include all the NESTs in the study (e.g., 1BNS and 2BNS). Most interestingly, the literature often talks about "passing for a native speaker" and yet the study provided evidence of a NS (2BNS) who passed as a local and therefore as a NNS, even though the indicators of her apparent NNS status, such as her name and appearance, were not primarily linguistic. Drawing on the literature, individuals can pass as NSs if they can be accepted by others (Davies, 2003) and thus the NS/NNS categories should be understood based on what one does or how one is interpreted by others, rather than what one is (Pillar, 2002). In this sense, the essentialisation of identity does not offer a discursive space for teachers' accounts of identity negotiation within and across the nexus of being and doing and may fail to capture the complexity of the teachers' identities in their teaching context (see Rudolph et al., 2015).

## 6. Conclusion

Based on the data analysis, self-presentations vs other-presentations were manifested in the interviews with English teachers. The findings indicated that teachers from various linguistic, cultural and national backgrounds negotiated multiple identities based on their personal and professional experiences within their given context. The representations of the teachers' identities illustrate the complex process of identity formation and thereby the oversimplified nature of the NS/NNS categories. The teachers used multiple identities when positioning themselves in the PYPs. They selected their identities strategically to position themselves as opposed to other people such as employers and other teachers in the program. Some of these identities were regarded as empowering in the program: the Saudi identity as the future of their country and the NS identity as the default model of the ideal teacher. The data also showed that some NNESTs recognized the impact of the NS fallacy on the development of their professional identity and perceived the image of "a competent English teacher" beyond the NS/NNS lens. They also succeeded in constructing their professional identity due to their extensive teaching experience, high English competence and ownership of English.

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