
7-1-2019

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Recommended APA Citation

Howard, N. (2019). Constructing Professional Identities: Native English-Speaking Teachers in South Korea. *The Qualitative Report*, 24(7), 1478-1510. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2019.3606>

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Abstract

Responding to globalisation, a ubiquitous obsession with English has pervaded South Korea and led to the employment of tens of thousands of expatriate English teachers. However, native-speaking English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers may be subject to marginalisation and acculturation difficulties as they navigate overseas employment contexts. Moreover, scholars question the legitimacy of their careers and challenge the bias for their native-speaker expertise. Against this contentious backdrop, this study explores how the experiences and beliefs of native-speaking EFL teachers both promote and hinder their professional identity constructions. Adopting a qualitative, interpretivist approach, interviews are mobilised to document the participants' lived realities. Resultant to a thematic analysis, an original typology of five conceptualisations of professional identity is presented, contributing to contemporary identity discourse by revealing that expatriate teachers find their sojourns characterised by much ambivalence, and whilst limited positive professional identity is attainable, there are salient barriers to its development.

Keywords

Professional Identity, Korea, EFL, Native-Speaker, English Teacher, Thematic Analysis

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Constructing Professional Identities: Native English-Speaking Teachers in South Korea

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Responding to globalisation, a ubiquitous obsession with English has pervaded South Korea and led to the employment of tens of thousands of expatriate English teachers. However, native-speaking English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers may be subject to marginalisation and acculturation difficulties as they navigate overseas employment contexts. Moreover, scholars question the legitimacy of their careers and challenge the bias for their native-speaker expertise. Against this contentious backdrop, this study explores how the experiences and beliefs of native-speaking EFL teachers both promote and hinder their professional identity constructions. Adopting a qualitative, interpretivist approach, interviews are mobilised to document the participants' lived realities. Resultant to a thematic analysis, an original typology of five conceptualisations of professional identity is presented, contributing to contemporary identity discourse by revealing that expatriate teachers find their sojourns characterised by much ambivalence, and whilst limited positive professional identity is attainable, there are salient barriers to its development. Keywords: Professional Identity, Korea, EFL, Native-Speaker, English Teacher, Thematic Analysis

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in overseas contexts occupy a peculiar place in educational discourse; their “industry” is unregulated, their trajectories are transient by nature and they are often unqualified and inexperienced (Ruecker & Ives, 2015). Moreover, their biographical narratives are seldom recounted in empirical studies (Johnston, 1999), perhaps because the legitimacy of the expatriate teaching career is frequently questioned by writers such as Neilsen (2014) and Vu (2016).

Using the metaphor “postmodern paladins,” Johnston (1999) presents a paradox; the EFL teacher, moved by the desire to experience self-actualisation through travel, may exist in a marginalised position both socially and professionally, yet still benefit from the cultural prestige associated with their Western nationality and native-speaking status. The expatriate educator’s ostensible privilege in the English language teaching (ELT) industry has provoked academic critique excoriating their complicity in furthering an agenda of cultural and political hegemony (e.g., Bright & Phan, 2011) while enforcing a “linguistic standard against which any “deviation” is deemed erroneous” (Butcher 2005, p. 15).

In stark contrast, recruiting practices and pedagogical discourse in expanding circle nations, which are those utilizing English as a lingua Franca (Kachru, 1990), and include China, Japan, and South Korea (Korea herein), uphold the native speaker as the superior modeller of language - indispensable to the English acquisition process. Tens of thousands of institutes within South Korea offer attractive incentives to recruit native speakers, routinely prioritising their language competence over proven teaching ability (Seol, 2012). While initially a noble rationale may drive Western citizens to relocate and teach English abroad - the desire to utilise their skills and knowledge to empower learners and foster their future success (Johnston, 1999) - these teachers often exist on the periphery of society, may fail to culturally adapt to their

surroundings (Chesnut, 2016) and prematurely leave their positions under a shadow of dissatisfaction and disenchantment (Cresswell-Turner, 2004; Neilsen, 2011).

Research Aim and Questions

The assumptions described above potentially have a direct influence on the expatriate teacher self. While empirical research is replete with accounts of language teacher identity, much of this literature focuses on in-training, recently qualified and non-native speaking teachers, with little attention paid to expatriates (Scotland, 2014), including native speaking English teachers (NESTs) in the Korean context. Therefore, this study aims to bridge this gap and contribute to existing professional identity (PI) research, by exploring the influence of native-speaking EFL teachers' experiences and beliefs on constructions of professional identity in Korea. The following research questions frame this qualitative inquiry:

1. How do NEST experiences and beliefs *hinder* positive professional identity constructions in the Korean EFL context?
2. How do NEST experiences and beliefs *promote* positive professional identity constructions in the Korean EFL context?

Literature Review

Globalization and English in the Korean Context

The combination of globalization and educational reforms have generated "English Fever" (Park, 2009); a societal obsession transcending mainstream schooling (Jeon, 2009). The desire for children to excel is reflected in the most prolific "shadow" education industry in the world and accounted for \$19 billion in expenditure in 2011 alone (Byun, 2014). This immense sector includes "ubiquitous" private English kindergartens (Shin, 2007), numerous afterschool academies, and widespread one-to-one tuition, meeting parental demand for supplementary education to provide children with a robust competitive edge. Furthermore, "English fever" transcends the young; there are countless English institutes devoted to adult English classes. At the tertiary level, English is often required as a non-credit course for degrees, yet there is also an increasing trend for English as a medium of instruction (Kang, 2012). This compulsion for English has prompted the widespread recruitment of NESTs and the importation of "Western" pedagogical approaches (Shin, 2007).

NESTs

In this study, a NEST¹ is an individual holding an E-2 visa, representative of the majority foreign teacher populace in Korea (Collins & Shubin, 2015) with 23,222 visas granted in 2010 alone (Seol, 2012). Pursuant to The Korean Visa Portal (n.d.), those eligible are "native English speaking" citizens of the inner circle; the UK, Ireland, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa (Kachru, 1986). The single academic requirement is a bachelor's degree in any subject (Korean Immigration Service, 2015), yet the qualification statuses of individual teachers is varied, including some holding EFL certification (e.g., the CELTA), QTS and master's degrees. However, due to the basic requisites, many do not have a teaching background with 48% holding a degree unrelated to education (Smith, 2010). These

¹ Other terms used synonymously with "NEST" throughout this article include EFL teacher and expatriate teacher; these terms are neither fixed nor absolute (Johnston, 1999) and the very notion of the idealised "native speaker" is highly contested.

factors position the group as particularly worthy of study, especially due to the pervasive sentiment amongst Koreans that foreign English teachers are “unqualified” (Jambor, 2010).

The NEST/NNEST Divide

Undeniably, the ceaseless demand for NESTs developed from the assumption that only native speakers (NS) have an innate predisposition for modelling genuine English, essential to the acquisition process (Ahn, 2011). The bias towards learning from a “competent” NEST, over an “inferior” non-native English-speaking teacher (NNEST) is a highly contentious issue (Ahn, 2011), and the discordant native/non-native binomial has attracted extensive academic critique (e.g., Butcher, 2005; Pennycook, 1994; Ruecker, 2011).

In his seminal work, “The Native Speaker is Dead,” Paikeday (1985) rejects Chomsky’s paradigm of the idealised NS (Saniei, 2011) and argues for the discontinuance of the divisive native/non-speaker dichotomy, dismissing it as “arbitrary and elusive a concept as the Abominable Snowman” (p. 3). Similarly, Cook (1999) calls for the demise of the monolingual bias, which unjustly holds second language (L2) English learners to unreachable standards; they are appraised by the proximity of their accent, pronunciation and grammatical cognizance to native speaker norms, yet “are not monolingual native speakers and never will be.... L2 users have to be looked at in their own right as genuine L2 users, not as imitation native speakers” (p. 195).

Phillipson (1992) coined the term “native speaker fallacy” to reflect his “critical observation of the exonerative monolingual NS model of English teaching” (as cited in Hodgson, 2014, p. 113). Phillipson (1992) argues that the glorification of the NS as culturally and linguistically superior is a form of imperialism, borne out of the history of colonisation and furthered by Western educational theory. Butcher (2005) supports this, declaring that the fallacy is “the last manifestation of an old-world order of British colonialism and American imperialism” (p. 13), in which the two powerhouses dominate an extremely lucrative industry which not only trains EFL teachers, through organisations such as the British Council (Gray, 2012), but also dictates the content of English Language Teaching (ELT) texts, distributed worldwide. Similarly, Holliday (2006) contends that the fallacy propagates an underlying belief that NEST teachers “represent a Western culture from which spring the ideals both of the English language and of language teaching methodology” (p. 385). Moreover, the NS myth sanctions “cultural reductionism,” situating NESTs at the forefront of a moralistic agenda which strives to impose a model of supremacy upon essentialised, subservient nations (Bright & Phan, 2011; Holliday, 2006). Thus, NESTs may be perceived as cultural emissaries, disseminating their idealised version of English. They indoctrinate “the Other” and seek to remedy its deficiencies with progressive methods, pitting the analytical, learner-centred approach to teaching against the substandard, passive Asian model (Bright & Phan, 2011; Holliday, 2006).

Yet, several years ago, Hodgson (2014) commented that “Paikeday declared that the native speaker was dead, yet its ghost still continues to haunt the journals, conferences and classrooms of our profession worldwide almost three decades after his eulogistic pronouncement” (p. 113). Thus, despite such embittered opposition to the NS ideology, the overwhelming preference for NESTs continues to permeate ELT globally (Holliday, 2006), evidenced in recruiting practices and the sheer numbers of NESTs employed overseas (Butcher, 2005; Phillipson, 1992). The charged academic rhetoric of native-speakerism and the hegemony of English undoubtedly warrant investigation in a study of EFL teacher professional identity.

