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Identity formation of non-native English-speaking teachers and prospective teachers through perceptions towards native-speakerism: the Turkish Cypriot story

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In this article we report on a study in which we used native-speakerism as a lens to investigate the identity formation of non-native English-speaking teachers and prospective teachers in Northern Cyprus. A qualitative method through narratives was used to access the thoughts and experiences of the participants. In the study the participants' identity formation was revealed by 3 concepts: self-image, self-efficacy, and beliefs about teaching and learning. The findings reveal that the participants had positive and high self-efficacy and self-image with regard to teaching English. Weaknesses often create self-doubt; the participants recognised their weaknesses which propelled them to invest more in themselves. Wheatley (2002) states that teachers' learning and professional growth can be instigated through a level of self-doubt and weaknesses about their abilities. Similarly, their beliefs, a core reflection of their identity, were catalysts to being English language teachers.

Keywords: English-speaking teachers; native-speakerism; non-native English-speaking student teachers; non-native English-speaking teachers; teacher identity

Introduction

Through the neo-racist ideology that native speakers of English are better language models, the English Language Teaching (ELT) profession broadly utilises the “us” and “them” polarity, where non-native teachers are considered socially substandard as well as culturally inferior, and in need of proper preparation in the correct Western methods for teaching and learning (Holliday, 2005). It is an arrangement of thought, which reveals a distorted world view, favouring a particular vested interest. This is seen in how the ELT industry promotes the native-speaker brand, especially in hiring practices, which have a wide-ranging impact on how teachers perceive themselves, and how they are perceived by others, their students, and stakeholders (Atamturk, Atamturk & Dimililer, 2018).

Holliday (2005) terms this ideology “native-speakerism”; a pervasive ideology that situates native speakers as the ideal teachers, which influence school administrators and privilege native-speaking teachers more than non-native teachers in the ELT profession. This makes non-native teachers feel inferior in their profession, which affects their identity formation as English language teachers. The ELT industry worldwide has been criticised for situating the native speaker as the ideal model in language teaching, which along the line, builds up a false division (dichotomy) among native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) (see Moussu & Llurda, 2008; Selvi, 2014). The distinction between native/non-native influences the lives of NNESTs. Motha (2014) notes that this ideology influences identity, therefore, identity becomes the dominant area of focus in research, especially in teacher-identity development. The dichotomy between natives/non-natives falls short of fully capturing the complex and multifaceted nature of individuals' diverse linguistic backgrounds. It is, therefore, necessary to investigate the identity of NNESTs in diverse distinct contexts.

Considering the effect of this ideology on teacher identity, the dynamic nature and the status of English and the dearth of research on teachers' identity in Northern Cyprus, with this study we aimed to investigate the impact of the native speaker ideology on the identity of NNESTs and preservice teachers in Northern Cyprus. A qualitative approach through narrative was used to gain insight into the beliefs, practices, discourses, and knowledge of the NNESTs and preservice teachers. The aim was to examine the influence of this ideology on their identity formation. Understanding teachers' identities is key to unpacking teachers' professional lives, the quality of their instruction, their motivation and commitment to teach, and their career decision-making. The findings shed more light on the discourse of native-speakerism and its effect on teachers, which will enable NNESTs to understand and develop better images of themselves.

Theoretical Framework

This article is premised on the social identity theory of Hogg and Abraham (1998), based on the work of Tajfel (1978), to investigate NNESTs' and preservice teachers' language teacher identity. The social identity theory champions the notion of identity based on social categories created by society (nationality, race, class, etc.) that are relational in power and status. Hogg and Abraham (1998:22) note that “individuals derive identity, or understanding of self, in great part from the social categories to which they belong.” This self-definition is a dynamic process, “temporally and contextually determined, and ... in continual flux”; furthermore, identification with a negatively valued group, for even a short while, will have a “negative impact on one's level of self-esteem” (Sherman, Hamilton & Lewis, 1999:88–89). We, therefore, examined identity based on the following

perspectives: (a) identity is not fixed, but instead is diverse, dynamic, contradictory, multiple, and changeable over time and space (Norton, 1997, 2000); (b) identity formation is dependent on social, cultural, and political contexts (Ibrahim, 1999; Pennycook, 2000).

