

The Impacts of Inequality Incidents on Constructing Non-native English-speaking Teachers' Professional Identity

Yaohui Zhong*

School of Culture and Communication, Shenyang City University, Shenyang, China

*Corresponding author: 1181549800@qq.com

Abstract

In recent decades, non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs), as the majority of the English language teachers around the world in numbers nowadays, have played an important role in English language teaching and education. However, several studies have addressed that the NNESTs are encountering discriminatory practices and identity crisis in their workplaces, which impede them to be legitimate teachers in English language teaching (ELT) and teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) professions. This qualitative study aims to describe the impacts of the inequality incidents on the NNESTs and explore how they respond to the unfair incidents with the construction of professional identity. By employing online semi-structured interviews among 5 Asian teachers from the TESOL program at the University of Edinburgh, the results indicate that the negative outcomes of inequality incidents results from the anxiety caused by both the NNEST's self and the doubts from others, and they manage to counteract the discriminatory experiences by means of recognizing the NNEST identity, exploring NNEST strengths, promoting teaching credibility, harmonizing working atmosphere and raising intercultural awareness and competence, which contribute to the construction of professional identity and the entitlement of legitimacy.

Keywords

Non-native English-speaking teachers, Inequality incidents, Professional Legitimacy, Identity construction.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

Decades of global migration across boundaries and broader power relationships have contributed to a continual diffusion of English[1]. Faced with worldwide growing demand for English, the non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs), taking up 80% of all the English teachers nowadays, have played a crucial role in language teaching [2]. However, numerous studies have identified that the NNESTs are encountering discriminatory experiences and practices, which impede them to be legitimate teachers in the ELT profession[3].

1.2. Rationale and Research Purpose

Though previous studies have figured out the dominant ideology of native-speakerism, but few have explored deeper in how the NNESTs, as agents, react and construct professional identity in response to difficult experiences. Moreover, it seems that less attention has been paid to those NNESTs who teach abroad, especially in English-speaking countries. In addition, it has been found that discrimination and credibility problems seem to be more serious in the TESOL workplace[4].

Being as an English teacher in China and an international TESOL postgraduate at the University of Edinburgh, differences have been found in students' attitudes towards different teachers:

international TESOL students tended to doubt the linguistic proficiency and the teaching skills of Asian teachers more than those native speakers or Europeans; while in Chinese English classroom, students showed less distrust on the NNESTs' (mostly Chinese teachers) teaching credibility. Together, these shed light on this study to identify the following two research questions: What are the causes of the inequality incidents on Asian teachers of TESOL program at the University of Edinburgh? How do these NNESTs react with the construction of professional identity?

1.3. Research Context

This qualitative research was conducted at the University of Edinburgh, and all the participants were from the teaching team of TESOL program in Moray House School of Education and Sport, since different institutions have different values and regulations, which might cause bias to the findings. Meanwhile, the participants all come from East Asia countries, as it is presumed that East Asians show more differences with the native speakers in linguistic competence and cultural background, compared with those from other European countries or near Europe countries.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Position of NNEST

2.1.1. The NEST and NNEST Dichotomy

Traditionally, there has always been an ongoing debate on the dichotomy issue toward the NESTs and the NNESTs, representing the tensions between the non-native speakers (NNSs) and native speakers (NSs) in the field of ELT[5].

Being born and immersed in one homogeneous speech community, the NSs are recognized as the ideal speaker-listeners and the authorities on their given language[6]. For this reason, many scholars concur that NNESTs are inferior to NESTs in linguistic acceptability and language teaching skills.

However, the native language priority ideology, as the 'native speaker fallacy', has also been challenged and criticized. According to Braine, NNESTs' experiences in learning English as NNSs shape them more likely to be qualified teachers as they know exactly what the non-native English learners would meet during their learning process[7]. Thus, the NNESTs do have relative strengths as good models who are more empathetic to the learners' needs and who can better anticipate learning difficulties[8].

Even so, the severity of the dichotomy has been demonstrated, as the unequal relationship between the two has been revealed to a larger extent. So, more measures could be taken to promote NNEST professionals, and help them strive for legitimacy and social expectations within the contexts where they teach[9].

