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# Teaching in Kindergarten Through Grade 12 Programs: Perceptions of Native and Nonnative English-Speaking Practitioners

■ **This study compared the perceptions of two groups of kindergarten through grade 12 (K-12) practitioners, native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and nonnative English-speaking teachers (NNESTs), in relation to their professional preparation, their level of job satisfaction, and their degree of comfort teaching various skill areas. Quantitative and qualitative analyses of a survey administered to 55 NESTs and 32 NNESTs in Southern California showed that a complex set of similarities and differences characterized the K-12 NESTs and NNESTs who participated in this investigation. The similarities identified included the positive views of the two groups about their professional preparation and the support received from formal networks (e.g., mentoring programs) and informal networks (e.g., colleagues, friends, and relatives). The two groups were also similar in their positive self-reported level of job satisfaction and their positive perceptions of their English language skills. One of the differences was the grades they taught, with a higher percentage of NNESTs teaching early elementary grades. Additionally, NNESTs were slightly more negative than NESTs in their evaluation of school administrators, exhibited more positive self-perceptions about their instructional abilities, and saw their nonnative status as contributing to their professional abilities. The results of this preliminary investigation suggest the need for further research on NNESTs and for the development of collaborative projects between master of art (MA) degree programs in**

**Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and K-12 programs designed to benefit future teachers, regardless of their language background.**

Over the past few years, interest has grown in issues related to language and ethnic minority practitioners in the field of TESOL. Recent publications have looked at the perceived advantages and disadvantages of NNESTs in English as a foreign language (EFL) and English as a second language (ESL) classrooms (e.g., Medgyes, 1992, 1994; Samimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999), perceived attitudes toward NNESTs (e.g., Amin, 1997; Tang, 1997), and the struggles and triumphs of NNESTs (e.g., Braine, 1999; Connor, 1999; Thomas, 1999).

Much of the research cited above has focused on NNESTs in EFL contexts (Medgyes, 1992; 1994; Tang, 1997), adult ESL classes (Amin, 1997), or college-level courses (Braine, 1999; Thomas, 1999). The present study was designed to focus on practitioners in K-12 contexts, specifically K-12 practitioners from a language minority background. The focus on this group was motivated by two factors. First, there is limited research on NNESTs teaching at the K-12 level. Second, prior research (Kamhi-Stein, Lee, & Lee, 1999) and informal interviews of MA TESOL students suggest that U.S.-based NNESTs seem to favor teaching at the K-12 level over other levels. Therefore, we designed the current study to compare the perceptions regarding professional preparation and job satisfaction between K-12 NESTs and NNESTs. The study was also designed to look at the perceptions of K-12 NESTs and K-12 NNESTs regarding their English language skills and teaching preferences.

## Background

This investigation included four broad areas of research: (a) teacher confidence, (b) self-perceived language needs, (c) self-perceived prejudice, and (d) mentoring concerns. Following is a summary of research in each of the four areas.

### *Teacher Confidence*

A few studies have focused on factors affecting the confidence of teachers from ethnic and language minority backgrounds. For example, Freeman, Brookhart, and Loadman (1999) investigated beginning teachers in high-diversity schools and concluded that these teachers "tend to encounter a complex and challenging teaching environment, struggle to form meaningful relations with their students, and be less satisfied with their jobs" (p. 107). In another study of five novice Cantonese-dominant secondary English teachers in Hong Kong, Pennington and Richards (1997) reported that the teachers discarded a communicative methodology in favor of a product-oriented approach to instruction. Possible factors explaining this finding include the following: a heavy teaching load, large class sizes, students' low proficiency in

English and lack of discipline, closeness in age between the students and beginning teachers, personal experience of the new teachers while in school, low job satisfaction, low perceived effectiveness in their first year of teaching, and the school culture. Another factor affecting the confidence of NNESTs is challenges to their credibility (Samimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999; Thomas, 1999). According to Thomas, NNESTs are challenged by professionals in the TESOL field, by professional organizations, and by students.

### *Self-Perceived Language Needs*

The self-perceived language needs of NNESTs is another area of research that has received some attention within the literature. Specifically, several studies have identified pronunciation (Barkhuizen, 1997; Tang, 1997), writing, vocabulary (including idioms and slang), and cultural knowledge as areas of perceived difficulty (Kamhi-Stein, Lee, & Lee, 1999; Liu, 1999; Samimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999; Tang, 1997). While two studies (Kamhi-Stein, Lee, & Lee, 1999; Samimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999) have shown that lack of English proficiency does not have a negative effect on the instructional practices of NNESTs, another study (Li, 1998) has concluded that, in some cases, NNESTs view their variety of English as deficient and argue that lack of English proficiency constrains them when implementing communicative methodologies.