Literature Review

There is no substantial evidence supporting the notion that native English-speaking teachers are better teachers than their non-native counterparts, nevertheless, NESTs are more privileged than NNESTs (Canagarajah, 1999). In many parts of the world, as ascertained by Benson (2012:484), it is inevitable to rule out the divides between the NEST-NNEST as it is “central to everyday ELT discourse and practice.” Several studies have challenged the divides between native/non-native speakers from different perspectives. For instance, Cook (1999) reflects on the role of individuals in second language teaching, and raises questions on the definition of *native speaker*, which empowers dichotomy. This dichotomy perpetuates power relations in the discrimination against non-native speakers (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). Holliday (2006:1) regards it as a “neo-racist ideology that has a wide-ranging impact on how teachers are perceived by each other and by their students.” Luk and Lin (2007:31), from a sociohistorical perspective, claim that native/non-native “should not be seen as a pre-given natural identity and ability, but should be seen through dialogic and repeated acts of discourse in different contexts.”

Furthermore, Smolder (2009) comments on the blinded privilege, prestige and promotion of the native-speaker teachers which is inappropriate and unfair; the widely held notion that the ideal teachers are native speakers places NESTs above NNESTs (Kiczowskiak & Wu, 2018). This ideology results in the marginalisation and the derogatory naming of NNESTs as second-class citizens in their profession (Park, 2015). This, therefore, has created several challenges for many NNESTs. For instance, Amin (2001) reveals how some students of English as a second language (ESL) challenged the credibility of NNESTs as English teachers. Furthermore, research reveals that NNESTs are discriminated against in hiring practices (Holliday, 2005; Jenkins, 2017; Kiczowskiak & Wu, 2018). Although NESTs might have advantages, the value of NNESTs cannot be overlooked. Lasagabaster and Sierra (2005) note that some students appreciate and prefer NNESTs in ESL and English as foreign language (EFL) settings – especially for certain classroom tasks.

Different studies reveal that students sometimes have sentiments against NESTs for their lack of understanding of local languages, which do not allow them to empathise, being an expected quality of a good teacher (Han, 2005). Mahboob (2004) reveals that students do not have preference

for either NESTs nor NNESTs, rather, they place value on teachers with the appropriate pedagogical knowledge. Recent research by Atamturk et al. (2018) expose that contrary to common assumptions of the preference for NESTs, EFL students from a Turkish Cypriot context favoured English teachers with good teaching skills, without necessarily being a NEST. In light of this, a post-structuralist approach in analysing the native-speaker status problematising the so-called NNESTs and conceptualising identity as multiple and dynamic is advocated by scholars (e.g., Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 2001; Rudolph, Selvi & Yazan, 2015). This is aimed at reorienting researchers to shift from focusing on the definite criteria, like an enumeration of who is and who is not a native speaker, but to develop an in-depth understanding by having an identity-driving approach that considers individual’s experiences in different contexts. Consequently, Faez (2011) reveals that the native-speaker ideology has failed to adequately reflect the complexity of potential linguistic identities. He, therefore, urges that it is important to regard such identities as negotiated within situated social contexts.

Many researchers have explored teachers’ identity construction from different perspectives. One major area of extensive focus is the epidemic of “native-speakerism” in teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL). The native/non-native dichotomy has become the dominant paradigm for examining language teacher identity and identity development. In recent times, different studies have considered the influence of the native/non-native dichotomy on teacher identity (e.g., Aneja, 2016; Kim, 2011; Matsumoto, 2018; Reis, 2010, 2012; Swearingen, 2019), and the negotiation and (re)construction of NNESTs’ identity (Mutlu & Ortaçtepe, 2016).

Aneja (2016) adopted a poststructuralist lens to reconceptualise native and non-native speakers as complex, negotiated social subjectivities that emerge through a discursive process the author termed “(non)native speaking.” Aneja (2016), using the “narrative portraits” of four different archetypical language teachers, reflects on how these preservice teachers negotiate, re-create, and resist the produced (non)native speaker subjectivities, and considers the complexity, fluidity, and heterogeneity within each archetype.