2.1.2. The NNEST's Professional Legitimacy

Considerable amounts of literatures have pointed out that the NNESTs are encountering with inequality incidents in their workplace[10]. The phenomenon is revealed to be more severe in the TESOL field, where NNESTs are willing to be accepted as legitimate teachers, but facing with discriminatory practices and identity crises owing to their accents, social background and credibility. In addition, the distrust on NNESTs also comes outside of the classroom. Studies have found that requirement of being 'nativeness' is empirically demonstrated in the hiring preferences of most teacher workplaces[11].

Although being attached increasing attention and giving birth to a series of anti-discriminatory initiatives, such as the TESOL Organization, the Statement on Nonnative Speakers of English and Hiring Practices and the Position Statement against Discrimination of Nonnative Speakers of

English in the Field of TESOL, inequalities still remain as a wide range of uncomfortable experiences of NNESTs in the ELT profession today[12].

2.2. NNEST's Professional Identity

Drawing from Kumaravadivelu, understanding teacher identity helps the teachers to realize and reflect on the roles in the classroom and contributes to better practices in the future[13]. This paper opted to use Sloan's definition of teacher professional identity (TPI) in combination with insights from other scholars. TPI reflects the teacher professional biography, that is, how teachers see themselves and their work as professionals[14]. Meanwhile, it also reflects kinds of teachers' roles and competencies shared by and expected from broader social and political contexts. In existing literature, theoretical discussion about TPI takes into account three levels of analysis: an individual level, including teacher's personal biography and positioning dynamics; an interpersonal level, including social relationship, practices and artefacts; and a cultural level, including representations, norms, values and organisational context[15].

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

3.1.1. Philosophical Perspectives

Five NNESTs of the TESOL program at the University of Edinburgh (from different countries in east Asia) are recruited as participants. As they are different in individual experience and sociocultural background, leading to the differences in how they feel and respond to the inequality incidents, the multiple realities appear aligning with the ontological perspective[16]. With regard to the epistemological stance, the researcher aims at achieving in-depth interpretation on how the NNESTs construct professional identity through individuals' engagement with the world[17]. Thus, connecting to the ontological and epistemological assumptions, interpretivism sets up the theoretical foundation of this research.

3.1.2. Research Approaches

Regarding the research questions, the ideal research methodology lies in the evaluation of case studies, which are detailed and rich descriptions of a real-life bounded system[18]. In addition, an inductive process is applied in which individual experiences are to be analyzed and interpreted. Since the researcher intends to describe how the NNESTs respond to inequality incidents, numerous themes and categories of these phenomena and their conceptual relationships are required. Meanwhile, it is of vital importance to ensure that the participants feel free to share their feelings and ideas, and to realize multiple interpretations from their conversations[19]. Thus, the grounded theory is considered as the most appropriate approach, since it helps to find the interrelationship between meaning in the perception of the subjects and their action and to set up the basis for new theories based on the empirical materials.

In sum, case studies and grounded theory are adopted as the methodological approaches for this study in order to achieve in-depth descriptions and interpretations of the NNESTs' behaviours and the formation of their professional identities.

3.2. Sampling and Participants

This study employs purposive sampling (criterion sampling) to find the target participants.

Before confirming the criteria, several points deserve attention. The participants are all Asians, so as to differentiate from the NNESTs from European and American countries who might be more capable in linguistic competence and more familiar with the culture. In addition, since 'inequality incidents' is an umbrella term and it's hard for the researcher to define its essence and levels to the participants, the participants should be recruited from those who are self-identified as enduring such difficult experiences.

A total of five voluntary participants who met the criteria consented to participate in the interviews. One of the participants was randomly selected for a pilot interview, while others comprised the primary sources of data. The four valid participants came from Mainland China, Taiwan, and Malaysia respectively.

3.3. Data Collection

In-depth semi-structured interviews are conducted in this study to understand the NNESTs' perceptions and behaviors in relation to the inequality incidents.

Online video calls were applied in a bid for reducing the anxiety of the participants during conversation because of physical isolation[19]. In order to maintain mental comfort, each of the video calls went on for no longer than 50 minutes.

The initial interview text was informed by the research questions and previous empirical studies on similar topics, following this sequenced process: introduction, warm-up, main body, cooling off and closure. Since they came from different countries, to promote credibility and confirmability, Mandarin was used within the interviews with Chinese teachers; for others, interviews were undertaken through English.

3.4. Data Analysis

Aiming to identify meaningful units and generate coherent and recognisable categories, a 'step by step process' is applied to analyse the interview data, following this sequenced process: category construction, sorting categories, naming categories, numbering categories, and theorizing categories.

