

Language proficiency development of non-native English-speaking teacher candidates: A comparative case study of two teacher preparation programs in Canada and Israel

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The purpose of the research was to conduct a cross-context analysis of stakeholders' perceptions of teacher education programs for non-native English speaking teacher (NNEST) candidates in two contexts: an ESL context in Canada and an EFL context in Israel. The research is directly linked to the TIRF 2003 priority topic which called for research on NNEST issues and reflects the growing interest in NNESTs, their status, perceptions and attributes and the gradual recognition of their significant role in the English teaching profession. It was believed that the collaborative examination of the same issues in these different contexts would enhance a broader understanding of the issues involved particularly regarding the teaching and language proficiency development of NNEST teacher candidates in teacher preparation programs. Thus it was felt that drawing on this collective analysis and combined knowledge base would allow teacher educators in various settings to better plan and provide adequate solutions to the proficiency needs of NNEST candidates.

The study was carried out in the English Department of a College of Education in Israel and in a teacher education program at a Canadian university.

The Israeli Context

The program in the Israeli site comprised three different teacher preparation programs meeting the needs of a varied population of students wishing to prepare for a career in teaching. All three programs were based on a content-based approach whereby the courses were all provided in English. The student population in the college is diverse and includes speakers of Hebrew and Arabic born in Israel, as well as speakers of other languages who have immigrated to Israel from various countries. The research sample in the EFL site therefore included teacher candidates from the three different programs and with a different L1 and ethnic background (N=16), teacher educators (N=11), host teachers from partner schools (N=5), as well as 2 school principals and 2 superintendents.

The Canadian Context

Two teacher preparation programs (a 9-month program and a 2-year program) for both Canadian born students and New Canadians with an undergraduate degree were the focus of this study. New Canadians comprised about 10% of the student population preparing to teach in English medium elementary and secondary schools. All courses were offered in English with additional supports provided to NNEST teacher candidates outside of class. The following groups participated in our research: non-native English speaking (NNEST) and New Canadian teacher candidates (N=6), teacher educators (N=7), host teachers from partner schools (N=9) (from elementary, middle, and high schools), principals (N=2) (one each from elementary, and secondary schools), and superintendents (N=2) (one each from the elementary and secondary panels).

Research methods

The research examined the teacher education programs from the perspectives of different stakeholders in both sites using case study methodology which emphasizes the collection of data from multiple sources and data triangulating. The data collection tools used included in-depth interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, analysis of documents and reflection logs.

Findings

The findings show that despite obvious differences both research sites share much in common especially in terms of the great variability among the teacher candidates: their identity constructs as NNEST candidates; the role language proficiency plays in their personal and professional lives; their confidence regarding their own English proficiency and degree of satisfaction with the program. What emerges

specifically from the portraits drawn of a number of candidates in each site (5 in Israel and 5 in Canada) is that their confidence in using English plays a major role in their identity construction in general and also reaches beyond their professional role as teachers.

Candidates were found to vary in the support they sought to improve their proficiency skills and, in the case of new Canadians or immigrants in Israel, their acculturation in the new society. Since in the Canadian sites all the NNEST candidates were immigrants the greatest similarity between the populations in the two sites was found between the immigrant teachers in both countries. This was especially evident in their lack of confidence in their teaching ability resulting from language and culture issues. The predicament in Israel was found to be more complex as the respondents struggled with acquiring the dominant language (Hebrew) in addition to striving to improve their language proficiency in English. This often resulted in an internal conflict for immigrant teachers in Israel as they debated which language should take precedence and what language they should invest more time developing further. It was also found that candidates in both sites benefitted greatly from the opportunity provided to openly discuss NNEST issues and their impact on their professional lives.

In terms of the program in Israel there seems to be satisfaction among the stakeholders with the content-based instruction model. They felt, however, that the candidates' English proficiency level should be improved by emphasizing this component more as well as by instituting a more rigorous acceptance criteria. It was also found that the implementation of the content-based model is not fully exploited due to limited coordination between the content and proficiency teachers, and that the traditional teaching methodology employed by some teacher educators hinders the proficiency development of the NNEST candidates as little space is provided for oral interaction and practice. Findings related to the perspectives of the stakeholders outside the program show a greater dissatisfaction with the language proficiency of the teacher candidates among the stakeholders from the EFL profession (host teachers from partner schools and EFL superintendents) versus concerns related to classroom management voiced by school principals especially with regard to new immigrant teachers, native or non-native speakers and their acculturation in Israeli society.

Recommendations include:

1) the need for differentiated support of NNEST candidates in their language development process, 2) the need to provide language and culture support for immigrant teachers to ease their transition into Israeli or Canadian schools, 3) in contexts where English is not the dominant language providing support for proficiency improvement in English as well as gaining mastery in the local language, 4) more coordination between language proficiency courses and content courses in teacher development programs to allow for closer monitoring of NNEST candidates' proficiency development along with the integration of a variety of effective teaching strategies across courses to promote proficiency development, 5) opening up the NNEST candidate issues for discussion throughout the program duration and involving the stakeholders from the field in finding ways to address the issues.

The TIRF funded research acted as a catalyst in terms of focussing attention on a group of teacher candidates that had been misunderstood overall in both the Canadian and Israeli contexts. The issue of proficiency emerged as one of the many concerns raised by stakeholders regarding NNEST teacher candidates. Although the need to improve programming in the teacher preparation programs to ensure increased proficiency in English was highlighted, other issues such as the need to implement strategies to combat the systemic discrimination of NNEST candidates also emerged. The need to move beyond a deficit discourse regarding non-native English speaking teacher was underlined. Our main goal is to support all NNEST in developing high levels of proficiency so that stakeholders perceive their presence in schools as an opportunity rather than as a challenge or a problem.

