



# **The Teacher Identity of Non-native & Non-Chinese Pre-Service English Teachers in Hong Kong**

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Honours Project

**Name: Pun Srijana**  
**Student no.:**  
**Lecturer: Dr. John Trent**

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## **Abstract**

This paper investigates the teacher identity of non-Chinese, non-native pre-service English teachers that are currently emerging in the English language teaching field in Hong Kong. Considering the teaching practicum that placed these groups of pre-service teachers in local schools, their self-perceived identity, views on the teacher profession established in Hong Kong; native-English teachers (NETs) and local English teachers (LETs) and perspectives of stakeholders in schools are analyzed to understand how these factors contribute in constructing their identities as English teachers. In-depth interviews are conducted with three non-Chinese, non-native pre-service teachers who are in their final year of completing their English education programme and their interviews are examined to indicate recurring themes and keywords, which is then organized into different categories to represent the different aspects of teacher identity. The findings suggest that these pre-service teachers' construction of their teacher identity highly depend on their personal experiences at the practicum and their own beliefs in how they choose to adapt. However, as these teachers are at the beginning stage of their teaching career, a more legitimate teacher identity will be constructed when they enter the profession full-time. The study has significant implications on teacher education programmes, indicating support is needed to better prepare these pre-service teachers to overcome challenges in the real teaching field.

**Keywords:** teacher identity, non-native, non-Chinese, pre-service teachers

## **Introduction**

There seems to be a noticeable emergence of non-native and non-Chinese English pre-service teachers in Hong Kong schools, who teach English as a second language to local schools. These

teachers are non-native speakers of English, where English serves as a second language for them and are of non-Chinese ethnicity, distinctly separating them from native English teachers and local Cantonese-speaking English teachers. In fact, most of these pre-service teachers are of ethnic minority backgrounds, such as India, Philippines, Nepal and Pakistan whose families have migrated to Hong Kong and are now well settled. They have also been educated in English medium schools in Hong Kong, experiencing the local education system and the Secondary public examinations, which make these teachers partly local due to their local education setting, though with limited Cantonese fluency.

As a non-Chinese pre-service English teacher myself, this topic is of a particular interest to me that can shed some light on the views, expectations and future prospects as English teachers in Hong Kong. In this research, pre-service English teachers of non-native and non-Chinese ethnicity will be studied, exploring a salient factor that defines our vision as educators: teacher identity. Teacher identity refers to who we are and who we think people are (Danielewicz, 2001 p.10). It is our inner beliefs as educators and the role we believe to play in the education context. The main aim of this research is to investigate how non-native, non-Chinese pre-service English teachers construct their teacher identity in Hong Kong.

## **Literature Review**

Teacher Identity is a complex notion, which has been highlighted in literature as an important aspect for developing teachers during their teacher education (e.g. Freese, 2006; Hoban, 2007, as cited in Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). As suggested by Beauchamp & Thomas (2009), the concept of teacher identity is complex and multi-dimensional in the sense that it involves a wide range of internal & external factors that are unique to individual teachers. Considering all these factors that interact in the construction of our teacher identity, Dunne (2011) refers to it as the relationship between our personal self and our professional self (p.40). Along with other scholars, (e.g. Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop, 2004), Dunne also argues that teacher identity is not fixed but is ever changing due to the continuous experiences we encounter throughout our lives and interaction within the context such as with learners, mentors, colleagues and peers. Therefore, from literature on teacher identity, we understand that various factors contribute in shaping our identities as teachers, such our self-beliefs, interaction in context that affect our personal experiences and that there is no definite identity as it is an evolving phenomenon.

