5-2018

Perceptions of Nonnative English-Speaking Graduate Teaching Assistants: Identity Issues, Successes, and Challenges in the Field of TESL/ TESOL

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Perceptions of Nonnative English-Speaking Graduate Teaching Assistants:

Identity Issues, Successes, and Challenges in the Field of TESL/TESOL

by

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A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

St. Cloud State University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

in English: Teaching English as a Second Language

May, 2018

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Abstract

Historically, the *native* and *nonnative* speaker dichotomy has been very limiting and marginalizing to an estimated 1 billion nonnative English speakers worldwide. Furthermore, the voices of these nonnative English speakers, particularly those that are teachers (NNESTs) have long been absent from empirical research and publications. Over the past two decades there has been a slow shift, and more focus is being given to this topic. This ethnographic, qualitative study aimed to provide a platform for NNESTs by recruiting 10 graduate teaching assistants in a TESOL program at a Midwestern University. These participants, who hailed from 5 different continents, were interviewed about their self-perceptions of their identities, successes, challenges, and their views on the native/nonnative divide. The findings of this study closely mirrored prior studies in terms of views on the advantages and disadvantages of NESTs/NNESTs. Additionally, the real and lasting impact of (mis)labeling and categorizing people by their 'native' or 'nonnative' status is revealed. The results of this study are presented such that they can be useful for future research on NESTs/NNESTs, especially those utilizing the lens of meaningful firsthand accounts, stories, and narratives.

Keywords: *native, nonnative, language identity, perceptions, TESOL, graduate teaching assistants*

Acknowledgements

All praise and thanks are due to Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Beneficent

Somaalidu waxay ku maah maahdaa:
Aqoon la'aan wa iftiin la'aan.
The Somalis have a proverb:
The absence of knowledge is the absence of light.

I thank my family, friends, professors, colleagues, and all the educational institutions I was

blessed to attend for allowing me to capture the light of knowledge.

I thank Dr. Robinson and my thesis committee for their invaluable guidance and support.

This thesis is dedicated to nonnative English-speaking students, teachers, and professionals

worldwide.

"Don't ask where I'm from, ask where I'm a local"

- Taiye Selasi

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Chapter I: Introduction

Background

The literature on teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is dominated by research and studies on native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) even though they are the minority. Seargeant (2012) estimates that there are one and half billion to two billion speakers of English if the four categories of mother-tongue (native), second language English speakers (ESL), foreign language English speakers (EFL) and those who use English as a lingua franca are totaled. The author states these statistics prove that nonnatives do indeed outnumber native speakers with a 4 to 1 ratio (pp. 48-50). Furthermore, Matsuda and Matsuda (2001) state, "The majority of English teachers in the world are nonnative speakers of the language" (p. 109) and yet they were practically invisible for decades in empirical studies and publications. There are political, historical, social, and linguistic reasons behind the disproportionate representation in the literature. These reasons will be further explored throughout this study. Past trends are fast changing, and more research is being carried out on nonnative English-speaking teachers (NNESTs). These teachers hail from every part of the world and teach in various educational settings. Many questions arise about this special population of educators. Who exactly are they? What is a nonnative speaker? How are they identified and how do they identify themselves? Furthermore, what are their unique perspectives and experiences? What specific struggles do they face? What are their needs?

Such questions gave birth to the nonnative English speaker's movement which was conceived at a colloquium shortly after the 1996 annual TESOL International Convention held in Chicago, Illinois. This colloquium, organized by George Braine, hosted a panel of NNES

professionals and was created as a platform for them to share experiences. Thomas (1999)

reports the presentations were best summarized by grievances communicated by Jacinta Thomas

who remarked that she felt *invisible* and her credibility was often challenged by students,

administrators, and professional organizations, including TESOL International. This colloquium

was the spark which led to the greater NNES movement. Two decades since, this movement has

grown in number and power. Braine (2010) commented that 10 years later, "What began as an

attempt by a small group of TESOL members has now become a worldwide movement." He then

listed three benefits reaped from efforts of the movement which are, "[a] rise in self-esteem, a

surge in academic research and publications on NN[E]S issues, and leadership in TESOL" (p. 5).

An interesting note mentioned was initially there was concern among founders about the

proposed name of the caucus. Some members did not feel comfortable using the term

'nonnative' in the name. Braine (2010) explained that the long-standing negative connotation

around the term led to a lack of self-confidence among the professionals and they were uneasy to

proclaim themselves as nonnative. However, ten years later, the author commented that the term

has gained wider acceptance among native and nonnative professionals and researchers. Even so,

greater use and delineation of the terms *native* and *nonnative* have not been without controversy

and challenges from academic circles, classrooms, and the greater society.

Native vs. Nonnative

There is much debate surrounding the labels of native and nonnative speakers. The lines

are blurred when trying to pin down an exact definition for each label. One of the earliest

divisions between these two groups is Kachru's (1985) concentric Three-circle Model of World

Englishes. This model grouped English speakers worldwide into three circles: Inner Circle, Outer

Circle and Expanding Circle. According to this model, the Inner Circle consists of countries

where English is spoken as a native language such as in the U.K., New Zealand, Australia, U.S,

etc. Meanwhile the Outer Circle consists of countries that were for the most part former colonies

and who now use English as a lingua franca, official language, co-official language, language of

instruction, etc. Lastly, the Expanding Circle is made of countries that were not colonized but use

English for functional purposes in an EFL setting. In this model, Kachru acknowledged the need

for more pluralistic views of English and that different varieties needed to be examined and

accepted. He comments:

> My position is that the diffusion of English, its acculturation, its international functional
> range, and the diverse forms of literary activity it is accommodating are historically
> unprecedented. It is hard to think that linguists, pedagogues, language planners and even
> the purists have ever faced this type of linguistic challenge before. I do not believe the
> traditional notions of codification, standardization, models, and methods apply to English
> any more. The dichotomy of its native and nonnative users seems to have become
> irrelevant.

He further noted:

> In my view, the global diffusion of English has taken an. interesting turn: the native
> speakers of this language seem to have lost the exclusive prerogative to control its
> standardization; in fact, if current statistics are any indication, they have become a
> minority. This sociolinguistic fact must be accepted, and its implications recognized.
> What we need now are new paradigms and perspectives for linguistic and pedagogical
> research and for understanding the linguistic creativity in multilingual situations across
> cultures. (pp. 258-259)

Though this model accounted for the spread and acquisition of English, in a historical

sense, there have been many criticisms about it in terms of applied linguistics. For example, the

model has been criticized for representing a false image of how English is used in Outer and

Expanding Circles. The rate at which the English language is spreading is in fact too fast, and too

complex to be demarcated by three circles. Furthermore, there is great overlap in all circles.

Another criticism is that the Inner Circle though drawn alongside other circles, is still considered the provider of 'norms' and the other circles rely on it when this might not be the case. This creates even more problems for nonnative speakers who are already discriminated against. A last criticism is that though different, perhaps national, varieties are accounted for, many local or non-standard varieties of English are practically non-existent in this model.

Phillipson (1992) expounding on Kachru's (1982, 1985) three circles model of World Englishes, referred to English-speaking countries as a term that, "covers Britain and the USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand" (p. 17). He also refers to periphery-English-speaking countries which fall into two categories. The first broad category is countries in which English is used as an international link language such as Scandinavia and Japan. The second category is countries in which colonialism occurred and English remained as the lingua franca (p. 17). Therefore, NNESs can come from countries which fall under each category. What about other NNESs? Where do they fit into this picture? For example, a NNES from Somalia, a country in which Italian and Portuguese are third and fourth languages, does not fit the description of the aforestated divisions. Therefore, the black and white categorization above is very problematic and marginalizing to hundreds of millions of NNESs worldwide. The invisibility of these speakers gives rise to a plethora of issues such as binary perspectives of English speakers, among other things.

There have always been challenges around the accuracy and fairness of the native vs. nonnative terminology. Moussu and Llurda (2008) explore the three arguments against this divide. The first is that it is inaccurate to refer to anyone as nonnative as they are in fact natives of their own language. The second argument expanded on is that there are many varieties of

English spoken throughout the world for example in Australia, India, South Africa, etc. Even so, paradoxically it is only those speakers who are from western countries such as Australia, Britain, Canada, the U.S., and New Zealand who are referred to as native speakers. Such countries like Kenya, Singapore and South Africa are left out of this category despite English being an official language and a language of higher instruction. The last argument is that calling a teacher or professional native or nonnative, "has been criticized for its lack of contextualization, on the grounds that it disregards the interdependence between language teaching and the local context where it takes place" (p. 317). To further elaborate on this, the authors cited findings from a series of case studies conducted by Brutt-Griffler and Samimy (2001). The case studies focused on four English speakers and their self-perceptions and self-identification as native or nonnative speakers. Of the four speakers, two learned English in a 'foreign context' albeit coming to the United States at a very young age (8 and 13). Interestingly, the other two participants though born in other countries (Philippines and Zimbabwe) learned English first and only spoke English at home (therefore learning the language in second language settings). They later came to the United States to further their education. The authors commented that bilingualism seemed to play a part in the participants labeling themselves as native. For example, two participants struggled to identify themselves as native simply because they spoke other languages, which lead the authors to comment that it seemed the reality of being bilingual somehow disqualified them from being "authentic native speakers" and that such thoughts operate on the idea that being bilingual is a deficit instead of a valuable advantage. In conclusion, the authors found that rather than linguistic factors, "…identity of international speakers of English as 'native' or 'nonnative speakers' depends upon social factors–preconceived notions of what a 'native speaker' should

look like or sound like-that are not contemplated within the linguistic construct of the native speaker" (p. 100). This study gives great perspectives into the inaccuracy and biasedness of labels. For when a speaker's appearance or accentedness is the only determinant for being a native or nonnative speaker, the topic of *unequal Englishes* arises.

Tupas (2015) states there are multiple Englishes, a concept explored in previous works. In addition to multiple Englishes existing, the author argues there are also numerous ways to teach English. Furthermore, global English speakers, outside of the 'inner circle' (Kachru, 1985), are disadvantaged and marginalized with binary definitions like native and nonnative. If there are 2 billion English speakers around the world, what makes one a native and the other nonnative? What makes one proficient and another permanently a learner and never native-like or native? Tupas goes on to state:

> …the supremacy of standard English and the dominant discourse of native speaker authority, which places nonnative speakers in a position of deficit competence, are at the root of unequal Englishes, and have much to do with the historical, economic, political, and ideological processes associated with colonization and globalization. (p. 43)

Not only are there unequal Englishes, but another root cause which cannot be ignored is the superiority of the English language over others and the reality and long-standing implications of colonization and imperialism. In Phillipson's (1992) phenomenal work, a critique of the dominance of English at the cost of local vernaculars, he proposed the *linguistic imperialism* theory. The definition he gave is that, "the domination of English is asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages" (p. 47). In both *Linguistic Imperialism* (1992), and a later version, *Linguistic Imperialism Continued* (2015), Phillipson recounts five widely-adopted, but very damaging, ELT tenants. They are:

- English is best taught monolingually.
- The ideal teacher of English is a native speaker.
- The earlier English is taught, the better the results.
- The more English is taught, the better the results.
- If other languages are used much, standards of English will drop. (p. 185)

In the earlier work (Phillipson, 1992), the author debunks the tenants as fallacies. Among them *the native speaker fallacy.* This fallacy he asserts gives rise to the over-reliance on native speaker teachers (sometimes regardless of their qualifications), overemphasis on accent and a loss of language and identity. These complaints are oft-repeated in the literature as is witnessed below. Canagarajah (1999) explores this further by proposing effective ways for English learners and teachers to confront the reality of linguistic imperialism, and as a result become empowered in the classroom.

Labels like native and nonnative therefore are not only historically disenfranchising but they also presently affect the lives of millions of speakers, and more specifically, professionals worldwide. An NNES, for example, can be reclassified and employed as a native English speaker (NES) due to appearances and background alone, and vice versa, as Hansen (2004) relates in her narrative on being an invisible minority. She explains that though she describes herself as a nonnative speaker, others misclassify her as native due to her European background (Denmark) and appearance only. She also states that due to this misclassification her experiences as an invisible nonnative minority are not regarded. Additionally, her proficiency in English is never contested (pp. 40-57). The complete opposite is true for visible nonnative minorities who perhaps hail from non-European countries. For example, renowned scholars such as George Braine and Suresh Canagarajah facing continuous challenges and discrimination despite being

leaders in the field of TESOL. Considering these blurred and often prejudicial definitions, who qualifies as a native and nonnative speaker? What factors determine these qualifications?

Braine (2010) attempts to simplify the definition by stating, "In simplistic terms, a (native speaker) NS of a language is one who speaks the language as his/her first language; accordingly, a (nonnative speaker) NNS is one who speaks that language as a second or foreign language" (p. 9). Though this attempt at classifying native and nonnative is praiseworthy, it raises many other questions. What about the countless bilinguals who live in the U.S. and abroad who speak English as an equally strong and fluent first language in addition to their 'mother tongue'? How about those who speak English as a second language, foreign or even as a dominant language compared to their less dominant 'mother language'? How can they be classified? The reality is that binary definitions of English speakers need to be revisited and radically revised. Just in the U.S. alone there are a plethora of bilingual speakers from a vast array of backgrounds.