In the same vein, Kim (2011) investigated how non-native English teachers see themselves as EFL teachers by employing critical theory and identity theory. The findings show that non-native English teachers were influenced by the ideology of native-speakerism, leading to low professional self-esteem. Hence, Reis (2012) investigated how one NNEST struggled to claim professional legitimacy as a university-level ESL writing instructor. The findings reveal that coursework and professional development addressing the native speaker myth can

provide NNESTs with mediational tools, through which they have a chance to reimagine themselves as legitimate speakers and professionals in ELT.

Furthermore, Reis (2010) investigated the development of an ESL writing teacher's professional identity, and how his beliefs and attitudes with regard to the native-speaker (NS) myth are connected with his professional identity and instructional practices. Based primarily on classroom observations, interviews, and a dialogic journal between the researcher and the teacher, the findings show how the participant, the teacher of a graduate-level writing course, went from being a "blind believer" in the native-speaker myth to challenging it in an attempt to empower his own students as expert speakers and users of the language. Similarly, Swearingen (2019) reviewed 17 studies exploring non-native English-speaking teacher candidates (NNESTs) and the development of the language teacher identity (LTI). The following questions were addressed in the study: what influences NNESTs' LTI development, and in what ways do teacher preparation programmes promote positive LTI development? The findings reveal the non-native speaker and the native-speaker fallacy as one of the four categories highlighted in the study. Swearingen (2019) suggests that teacher preparation should commit to critiquing native-speakerism and offer spaces for empowering NNESTs through narrative reflections. IC Huang (2014) and Z Huang (2018) also investigated identity construction through self-perceptions towards NNESTs and NNESTs in EFL/ESL contexts.

Since a fixed and unitary view of linguistic identity has serious implications for practice, policy, and research (Faez, 2011), it is, therefore, crucial that language learning programmes show an understanding of teachers, as well as, for teachers to have an understanding of who they are as professionals in the field. Our study was the first to

be conducted on such in Northern Cyprus. Since the concept of identity and native-speakerism is universal, the value of the findings of this study would further inform NNESTs and raise global awareness for teacher education programmes.

Methodology

Participants

The participants were Turkish Cypriots: two EFL teachers, two doctoral (PhD) students who were also EFL teachers, one Master of Arts (MA) student and two EFL undergraduate students. The sample (two males, five females) falls within Leedy and Ormrod's (2010) participant range in qualitative research (5 to 25). The sample size represented one third of the Turkish Cypriots in the foreign language education (FLE) department of an international university with more international than local students. The criterion for participation in the study was that the participants had to be Turkish Cypriots studying or teaching English at a FLE department of a university in Northern Cyprus. The two EFL preservice teachers had completed their microteaching and were (at the time of the study) completing their teaching practice in a secondary school, therefore, they were also categorised as teachers. The MA and PhD participants worked as instructors at different universities in Northern Cyprus. The EFL teachers also worked at different universities in Northern Cyprus. Therefore, the sample represented more than a single university in Northern Cyprus.

The participants were all from a FLE department at a university, which offered programmes leading to bachelor, master's or doctoral degrees in ELT. Dörnyei's (2007) guiding principle of purposeful criterion sampling was used to choose the participants. The participants were given pseudonyms in order to preserve anonymity and confidentiality (Ahmet, Merve, Eylül, Zeki, Miray, Beyza, and Ecrin).

Table 1 Background information about the participants

Name	Age	Gender	Mother language(s)	Educational level	Language studied	Year of study/ teaching experience
Ahmet	21	Male	Turkish/English	BA	English	3rd
Merve	21	Female	Turkish/English	BA	English	4th
Eylül	29	Female	Turkish	PhD	English/German	3rd/5
Zeki	26	Male	Turkish	MA	English	2nd
Miray	37	Female	Turkish	PhD	English	3rd/9
Beyza	48	Female	Turkish	PhD	English	22
Ecrin	58	Female	Turkish/English/Greek	PhD	English	23

Instruments, Procedure and Analysis

In the study we employed the qualitative research methodology through narratives. Narratives were suitable for this study because they provide researchers with the opportunity to inquire into the history (both present and past) of an individual by "adopting a particular view of experience as

phenomenon under study" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006:479). To produce a thick description of the phenomenon at hand, we used multiple sources of data: electronic autobiographies (e-auto), journals, interviews, field notes and email exchanges.