Identity

Identity, a significant field of inquiry in education and applied linguistics (Martel & Wang, 2014) is inherently complex, with definitions varied and conflicting (Bright & Phan, 2011; Tsui, 2007). While the developmental psychologist Erikson (as cited in Martel & Wang, 2014) treated the construct of identity as a coherent and stable phenomenon, scholars including Mead (1934, as cited in Scotland, 2014) theoretically refined the conceptualization, establishing the salient association between the self and social influences on forming multiple identities (Martel & Wang, 2014).

Continuing in this vein, contemporary theories recognize that identity formation occurs in the complex relationship between the individual and the social world (e.g., Scotland, 2014; Tsui, 2007) rather than as a predetermined and enduring quality (Sachs, 2005). Moreover, identity is a dynamic construct, subject to the ebb and flow of social interactions and contextual factors. Essentially, identity is a means by which individuals “justify, explain and make sense of themselves in relation to other people and their context” (Scotland, 2014, p. 34).

Adopting a socio-cultural approach to identity, Wenger (1998) extends the role of social interaction to suggest that participation (and non-participation) within *communities of practice*, shapes, mediates, and modifies identity. Wenger classifies identity as “negotiated experience, community membership, a learning trajectory, a nexus of multi-membership and a relation between the local and the global” (p. 149). Thus, individuals personify themselves and reconcile their identities through participation with others in negotiations with the known and the unknown, their perspective on the current stage of their life path, which cultures and sub-cultures they feel an association with, and how they frame their affiliation with the broader discourses of localised and globalised contexts.

Language Teacher Professional Identity

Specific research into *language* teacher PI has grown considerably since the millennium (Martel & Wang, 2014). PI is a salient concern not only in terms of praxis, but also in understanding how EFL teachers reconcile their broader experiences overseas with their developing sense of self (Morgan & Clarke, 2011). Arriving at a resolute definition of PI is challenging, but Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop, (2004) established that it encompasses the ways in which teachers assume their roles and perceive themselves as educators, vis a vis their interpretations of their socio-contextual interactions.

Within the EFL field specifically, there is a developing body of research endeavouring to conceptualise the construct, to furnish academics and educators with a profound understanding of how PI is developed and renegotiated (Scotland, 2014). PI involves “a complex and dynamic equilibrium where self-image is balanced with a variety of roles teachers feel that they have to play” (Beijaard et al., 2004, p. 113). Similarly, since a multiplicity of identities may exist within the self at any given time, Duff and Uchida (1997) suggest that NESTs may adopt plural identities spanning, they are not only instructors, immigrants, native language users and experts, but “gendered and cultured individuals” (p. 451).

NEST PI Research in Korea

There is a paucity of research directly investigating NEST professional identity in Korea. Kim (2012) represents a noteworthy example of a study with a substantive correlation to this inquiry, although this research was centred on university faculty. Kim (2012) conducted extensive interviews with four NESTs in a Korean university and analysed the findings from a socio-cultural theoretical perspective. Subsequently, three key thematic constructs emerged,

“teaching as a defining career” “respected but separated” and “welcomed but not belonging” (p. 39); the participants were confident teachers and built up strong rapport with their students, but they felt isolated from the Korean faculty. The findings also highlighted personal issues related to acculturation; teachers were continually conscious of their status as foreigners and struggled with language barriers. They were also starkly aware of their status as native speakers, and while this afforded them some prestige, it also reminded them of their outsider status. However, Kim (2012) surveyed university lecturers with master’s degrees, sojourners with E-1, or “Foreign Professor,” visa holders. I anticipated that the lecturer’s perceptions and experiences would be more favourable than those of my participants, since by nomenclature alone the type of employment and visa status is associated with a sense of pride and professionalism. Certainly, the Korean EFL community in general hold university jobs in high esteem, chiefly due to the cache of working with older learners, reduced working hours and lengthy holidays (Chesnut, 2016).

One recent Korean study specifically focused on identity in NESTs (in both schools and universities) is that of Chesnut (2016). Positing “teacher selves” as a hypernym to encompass a broad range of possible self-perceptions; “identity, subjectivity, positionality, self-perception, self-narration, playful imagining,” Chesnut (2016) draws on discourses of gendered selves, sexuality and physicality to explain teacher identity constructions (p. 13). While this previous study presents rich vignettes of lived experiences vis a vis cultural, social and political issues, it does not inform a discussion of the influence of native-speakerism on PI, since this dimension did not converge with the study’s evolving themes. However, as Kim (2012) reveals, native-speakerism may be a fundamental consideration in NEST identity discourse and the present study probes this issue while focusing on a group which has received very little academic attention; E-2 visa holders working as English language teachers in South Korea.

Set against the contentious backdrop discussed above were my own chiefly positive experiences working in the Korean EFL field, both as the manager of language institute and as teacher and content developer in a preparatory academy. Yet during my sojourn, I witnessed NEST isolation, resentment to certain educational practices, and high attrition rates. These observations and my academic interest in identity inspired me to explore how teachers in this seldom-researched community reconcile their professional self-image with their employment in a controversial, yet often rewarding, career.

Methods

The principal objective of the methodological design was to elicit in-depth personal accounts of experiences, feelings, emotions and personal truths. As a researcher who sought to engage with personal narratives embodying teacher beliefs and experiences of identity construction, the qualitative paradigm was the appropriate conceptual framework to inform the research methodology; naturally adopting the interpretivist position, I wished to understand the social context from my participants’ perspectives (Bryman, 2008). Thus, the study sought to afford an understanding of the context in which professional identity formation not only takes place, but how it is potentially subject to fluidity and renegotiation, drawing on Bryman’s (2008) perspective that “social phenomena and categories are not only produced through social interaction, but are in a constant state of revision” (p. 19).

Within this paradigm, I carried out a descriptive qualitative study (Bryman, 2008) and acknowledge that my account presents one version of reality, which is not definitive, but mediated through the eyes of my respondents. Social and cultural life are inherently complex, resist being taken for granted and call for researchers to pursue “a way of knowing” (Freebody, 2003, p. 38). As I explored individuals’ perceptions relating to their identity construction, a

deeply subjective and personal realm, gathering data which is told in the form of stories and personal anecdotes was most appropriate for my research questions. The desire to interpret narratives holistically and translate them into rich, thick descriptions (Denzin, 2001; Punch, 2005) informed the methods mobilised in this study.

Sampling

Devers and Frankel (2000) propose that “qualitative research design can be thought of as a rough sketch to be filled in by the researcher as the study proceeds” (p. 264). Nevertheless, sampling is equally important in qualitative research as is in quantitative studies (Punch, 2005). To locate and engage with a sample of participants, it was necessary for my sampling strategy to be purposive and deliberate, with a view to identifying and including a specific cohort of participants (Punch, 2005), E-2 visa holders in Korea, as opposed to a random sampling process, more common to quantitative, statistically driven approaches (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). The first phase, online questionnaires, was predominantly for recruiting participants and then selecting those who corresponded with the sampling frame, the second was designed for substantive qualitative data collection, through in-depth interviewing; the key research stage, elaborated on below.

Phase 1: Online Questionnaires

I utilised E-research methods (Bryman, 2008; Denscombe, 2007) to complete this study. During the first phase, I disseminated online-questionnaires, instruments which are particularly beneficial with populations situated overseas (Bryman, 2008). I designed the questionnaires to be convenient, succinct and straightforward, to reduce the possibility of “respondent fatigue” (Bryman, 2008, p. 217). Bryman (2008) opines that online questionnaires lessen the effects of social desirability bias; due to the physical absence of a researcher, responses are more likely to be earnest. Furthermore, online questionnaires can potentially gather a lot of data quickly and the possibility for errors is greatly reduced by the limitations set within multiple choice questions (Ritter & Sue, 2012).

I invited potential participants to complete the questionnaire by posting a brief introduction to my study and a link to the web page, in a total of twenty private groups. The questionnaires were purposively distributed to Facebook groups which I believed included a large membership of the target population, NESTs currently working in Korea and either appeal specifically to NESTs in Korea, or expatriates in Korea more generally, including the groups “*E-2 Visa Holders in Korea*” and “*Expatriates in Korea.*” Contacts from my own professional networks shared links to the study and I received numerous “likes” and positive comments which aided the questionnaire’s circulation and response rates.

Primarily, the questionnaire was a recruitment vehicle which collected demographic data, and included questions relating to each teacher’s age, type of workplace, nationality and length of service in Korea. Importantly, the sections regarding the respondent’s qualification status and current visa type enabled the narrowing of the potential sample later. Additionally, respondents had the option of answering a broad, open-ended question about their employment experiences in Korea, which served two key purposes. Firstly, this section acted as an introduction to potentially salient aspects of professional identity which could be woven into the general interview protocol; and additionally, for those participants who continued to the next stage, their specific responses could be referred to as discussion points in their individual interviews.

Respondents could complete the questionnaires anonymously, since they were only required to provide contact details should they be willing to progress to the next stage. This

approach is similar to that adopted in Bryman (2008), in which the researchers mobilised an e-survey as a selection instrument, and subsequently selected respondents to participate in interviews. Thus, in both my study and that of Bryman (2008) the questionnaire functioned to increase the purposeful nature of identifying interview participants.

The questionnaire responses generated a sufficiently broad sampling frame (n=247), of which 67% (n=164) were E-2 visa holders. From this cohort, 48% (n=78) provided email addresses and agreed in principle to being interviewed in the secondary stage. This frame was reduced according to my sampling criteria. Thus, I wished to interview teachers who fulfilled the following prerequisites:

- native-speaking English teacher who is a citizen of one of the seven inner circle nations
- currently or recently employed in Korea, sojourning under an E-2 visa²
- not a qualified mainstream teacher
- not proficient/fluent in Korean³

Therefore, I disseminated 70 interview requests by email, to those who met the above criteria. From this group, I then carried out interviews with those who responded with the completed consent form. Unfortunately, the return rate was initially very low, culminating in just four interviews in the first week. I then elected to post a direct invitation in six of the most relevant Facebook groups I had originally utilised, which ultimately yielded two more appointments. Fortunately, I subsequently received further email replies, expanding the final research sample to eleven interviewees.

