



Bilingual English Speaking Professionals and The Current Recruitment Practices in EFL Market

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Abstract: In this paper, I attempt to investigate how bilingual English Language professionals are perceived by recruiters in Saudi Arabia. The paper also explores what EFL teaching jobs hiring policies and practices are in place.

This study is informed by the critical research paradigm to call attention to inequitable practices and policies that affect bilingual English professionals. Eleven Arab teachers participated in this study in the eastern province, Saudi Arabia. These teachers had teaching experience varying from 3 to more than 25 years.

These teachers were interviewed using a semi-structure method. The findings revealed that the majority of the participants were aware of who the ideal English language teacher model is. The interpretation of the data also showed that they were dissatisfied and concerned about how recruiters neglect their teaching experience and educational background when hiring. Additionally, 'accent' and 'nationality' issues were also considered amongst the causes of inequitable hiring practices in EFL jobs in the Saudi market.

The study recommends giving bilinguals equal opportunities with their monolingual colleagues with regard to recruitment. Collaboration between monolinguals and bilinguals should not be considered as a one-way relationship but as an investing relationship

With regard to employers, it is also recommended that they should be linked to the field of TEFL/TESOL so they can understand at least what is meant by 'ELT profession' so they can revisit and revise the current hiring criteria to be more inclusive.

Keywords: hiring process, monolingual English teacher, bilingual English teacher native speaker, non-native speaker, critical issues, TESOL

1. INTRODUCTION

Although both native (monolingual) and non-native (bilingual) English speaking teachers are in great demand, most employers in Saudi Arabia have a stronger preference for monolingual English-speaking teachers. Whilst TESOL professionals have rejected the controversial statement of the two camps in the ELT profession (Medgyes, 1992), it is still the case in Saudi Arabia. The concept of preference of this label native English speaking teacher (NEST) over non-native English speaking teacher (NNEST) is ingrained in some people's beliefs in the ELT contexts.

The reason I have chosen this area of research is because, being a bilingual myself, I have faced discrimination in employment as well as various other challenges related to monolingualism, such as proving myself as an effective

user of the language before being accepted as professional.

More precisely, I want to draw attention to the discriminatory actions and policies of the dominant social paradigm in order to bring about some change; therefore, I have gathered all participating bilingual professionals' views in an attempt to accommodate a wide scope of perceptions of their role in English-language-teaching in terms of discrimination and employment inequality, and how such attitudes against bilingual English Language professionals can be changed.

In addition, I hope this study will encourage both employers and administrators to be more open-minded and to listen to teachers' experiences as *bilingual professionals*, thus allowing some kind of potential diversity within the ELT profession.



2. CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND AND CURRENT PRACTICE

Despite the TESOL organisation's explicit opposition to hiring practices/policies that discriminate against bilinguals, most employers in Saudi Arabia especially in higher education hire mainly monolinguals from what Kachru (1985) defines as 'countries of the Inner Circle' (i.e., Great Britain, the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand). The common stereotype is that any monolingual is competent in teaching the English language regardless of his/her qualifications, whereas bilinguals are less privileged in finding employment. For many bilinguals, qualifications, ability and experience are of little help in the Saudi job market. Few bilinguals have succeeded in breaking the unwritten rule of 'Only monolingual natives need apply'. Notably, these Saudi administrators favour hiring unqualified monolinguals as opposed to qualified bilinguals. Accordingly, the minds of people are brainwashed, and 'the native-speaker fallacy' is perpetuated by the newspaper pages and related websites, which are covered with advertisements for 'native English speakers only'.

In reality, some employers have openly declared this 'fallacy' on their websites and job interviews. Some EFL students may unpretentiously subscribe to the native-speaker fallacy that the ideal English teacher is monolingual. Such a belief is challenged by Lewis (1993), who stresses that being a monolingual native might be helpful in teaching the language, but that there are more essential requirements to be achieved by monolinguals.

In my own opinion, the greatest and single most cogent reason for the current situation of bilinguals in Saudi Arabia has been that these employers lack knowledge of the issues of relevance, and are not up-to-date on educational development.

