

# PRACTICUM SUPERVISORS' INSIGHTS REGARDING NON-NATIVE TEACHERS IN TRAINING

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## Abstract

This paper presents the results of a series of oral interviews with practicum supervisors in MA TESOL programs, regarding their views on the characteristics and the challenges experienced by non-native teachers in training while they were doing their practice teaching. Practicum supervisors constitute a group of professionals with a unique and privileged perspective onto the classroom performance of both native and non-native student teachers, and through these interviews they can express their concerns and appreciations of non-native student teachers in North-American TESOL programs.

**Keywords:** practicum supervisor, non-native teachers, TESOL programs

## INTRODUCTION

Research on NNESTs has enjoyed a great deal of attention in the last few years, especially after Medgyes (1994) and Braine's (1999) seminal books on the topic, which helped placing the study of NNESTs in the TESOL research agenda. More recently, the publication of a few books exclusively devoted to NNESTs (Kamhi-Stein, 2004; Llurda, 2005a) has confirmed the wide appeal of this topic within the language teaching research community.

As noted by Moussu and Llurda (2008) and Llurda (2015), there is an abundance of studies using surveys, complemented with a good deal of recent studies using interviews and autobiographical narratives. Llurda (2005b) analyzed the results of a survey among MA TESOL practicum supervisors focusing on their views of non-native student teachers under the light of two broad categories, namely non-native speakers' language skills and teaching performance.

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The results of the above study, pointed to a confirmation of Medgyes' arguments for the importance of language training in teacher education (Medgyes, 1999). However, the relatively small number of completed questionnaires received by the researcher raised some questions regarding the validity of its results (Turnbull, 2006). The low response rate, together with the logical limitations of survey studies, in which respondents have very limited space for developing their ideas and thoughts in depth, triggered the current study, in which a series of extended oral interviews with some of the actual respondents to Llorca's initial survey would provide a valuable extension of the data, therefore adding insights into the nature of NNS student teachers that were missing in the previous data. Thus, people with long experience and expertise in the area of teacher training, and more particularly people with experience observing both native and non-native student teachers, would be able to express their views and opinions on the qualities and characteristics of NNESTs while at their final stages in their training process as TESOL professionals.

## **METHOD**

Twenty-one respondents to Llorca's (2005b) survey on non-native student teachers were sent an electronic message asking whether they would be willing to further contribute to the study by participating in a relatively short oral interview to be carried out via telephone at their convenience. Sixteen supervisors responded positively to the request. Respondents were representative of the total group of participants in the survey in terms of both geography and demography. They were working at institutions based on different geographical areas, and the students enrolled in their programs represented the range of students in the whole group of programs surveyed. Five of the interviewed supervisors were from Atlantic coast institutions, two were from the Pacific coast, and nine from institutions in central states/provinces, which were evenly distributed from north to south. Eleven were public, and 5 private. The programs represented in the interviews were of different sizes, ranging from 5 to 40 students, and the number of NNSs currently enrolled in those programs ranged from 1 to 15. All oral interviews took place during the months of June and July of 2001. Two individuals said that they would be willing to be interviewed on the topic, but they would rather do it by electronic mail – which we did over a period of two weeks. All but one of the orally interviewed participants agreed to being tape-recorded. One interview could not be recorded because of mechanical problems. Subsequently, the recorded conversations were transcribed and relevant excerpts were identified and incorporated into the analysis. In the case of the two interviews that were conducted by email, extracts are based

on the actual passages written in the messages. The two oral interviews that were not recorded were discarded.

Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner (Nunan, 1992), as all included the following list of items previously identified as points of interest:

- A. Can we consider all NNSs as belonging to a single group? Do you perceive clear differences among different NNSs? Which ones?
- B. Please, talk about the challenges that face NNS teachers of English. How are these different from those facing NSs?
- C. If we take teaching skills on the one hand and language skills on the other, which ones are more relevant? How dependent or independent are they on each other?
- D. Some people have the idea that NNS teachers teach in a less communicative way than NSs, and they rely more heavily on textbooks. Do you share this idea?
- E. What should an ideal training program – tailored to your NNSs – include?

These were guiding questions that were asked of all participants, in addition to more specific questions inspired by some of their individual responses to the written questionnaire. From here, each conversation proceeded in its own way, depending on the aspects that the interviewee wanted to emphasize.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The insights obtained through this semi-structured method were rather rich and varied. The most relevant findings have been structured around the five main topics arisen during the interviews and illustrated with extracts from the interviews. Names of supervisors have been omitted and substituted by 14 letters of the alphabet.