Analytical coding was conducted to organise the open codes. Through reflecting on all the grouping lists, recurring patterns came out, which were the themes that were categorised in the next step. Then, the (sub)categories were refined through (re)assigning and (re)naming repeatedly, which were congruent with the research questions. Finally, the interrelationship among (sub)categories was summarized in order to generate theories and on the results, providing a basis for future research. Accordingly, two major themes were elicited in related to the first research questions, while three main categories with five major themes were generated in response to the second.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

Before each interview, informants voluntarily gave informed consent by signing the consent forms after careful consideration of this research. They were given the warning of the foreseeable risks that might happen during the interviews, as they were the vulnerable groups who needed to be protected. Ongoing consent was established by giving chances to withdraw from the research anytime because of indisposed feelings. Flexible breaks were also arranged to help the interviewees relieve negative feelings.

As all the participants are Asian teachers from the TESOL program at the University of Edinburgh, their personal information might be identified, and they were expected to share not only the discrimination they've suffered but also their views on ELT among universities and countries. Therefore, pseudonyms were used while processing data and all private information will be destroyed after meeting dissertation requirements.

4. Results

Through data analysis, the impacts of inequality incidents mainly come from two categories: anxiety from the self and doubts from others; and the NNESTs construct their professional identity in three different levels: intrapersonal, interpersonal and cultural.

4.1. Anxiety from the Self

4.1.1. Comparison with NESTs

All participants said they would unconsciously compare themselves to their native colleagues, or those from Europe, owing to differences in linguistic competency and exposure to the context of standard English. Based on the interviews, these differences are not only reflected in races, but also in the familiarity and adaptability to teaching in their working place. They described that constant subconscious comparison exacerbated self-anxiety:

When I came, among other NSs, teaching English, certainly, I was very nervous because you always compare yourself to the NSs.

Unconsciously, my accent, the words, and writing have to become British style. So, it's stressful to have some distance with NSs.

Although they believe that their teaching skills and strategies are no worse than the NESTs (or perhaps even better), their psychology of comparing themselves with NSs has revealed the gap between the two groups. That is the dichotomies between NSs and NNSs.

4.1.2. Teacher-student Relationship

Collectively, another important factor lies in the excessive worries about the students' words. Although setting up a good student-teacher relationship is difficult but also crucial for language teachers[20], the NNESTs perceived more difficulties than native teachers, namely due to the following factors: teacher-student distance, language and background culture(s):

I came to an English-speaking country; I want to have the experience of studying abroad. If I found the teacher in the classroom is Chinese, I will be disappointed, so I quite understand such feelings.

One participant even expressed her helplessness when considering students' pre-conceptions: If that happened, for me, I would not do anything because it's their own problem. There should be some lesson to learn for them.

Drawing to social identity theory, their unease on self could be understood, because whether facing with native teachers or international students, they are the marginalized minority which yearns to be affirmed. Therefore, they unconsciously compare with NSs, and excessively worry about their students' views.

4.2. Doubts from Others

4.2.1. Teaching Market

Throughout the interviews, the teaching markets in both EFL contexts and English native counties – in particular, the employers of schools and programs who recruit language teachers under native speaker fallacy– are described as the overriding group which puts pressure on NNESTs:

I know of some other universities in the UK, where most of the teachers are white and male... China is likely to be tougher... a lot of training institutions, they choose native speaker teachers, even if you have more years of teaching experience and professional qualifications.

One participant pointed out that the teaching market have exerted more load on them, doubting their abilities, and demanding them to do more than they should, which made them feel offended:

So much load has put on us, as NNSs, coming onto the cases in the UK. It's like a man has got extra skills and have to work abroad harder to be understood... I have to record myself and I have to send my recordings of my speech, my teachings to the university.

4.2.2. International Students

Another major source of doubts comes from international students, as they do have certain pre-concepts on NNESTs teachers. It is not just NNESTs' expertise that appears to be questioned, but also their language proficiency which is instrumental to deliver knowledge:

Because I'm a non-native speaker, they worry about the content, whether we can make the content transparent.

They suspect because they are afraid that they will not be able to learn what they want to learn. In addition, one informant perceived hostility towards NNESTs based off of comments from the student body:

Most of my students commented well on me, but one of my students wrote a simple sentence, "I want a native speaker".

It is plausible that NNESTs feel depressed with students' resistance, because their non-native level of English is evident. Therefore, knowing themselves as qualified, the NNESTs strongly long for acceptance by the students and the community.