From my experience, most of monolinguals with any certificate in any field or one-month TEFL course can apply for a teaching position in Saudi Arabia and, in some cases, even without any teaching or proof of qualification. Although many monolingual native speakers lack teaching experience, as stated earlier, or have irrelevant degrees, such as in History, Music or Arts, they are still considered qualified enough to teach the language. For example, at one of the training centres in Riyadh city where I used to work, I was the only bilingual who hardly got accepted, despite holding a university academic qualification in teaching English along with several professional certificates from Saudi Arabia and various English-speaking countries' institutes.

In contrast, one of my British colleagues held only a certificate in Music. He had no relevant qualifications, no teaching experience and had not taken any training courses. The only reason why he was accepted is because

he was a monolingual speaker. It is true that many bilinguals lack English language competence; however, I know some who are qualified and well-trained, well-educated and who have received their master's degrees in the UK or the USA, but were ultimately being denied employment.

If we look at the situation in Higher Educational institutions, one of the universities, which is ranked amongst the top universities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and another leading state college, are dominated by monolinguals. It is natural then that monolinguals are given privileged status in the profession—even when monolingual professionals are not more qualified as bilingual professionals.

I totally agree with Abe (2001) in terms of suggesting the existing hiring practice to be re-examined. I consider the hiring policy to be discriminating against local trained bilingual teachers.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This study explores the Arab English language teachers' perceptions about their role as bilingual English speaker teachers in English-language teaching professions from a critical standpoint. Thus, the study uses aspects of Critical Applied Linguistics (hereafter CALx) directed by the critical research paradigm. One of the main aspects of CALx is constant scepticism—a constant questioning of the normative assumptions, beliefs or practices of applied linguistics. It requires a restive problematisation of the givens related to various topics in TESOL (Pennycook, 2001). CALx critiques and transforms any types of social or cultural norms with the aim of introducing the desirable changes (Pennycook, 1999).

Monolingual Native Versus Bilingual Non-native English-speaking Teachers

Davies (1991) defines the term 'native speaker' as someone who is perceived as not being a non-native speaker, whereas a non-native speaker is defined as not being a native speaker, also supported by (Gill & Rebrova, 2001). Medgyes (1994:10) provides a summary of the characteristics of the native speaker of English. Accordingly, the native speaker of English can be described as someone who:

- was born in an English-speaking country;
- acquired English during childhood in an English speaking family or environment;
- speaks English as his/her first language;
- has a native speaker-like command of English
- has the capacity to produce fluent, spontaneous discourse in English;
- has reliable intuitions to distinguish right and wrong forms in English;
- uses the English language creatively.



However, it also may be argued that the above-mentioned characteristics cannot be taken for granted. I believe it is possible that non-native English-speaking teachers possess some of these characteristics and can be near-native. To add, my two children received a formal English education from nursery while living with us in England and they spoke English before they spoke Arabic even though they were surrounded by Arabic-speaking family members. Bloomfield (1933, p. 43) would call them 'native speakers' as he stated that "the first language a human being learns to speak is his *native language*; he is a *native speaker* of this language". Children who learn two languages simultaneously from birth have two L1s (Davies, 1991).

Characteristics of Monolingual Native English Speaking Teachers (NESTs)

NESTs are likely to be given more privilege over NNESTs, as Hyde (1998:9) points out with the statement, 'when a native speaker uses English in an unusual or new way, it is 'creative' language use, but when a non-native speaker does so, it is an "error"'.

A study by Arva and Medgyes (2000) confirms some of the perceived differences in the teaching behaviour of NESTs and NNESTs, such as NESTs being flexible, innovative and more casual. Sheorey (1986) recognises that NESTs tend to be more lenient in error evaluation, whereas NNESTs tend to be stricter. Moreover, NESTs can supply more cultural information than NNESTs, which can greatly motivate learners.