Phase 2: Semi-Structured Interviews

The interview is a fundamental qualitative research instrument (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008) which can be designed as structured, semi-structured and unstructured (Punch, 2005). I decided that semi-structured interviews were the most suitable method for the primary data collection, since they are particularly effective when combined with questionnaires, “adding depth to breadth” (Hart, 2005, p. 357) and enabling the researcher to probe salient issues encountered in the initial phase. Moreover, this type of interview begins with a frame of topics for discussion, embedding some direction whilst permitting flexibility during the conversation (Robson, 2002). Thus, the researcher is at liberty to alter the sequence of questions, or focus on germane aspects more deeply, by adapting, and perhaps departing from, the original schedule. (Bryman, 2008; Denscombe, 2007). This genre of interview also lends itself well to questions which are principally open-ended, encouraging the respondents to elucidate on their perspectives and experiences, (Denscombe, 2007) imperative to providing rich data and descriptions (Bryman, 2008).

Pilot Study

I carried out pilot interviews with two of my professional contacts, in order to experiment with my draft interview questions, shaped by the literature I had already reviewed. It is preferable to carry out the pilot with respondents who meet the sampling criteria, so they are representative of, and comparable to, the authentic participant sample (Bryman, 2008). My

² Vanessa did not have a working visa but presented an interesting case nonetheless.

³ Acculturation was predicted to be a salient factor and fluency in the host language would not be representative of the majority of NESTs in this context.

contacts, Gideon and Drake (pseudonyms have been used for all participants) had previously worked in Korea, both sojourning under E-2 visas for several years. To make the pilot as realistic and representative as possible, they first completed the questionnaire, so that this data could be referred to in the interview, the same procedure carried out with the primary participant group.

Overall, the pilot was informative in guiding the interview design and execution; exposing potential problems at an early, pre-substantive research stage. My colleagues not only responded to the questions in detail, but also provided critical insight into sections they identified as misworded or ambiguous, allowing me to construct an improved interview schedule⁴. The procedure also raised my awareness of grouping particular questions together, to ensure that the line of inquiry progressed logically and appropriately. Fortunately, adequate time was available to conduct these pre-interviews (approximately 90 minutes) allowing me to gauge realistically how much time would be required for the substantive interviews. Upon reflection and in line with Van Teijlingen and Hundley (2001) this data is not included in the main findings to circumvent any contamination.

Participants

The eleven participants exhibited diversity in terms of age, nationality, employing organisation and educational background reflecting the information-rich cases (Patton, 2002) often yielded through purposive sampling. In consonance with the inclusion criteria, participants are citizens of inner-circle nations (the UK, USA Canada and Ireland), are not proficient in Korean, have not completed mainstream teacher training and hold E-2 visas. Their ages range from 21 to 42.

Interview Process

Each audio interview took place remotely over Skype and lasted between 1 hour and 1 hour 45 minutes. Prior to each interview, email exchanges allowed for some rapport to be built with the respondents. During the actual interviews, this rapport was extended with “a warm up” (Robson, 2002) consisting of some small talk to humanise the researcher and put the interviewee at ease. This was especially pertinent since as some topics and themes were personal and controversial, it was important to create a conducive environment in which respondents could share their thoughts openly (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Robson, 2002). Subsequently, I confirmed demographic data and posed open questions according to the interview schedule. In line with a semi-structured approach, I adapted certain questions when salient points called for further elaboration and narrative (Robson, 2002). At the close of each interview, I asked the participant for permission to follow up by email if necessary, and all participants kindly agreed. Follow-ups took place on number of occasions, when the recording quality had momentarily suffered, or to allow me to probe an issue in more depth, which in turn permitted a degree of respondent validation (Bryman, 2008). I maintained detailed notes during the interviews and recorded each conversation. I then transcribed the content verbatim within twenty-four hours of each interaction. Independently transcribing the data to a strict schedule was somewhat arduous, but also advantageous since I was able to immerse myself in the data from an early stage, while witnessing themes and contrasts emerging from the outset (Bryman, 2008).

⁴ For a copy of the interview schedule, please see Appendix 1.

Approach to Thematic Data Analysis

Following the transcription process, I subjected the data to a thematic analysis, a sub-technique of narrative analysis (Bryman, 2008). This approach enables the qualitative researcher to analyse the content of the exchanges (Bryman, 2008) “to reflect reality, and to unpick or unravel the surface of ‘reality’” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81). Moreover, Guest, MacQueen, and Namey, (2011) suggest that thematic analysis is the most appropriate system for “capturing the complexities of meaning within a textual data set” (p. 11). Whilst it may not have always been a traditional approach, it has become increasingly common since the turn of the millennium (Bryman, 2008) and in this small scale-study the volume of data collected certainly called for a technique which facilitated a humanist reading of the text, since an understanding of the respondents' perceptions, feelings, and lived experiences is integral to responding to the research questions (Guest et al., 2011).

Analysing data in this manner, I followed the guidelines set forth by Braun and Clarke (2006). The first step was to read and re-read the transcripts as early as possible (Bryman, 2008) to become familiar with the data. Next, the initial coding step required examining the raw data for “repetitions, indigenous typologies, metaphors and similarities and differences” (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, as cited in Bryman, 2008, p. 555). In order to adequately respond to the research questions, I was particularly interested in commentary which related to workplace experiences, beliefs, self-identity, and the perceptions of others. I used empirical codes, or tags, such as “feeling dispensable,” “feeling respected,” and “payment problems” to define the content of the narratives (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). In Table 1 below, we can see that Janet discussed problems she faced at work, in relation to her identity (through the lens of others). The codes used for the highlighted text were succinct phrases (Elliott, 2018) including “them and us” “language barrier” and “lack of information.” Similarly, in the second excerpt, Geraldine described her own feelings of separation between native and local teachers and the codes “them and us” and “animosity” were ascribed:

Table 1: Coding Samples

Sample excerpts	Codes
They hesitated to treat me like an equal as a fully-fledged teacher. I was considered just the foreign teacher - so they would hold these meetings in Korean and I would have to sit through them and not really be informed about what was going on.	Them and Us Language barrier Lack of Information
The boss and the work politics environment is a problem as she always sides with the Korean teachers and the influence her a lot, so I don't think personally that she is a good leader. And some of the Korean teachers look down on the foreign teachers and are hostile towards us, even though two of them are married to foreigners.	Them and Us Animosity

After coding all the interviews, I grouped the initial codes into higher order labels (Elliott, 2018) with corresponding excerpts across all the interview data. Continuing with the example above, I noted that recurring and salient codes, such as “them and us” “language barrier” “lack of information” and “animosity” could be subsumed under the higher order label of polarisation. Along with two more final codes related to hierarchies and preferential treatment, the notion that teachers feel distanced from both their Korean colleagues and managers emerged, leading to a potential theme. Through an iterative scanning of these higher order labels and their constituent codes, I mapped-out the remaining potential themes, which constituted the third phase (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The final phases involved reviewing and defining the themes. The examples above, along with data coded under “hierarchies” and “preferential treatment,” was translated into the *Distanced Other* finding. Originally, the theme was written as “NESTs feel distanced from their Korean co-workers and supervisors,” but I subsequently wrote the constructs in succinct forms to reflect the identity being described vis a vis my interpretation of the data, using the participants’ own language where possible to clearly convey each theme’s quality (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process was repeated with the remaining four themes, enabling me to produce an inductive model of the five key themes, or constructs, as they pertain to NEST professional identity, which will be discussed below (see Figure 1).

Ethical Statement

This study was reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Committee at the Institute of Education, University College London, before its commencement and adhered to the British Educational Research Association (BERA) guidelines throughout.

Results

The data revealed that the eleven participants exhibited multiple, often co-existing, identity constructs of which three constituted chiefly restrictive sub-texts, and two which were marked by positive self-evaluation. Teachers appear to forge an identity as a *Distanced Other* due to cultural differences and hierarchies in their workplaces and beyond. Private institutions are profit-oriented contexts in which NESTs may characterise themselves as *Commercial Assets* rather than educators. Moreover, career stagnancy combined with contractual disputes may cause NESTs to perceive their teaching trajectories in Korea as temporary and unstable, whereby they identify as *Replaceable Parts*.



Figure 1: Inductive Model of NEST Professional Identity Constructions

However, when teachers draw on their pedagogical value as a native speaker, strengthened professional identity is potentially attainable as a *Cultural and Linguistic Ambassador*. Similarly, atypical instances of career progression, social prestige and disaffiliation from pejorative stereotypes potentially engender a robust professional self-image, represented here as a *Professional and Respected Educator*.

Theme 1: Distanced Other

The data revealed cultural challenges facing NESTs in this context. Nine interviewees presented identities as *Distanced Others* expressing sentiments of communicative disconnect from fellow Korean teachers and managers and instances of isolation in their roles. They attributed this to the rigid hierarchical nature of Korean society, which also pervades private and public-sector institutions. However, an additional aspect that materialises through “otherness” is more constructive, manifested by the preferential treatment that some respondents experienced as a result of their “foreignness.” This is summarised in Figure 2:

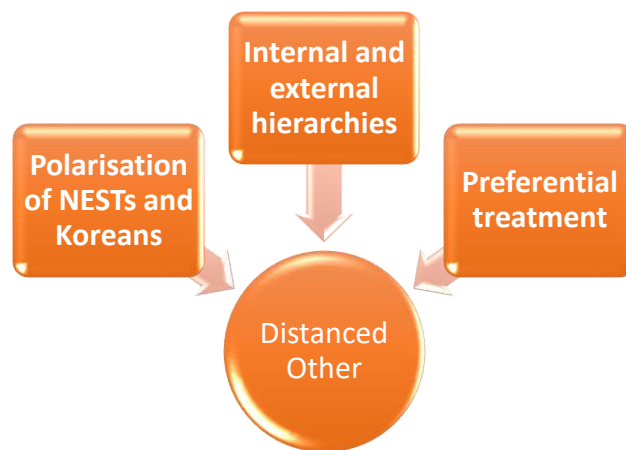


Figure 2: Distanced Other

Polarisation of NESTs and Koreans. Most participants described circumstances in which they felt detached from both the Korean faculty and management in their employing institutions. Dale, spoke of the ubiquitous use of “foreigner” to describe anyone not Korean, and how this made him feel like an outsider. More specifically, he described how spatial separations influenced his views of the university department and his position within it: “At the university, no I didn’t really have that strong professional environment. I was quite separated from the Korean management and the foreign teachers had their own office,” whilst Tyler commented that “management rarely listens to the foreign teachers.”