### **ONE GROUP OR MANY GROUPS OF NNSs?**

The question of whether all NNSs are comparable and clearly distinguishable from NSs is of key importance in this study, due to the fact that many of the claims made in the existing research on NNS teachers are

based on generalizations about NNS teachers. However, as this section will illustrate, such a distinction is problematic and far from generating general consensus. The works of Liu, J. (1999), Brutt-Griffler and Samimy (2001), and Inbar-Lourie (2005) have illustrated some of the problems in characterizing speakers of a language as either NSs or NNSs. There are multiple examples of individual cases who fail to fall clearly within either of those two categories. Based on supervisors' responses, we can first note a certain lack of clarity in giving a well-defined answer to the question of whether all NNSs can be grouped under the same label, as though they were all sharing a similar set of characteristics. C, for instance, starts by saying that "there are differences" among NNSs, but adds that "sometimes people go too far down the road of contrastive analysis", as "English is hard for anybody" and "learning to be a TESOL teacher is hard for anybody". He recognizes that he tends to think of Asian NNSs as the prototype for all NNSs, because "if we can address those that come from the more distant cultures, it is easier to back-step and address those from more similar cultures". The same lack of clarity is found in K's remark: "I think there are some characteristics that are common to all NNSs, but on the other hand there are huge differences as well", and in L's words: "they are all different. There are some generalizations. In general, they are more worried about their language [skills] than NSs, of course, but not all of them. They are not all worried about their language. Some are not. It is true of most, but not all of them". G summarizes in a single sentence this unsolved duality: "We need to have some label, but there are differences". She complements this statement by adding that "not all NNSs are the same".

What C, G, K, and L express through their seemingly contradictory statements is the feeling that all NNSs have some common characteristics, but at the same time they all differ according to their origin and especially with regard to their individual personalities, in much the same way as NSs are all different from each other. They are torn between two forces that point in contrary directions: one leading to the realization of individual differences and the other emphasizing the common challenges and values experienced by most NNS teachers.

The lack of unity among NNSs is acknowledged by some other supervisors, who claim the NS/NNS distinction "is not a valid description in many ways" (B), or simply state that "I wish we wouldn't classify people in NSs and NNSs, frankly, it's quite terrible" (J), and point out the existence of factors showing a diversity among NNSs "based on cultural differences in educational practices and attitudes, differences in the languages, etc" (D). O's words are revealing of this position:

There's diversity within non-native English speakers just like there's diversity within native English speakers. Of course, with native English speakers who are teaching English, they may have a greater level of proficiency or fluency in English, but non-native English speakers bring special resources too. Maybe they're more meta-cognitive about learning English; they've gone through the experience of language acquisition and second language acquisition... I mean, there's so much that's valuable there for their students. (...) You know, I do see that as problematic, looking at them as a group. Also because depending on their experiences they might not... a non-native English speaker, might have gone through a process of acculturation and might not have been particularly reflective about it, and therefore might encourage assimilation in their students. (...) I'm having trouble making generalisations about that. (O)

The penultimate statement raises an important issue that is quite often ignored: The role of NNS teachers who have totally adopted NSs' values and norms. Such NNSs could somehow be equated to religious converts who are more enthusiastically supportive of their new faith than old-timers.

Conversely, H and N seem to stress the importance of NNSs' background, and they give a fairly extensive account of how NNSs from different countries of origin are different from each other:

What a German needs to know to master English is quite different from what a Japanese or Chinese needs to know. (H)

The difficulty of answering this question is that a student who comes from a country in northern Europe, people from Denmark, their English is unbelievably good. They have a great attitude towards language. It's perfectly normal to be multilingual. They are almost like NSs except for a little bit of an accent. People from the middle east are very verbal with English, they haven't been giving much attention to reading and writing. People from Japan have the most incredible grasp of English grammar and can write and read very well, but cannot speak very fluently. To say what are the main challenges facing NNSs from a language perspective, different aspects of language challenge some, but for others language is

not a problem at all, because they come having mastered the English language. They know it at both an intuitive level and a non-intuitive level and in some cases they are much better than their NS colleagues. (N)

On the other side of the spectrum, some supervisors acknowledge the forces that bring all NNSs under a similar set of defining characteristics. Here, we can find M's acknowledgment of the usefulness of having a global distinction between NSs and NNSs, and A's claim that all NNSs share "an inferiority complex with respect to NSs, that their English is not as good, and that their qualifications as English teachers are not as good". This view is in essence shared by F, who believes that "we shouldn't consider different types of NNSs", as "Vietnamese would have the same problems and concerns as Spanish speakers". F, a non-native speaker himself, closes his response to this question with a statement that clearly shows his view with regard to the need for a label that puts all kinds of NNSs together: "they have a lot of common ground, and I think differences are not the norm; they are exceptional".