### *Self-Perceived Prejudice*

Research has also shown that another area of concern for NNESTs is self-perceived prejudice based on ethnicity, nonnative status, or both (Amin, 1997; Canagarajah, 1999; Kamhi-Stein, Lee, & Lee, 1999; Thomas, 1999). Montemayor (1991) also identified a few critical issues that minority teachers face as they begin teaching, some generic to all teachers and some specific to their situation:

1. They may face isolation and separation from their ethnic group culture.
2. They may experience teacher bashing and the media's distrust of public education.
3. They may be expected to advocate for their ethnic group and solve emerging problems. Also, they may be relied on to communicate with parents, especially when language is a factor.
4. They may "burn out" trying to meet the needs of bilingual programs while working under the stigma of teaching in a "bilingual" rather than a "regular" program.
5. They may feel they were hired to fill a quota and provide a minority presence, thus making them feel conspicuous and out-of-place.

### *Mentoring Concerns*

According to Stallworth (1994), it is critical that the teaching profession attract qualified minorities, including those who come from fields outside the teaching profession, since these professionals "bring with them a larger reper-

toire of life experiences and skills learned in the field and not just from academic preparation" (p. 27). While the mentoring of NNESTs has received no attention in the TESOL field, research suggests that the lack of availability and low quality of mentoring are barriers frequently faced by minority teachers. For example, Stallworth (1994) found that novice teachers from a minority background feel "isolated and incompetent" in their new environment; however, they tend to feel less intimidated when they secure at least one colleague as a mentor to assist them in answering questions "in a nonjudgmental manner" (p. 29).[1] Novice teacher support—in the form of conferencing with mentors, being observed by mentors, and receiving tuition-free graduate courses—has been reported to be helpful and to promote teacher retention (Smith, 1989-90).

Blankenship et al. (1992) outline a set of principles for effectively inducting all beginning teachers while focusing particularly on minority teachers' needs, including the following: (a) the need to meet with other teachers to reflectively discuss classroom experiences, (b) the need to observe experienced teachers, (c) the need to incorporate new and innovative instructional methodologies and resources, (d) the need to learn how to manage time and paperwork wisely, and (e) the need to develop classroom management ideas with diverse student populations.

In summary, the studies reviewed in the above sections suggest that ethnic and language minority teachers face challenges to their professional credibility and prejudice based on ethnicity or nonnative status. Additionally, while so far very little if any research has focused on NNESTs and mentoring issues, some research suggests that lack of quality mentoring is a barrier faced by minority teachers in general. Still missing from the literature is research designed to compare the perceptions of K-12 NESTs and NNESTs in relationship to their professional preparation, their level of job satisfaction, and their teaching preferences.

## Research Questions

This study was guided by three research questions.

1. To what extent, if any, are there differences in the perceptions of K-12 NESTs and NNESTs regarding their professional preparation?

2. To what extent, if any, are there differences in the perceptions of K-12 NESTs and NNESTs regarding their job satisfaction?

3. To what extent, if any, are there differences in the perceptions of K-12 NESTs and NNESTs regarding their English language skills and teaching preferences?

## Method

### *Participants*

Participants in this study were selected according to two criteria: (a) language status (NESTs and NNESTs) and (b) the type of institution in which they taught (K-12). The participants in this study were 55 NESTs and 32

NNESTs teaching in K-12 programs in Southern California. All of the 55 NESTs reported being born in the U.S. Additionally, nearly 65% of the NESTs reported being Caucasian, 13% reported being Asian, 7% reported being African-American, Latino, or other, and the remaining 16% did not provide information on race or ethnicity.

Of the 32 NNESTs, 59% reported they were born outside the U.S. Specifically, 31% of NNESTs were born in Mexico, 13% in Taiwan, 9% in Korea, and 6% in El Salvador and Vietnam. The other 41% were born in the U.S. Of the 32 NNESTs, 44% reported being Latinos, 38% reported being Asian, 9% reported being Caucasian, 3% reported being African-American, and 7% did not report race or ethnicity. Additionally, at the time of the study, 88% of the NNESTs reported having lived in the U.S. for 10 or more years. While 41% of the NNESTs reported speaking Spanish as a first language, only 19% reported speaking Spanish at home at the time of the study.