In more extreme circumstances, polarisation led to feelings of marginalisation and even malevolence, characterised by an explicit “them and us” culture towards conflicts in the workplace, causing Geraldine to question the effectiveness and impartiality of her kindergarten’s management:

The boss and the work politics environment is a problem as she always sides with the Korean teachers and they influence her a lot, so I don’t think personally that she is a good leader ... some of the Korean teachers look down on the foreign teachers and are hostile towards us, even though two of them are married to foreigners.

Similarly, Janet recounted the alienation and lack of communication she encountered during meetings whilst employed in a private academy. This positioned her, as a NEST, on the periphery of the organisation, and as seen above, led to her feelings of detachment.

Internal and external hierarchies. Combined with these instances of disjunction, a further finding is associated with rigid hierarchies engendering distinctive boundaries within schools, which also appears to “other” the NESTs in this study. For example, Renato, again reflecting on his time in the state school, exemplified how the organisational hierarchy reinforced his self-image as the “lowest role on the totem pole”:

The organisational chart; it is almost like a reverse family tree. You’ll see a head guy and ... a couple of pictures of the vice principals and pictures of all these teachers ... and then at the very, very, very bottom of the second page, was the spot for the foreign teacher. So, that was really telling about where they saw how people fit in ... It wasn’t even off to the side laterally, it was just the bottom of the bottom.

This stark realisation cemented Renato’s interpretation of his status in the school, and the perceptions of those around him. He reported that not only did this affect his self-confidence and pride; it negatively impacted his motivation. Moreover, Lily held similar views of the private school she works in: “The emphasis is on hierarchy. And there is not a lot to motivate an individual to work.”

In the broader context, NESTs observed a hierarchy pertaining to the positions available to E-2 visa holders. The participants unanimously positioned academies as the lowest, and Lucinda, who works in a “hagwon” (private academy), elaborates on the ranking; “hagwon, public (state), university - hagwon being the lowest, clearly.” Moreover, the social stratification of NESTs occurs since working in an academy, according to Lucinda, “is kind of frowned upon because they’re businesses that can start up and shut down like Macdonald’s can.” Yet even among academies there exists a stratum, as Cassandra explained, “there is a hierarchy for the hagwons too because there are some which offer [expletive] jobs; people call it ‘hagwon hell’.” Thus, those working in private academies may be subject to social marginalisation and distancing from peers who work in “higher-tier” establishments or their marginalisation may arise within the workplace.

Preferential treatment. While polarisation and hierarchies predominantly exert a limiting effect on teacher self-image, there are some positive aspects arising from the “distant other” construct. Firstly, participants commented on how their outsider status grants them privileges in the workplace. Renato emphasised the positive reception he experienced at the English Village:

I just really enjoyed it, the students were really highly motivated and ... I really felt valued, I felt like they wanted me to be there and everyone was super appreciative and super friendly; I think we developed the term “rock-star” treatment!

Renato was clearly thankful that he was well received at his new position and spoke fondly of this memory. Meanwhile, Lily believed that despite times of alienation, on balance, she experienced equal instances of preferential treatment, and she offered a specific example of exemption from certain duties:

I think that a lot of Koreans are obligated to do extra hours and overtime on certain occasions and that is often unpaid ... when we had special festivals or open classes they had to stay late, getting the school ready. But, because we were foreigners, we got to go home as per our contract.

Fortunately, Vanessa too found her employer to be accommodating and amenable even in the absence of a work visa, reinforcing her self-efficacy. As a non-Korean, she benefits from concessions including generous leave (unavailable to her Korean colleagues), which facilitate a satisfying lifestyle. Other participants described how students were very respectful and appreciative of teachers leaving their home countries to teach in Korea.

Therefore, the self-image of a distanced other was a central finding in this study. While teachers often reported negative experiences in their contexts through feelings of polarisation and due to the presence of rigid hierarchies, there were instances of preferential treatment, due to their foreigner status, which served to strengthen self-image.

Theme 2: Commercial Asset

The second construct is embedded in the business model of education, encountered by all interviewees at some point in their teaching careers. The recurrent characterisation of NESTs as commodities undermines the development of an authentic teacher-self. Sub-themes which contribute to the notion of NESTs as commodities include the perceived pandering to parents espoused by school administrations, the resultant pedagogical implications and the reduction of NESTs to “foreign faces” who elevate the reputation of the educational institution, as Figure 3 shows:

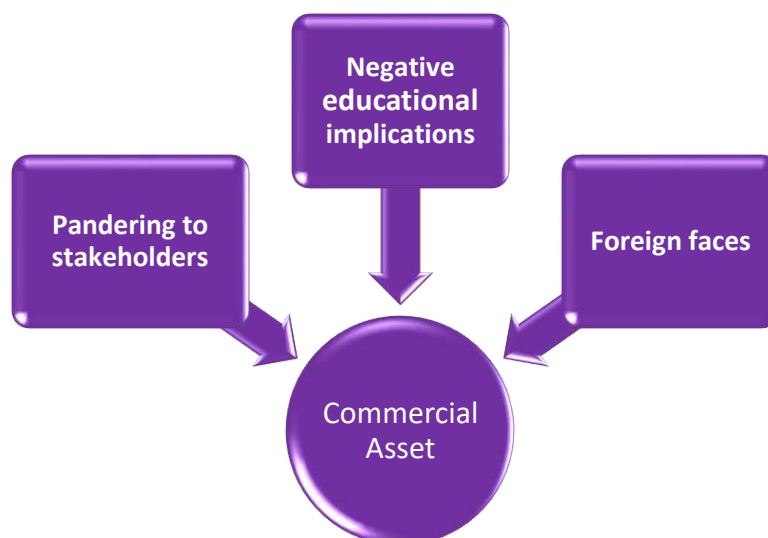


Figure 3: Commercial Asset

Pandering to parents. Six teachers of younger learners objected to administrations reactively catering to the demands of individual parents, at the expense of educational gains, as demonstrated by Tamara in her account of the institutional culture of the international school:

The person who owns the school ... has lived in Korea long enough that he has kind of pushed aside a lot of western notions of education and totally embraced Korean private education ... let's pander to parents as much as possible.

Seemingly, as private schools strive to retain as many students as possible, situations transpire in which catering to stakeholders ultimately results in diminished teacher authority. When discussing the relationship with her employer, Geraldine acknowledged that her school prioritises its relationship with parents:

If it is a conflict between us and a parent, and the parent is unreasonable, [the Korean teacher] will still side with the parent. The school is definitely run like a business - they definitely want the money.

Similarly, the leadership's deference to parents also triggered Cassandra's feelings of inferiority. The dismissive attitude of the management and the influential power held by complaining parents subjugated her status and led to even larger sweeping changes, such as alterations to the academic programme, "the director didn't care about the welfare ... of the English teachers...if a parent complained, he would change the curriculum."

Negative educational implications. Furthermore, most participants believed that the focus on profitability produces detrimental educational outcomes. For instance, Tamara lambasted her international school's practice of amalgamating students, whereby "in an effort to generate revenue and to become bigger in general, they have been clustering kids of mixed abilities in the same level," since she was then faced with the dilemma of abandoning certain lessons to avoid overwhelming weaker learners.

Janet also expressed concerns regarding the impact discretionary student admissions in another international school had on learners:

There is a big issue with students getting accepted even though their English level is way too low – I have an ESL student who is looking at spending a full 3 to 4 semesters in the ESL programme which means he is not earning any high school credits at all... the administration didn't want to say no to the money and they don't realise what the big deal is in making a decision like that.

Meanwhile, Lily, now working in a private elementary school, revealed that tests are often simplified to promote higher pass rates, with the objective of gratifying parents. She argued that this is an unethical system, triggering adverse effects such as student demotivation, while also marring the teachers' views of their own praxis. Accordingly, participants evinced a lack of institutional confidence, citing how the entrenched business culture often takes precedence over student needs.

Foreign faces. Inextricably linked to the business culture is the pervasive use of metaphors, including "prop" "foreign face" "commodity" and "white face," which define NESTs as embodiments of the marketed subject, English, rather than as established teachers. Cassandra described how this self-image is intertwined with a lack of recognition as a professional: "The first job I had I didn't really feel respected there, I felt more like a prop ... like she speaks English so your kids and are going to speak great English." Whilst Geraldine also considered the symbolic value NESTs bring to the school's image: "The perception is that maybe we help kids learn English merely by the fact that we are native speakers ... to have NESTs at your school gives it a better reputation and brings it to a higher level."

Lily reflected on her previous post as a homeroom teacher, where a high level of learner contact, autonomy and responsibility furnished her with a strong sense of identity. Now employed in a private school as a "floating" English teacher, she lamented the arrant contrast

in the two positions, “I just feel like foreign face and a commodity in the classroom now; I wouldn’t really classify it as teaching to be honest.”