By way of conclusion to this section, there is clearly no total consensus on this matter among respondents, but as the above selection illustrates, although NNS teachers may share certain characteristics, they can hardly be universally taken as belonging to a single homogenous group.

## **SELF-CONFIDENCE**

Several factors affect teachers' performance. These include, in addition to the preferred teaching methodology and teachers' command of the L2, teachers' attitudes, values, motivation, beliefs on education, personality, and self-confidence or self-esteem (Bernaus, 2001). Based on the interviews with practicum supervisors, it appears that lack of self-confidence is one of the key problems NNS teachers experience in their practice. Whether this is caused by their own self-image or by the shadow cast by students and NSs' distrust in the capabilities of NNS teachers is difficult to tell. The outcome is a situation of anxiety, which is a feeling that may potentially block the teacher's performance and cause some trouble in their task. It could even be claimed that this lack of self-confidence is one of the features that unites most NNS teachers.

N says about two NNS teacher trainees in her program that "they have high anxiety because they know they are competing against NSs" and she adds "they are worried that the students will not value their teaching as much as they would value a NS's. There will probably always to be a thorn in their side". In this respect, K states:

I think there are some characteristics that are common to all NNSs, but on the other hand there are huge differences as well. In terms of teaching ability, in terms of language proficiency. I do think all my NNSs experience insecurity. The NSs are insecure as well, but I have seen it much more with the NNSs. ... NNSs have to prepare more and have to go through the material more carefully to make sure that they understand everything. ... Students get some benefit from interacting with NSs. NSs, even if they might not be great teachers, have more confidence and students can get something out of that. (K)

A stresses the fact that all NSs share an inferiority complex, which they must overcome to do their job satisfactorily:

I think there is one feature which has been shared with every culture that I have seen teaching English. I have had experience in Europe, Asia and South America, and all three have shared this inferiority complex with respect to NSs, that their English is somehow not as good and that their qualifications as English teachers are not as good. No matter how many years they have been learning the language, and most of them have spent their whole educational life learning the language, they are still not there. (...) When people do not understand you that reinforces your inferiority complex. (A)

She also thinks that lack of self-confidence is due to an excess of pressure on NNSs with regard to their language proficiency: "There's this myth that you have to be perfect in the language, and that keeps people from being confident."

C introduces the concept of self-esteem in connection with language proficiency:

Being a successful language teacher means feeling good about yourself and having a degree of self-esteem. That means you really have to make a commitment to increasing your proficiency in the target language half of your life because you need to keep improving more and more, if nothing else so you feel good about yourself, because if you don't feel good about yourself, you are not going to be a good teacher. (C)

But self-esteem is a very subjective element, which does not equally affect every individual, as J reminds us when she mentions that in her own research on the relationship between self-esteem and the oral production of a foreign language she found that “the people who think they can do it, do it, and those who think they can't, don't.”

The differences between ESL and EFL settings also seem to be relevant in determining the amount of self-esteem or confidence experienced by NNS teachers. M, when dealing with the differences a NNS may encounter in an EFL or an ESL setting, argues that the ESL setting is more demanding and therefore “more people would feel more comfortable in an EFL setting than in an ESL, because of the attitudes they have to deal with”. The great pressure NNSs may experience in ESL settings is further illustrated by H's words, pointing at the preference for NSs in ESL settings: “they are not native speakers, and people want a native speaker to teach them”, although he later qualifies his statement by specifying that it only refers to NNSs with a strong accent. And N thinks that a big challenge for NNSs who want to teach English in the US would be “to convey their authority as language teachers”.