### *Instrument*

A survey was designed to provide information on the above three research questions.[2] Survey items were developed based upon a national survey of graduates of teacher education courses (Loadman, Freeman, Brookhart, Rahman, & McCague, 1999). A pilot copy of the survey was administered and revised. The revised version of the survey instrument had three main sections requiring participants to respond to questions on a Likert-scale as well as to open-ended questions. The first section, "Demographic Information," contained 14 questions designed to provide information on the participants' age, ethnic background, and degrees completed and in progress. The second section, "Professional Information," contained 66 questions designed to provide information on the participants' schools and their current teaching assignments, the participants' reported job satisfaction and future plans, and the participants' perceptions regarding the quality of formal mentoring they received and the quality of their interactions with school faculty and staff. The third section, "Language Background," contained 21 questions designed to provide information on the participants' perceptions regarding their English language skills as well as perceptions about the NNESTs' strengths and weaknesses.

### *Data Collection and Analysis*

The survey was distributed and collected in two ways. First, copies of the survey were administered during the summer quarter of 2000 within the Charter College of Education at California State University, Los Angeles (CSULA). Second, copies of the survey were mailed to selected K-12 programs with a stamped, self-addressed return envelope. Mailed responses were collected over a six-week period.

Survey responses were analyzed using quantitative and qualitative techniques. Specifically, survey responses were analyzed for descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, overall frequencies, and percentages) using the

*Statistical Package for the Social Sciences* (Version 9.0, 1998). Open-ended responses were analyzed qualitatively by engaging in a process of recursive reading of the survey instruments, identifying recurring responses, and assigning them to tentative themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The process was completed by naming the themes.

## Findings

This section presents findings for the quantitative and qualitative analyses.

### *Quantitative Findings*

***General profile of the participants***. Table 1 shows that NESTS and NNESTs had a variety of teaching assignments. However, as can be seen in Table 1, a larger percentage of NNESTs reported teaching early elementary grades (NNESTs = 41%, NESTs = 18%). Additionally, while the same percentage of NESTS and NNESTs reported teaching senior high school (16%), a larger percentage of NESTs reported teaching middle school or junior high school (NESTs = 26%, NNESTs = 22%).

**Table 1**
**Teaching Assignment by Language Status**

| *Teaching Assignment* | *NESTs* | | *NNESTs* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *N* | *%* | *N* | *%* |
| Pre-school | 2 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| Early elementary | 10 | 18 | 13 | 41 |
| Upper elementary | 5 | 9 | 3 | 9 |
| Middle school/junior high | 14 | 26 | 7 | 22 |
| Senior high school | 9 | 16 | 5 | 16 |
| Early & upper elementary | 2 | 4 | 1 | 3 |
| Senior high school & adult ESL | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| Early elementary & adult ESL | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| Senior high school & intensive English program | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| Other combinations | 13 | 23 | 0 | 0 |

Table 2 presents information on the participants' length of service in their current positions. According to the results presented in the table, NESTs were somewhat more experienced than NNESTs. Specifically, 75% of the NESTS and 87% of the NNESTs had been in their current positions for four years or less.

**Table 2**
**Current Teaching Experience by Language Status**

| *Length of Service in the Current Teaching Position* | *NESTs* | | *NNESTs* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *N* | *%* | *N* | *%* |
| Less than one year | 12 | 22 | 3 | 9 |
| One to two years | 19 | 35 | 17 | 53 |
| Two to four years | 10 | 18 | 8 | 25 |
| More than four years | 14 | 25 | 4 | 13 |

***Perceptions regarding professional preparation***. Table 3 presents descriptive statistics for the participants' perceptions regarding professional preparation. As can be seen in the table, both NESTs and NNESTs viewed their credential program preparation as being between "average" and "above average." In contrast, while NESTs rated their MA program preparation as being between "average" and "above average," NNESTs rated their MA program preparation as being "above average."