On the other hand, one disadvantage NESTs have when teaching EFL is their lack of local language, which may have negative impacts on their teaching; therefore, NESTs cannot analyse the causes nor provide effective solutions for the mistakes. Moreover, as McKay (2002) argues, NESTs may not be able to understand learners' needs on a regular basis on account of the fact that they are unfamiliar with learners' culture. What is considered a critical disadvantage of NESTs is that, without studying and training, they might be unaware of the structure of their mother tongue. Furthermore, commonly they lack grammatical knowledge (Arva & Medgyes, 2000).

Characteristics of Bilingual Non-Native English Speaking Teachers (NNESTs)

The linguistic discrepancies of NNESTs include mainly the difficulties they face relating to the use of vocabulary and fluency (Medgyes, 1994: 362). NNESTs face notable difficulties in cultural contexts; many lessons that contain cultural information will represent challenges (Reves & Medgyes, 1994; Matsuda, 2002; Arva & Medgyes, 2000). However, the deficits of NNESTs may be regarded as an advantage in the words of Medgyes (cited in Brain,

1999:170), when commenting that, 'it is this deficit that helps NNESTs develop capacities that NESTs would never be able to acquire'.

On the other hand, NNESTs are advantageous in many aspects. Medgyes (1992:346–347, 1994) confirms six advantages associated with NNESTs:

- Only non-NESTs can serve as imitable models of the successful learner of English.
- Non-NESTs can teach learning strategies more effectively.
- Non-NESTs can provide learners with more information about the English language.
- Non-NESTs are more able to anticipate (and prevent) language difficulties.
- Non-NESTs can be more empathetic to the needs and problems of their learners.
- Only non-NESTs can benefit from sharing the learners' mother tongue.

In reality, NNESTs can be more successful with lower-level students (Arva & Medgyes, 2000; Medgyes, 1994). In addition, Arva & Medgyes (2000: 369) argue that, in an NNEST context, 'trained non-native teachers are better than untrained native ones'. Moreover, speakers of more than one language have both the ability to relate to students' needs and a keen awareness of language (Phillipson, 1996).

Based on a review of the literature, a qualitative study conducted in Egypt by Fathelbaz (2009) focused on bicultural teachers and the ways they are perceived by students in an EFL context. The study attempted to show why it is important to address the dichotomy of the NEST-NNEST categorisation. She concludes that students have concerns about classifying bicultural teachers. Nevertheless, students recognise that they associate advantages from both NESTs and NNESTs when a clarification was provided of how bicultural teachers are defined.

English as an International Language

It is a fact that, in the modern-day world, English is used as an international language. This means that not only native speakers but also non-native speakers use English for a variety of purposes (Timmis, 2002). Accordingly, questions may arise about the extent to which native speakers own the English language and to what extent they have authority concerning the use of the language. Since English has become a universal product and is the official or semi-official language in more than 60 countries in over six continents, native speakers no longer own the language (Medgyes, 1994). In support of this view, I was fortunate enough to attend one of the Mgimo University Conference workshops entitled 'Pragmatic



Accommodation in Intercultural Talk' led by Peter Grundy who was in complete agreement that NESTs no longer have this ownership.

Challenges for Bilingual NNESTs

From my personal situation as a bilingual in my previous role, I can say that there is still a tendency for bilingual professionals to be viewed by administrators and students alike as less competent and less knowledgeable as resources. As a result, their contribution was viewed as less valuable. For example, students complain when they have a bilingual and may reject him preferring a native speaker. Furthermore, administrators perpetuated inequitable offensive stereotypes by so doing. Such a treatment by administrators affected the local teachers (bilinguals) and subsequently made them feel unfavourable and insecure. These issues of credibility that may be encountered have an impact on teachers' identity and self-image.

I can say this was particularly the case at my previous job, although there were some students who supported bilingual professionals and favoured them over their monolingual colleagues. Reves & Medgyes (1994: 364) assert that self-confidence is a necessary ingredient of successful teaching: it is important that NNESTs assume a more favourable self-perception. This can be achieved if the differences between NESTs and NNESTs in Saudi are overtly acknowledged and legitimised—both by the authorities and the NNESTs themselves. As a consequence, NNESTs' work will be judged for what it is really worth, and they will not be discriminated against because of what is rooted in some people's beliefs.