F states that NNS teachers “probably feel less insecure in a place like China, where the students actually revere the teacher.” On the other hand, spending some time in the US completing a masters program is regarded as positive for their self-confidence in future situations teaching EFL. As B expresses it:

Doing the practicum here in this country, one of the great benefits is a great boost of confidence; you know, many NNSs come to me and say I want to do the kids' class, I want to do the lower level. And I know exactly what they are saying; they are saying ‘I don't feel confident to teach in a high level.’ I think, one of the great benefits of practicum experience for them is that it's a great confidence booster. (B)

The pressure coming from people surrounding NNS teachers in ESL severely damages NNSs' self-confidence. O, first, states there is a relationship between self-perception and teacher identity, but she later suggests that the environment surrounding a NNS teacher in an ESL setting may contribute to having strong feelings of insecurity:

I think there's a really huge relationship between teacher self-perception and teacher identity, so that if you don't think you are doing a good job you are not going to do a good job. ... I



think it's hard to separate your self-perception from the perceptions of those around you, because if you are constantly surrounded by people who don't believe that your proficiency is adequate, it's really hard for you to maintain a sense that what you have got is adequate. If you are constantly getting this message as being that you are deficient, because your non-native English speaker status creates a deficiency model... it's hard for you to think you are beyond that. (O)

This is further linked to the supervisor's consideration of the existence of discrimination against NNS teachers in the US: "almost every single student I have had has had some kind of an exchange in which they were up against discrimination".

F points out that NNSs tend to be "insecure of their speaking abilities, so they rely on the text or even on other materials like tapes and so on". When specifically asked whether this may be due to a feeling of insecurity on the part of the NNS teacher, his response is affirmative. He further dwells on this issue, identifying insecurity as the biggest challenge faced by NNS teachers:

The biggest challenge is insecurity. They have that kind of complex of inferiority that they cannot provide a native-like pronunciation model to the students. But I think that is unfounded. ... One of the elements of a Masters program for NNSs is not so much the content but the actual exposure to a greater level of proficiency and getting more confident in themselves. (F)

## **LANGUAGE SKILLS vs. TEACHING SKILLS**

Language proficiency in all its various dimensions is often referred to as one of the most problematic weaknesses of NNS teachers (Berry, 1990; Medgyes, 1994, 1999). As the questionnaire on practicum supervisors' perceptions of NNS students' showed, the fact that a considerable proportion of NNS teachers have lower language skills than NSs constitutes a handicap for the whole group of NNS teachers, as it will be very difficult for any NNS teacher not to be *a priori* judged as lacking in language proficiency.

In contrast to this handicap, research on NNS teachers provides the evidence that NNSs can be fully competent teachers, and several authors (i.e., Seidlhofer, 1996; Amin, 1997; Liu, J. 1999) claim that NNSs can be as

good language teachers (if not better) as NSs. In that respect, the idea seems to be that NNSs' deficiencies as language users are compensated by their added value as language teachers. And so language skills and teaching skills appear to be confronted as two dimensions of language teaching, with NSs dominating in the former and NNSs in the latter.

Interviewees were required to choose between either language skills or teaching skills as the most relevant to language teaching. Teaching skills were regarded as more important than language skills by some participants. L expresses this idea quite clearly:

I would definitely come down on the side of teaching skills. If I know a little more chemistry than you do, and I have good teaching skills, you are going to learn something. Do I have to be the world's finest expert in chemistry? No. Now, what we are talking here about isn't just chemistry – a topic of knowledge – but language, and somebody who has – or maybe perceives to have – deficiencies whether it is in accent, in grammar, in vocabulary, or in idiomatic use of the language, as a teacher they are going to feel pretty concerned – what kind of model am I offering to my students? I have to say that I've seen a lot of NSs of English who couldn't do their students nearly as much good as a NNS who may have distinctive problems with their English and yet very good teaching skills. And, you know, they are right to be concerned, they are modeling from incorrect English, their students probably would be better off without. But those students learnt a lot because the teacher knew a lot more English than the students did so. Is there net gain? Yes, of course there is. Does that teacher have to speak perfect English? No! (L)

In addition to L's view, A, G, and J also think that teaching skills are more desirable than language skills, as illustrated by the following excerpts:

It's amazing what some teachers can do with so little, and yeah, if you are a good teacher and a good actress, I think you can do a lot even with little knowledge. (G)

It's really the teaching skill and knowledge and ability to deliver that content that is more important in language. So

once again one doesn't look at accent, one looks at knowledge and skill and how to impart information. (J)