Bilingual Learners (U.S.)

The Migration Policy Institute (MPI), a nonpartisan thinktank based in Washington, D.C., analyzes migration/immigration policies in America and Europe. In their 2016 report on language diversity in America, they stated:

> While a record 64.7 million people ages 5 and older in the United States spoke a language other than English at home in 2015, a growing share of them are also fully proficient in English. Sixty percent of those speaking a foreign language at home were fully proficient in English in 2015, up from 56 percent in 1980–even as immigration levels rose significantly. (Batalova & Zong, 2016)

That is over 20% of the U.S. population that is bilingual! What languages do these Americans speak in addition to English? Although the number of languages spoken in the U.S. number well over 350 (according to the U.S. Census Bureau), the majority (ordered by most spoken) are:

Spanish, Chinese, Tagalog, Vietnamese, French, Arabic, Korean, German, Russian, and French

Creole.

An astounding 25.9 million of the 64.7 million bilingual American population are

categorized as Limited English Proficiency (LEP). The MLP reports in detail about this

demographic:

> As of 2015, the highest concentrations of LEP individuals were found in the six
> traditional immigrant-destination states—California (6.8 million, or 26 percent of the
> total LEP population), Texas (3.6 million, 14 percent), New York (2.5 million, 10
> percent), Florida (2.3 million, 9 percent), Illinois (1.1 million, 4 percent), and New Jersey
> (1 million, 4 percent). Together, the top six states accounted for approximately two-thirds
> of the 25.9 million LEP individuals. (Batalova & Zong, 2016)

Among the huge population of LEPs in the U.S., there are millions of children striving to

learn English at schools. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, there were an

estimated 4.6 million English Language Learner (ELL) K-12 students in the 2014-2015 school

year. The most commonly reported languages spoken in the homes of these learners were:

Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, Vietnamese, English, Hmong, Somali, Russian, Haitian/Haitian

Creole, Tagalog, and lastly Korean.

Most of these ELL students are placed in language assistance programs, sometimes for

years, to help them attain the same levels as their peers. The methods used to help ELLs and

even the terms used to describe these learners have not gone without heavy criticism. Valdes,

Menken and Castro (2015) made an interesting remark about perceptions of ELLs: "They have

always been described as lacking language and knowledge and have seldom been recognized for

the qualities they possess. Furthermore, that, "instead of having their potential acknowledged,

they are marginalized, made inferior, and seen as limited" (p. 23). This marginalization is even

witnessed, they claim, in "deficient perspective" labels such as limited English proficient (LEP)

or English language learners (ELL) and that more encouraging labels such as emergent bilinguals (EB) should be embraced. The use of, and belief in, this label can also positively influence students' perceptions about themselves as learners. This relates back to the earlier discussions about labels and misrepresentation.

A unique group among bilingual learners in the U.S. are generation 1.5 immigrants. As defined by Roberge, Siegal and Harklau (2009), the 1.5 generation immigrant is defined as, "those who immigrate as young children and have life experiences that span two or more countries, cultures, and languages". Although the language proficiency levels, and really language learning journeys, among this group differ vastly there are still common characteristics, struggles and challenges. There is increasingly more research being carried out to further explore these commonalities. Additionally, there are numerous articles focused on the academic similarities and differences between international and generation 1.5 students (Di Gennaro 2013; Harklau, 1994, 2000; Mikesell, 2007; Reid, 1997; Thonas, 2003); or the latter, generation 1.5 vs English L1 and L2 students (Doolan, 2013; Doolan, 2014; Doolan & Miller, 2012).

In addition to comparisons between other language learners, a growing body of research focuses specifically on the writing challenges of generation 1.5 immigrant students. In Roberge et al. (2009), the authors state that this group has, "knowledge about English and ways of expression that have served them well in other contexts, but many have not had an opportunity to expand their range of English grammatical resources for the tasks they face as college writers" (p. 222). Furthermore, the authors state that despite knowing a variety of registers, they are lacking in terms of academic registers required for educational pursuits. Meanwhile, Lewis (2016) focused on pre-service teachers belonging to the generation 1.5 demographic, more

specifically how they improved in writing, and consequently confidence and self-efficacy, through targeted writing workshops. A loss of confidence and sense of belonging is something that is constantly dealt with among this group as they are often torn between two linguistic and cultural worlds. The author makes an important remark about this difficult predicament. She states:

> Because Generation 1.5 students are neither bilingual, ESL, or monolingual they are often placed in remedial English courses as they are often seen as developing native English speakers who are working at deficit level, even though they have grown up in the American public-school system. These remedial courses limit these students' exposure and engagement in a rich reading and writing curriculum (Roberge, 2009). Often as a result, these students do not fully develop language skills in either language, which limits their academic growth (Singhal, 2004). (Lewis, 2016)

This is yet another example of real life consequences of alienating and mislabeling specific English language learners because they do not fit the black and white descriptions of native and nonnative.

The introduction alone shows that labels like native and nonnative are not only difficult to define but are also very dismissive terms for certain groups. Furthermore, there are various groups that come to mind when a label like nonnative is used. Does it refer to the international speaker who speaks English as a second language? How about the international speaker who speaks English as a *first* language? This is yet again further complicated when considering bilingual speakers in the U.S. who speak English as a first, second or even third language.

This dilemma has been faced by many scholars in the field. The question arises, what terms have *they* used in the literature? To not confuse the reader, and for the sole purposes of clarification, the following acronyms will be defined, as they are used interchangeably throughout the literature review to refer to native and nonnative English-speaking teachers:

Native	Nonnative
NES–Native English Speaker	NNS–Nonnative Speaker
NEST–Native English-Speaking Teacher	NNEST–Nonnative English-speaking Teacher
NS–Native Speaker	NNES–Nonnative English Speaker

Figure 1: Acronyms used for the study.

Foundational Works on NESTs and NNESTs

The earliest major works published about NNESTs are by Medgeys (1992; 1994) and Braine (1999a). Medgyes (1992) maintained the delineation between native speaking teachers and nonnative speaking teachers. He mentions that there are distinguishing factors between the two, namely linguistic or language differences. Even so he asserted both groups can become effective teachers. He also highlighted some advantages that NNESTs have over their NESTs counterparts, including anticipating language problems, connecting, and empathizing with learners, and teaching successful strategies. Braine (1999b) was a collection of chapters from various educators and researchers. This collection covers three areas, namely: identity of NNESTs, sociopolitical issues, and pedagogical implications. For example, in this collection, Canagarajah (1999) in a moving piece challenges the idea of native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) being the ideal or standard in the field, or what Phillipson (1992) referred to as "the native speaker fallacy" (p. 78). Other contributors focused on language training (Liu, 1999; Medgeyes, 1999) and two discussed teacher and student perceptions (Kamhi-Stein, 1999; Samimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999). Yet another monumental collection, Llurda (2005), is an assemblage of 15 chapters, authored by various professionals and it covers four broad areas: history of NNESTs, their performance in classrooms, training, and lastly perceptions of NNESTs.

Problem Statement

Some of the problems faced by nonnative English-speaking professionals are: being mislabeled, misrepresented, discriminated against and generally being invisible in the literature on English language learning and teaching. Decades of political, historical, and academic linear thinking on the English language have given rise to binary labels that have marginalized NNESTs inside and outside of the classroom. The negative repercussions have been felt not only in the professional sense but also in terms of NNEST's self-perceptions. The motivation of the following study is to increase the discourse about nonnative English-speaking teachers' self-perceptions. More research needs to be carried out on NNESTs' perceptions of themselves as teachers not only for research and administrative purposes, but also for representation and inclusion. The reason this is important is that historically this has been a disadvantaged, mislabeled and misrepresented group. This damage can only be reversed with practical steps such as further research in the forms of narratives, interviews, surveys, etc. Essentially, more data needs to be compiled, especially first-account data as that is most crucial. Also, the most qualified to speak about issues pertaining to identity, perceptions, and challenges of NNESTs are in fact NNESTs themselves. Only after this point, can real measures be taken to address the problems that nonnative speakers face in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT).

Chapter II: Literature Review

The literature on perceptions of, or about, NNESTs is increasingly growing. Kamhi-Stein (2016) notes that the growing number of publications of NNES professions in general, "shows that NNES professionals are no longer a niche topic in the field of TESOL" and furthermore that NNES professionals have "become a topic of mainstream research" (p. 185). In the literature on self-perceptions of this said population, there are two common themes: 1) perceptions of ESL or EFL students about their NNES teachers, sometimes in comparison to NES teachers or 2) self-perceptions of NNESTs about their linguistic abilities, their place in the field of TESOL and contributions to it and a host of other topics. Studies from both areas will be discussed below.

Student Perceptions

Several studies were conducted about students' perceptions of NNESTs, often in comparison to their NEST counterparts. One such study by Kelch and Santana-Williamson (2002) enlisted 56 ESL college students to listen to pre-recorded audio passages of three native and three nonnative teachers. Different American English dialects were represented in the native speaker passages (Southern Californian, New Orleans, and British) while the nonnative passages represented nonnative speakers from Japan, Portugal, and Germany. A control group of 13 native speakers were also recruited to compare results. After listening to the audio samples, participants were given attitude questionnaires about their feelings on, "teacher education and training, experience, teacher likability, teaching expertise, desirability as a teacher, empathy for students and overall teaching ability" (p. 61). The results showed two things: 1) the native speakers group could detect native speaker dialects as native (97%) compared to the nonnative group (45%) and 2) data revealed that there was a direct link between native speaker accents and teacher likability

and ability. Researchers stated, "the higher the rating of a perceived native English speaker's accent, the more educated, experienced, and skilled she was considered to be" (Kelch & Santana-Williamson, 2002, p. 65). On the other hand, the nonnative speaker who was perceived to be nonnative by most participants had the lowest ratings of favorability. Although this study had several limitations and skewed results due to dialect and accent confusion on the part of participants, it showed that bias against perceived nonnative speakers does exist among native and nonnative students.

Aslan and Thompson's (2016a) study had the opposite finding. Their study, which was conducted at a Southeastern university in the U.S., had 76 ESL students as participants. The researchers used a semantic differential scale (SDS) which used adjectives for descriptors. The instruments utilized did not state the nativeness or nonnativeness of teachers to reduce bias. The quantitative results showed that, "NEST/NNEST status does not seem to have a differentiating role in learners' perceptions of their English teachers' attitudes toward teaching, teaching style and practice, and personality" (Aslan & Thompson, 2016a, p. 11). Benke and Medgyes's (2005) large scale study recruited 442 Hungarian learners of English in Budapest to also gain perspective on students' perceptions of differences between NES and NNES teachers. The researchers gave out 4-page questionnaires which included background information and items regarding NES and NNES teachers', "classroom management issues as well as personal, albeit teaching-related, characteristics" (p. 200). The questionnaires also included open-ended items about the advantages and disadvantages of each group. The results were very interesting. Participants identified each group by different characteristics. For example, that NESTs place a heavy emphasis on speaking, are good role models, and tended to experiment with lessons, while

NNESTs gave a lot of homework, checked for mistakes thoroughly, and were patient (pp. 201-208). The analysis of open-ended items also suggested that participants felt both groups of teachers were valuable assets to their language learning. This research confirmed the findings of Megyes (1994) that differences do indeed exist between NESTs and NNESa Ts but those differences do not necessarily make one superior or the other inferior.

A study carried out by Florence Ma (2012) came to the same conclusions that one group is not necessarily better than the other but rather that they complement each other, i.e., what one is missing the other makes up for. This study was conducted in secondary schools in Hong Kong. The participants were 30 students of varying ages and were chosen because they were being co-taught by a native and nonnative, or *local,* English teachers. The data gathered from semi-structured interviews revealed that students believed that there were numerous advantages and disadvantages of being taught by both native English-speaking teachers and nonnative English-speaking teachers. For example, in terms of the benefits of being taught by NNESTs, students mentioned easier communication, teachers better empathizing with students' linguistic problems and needs as well as a more personal connection. The disadvantages highlighted were less time to practice English, linguistic errors on the part of the teacher and a more traditional style of teaching as compared to more contemporary, interactive methods. The advantages of the native English-speaking teachers were basically the opposite of the nonnative English-speaking teachers' disadvantages. Students preferred their teaching styles, cited their strength in the language and they admitted to better assisted in their learning. The disadvantages of being taught by native teachers were issues in communication and understanding as well as anxiety issues on the part of students and a lack of personal connection. The students also mentioned the fact that

native teachers focused less on grammar and exams as a disadvantage. These results show that the classification of native and nonnative teachers as being good or bad is a flawed, inaccurate one. Even so, some studies have revealed a clear preference for one group over the other.