Moreover, Lucinda’s self-characterization as a “white face” in the online videos that are used by her school as promotional instruments had a deleterious effect on her self-esteem:

I feel insecure about my image being used because I don't know how long [the principal] will use it or what rights I have over it. I have degrees and experience in the field and yet, it seems like I'm still just a white face for advertising. It's a bit of a blow to my ego.

However, Dale suggested that NESTs identify with the reductionist metaphors above partly because they are by official definition, non-professional workers, which is attributable to the employment visa granted to them and the low status it subsequently engenders:

I think the problem us being seen as “foreign faces” is unfortunately the E-2 visa is a [expletive] joke ... On an E-2 visa by definition you are not a “선생” [teacher], you’re a “강사” with means instructor, so you are not considered to be a valued professional.

Thus, the Commercial Asset finding reflects how the professional identity of the teachers in this study could to be compromised when instances of pandering to parents takes place, since it serves to remind them of the profit-driven context they are part of. Moreover, they bear witness to educational practices which detract from their institutional confidence and are reminded of their involuntary strategic positioning as white faces of English.

Theme 3: Replaceable Part

A further finding which emerged is rooted in issues of temporality and stagnation, leading to discourses of disengagement and replaceability. As Figure 4 demonstrates, two critical factors which caused the NESTs to question their legitimacy and long-term viability were perceived career ceilings and frequent contractual issues.

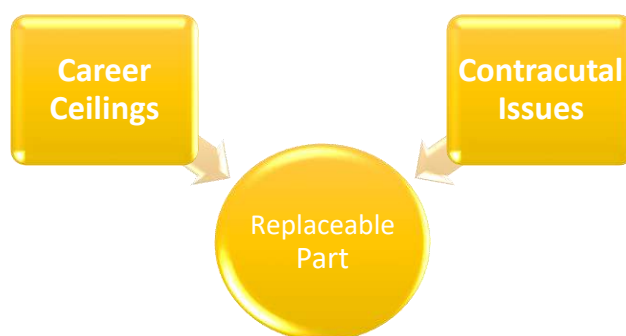


Figure 4: Replaceable Part

Career ceilings. Participants across the various educational institutions associate the lack of opportunities for progression in their contexts, along with their perceived dispensability. This is summarised by Tyler, who juxtaposes his conception of a “career” with the reality he encountered:

It's something I can see myself doing permanently as well as receiving the support and having the upward-mobility with which to advance ... I don't think that is possible in Korea as the foreign teachers are far too often treated as replaceable parts.

It became clear than NESTs find furthering their careers challenging. Describing her previous school's organisational structure, Cassandra too recounted the lack of opportunities available to NESTs, beyond the limited advancement to head teacher:

There is a head teacher at that school, but ... there wasn't a lot of pay bump and you would still have the same duties as the other teachers. There wouldn't be any more movement up to administration. You would just be in charge of the teachers and be the voice of them. ... You would still be considered an English teacher.

However, Lily's current predicament is even more restrictive with no potential for progression. She is currently embarking on an MA, similar to Vanessa and Jeff, in order to bolster her employment opportunities outside of Korea, since she sees no discernible career trajectory; "I am the only full-time (English) teacher, everyone else is classified as part-time. There are no higher positions. This is as good as it gets."

Contractual issues. Further perceptions of impermanence were exposed, emanating from cases of contractual disputes relating to salary, location and housing. Six of the participants candidly shared narratives of such conflicts, and it is evident that several even *expect* some form of discord, such as Tyler, who encountered "the common problem of [employers] trying to find every loophole to pay me less" and Tamara who expanded on this problematic issue:

I have a number of friends who have had to sue to get their employer to pay them what is legally owed to them ... that happens when people think you are [on] a lower rung or a dispensable service worker, not a professional that should be valued for institutional and intellectual knowledge.

In Tara's case, dispensability negatively affected her perception of professionalism. Moreover, modified employment conditions can also impinge on job security. Renato's identity as a "distant outsider" at the bottom of the state school hierarchy was exacerbated by a dilemma he faced when he was unexpectedly relocated after the school holidays:

It was the first day back ... I was talking to a Korean teacher, and she said, "I am sorry about your new placement, it is very far away." I said, "What are you talking about?" I went to my own co-teacher and asked her what's up; I went from having one countryside school to two and I changed from commuting 11 hours a week, more than any of my colleagues ... to 16 hours a week. I was gonna be getting on a bus at 6 am and getting home at 8.30 at night ... I said, "That's crazy ... there are hundreds of teachers in this programme, why did you pick me to go that school?"

Renato felt disrespected and undervalued when faced with such a complicated and unjustifiable commute. He unsuccessfully protested the education authority's decision, ultimately leading to his unchallenged resignation and departure from Korea to undertake a Masters in TESOL.

A further controversy raised during the interviews was the fluid nature of NEST contracts, skewed in the employer's favour. This may adversely impact teachers' working hours and salaries. Geraldine elucidated how this may transpire, describing the convoluted nature and vitiating factors associated with contractual agreements at the kindergarten:

The contract ... adds in clauses under everything, so the employees' work hours are 9 am to 6 pm, but you can leave when your classes are finished ... the bottom term "d": "However the employer can direct the employee to work whenever is necessary." So, although it has set terms, they are subject to change. In the normal contract, they say you can be made to work up to three Saturdays a year, but someone made a fuss about that last year because we had to work on a Sunday once, so they changed it to Saturday or Sunday, but this is all after they signed the contract and are (already) in Korea ... There is a double standard. Any time we bring up the contract ... they say well it is just a guideline, you don't care about the school; a contractual or moral guilting [sic] thing.

When her previous employer reneged on certain pecuniary aspects of her contract, in an apparent "bait and switch" manoeuvre, Cassandra was similarly discouraged. Since the E-2 visa is tied to the sponsoring employer, she accepts that there was little action she could have taken:

He had me on as an independent contractor, so he was getting a tax break, and I wasn't signed up for public (health) insurance ... A lot of the stuff that was written in the job offer that caused me to accept [the job], like the pension ... wasn't offered to me once I was working there.

Teachers may feel a sense of impermanence and unease, as this finding demonstrates. When contracts are altered without prior agreement, or contracts appear to exploit the NEST, naturally the participants feel undervalued and easily replaceable. Moreover, oftentimes it seems that opportunities for progression are severely limited, which only further contributes to their sense of dispensability.

Theme 4: Cultural and Linguistic Ambassador

Positive NEST reflections on their roles generated the fourth finding, *Cultural and Linguistic Ambassador*, as represented in Figure 5. Despite the obstacles and sense of replaceability described above, one's native command of English combined with innate cultural knowledge serve to reify teacher identity and self-efficacy, as eight of the interviewees recounted.



Figure 5: Cultural and Linguistic Ambassador

Native speakerism and culture. Several participants described how their native-language proficiency furnishes them with the requisite knowledge to teach cultural appropriacy. For example, Dale acknowledged that while the Korean NNESTs he worked alongside had studied English extensively and were particular adept at explaining grammar, he feels that his role could *not* be fulfilled by someone lacking an intrinsic cultural understanding of the language, since:

[NNESTs] may be very knowledgeable, but for me it's the cultural dynamic that I can bring to a role that they can't bring. It is the culture; why do we say this, why do we do that, what it means. I would teach them things that culturally a Korean wouldn't know but are important when communicating with a westerner.

Tamara further emphasised how imparting cultural knowledge is instrumental in promoting fluency and engagement with the target language:

I actually said to my managers, that you could get a hologram to teach English, you don't need me to be physically present for the kids to understand the vocabulary; my job is to be a cultural ambassador – to make the words have some cultural context, to let the students know how this word is really used ... how to communicate and start thinking more as an English speaker.

As shown here, Dale and Tara offered examples of their roles as cultural ambassadors, instrumental to the authentic modelling of nuanced meanings, thus solidifying their perceived value in the classroom.

Native speakerism and language. A second sub-text which validates NEST PI is associated with the unique, intrinsic language competence they bring to the classroom; their ability to model pronunciation and natural language usage. Janet illustrated the importance of phonological accuracy during English instruction:

Native speakers have advantages ... we are less likely to make certain mistakes because our English is native level, already perfect ... to model perfect pronunciation there is a clear advantage of having a native speaker.

More pointedly, Lily questioned the effects of learner exposure to non-native pronunciation, following her observation of a NNEST: “Even [the students] could pick up on her accent. She was saying ‘beach’ instead of ‘peach’ and a student corrected her ... it was embarrassing.” Additionally, Geraldine suggested that native speakers alone possess the necessary capability to distinguish between prescriptive and descriptive grammars:

When I watch my Korean co-teachers ... they are really good teachers in terms of teaching methodology and their English may be textbook perfect, but sometimes textbook perfect is not natural or not speaking perfect so students really need a native teacher.

Native-speakerism and the knowledge and cultural understanding that accompanies it is highly significant to the NESTs. As this finding displays, native-speakerism robustly reinforces their value as teachers in Korea, notwithstanding the other difficulties that they faced. Having such

an innate understanding of language and culture furnishes them with the belief that their contribution to the English education system is both essential and effective.