The autobiographies elicited general demographic information about the participants'

backgrounds as related to their language learning and their educational life. Two in-depth interviews with each of the seven participants were conducted. The interview questions were designed to elicit information on the participants' experiences of native-speakerism in Northern Cyprus and its influence on their personalities and teaching. Each interview section lasted 1 hour and was, with the participants' consent, audio-recorded for analysis. Furthermore, a controlled journal was used to capture the participants' thoughts/ideas/actions during the teaching/learning experiences and their interactions with colleagues and classmates. In addition, field notes and email exchanges were also used as sources of data. This allowed for the triangulation of the data at our disposal.

The data were analysed based on Boyatzis' (1998) thematic analysis. Different related themes emerged in the coding of the data. This is in line with the observation by Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop (2004) that most of the different concepts on teacher identity are related and synonymous to each other. They, therefore, suggest that a "better conceptual clarity" is necessary in order to relate these concepts with each other (Beijaard et al., 2004:126). The literature on teacher identity reveals self-image, self-efficacy, and beliefs about teaching and learning as the core of teacher identity and the key components affecting all other components. Thus, because of the recursive and iterative nature of the data at our disposal, most of the themes that emerged from the data fit these three components.

Results

Identity Formation in Terms of Self-image

The findings reveal that the participants developed a positive image towards their personality and abilities as NNESTs without the need to justify their knowledge of English to native speakers. This helped them focus on being good teachers, which reflected in the way they described themselves. For instance, Merve revealed that due to her belief (prior to entering the teacher education programme) about NESTs as the ideal model, she lacked self-confidence, but things changed after much exposure through teacher education. Describing how she and others regarded her then, she said: "...I will say I am responsible, practical, punctual, hardworking, creative and fair. Also, my classmates see me as a confident teacher who is able to manage a class without difficulties."

Furthermore, the participants considered themselves effective teachers with advantages in language teaching. Some of the advantages listed were: their ability to use students' first language (L1), their understanding of students' learning difficulties, the ease for students in understanding their teaching, and effective communication between them and students. They also had

confidence in their abilities to disseminate the language appropriately to their students. Moreover, regarding accent, the participants revealed that although they could express themselves fluently, they did not have native accents. They did not consider it as a disadvantage in their teaching career because of the confidence they had in their pronunciation. They revealed that, in the age of worlds Englishes, appropriate pronunciation was more important than native-like pronunciation (Mauranen, 2018).

Before they started with their teacher education programmes the participants lacked self-confidence, but the teacher education programme had a positive effect on their efficacy. They revealed that the way in which people had perceived them before entering the teacher education programme, especially by comparing their abilities with native speakers, made them regard themselves as inferior. Since change is the only constant thing, the teacher education programme boosted their abilities and self-confidence: "*Yes, definitely, in the past I had no self-confidence, my thoughts changed during my education period*" (Ahmet).

They further revealed that prior to their admission to the university and at the beginning of their undergraduate programmes, they had little confidence. The exposure to a real teaching environment through teaching practice, and the courses in the teacher education programme boosted their confidence.

The participants also regarded themselves as bilingual, which influenced their self-image. They did not regard themselves as deficient users of the language but as bilinguals with ample advantages. They further revealed that, being able to master English alongside their first language, put them in a position where they could negotiate between two different images depending on the situation: less formal in their native language but formal while using English. For instance, Eylul revealed that language reflected her identity in the sense that she regarded herself differently when speaking Turkish and English; as soon as she switched to English, she "*turn[ed] off*" her Turkish identity and "*turned on*" a professional identity as an English teacher.