In Alseweed (2012), data was collected from 169 Saudi male students at Qassim University. This mixed methods study used qualitative interviews and quantitative questionnaires to get students' perspectives on their feelings about NESTs and NNESTs. Furthermore, whether teachers' instructional strategies had any impact on their perceptions. It's interesting that the researcher's original hypotheses, which is supported by pervious literature, were proven completely wrong. The hypotheses were:

> Based on the previous literature and the research questions, the following hypotheses can be drawn:
> 1- There is no significant difference in the respondents' perceptions of their NESTs or NNEST.
> 2- There is no significant difference in the respondents' perceptions of the teaching strategies used by either.
> NESTs or NNESTs.
> 3- In general, Saudi university students will not show positive perceptions of either NESTs or NNESTs over the other. (2012, p. 43)

There was indeed a significant difference found in the participants' perception of their native and nonnative teachers. In fact, the findings show that surprisingly: "…89% of the students feel more comfortable in a class taught by a NEST" and that, "…72% - 83% of the students believed that a NEST is more friendly than a NNEST because he provides a relaxed learning environment" (p. 47). Interview data explained the high percentage of preference for NESTs. The pattern showed that Saudi students cited personality traits, lack of discipline for students, and more casualness and easier and more comfortable access to communicate as reasons for liking NESTs. One of the participants reflected that he felt more *at home* with a

NEST. There were positives of having a NNEST teacher also mentioned. For example, most of the participants, 68% to be exact, stated that nonnative teachers understood the difficulties they were experiencing while learning the language as well as having more effective class management. Despite the participants highlighting some benefits of NNESTs, the results were very clearly in favor of NESTS.

The researchers state, "Another finding shows that 77% of the sample would have more positive attitudes toward the learning of English if they had a native English teacher" (p. 47). These findings deviate from results of previous studies and from those that came after. The overwhelming evidence shows that students usually do not have a preference but rather agree that there are tremendous benefits of having both NES and NNES teachers. The reason this study deviates from most is explained by several factors. A few of those reasons have been explained above in that the Saudi students preferred NESTs explicitly over their counterparts for personality traits, discipline, or lack thereof, and ease of communication. Another reason is that students believed NESTs had, "motivating teaching methods which assist in learning the language in a better and sound way" (p. 49). Despite this preference, the authors explained that though participants had clear favoritism for NESTs, they had "warmer" feelings towards NNESTs. Furthermore, they respected NNESTs great contributions to the field and their ability to relate to their learning experiences (pp. 49-50).

Self-Perceptions

A teacher's self-perceptions and self-image trickles down and impacts students, especially in regards to their motivation. Kamhi-Stein (2014) states, "Self-perceptions are important because they affect how teachers position themselves in the classroom, contribute

(positively or negatively) to instructional practices and ultimately affect students' motivation and learning" (p. 591). This is supported by Butler's (2004) study that was conducted with elementary school teachers in Korea, Taiwan and Japan. The data revealed that, "Gaps were found consistently between the elementary teachers' self-assessed and desired proficiencies" (p. 266). A few studies on the topic of NNESTs' self-perception will be discussed below.

The first groundwork study on NNESTs' self-perceptions was by Reves and Medgyes (1994). In this study, 216 NNESTs from 10 different countries were surveyed about their teaching practices and behaviors. This study revealed some of the advantages NNESTs have over NESTs, and vice versa. For example, that NNESTs had a profounder understanding about the language while NESTs used more natural language. Similarly, Samimy and Brutt-Griffler's (1999) study sought to uncover four things: 1) the self-perceptions of NNESTs as teaching professionals, 2) beliefs about differences in teaching conduct between NESTs and NNESTs, 3) whether they felt disadvantaged, or "handicapped", about not being native speakers and 4) what concerns they had as teaching professionals. The researchers organized and used classroom discussions, interviews, autobiographic reports along with quantitative questionnaires for the 17 recruited participants who were all TESOL graduate students enrolled in an Upper Midwestern University in the United States.

Conducted in two phases throughout a semester, the researchers found quantitative questionnaires showed that despite being aware of differences between NESTs and NNNESTs, participants did not believe one group was superior, or another inferior. Rather, they believed numerous factors contributed to effective teaching (p. 137). These factors include teacher preparedness, education, professional development, and the curriculum used. The qualitative data

(interviews and autobiographical reports) of the study showed participants' agreement that

creating qualified teachers is more important than continuing the debate of NESTs vs NNESTs.

Furthermore, the results contrasted with prior studies (Reves & Medgyes, 1994) which correlated

NNESTs grasp of the English language with a lowered self-image. Instead, participants

highlighted positive aspects which both groups, NESTs and NNESTs, brought to the field of

teaching (p. 142). The study provided numerous benefits, among them the researchers

highlighted the need to move away from the "native-speaker fallacy" (Phillipson, 1992) and that

"more emphasis needs to be placed on the multidimensionality and expertise than on nativeness

or authenticity" (p. 143).

Autobiographical / Autoethnographic Works

Another common form of research based on NNES professionals and teachers is

autobiographical or autoethnographic narratives. Braine's (2013) *Non-Native Educators in*

English Language Teaching contains several personal narratives from teaching professionals

including the 30 plus year teaching journey of Braine himself. In his chapter, he mentions how

colleagues have often commented on his accent or have demanded to know the cause of the

'mismatch' between his name, which seems to be European in origin, and his ethnic (Sri Lankan)

background. In this poignant account, Braine discusses his primary and secondary education,

early teaching career and later details accounts of obstacles he faced in the field of TESOL. He

writes, "…Even when they enter Western academia, these [nonnative English-speaking] scholars

face invisible barriers that hinder their assimilation and productivity" (p. 21). He goes on to say,

"I experienced the full impact of the term *nonnative speaker*, and all the accompanying social,

psychological, and economic baggage, only when I arrived in the United States to enroll in a

Master's program in TESOL in the mid-1980s" (p. 22). These experiences echo the sentiments of many NNES professionals such as Jacinta Thomas who also wrote a chapter in the collection. She writes that despite her doctorate and many years of experience, her credibility was often put into question. Ironically however, in her previous position as a college coordinator, she often interviewed unqualified candidates who cited their *nativeness* as a primary qualification while ignoring the fact that they lacked the basic requirement of having at least a Master's degree. She goes on to challenge the credibility issues NNES professionals face in hiring practices on the organizational level and even from students (pp. 5-9).

An autoethnography by Canagarajah (2012) touches on the author's creation of a professional and teaching identity as well his journey to developing certain teaching practices. From a moment of embarrassment which motivated him to pour over books for months to learn terminology and theories, to moving to the U.S. to attain a higher education, the author authentically discusses both his failures and successes as a NNES professional. After he discovered a book (*Communities of Practice*) which spoke to the issues of identity he was facing, he wrote that he realized: "Rather than treating my multiple identities as a problem, I have to treat them as resources…I should use these other identities to gain voice in my professional community" (p. 269). He goes on to say that through this book his own Sri Lankan community's practices were now justified in his eyes. He concludes by arguing that professional organizations, such as TESOL, should encourage more sharing between seemingly different communities of practice. He states, "The organization has to create more opportunities for boundary crossing [between different communities of practice]" (pp. 276-277). It this type of boundary crossing,

and inclusion of different communities, that originally led to the creation of the Nonnative

Speakers movement of which he was a founding member.

Finally, a unique collection of chapters in Hendrix and Hebbani (2014) focuses on the

struggles and challenges of second language English-speaking international instructors in

American classrooms through the lens of authoethnographic accounts. One instructor has a

chapter about using her own culture and background to enhance instruction and benefit students.

She states that despite her citizenship and resembling a clear majority of her students, a dead

giveaway she is foreign is her accent. Other instructors and teaching assistants also recount their

experiences. There are many other biographical accounts of professionals about the various

obstacles they faced and successes they attained throughout their professional teaching careers.

These narratives have not gone without criticism and without a doubt there are limitations to this

autoethnographic approach.

Braine (2010) acknowledged in his account of two Asian teachers that, "Another issue

[with personal narratives] is the trustworthiness of these stories, their validity and reliability to

use the jargon of research" (p. 61). He admitted there are steps one can take to ensure validity

such as checking with external parties such as the government. However, at the end of the day a

personal narrative is just that: *personal* and it can be criticized for lack of authenticity, reliability,

and validity. Even so, personal narratives are needed and add value to the body of research on

nonnative English-speaking professionals. Braine (2010) argues, "…every life story adds depth

to the research base on English language teaching" and that, "…the publication of these

narratives empowers these often-marginalized teachers by giving them a "voice" and

encouraging them to view events from their own perspectives" (p 61).

In addition to these personal accounts, numerous other studies have been conducted which examined the strengths of NNESTs (Dogancay-Aktuma, 2008; Ellis, 2002; Llurda & Huguet, 2003; etc.) as well as their shortcomings (Moussu, 2006; Tang, 1997). According to Braine (2010), "In little more than a decade, over 1,200 NNS teachers have been surveyed, interviewed and observed in order to determine their self-perceptions" (p. 27). These studies focus on, for the most part, self-perceptions of teaching abilities or behaviors and are usually regulated to the teaching domain. However, many international students, who speak English as a first or foreign (NNES) in the U.S. are also graduate students who are taking classes of their own.

To the researcher's knowledge there aren't many studies that focus on the combined perceptions of NNESTs about their roles as students and their teaching abilities, successes, and challenges. There are, however, quite a few studies dedicated to nonnative MA TESOL teachers and students (England & Roberts, 1989; Govardhan, Nayar & Sheorey, 1999; Kamhi-Stein, Lee & Lee 1999; Li & Tin, 2013). A closely related study to this theme would be Phillabaum and Frazier (2013). This study focused on nonnative English-speaking graduate students' perceptions about Professors' treatment of nonnative English-speaking students in a MA TESOL program. A total of 65 native and nonnative students in various Northern and Southern California universities participated by filling out an emailed survey with 46 of those students completing it fully. This unique survey consisted of four open-ended questions, which are as follows:

1. **Question 1:** Do you feel that non-native-English-speaking M.A. TESOL students are at a disadvantage, or at an advantage, compared to native speakers, while studying in the M.A. program? Or are the benefits and drawbacks generally balanced? Please comment on this question with regard to two areas: writing and speaking.
2. **Question 2:** Do your M.A. TESOL instructors treat non-native- and native- English-speaking students differently? If so, how? Do your instructors provide more help to

non-native speakers in their writing or speaking? In what other ways are the differences apparent, if any?

3. **Question 3:** Do you believe native- and non-native-speaking M.A. TESOL students SHOULD be treated differently? Do you believe that non-native speaking students should receive extra help in any way? If so, how?

4. **Question 4:** In what way, if at all, do your M.A. TESOL instructors discuss World Englishes in your classes? What insights, if any, have you received in your classes about how the existence of different varieties of World English influences non-native English teaching issues? (Phillabaum & Frazier, 2013, pp. 248-259)

Focusing on just the first three questions, it is clear the findings were full of insights. In response to the first question, the researchers state, "Of the 45 responses we received, 30 responded in the negative or affirmative, while 14 provided more nuanced commentary that might best be described as "it depends" (p. 248). A small percentage (2%) believed that nonnative students had an edge over their native counterparts when it comes to the graduate program. An overwhelming majority (62%) believed nonnative students are disadvantaged due to linguistic difficulties in all four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Another group, (35% of participants), fell into the 'balanced response' category and they argued for the advantages nonnative students have as well as some disadvantages.

In response to the question about instructor treatment towards native and nonnative students the researchers concluded, "Of the 45 responses, 16 (35%) indicated that their instructors did indeed treat nonnative and native English-speaking students differently" (p. 252). Many participants claimed instructors were more lenient about nonnative students' language errors. A small percentage argued the opposite that they were in fact more critical and harsh. Interestingly, more native students than nonnative claimed instructors treated the groups differently. On the other hand, nonnative respondents tended to focus on issues of leniency while

not really stating in what areas professors assisted them like the native students did. It is

important to note, most respondents specified that there was equal treatment from instructors.

The last question asked was whether the two groups, native and nonnative students,

should be treated differently. The researchers reported that, "38 of the 45 respondents (84%)

answered in ways we interpreted as a 'No' in our coding scheme" (p. 256). Native and nonnative

students argued that there shouldn't be any discrepancies in the treatment of instructors to their

students, regardless of their status. One participant whose native language was Italian stated:

> The rules and the expectations should be the same for all students, regardless of their "native" or "non-native" status. I think that letting all students know which gap they need to fill, is necessary. Trying to protect the nonnative students is not helpful, they need to learn to deal with the reality outside the training program. (p. 256)

The remaining participants for the most part argued against preferential treatment but for more

understanding from instructors about the challenges nonnative students face. Furthermore, some

participants wished that nonnative instructors would take a lead to become role models for

nonnative students. One participant stated: "If non-native speaker instructors would discuss more

openly about the challenges they must have faced at their beginnings, I think it would help non-

native students" (p. 26). Lastly, a small minority of two participants argued that nonnative

students should receive different treatment. They explained that nonnative students must

overcome extreme linguistic difficulties and therefore should be treated differently and should

receive extra help and support.

The study provided remarkable insights about the unique perceptions of TESOL graduate

students. This type of research needs to be increased as no one is more equipped to speak about

their perceptions and language status than speakers themselves. For the purposes of increasing

the research on nonnative English speakers in general, and more specifically their perceptions as

both students and teachers, the following study was conducted. Some of the questions which

motivated this study are: Given the broad categories of bilingual and international students who

speak English as a first, second or foreign language, who self-classifies as native or nonnative?