Appendix: Publications and conference presentations

Publications

Book in preparation which includes chapters on different aspects of the research (proposal submitted to Multilingual Matters):

Gagné, A. & Inbar-Lourie, O. (eds.) *Teachers and Migration: Beyond the Native Speaker Myth*.

Inbar, O. (2004). More on Nests and Non-Nests in TESOL, *The ETAI Journal*, summer, 2004, 78-79

Gagné, A. Schmidt, C., & Gambhir, M. (2005). Language and Culture Skills for New Canadian Teachers. In C. Rolheiser (Ed.) *Connections - School University Partnerships Publication*, OISE/UT, Toronto.

Conference presentations

Inbar, O. (March, 2004). *CBI (Content Based Instruction) models for prospective non-native EFL teachers*. Poster presented at the annual TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) international conference, Long Beach, CA.

Inbar, O., Singer, S., Adar, S. & Vered, A. (2004, June). *The language proficiency program for non-native English speaking teacher candidates*. Paper presented at the International Conference of the Israeli Association for the Study of Language and Society, Beit Berl College, Israel.

Inbar, O. & Singer, S. (2004, July). *Language proficiency for non-native English speaking teacher candidates: A comparative case study*. Paper presented at the International English Teachers Association of Israel (ETAI) Conference, Jerusalem.

Inbar O. & Gagné, A. (2005, April). The language proficiency development of non-native English-speaking teacher candidates: A comparative case study of two teacher preparation programs in Canada and Israel. Paper presented at the annual TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) international conference, San Antonio, Texas.

Inbar, O. (2005, July). Non-native language teachers: Which language? Which context? Paper presented at the 14th World Congress of Applied Linguistics (AILA) hosted by the American Association for Applied Linguistics, Madison, Wisconsin.

Inbar, O. (2006, March). The role of proficiency in teacher identity formation in pre- and in-service teacher education programs. Paper presented at the annual TESOL Conference, Tampa, Florida.

Inbar, O. (2006, March). Proficiency and job satisfaction among ESL/EFL teachers. Paper presented at the annual TESOL Conference, Tampa, Florida. Received the 'East Carolina University & TESOL Award for an Outstanding Paper on NNEST (Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers) Issues', (with other symposium members, symposium 'Exploring NNESTs' professional self-esteem and confidence'), the TESOL International Conference, March 2006, Tampa, Florida.

Inbar, O. (June, 2007). Proficiency and identity formation: Non-native English speaking immigrant teachers. Paper presented at the Fifth International Conference on Teacher Education, Kay Teachers' College and the Mofet Institute.

Gagné, A. (2007, October). Policies and Practices Affecting Teacher Mobility Across National Boundaries. Metropolis International Conference. Melbourne, Australia.

Gagné, A. (2007, September). *The impact of policy and practice on internationally educated and trained teachers in Ontario*. British Educational Research Association Conference, London, UK.

- Gagné, A. and Lawrence, G. (2007, June). *Fostering Intercultural Communicative Competence among Language Teachers: Challenges and Strategies* Language Teacher Education Conference, Minneapolis, Minnesota.
- Gagné, A., Faez, F. and Lawrence, G. (2007, March). *Language and culture support for immigrant teachers*, TESOL , Seattle.
- Gagné, A., Faez, F. and Lawrence, G. (2006, November). *Language and culture support for internationally educated teachers at OISE/UT*, TESL Ontario, Toronto, ON.
- Gagné, A., Faez, F. and Lawrence, G. (2006, November). *Language and culture support for internationally educated teachers at OISE/UT*, TESL Ontario, Toronto, ON.
- Gagné, A., Schmidt, C., Faez, F., Gambhir, M. and Soheili-Mehr, A. (2006, October). *Programming and policies for non-native English speaking teachers*. TESL Canada, Winnipeg.
- Gagné, A. (2006, May). From Conceptualization to Implementation: The OISE/UT Academic and Cultural Support Centre, *Canadian Society for Studies in Education, Toronto, ON*.
- Gagné, A., Deters, P., Soheili-Mehr, A., & Faez, F. (2005, October). *Language and culture support for internationally educated teacher candidates at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto*. 10th International Metropolis Conference, Toronto, ON.
- Gagné, A., Schmidt, C., Gambhir, M., Eidoo, A., Soheili-Mehr, A., Deters, P., & Faez, F. (2005, June). *Supporting internationally educated teacher candidates who work with diverse K-12 students*. Language Teacher Education Conference, Minneapolis.
- Gagné, A., Gambhir, M., Eidoo, S., Faez, F., Deters, P., & Soheili-Mehr, A. (2005, May). *Multiple perspectives: The language and cross-cultural challenges faced by Non-Native English-Speaking teachers*. TESL Canada Conference, Ottawa, ON.
- Gagné, A., Gambhir, M., Eidoo, S., Soheili-Mehr, A., Deters, P., & Faez, F. *Supporting NNES teachers who work with diverse K-12 students*. OISE/UT Teacher Education for the Schools We Need, Toronto.
- Gagné, A., & Inbar, O. (2005, March). *Language proficiency development of non-native English-speaking teacher candidates: A comparative case study of two teacher preparation programs in Canada and Israel*. TESOL Conference, San Antonio, TX.
- Gagné, A., & Schmidt, C. (2005, March). *Supporting NNES teacher candidates in pre-service programs*. TESOL Conference, San Antonio, TX.
- Gagné, A., Gambhir, M., Faez, F., & Soheili-Mehr, A. (2004, November). *Multiple perspectives on the language and culture skills required by Non-Native English Speaking (NNES) teachers*. TESL Ontario Conference, Toronto, ON.