4. METHODOLOGY

In this study, I am concerned with the following key questions:

1. Who is the ideal language model from the perspective of bilingual NNESTs?
2. What criteria do employers in Saudi Arabia consider when recruiting English language teachers from the perspectives of bilingual NNESTs?

This study is guided by a critical research paradigm since its aim is to call attention to the inequitable actions and policies of the dominant social paradigm so as to bring about a change. An example of a data collection technique based on qualitative inquiry is an interview. Interviews provide channels for teachers to reflect on action, which is the best way of understanding teachers' views (Hedgcock, 2002; Johnson, 1999).

The Research Process

One of my goals in interviewing the selected teachers individually was to understand the way they perceive

their role in English-language-teaching in terms of issues of discrimination against them during their work, and issues relating to employing monolinguals in my context, as well as the disadvantages bilinguals experience.

Selection of Participants

Teachers were selected from two different institutions in Saudi Arabia according to two criteria: purposiveness and accessibility (Silverman, 2001). None of the participants were from inner circle countries (e.g., Britain and the US). They are mainly from Saudi and very few from some other Arab countries (e.g., Sudan, Egypt and Lebanon). This study focuses on 11 bilingual male English language teachers, who have experience in teaching ranging from 1 year to more than 10 years. Half of the teachers have more than 10 years' teaching experience; 4 of them have between 4 and 10 years' teaching experience, whereas only 1 has less than 3 years' experience. Notably, 8 out of the 11 teachers hold a bachelor's degree in English whilst 2 hold a master's degree in TESOL. They represent a range of teaching backgrounds, current experience and working contexts. I have chosen to gather all of the bilingual professionals' views with the aim of obtaining a wide range of fruitful perceptions of their role in English language-teaching in terms of discrimination and employment inequality, and how such attitudes can be changed.

Interviews were chosen as they are less demanding than a questionnaire in the sense that most of the work falls on the interviewer. Radnor (1994:13) states that the interview 'is an active encounter in which someone seeking information is supplied with it by another'.

Fontana & Frey (2000:645, cited in Creswell, 2012) describe semi-structured interviews as 'one of the most powerful ways in which we try to understand our fellow human beings'. In semi-structured interviews, it is the researcher who decides on the questions to be asked and who further elaborates on responses (Robson, 2002). Furthermore, semi-structured interviews are more exploratory whereas surveys are more confirmatory (Harris & Brown, 2010).

After designing the first version of the interview, I piloted it with two teachers in Saudi Arabia with the objective to evaluate the interview questions in terms of ambiguity and content, and to ensure redundancy of questions was avoided. This proved to be very helpful in highlighting various weaknesses in the framework, which were amended as a result. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. I assured the participants that there was no right or wrong answer to the questions I asked in an attempt to make them feel more comfortable when speaking.



Data Analysis

All interviews were carried out individually and recorded, following assurance to participants that their response would be kept confidentially. I first listened to the tapes repeatedly and reviewed notes I had taken. Then, I transcribed the recorded interviews for familiarity and cross-checked this with respondents in order to ensure accuracy. Following this, I detailed them in a notebook, making space for coding, memos and notes, which enabled me to produce an overview of informants' responses according to question and theme. The files produced for each participant comprised basic information, and all gathered from interviews were tagged with pseudonyms (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Themes were then reviewed, refined and organised for the purpose of the analysis. Finally, the hard copies of the interview were re-read and the final report of the analysis produced.

5. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This section includes the findings and discussion of teachers' expressions and perceptions according to the transcribed interviews. I have organised these findings according to the two research themes of this study. As noted earlier, these eleven teachers work in two different institutions, with efforts taken to remove any clearly identifying information.