Identity Formation in Terms of Self-efficacy

The participants revealed that they were able to empathise with students, which is one of the major characteristics of an effective teacher. For instance, Beyza stated as follows: "*in order to be an effective teacher, one needs to put himself/herself in [the] students' shoes.*" Having tried this in her class, she realised that each student represented a different world, and their psychology and background played an important role in their education, which necessitated the need for empathy.

The ability to empathise was one of the attributes that the participants had developed during

their university education, which reflected on their efficacy. For instance, Zeki revealed that he went through a lot of difficulties during his studies, but with the assistance of his instructors, he was able to develop and master the language. This helped him develop strategies on how best to teach students by putting himself in their position. Miray also revealed that her students were always comfortable to be with her because she was always ready to use different strategies to teach, knowing what learning a second language entailed, which opened her up for empathy. “[W]hile I was teaching A2 level students with a teaching partner who was a native speaker, the students were not satisfied with their native speaking teachers, they preferred me, because native speaking teachers usually use difficult examples while teaching.” This preference was because NNESTs could empathise, having gone through the same experience as their students. Through their background knowledge of language learning the participants were able to anticipate learners’ learning problems or areas where support was needed.

Furthermore, the participants noted that they had confidence in their abilities to teach grammar rules. They revealed their strengths in being able to explain grammar by integrating different activities into their lessons. Even though the participants were confident regarding their knowledge and pedagogical skills in grammar, they revealed that they were not fully equipped in pronunciation and vocabulary. For instance, Miray stated: *“I am competent and proficient in English, however, my speaking skill is not as good as that of a native speaker due to the volume of vocabulary they possess.”* Furthermore, Beyza revealed that she considered mispronunciation a weakness, which she often overcame by checking the pronunciation of unknown words prior to teaching. The realisation of these weaknesses did not make the participants lose confidence in their competence as teachers, rather, it pushed them to prepare more before each of their classes. For instance, Eylul stated: *“I have weaknesses, which sometimes makes me feel timid, but this does not affect my ability to teach, rather, it propels me to invest in myself.”* Miray also revealed that being aware of her strengths and weaknesses she often put more effort into preparation before going to class: *“I am not as fluent as native speaker teachers, yet I am competent in teaching English. I keep working hard to develop on [sic] the four language skills”* (Miray).

Eylul revealed that she might not be able to pronounce a word appropriately like a native teacher would, yet she did not regard this as a disadvantage, especially in her context, where the aim of language teaching was to develop English language users and not native speakers. Thus, the participants did not consider mispronunciation a disadvantage in their efficacy but a motivating

factor, which made them invest more in being comprehensible, not necessarily like native speakers, but proficient users. For instance, Eylul revealed that as an NNEST, her aim was to allow students to find their own abilities within English as a foreign language and become proficient users of English and self-confident individuals.

In spite of this awareness, the participants did not feel inferior being non-native teachers while comparing their abilities to native speakers. Rather, their weaknesses propelled them to exert more effort in improving themselves, thereby, viewing themselves as capable teachers. For instance, Miray stated: *“I always prepare ahead despite my weaknesses, in order to show that I am capable and good at teaching like native speakers.”* Beyza also revealed that in her early days in the teaching profession she invested more in developing herself, especially in areas that seemed difficult to teach. She stated: *“I often put pressure on myself so as master areas that [are] difficult in order to be a perfect teacher.”* Similarly, Ahmet commented as follows: *“I am nearly [at] the level of [a] native speaker, which gives me confidence in learning and teaching.”*

The participants developed confidence in teaching through the abilities acquired during the teacher education training programme. Ahmet said that his confidence increased during the period of training as a teacher, which made him view himself as an ideal teacher. Merve also revealed that although she had been proficient in English from infancy, she was able to handle some situations in her teaching practice through the help of a mentor, which boosted her ability and confidence in handling students from different proficiency levels and from different backgrounds. In like manner, Beyza stated as follows: *“the training and experiences I gathered over the years, opens me up to some appropriate guidelines on effective teaching.”* The participants emphasised the importance of teacher education, training and experience for language teachers, despite being exposed to English from an early age. For instance, Ecrin stated: *“[A]lthough I am proficient because I learnt English from infancy, at the moment I am more productive in teaching.”* She attributed her confidence and teaching effectiveness on training and 32 years of teaching. We, therefore, submit from this finding that teacher training is a necessity for language teachers. It is through training that the appropriate knowledge and skills for effective teaching can be internalised.