**Table 3**
**Perceptions About Professional Preparation**

| *Type of Program* | *NESTs* | | *NNESTs* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *M* | *SD* | *M* | *SD* |
| Credential | 3.55 | .59 | 3.71 | .69 |
| MA | 3.60 | .50 | 4.00 | .95 |

***Note.*** Scale: 1 = unacceptable, 2 = below average, 3 = average, 4 = above average, 5 = exceptional

***Perceptions regarding job satisfaction***. Tables 4 and 5 present information on the participants' perceptions regarding job satisfaction. As indicated in Table 4, NESTs and NNESTs were similar in their overall job satisfaction. Specifically, the mean for overall job satisfaction for NESTs and NNESTs was closer to "positive" than to "somewhat positive," although NESTs were slightly more positive than NNESTs ($M$ = 3.94, $SD$ = 1.02; $M$ = 3.83, $SD$ = .83, respectively). As shown in Table 5, the job feature that NESTs and NNESTs rated highest (between "positive" and "very positive") was "interactions with students." While "salary/fringe benefits" received the lowest mean rating for NESTs (between "negative" and "somewhat positive"), "general work conditions," including class size and work load, received the lowest mean rating for NNESTs ("somewhat positive").

**Table 4**
**Perceptions Regarding Overall Job Satisfaction**

| *Quality Rating* | *NESTs* | | *NNESTs* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | ***M*** | ***SD*** | ***M*** | ***SD*** |
| Overall satisfaction | 3.94 | 1.02 | 3.83 | .83 |

***Note.*** Scale: 1 = very negative, 2 = negative, 3 = somewhat positive, 4 = positive, 5 = very positive

**Table 5**
**Perceptions Regarding Various Job Features**

| *Job Features* | *NESTs* | | *NNESTs* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | ***M*** | ***SD*** | ***M*** | ***SD*** |
| Interactions with students | 4.44 | .79 | 4.50 | .72 |
| Interactions with colleagues | 3.98 | .95 | 3.84 | 1.10 |
| Professional autonomy | 3.96 | .88 | 3.73 | .74 |
| Interactions with parents | 3.81 | .96 | 3.87 | .99 |
| Interactions with administrators | 3.87 | 1.07 | 3.61 | 1.02 |
| Opportunities for professional advancement | 3.34 | 1.04 | 3.53 | .98 |
| General work conditions | 3.30 | 1.22 | 3.00 | 1.11 |
| Salary/fringe benefits | 2.78 | 1.11 | 3.30 | .93 |

***Note.*** Scale: 1 = very negative, 2 = negative, 3 = somewhat positive, 4 = positive, 5 = very positive

Table 6 summarizes the participants' perceptions regarding the quality of faculty-staff interactions. As shown in the table, "respect for minorities" received the highest mean rating. Specifically, both groups viewed faculty and staff interactions to be "respectful of minorities" ($M$ = 4.11, $SD$ = .98, $M$ = 4.11, $SD$ = 1.01 for NESTs and NNESTs respectively). In contrast, the two groups ranked different variables lowest. NESTs gave "networking" a mean rating of 3.67, indicating that the participants' views about faculty-staff "networking" was between "somewhat positive" and "positive." The lowest-ranked feature for NNESTs was "clarity of school requirements" ($M$ = 3.34, $SD$ = 1.11), indicating that the NNESTs' mean rating of "clarity of school requirements" was closer to "somewhat positive" than to "positive."

**Table 6**
**Perceptions Regarding Faculty and Staff Interactions**

| *Features of Faculty and Staff Interactions* | *NESTs* | | *NNESTs* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *M* | *SD* | *M* | *SD* |
| Respect for minorities | 4.11 | .98 | 4.11 | 1.01 |
| Sharing of resources | 3.97 | .91 | 3.65 | .97 |
| Respect for novice teachers | 3.90 | 1.04 | 3.67 | 1.14 |
| Openness to new ideas | 3.77 | 1.19 | 3.62 | .97 |
| Clarity of school requirements | 3.77 | 1.09 | 3.34 | 1.11 |
| Networking | 3.67 | .96 | 3.42 | .91 |

***Note.*** Scale: 1 = very negative, 2 = negative, 3 = somewhat positive, 4 = positive, 5 = very positive

NESTs and NNESTs did not differ in their perceptions regarding their schools' support. As indicated in Table 7, the mean for "quality of formal mentoring" for both groups was "between average" and "strong." Additionally, both groups of practitioners reported meeting with their mentor teachers at least "once a month." However, the slightly higher mean for NESTs ($M$ = 3.61, $SD$ = .92 vs. $M$ = 3.29, $SD$ = .91 for NNESTs) suggests that NESTs meet somewhat more frequently with their teacher mentors than NNESTs.