Theme One: The ideal language model from the perspective of bilingual professionals NNESTs

Personal Qualities

All eleven of the participants in the study claimed that the ideal language model is someone who is proficient in the language and who has some kind of teaching experience. Markedly, 9 out of 11 mentioned various qualities, such as being sensitive towards the culture of the learners, flexibility, confidence, helpfulness, friendliness, commitment, consideration, multicultural understanding, identification through similar experiences, sharing learners' mother tongue, and empathy to the needs and problems of their learners.

The majority of teachers also mentioned that teachers who do try to develop themselves are the really good ones; on the other hand, a few claimed that the ideal language model is someone who is competent in the language he teaches.

Qualifications

When it comes to qualification, of the 11 participants, 9 stressed that English language teachers should have a TESOL/TEFL qualification, if not highly qualified in the field. They claimed that most of the NNETs in their institutions are sufficiently qualified to practice teaching. For example, one of the participants said: 'Yes, I am entirely convinced that my NNEST colleagues are well

qualified to teach...' This was also supported by one of the participants' views in this same regard.

Interestingly, one of the respondents said, 'Any NEST who gets the one-month TEFL certificate can be a teacher (apparently this is not enough). Formal qualifications in the field are a must.'

Surprisingly, whilst most participants chose a non-native speaker with formal teaching qualifications over a native speaker with no formal education, one of the respondents, in contrast, stated that native teachers (even without having a degree) are better than non-native teachers without formal training. This participant commented, 'I think that a native teacher is better than a non-native one with all the qualifications, simply because he/she has the language knowledge advantage.'

Summary and Discussion of Theme One

The overall responses of the participants revealed that proficiency in the language is clearly perceived to be an important factor in terms of the ideal language model. This is highlighted by Roberts (2004:11), who advises that, 'the best people to teach English are those who are proficient in the language and who have some kind of experience of using it cross-culturally and/or internationally'.

With regard to personal qualities, the participants valued being empathetic to the needs and problems of their learners as one of the key personal qualities. This finding weighs NNEST over NEST. It is in congruence with Tang's words, who suggests NNESTs 'not only play a pedagogical role in their classrooms, but they also serve as empathetic listeners for beginning and weak students... in the local context' (1997:579).

Other qualities, such as having similar experiences, sharing learners' mother tongue and having multicultural understanding, were all highly emphasised by the participants. Their responses showed that they had awareness regarding personal qualities of the ideal language model. Such advantages have been stressed by Myint (2002:9). For example, regarding learners' mother tongue, most NNESTs, particularly those who have the same first language as their students, have developed a willing awareness of the differences between English and their students' mother tongue. This understanding gives them the ability to anticipate their students' linguistic problems especially in lower levels.

Tollefson (1991: 211) argues for the significance of an understanding of language rights. This indicates that we should go further than a general value for diversity and instead perceive access to instruction and other domains of use of the mother tongue as essential human rights: 'A commitment to democracy means that the use of the mother tongue at work and in schools is a fundamental human right.'

Yet, many employers in Saudi Arabia are not aware of



these perspectives, which is an issue that indicates, in my opinion, a lack of sufficient knowledge of up-to-date research, literature, and new teaching methods and materials.

In terms of who is the ideal language model, a few claimed that this individual is someone who is competent in the language he/she teaches. Nonetheless, I believe that someone who is competent in a language does not mean he/she is a good teacher either. Here, I support Rampton (1996:98), who states that 'expertise is learnt, not fixed or innate'. People need not be expert in everything.

I have stressed the significance of NNESTs so far, but without doubt, NESTs have a significant role in teaching English as a foreign language. NESTs may be unrealistic as a goal for learners because most of them do not have first-hand experience; however, they are an invaluable arbiter of the language and culture behind them. Moreover, some respondents claimed that being flexible is one of the qualities of the ideal language model. As Arva & Medgyes (2000) suggest, 'NESTs could afford to be innovative and flexible'.

Theme Two: Criteria employers in Saudi Arabia consider when recruiting English language teachers from bilingual NNESTs' view

Accent

Many participants have pointed out that accent could be a great barrier employers impose for non-native teachers. They mentioned that individuals who were qualified and experienced but who had non-native accents were perceived as being less qualified and less effective. Participant 5 said, 'The issue of accent has often been the cause of employment discrimination practices in EFL/ESL'. Another participant stated, 'We non-native accents were compared unfavourably with native English-speaking colleagues'.