Secondly, how do these speakers perceive themselves as students? Do their linguistic abilities

have any impact on the courses they take, whether negatively or positively? Furthermore, how

does this linguistic status affect their teaching roles? Are there commonalities between the

perceptions they hold as teachers and students? Are their commonalities between the self-

perceptions of international and bilingual English speakers? What about the challenges they face

as students and teachers? What about the successes they've attained? A great number of studies

have not been dedicated to analyzing NES/NNES' concurrent roles as graduate students and

teachers and moreover have not recruited both bilingual U.S. raised/born and 'international'

students as participants (to compare and contrast). Therefore, this gap in the research has

motivated the following study in hopes that these unique double perspectives are gained.

Chapter III: Methods and Procedures

This study focuses on a special group of graduate teaching assistants' self-image, i.e., perceptions of self, and their views about their abilities, successes, and the challenges they face both as students and novice teachers in a graduate program. The goal of this study was to exam definitions of native and nonnative, among other things. The participants recruited fell into one of the four following categories:

1. Bilingual US students with English as a first language.

2. Bilingual US students with English as a second language.

3. International students with English as a second language.

4. International students with English as a foreign language.

Participants relayed their understanding and perspectives of labels such as native and nonnative and how they best classify themselves regarding these labels. Furthermore, participants were asked numerous questions through a semi-structured interview. The data obtained from such interviews will answer the following research questions.

Research Questions

After careful reading of the literature and further inquiry, the researcher posed the following research questions:

1. What are the self-perceptions of novice bilingual and international graduate teaching assistants in a teacher preparation program?

   Specifically:

   a) What are the participants' perceptions about their 'native' or 'nonnative' status? How do they identify themselves?

b) What are the participants' perceptions about their abilities as both students and teachers?

c) What are the participants' perceptions about the successes they have attained as students and teachers?

d) What are the participants' perceptions about the challenges they face, both as students, and as they pursue their teaching career?

Participants

This study was conducted at an Upper Midwestern University with ten graduate teaching assistants who are pursuing their Master's degree in teaching English as a Second Language (TESL/TESOL). The participants were recruited from an Intensive English Program (IEP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program, respectfully. Though they might self-identify as otherwise, all the participants can be (generally) categorized as nonnative per Braine's (2010) definition that: "…. a (nonnative speaker) NNS is one who speaks that language as a second or foreign language" (p. 9). Even with this common characteristic, the participants differ in their backgrounds. Some are international students who have studied English as a foreign language and with others as a second language. Yet other participants are bilinguals who were either born or raised in the U.S. and who speak English as a first or second language. Only current graduate teaching assistants were recruited to prevent memory recall issues when relating teaching and student experiences. The TESL program at this university has a diverse population of graduate students. Some students have very little teaching experience while others have been teaching for over a decade in their own countries or others. Additionally, the students range from different parts of the world: East Asia, Europe, South America, and Africa. Much care was taken to

diversify the participants in terms of native language (L1), teaching background and program

affiliation, i.e. English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and Intensive English Program (IEP). The

participants partook in individual interviews on-campus, convenient nearby locations or when

physically unavailable, online.

Instruments

The instruments used in this study were semi-structured interviews following the

ethnographic research methods highlighted in Spradley (1979). The purpose of these interviews

was to gain unhindered access to the thoughts and perspectives of international and bilingual

graduate teaching assistants. To ensure comfortability for the interviewees, sessions were

conducted on an individual basis. All interviews were recorded using a cellular phone application

and a tape recorder. If interviewees were not available to meet in person, they were contacted via

Skype or phone. During these online calls, the researcher ensured interviews were recorded

simultaneously through a mobile or web application while using a laptop to record notes and to

organize data.

Procedures

All attempts were made to meet at a neutral location, such as at a University campus, or

nearby location. Each interview was expected to last approximately 1 hour. Some went well over

an hour while one interview only lasted half an hour. As mentioned previously, a semi-structured

interview format was used. The purpose of using this semi-structured style was to elicit natural

responses from participants as well as to encourage them to share even more information through

follow-up questions. Semi-structed interviews also encourage open-ended questions which the

main characteristic of qualitative studies is. All interview sessions were audio recorded for

further data analysis.

Chapter IV: Results

This study made use of Spradley's (1979) Developmental Research Sequence (DRS) in terms of data collection and analysis. This sequence includes recruiting informants, creating an ethnographic record, and using a specific framework for question generation. For example, the use of descriptive questions which are further broken down into *grand tour*, *mini-tour*, and *experience questions*, etc. (Spradley, 1979). The ethnographic interview method was chosen for this study for specific reasons. First, the researcher comes from a linguistic or language status which would be described to some as bilingual, and to others as nonnative depending on the identification of the L1. Additionally, the researcher herself is a graduate teaching assistant in the same TESL program. Therefore, though the researcher played an objective, observant role that did not have any influence over participants or their answers, there was still a personal interest and stake to discover more about this topic of nonnative English-speaking graduate teaching assistants. Second, this method allows participants to tell their own story, to relay their own perspectives uninhibitedly. Most importantly, the ethnographic interview approach allows participants to be the experts or informants.

Furthermore, this sequence involves using several types of analyses. Spradley (1979) highlighted the four types: domain analysis, taxonomic analysis, componential analysis, and theme analysis (p. 94). He defines them:

> **Domain analysis** involves a search for the larger units of cultural knowledge called domains. In doing this kind of analysis we will search for cultural symbols which are included in larger categories (domains) by virtue of some similarity.
> **Taxonomic analysis** involves a search for the internal structure of domains and leads to identifying contrast sets. Componential analysis involves a search for the attributes that signal differences among symbols in a domain.
> **Theme analysis** involves a search for the relationships among domains and how they are linked to the culture as a whole.

Componental analysis involves a search for the attributes that signal differences among symbols in a domain. (p. 94)

He stated, "All these types of ethnographic analysis lead to the discovery of cultural meaning…." (p. 94). By using these different methods of analyses then, the researcher's main goal was to seek meaning from participants' data from an emic approach or viewpoint. Emic and etic are terms created by Pike (1967) based on principles of phonetics. He wrote, "The emic viewpoint results from studying behavior as from inside the system" while defining the opposite etic as, "studying behavior as from outside the system" (p. 37). He went on to mention the differences between the two points while also listing their merits. A benefit of the chosen emic approach is that discovery determines the structure of data, i.e., patterns in the data. This approach lets the data collected from experts, or informants, be the guides for further analysis. This is the purpose of an ethnography. Therefore, the data gathered in this study influences the structure of the results and discussions sections. It might be the case, such as in Alseweed (2012), that data leads to surprising new findings and forces the study to take a complete turn.

The approach taken in this data analysis is also compatible with the foundations of grounded theory (GT) which was founded by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Later, Lincoln and Guba (1985) initiated a grounded data analysis approach wherein patterns and themes are believed to develop from data instead of being impressed on them. According to Nunan and Bailey (2009), "Analysts working within this tradition use inductive reasoning processes, in contrast with deductive approaches" (p. 421). Spradley (1979) commented that, "Ethnography offers an excellent strategy for discovering grounded theory" (p. 11). Lastly, in terms of data analysis instruments, the researcher relied heavily on technology in the form of word processors, spreadsheets, and graphic organizers to categorize data for easier viewing and coding.

Results

The expected results in this study were that participants delve into detailed accounts of their experiences both as graduate students and teachers. They did indeed delve into very insightful firsthand accounts that aptly answered the research questions posed in the study. Another expectation was that participants serve as informants who give the researcher and future readers a glimpse into the successes and failures encountered in their learning and teaching experiences. Moreover, it was hoped that participants would give their perspectives on identity issues, including using the label NNES, advantages and disadvantages of NESTs and NNETs and numerous other topics. To gain even deeper insight into the mind of participants, the researcher used semi-structured interviews with room for follow-up questions. Although the questions were many, collectively the research questions were fully answered. The general breakdown of the results below is: 1) general demographics of the participants, 2) teaching and student backgrounds and 3) research question parts a, b, c, and d. A general discussion of the results and the conclusion follow.

Demographics

The 10 participants in the study originate from 10 different countries, spanning five continents: Asia, Africa, Europe, North America, and South America. Seven of the participants were international students. One student (Bilan) was born in the U.S. Her father originally came to the United States as a student from Somalia. He later found work, started a family, and became a U.S. citizen. Another student (Amanda) is also a citizen of the U.S., having been born in the unincorporated territory of Puerto Rico. Furthermore, she completed her early school years in the U.S. before moving back home. She later returned to the U.S. to work and further studies.

The third participant (Mahad) and his family came to the U.S. as refugees from Somalia. In

1990, a civil war broke out in the country and thereafter millions of Somalis migrated to various

countries around the world. Mahad was only 3-4 years old when he came to the U.S. and thus he

completed his K-12 and undergraduate studies in the U.S.

Figure 2: Participants; countries of origin (generated with www.MapChart.net).

There was much diversity among the participants in terms of nationality. Linguistically,

the majority language spoken (other than English) was Spanish. The participant who had been in

the United States the longest (among international students) was Gabriela from Mexico. She

came to the U.S. to attend high school and stayed to attend university. Next is Lucia from

Argentina who completed two years of her undergraduate degree in the East Coast as well as 2

years of graduate school here in the Midwest. On the other hand, Nadeeka, a student from Sri

Lanka had been here the shortest for just under 10 months. Among the international students,

Alex and Min had been in the U.S. on prior occasions. After receiving a scholarship from the

Department of State, Alex completed one year of his undergraduate degree in 2012-2013.

Additionally, Min was also previously the U.S, albeit for just 4 months. Altogether, this group were a very diverse array of voices from dissimilar backgrounds. This demographic makeup led to incredible insights. Table 1 below is a helpful chart which details the general demographic information for each participant, in alphabetical order. This data was gathered from answers to two background questions from the interview sessions.

Table 1

Participant General Demographic Information

Table 1			
Name	**Country**	**Languages Spoken (In Addition to English)**	**Length of Time in U.S.**
Alex	Thailand	Thai	1 Year, 10 months
Amanda	Puerto Rico	Spanish; Korean (Beginner)	Dual Citizen (14-15 Years)
Bilan	United States	Somali; Arabic (Beginner)	Citizen (26+ Years)
Gabriela	Mexico	Spanish	11 Years
Lucia	Argentina	Spanish; French (Intermediate)	4 Years
Mahad	Somalia	Somali; Arabic (Intermediate)	Citizen (22 Years)
Min	South Korea	Korean	1 Year, 4 Months
Nadeeka	Sri Lanka	Sinhalese; Hindi (Intermediate); Tamil (Intermediate); French (Intermediate)	10 Months
Tamara	Moldova	Russian; French (Beginner)	1 Year
Yesenia	El Salvador	Spanish	2 Years

Another background question participants were asked was: when and where did you first learn English and how proficient are you in the (English) language? The answers were very interesting. Seven participants started the process of learning English between 3 and 8 years old, with the majority learning from ages 6-8 from watching TV at home, learning from family members or formally in the K-1 school setting. Lucia from Argentina had somewhat of a head start as her father was an English teacher, therefore she learned informally at home before starting English classes. Amanda, on the other hand, had quite a unique story. She reflects on her early language acquisition:

My first language I consider Spanish because that's the language my family spoke at home and that's the first language I heard as a baby I guess when I was in Puerto Rico with my mom at home. When and how did I learn English? I can only tell you stories of what my mom told me she said that when I was like 2 years old she would take me to the grocery store to go to the laundromat when we lived in [on the East Coast] and she said that when I was around English speakers I would kind of like sound out their phonetics. So, like if I would hear English speakers around me, I would be like [mimics sounds]. Kind of sounding [them] out. The first time I discovered that I could speak English was when we moved [to another city on the East Coast] I think, I was like 3 or 4. We had a native speaker of English neighbor, like a little blonde hair blue-eyed girl, and one time I was outside playing and my dad came out to check on me or just like peeked over to check on me. And he saw me talking to the little girl talking through the fence, so he kind of got like closer to eavesdrop and that's like the first time he heard me speaking English. So, he kind of like went back over to my mom and he was like, 'did you already know that Amanda knows how to speak English'?

Nadeeka, from Sri Lanka, also mentioned that she learned English 'naturally' as her grandmother and mother would teach her nursery rhymes at home, in addition to playing songs on the radio and watching English programs. Furthermore, she went into detail about the history of the English language in Sri Lanka. Several notable scholars hail from Sri Lanka, namely Suresh Canagarajah and George Braine. Both have written extensively about their experiences as nonnative teaching professionals. In addition to personal accounts, Braine (2014) explores the history of English in Sri Lanka (or as he refers to it, the dialect of Lankan English). The author contends that the government's former harsh stance on decreasing English and upholding native languages set back the nation in terms of advancement. Furthermore, he argues another loss was the country being deprived, "of a whole generation of competent English teachers" (p. 156). The situation has drastically changed, as Nadeeka shared, and the government has mandated English an instructional language throughout schools. She also mentioned that her desire for very reluctant friends to embrace the English language, and the multitude of opportunities that come with it, initially lead her to learn more and thereafter become a teacher.

To continue the discussion on the demographics, two participants, Min, and Tamara, had somewhat of a 'late start' to learning English, at least in comparison to the rest of the group. Min states:

> Yeah actually my English studying started when I was 14 years old in middle school. As soon as I entered the school, I had the English subject. So, at that time I learned the English alphabet for the first time. Actually, at that time I didn't know why I had to learn English because it was not my priority, so I just studied because my teacher forced us, and I continued to study until now.