Theme 5. Professional and Respected Educator

As shown above, there are circumstances where Positive PI may be forged notwithstanding the conflicts, marginalisation and dilemmas confronting NESTs as represented by the *Commercial Assets*, *Replaceable Parts* and *Distanced Others* constructs. Eight of the participants are already in possession of a master's degree or working towards one, exercising personal agency to reify their self-image and facilitate social mobility. Moreover, four *have* experienced limited career progression in Korea. Additionally, discourses reveal how the teachers benefit emotionally from social prestige. A final prevalent aspect, bolstering positive identity originates from the participants' detachment from inauspicious stereotyping. Figure 7 displays these sub-texts, which lead to teachers feeling professional and respected in their contexts:

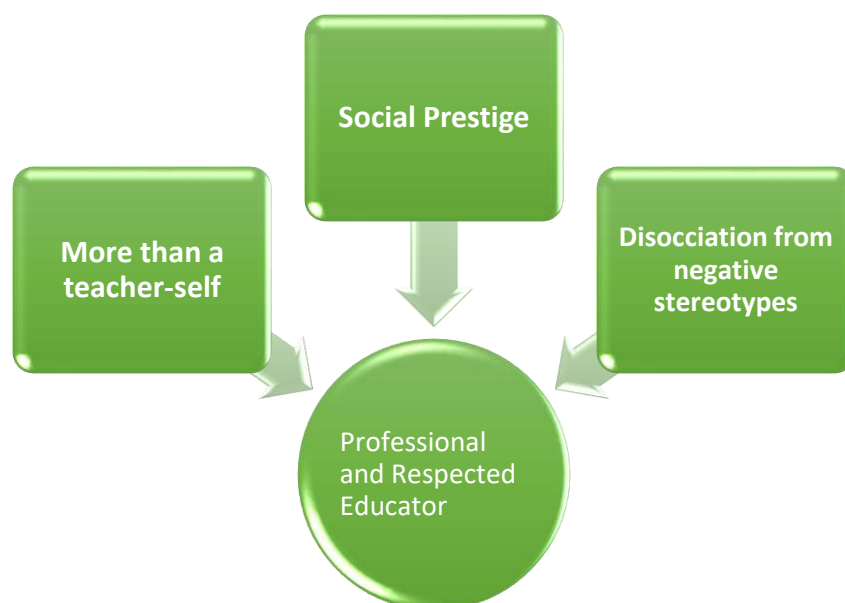


Figure 6. Professional and Respected Educator

More than a teacher-self. Among the cohort, Jeff, Tamara, Lily and Renato *had* experienced promotions during their sojourns in Korea, highlighting how career progression *is* possible, whilst patently not the norm. When furnished with increased responsibility and recognition in their roles, NEST perceptions of career legitimacy and longevity are reinforced. For instance, Jeff has a leadership role as a university co-ordinator, managing lecturers, delivering training workshops and assisting with recruitment:

[ELT] absolutely can be a career ... As long as you are still good at what you do, you could stick around and do it a long time ... I was pushed to take the co-ordinator position for many years ... now I am doing that job I take it much more seriously...it's harder to detach myself from the job.

Lily felt valued and respected while in her position of responsibility at an academy. Moreover, she recounts how having some influence over methodology was professionally edifying:

I had a lot of input as head teacher. I would do demo lessons to train the teachers, or before the lessons I would tell them the effective ways to teach phonics, for example. I wanted the classes to go very slowly, so I had the teachers make games and I showed them lots of different activities that would be fun for the children.

Tamara was another participant who was especially successful in negotiating the hierarchy of a language chain of academies, moving from a teaching role to training and eventually to curriculum development in the company headquarters:

After teaching for about 18 months, the hagwon asked me to train the Korean staff on the upper-intermediate materials so that they could market them to the parents. Around the two-year mark, HQ became aware of some of my unorthodox methods and approached me about training veteran teachers in education seminars. Based on my evaluations from those instructors, the company asked me to become a part-time content developer. This subsequently led to me becoming a trainer and senior content developer ... I had pretty much done every single job that someone who was not bilingual could do.

Social prestige. Besides advancement to a senior role, having a professional reputation is another factor which support favourable identity formation. Tyler attributed this recognition to his long-term career as a teacher, since “almost everyone perceived me as a professional ... due to the fact that I had years of experience; they respected that.” After transitioning to a university role, Dale experienced an elevated social standing: “[The] job gave me a lot of respect amongst Koreans...my stock went up.” Meanwhile, Tamara enjoyed the esteem private tutoring has brought her:

I have enjoyed ... freelancing as a consultant and guiding students. Well for a while, I was a bit of a celebrity in the educational world ... I am known as a “star-maker” ... Korean mothers, the rich ones, are very much like I don’t want a substitute, I want exactly the same thing that you have; that service, that person. Some mothers will pay whatever amount just so that other mothers can’t use me.

Furthermore, successfully overcoming the negativity associated with private academies, Janet ascended the hierarchy to an international school, leading to an enhanced status amongst her peer group. For Vanessa, her social prestige is not only linked to her disposition and aptitude for teaching, but also through her identification as a desirable, quintessential NEST, since her employers, “think I do I great job and would like to keep me on as long as possible... I am a good teacher and I do really care about the kids ... but also I am the ideal teacher type; being young, cute and a girl.”

Dissociation from negative stereotypes. This final sub-text materialises when participants detach themselves from the negative bias associated with the NEST “out-group.” Explicit in several interviews is the perception of a dichotomy of dedicated teachers and “opportunists,” as participants engage in discourses designed to dissociate from the latter. Vanessa illustrated the division between the two: “Some people are just enjoying their time. The job is a second place to ... the lifestyle of living abroad. Other people, like me, really care about teaching.” Dale concurred with this view, as for some, “it is just something they do because it gives them an income and they can live this great life in Korea, and there are others

who are *teachers*; they take their work seriously and love what they do.” Similarly, Cassandra, echoes the prevailing belief that opportunistic teachers prioritise their social lives over their responsibilities: “There were a lot of people who go over to Korea to party ... that don’t care really about what happens in the 9 to 5 ... all they care about is partying until Sunday morning.”

In a more serious vein, Lucinda divorced herself from the potential hazards associated with the opportunistic NESTs: “I had issues with other foreigners; I just found them to be quite reckless ... people come over here for the wrong reasons ... I just think that’s unacceptable when there are children being trusted in our hands.”

Finally, Dale attributed the erosion of personal friendships to his incompatibility with “directionless” peers from the unfavourable NEST out-group:

My relationships with my original bunch of friends have got worse because I just can’t relate to these people ... They are not investing in themselves with qualifications. It is just teaching is an easy job and they can live this great life ... I have had to detach myself from a lot of those people because I feel like they’re just not bringing anything to the party. I think they’re losers who are wasting their time.

Thus, by distancing themselves from unfavourable typecasting, NESTs internally affirm their professional commitment and legitimacy as teachers, as shown by this finding. Moreover, teachers enjoy recognition from others in their communities, which reinforces their social image and perceived reputation. Lastly, this finding establishes that NESTs can experience some forms of career progression and advancement.

Discussion

1. How do NEST experiences and beliefs *hinder* positive professional identity constructions in the Korean EFL context?
2. How do NEST experiences and beliefs *promote* positive professional identity constructions in the Korean EFL context?

In response to the above research questions I present an analytical and interpretive discussion (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008) of the lived experiences and beliefs of the eleven participants and how these impact on their PI constructions in both affirmative and restrictive ways. The findings confirm that their identities are undeniably complex and conflicting (Appleby, 2016), since NESTs inhabit a reality often characterised by ambivalence; arising out of their marginalisation, commodification and replaceability, but mediated, to a degree, by their preferential treatment, perceptions of career legitimacy and native-speaking status. Moreover, the findings also reinforce the fluidity of PI (Appleby, 2016); since these constructions are “not something ... fixed nor ... imposed; rather [they are] negotiated through experience and the sense that is made of that experience” (Sachs, 2005, as cited in Pennington & Richards, 2016, pp. 47-48).

NEST Experiences and Beliefs that Hinder Positive Professional Identity Constructions in the Korean EFL Context

In line with Varghese, Morgan, Johnston & Johnson, (2005), the participants described instances of marginalisation which stemmed from cultural and communicative differences. Through the lens of social identity theory, marginality is an amalgam of a state and an emotion, causing struggles in PI formation (Mowat, 2015). Whilst there is extensive discourse refuting

the privileged position of NESTs overseas (e.g., Golombek & Jordan, 2005; Holliday, 2006), Jeon (2009) revealed that this reputed superiority is oftentimes absent since NESTs habitually experience institutional isolation. This study's thick descriptions (Punch, 2005) confirm that in both the private and state school systems, teachers are alienated, positioned at the bottom of hierarchies and deserted by co-teachers.

Other studies concerning expatriate teachers (e.g., Jeon, 2009; Kim, 2012; Le, 2013; Stanley, 2012) discuss analogous cases of exclusion. In an investigation of Canadian NESTs in Korea, Lee (2011) discovered that communicative issues were a chief factor in the division of Korean administration staff and the expatriate faculty. There were few opportunities for the Korean faculty, the Self, and the expatriate teachers, the *Distanced Other*, to engage in educational and organisational dialogues. Lee (2011) suggests that the communication deficit is attributable to the perception of NESTs as assistants rather than genuine teachers. Accordingly, as shown in this study, they lack influence and voice (Kim, 2012), are situated on the periphery of the organisation, and denied the opportunity for complete participation (Wenger, 1998).

Moreover, polarisation may be a corollary of working in a hierarchical context without proficiency in the host language (Chesnut, 2016; Kim, 2012), a reality shared by this study's cohort. Korean society is predominantly ethnically homogenous (Seol, 2012) and characterised by vertical relationships and "high-context communication" (Froese, Peltokorpi, & Ko, 2012). However, expatriate teachers hailing from Western cultures, characterised by "low-context communication" and individualism may experience incompatibility with the hierarchical, collectivist society (p. 332). Froese et al. (2012) suggest that when NEST conflict and communication styles are inconsistent with Korean values, there is a greater likelihood of NEST demotivation and increased attrition rates. Thus, the assumption that the process of acculturation exerts a restrictive influence on PI is validated by these participants' in the Korean context.

The influence of commercialised education is a consistent sub-text restricting affirmative PI. Working in profit-oriented domains appears to impinge on self-esteem and test identity resources in several ways (Miller, 2009), since NESTs experience difficulty in reconciling the perceived pandering to stakeholders, unorthodox academic practices and their objective commodification with their personal values.