**Table 7**
**Perceptions Regarding School Support**

| *Mentoring Ratings* | *NESTs* | | *NNESTs* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *M* | *SD* | *M* | *SD* |
| Quality of formal mentoring | 2.32 | .82 | 2.50 | .52 |
| Frequency of formal mentoring | 3.61 | .92 | 3.29 | .91 |

***Note.*** Scale, Quality of mentoring: 1 = weak, 2 = average, 3 = strong
Scale, Frequency of mentoring: 1 = never, 2 = once a semester, 3 = once a month, 4 = once a week

Table 8 presents a ranking of the participants' perceptions regarding the different kinds of support received. According to the table, "support from family and friends" was at the top of the ranking for both NESTs and NNESTs. Following in the ranking in descending order for both groups were "support from school colleagues," "support from school administrators," and "support from pre-service courses."

**Table 8**
**Ranking by Type of Support Currently Received**

| *Type of Support* | *NESTs* | | *NNESTs* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *M* | *SD* | *M* | *SD* |
| Support from family and friends | 4.20 | .78 | 3.79 | .79 |
| Support from school colleagues | 3.76 | .97 | 3.70 | .88 |
| Support from school administrators | 3.62 | 1.07 | 3.34 | 1.11 |
| Support from pre-service courses | 3.37 | 0.96 | 3.13 | .90 |

***Note.*** Scale: 1 = unacceptable, 2 = below average, 3 = average, 4 = above average, 5 = exceptional

***Participants' perceptions regarding their English language skills***. Table 9 summarizes the participants' perceptions regarding their English language skills. As can be seen in the table, while NESTs viewed their overall language skills as being between "very good" and "excellent," NNESTs perceived their overall English language skills as being between "good" and "very good" (although the mean was closer to "very good"). Additionally, NESTs and NNESTs differed in their individual language skill areas that they rated highest and lowest. Specifically, the highest self-rated skill area was reading for NESTs and listening for NNESTs. In contrast, the lowest self-rated skill area was grammar for NESTs and pronunciation for NNESTs.

**Table 9**
**Perceived English Language Skills by Language Status**

| *Skills* | *NESTs* | | *NNESTs* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *M* | *SD* | *M* | *SD* |
| Overall | 4.35 | .76 | 3.97 | .78 |
| Reading | 4.45 | .79 | 4.13 | .75 |
| Listening | 4.42 | .74 | 4.22 | .83 |
| Speaking | 4.27 | .87 | 3.88 | .66 |
| Pronunciation | 4.29 | .94 | 3.75 | .88 |
| Writing | 4.22 | .92 | 3.81 | .83 |
| Grammar | 4.09 | .89 | 3.97 | .93 |

***Note.*** Scale: 1 = poor, 2 = fair, 3 = good, 4 = very good, 5 = excellent

Table 10 summarizes information on the participants' self-reported degree of comfort teaching the different skill areas. As shown in the table, while the means for NESTs ranged from "somewhat comfortable" to "comfortable," the means for NNESTs were within the "comfortable" category. Table 10 shows that NESTs reported feeling comfortable teaching pronunciation, speaking, listening, writing, and reading, in decreasing order, but only

somewhat comfortable teaching grammar. In contrast, NNESTs reported feeling comfortable teaching all six skill areas, including reading, listening, speaking, writing, pronunciation, and grammar, in decreasing order.

**Table 10**
**Teaching Comfort in English by Language Status**

| *Skills* | *NESTs* | | *NNESTs* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *M* | *SD* | *M* | *SD* |
| Pronunciation | 3.26 | .76 | 3.25 | .67 |
| Speaking | 3.24 | .70 | 3.28 | .63 |
| Listening | 3.24 | .78 | 3.38 | .61 |
| Writing | 3.11 | .86 | 3.25 | .62 |
| Reading | 3.11 | .90 | 3.41 | .61 |
| Grammar | 2.98 | .81 | 3.25 | .72 |

***Note.*** Scale: 1 = not comfortable at all, 2 = somewhat comfortable, 3 = comfortable, 4 = very comfortable

Table 11 summarizes information regarding the participants' perceptions about their instructional abilities. As can be seen in the table, the mean rating for NESTs was slightly lower than that for NNESTs. While NNESTs perceived themselves to be "better than average" teachers, NESTs perceived themselves to be between "average" and "better than average."