When asked how proficient she was in the English language, Min responded:

> I guess I'm just intermediate if not a little bit advanced, but I don't think I'm very good at English. I think I'm just not confident at all.

She was the only one among the participants who wavered on her proficiency levels. Tamara, a graduate teaching assistant from Moldova, explained that she took her first English classes in the fifth grade, around age 11. Even so, she believed her English proficiency to be 'upper-intermediate' and did not have any doubt in her abilities in the language. Otherwise, three participants claimed native-like or native proficiency (Mahad, Amanda, and Bilan). Interestingly they shared the same timeframe in learning English as most of the international students. However, Mahad, Amanda and Bilan, spent the most time in the U.S. with the latter two being born here. This could explain, albeit it is a bit early, their firm beliefs that they have *native-like* or *native* English proficiency.

Teaching Backgrounds

After background questions pertaining to nationality and language, participants were asked 10 teaching-related questions. The data from questions 1-3 (which were more general in nature) are summarized in the following table and will be further elaborated on below.

Table 2

Summary of Participant Data for Questions 1-3

Name	Teaching Experience	Contexts
Alex	2 Years	EFL (*Thailand*) ESL (Intensive English Program)
Amanda	3 Years	EFL (*Korea*) ESL (Intensive English Program)
Bilan	2.5 Years	ESL (English for Academic Purposes)
Gabriela	5 Years	ESL (Intensive English Program) ESL (K-12) Spanish – (Spanish Immersion K-12)
Lucia	9 Years	EFL (*Argentina*) Spanish – (Spanish Immersion K-12l) Spanish – (University) ESL (English for Academic Purposes)
Mahad	6 Years*	Qur'an Teacher ESL - Writing Center ESL - Intensive English Program)
Min	17 Years	EFL (*Korea*) ESL (English for Academic Purposes)
Nadeeka	2 Years	EFL (*Sri Lanka*)
Tamara	1 Year	EFL (*Moldova*)
Yesenia	8.5 Years	EFL (*El Salvador*) ESL (English for Academic Purposes)

Altogether, the participants had a combined 56 years of various teaching experiences. This includes EFL in 7 different countries and ESL in K-12 and higher education settings in the United States. As can be deduced from the chart, not every teaching experience was related to English. For example, Gabriela and Lucia taught Spanish for several years. Gabriela, originally an exchange student from Mexico (who chose to stay to work and further her studies), commented on her academic/career transition to ESL:

I taught Spanish at the high school level for one year and then after that, I taught at the Spanish immersion program for three years, basically I was just a fourth-grade teacher, teaching all subjects. And now, IEP. I started off just wanting to become a Spanish teacher. But then I realized there was more need for ESL in this country than world languages, to say. And, because I know how important knowing another language is. And I just wanted those kids that come here and don't have that opportunity to learn English so quickly, they were not exposed to before, help get them on the road and not feel like they're left out.

Meanwhile Lucia shared that in her combined 9 years of teaching, she taught Spanish at the K-12 and at the University level for 2 years, here in the United States. Prior to this, she taught EFL for 5 years in Argentina. She has come full circle as she has recently graduated with her MA in TESL and is now teaching EFL classes back in her home country. Another unique case is Mahad who has 6 years of teaching experience, 5 of them being in a *Dugsi*. Dugsi is a Somali term that refers to a Qura'nic weekend school held at local Mosques. He asserted that his Dugsi teaching was one of several inspirations to becoming an ESL teacher:

> The moment I realized I first wanted to teach. Boy that's a tough question. I started teaching *Dugsi* about six, seven years ago and I maybe taught for 5 years during that time. I always enjoyed teaching. One of the main reasons was because I feel like with teaching you get to see the effects of what you do and that's a big thing. For example, I was a clinical lab tech before I started this program and there you know you're doing tests, but you don't actually see the patient. You don't see your patient improve, but with teaching you get to see the results you get to have that Aha moment. You got to see them gradually improve and I also like how it makes you a better person, makes you more patient, makes you better at explaining things makes you better at relationships, all types of relationships. But to answer your question, I don't know I really honestly don't remember I used to tutor in high school. But even before that I just help out with Dugsi and I always enjoyed explaining things. People told me I'm good at it.

Tutoring was often mentioned as a launching point for teaching; it was something which showed participants they had a knack for teaching and explaining concepts.

Lastly, in terms of teaching experience Min from South Korea was the most experienced of the group. She taught English for 16 years in Korea and mentioned that she is still in fact a

teacher there and is taking time off to further her studies. She later disclosed that she must make up for the time she has been away, as the government funds teaching jobs. The student backgrounds of the participants, as summarized in Table 3 below, were not as varied as participants' teaching experiences, with a few exceptions.

Student Backgrounds

At the time of the study, all the participants were actively teaching, or taught a few weeks prior to the interview. On top of their teaching duties, they had various classes to complete (linguistics, pedagogy and methods courses, practicum, etc.). When asked about a typical day as a graduate student, most responded that they have very early mornings with teaching assignments and classes and even later nights with homework and other responsibilities. Two participants were parents and had the added responsibility of carving out time to spend with children and spouses. Five of the participants were teachers in the IEP (Intensive English Program) and the other half in an EAP (English for Academic Purposes) program. They all met once a week during a practicum course to discuss challenges, complete workshops, and present research. Participant Yesenia from El Salvador captured most of the participants' daily experiences in her response below:

> So, depending on the day, usually I wake up right before class because I usually teach in the morning, so I just wake up and get ready to go to teach. I'm usually in the classroom about thirty minutes before class because I like to be prepared and have everything ready for when the students come in. I prepare everything on the computer and then they start coming in and [I] teach my class. They usually have questions at the end, so I usually stay for five or ten minutes with individual students who have questions and then I just go have lunch usually. And then I just go to my other classes when I am studying. Monday was the craziest day. I had to teach in the morning and then I had to go to [a] research class and then wait for about thirty minutes and then go to practicum. So, it was the craziest day, so it was around five when I finished. Although then I had to go do homework, so I guess it does not really end.

In terms of past student backgrounds, as can be seen in Table 3, with the exceptions of Mahad, Bilan, and Amanda, all the participants majored in English for their undergraduate degrees.

Table 3

Backgrounds of Student Participants

Name	Undergraduate Major / Degree
Alex	English
Amanda	Social Sciences
Bilan	Biology, Science & Environment (Interdisciplinary Degree)
Gabriela	Spanish & ESL (K-12 License)
Lucia	1st English & Teaching 2nd English Literature
Mahad	Biology, Science & Environment (Interdisciplinary Degree)
Min	English
Nadeeka	English Language & Literature
Tamara	English
Yesenia	TESOL

Mahad and Bilan initially pursued the medical/science route in hopes of entering medical school. Mahad eventually went on to work in a medical lab for several years before deciding to pursue teaching. Bilan earned the same baccalaureate degree as Mahad and was very determined to study science before she realized her great passion for teaching. She commented:

> At a young age, I realized I wanted to teach because I realized I really enjoyed it. In College, when I decided to go down the science route, I realized that was my only other option. It was either the doctorate in biology, PA, or Pharmacy school. Teaching was always an option, so I decided teaching was the best route.

Last of all, Amanda finished her social sciences undergraduate degree in Puerto Rico. After graduation, she relocated to the East Coast of the U.S. and held a job as a social worker for a year. After living for 2 years in Korea, one in which she spent teaching, she changed career

paths. Yet again, Bilan, Amanda and Mahad are grouped in the same category, this time over

their differing undergraduate careers. During the study, more commonalities were found

between these three participants. Furthermore, there were many common links between other

participants in terms of identity, teaching abilities, successes, and challenges.

Research Questions

To refresh the reader's memory, the research question posed in this study was: *What are*

the self-perceptions of novice bilingual and international graduate teaching assistants in a

teacher preparation program? This further broke down into four separate sub-questions. They

are discussed below with the findings.

Identity / Self Perceptions–RQ. 1A

The first research sub-question asked participations about their perceptions of their

'native' or 'nonnative' status. How do they identify themselves? There were three teaching and a

follow-up interview question which were related to this sub-question. These series of interview

questions went straight to the core of this study which deals with the issue of perceptions and

identity. The first interview question was intentionally vague and asked participants how they

self-identity and whether they attached any labels to themselves. The common answer among

participants was in fact not a label, but a *title*. They identified themselves simply as teachers.

Four participants went further and added adjectives to the titles. For example, Amanda identified

herself as a *strict* and *goal-oriented* teacher; Lucia as an *educator*, a *first language learner*,

proficient English language learner and Bilan as a *minority teacher* who is uniquely Somali,

female *and* Muslim. Yesenia saw herself as an *EFL* teacher. Tamara and Nadeeka, responded

that they didn't attach any labels to themselves, but that the question was interesting. Others

echoed this statement and said the question was one to think further about. One participant,

Mahad, briefly touched on the native and nonnative dichotomy in his response:

> Not really. You know because for example when I tell people, I tell them I'm a *teacher*. As far as how I think about myself for example when it comes to whether I consider myself a native speaker when I first started this program, I used to say Somali is my native language and English is my dominant language but now that I read more about what's considered your native language, really English is my native language because I started speaking when I was 4 or 5. It makes me change my answer from *native-like* to an actual *native speaker*.

Mahad grappled throughout the interview about his identity as a native speaker, but he was not

the only one. The next two interview questions asked participants their observations of native

and nonnative speakers in general and how they perceive both groups in terms of teaching

abilities. Participant's general observations and perceptions of native and nonnative teachers

were straightforward and aligned with previous research findings. There were both positive and

negative remarks about each group.

In regards to the positive observations made about native speakers, participants noted:

1) they have a native accent (or lack of a nonnative one) 2) have a strength in pronunciation and

the phonological aspects of English, 3) understand the nuances and culture of the language as

well as idiomatic expressions, colloquial terms/phrases, and finally 4) the English language

comes naturally to them as it is innate, or an instinct. Meanwhile, some of the constructive

criticism mentioned about native speakers were that they might not have the background and

experience of learning a second language. Therefore, most participants argued that they might

not understand the difficulties of the learning process. Furthermore, another criticism was that

native English-speaking teachers might have problems explaining grammatical points as they do

not consciously think about the language like nonnative speakers. Nor do they have a solid

understanding of the grammatical and linguistic features of the language. The reverse was mentioned about nonnative speakers.

Almost all of the participants noted that nonnatives have both the background experience of learning a second language and strong grammatical foundations in English. This they asserted made nonnative speakers more able to relate to student's difficulties in learning a second language. Furthermore, this background equipped the teachers to use different strategies and approaches, some of which had worked for them in their own journeys. One participant, Bilan, argued that nonnative speakers do not rely on the innateness of the English language and therefore have an elevated awareness about the rules and patterns. Two participants contended that sometimes nonnative speakers have accents. Neither participant viewed this as a drawback unless it interfered with intelligibility. Tamara made a great point about using the L1 in the classroom and how it can be both a teaching tool and a hindrance. For example, she mentioned using Russian to explain certain concepts in English. She noted, however, that her L1 would not be helpful in a more heterogeneous classroom and that it would in fact impede her from understanding the experiences of learners with different L1s. She also believed that nonnative speakers would be most useful in lower-level ESL/EFL courses as they would understand learners better than a native speaker.

A consensus among most of the participants was two-fold: 1) qualifications matter more than a teacher's native or nonnative status and 2) both groups complement each other. Lucia, the second most experienced teacher of the group, made a strong case for being qualified:

> I think the best thing that you need to have is the qualifications…. a bachelors with a major in English, then pursuing a masters in TESOL. I think that gives you the strengths for teaching a language effectively. Many people try to teach a language without having the qualifications for doing that and I think that is the biggest problem.

When asked if she felt that was the differentiating factor between a good ESL teacher and a bad

one, she replied: "Yeah, I think it has to do with your qualifications. Your knowledge of

grammar, your knowledge of so many things that are related to linguistics, pedagogy, how to

explain a certain grammar rule". Min agreed with Lucia and reflected on her transformed beliefs:

> Before I came here studying this TESL program I categorize native and nonnative teacher
> according to only the place or location where they were born the kind of nationality so
> the teacher who were born in English-speaking countries can be considered as a native
> teachers and I thought I'm a nonnative speaker because I was born in Korea which in we
> don't use English as a main language. So, but now I think it's a little bit different.

She continued:

> I think it's not, it's not a matter of just where you were born I think it's a matter of how
> you're equipped with your qualifications or just a method of things. So, an effective
> teacher cannot be categorized only by the location or place. Yeah they should be actually
> by categorized all together like what kind of teaching qualifications, teaching methods or
> what you study, things like that.

Secondly, participants noted directly or indirectly that native and nonnative teachers complement

each other in the English language teaching world. Gabriela argued that hearing both native and

nonnative accents was good for learners as English is a worldwide language and getting

accustomed to one accent wasn't a good thing. Meanwhile Yesenia commented on the teaching

situation in her country, El Salvador. She indicated that she saw native speakers who were not

well-equipped to teach and nonnatives who were qualified to teach. She concluded:

> They could complement each other, because some [nonnatives] are very good teachers
> but their language skills are not perfect but then on the other hand, you have the ones
> whose English is relatively perfect because they're native, but their teaching skills are not
> so good.