In the field of English language teaching (ELT), there has always been the binary distinction of native English speaking teachers (NESTs) and non-native English speaking teachers (NNEST), who usually share the first language (L1) of the students. The discussion between a NEST and a NNEST has been covered to a wide extent in literature, such as the debate of which teacher is the ideal English teacher (see, e.g. Arva & Medgyes, 2000 as cited in Mahboob, 2010 & Masrizal, 2013). Peter Medgyes, was among the first to investigate this debate in his paper “Native or Non-native: Who’s worth more?” (1992). In his paper, he hypothesized two differences between NEST and NNEST: (1) NEST and NNEST contrasted in their language competence and (2) this

difference reflected for the most part of their teaching practices (p.6). Though, traditionally believed that NESTs were superior English teachers, some practitioners now believe that NNEST are just as valuable. This is because NNEST can act as imitable models for students and are more responsive in providing effective learning strategies because they too were learners of the language at some point (Masrizal, 2013 p. 204). However, despite the differences, both NEST and NNEST were concluded to have their own strengths, where one's weakness was another's asset, highly complementing one another (Masrizal, 2013). This makes them both valuable and equally qualified in gaining professional success. The rich literature on NEST & NNEST, pave way for understanding the formation of teacher identity of these two groups based on their roles and strengths in the ELT field.

Cases of non-native English teachers who come from different cultures have also been covered to a certain extent, usually in a setting of English speaking country (eg. Abramova, 2013 & Subtirelu, 2011). Some major challenges for these teachers that was recognized by Braine (2013) was the issue of credibility, that included the credibility in hiring practices, organizational invisibility, challenges from students and challenges at teacher training institution (p. 5). The fact that there was a '*non*' in the title, led some NNESTs to believe that this put them in disadvantage and gave them an unfavorable identity marker (Braine, 2013 p. 141). For these groups of teachers, authority of the language in the classroom also serves as a challenge that is to be proven to related stakeholders within the context of practice. According to Subtirelu (2011), non-native English language instructors have a need in constructing identities that is compatible to their students' expectations on what gives them an authority of the language (Inbar-Lourie, 2005 as

cited in Subtirelu, 2011). Though, there are plenty of insights from non-native teachers who have encountered difficulties in maintaining their identities as legitimate language instructors (e.g. Choi, 2007 & Braine, 2013) , Subtirelu (2011) deduced an optimistic conclusion, assuring that it is possible for non-native teachers to acquire authority of the language successfully even with one's non-native speaking status. However, there seems to be a lack of interest in the specific subject of non-native speaking English teachers who consider themselves local to the setting but do not share the L1 of the students, which is a particular subject this paper is concerned with.

Relating to the Hong Kong context, English teachers are categorized as native English teachers (NETs) and local English teachers (LETs). NETs are recruited through the NET scheme to increase the exposure of authentic English and to work along LETs to enhance English programmes in schools (Education Bureau, n.d.). In Ma's (2012) paper, where she examines Hong Kong students' perception of NETs and LETs, she explained that each one of these teachers played a different role and complemented one another in the classroom. Ma (2012) discovered that students preferred one over the other according to the language skill and learning task, such as choosing LETs for vocabulary and grammar learning and NETs for oral practice. There are also a number of studies focusing on teacher identity of NETs and LETs in Hong Kong (e.g., see Trent, 2012). From Trent's (2012) paper, it was found that NETs regarded themselves as professional language teachers that provided 'real language teaching' and they viewed LETs as 'traditional' teachers that focused on meeting examination demands. However, non-native

English teachers in Hong Kong that are not the typical-local because of their Cantonese deficiency has been rarely discussed.

More specific to my research scope is Benson's study (2012), which is one of the few studies that looks into the teacher identity of Mainland pre-service teachers, who are non-native and non-local English teachers in Hong Kong. He evaluates where they fall in the typical categories of NEST and NNEST, their perception of the value they bring in an education system that is dominated by NETs and LETs and particularly, how they construct their '*authority to teach*' (Benson, 2012), which is a factor linked to their identities as teachers. Similarly, the main concerns of this paper is to see where these new generation of non-Chinese pre-service English teachers stand in comparison to their counterparts; NETs and LETs, how well assimilated they are in the school culture and the unique values they are able to contribute through the role they adopt as non-Chinese English teachers in local schools. By exploring these aspects and interpreting these non-Chinese pre-service teachers' perspective, a better understanding of how these groups of teachers construct their identities as English teachers will be discussed.

