5. PERCEPTIONS OF BECOMING A LEGITIMATE EFL TEACHER

A Case Study of an Asian Teacher-Trainee

INTRODUCTION

With the growing popularity of the English language worldwide, demand for English teachers continues to increase, especially in some Asian countries where English is used as a foreign language (EFL) and has been made a compulsory subject in primary schools (see e.g., Hashimoto, 2011, in Japan; Li, 2007, in China; Nguyen, 2011 in Vietnam). To accommodate this demand, a large number of non-native English-speaking (NNES) teacher-trainees enrol in language teacher training programs in native English-speaking (NES) countries to immerse themselves in English language and cultural environments. This also allows NNES teacher trainees’ to acquire Western qualifications and have frequent contact with their NES counterparts.

As contact with NES speaking groups is believed to significantly benefit NNES teachers (Brady & Gulikers, 2004; Liyanage & Bartlett, 2008; Tananuraksakul & Hall, 2011), researchers (e.g., Faez, 2011; Higgins, 2003) have encouraged more investigations into how interactions between these two groups may affect NNES teacher trainees’ sense of becoming competent and legitimate EFL teachers. Aiming to contribute to this area of research, we conducted a case study with an NNES teacher-trainee undertaking a TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) degree in an Australian university, examining (1) how this NNES teacher-trainee perceived the attitudes held about her by her NES peers, and (2) how these perceptions influenced the trainee’s sense of becoming a legitimate EFL teacher.

This chapter presents the attitudes that this teacher-trainee perceived from her NES peers in terms of her knowledge of English language and language teaching, her oral language proficiency, teaching practice performance, and the advantages conferred by her first language capability. We would argue that in general these perceptions, either positive or negative, can constructively enhance the teacher trainee’s sense of becoming a competent and legitimate EFL teacher.
LITERATURE REVIEW

There have been two main areas of focus in discussions in literature about NES and NNES teachers within language communities. One concerns the dichotomy of the two parties, addressing that the two groups are different and that NESs enjoy a power and status in English language that NNESs are denied (Ilieva, 2010; Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005). The other view claims that NES and NNES groups have varying degrees of ownership of the English language (Norton, 1997), and argues against the belief that NES teachers are the best teachers of English (Canagarajah, 1999; Liu, 1999).

Both these judgements are believed to impact on both NES and NNES language teachers while our paper has concentrated especially on NNES teachers’ perceptions of these judgments. The literature has presented these perceptions from various standpoints, including NNES English teachers’ perceptions of the attitudes of their students, their NES colleagues and employers, as well as other NESs acknowledgement of their advantages and disadvantages in terms of English language teaching (Canagarajah, 1999; McKay, 2003; Moussu & Llurda, 2008; Rampton, 1990). Amin (1997) was the first scholar to study the influence of NNES teachers’ perceptions of other people’s impressions of them. In Amin’s study, it was found that if NNES teachers perceived implications of inferiority from their students and NES colleagues, they could become less effective in facilitating their students’ language learning regardless of their qualifications. In a similar vein, Maum (2003) identified that while NNES teachers felt inferior in their profession, their NES counterparts might have no awareness that NES teachers themselves were potentially one of the causal factors.

The existing literature has emphasized that the perceptions of being socially marginalized may have an adverse influence on how NNES teachers position themselves within the profession. As a result, NNES teachers would possibly have experienced a denial of legitimacy as competent EFL teachers (Braine, 2010; Reis, 2010). In addition to unfavorable perceptions and their correspondingly negative influences, this paper, as an exploratory and a descriptive study, extends the investigation to both the negative and positive aspects of perceptions and their influences on construction of NNES teacher-trainees’ legitimate teacher identity.

METHOD

Yin (2013) suggests that a case study is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 16). This research adopts the case study method in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of NNES teacher-trainees’ perceptions of attitudes held by their NES peers. A Masters degree program in TESOL at an Australian university was chosen for the case study setting due to its mixed enrolment of both NES and NNES teacher