A last follow-up question, created during the first interview session, asked if participants

considered *themselves* native or nonnative. The researcher believed the prior questions did not

push participants enough to speak about themselves and therefore felt the need to include this

direct question to get participants' personal thoughts and self-perceptions. The responses were very impressive. Two participants identified as native speakers, six as nonnative speakers and two were unsure of their status.

Those who identified as native speakers were Bilan and Mahad. Bilan, who was born in the U.S., stated she never saw herself as anything but a native speaker but that other people have made presumptions about her status as a speaker based on her appearance, dress, and ethnicity. Additionally, that her faith as a Muslim plays a factor in being mislabeled. Meanwhile, Mahad who grew up in the U.S. admitted his self-identification has now changed, from nonnative to native speaker, and his acceptance of that label or status, though at times wavering, seemed to be evolving. He remarked that the TESOL program he is currently in has made a great impact on broadening his horizons on what a native speaker really is. He laughed as he recalled an incident where a teacher asked a question and he turned to classmates and remarked, "Come on native speakers!" i.e., he did not include himself among that group. More than once in the interview he asked, almost to himself, "Why wouldn't I be a native speaker?"

Six of the participants, who were all international students, self-identified as nonnative speakers. Those participants were Alex, Tamara, Min, Gabriela, Nadeeka and Yesenia. Alex responded that he was a nonnative speaker because of his accent and appearance and that his native tongue was not English. Gabriela had the same views, that English was not her dominant language. Moreover, she believed that she could never reach the native status. Thereafter a lengthy discussion ensued about what it means to be *native*, and after some time, the participant started to question her own line of thinking. She concluded by stating:

> Yeah it is hard because especially when you have the background of let's say going to grad school and learning about these labels and how you cannot just put someone in one

label because that person can have other characteristics from other labels, you know quote unquote labels and they can branch out into many other things and it just gets more complicated. But I feel like if people who don't have that background and would say okay you're not native like it's just like black and white. It's a black and white thing for many people but I feel like for people like us we're like learning all of this it's like oh no it's like a rainbow and like even more colors.

The question of who participants considered a true native speaker was a difficult one to answer.

For example, Yesenia referred to native speaker as a very blurry construct. Yesenia

acknowledged:

> Oh Gosh, I don't know. It's just that I've seen people, I know people who go to the US when they're like 5 years old and they forget Spanish and start only speaking English like a native speaker. So, I would definitely think that they are native speakers because if they don't speak Spanish, and you're not calling them native, then what are they you know? I don't know. It's a very blurry construct."

This same term, blur, was used by participant Amanda as she tried to explain being a native and

nonnative speaker concurrently.

Amanda contended with the fact that she felt neither native, nor nonnative for that matter,

in both Spanish and English. This led her to ask, "What do you call us?" The researcher asked

for clarification on who "us" included. Amanda responded:

> People with the same situation as me who grew up at a young age in the U.S. and so learned the languages when they were young, so they don't even have any memory or recollection of how they learned it.

She continued to talk about the negative impact being stuck between two labels, languages and

cultures have caused:

> Something that I would like to add, and this is just personal is the loss of identity. I don't feel Puerto Rican and I don't feel American. Cause like when I'm in Puerto Rico with my family, I've travelled so much, and I've experienced so much that there's a certain point where we relate as a family but there's a certain point where it stops. Where I'm not fully related to them and then whenever I'm here I'm always a foreigner. So, there is a loss of identity, like who I am. I don't know to what extent, language is identity. Language is who you are, language identifies who you are.

She concluded her response by admitting she was in a linguistic limbo of sorts. Furthermore, that not belonging hurts and she wishes she had something she fully belonged to.

Participant Lucia wavered between being a native and nonnative speaker and argued that her self-identification is contextual. She explained that Spanish comes naturally sometimes while English comes naturally, at other times. She added that she feels more comfortable using English in professional and academic settings while Spanish is the preferred language for casual/conversational topics. Lucia reflected on her fluctuating native/nonnative status:

> So, I don't know, Spanish is my first language and, in many contexts,, it's my, I would say my unmarked choice, you know? But in many other contexts, English is my unmarked choice, what comes most naturally for me. So, I wouldn't say that I am a native speaker of English, but it's mostly an ideological thing, I don't consider myself a native speaker of English. I consider myself an Argentinian person who speaks Spanish but when the moment comes, and you start talking to me in a topic, sometimes it happens to me that I feel more confident in English.

At the end of his interview, Alex proceeded to ask the researcher the same question, whether she considered herself a native speaker. This question was of course an unexpected and perplexing one as the researcher seems to be the in the same linguistic limbo described by participant Amanda. Furthermore, her identification as a native speaker is both fluid and relative most of the time. Alex responded that he felt like the researcher was a native speaker because of the amount of years she has lived in the U.S. and the way she speaks.

Abilities–RQ. 1B

The second research sub-question asked: What are the participants' perceptions about their abilities as both students and teachers? There was one teaching and one student interview question related to this theme. The teaching interview question asked participants' how their linguistics abilities, as a second language learner, impacted their role and duties as an instructor,

both positively and negatively. Similarly, the student interview question asked participants' how their linguistics abilities, as a second language learner, impacted their studies / classes, both positively and negatively.

The participants mentioned several positive impacts that their second language learner or bilingual status had on their teaching. Some of these were: 1) understanding the procedures, steps and strategies involved in learning English, thus better aiding students, 2) having a common L1 such as Spanish and 3) being able to effectively explain grammatical rules. Amanda and Bilan differed from the group in terms of grammar and admitted they sometimes struggled to fully explain certain concepts to students. As for negative impacts, participants mentioned: 1) Shortcomings in terms of pronunciation and vocabulary and 2) unfamiliar idiomatic and colloquial English expressions.

As leaners themselves, the participants noted several benefits of being a second language learner. These benefits included: 1) relating and connecting to, and thus understanding theoretical and linguistic theories; applying them to lived experiences and 2) having an edge or advantage over native speakers in pedagogy and grammar/linguistic courses. Yesenia commented about the professors in her program and their relationship with second language learners:

> I think teachers are very understanding about the fact that we are second language learners. However, I don't think they look down. I mean I think they know that we are second language learners, but at the same time I think they know we have the abilities to follow the text and know the topics we are covering in class. So, I don't think they slow down or anything for us but I think that they are aware that we are coming from different places and that we are different so I think that's something positive about the program.

Participants claimed the following were drawbacks to being a second language learner in the classroom: 1) complex vocabulary or lack of vocabulary, 2) competing with native speakers,

3) limitations in grammar and academic writing standards, and 4) differing educational standards. For example, Nadeeka, Min and Tamara commented on the vastly different student and teacher interactions in their respective countries. They shared that in their countries students didn't have such a vocal role in the classroom because it was so teacher-oriented and really teacher-dominated. Once they entered the graduate program, they all admitted to having a difficult period of adjustment where they had to basically find and assert their voices in the classroom.

A unique drawback mentioned was grammatical shortcomings. This drawback was mentioned by Mahad and Amanda. Mahad shared that he had great difficulty with grammaticality tests and explaining concepts although he admits his classes, especially pedagogical grammar courses, have greatly helped. Amanda echoed this sentiment and shared incidents of language gaps wherein she realized she was expressing something incorrectly or couldn't quite grasp a concept. Finally, Tamara, Yesenia and Lucia shared that their undergraduate linguistics background and past teaching experiences helped them in graduate classes and therefore made seemingly difficult theories and concepts easier to comprehend.

Successes–RQ. 1C

The third research sub-question asked: What are the participants' perceptions about the successes they have attained as students and teachers? There was one teaching and one student interview question related to this theme. Participants were asked to share one successful teaching and one successful learning experience.

In terms of teaching, several of the participants shared successful vocabulary and writing lessons that were executed well and benefitted students. Others like Gabriela and Amanda talked

of successfully increasing student's reading or writing levels by the end of the semester. Mahad talked about his summer IEP learning course wherein he helped learners use context clues. Nimna shared her experiences of using a reading strategy her grandmother taught her. This strategy involved breaking words into syllables and then breaking each syllable up by covering it. Thereafter, when each syllable was read, they would all be uncovered, and the word read all together. She noticed a student using this strategy successfully (long after she taught it). Min happily shared that a student sent her a thank you email for being an understanding teacher who academically challenged her students.

In the matter of learning, participants disclosed positive experiences relating to their pedagogical and linguistics courses. For example, Alex was particularly proud of a presentation he put together for a methods course. He admitted that it was his first presentation in the US and it went very well and he received great feedback from his professor and classmates. Amanda and Lucia remarked that their improved academic writing abilities were their greatest achievements in the program. Meanwhile, Tamara, Gabriela and Nadeeka spoke of a difficult but very beneficial vocabulary acquisition course they took and passed. They all shared that this class also improved their teaching abilities. Mahad enjoyed writing about various linguistics theories and found great satisfaction from independently writing research papers. Nadeeka, on the other hand, recalled a period from her undergraduate years where she taught her friends about verb tenses in creative ways thereby motivating them to learn English. Yesenia took great pride in completing her thesis proposal in a timely manner despite a hectic schedule with time constraints. Finally, Bilan shared that taking a course on ESL and Culture was her most positive experience as a student. She shares some of the benefits she derived from the course below:

> Just learning about the different perspectives of you know culture and how they impact someone's learning…I learned about how in East Asian culture, saving face [is a social construct] and how students may not look at their teacher in the eye. I think that really did impact me because when I was teaching my students that were from East Asia I noticed yeah that they wouldn't look me in the eye. I didn't know what it meant, and I think just understanding your students that you teach and their background it's very important as a teacher because it can change from you having a negative perspective about your students to having just a normal or positive point of view. Versus if I had assumed that child and that student and look at me you know out of disrespect or something you know I could have a negative point of view about my own students.

She continued by explaining that she believed a student would learn more freely or more comfortable from a teacher that they perceived understood them or was kind to them. For these reasons, she stated she really enjoyed taking the course. Overall, it was evident that the participants enjoyed talking about their positive teaching and learning experiences. On the other hand, the next questions dealt with a less lighthearted topic and addressed challenges in teaching and the participants' roles as students.

Challenges–RQ. 1D

The final research sub-question asked: What are the participants' perceptions about the challenges they face, both as students, and as they pursue their teaching career? There were two teaching and two student questions related to this theme.

The first two interview questions asked participants about challenging teaching and learning experiences. Alex found a grammar class he was teaching challenging in terms of content. He was frustrated that he couldn't bring the subject (grammar) to life as it was often a boring topic to teach. He admitted his small class felt the same and were not very motivated to learn. Gabriela also spoke of unengaged students in a cultural orientation course. She said students had taken the course twice before and therefore felt it was too repetitive and uninteresting. Meanwhile Amanda and Lucia had challenges with writing classes. Particularly,

they struggled with getting lower-level students to meet Student Learning Outcomes or SLOs. Mahad had a cultural challenge in terms of students sharing papers. He remarked that he appreciated the cultures which valued sharing and collaboration but that sharing answers and cooperating on assignments made it hard to see students' individual academic abilities. Tamara was challenged by the diversity of L1s in her class. Back in Moldova, she was used to using her L1 to communicate difficult aspects of English. Consequently, a plethora of different L1s in her current classes limited the multitude of ways she could explain concepts. Yesenia found the most challenging teaching days to be ones she didn't prepare for in terms of reading and reviewing material. Bilan spoke about a minority of students who felt unchallenged and bored in several of her courses as their levels were too high, or for other reasons. She explained although she was frustrated at first, she later learned how to engage those students and differentiate instruction, so they remained constantly challenged. Nadeeka shared that she faced great hurdles teaching vocabulary words and acquisition strategies to certain students. Finally, Min found teaching a different population of learners, in terms of age, a challenge. In Korea, she taught only at the elementary and middle school levels. She admitted learning how to speak to adults and cater lessons towards them that are academically challenging and engaging was at first, very taxing.

A common answer among participants about challenging learning experiences were difficult linguistics courses. Some of the courses participants admitted to struggling with were: phonetics and phonology, code-switching, syntax, and sociolinguistics. Amanda discussed an incident in her phonetics and phonology course where she was unable to (correctly) divide syllables and how this shocked both her teacher and classmates. She remembers her friends asking her, "what in the world did you do"? She explained that she divided the syllables in

Spanish instead of English. Alex found syntax very difficult to keep up with. Lucia found a certain linguistics course very repetitive and found it hard to differentiate between theories. Yesenia had a difficult time in a linguistics course, not because of the content, but because of communication issues and lack of clarity from the professor.

On the note of professors, Nadeeka recalled a humiliating experience in her undergraduate years that eventually created a fear of reading aloud. The teacher, who she described as an elitist Sri Lankan with proficient English, left a lasting negative impression on her. Additionally, she favored students based on merely appearance and status. Nadeeka admitted that the fear of reading aloud remains but is getting better with her current positive learning environments and understanding professors. Tamara had difficulty in a pedagogical course when her professor asked about literacy in U.S. public schools. She remarked how she felt lost and far behind her native speaker classmates who were more familiar with K-12 contexts in the U.S. Bilan found a vocabulary acquisition class very difficult to apply in her teaching which she commented was always her main priority in the program, i.e., to strengthen her teaching via classes. Min had a list of challenging learning experiences to share. Among them were integrating theories as opposed to just rote memorization (which she often did in Korea). She also stated not fully understanding culturally bound English phrases or the nuances of the language as a great struggle. Furthermore, she mentioned the vastly different classroom dynamics and student-teacher interactions as well as overcoming incorrect misconceptions she held, an additional challenge. Finally, Mahad stated juggling his various roles as a student, teacher, spouse, and parent and avoiding bad habits such as procrastination a current obstacle.