**Table 11**
**Self-Perceptions About Instructional Abilities**

| *Language Status* | *Self Perceptions About Instructional Abilities* | |
|---|---|---|
| | *M* | *SD* |
| NESTs | 3.82 | .69 |
| NNESTs | 4.04 | .64 |

***Note.*** Scale: 1 = inferior, 2 = below average, 3 = average, 4 = better than average, 5 = exceptional

### *Qualitative Findings*

The open-ended survey questions were analyzed qualitatively in order to identify the perceived difficulties faced by NNESTs as well as their sources of strength. The analysis allowed the identification of two areas of perceived difficulty: "communication skills" and "vocabulary skills." According to the survey respondents, effective communication was sometimes hindered by the "nonnative" status of students and teachers alike. One teacher noted: "Nonnativeness both from students and teachers may hinder effective communication" (#74). However, another participant made the following comment:

> Sometimes they [NNES teachers] are afraid that they're going to make a mistake when speaking; they need to realize that everyone makes mistakes when speaking and writing. (#35)

The respondents noted that "vocabulary skills" were the second area of difficulty for NNESTs. Specifically, survey respondents agreed that lack of an adequate vocabulary might interfere with NNESTs' ability to teach. One commented: "Lack of prior knowledge of vocabulary is a hindrance when teaching."

The qualitative analysis of the open-ended survey questions allowed the identification of three sources of strengths for the NNESTs: "cultural awareness," "empathy," and "linguistic advantage provided by the nonnative status." First, the survey respondents agreed that NNESTs can strengthen the school curriculum by bringing to the classroom their "cultural awareness," involving but not limited to an understanding of two or more cultures, multicultural experiences, and a broad world view. A participant summarized this idea as follows:

> Diverse cultural background contributes to a multicultural learning environment, which can help students broaden their perception of the world. (# 46)

Second, many of the survey respondents explained that another feature that characterized NNESTs was their empathy. They explained that second language (L2) students usually see their NNESTs as role models with whom they can identify and relate. Specifically, NNESTs were seen as being able to understand the difficulty of learning a new language since they had gone through the L2 learning process and were, therefore, especially sensitive to the language needs of their ESL students. The following observations reflect these points:

> NNES teachers tend to be more successful in reaching students who can relate culturally or linguistically to them. (#16)

> Because of their nonnative status, they had to "rise" above and usually, in my experience, they were better teachers, more sensitive too…(#127)

> [NNESTs have] the ability to understand the difficulty of learning a new language, different methods of acquiring the English language…and can share personal experiences. (#76)

Finally, survey respondents agreed that NNESTs are characterized by what might be called a "linguistic advantage provided by the nonnative status." Many survey respondents teaching elementary grades agreed that the NNESTs' ability to communicate with their students' parents promoted positive parent-teacher rapport. At the same time, survey respondents explained that NNESTs become interpreters of the U.S. school culture for students. They also help immigrant parents understand how U.S. schools operate and how they can assist their children in becoming successful learners. The following two comments reflect what was said about this issue:

They provide a communication link to some students; similar to an interpreter…(#37)

[They have] good communication skills with parents who speak their language and ability to translate school newsletters, etc.…(#113)

## Discussion and Conclusions

This study provided information on K-12 NNESTs, a group of practitioners that, so far, have received little attention within the literature on nonnative English-speaking professionals. NESTs and NNESTs in this study differed in their teaching assignments. While 41% of the NNESTs in this study reported teaching elementary grades, only 18% of the NESTs in this study reported teaching at that level. This finding suggests that NNESTs find teaching elementary grades to be an appealing career choice (Kamhi-Stein, Lee, & Lee, 1999). This result may be explained by the qualitative findings in this investigation, supporting the notion that when teaching elementary grades, NNESTs have a linguistic advantage both inside and outside the classroom because of their first language (L1) skills. NNESTs may strengthen the school curriculum by bringing a unique world view to the classroom. Outside the classroom, NNESTs who share their students' L1 can easily communicate with parents and can serve as cultural brokers. However, great caution should be taken when making generalizations about these findings since the sample in this study was small and not randomly selected. It is unclear whether the same results would be obtained with a larger, randomly selected sample.

The results of this study also showed that NESTs and NNESTs shared positive views of their pre-service and in-service training. Specifically, both NESTs and NNESTs were positive about their preparation in credential and MA programs, although NNESTs were slightly more positive than NESTs. Additionally, both NESTs and NNESTs rated the formal mentoring they received in their schools as being between "average" and "strong." Both groups reported meeting with their mentors at least "once a month," although NESTs reported meeting with their mentor teachers more often than NNESTs did. In any case, this fact did not affect the NNESTs' perceptions about the quality of the mentoring received, as shown by the small difference in mean ratings between NNESTs and NESTs (*M* difference = .18).