Sometimes if you struggle with the language yourself, you have more compassion, which makes you a better teacher. The people who have learned the language easily and are absolutely fluent with a native-like status... level, they often (not always) have forgotten what it's like to struggle with their language. There's nothing wrong with having problems with the language. NSs are not role models, they have not gone through that process. (A)

In addition to the remarkable fact that "compassion" is mentioned as one of the defining features of NNS teachers, the arguments in the above three extracts go around the idea that if you know how to help your students (and NNSs have more chances to know if only because they have been in the same situation as their students) you do not need extremely high language proficiency, as language skills are only relatively important in language teaching. This is very similar to the position held by Canagarajah (1999), and is very well captured in A's words: "there's this myth that you have to be perfect in the language, and that keeps people from being confident".

An opposite view is held by those who think language skills should always be guaranteed as a basic condition for language teachers. The degree of such proficiency is rather difficult to establish, as Koike and Liskin-Gasparro (1999) showed with a seemingly clear and widely used concept as "near-native proficiency". Possessing essential levels of language skills may mean "being comfortable" and "being able to use English in the classroom" (K), or having a level adequate to the context of teaching:

In EFL settings, where English is required in secondary schools, a lot of students may not ever find a real use for English. They don't need to be exposed to NS discourse. If they hear the language, it may be used between NNSs. So, in that case, having NS proficiency wouldn't be very important. On the other hand, if you are working with people who are going to be interacting a lot with NSs, that would be very important. So, the audience is very important. (C)

I think it really depends on the cultural context where the teaching is going to occur; if it is ESL in this country, then proficiency has to be very high, because the aim is to bring the

students up to native ability, certainly near native. But if it's overseas, where English is taught as a foreign language, perhaps the goal, and viewed realistically, English proficiency is not achievable like it is within a country where English is the spoken language; so that a lower level of proficiency is acceptable. (H)

NS teachers have "good" language skills, except often their metalinguistic knowledge is miserable and they may be poor at explaining matters in such a way that their students can benefit, particularly if the teachers don't know the culture or L1 of their students. NNS teachers can be good pedagogically (whatever that means) and poor linguistically... Then you want to see if you can say 'well if they can't speak the language how can we say they are good English teachers' (like in Korea, most state teachers of English are not good English speakers). But then it depends what you mean by teaching English. In Korea that means something like "assisting students to pass local exams concerning formal knowledge of English", which in many cases the Korean teachers of English do much better than visiting native speakers of English with some or no relevant professional qualifications. (E)

N thinks language skills are basic, as they underlie any other abilities teachers may acquire in their professional lives:

Language abilities might be more important because if a teacher, if as a professional, you know that you can improve your teaching by going to conferences and reading books and reading articles, if your language skills are not good enough you will have difficulty in accessing that information. And in some way strengthening your language ability gives you access - both during your program and after your program - information that can help you improve your teaching ability. I guess in the ideal world both would be very important, that a NNS would not only improve their language abilities but also develop teaching ability. But if you are going to be a language teacher, I guess you need to have good language. (N)

Some answers also indicate that the question is complex and entailing some conceptual difficulties, as shown by I's statement that language skills

and teaching skills are totally unrelated, and so it is perfectly plausible to find one without the other. F's answer also shows the difficulty in finding a balanced answer to the choice between these two skills, as he starts by giving priority to teaching skills, and ends accepting that speaking very good English is not a necessary condition for being a good teacher:

A person that speaks perfect English or Spanish may not be a good teacher if he or she doesn't know how to teach: It's kind of hard to decide, but of course I would prefer to have all my candidates to be good language speakers. They should be good in both languages if that can be found; I don't know, I have seen people who don't speak very good English and teach very well in a classroom. They can speak more cautiously, more slowly, but at the same time very correctly.  
(F)

## DIFFERENCES IN TEACHING METHODOLOGY

Supervisors were asked about their position with regard to the following statement: "Some people have the idea that NNS teachers teach in a less communicative way than NSs, and they rely more heavily on textbooks. Do you share this idea?". In general, participants in the study tended to agree with the statement. Their most frequently cited reasons for the NNSs' heavier reliance on textbooks and grammar teaching were: insecurity due to lack of native-like proficiency, and the influence of their own countries' language teaching traditions. For the sake of clarity, some supporting extracts with regard to this issue will be presented first, followed by extracts in which some interviewees express their disagreement.