For-profit education inevitably results in a power shift where parents (and students) have increased authority and control (Chesnut, 2016). NESTs, constrained by the power exerted by the "customers," conceive that what occurs pedagogically is of less salience than client satisfaction and school profitability (Whitsed & Wright, 2011). Thus, NEST careers are ostensibly dependent on factors such as student reenrolment rather than educational outcomes, which, from the teachers' perspective results in school administrations implementing unethical policies (Walker, 2014), certainly reiterated in this study.

Participant accounts testify to schools promoting English acquisition and the attainment of cultural capital through the representation of NESTs as embodiments of authenticity (Lan, 2011). Disparity between conceptions of educational values and commercial practices confined the participants' identities to symbolic representations including "foreign faces" and "props," rather than valued professionals. This parallels the pejorative metaphors self-ascribed by NESTs in other Asian contexts; "a white face" (Ruecker & Ives, 2015, p. 749), "a tool" (Whitsed & Wright, 2011, p. 38), "performing monkeys with entertainment value" (Jeon 2009, pp. 238-239) and even "English prostitute" (Cho 2012, p. 233). The dehumanising imagery teachers use in their own self-reduction accords with Jeon's (2009) observation that NESTs *are* utilised as commodities, whereby their symbolic presence in schools serves to appease parents' anxieties and fulfil expectations of authentic English instruction. Thus, as the findings here reveal, when market forces take precedence over skills and professionalism this restricts

the teacher-self; personhood becomes intertwined with the commercial “product” (Appleby, 2016).

Whilst the participants do self-identify as English *teachers*, one participant comments on the official visa designation of “foreign language *instructor*” - sojourns are performed under a nomenclature which characterises them not as *teachers* per se. Ostensibly, the distinction may appear inconsequential, especially since recruitment discourse employs them interchangeably (Ruecker & Ives, 2015). However, a potential conflict in the beliefs of NESTs and employers could exist; the former characterising their status as “qualified teachers” and the latter as “assistants” (Lee, 2011). Operating in a culture which emphasises hierarchies and social status, NESTs are inevitably subject to subsidiary positioning (Jeon, 2009). Moreover, Jambor (2010) asserts that the commodification of NESTS may, in part, be due to the preponderant Korean sentiment “that the average ‘foreign English teacher’ is unqualified” (p. 9) - grounded in the belief that their linguistic competence, a primary employment criterion, is inherited knowledge rather than acquired skill (Lan, 2011). This is underscored by lenient E-2 visa requirements which do not stipulate prior teaching experience or certification. Undoubtedly as NESTs avail themselves of the relatively liberal prerequisites to secure “teaching” positions, the same leniency also serves to feed the huge demand for their presence, by *businesses* competitively vying for success by promoting authenticity through their prized commodity, the NEST. Therefore, when NESTs attempt to reconcile their positioning by employers with their own self-characterisation (Le, 2013) and the impact this has on their professional credibility, the *Commercial Asset* construct evolves.

Commodification appears to limit the extent to which NESTs can establish career legitimacy (Johnston, 1997), and this is further complicated by issues of temporality. Collins and Shubin (2015) portray EFL teachers as existing “in a social milieu where transience is accentuated” (p. 103), corroborating the negotiation of temporality that underpins the lived experiences of the participants here. The *Replaceable Part* identity embodies feelings of impermanence which impede the development of robust PI, evidenced in the scant opportunities for advancement and contractual disputes which frame teachers’ perceived dispensability. The findings reveal how through temporality, NESTs may identify as migrant service workers (Cho, 2012; Lee, 2011) perhaps because they “have to reconcile their lives with the objective temporal structure of Korean society” (Collins & Shubin, 2015, p. 98) and short-term contracts. Similarly, Johnston’s (1997) study in Poland displays how NEST trajectories are constrained by limited promotion opportunities in roles characterised by “permeability” (Maley, 1992, p. 98). Undoubtedly, the identity transposed on NESTs when faced with expendability results in a lack of motivation and commitment, exemplified by participants who found no incentive to remain in their posts.

Egregious contractual infringements are self-reported by the author of a study of expatriate educators in a Korean institute. Oliver (2009) laments her sub-standard housing, unpaid flight reimbursement and non-existent bonuses - similar disputes to those experienced in state and private schools in the present study. When contractual obligations are dishonoured, NESTs are often at the mercy of employers, since taking legal action to rectify such issues is inevitably protracted and could even harm the teacher’s reputation to future employers (Barrett & Fellin, 2016). Thus, contractual breaches and career ceilings undoubtedly lead to insecurity and distress amongst expatriate teachers, whereby they adopt the *Replaceable Part* identity.

NEST Experiences and Beliefs that Promote Positive Professional Identity Constructions in the Korean EFL Context

Language teacher PI may be fragmented and conflicting (Varghese et al., 2005), which accounts for an unanticipated finding arising from this study; the paradoxical preferential

treatment that the participants describe, vis a vis their polarisation, commodification and temporality. However, Appleby (2016) reports a similar finding in Japan, where the contradictory states of marginalisation and privilege were also present. The instances of favourable treatment described in the findings illustrate how teachers may be granted affordances due their peripheral positioning, (e.g., exemption from extra-curricular activities) which reinforce self-efficacy.

However, preferential treatment is certainly not universal, but institutionally bound. Vanessa, for instance, enjoys a flexible schedule even in the absence of a visa, yet there may also be fiscal advantages for her employer; perhaps in circumventing the requirement to pay tax, pension and national health contributions (Hymans, 2015). However, this arrangement still affords her some alignment with her employer (Wenger, 1998). Moreover, for Renato, the positive reception he received at one school was diametrically opposed to the alienation encountered at another. So, whilst this finding is sanguine, it also reflects the inconsistency that NESTs in the EFL context experience; they are both privileged due to their foreignness but segregated because of it. Furthermore, Wenger (1998) may view the ambivalent positioning of NESTs as something they both “resent and embrace” (p. 170); in one regard marginalisation inhibits the self, yet in another it strengthens PI, since it may signal an opportunity for increased participation and hope for acceptance *in the future* (Wenger, 1998).

Multiple studies of *NNESTs* highlight the uncertainty and uneasiness experienced in their PI formation (Martel & Wang, 2014), with scholars such as Bright and Phan (2011) denouncing the ELT industry for perpetuating the discriminatory “native speaker fallacy” (Phillipson, 1992). While the NS ideology is disruptive, grounded in the history of colonialism and imprinted with cultural hegemony (Holliday, 2006), the propensity to recruit NESTs in Korea and beyond is unabating (Ruecker & Ives, 2015). Moreover, this study’s participants ascribe to what I tentatively posit as their own “*native speaker reality*.” They explain how their intrinsic cultural and linguistic competence reinforces their PI as legitimate educators, thus patently conflicting with rhetoric discrediting the idealised native-speaker model (e.g., Holliday, 2006; Phillipson, 1992).

To evaluate the merits of native-speakerism, studies have examined student perceptions in Asian contexts. For instance, Ma’s (2012) investigation in Hong Kong revealed preferences for NESTs based on their linguistic competence, teaching methodology and facilitation of a conducive, immersive environment. A further salient factor was pronunciation; students dismissed the unorthodox speech of local teachers, viewing NEST pronunciation as authentic and reliable (Ma, 2012). Barratt and Kontra (2000) and Reves and Medgyes (1994) report similar findings and expatiate on the association between NS authenticity and student motivation. These studies reconcile not only the beliefs of Asian learners, but also the EFL teachers in the present study, who proclaim that their innate linguistic knowledge is indispensable. However, participant accounts in this study do uphold the resources of *NNESTs*, particularly with regards to their broad grammatical knowledge, which also correlates with the findings in Ma (2012) and Barratt and Kontra (2000).

Functioning as an “unofficial emissary” (Johnston, 1999, p. 277) of Western culture is a significant element of NEST pedagogical repertoire. Despite academic opposition to teaching idealised western culture as a form of indoctrination (Holliday, 2006), it appears from this study that NESTs deem cultural referencing unavoidable when infusing language with meaning. While Bright and Phan (2011) suggest that this phenomenon stems from the NEST desire to position Western ideals as superior to those of the East, this was not a perceptible sub-theme. Rather, the participants believe that displaying lexis and concepts in an accessible cultural framework aids acquisition. However, some participants perceived the use of communicative language teaching styles as a means to offset the inadequacies in the mainstream system, which may bolster Bright and Phan’s (2011) contention that NESTs subscribe to ethnocentricity,

advocating the dismissal of “backward” Asian approaches in favour of idealised westernised tenets, such as critical thinking, independence and creativity. Such cultural reductionism (Shin, 2007), is vehemently lambasted by Holliday (2006) who perceives it as a “moral mission” (p. 386) to remedy “imperfect” cultures. Yet while the ethical and political opposition to this controversial stance is legitimate, there was no evidence of subversive motives in the current study; the participants appear to be motivated by the sincere desire to empower learners, albeit defined through the lens of what the *NESTs* stipulate as “correct” and “natural” language. Thus, a significant determinant of the participants’ self-efficacy is their competence in fluent and “standard English” (Martel & Wang, 2014, p. 292), which translates into their identification as cultural and linguistic ambassadors.

The findings reinforce the assumption that native speakerism would influence *NESTs* and display the extent to which it is determinant of positive PI. However, through a critical lens, Holliday (2006) would argue that it is in the interest of *NESTs* to (consciously or unconsciously) perpetuate the NS ideology for protectionist means; in order preserve their capital and careers overseas.

Notwithstanding the experience of temporality experienced by some, there is a salient juxtaposition where reified EFL teacher identity emerges, reflected in the construct, *Professional and Respected Educator*. Teachers develop more robust PIs if they experience recognition for their pedagogical and intellectual contributions. Moreover, conditions which support teachers lead to the evolution of an increasingly authentic teacher-self (Pennington & Richards, 2016) and include career progression, social prestige and dissociation from pejorative stereotypes.