In sum, four main categories and two broad strands are identified in related with the first research question, theoretically proposing that the negative outcomes of inequality incidents impact on both the anxiety from self and the doubts from others. However, those NNESTs were found not to succumb to the inequality incidents by constructing professional identities, which could be generalized in three different levels: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cultural.

4.3. Intrapersonal Level of TPI

4.3.1. Recognizing NNEST Identity

Though under the negative impacts of inequality incidents, all participants reported that they sought to positively recognize and accept their NNEST identity to get rid of the shadow of the difficult experiences. They gradually developed confidence in their own identity, and had strong wills to change the stereotyped views from others:

I know as soon as I came into the classroom, everyone thought you were Chinese, so, I had to fight the battle.

I hope that students can know that even you are not NSs, you are also okay.

Therefore, participants emphasized they should retain their own identity and stop glorifying standard English:

We should stop glorifying these varieties of English, because English is being shared globally... these are the perceptions put by our non-native speakers.

We want to use this tool to maintain cultural and linguistic assets as well. I don't want to learn the language that way and, in the end, we lose our own identity.

4.3.2. Exploring NNEST Strengths

As regards the self-recognition of NNEST identity, the participants started to explore unique strengths as non-native teachers. One of the advantages lies in their multilingual background:

We can teach students with group activities in western-style to arouse their initiative; on the other hand, we know Chinese students are more used to having teacher summarize the key knowledge, I will do this. I don't think teachers from other countries can make this.

As most of the learners in the TESOL program of the University of Edinburgh are, Asians, the likeness between NNESTs and Asian students converts to another advantage that could be exploited:

Chinese students are more able to understand what I'm talking about. I think we can communicate better.

In addition, the participants said their early experience of learning English also helped them teach better. Through recognizing their own identity and strengths, they become more confident with the construction of TPI at the intrapersonal level.

4.4. Interpersonal Level of TPI

4.4.1. Promoting Teaching Credibility

All participants perceived promoting teaching credibility as another crucial aspect to strive for professional legitimacy. One participant mentioned her approach to learn from self and others through finding similarities with the same lens:

All these have changed from the experience, the mistakes I made, and the skills and strategies I picked up from other teachers.

Based on the interviews, taking multiple roles in the classroom is adopted as another strategy to achieve better practice:

I always take my Asian identity in class especially when I teach most students from China ... navigating between who I am as an NNEST and who I am as an Asian.

One participant also stressed the importance to set up a new image in front of the students, as it often takes great effort for NNESTs in the beginning but few for NESTs.

Furthermore, all NNESTs reported they worked hard in constant learning to establish credibility. One participant pursued her PhD degree in part-time mode; almost all studied in training programs and for qualifications, for example, CELTA, DELTA, and PgCAP, which helps them keep pace with current pedagogy, promote confidence and teaching credibility.

4.4.2. Harmonizing Working Atmosphere

The NNESTs perceived that rapport with students and colleagues plays an important role in constructing TPI. Thus, effective interaction between them is expected to be established. All participants said they tried their best to come close to the students and generate empathy, which contributed them to be as professionals. Among them, one participant highlighted the function of small talk, although considering herself as a poor small-talker:

It gives full play to your advantage as an NNEST who share the same language with your students, and then strengthens the connection within you.

In addition, most NNESTs showed positive attitudes to the colleagues as they didn't feel being discriminated or isolated. However, they claimed it could be better if the university provides more opportunities for teachers to enhance their relationship:

If there are some supports from the school, let the teachers get together with each other, the working atmosphere will be better.

Through harmonizing social relationships and promoting teaching credibility in practices, the NNESTs interpersonally developed professional identity.

4.5. Cultural Level of TPI

4.5.1. Raising Intercultural Awareness

The participants in various ways affirmed the positive effect of intercultural awareness in helping them establish a professional identity. They said they have been greatly helped by the University of Edinburgh, which promotes the values of cultural diversity, internationalism, and inclusiveness, and that also one of the main reasons why the NNESTs feel comfortable with their colleagues:

In Moray House, the teachers of TESOL and language education are quite international and embrace diversity. They are open-minded and supportive of the new teacher no matter where you're from.

This university accepts diversity, a positive value. It helps in terms of acceptance from colleague and friends. It makes you feel you have the experience, you have the knowledge, the skills.