### Supporting Arguments

*Insecurity due to lack of native-like proficiency:*

Most supervisors mentioned insecurity or lack of confidence as key factors in explaining why NNSs tend to teach in a more grammar-oriented and textbook-centered way than NSs. Here are some extracts that conform to this idea:

There are aspects of communicative language teaching that you can't always prepare for. It's a lot easier to prepare yourself for a grammar lesson. When you walk into class, confidence in your English is top, because you know every word you need to use, compared to, say, a communicative

class, and you walk in and you have to conduct a conversation in English whose direction you cannot entirely predict. Yes, of course, I must agree on that point. Teachers who are afraid that their English is not good enough may be afraid to try a communicative method. (L)

I think that with grammar teaching, the teacher is in control. Communicative language teaching does relinquish control. And you put the responsibility on the hands of your students. The teacher is sort of the orchestrator, and so it's very frightening, especially for a new teacher, to be potentially out of control. So, grammar teaching gives the teacher a sense of security because they are in total control. (N)

NNSs are insecure about their speaking abilities, so they rely on the text or even on other materials like tapes and so on. (F)

One of the problems for NNSs, when you get into communicative language teaching is that you need to have that native speaker knowledge of language, which they don't possess, in terms of vocabulary, in terms of structure. (B)

*The weight of tradition - reproducing the way they have been taught:*

The supposedly higher reliance of NNSs on textbooks and preference of grammar-based teaching was also supported by a second argument, which roughly stated that all teachers tended to reproduce the teaching patterns they had been exposed to when they were students, and the majority of NNSs had been educated in grammar-based non-communicative environments, which were still very highly regarded in many countries of the world.

I think it's probably because of the way they were taught. And if you learn a foreign language you do have a better grip of grammar. NSs, if they don't have enough training, they just go by their intuitive knowledge of how language works. I would agree that NNSs do teach more grammar. It is probably also because they think it is important. (G)

Japan uses almost exclusively the grammar-translation approach. And it's largely their tradition, it's the way it has always been done; it's how they learn other languages. (H)

Many of the non-native speaking teachers have been teaching for a long time... so anybody on the practicum may fall back upon the particular ways of teaching which have been successful for them. And many of the non-native speaking teachers are very good at teaching grammar, so they can emphasize explicit approaches to grammar. (B)

If one has been successful as a student in an approach with a lot of drill and practice, then one is likely to use that approach in one's own teaching. (D)

O also resorted to the way NNSs were taught to account for their apparent tendency to rely more on textbooks and grammar-teaching:

That relates so much to their non-native speaking condition as much as to their apprenticeship of observation. I think a lot of teachers who have learnt English as a second language have been exposed to more traditional and less communicative models of teaching, and it's really hard to break away from teaching the way we saw teaching done. (O)

However, she later qualified some of her previous opinions by claiming her acquaintance with NNS teachers who had made "a very conscious departure from the way they had been taught, and really sort of changed this model". She further strengthened this argument by placing a heavier emphasis on personality than on NS/NNS condition: "I have a feeling that it's about their personality, or their disposition, more than anything else". Thus, she thinks that all teachers teach differently and their personality determines the reasons for their particular choices and performance as teachers.

### **Arguments Against**

Some supervisors expressed their disagreement with the association of NSs and communicative language teaching, on the one hand, and NNSs and grammar-oriented textbook-based teaching, on the other. Their main argument was that there are no such differences between NSs and NNSs, although there are differences among teachers, irrespective of L1 status. J indicates that it "depends on the context" and complements it by affirming that "NNSs may teach communicatively as well as NSs". The same conviction is held by E who think nobody can "generalize safely across the

entire world and the multiple cultural contexts of TEFL or TESL here". He further adds that:

Untrained NS teachers of English are perfectly capable of teaching in non-communicative ways. Reliance on textbooks is not a relevant factor for me. Most of my teachers, NNS or NS, would not like to have to work from no textbooks. ... Some NNS and some NS teachers have the resources to provide such direct instruction. Some don't. How can we generalize about this concerning the entire planetary population of English teachers? (E)

Thus, E thinks that reliance on textbooks has to do with experience teaching regardless of whether the teachers are NSs or NNSs. N also shares this idea. According to her, "all new teachers rely on textbooks, not just NNS teachers", but she adds that many NNS practicum students "have had teaching experience and so they are less likely to be tied to textbooks because they have a little more teaching experience".