Nationality

The results showed the fact that more than half of the participants admitted they faced nationality as another barrier when applying for a job. They considered nationals of English-speaking countries as prioritised over Saudi/non-native ones. Participant 3 said, 'I think that the nationality of the teacher is not as important as his ability to motivate and support his students'. It is evident that the teacher's nationality is weighed more on the expense of other important criteria such as competency and qualification.

Participant 4 recognises 'that the pay scheme is even categorised according to nationalities ...any one has a passport from the inner-circle countries can get the best paying jobs in Saudi Arabia'. This is further supported by another participant who said, 'When there are two people

with the same formal qualifications, the native speaker would be better qualified based on his nationality' Moreover, Participant 6 said, (laughs) 'They (employers) drive me crazy. Sometimes I think of applying for an American or a British passport to get a good pay scheme.'

Educational Background

Of the 11 respondents, 9 mentioned that some employers may truly consider educational background not important as long as the applicant is a native speaker. Moreover, 2 of them went so far as to claim that native speakers must at least have a diploma or a master's degree in teaching English to be able to perform classroom teaching effectively. One of the respondents said 'Any native speaker can teach English without proper educational degrees or pre-service training... How can this work?' This could result in making NNESTs believe they are less deserving of acceptance by recruiters and students alike.

Teaching Experience

All participants also agreed that both native and non-native speakers should have the same criteria of years' experience in teaching. Ironically, the majority also pointed out that employers ignore such criteria and exempt native speakers from such a condition. One teacher said, 'Having a teacher who had taught before, he would be able to teach the activities and tasks of the language skills more effectively.'

Summary and Discussion of Theme Two

The above extracts revealed an attitude of dissatisfaction and concerns about the way employers disregard experience in teaching and educational background when recruiting. Their responses could express the employment discrimination practices faced when applying for jobs. Moreover, as can be garnered from the above findings, it may be noticed that issues of accent and nationality have often been the cause of employment discrimination practices in EFL programmes in Saudi Arabia. It is unfortunate that teachers are considered less credible and less competent just because of their accent. Lippi-Green (1997) relates this interrogating of English teachers' ability and credibility based on their accent as a type of linguistic discrimination. It is, therefore, argued that teaching credentials should be required of all teachers, regardless of their native language (Canagarajah, 1999; Nayar, 1994; Phillipson, 1996).

With regard to nationality, one of the participants mentioned that the ability to motivate and support students is more important than the nationality of the teacher, although the TESOL organisation in the United States issued a statement condemning as discriminatory the employment of English language teachers on the only basis of their being or not being native speakers of



English (TESOL, 1991, cited in Braine, 1999b, p. xxi). It can be seen in the teachers' comments that it is still the case in Saudi Arabia that this concept is rooted in various employers' beliefs in the EFL context. However, despondently, such differences in the hiring practices cannot be eliminated completely as the situation in the English-teaching industry is both a social and political problem.

The majority of participants revealed that employers do not view NNESTs as having first-hand experience by going through the experience of learning English as a second/foreign language as a vital element. Medgyes (1994) points out that NNESTs can be good learner models: having gone through the experience of learning English as a second language, almost certainly, this makes them better qualified to teach the strategies they have encountered during their own learning process, and may make them more empathetic to students' linguistic challenges and needs.

6. REFLECTION AND CONCLUSION

Based on the findings presented in this study, different perceptions, attitudes and expectations have emerged from the data collected from participants in this study. An attempt was also made to strengthen the voice of teachers (NNESTs) to describe how they view the ideal language model in English language-teaching, and the criteria employers in Saudi Arabia consider when recruiting English language teachers.

Most of the participants seemed to be aware of the role of the ideal language model. They believe that employment decisions in this ELT profession are solely based upon the criterion that an individual is or is not a native speaker of English; therefore, this discriminates against well-qualified individuals. Some implications of this are discussed below.