## **The Study**

### **Sampling**

The informants in this study were three female pre-service English teachers; Abby, a secondary major, Crystal and Renee who are primary majors. All of them were completing their final fourth

year of their Bachelor of Education in English language and had completed their field experience (FE), which is a compulsory practicum that places student-teachers to teach for a school term in local schools. These three participants were the ideal candidates for the sampling of this research as they met the requirements that were necessary to investigate the core enquiry this research focused on. Besides being a non-Chinese pre-service English teachers in Hong Kong, the completion of field experience of the programme was a major criteria for the sampling of this study as the influence of authentic teaching and interaction in local school settings play a key role in constructing their teacher identity.

Though by ethnicity these pre-service teachers were non-Chinese, they still considered themselves to be a local Hong Kongers as they had been living in Hong Kong for most of their lives. Abby's ethnicity is Indian but she was born in Hong Kong and completed her primary and secondary education in English-medium local schools that had a high number of non-Chinese students like herself. Crystal moved to Hong Kong from the Philippines when she was 16 and completed her higher secondary education in Hong Kong. Abby and Crystal attended the same secondary school and were classmates in the last two years of their secondary schooling. They faced two public examinations, the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE), which is taken after completing form 5 and the Hong Kong Advanced Level Education (HKALE), which is taken after completing form 7. The secondary school they attended catered to ethnic-minority students who were non-Chinese like them and the language of communication in the school was English. Because Crystal entered secondary school in form 4, she never got the chance to learn Cantonese in school. While for Abby, she learnt Cantonese in her Chinese as a



second language class during her junior secondary years and that was the only time she ever spoke Cantonese in school. Renee, on the other hand, who is also of Filipino ethnicity like Crystal, did not attend local mainstream schools but attended an international school that followed the Canadian education curriculum, thus, unlike Abby and Crystal, she did not have to take the public examinations. She took the International Baccalaureate (IB) examination instead, which is an assessment that is globally recognized. It is a non-profit educational foundation that offers four respected programmes of international education that focuses on intellectual, personal, emotional and social skills necessary to live, learn and work in a rapidly globalizing world (IB, n.d.), which she describes is completely different to the Hong Kong education system.

Having been educated in an English environment and English was the language of communication and socialization outside of their homes, Abby and Crystal considered English as their second language, staying loyal to their mother-tongue, while Renee was comfortable stating English as her first language. Most of their reasons for choosing to study the Education programme in English language were mainly attributed to the limited courses in English available to them in local universities and was related to future job prospects. However, studying the course over the four years changed their opinions and motivated them to pursue the career of teaching.

### **Data Collection**

A semi-formal individual interview was implemented so as qualitative and in-depth data could be collected. To systematically organize the data, the interview was divided in three sections: (1)

Factors relating to Teaching Identity, (2) Teaching Experience, and (3) Future Prospect. Each interview ranged between 30 to 50 minutes, depending on the participant's response and setting involved a quiet coffee place for a relaxed atmosphere. A set of guiding questions were prepared, however, follow-up questions according to the participants' response were asked on spot. The whole interview of each participants were audio-recorded and only important points were noted in the interview sheets. Prior to conducting the interview, an informed consent form were provided to each individual. After consents were approved, background information, such as their personal information, educational background, first language (L1) and second language (L2) were collected to get a head-start into more complex discussion. To ensure privacy and confidentiality of the participants, names have been changed and data gathered are not disclosed to any third-parties.

### **Data Analysis**

As the interviews were audio-recorded, data analysis started with listening to the tapes and transcribing relevant parts verbatim. The interview composed of three sections, thus, the transcription process was divided into three parts as well. For each section, all of the participants' input of the particular section was transcribed instead of transcribing each one's interview at once. For example, when looking at the first section; Factors relating to Teacher Identity, each of their responses were transcribed in a table format in the same document. This way of organizing the data allowed for a more comprehensive comparison of viewpoints. After transcribing each sections and reviewing them, three categories were developed based on

Marshall & Rossman's process of generating categories and themes, where they suggest noting patterns that were evident and expressed by participants (2006, p. 159). After being familiar with the data and reviewing it, general themes were evident for each section. Furthermore, key words and repeated words during the interview were noted down in each category and compared among the participants, which enhanced understanding of each participant's viewpoints. The three categories based on the data formed are the following:

1. Self- perceived Teaching Identity
2. Identifying with the Profession
3. Stakeholders Views on their Identity

## **Results**

### **(1) Self- perceived Teacher Identity**

A part of understanding the construction of the participants' teacher identity involved exploring who and how they saw themselves when undertaking the teacher role. From observation, this became a process of reflection, where participants were deciphering their own perspective of their individual teacher identity through the interview.