Unquestionably, teachers wishing to remain in the EFL profession for extended periods of time naturally mirror employees of other fields, since they too are “motivated by their higher-level psychological needs for challenge, responsibility, personal growth, advancement and recognition” (Pennington 1992, p. 208). In isolated instances where promotion endows participants with added responsibility this results in increased participation; *NESTs* migrate from the periphery of an educational organisation to an engagement with the vision and philosophy of the institutional community of practice (Wenger, 1998).

Embedded in participant commentaries are discourses of social prestige, displaying how one’s status as an English teacher *may* generate respect amongst the host citizens and peers. This supported by Lan (2011), who claims that *NESTs* “can convert their native-language proficiency ... into symbolic prestige” (p. 1670). Similarly, Kim’s (2012) study reveals that *NESTs* did experience affirmative recognition in the wider social context. Moreover, with a wholesale focus on the improvement of English competence nationwide, the Korean government, the Ministry of Education, institutions, parents and students all subscribe to the ideology of English as a global language, evident through the hiring of tens of thousands of *NESTs* (Jeon, 2009). Against the background of working in a nation which has fully succumbed to English fever (Park, 2009), teachers may align their identities positively with the instrumental roles they fulfil in delivering the “product” to the highly demanding market, especially when this is within a university or international school setting, which the participants unanimously view as a veritable ascension in the employment hierarchy.

Yet an official, institutionalised career structure is largely absent in the EFL field, (CfBT, 1989) and is a quandary mirrored in the Korean context. With perhaps only two potential career trajectories available – a vertical move via promotion or a horizontal shift through the negotiation of the hierarchy of employer types, both facilitate *limited* social mobility in this context. Firstly, the E-2 visa designation “instructor,” theoretically precludes higher status positioning. Although, as the findings show, teachers may be promoted “unofficially” in that they are given the title of “Head Teacher” for example, their official visa designation does not change. Moreover, a lack of competence in the host language constrains

advancement opportunities, as the findings reveal. Lastly, NEST salaries have stagnated in Korea, so teachers often relocate to other nations in pursuit of more lucrative positions or exit the field, as exemplified in this study.

The final means of solidifying PI arises through a dissociation with what the teacher is not; participants distance themselves from the image of the peripatetic, the directionless, the opportunist often typified in narratives of NEST identity (e.g., Collins & Shubin, 2015; Neilsen, 2009, 2014), generated through recruitment practices (Ruecker & Ives, 2015) and placed at the forefront of the ELT professionalism debate (Clayton, 1990). Thus, viewed through the lens of social identity theory, (Tajfel, 1974) the rejection of the morally inferior out-group enables NESTs to view their predicaments more positively, as they guard their self-esteem and characterise themselves as *Professional and Respected Educators* (Varghese et al., 2005).

This study has shown that citizens of inner-circle nations working as English teachers in Korea find their sojourns characterised by extensive ambivalence which is manifested on several levels; they perceive themselves as valued for their “foreignness” yet marginalised because of it; they are objectified as commodities yet without private education employment opportunities would be scant; they identify as authentic teachers but by official definition they are conversational instructors; they may experience instances of recognition and promotion yet this competes with the reality of their expendability; they uphold their native-speaker competence, but do this against a controversial backdrop of linguistic imperialism and cultural hegemony; they use harsh metaphor to characterise their tokenism, yet employ similar pejorative imagery to distance themselves from peers.

I have evidenced how EFL teachers in the Korean context are located in a struggle between the lived realities of their working environments and the desire to be recognised as professional educators, while oscillating between societal and institutional peripheral participation and non-participation in their communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). Although the decision to relocate to Korea to commence teaching English may result in glimpses of promise for the future, I have shown that inevitably, the majority of teachers will be obstructed in their professional development since they find it impracticable to overcome career ceilings and restrictive visa and employment conditions. Ultimately, as contextual factors constrain their professional selves, high NEST attrition rates will undoubtedly persist. Moreover, I argue that NESTs should view entering the EFL realm in Korea as a vehicle to initiate a teaching career, rather than as the inception of a lengthy and fruitful sojourn. Whilst participant testimony in this study has established that teachers may enjoy some recognition and limited promotion in their roles, and that their pursuit of further ELT credentials and postgraduate qualifications reflects their commitment to the profession in the long term, I propose that the prevailing question that they need to consider throughout their sojourn is, “What’s next?”

Since there is a paucity of opportunities for professional growth and development, combined with the absence of a structured career path, the findings of this study indicate that NESTs will reach an inevitable point where they either wish to relocate to another nation or leave the profession; thus, the salience of the “What’s next?” question may, in most instances, be incontrovertible.

While this study focused on the narratives of teachers in one specific context, I have drawn on literature from other Asian countries and the findings here could have significant implications beyond Korea. This may be especially pertinent in expanding circle nations, including China and Japan, where teachers entering the EFL profession are not routinely required to have previous teaching experience or certification, as illuminated by the recruitment discourse. Moreover, in such locations where there are salient cultural barriers and numerous commercial language institutes competing for “clients,” it is certainly conceivable that EFL teacher status and trajectories may mirror those of the participants in this study, whereby they

encounter similar challenges of commodification, acculturation, temporality and marginalisation, inhibiting the affirmative development of their professional identity.

Limitations

Within the methodological framework, interviews were mobilised for their flexibility and as a means of generating in-depth narratives, yet they are not neutral collection instruments (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008), since they arise out of a social interaction, and may be shaped by the researcher's own reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, as cited in Punch, 2005). Moreover, Denscombe (2007) expounds how an interviewer's personal identity may influence the interviewee responses; how they perceive the interviewer in terms of their age, race and social status can certainly bring about the "interviewer effect" (Denscombe, 2007, p. 184). In the interest of ethics and transparency, the respondents were aware that I had previously lived and worked in the same social milieu and may have inferred personal characteristics, such my age or employment background. To mitigate this, there were some instances of respondent validation (Bryman, 2008) and the open-ended questionnaire responses permit a degree of triangulation, hopefully enhancing the credibility of the findings.

In any study, participants who have given consent to participate may have complex and differing motives for doing so, which are unknown to the researcher. This lack of knowledge may also be confounded by the presence of social desirability bias, a form of reactivity (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Punch, 2005) which perhaps may be deeply entrenched in a potentially marginalised teaching community with little opportunity for reflection, especially since "it takes a healthy degree of ego development to put oneself and one's work under the microscope" (Stanley, 1998, p. 586). Such bias is characterised by the tendency for interviewees to respond to questions in what they perceive as a socially acceptable manner, casting them in a positive light. Spector (2004) suggests that this bias generally occurs when respondents are confronted with questions which probe for personally or socially sensitive responses. This is a limitation which is hard to control for, however, due to the assurances of anonymity and confidentiality, it is hoped that the respondents were suitably at ease to respond to questions accurately and sincerely, reinforcing the credibility of the findings. Moreover, and quite surprisingly, several participants expressed that they found the interview process to be beneficially thought-provoking and cathartic.

This study does not seek to present generalizable findings; the objective is to reveal insights which could further our academic understanding of professional identity in a very specific context and cohort of teachers, by giving extended voice to the actors involved. Ultimately, confronting limitations is a reflexive practice, which acknowledges that my role as researcher is, to an extent, embedded in the constructs of knowledge and the reporting of my findings (Bryman, 2008) for; "like the texts we write, we can never be transcendent" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 582), yet we can reveal edifying insights, nonetheless.

It was beyond the scope of this study to interview participants more than once, so to corroborate and extend on these findings, future studies could employ a case study strategy over an extended period. This could further our understanding of both the dynamic nature of EFL teachers' self-image and yield further distinctive identity constructions.

While this study focused on the narratives of teachers in one specific context, I have drawn on literature from other Asian countries and the findings here could have significant implications beyond Korea. This may be especially pertinent in expanding circle nations, including China and Japan, where previous teaching experience or certification is not routinely required (Ruecker & Ives, 2015). Moreover, in such locations where there are salient cultural barriers and numerous commercial language institutes competing for "clients," it is certainly conceivable that those NESTs encounter similar challenges of commodification, acculturation,

temporality and marginalisation, inhibiting the affirmative development of their professional selves.

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Appendix 1. Interview Schedule

Initial move to Korea

- What compelled you to move to Korea? How did you find your first job? What was your recruitment experience like?

Acculturation

- How have you adapted to being in Korea? Have you experienced any culture shock? Please explain.
- Presently, how comfortable is your life in Korea?
- How does not speaking Korean affect your life inside and outside of work?

Roles

- Tell me about your work history in Korea. Which kinds of education institutions have you been employed in?
- Can you describe your current teaching role and curriculum used? How effective are they?
- What do you like most about your current job?
- What do you like least about your current job?

Work Culture

- Could you tell me a little bit about the relationships you have with management/director and your co-workers? Please describe any working difficulties/disputes/contractual problems you have experienced.
- How is the working culture in Korea different to the working culture in your home country?

Training and feedback

- Please describe any initial, in-house training you received at your current job or others.
- (If relevant) How has your English language teaching certificate helped you/prepared you? Or How did you learn to teach?
- Please describe the feedback and support you receive in your current job.

Career/professionalism

- Would you consider teaching English in Korea to be a career? Why or why not?
- Do Koreans/other foreigners perceive you as a professional? Please explain your opinion.
- Are you a professional teacher? What factors make someone in this context professional?
- How long do you plan to remain in Korea/continue teaching? Are you planning any professional development?

Native-speakers/foreigners

- From the perspective of employers, what factors make someone an attractive candidate for teaching English in Korea?
- Is the bias for native speaking teachers justified in your opinion? Is being a trained teacher or a native speaker more important?
- To what extent is teaching English intuitive?
- What could be done to improve the careers of teachers (E-2 visa holders) in Korea?

Author Note

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Article Citation

Howard, N.-J. (2019). Constructing professional identities: Native English-speaking teachers in South Korea. *The Qualitative Report*, 24(7), 1478-1510. Retrieved from <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol24/iss7/1>