Participants claimed that the intercultural beliefs from the University of Edinburgh also contributed them to realize it's not the hinge of NESTS or NNESTs that matters, but what the teachers could offer and give to their students:

I think that helps me approach students differently. It gives me more ideas on what students might experience here, adding on how I learned and how I want students to learn, but really trying to understand their perspectives.

Therefore, it could be concluded that ample intercultural competence helps them to be more capable professionals and relate to their students better.

To sum up, referring to the framework from Tateo's (2012) in analysing identity, the participants gave their response to inequality incidents through recognizing NNEST identity and exploring NNEST strength (intrapersonal level), promoting teaching credibility and harmonizing working atmosphere (interpersonal level) and raising intercultural awareness (cultural level), with the construction of professional identity.

5. Discussion

5.1. What are the Impacts of Inequality Incidents on NNESTs of TESOL at the University of Edinburgh?

5.1.1. Anxiety from Self & Doubts from Others

The NNESTs concurred the impacts of inequality incidents came from both self-anxiety and others' doubts. The NNESTs are being challenged in EFL and English native contexts, and they have to face the unfair questioning and treatments from job markets. Students are also found to have low expectations for their NNESTs, preoccupied with their professional knowledge and pedagogical skills. One reason is the ideology that discredits non-nativeness and takes NSs as language authority; the other lies in the fact that international TESOL students are also eager to learn a language authentically, except for learning to teach.

Different to the studies mentioned, although being suppressed, the involved NNESTs demonstrated harmonious relationship with their native colleagues, as they claimed that they did not feel being excluded, which is believed closely related to the inclusive values that TESOL program at the University of Edinburgh promotes.

In addition, this study goes deeper into the NNEST's subjectivity, which were not much explored in previous works. Participants demonstrated their self-anxiety came from an unconscious comparison with native teachers, as they express different racial identities, appearances, inexperienced practices, and unfamiliar social background. Moreover, the interviews have shown that the Chinese informants seem to be more anxious than the Malaysian and Taiwanese with regard to their linguistic proficiency. One contributing factor might lie in the difference between historical and cultural backgrounds. Compared with China, where English is regarded as foreign language, English already has a significant role in the social life of Malaysia and Taiwan.

Furthermore, the NNESTs' much worries on students' stereotyped pre-concepts also aggregates their anxiety. Thus, the anxiety from self and doubts from others are perceived to make the NNESTs ineffective in negotiating professional identity.

5.2. How do NNESTs Respond to Inequality Incidents with the Construction of TPI?

5.2.1. Recognizing NNEST Identity

Participants reported that awakening of recognition as NNESTs contributed to establish professional identity, as they dared to stand opposed to NS ideology. The recognition of NNEST identity largely due to the changes in teachers' views of English. Instead of taking NSs as the sole owner of language, these NNESTs regarded English as a global one. Although it's impossible to achieve one-hundred per cent assimilation on language proficiency, as they are capable enough in effective meaning-making, their identity is not inferior to the NSs[21]. In addition, maintaining NNEST identity has been found to bring extra help in teaching. These results also conform to the views of most researches in helping NNESTs recognize identity and achieve professional legitimacy.

5.2.2. Exploring NNEST Strengths

Participants believed successful teaching depends on numerous factors on skills and pedagogy, thus, they started to explore unique strengths as NNESTs: one is the competence to flexibly use and adjust different skills in teaching with their multilingual and multicultural experiences; the other is their likeness to the international students, owing to their similar experiences, cultural background, and even beliefs. These findings on NNEST's strengths are congruent with the researches from Huang (2019), collectively indicated NNESTs are advantaged in applying bilingualism in the classroom, and tackling students' learning difficulties[22].

This study further investigated on the likeness of NNESTs and international students, and found out NNESTs' understanding on international students reflected not only in classroom teaching, but also the empathy on students' life, as they were all international students before. This closeness narrows the gap between the NNESTs and students, motivates positive construction of TPI, and contributes to productive teaching practices.

5.2.3. Promoting Teaching Credibility

Except for their strengths, the participants in this study tended to reflect on previous experiences and others' skills and strategies. Being reflective, as an effective mean, enables NNESTs to inform teaching decisions, and achieve long-term professional development[23].

In addition, they consonantly mentioned the importance of constant learning, whether proceeding for degrees and certificates, or receiving training in teacher education programs. Although native teachers should also pursue constant learning, it's probably more important to the NNESTs as they are more required to familiarize the target language and culture.