## **IDEAL TESOL PROGRAM FOR EFL-NNS TEACHERS**

In all the interviews, practicum supervisors were at some point asked to give an account of an ideal EFL teacher training program aimed at NNSs. The rationale behind such a question was that respondents would make explicit reference to all the aspects that need to be emphasized in the training of NNS teachers, particularly those who are likely to end up teaching in an EFL context. This would complement the work of Govardhan et al. (1999), who claim that US ESOL programs do not meet NNS students' needs, as well as Kamhi-Stein (1999) and Carrier's (2003) proposals of courses specifically designed to cater for MA TESOL NNS students' needs.

Responses were fairly diverse. Three respondents (B, O, and J) did not think that a program that was specifically tailored for NNSs would be necessary, as they considered that NSs and NNSs bring diversity to each other, and therefore it is good to have them together in the same program. In a similar vein, D said: "In TESOL programs where both NSs and NNSs are in classes, they can learn a great deal from each other and perhaps most hopeful, can learn how to collaborate to maximize their strengths". In spite of this reluctance to considering the possibility of an ideal program exclusively aimed at NNSs expressed by a few respondents, some key aspects were reported to be likely to constitute an ideal TESOL program for NNSs. For instance, C emphasized the need to "raise an awareness of the differences of the way languages are taught in their home country and in the



US". In his view, one of the main problems experienced by his students is caused by a mismatch between the teaching styles in the TESOL program and in their home country: "a lot of things we tell them 'this is the way to do it in our program' may not be acceptable when they go back home" and so they must be critically aware of the diversity of contexts in order to have a diversity of resources. Similarly, L mentions the need to train NNSs to teach in large classes, which according to her are commonly found in EFL, and E advocates for a course aimed at raising a critical awareness of what it means to teach in their own EFL setting:

(NNSs) had better have a course on the whole business of teaching a lingua culture that one didn't necessarily grow up in, as well as plenty of stuff that enables the student to recognize the inappropriate, not to say incorrect nature of homogenous conceptions of languages and cultures. (E)

Several other extracts from the interviews reflect the need to focus on the characteristics of EFL, as opposed to ESL, contexts. N says that "the ideal program would give the EFL students that might go back to their country an opportunity to reflect on the implications of course content for a foreign language as opposed to a SL setting". Besides, J makes the point of teaching English as a Foreign language "in an environment where English is not spoken around as soon as students leave the classroom and what opportunities do you make available to them", and A says:

When one is learning English as a FL, one has to intentionally seek out opportunities to read language, use the language, etc. And there are different ways that that can be done, but one is not going to be able to immerse their students in that context. Maybe you have to have additional assignments and think of ways to bring NSs into the classroom or structure activities, etc. or put them in contact with people from their own language and culture who speak English as a FL. (A)

NNSs may experience a conflict between their North American training and their prospective jobs in EFL countries. According to C, NNSs in the US may find themselves in a situation in which there are plenty of resources and materials, and their supervisors motivate them to innovate and to promote communicative principles in language teaching. As J expresses it: "in this country, we encourage teachers to experiment and try". However,

many of them will face very different situations when they go back to their home countries:

Every culture, every ethnic group, probably has its own educational culture and I think you have to be very sensitive to it. Our program is extremely supportive of the communicative approach, but I would be naive if I didn't say that the communicative approach is highly ideological, it's a very top-down process, it's the sort of thing that Americans might like very much but there are other ways of looking at learning.

We have to be careful. Otherwise we set them up for a big disappointment. A lot of times, we make certain suggestions and they go back and try to do things the way they did them in the US, the people there may not be very receptive. So we have to be very sensitive to the differences. The best way to go is to develop a kind of a hybrid between what they learn here and what is done there. (C)

The teaching of language and culture are two aspects that were frequently cited as important elements of an ideal TESOL program in North America. With regard to language teaching within TESOL programs, N argues:

I would want to have some mechanisms for helping NNSs with their English, if they needed it. So, it could be an academic English class they would get credit for, it could be credit or non-credit, but you would want to make sure that early on the NNSs who come from countries where they aren't as prepared as they could be they have the opportunity to improve their English. ... I would want to address their language needs early on so that they get the most out of the program and they return to their home country - if they return to their home country - with the best English possible, and that you made the content courses relevant to foreign students. (N)

Similarly, J says that programs should take care of students' "special needs in terms of understanding the English language or using the English language themselves", a statement that is shared by E and M. This view is contrasted by A, who does not think language should be taught in TESOL

programs, but who does think that such programs should promote "an understanding of different varieties of English worldwide, and an attitude that varieties are OK, that people do not have to know one particular variety".