The support received by the NESTs and NNESTs in this study came from formal networks, including mentoring programs organized by the teachers' schools, as well as "from informal networks such as their school colleagues." Both NESTs and NNESTs rated this informal support as closer to "above average" than to "average," which supports the notion that novice teachers, regardless of language status, benefit from developing support networks that enable them to deal with the demands of the school culture. Informal support networks, like the ones provided by teacher colleagues, can promote a positive school environment (Stallworth, 1994) and can ultimately contribute to teacher retention.

A further similarity between NESTs and NNESTs was their self-reported job satisfaction. Specifically, the mean rating for overall job satisfaction for both groups was closer to "positive" than to "somewhat positive," although the mean rating for NESTs was slightly more positive than that for NNESTs. The job feature that both groups rated highest was "interactions with students." This finding is not surprising given that teachers' responsibilities center on students and their instructional and emotional needs. Other factors contributing to overall job satisfaction for NESTs were "interactions with colleagues," "professional autonomy," "interactions with administrators," and "respect for minorities." On the other hand, overall job satisfaction, for NESTs, seemed to be negatively affected by factors like "salary/fringe benefits," "general work conditions," and "opportunities for professional advancement." In the case of NNESTs, overall job satisfaction seemed to be positively affected by factors like "interactions with parents," "interactions with colleagues," and "respect for minorities," and it seemed to be negatively affected by factors like "salary/fringe benefits" and "general work conditions." Future research needs to be done in this area. Specifically, future studies need to look at larger samples and rely on inferential analysis techniques to determine the extent to which various job features contribute to job satisfaction and ultimately promote the retention of NESTs and NNESTs.

NESTs and NNESTs were similar in that neither group perceived their English language skills to be "poor" or "fair." However, when compared to NNESTs, NESTs were found to have slightly more positive views of their English language skills. Specifically, while the mean ratings for the NESTs' self-reported English language skills ranged from "very good" (for grammar) to close to "excellent" (for reading), the means for NNESTs were close to "very good" (for pronunciation) and "very good" (for listening). The findings related to English language skills perceptions confirm prior research on NNESTs that has shown that pronunciation is an area of concern for NNESTs in EFL contexts (Medgyes, 1994). However, unlike typical EFL teachers, most of the NNESTs in this investigation had resided in the U.S. for 10 or more years and their mean rating for pronunciation approached "very good." Nevertheless, pronunciation still turned out to be the skill area with the lowest mean for NNESTs.

This study's findings related to grammar confirm a prior study (Kamhi-Stein, Lee, & Lee, 1999) showing that long-term U.S. residence was negatively related to NNESTs' views about their English grammar skills. In the current study, grammar was ranked as the third best skill area for NNESTs and it was ranked as the weakest skill area for NESTs. Additionally, while NNESTs reported feeling comfortable teaching grammar, their mean for degree of comfort teaching grammar was lower than that for reading, listening, speaking, writing, and pronunciation. It would seem that, in the area of grammar, the NNESTs in this study were, in some way, different from EFL teachers in other studies (e.g., Medgyes, 1994; Tang, 1997) who felt that grammar was one of their strongest areas. The results of this investigation

could be attributed to the fact that 88% of the NNESTs in the study had lived in the U.S. for 10 years or more. However, it is not certain that the results of this investigation can be replicated with other groups of NNESTs with long-term U.S. residency.

The results of this investigation contradict prior findings in the area of speaking skills. In this study, speaking was ranked as the fourth best skill area for NESTs and NNESTs alike. This finding does not support the notion that speaking is an area of concern for NNESTs (Medgyes, 1994) and could be explained by the fact that the NNESTs in the current study differed from the teachers in Medgyes' investigation in their length of U.S. residence, as well as in their opportunities to be exposed to and to use the English language.

NESTs and NNESTs were found to differ in more than one way. First, NNESTs were slightly less positive than NESTs in their evaluation of school administrators in the areas of "current support given by administrators" and "interactions with administrators." One possible explanation for this difference could be that a higher percentage of NNESTs had been in their current teaching position for four years or less compared to the NESTs. As already noted, novice teachers benefit from the support of informal and formal networks, including but not limited to relatives, colleagues and, mentor teachers. This finding suggests that school administrators may need to play a more central role in helping novice teachers adapt to and cope with the demands of schools (Kamhi-Stein, 2000).