The second set of questions asked participants if they had ever experienced prejudice or discrimination based on their linguistic abilities as a second language learner. Alex, Gabriela, Lucia, and Yesenia all stated they had not faced discrimination in the U.S. Even so they mentioned discriminatory practices back home. For example, Alex mentioned the native speaker preference in terms of hiring English teachers in Thailand. Lucia also mentioned this problem as she was growing frustrated with job postings asking for teachers with native speaker accents. This phenomenon, she admitted, made her reconsider teaching abroad and instead to settle for a good job in Argentina where she is paid at the same rate with the added benefit of having family and friends nearby. She elaborated further on her feelings of frustration about discriminatory hiring practices:

> If you have a Masters in TESOL, you are pretty much prepared for teaching English, anywhere. You're not going to get a Masters without being proficient in English, without having certain qualifications. So, I feel a little bit frustrated when I have been trying to look for jobs abroad and then I only found some options like.... not the ones I was interested in. Then I was thinking like, I want to work in a private institute let's say in Dubai. Well, I can do exactly the same in Argentina, you know I can come to Argentina and work as an EFL teacher here you know. It kind of looks similar in a resume, you know. And I have my family and everything here, I was like I might as well get a job back home, rather than struggling, trying to get a job in another country where it's so hard to get one when you're not a native speaker. So yeah, I have felt discrimination in that sense when I have applied for jobs as an EFL teacher abroad.

Tamara did not believe she faced any prejudicial or discriminatory behaviors but stated she heard students in the program preferred native speakers to nonnative speakers. Yesenia, although claiming she did not face any discrimination during her stay in the U.S., admits there was a clear preference for the native speaker accent in El Salvador. Moreover, that lighter accents were preferred to heavier ones, thereby creating discrimination within nonnative speakers themselves. She stated that despite a teacher's perfect grammar, vocabulary knowledge

and everything else, they would still be looked down upon if they had a heavier accent. Finally, Gabriela shared that her lack of experiences with discrimination were probably because she was a Spanish teacher most of her teaching career. She assumed that had she been teaching ESL in the K-12 setting, instead of Spanish, there was a possibility she would have been discriminated against.

Min, Mahad, Bilan and Amanda shared clear examples of discriminatory behaviors that they believed were directed towards them or others. Min had the most to share on the topic. She said she faced discrimination from a broad array of people back in Korea including students, teachers, and administrators. Regarding students and teachers, she recalled:

> Yeah actually for my students, I've experienced that discrimination kind of when I worked with a native speaker in secondary school in Korea. We had actually an American teacher there and usually he implemented the speaking tests to students and I usually covered the written test because I could do the speaking part, but students actually didn't believe my grades because they do not I think... they had more trust with the native speaker to be judged by their speaking things. And whenever we had kind of argumentation on the written test they wanted to talk to the native teacher first about the question whether it was natural or not even though I was the person who made that question. Even though I made the question, the native teacher went through the whole questions together to make sure all were very natural and based on English things.

She continued about the discrimination she faced from her native speaker co-teacher and students:

> Once a week and mostly it was the listening and speaking class and reading and writing I usually went into the class alone without the native speaker but in listening and speaking class we went together and mostly he spoke and he just he just went through every questions on the contents in the textbooks and I just do some interpreting to make sure students understood in Korean sometimes or English repeat some words again and just help the students to their work properly. And the native speaker he dominated the class, but we were supposed to do it together. 70% or 80% yeah, he dominated the class and I was just in a supportive role in the class.

Despite feeling uneasy about the domination of her class, she felt she could not do anything as it was the students' preference. It was also the preference of the parents of the students as well as administrators who doted on native speakers. Amanda, who taught in Korea for a year, also repeated these concerns of clear native speaker preference. She even recalled having to hide her bilingual language abilities. Amanda acknowledged it was a very odd thing to have to pretend that you did not speak another language just so one lives up to the stereotypical native speaker image. Eventually she told her supervisor who was not pleased and insisted she keep the information private. She also shared that a Korean co-worker who was raised in the United States often pretended to not speak Korean even as students were mocking and insulting him in their mutual L1. She laughed as she talked about the "operation" of hiding her language abilities:

> The parents basically ran these schools, they paid for everything. So, when I was working, and my family member called me on my phone, I had to go outside. To where no students were around, to speak Spanish. It was kind of like uncomfortable [I] was almost like afraid of losing my job because I spoke another language which here would be like a perk. Yeah here in the US I've been catered to because I speak Spanish. I used to be a social worker and when I applied to a job in [the East Coast] as a social worker. When I sat down with who would later became my supervisor for the interview, she says before we start I need to know if you speak Spanish and how good is your Spanish so I'm going to have a conversation with you in Spanish, she's like if you don't speak well enough Spanish we can stop the interview right here.

On the topic of preferences, Mahad mentioned that in the tutoring center where he previously worked the prior semester, there was an issue of students choosing Caucasian-sounding names online and that the center eventually changed the format to numbers instead of names. This way students would enter the session before they saw who would be tutoring them. He further commented that at times, hiring people who are not well equipped, or qualified to tutor or teach has a negative consequence in that it furthers the stereotypes of nonnative speakers. The solution he proposed is to simply hire qualified people. He brought forth the example of his

brother who is fluent in Somali and English and does not make grammatical errors despite his

accent. Another example he posed is a colleague in his program who though not acquiring

English naturally, speaks fluently and makes very few errors in his speaking and writing.

In addition to discrimination in terms of preferences, Mahad and Bilan interjected their

feelings of being visibly black on top of being Muslim and how that impacts dynamics inside and

outside of the classroom. Mahad reflected on an incident at his previous tutoring job:

> I remember this just came to my mind when we started a conversation circle, the other students in conversation circle because of the way I look.... because obviously when I speak over the phone I sound American so anyway which I am but I'm a Somali American you know they thought my white co-coordinator was the one running conversation circle. Which is really weird, some of these people are people I've had a class with, and who know my proficiency they just thought that I was there. Like why would you automatically assume that she is coordinating? Of course, with biases you can never know for sure it was that. Again, maybe they thought a woman would be running it. Again, you don't know which bias it is. You can't prove that this person was thinking that at the time. And that's the interesting thing about discrimination is that...is it because of that, or is it because of this? Is the police officer afraid of the skin color or is he afraid of a thief? Is he afraid of this person's dress, which one is it? That's one experience I can think of.

He admitted to feeling conflicted and confused about the source of seemingly discriminatory

behaviors. He elaborated:

> I also think that with some clients (at the tutoring center) that they had less confidence in me as I look this way. Again, I can't prove that. One time somebody was surprised that I was an instructor, but it could just be because of my boyish young features. I have a baby face. Maybe it's the beard, maybe it's that. I don't know. I'm just giving them the benefit of the doubt like I can't prove that it was discrimination. As a person of color, it's always on your mind.

Bilan reiterated this belief that being a black individual only added to the discrimination

she faced. With students, she recalls meeting blank, confused faces as she walked into her

classes. She admits that though she is a native speaker, she still must overcome the period of

shock and bewilderment that her students face in the early parts of the semester. She argues that

they probably had different images in mind when they thought of a native speaker. Additionally, on several occasions, Bilan overheard students talking negatively about a teacher because of a pronounced accent or just because of appearances. Bilan also had several examples to share about discrimination in the classes she takes as a student. For example, her classmates undermining her work and overlooking her in group work. She felt frustrated that her voice was practically silenced and that she had to fight on so many occasions just to feel included. She also remarked that she had to continuously prove herself. She commented:

> I think it's just it's a problem a lot of minorities face whether they are native speakers or not, you know? And I think it's just you know constantly having to you know the stereotype; Constantly proving to people that you do know, that you are intelligent, that you do know what you're talking about; you know that you're here for a reason.

Bilan made interesting remarks about identity and racism. She stated that people will often, "tell you who you are". She went on to describe new forms and ways of prejudice, discrimination, and racism. She argued that a person would not outright call someone a derogatory term today as they did in the past but that they would instead veil their feelings in seemingly curious questions and remarks. She gave the example of someone asking about another's "real origins" after they state that they are simply American. Or another example of people asking if someone was lost in a certain neighborhood. Basically, she claimed that these new ways of disguised discrimination have an equally damaging impact on individuals and force them to feel like "the other", that they do not belong. Even though Bilan was born in the U.S, and is a native speaker by every definition, she admitted to getting many questions about her ethnicity, birthplace, and other identifying information. She went on to note that international students, even those in her program, might not realize how subtle this racism and discrimination really is. She recalls a "lightbulb going off" when she explained to her students about the various indirect ways people

could discriminate against them. She also believed her colleagues in the program, who were international students, didn't always detect or realize the underlying messages that were being hidden in seemingly innocent questions, comments and even suggestions.

Amanda also experienced this direct line of questioning Bilan referred to about her identity. She informed me that professors have even asked if she is local or international after hearing her say certain expressions or seeing her work. Others, like fellow students or coworkers are even more direct. She shares some of their comments:

> Right. They're always like, cause like when I say I'm from Puerto Rico, they're like...what? So, what's your story? Cause they hear that I have a[n] [accent]…. there have been people and I don't know if I don't hear that, there have been people who have told me that I do have an accent. And I was like in what way, and there have been people who are like, even though you are, your accent is clean there's something in your personality, in the way that you express yourself I know that you are not. Like your attitude or your expressions, or the tone of your voice, they say that I know you're not American.

When the researcher followed up with a clarification for what a clean accent referred to, Amanda replied: "clean accent is like native-speaker accent". Nadeeka remembered her first-time landing in the U.S. and meeting a nice elderly woman at the airport. She said everything was going fine until Nadeeka started speaking more to the woman. The woman was shocked to hear how well Nadeeka spoke in English. She shared the awkward interaction:

> She said, 'oh my God you speak English so well and it's the first time for you, how do you do that?' Hmm. Like I've been teaching English in my country for one year. So yeah, I've been learning English for so long, I've been immersed in it and still people ask that question.

This sub-question yielded the most data out of all the others and this was due both to the amount of questions but moreover participants' great lengths and willingness to give very detailed accounts of their experiences. A discussion of the results will follow.

Chapter V: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to make the focal point how a select group of bilingual and international graduate teaching students viewed themselves, along with their abilities, successes, and challenges. Not only were the research question[s] pertinently answered, the responses to all the interview question[s] were very significant and went beyond any expectations the researcher initially held. When the participants were originally asked how they self-identity (without any context or direction), almost all responded with generic titles such as teacher, educator, etc. Some went further and described what type of teacher they were. For example, EFL, strict or goal-oriented. Only one participant, Bilan, referred to herself as a minority educator. As Bilan later commented, people are quick to tell others who they are. Therefore, it was important to hear who the participants believed *they were* as teachers, as second language learners and as students.

The crux of this study was the topic of native and nonnative speakers. The next set of questions participants answered related to this central theme. They were asked about their general observations of native and nonnative speakers. Thereafter, their views about the differences between native and nonnative English-speaking teachers. It seemed the disadvantages mentioned for native speakers were the advantages of nonnative speakers. For example, participants observed that native speakers tend to lack the experience of learning a second language, and all the challenges that go with that. Furthermore, that they have issues explaining grammatical points (unless they study them formally). This was the opposite for nonnative speakers as they were complimented for their strong grammar foundations as well as understanding second language learners better. The agreement among participants was that qualifications trump everything. Overall the participants' perspectives aligned closely with

previous findings (Medgyes, 1992; Reves & Medgyes, 1994; Benke & Medgyes, 2005; Florence Ma, 2012, Aslan & Thompson, 2016b, etc.). wherein similar advantages of native and nonnative speakers were mentioned, and where it was concluded that either group could become effective teachers.

When participants were asked directly about their native or nonnative status, the answers were not as clear-cut. Two participants wavered and were unsure given the complexity of their language identities, an additional two identified as natives but admitted to being profiled as nonnatives due to appearances or ethnic background. The rest of the participants claimed to be nonnative. Even those who claimed to be nonnative had a challenge defining who a true native speaker was. Participant Lucia stated her native or nonnative status was contextual and based on the different domains of her life which echoed Moussa and Llurda (2008) criticism of the lack of contextualization of calling teachers nonnative. Bruff-Griffler and Samimy's (2001) conclusion that identifying as native or nonnative has more to do with social factors than linguistic ones was also proven in this study in Alex's response that he would never be a native speaker because of his speech and appearance. Bruff-Griffler and Samimy (2001) also remarked that their participants had a difficult time believing they could be authentic native speakers just because they spoke another language. This was also true for the international students interviewed in this study. Their reasoning to not being native had to do more with their bilingualism, as if speaking another language in addition to English somehow excluded them from being *true* native speakers. Eight participants stated they started learning English from 3 to 8 years old, even so only two of the participants (Bilan and Mahad) identified as native, with one of those participants (Mahad) very uncertain throughout the interview session. Why is this? This has to do with the

historically marginalizing categorization of native speakers (Kachru, 1982; 1985) and the real and lasting effects of linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992). This in fact goes farther back to colonization and imperialism. There are estimates of 470 million to 1 billion English speakers worldwide that are outside of the "Inner Circle". Most of these speakers not only learn English at an early age, but as is evidenced by this study alone, have mastered grammatical foundations and make up most of the English language teachers worldwide. Why then, can they not claim ownership to English? This shows that there is a critical need to move beyond the nativeness paradigm which Brutt-Griffler and Samimmy (2001) argue, "…provides neither a conceptually rigorous analytical tool nor does it serve a useful social purpose in dichotomizing users of the English language worldwide" (p. 105).