The teaching of culture is also considered by three respondents as a key element to help NNS TESOL students adapt to the North America context. E considers it as one of the three specific courses NNSs should be taught in TESOL programs, together with language improvement courses, and courses on how to become "a change agent in educational organizations". M talks about "cultural adjustment" needed by international (i.e., NNS) students, and he suggests that "arrangements could be made for them to stay with American families, to have English-speaking roommates". A gives some examples of cultural differences that may need to be tackled in such programs:

Sometimes, people have this idea in their heads that in the US you can do anything, it's completely free, so they get here and start doing things that are not against the law but is part of the unwritten law... the behavior that we don't do here... things about their bodily functions or whatever. They just think you can talk about anything in the US so I can tell people about it, you know... and, no, not in the classroom, this would be a private conversation or something, you know... And I just often think that... and it's again the same thing, it's case by case, most students never need any kind of thing except living in the culture. Other people you kind of need taking them aside try to find some ways of teaching them what in our culture... how late you call people in the evening, that kind of thing, they couldn't possibly know, so I think the language thing, if you see a weakness, yes you need to address that, but it's probably a case by case situation.

Finally, N believes that TESOL programs aimed at NNS students should incorporate case studies as the appropriate methodology to deal with differences in their home settings and the North American ones:

The ideal program would incorporate - not in all the classes, but for example in the methodology classes - case studies that the NNS could identify with. Let's say you are talking about the teaching of reading. In a methodology class you could have case studies where - a various case studies, making sure

the professor would make sure that some of the case studies would reflect the constraints that the NNSs would be going home to. So, if you have someone from Central Europe, in an area where they were just now beginning to develop resources in English like libraries and they didn't really have English movies available, that the non-native TESOL students could think about the way of teaching reading in a context with very few resources. (N)

Interestingly, only B made explicit mention of the need to incorporate discussions on issues such as the native speaker / non-native speaker distinction.

## CONCLUSIONS

These interviews showed the complexity of the topics covered in the study. There was no unanimity in many of the issues raised. However, some interesting points were made in the course of the conversations. First, supervisors did not show a clear idea regarding the identification of all NNSs as belonging to a single group or many different groups. They appeared divided between a view of NNSs as sharing some key features and one that regarded NNSs as individuals separated by their language backgrounds and their personalities. It is noteworthy the comment made by one participant with regard to his tendency to take Asians as the prototype of all NNSs. Whether this is due to the fact that they are the biggest group of NNSs in MA TESOL programs in the US, or the assumption that they are the ones who have a harder time with mastering the language and interiorizing the culture is difficult to establish. Despite this divergence of opinions with regard to NNS identity, the interviewees seemed to agree on the lack of self-confidence experienced by many NNSs. This was related to states of anxiety and an inferiority complex. All of these made it difficult for NNS teachers "to convey their authority as language teachers" (N). The reasons given for this lack of self-confidence ranged from their own language skills to the environment, especially in ESL settings, which were regarded as being more demanding on NNS teachers than EFL. One interviewee even mentioned that nearly all her NNS TESOL students have experienced some kind of discrimination in the US.

Participants mostly agreed on the heavier reliance of NNSs on textbooks and the greater use of communicative methods by NSs, although they tended to find justifications for such difference, and in some cases they pointed to the teachers' experience as a more important factor in determining reliance on textbooks. When practicum supervisors were asked about the

specificities of an ideal TESOL program for NNSs, they mentioned increasing language skills and culture knowledge, raising awareness of the differences between teaching in North America and teaching in their home countries, which often meant teaching in large classes, with an educational culture rather different from the North American.

Finally, this work has offered a new perspective into the insights of TESOL practicum supervisors regarding non-native speakers' performance. Hopefully, this research will open new grounds in this fascinating area of research.

## THE AUTHOR

Enric Llurda teaches courses on English, applied linguistics, and intercultural communication. His areas of interest are bilingualism, language attitudes, internationalization of higher education, language awareness and language teaching, with a strong emphasis on non-native teachers in TESOL.

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