NNESTs' were also slightly more positive about their instructional abilities than were the NESTs. The NNESTs' slightly more positive perception was reflected in the group's slightly higher mean ratings for degree of teaching comfort for various skill areas such as speaking, listening, writing, reading, and grammar. The differences in perceptions could be attributed to the NNESTs' slightly more positive views about their professional preparation. It could also be argued that three other factors—the NNESTs' strong sense of cultural awareness, their empathy, and their ability to communicate with their students' parents—also contributed to the NNESTs' positive perceptions about their instructional abilities.

To conclude, the results of this investigation suggest that a complex set of similarities and differences characterize K-12 NESTs and NNESTs. Among the similarities are the teachers' views about their professional preparation, their perspectives on formal and informal mentoring networks, their level of overall job satisfaction, and their perceptions about their English language skills. NESTs and NNESTs in this study differed in the grades they tended to teach (with a higher percentage of NNESTs teaching early elementary grades), in their evaluation of school administrators (with NNESTs being slightly less positive), and in their perceptions about their instructional abilities (with NNESTs having more positive perceptions).

Given the findings of this study and our own experiences with NNESTs, four recommendations are in order. First, further research needs to be conducted to provide in-depth information about the career choices of NNESTs in ESL and EFL settings. This line of research would seek to answer ques-

tions such as the following: To what extent, if any, do NNESTs favor teaching a particular age group? To what extent, if any, do NNESTs favor teaching in a particular setting (e.g., adult ESL programs vs. community college ESL credit programs)? Finally, what are the reasons for these preferences?

Second, future case studies need to be conducted to develop profiles of exemplary K-12 school administrators who have successfully supported newly-hired teachers in general and NNESTS in particular. This line of research would help identify the conditions that must be in place for NNESTs to become an integral part of the school culture and, ultimately, achieve professional success. Some of the questions these case studies should seek to answer about these exemplary administrators include:

1. What kinds of resources do they commit to assist NNESTS in the successful transition from "graduate student" to "novice teacher"?

2. What role, if any, do they play in helping NNESTs develop as professionals?

3. What kind of teaching situation (specifically the teaching load, class size, and class structure) do they assign to NNESTs during their first year on the job?

4. What role do they play in helping NNESTs understand the purposes and consequences of the various types of evaluations?

Third, the findings in this investigation support the notion that nonnative status contributes to the development of positive self-perceptions regarding professional practices. Teachers in the current study viewed their nonnative status as a professional asset. Future research needs to investigate NNESTs in different instructional settings in order to help develop an in-depth understanding of the relationship among pedagogical practices, self-perceptions about professional preparation, and self-perceptions about English language proficiency.

And finally, although not entirely supported by our findings, we wish to argue on the basis of our collective experience with NNESTS that MA TESOL programs should enter into what might be called "partnership relationships" with K-12 programs (as well as with other types of programs in which MA TESOL graduates may eventually teach). Such partnerships need not be limited to courses like the teaching practicum, in which mentor teachers initiate future teachers into the routines, norms, and behaviors of typical classrooms. Instead, these partnerships could take different forms, involving ongoing K-12 and MA TESOL program collaboration that would benefit both parties. For example, MA students could engage in tasks such as observing exemplary K-12 teachers, completing data collection projects designed to provide information on a particular area of need, tutoring ESL students, providing K-12 teachers and students with assistance in innovative instructional technology, collaborating in the development of curriculum materials, and serving as informants about the language-learning process. In turn, K-12 teachers could provide MA students with models of successful instructional practices, assist them in developing classroom management techniques, provide them with informal support

networks, and ultimately help them become acculturated to the demands of the school-site prior to being formally hired.

Completed research in the arenas outlined above coupled with the establishment of collaborative partnerships between institutions would contribute to the understanding of the complex set of factors that affect the instructional practices of nonnative English-speaking professionals, ultimately benefiting both nonnative English-speaking professionals and their students.

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## Endnotes

[1] See also Carvalho de Oliveira & Richardson, this issue.

[2] A complete copy of the survey instrument is available from Lía D. Kamhi-Stein, Charter College of Education, California State University, Los Angeles, 5151 State University Drive, Los Angeles, CA 90032.

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