A. The Need to Reach beyond a 'Deficit' View of Bilingual NNESTs and Support All Teachers without Discrimination

Both monolingual NESTs and bilingual non-NESTs have advantages and disadvantages in the context of the ELT profession. Although NNESTs have to pursue on-going language improvement, they should bear in mind that the language awareness and pedagogical skills they have already gained empower them to enjoy an equal opportunity to be successful in their profession. Accordingly, I am in congruence with the view of Cheng (2005:78) that, 'in an ideal school there are no native or non-native English-speaking teachers; there are, rather only competent or incompetent teachers'.

Moreover, Bailey (2002:5) argues that the 'key issues to be considered in employment decisions are proficiency and professional preparation'. This may suggest that, as long as the candidate is proficient in the target language

and as well prepared as a professional, he/she will have no difficulty finding a suitable position.

Such views 'in which power is held by oppressors (the dominant bloc) and maintained by ideology', as (Pennycook, 2001:42) states, need to be surpassed, with 'emancipation can be brought about as a result of awareness of the operations of ideology' (ibid).

What is needed is a change of attitude towards the ownership of English and the ideal teachers for Saudi learners of English. It may not be that easy changing many people's stereotypes, but at least attitudes towards non-native issues have, to some extent, been widened and changed. Therefore, authorities within the higher echelons of the Ministry of Higher Education, Ministry of General Education and other relevant agencies should make every effort to prevent such discrimination in the employment of NNESTs. They should also instruct the institutions to work towards the re-examination of such biased criteria without reference to the nativeness of English teachers (Braine, 1999).

Those with the power to recruit would do well to listen with an open mind to how teachers experience as NNESTs. They need to allow some kind of possible diversity within the ELT profession, as Tollefson (1991) declares, so as to create contexts that support and enhance their professional growth. In addition, the private sector should be encouraged to hire and train non-native people on a much larger scale than they currently do.

Such first language discrimination is an insidious and intangible problem making it almost unattainable to fight. The only generally agreed-upon approach is education and human rights legislation to discourage this practice from becoming obvious (Pennycook, 1999). These are inevitably long-term solutions. There should be 'the restive problematisation of the given' (ibid: 7), employment discrimination within institutions will need to be extracted gradually by the government itself. Those institutions, systems and policies that reflect and favour the majority of NSs over NNSs will eventually have to be changed to recognise NNESTs as partners with their colleagues (NSs) in the ELT profession.

B. The Need for a Collaborative Model of Teacher Development

For some people, cultural and linguistic advantages of NESTs are all obvious so that they are apt in terms of underestimating NNESTs' potential. It may be the time to empower NNESTs and to promote cooperation amongst NESTs and NNESTs.

In terms of employers, in my opinion, they should be linked to the field of TESOL so they can at least know what is meant by the 'ELT profession', and, most importantly, keeping up-to-date with both the literature and the movement surrounding TESOL and keeping in



touch with associations in this field.

With regard to teachers, collaboration between NESTs and NNESTs should not be considered a one-way relationship, with NESTs being the benefactors and NNESTs the beneficiaries; on the contrary, they should be regarded as a mutual relationship with cross-fertilising effects (Medgyes, 1994). I believe that a collaborative model of teacher development is appropriate in the Saudi Arabian context because the strengths of both the NESTs and NNESTs can be well integrated, and may even be multiplied to the benefit of both parties.

To conclude, what I have discussed has been stated well by Medgyes' words (1992:349): 'The ideal NEST and the ideal non-NEST arrive from different directions but eventually stand quite close to one another.... In an ideal school, there should be a good balance of NESTs and non-NESTs, who complement each other in their strengths and weaknesses.'

In addition, all NNESTs should be given equal opportunities as their NEST colleagues in the context of employment. This view is shared by Abe (2001), who advocates the revision of the current hiring criteria to be more inclusive. Finally, I believe that conducting this study has been a golden opportunity in terms of realising how much I have benefited by reflecting on one of the most critical issues in TESOL and Applied Linguistics.

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