In summation, the findings reveal that the participants had positive and high self-efficacy and self-image in teaching English. Weaknesses often created self-doubt; the participants recognised their weaknesses which propelled them to invest more in themselves.

Identity Formation in Terms of Beliefs

The findings also reveal the participants' beliefs about teaching and learning. They believed that being a native speaker or having the knowledge of a language was not determinant of the ability to teach the language. "*Being a NEST does not automatically place a teacher in a superior category in language teaching*" (Ecrin). Ecrin believed that a well-trained, proficient NNEST can be as efficient as a NEST, if not more.

In line with the findings on the participants' self-image and self-efficacy, they noted that identity was not static, that it kept changing throughout one's life based on context and social processes. For instance, Zeki revealed that due to his exposure to native-speaking teachers in elementary and high school, he regarded native speakers as being the best teachers. But by being taught by NNESTs at university, who taught him with precision, changed his view and influenced his belief in his capacity.

I started my university education with the belief that native speakers are the best teachers of English, but my exposure to non-native speaking teachers' teaching strategies, and how much I know now, has influenced my belief (Zeki).

The participants felt insecure at the early stages of their teaching profession due to previous beliefs. Eylul stated as follows: "*I used to feel a lot weak [sic] when I first started working as a NNEST due to my previous beliefs, prejudice and people's attitude towards NNESTs.*" However, her years of teaching experience informed her belief, having realised that the students' needs were more important than the native or non-native status of the teacher.

The participants' beliefs and practices on teaching strategies and styles emanated from their status as non-natives. They believed that the use of the native language (code-switching) in teaching was an added advantage, which they developed in their teacher education programme. They noted that students were comfortable with having difficult terms explained in their mother tongue, since they shared the same background with their teachers. This influenced their teaching strategies and practices. "*[W]hile teaching vocabulary, especially at the beginner level, students feel more comfortable and learn fast through code-switching*" (Eylul). NNESTs thus have the opportunity to use contrastive analysis in class since it might be difficult to explain some word in English. They also believed that learners' motivation could be enhanced when the teachers and learners shared the same L1. Zeki revealed that his motivation for language teaching grew more during undergraduate studies because his teachers often explained most difficult words in the mother tongue, which aided his understanding. He also had the same experience with his students.

Furthermore, the participants believed that the knowledge of the target culture was not a problem for them, because Northern Cyprus was colonised by

Britain, and English has been an integral part of the community. The effect of the British colony has always played a critical role in the history, culture and socio-economics of the country. English has always been a prestigious language to learn for students in Northern Cyprus as there are many English Medium Instruction (EMI) schools. The positive attitudes and beliefs that the participants enacted towards English were, therefore, not surprising. "*I started learning English when I was 7, and British culture was always the daily routine of both Turkish and Greek Cypriots*" (Eylul). The participants further noted that because of the uniqueness of their context, there was no reason for them not to feel confident about their knowledge of the English culture.

Discussion

The findings reveal how the native-speaker ideology impacted the participants' self-image, by instigating the development of a positive image towards their personalities and abilities. The ideology that native speakers were the best and ideal teachers made most of the participants feel less confident at the beginning of their academic careers, which made them invest more in themselves. Wheatley (2002) reports that teachers' learning and professional growth can be instigated through a level of self-doubt and weaknesses about their abilities.

According to Beijaard, Verloop and Vermunt (2000:751), teachers construct their identities from "the ways they see themselves as subject matter experts, pedagogical experts, and didactical experts." In that sense, another interesting finding of this study relates to how the perception of the participants towards the native-speaker ideology changed during their teacher education period, and also through teaching experience. In other words, the context in which they found themselves created the opportunity for them to challenge the ill-conceived belief about non-native English-speaking teachers, which influenced their efficacy and image. The shift from teachers with feelings of inferiority and low self-confidence to teachers with the skills required of ideal teachers affirms the suggestions in the literature that teacher identity is multiple and shifting in nature (see Peirce, 1995; Varghese, Morgan, Johnston & Johnson, 2005). This is also synonymous with the assertion in other studies on the changing nature of identity, teacher identity in particular, due to different social processes and contexts (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011).