Though the daily activities of participants were like that of any other graduate teaching assistant, their perceptions about their linguistic abilities, successes, and challenges were unique. As Kamhi-Stein (2014) argued, the self-perceptions of teachers influence instructional practices and thereby impact students' motivation. The participants for the most part saw themselves in a positive light, with room for improvement. There were numerous benefits discussed of being a second language learner, both as a teacher and a student. For example, they acknowledged their own second language learning experiences greatly impacted not only their teaching but their mindsets. They felt more empathetic towards learners and strive to teach them varied strategies, especially those that they found successful. The participants' rich background experiences, coupled with their rigorous TESL program, have equipped them to succeed in both teaching assignments and in their own learning. Many of the participants found great pride in successfully transferring and implementing concepts, approaches, and strategies from classes they were

taking right into their own classrooms. Vocabulary acquisition was the class most often referred to for its transferability. Yesenia's comments about understanding professors in the program mirrored one of the findings in Phillabaum and Frazier (2013) wherein graduate students were asked about preferential instructor treatment. The majority of the participants surveyed in that study didn't believe nonnatives were treated differently than natives but that professors were very mindful and empathetic towards second language learners, just as Yesenia stated.

The participants' first-hand accounts of challenges reflected those of Canagarajah (2012), Braine (2013) and Thomas (2013) as they spoke honestly of the accomplishments they have achieved and the surmounting internal and external challenges they face. As far as teaching, the challenges often mentioned by participants were not being able to effectively engage students and having students meet level expectations or SLOs (Student Learning Outcomes). Concerning learning experiences, they primarily dealt with challenging linguistics courses. The literature review of this study cited Roberge et al. (2009) who stated that a unique challenge of 1.5 generation immigrants were their shaky grammatical and academic foundations. This was true for Mahad who classifies as a 1.5 generation immigrant. It was also the case for Amanda who was born and completed K-12 in a predominately Spanish-speaking U.S. territory. Both participants admitted to having English language, particularly vocabulary, gaps. Consequently, they found this challenge affecting both their teaching and learning experiences. Bilan, Mahad and Amanda were often grouped together in terms of data analysis as they had similar non-teaching backgrounds, issues with grammar, clear examples of discrimination and many other common factors. Interestingly enough, they were also the only U.S. born/raised.

Braine (2013) touched on invisible barriers for NESTs which inhibit their "assimilation and productivity" (p. 21). One of those barriers is prejudice and discrimination. For this reason, participants were asked whether they have experienced prejudice in their teaching or learning. Min, Mahad, Bilan and Nadeeka shared the clearest cases of discrimination. For example, Min having her own class dominated by a native speaker and on top of that having the native speaker (and her own students) undermine her efforts. Another example was of seemingly curious questions about participants' birthplaces or "real origins" thereby making participants feel excluded and not like they truly belonged. Yet another example was of job postings abroad with clear preferences for a native-speaker accent instead of qualifications. Although several other participants noted they *personally* did not experience discrimination as a nonnative speaker, they did admit that it exists. It does indeed exist, and the experiences shared by participants showed that nonnative speakers (or *perceived* nonnative speakers) were being undermined, overlooked, and made to feel like the other. Amin's (1997) about minority female ESL teachers revealed how development of teacher identities were being negatively impacted by student's stereotypes of what an ideal ESL teacher was. The same applies to some of the participants in the current study, and to millions of NNESTs worldwide. The findings from this study alone show how harmful mislabeling and misplaced judgements can be. It further shows how the term nonnative carries negative connotations and complete disregard for people's individuality, experiences and even their solid qualifications as educators. The reality is that the ownership of the English language should be challenged as no one has claim to a language, especially one with such massive reach and impact as English. As Bruff-Griffler and Samimmy aptly state, "National identity should not be a basis of classification of speakers of an international language. The more English becomes

an international language, the more the division of its speakers into `native' and `nonnative' becomes inconsistent" (p. 105).

One of the greatest benefits of this study is that it proves that representation matters. One of the participants, Amanda, said the interview session was therapeutic as she was able to share so many pent-up feelings and perspectives. She believed vocalizing these inner thoughts brought her one step closer to navigating the cultural and *linguistic limbo* she was currently in. Other participants agreed that the topic of the study was important and looked forward to having it accessible for a wider readership. Recently, the researcher saw a former student of hers and after talking for some time, her thesis topic came into the discussion. When the researcher revealed the topic (nonnative speakers), the student proudly exclaimed, "Oh, it's about us!" Yes, it is about *us*. Author and political activist, Arundhati Roy (2006), once said: "There's really no such thing as the 'voiceless'…there are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard" (p. 330). It is time the English language teaching world open their ears to the voices and perspectives of nonnative speakers. More research, more publications, and simply more discussions need to be devoted to this topic, because at the end of the day, representation, (especially in the often-marginalizing world of academia, in the often-marginalizing *world*, period), matters.

Conclusion

Many people are vocal on the issue of NNESTs. This study gave a select group of bilingual U.S. born/raised bilinguals and international graduate teaching assistants a chance to speak for themselves, to identify or not identify themselves through labels, to voice their own concerns and to discuss their feelings about their place in the teaching world. A true

ethnographic interview lets an informant take the lead and tell their own story on their own terms and in the context in which they see fit (Spradley, 1979). The recruitment of bilinguals and international students, in addition to being unique, yielded very interesting data which had not been analyzed together in previous studies. Participants confirmed the findings of earlier research which asserts the advantages and disadvantages of being a NEST and NNEST (Benke & Medgyes, 2005; Florence Ma, 2012; Medgyes, 1992; Reves & Medgyes, 1994; etc.). Unlike usual studies, the participants also discussed the dichotomy of being a student and teacher and how they perceived their abilities in certain learning contexts, in addition to their own teaching.

Though most of the participants identified as nonnative speakers, there was much confusion about the delineation of a true native. Other participants were very vocal about the harmful effects that came with being perceived as a nonnative. These effects include being undermined in the classroom, being excluded, lacking a sense belonging and lastly being passed over for native speakers. Participants also shared some of their successes in their own classrooms as well as their graduate teaching courses. For the most part, they believed their linguistic abilities as second language learners assisted them in both spheres of their lives as graduate teaching assistants. There were many clear differences between the U.S. born/raised bilingual students and international students. Such differences include grammar foundations, student backgrounds and years of teaching experience. Even so, there were many similarities such as teaching motivation and teaching challenges. Overall, the participants provided great insight into the field of diverse English teachers and students.

Limitations of Study

     Although this study was incredible in terms of insights, there were several limitations. First, the amount of interview questions were overwhelming, both for participants and the researcher. A better approach would have been to have fewer questions that would yield equally rich and beneficial data. A further limitation was that interview questions did not align exactly, or chronology, to the research question and sub-questions. This unnecessarily complicated data analysis although it is safe to say data analysis is never a simple process. Another limitation was that interview questions seemed to lean more on the negative side. For example, four questions dealt with challenges and negative perceptions compared to only two that dealt with successes. Granted there are a plethora of undesirable aspects to teaching, and moreover teaching as a nonnative speaker, in hindsight the researcher could have included more questions relating to (even more) teaching/student successes and triumphs of the participants to equalize and balance data. This would have neutralized the overall tone because as it stands the study seems to be leaning heavily on the negative segments of life as a nonnative English-speaking graduate teaching assistant. Another limitation was the unequal representation of international speakers compared to U.S. born, or raised, participants (7:3 ratio). Although this could not have been helped given the smaller size of the TESOL program, coupled with other factors, future studies can eliminate this problem by judiciously diversifying participants. A last limitation of the study was not gaining enough historical context or background of participant's home countries. Nadeeka spent a great portion of time talking about the history of English in Sri Lanka, enough really to devote an entire paper on. Min also shared the reality of English language teaching in Korea, as did Amanda. Though it would have been ideal for other participants to also share more

detailed accounts, time and perhaps a lack of more probing from the researcher prevented this from happening.

Implications for Further Research

There are several take-away points from this study. The first is that more research needs to be devoted to diverse voices in the realm of English language teaching (ELT). The more diverse the voices, the more varied the perspectives and thus the more enriched ELT will be. Second, that native and nonnative are very loaded terms that are dripping with dark, and discriminatory, remnants of the past. These terms should be further investigated, if not completely done away with. The reasons for this being that they are limiting, lack context, are binary and cannot truly describe a person's language experiences, much less their identity. Another topic of interest for further research could be the great divide between generation 1.5 immigrants vs. international students. There seems to more than a linguistic divide and this should be investigated further. In terms of linguistics, perhaps more classes specifically catered for the 1.5 generation population should be created to address their unique grammatical limitations. Lastly, as the overriding theme is an efficient teacher is neither native nor native, but simply qualified, there should always be a push for more rigorous ELT curriculums and standards in order to produce competent, qualified educators from every part of the world, at every level of education, from pre-K to higher education.

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Appendix A: Consent Form to Participate

You are invited to participate in a research study about the self-perceptions of novice bilingual and international graduate teaching assistants in a teacher preparation program.

If you agree to be part of the research study, you will be asked to participate in an hour long, individual, semi-structured interview session.

Benefits of the research include contributing your voice and opinions to the discourse about nonnative English-speaking teachers of which you may self-identify as. Further benefits of this study will include engaging in thought-provoking discussions about the field of TESOL, teaching practices and shared experiences.

Risks and discomforts are minimal and include being asked personal reflection questions about thoughts of being a native or nonnative English-speaking teacher and graduate student. Any communicative risks such as discomfort will be reduced by the researcher's respectful tone, clear communication, and appropriate framing of questions.

Data collected will remain confidential as the researcher will protect your identity and keep it anonymous in recordings and data analysis. Data will not be accessible by anyone but the researcher. This includes school administration, professors, and other participants in the study. The researcher will keep this data safe in a password-locked device (laptop). Furthermore, the researcher will properly discard of data per IRB protocols.

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with St. Cloud State University, or the researcher. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

If you have questions about this research study, you may contact Anisa Hagi-Mohamed at the following email: ayhagimohamed@stcloudstate.edu or the faculty sponsor for this study Dr. James Robinson at the following email: JHRobinson@stcloudstate.edu
Results of the study can be requested from the researcher and once approved will be *published at the St. Cloud State University Repos"tor*y.

Participants fully acknowledge they will not be paid or reimbursed for partaking in this study.

Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age, you have read the information provided above, and you have consent to participate.

_____   _____
Signature   Date

Appendix B: Ethnographic Interview Questions

Instructions to Interviewees: I will conduct individual interviews with all participants in this study. There are ten participants in total, including you. Though I will stick to a script of pre-determined questions, I may ask for clarification of answers or pose a follow-up question(s). In terms of content, or purpose, the following questions will revolve around your beliefs and experiences as both a graduate teaching assistant or teacher, as well as your role as a student. There is no right or wrong answer. Please share anything which comes to your mind. All input is valuable for the study. If you need any clarifications on any question, please ask me. This interview should last approximately 1 hour. The audio of this interview will be recorded for further data coding and analysis.

Background Questions

1. Can you state your name, country of origin and how long you have been in the U.S?

2. What language or languages do you speak in addition to English?

3. When and where did you first learn English? How proficient are you in the language?

4. Tell me about the moment you first realized you wanted to teach.

Teaching Questions

1. Could you describe your teaching background?

2. Can you tell me when you knew you wanted to become an ESL teacher?

3. How do you self-identify as a teacher? Do you attach any labels to yourself?

4. Tell me about your perceptions of native and nonnative teachers.

5. Tell me how your linguistics abilities, as a second language learner, impact your role and duties as an instructor, both positively and negatively.

6. Tell me about a recent successful teaching experience.

7. Tell me about a recent challenging teaching experience.

8. Can you tell me what differences there are between native and nonnative speakers in terms of teaching abilities?

9. The literature has discussed a rampant issue of prejudice and discrimination against nonnative English-speaking professionals. Did you ever face prejudicial behaviors or discrimination as an instructor, if so how?

10. What are your thoughts about your future as a teacher?

Student Questions

1. Could you describe your student background?

2. Describe a typical day in your role as a graduate student.

3. Tell me how your linguistics abilities, as a second language learner, impact your studies / classes, both positively and negatively.

4. Tell me about a recent successful learning experience in a class.

5. Tell me about a recent challenging learning experience in a class.

6. Have you ever faced discrimination or prejudice as a student based on your linguistic abilities?