Participants also stressed their struggles to escape from the students' bias and establish new images. Owing to different research contexts, this indicates that the NNESTs who work in English-speaking countries with international students might face more difficult experiences compared to those with their own EFL contexts.

5.2.4. Harmonizing Working Atmosphere

The participants regarded harmonizing atmosphere as another factor to mitigate tough experiences, which requires both their efforts and the assistance from schools. Some tips are listed: navigating between their and students' culture, applying activities which are close to the students, taking advantage of chatting after class, and critically reflecting on students' evaluation. Former studies have pointed out the implication of active rapport between teachers and students, especially for NNESTs, the conventionally inferior group. However, these are what NNESTs have to overcome.

Besides, participants added that school measures are equally important. University should create more opportunities for them to communicate and collaborate with others, helping them achieve professional legitimacy and realizing productive educational achievements.

5.2.5. Raising Intercultural Awareness

It's worth noting that the participants demonstrated the significance of intercultural awareness and intercultural competence in constructing professional identity, which differs from most previous studies on this topic. As in most cases, NNESTs choose to teach in their own countries where they are the main constituents of faculty. Therefore, for teachers abroad, as those in this study, the intercultural awareness seems more essential. They claimed that active intercultural competence shed them lights on understanding the perspectives of international students and on this basis, refining teaching skills in a multicultural classroom[24].

Furthermore, they added the university's promotion of cultural diversity and inclusiveness in both values and real actions on the NNESTs largely improve their confidence and the relationship with other colleagues, for example, they were given extra opportunities to build rapport and share experience with the NSs. However, not all institutions in the UK adhere to such beliefs as some NNESTs and female teachers are suppressed in other universities. Thus, there also appears positive effects of cultural inclusiveness from the schools in constructing professional identity.

However, what the participants have done to construct professional identity is also a reflection of their own language proficiency and previous experience of English-medium education, as facing social challenges require them to reinforce or reconsider their choices and explicit displays of identity. For example, the Chinese interviewees implied the importance of obtaining professional certificates, while others emphasized the effects of sociocultural competence and teaching practices on establishing teaching credibility. This difference is probably due to the phenomenon that many Chinese ELT employers tend to value what is written on a teacher's certificate rather than their actual practices[25]. But whether getting certificates or increasing teaching practices, they are both effective methods for the NNESTs to respond to the inequality incidents.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Summary

The findings theoretically proposed that the negative outcomes of inequality incidents lied in the anxiety from both the NNEST's self and from others. Although English had long been viewed as a global language for communication, the dominated NS ideology remained rooted in the teaching markets, whether under EFL, ESL or English-speaking contexts. And the NNESTs were found not to succumb to the unfair incidents and sought to achieve legitimacy.

Within an intrapersonal level, most NNESTs addressed the effects of recognizing NNEST identity and exploring their own strengths in establishing professional identity. With regards to the interpersonal perspective, the NNESTs tried to promote credibility in teaching practices through applying NNEST strengths, learning from experiences and others, and constant learning, and to harmonize working atmosphere. In addition, this study disruptively revealed the effects of the NNESTs' intercultural competence and the cultural inclusiveness of the workplaces in constructing professional identity.

6.2. Research Implications

For NNESTs, it is advisable to cultivate critical thinking towards the prevalence of NSs ideology. Therefore, for those who have already been qualified but faced with unfair doubts, it's vitally important to stop glorifying the native-speakerism ideology, as it exacerbates the anxiety and nonconfidence of the marginalized teachers, deteriorates teacher-student and teacher-teacher relationship under international contexts. Moreover, exploring unique NNEST's strengths and the likeness with the international students are effective in constructing professional identity.

Besides, this study has generalized several useful approaches to promote teaching credibility, for example, constant learning in linguistic proficiency and pedagogical skills, playing multiple roles in classroom, learning from past experiences or others, and applying unique NNEST strengths. They're suggested to construct TPI in an appropriate way which matches up with the above factors.

Regarding the teacher educators, schools, and job markets, it would be better if they officially help the NNESTs strive for professional legitimacy. For example, in non-native teacher training programs, teacher-educators should design specific proposals for the NNESTs based on their strengths and weaknesses to enable them to deal with the difficult experiences they will meet in their teaching career. Moreover, as most participants advocated, cancel the clause of "only native speakers are required" from the advertisements for English teaching and education occupations.

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