As illustrated in our findings, the participants possessed some of the advantages which reflect the four main advantages of NNESTs in Florence's (2012:295) study: "their ability to use students' L1, their understanding of students' learning difficulties, the ease for students in understanding their teaching, and effective communication between students and teachers." This makes them view themselves as

effective teachers with confidence and abilities to teach English appropriately. Nevertheless, the native-speaker ideology influenced their judgments on pronunciation. By revealing that they did not speak English with native accents, the participant compared themselves to native speakers. This was because recruiters and school administrators placed much importance on accent apart from nationality as part of their criteria and hiring practices (Alenazi, 2014).

In spite of “world Englishes” (Mauranen, 2018) the participants still compared their pronunciation with that of native speakers, thereby considering the way they pronounce as “mispronunciation” because it did not sound like the pronunciation of native speakers. They regarded this as part of their weaknesses which affected their self-confidence and impacted their teaching. For instance, despite Miray’s 9 years of teaching experience and her qualification (PhD), she compared her fluency with native-speaking teachers and often tried to improve her pronunciation to become near native in fluency and pronunciation. Although some participants like Eylul revealed that the native-speaker ideology still influenced how they evaluated their pronunciation, they did not regard their pronunciation as a disadvantage, especially in their context, where the aim of language teaching was to develop English language users and not native speakers. Emulating the native accent only encouraged them to do more in preparing themselves for the lifelong profession where they will always be equated based on the native-speaker standard.

The findings reveal that despite comparing themselves with native speaker, the participants believed that being a native speaker or having native knowledge of English language was not a determinant of one’s ability to teach the language. Ecrin noted that being a NEST did not automatically place a teacher in a superior category in language teaching – irrespective of the “convenient fiction” that native speakers were ideal teachers of English, which continues to dominate the ELT profession (Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2014:2). The participants believed that NNESTs who had made the effort to become quality teachers could position themselves as ideal English teachers in their own environment (Kurniawati & Rizki, 2018). Considering the many advantages allotted to NESTs, which made them to be considered as ideal teachers, the participants considered different advantages that NNESTs possessed over NESTs, like the capacity to communicate with other second language (L2) users, which Cook (2005) notes, is becoming far more valuable.

Conclusion

Considering the influence of the native-speaker ideology on NNESTs, and the impact of this

ideology on teachers’ identity, it is necessary and crucial for NNESTs to understand who they are as professionals. By investing in the identity formation of NNESTs and preservice teacher in Northern Cyprus, with this study we established the dynamic nature of teacher identity in diverse contexts regarding the native-speaker ideology. The dynamic description of the participants’ confidence and abilities confirms the multiple and shifting nature of identity. The findings also reveal how contextualised personal experiences could disrupt the common narrative claims in ELT, which empower native speakers at the detriment of non-native speakers.

The findings of this study benefit NNESTs regarding the innate capacity they possess in the language teaching profession. Considering the potential of NNESTs, the findings also encourage administrators to re-evaluate their hiring criteria not to detract from NNESTs’ and prospective teachers’ self-image and abilities. This should limit the unbridled ideological belief that NESTs are better teachers than NNESTs. Since the native-speaker ideology impacts the way that NNESTs view themselves within the ELT field, the findings of this study have implications for investigating the native-speaker epidemic and teacher identity formation in other educational settings. Further research is needed in other educational settings in order to create more understanding on how discourse on native-speakerism shape teacher identity. This will further help to reveal and problematise the NEST-NNEST dichotomy, and how multiple discourses influence teacher identity.

Authors’ Contributions

TEA wrote the manuscript, conducted the participant interviews, and conducted the data analysis. NK reviewed the manuscript. All authors reviewed the final manuscript.

Notes

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