- ***Individual Beliefs & Experiences***

Individual beliefs on how an ideal teacher should be is an important aspect that contributes to

one's identity as a teacher. It is also more of a foundation for the construction of teacher identity. When asked on their teaching philosophy and the kind of teacher they thought they were, the pre-service teachers related it to their own educational experiences or experiences in their FE. Abby related her teaching beliefs to her English learning experience in junior secondary, stating that her English teacher made learning English very interactive and enjoyable, such as through drama, which she also hopes to replicate into her teaching. Crystal drew back to her FE school explaining that the school was "more concerned with grades" and that experience influenced her teaching beliefs.

Teaching is not only about knowledge... we also have to consider children's other things, like emotional beings.

- ***Self-expectation***

Expectation of themselves in the teacher role was another aspect discussed with the pre-service teachers. Considering the FE teaching experience they had, they were asked to rate their confidence in teaching English in mainstream schools. From 1 to 5, 5 being the highest, they rated their confidence between 3 to 4, this suggests that they have quite high confidence in teaching English. A major reason shared by the pre-service teachers in rating themselves at the higher points was due to their English fluency. Abby rated herself a 4, explaining that the only downside was her inability to connect instantly with her students because of not knowing Cantonese.

I think I only lack one thing, which is a way to connect with the students on a more personal level. They feel reluctant to do that because they do not want to use so much English to communicate.

In general, having native-like fluency in English seem to raise higher bars and greater expectations of themselves to become good English teachers. However, they did acknowledged that good English did not necessarily equate to good teaching, expressing that teaching experience is more important.

## **(2) Identifying with the Profession**

As NETs and LETs have their specific roles and specific strengths to contribute to the school. When asked to identify or distinguish themselves from NETs and LETs and which one they saw themselves more as, it was clear that this was not a straightforward question that was easy to answer.

- ***Category NETs, LETs or New Category?***

The pre-service teachers had a hard time understanding where they stood as English teachers in local schools due to the black and white categorization that is evident in the English teacher profession in Hong Kong. Their feelings of being a non-native and non-Chinese English teachers in Hong Kong were unclear, which were evident as participants repeatedly expressed their

dilemma as ‘awkward’ and ‘weird’. When asked about which category fitted their perception as English teachers, the participants mainly shared a conflicted view and showed hesitant in giving a fixed answer as they seemed to identify themselves in both categories. Renee expressed her confusion showing evidence of identifying with both categories:

I feel like it's awkward because there's a lot of non-western teachers and non-Chinese teachers, who are perfectly qualified to teach English and they are fluent in English... but at the same time, they don't fit into the boxes, into these categories... it's awkward because what parents want and what society wants is just not who we are.

When asked to distinguish themselves from the two teachers, the pre-service teachers expressed that they shared characteristics of both NETs and LETs, suggesting they fall in the grey line of somewhat being a local and a native. Crystal explains it as being “in-between”:

I don't know, because I have qualifications of a Hong Kong teacher... like I can teach the Hong Kong curriculum but I can only use English... so it's kind of like in between.

Renee however, was certain she did not qualify as a LET as her FE school did not consider her as one because she did not speak Cantonese. At the same time, she was “not sure” if she qualified to be a NET as she was not a “westerner”. Her experience in her FE school raises the question of whether knowing the L1 of students is a criteria to qualify as a LET in Hong Kong.

Continuing the discussion of identifying themselves from NETs and LETs, I asked whether a new category that identified them was necessary and they all agreed that a new category should be established to represent them. Crystal suggested that a new category, “(Native) English-speaking local teachers”, would make the identification of teachers like them easier.

I don’t want to say I’m a NET or a LET because I am not really any of that... a new category like “Native or Native fluency English Speaking local teachers” might help others to understand who we are.

From my understanding, I believe that a new categorization would bring a sense of belongingness to non-Chinese teachers like them and raise awareness of these groups of teachers that are currently emerging in Hong Kong.

- ***Roles & Expectations in Contrast to NETs & LETs***

In terms of how their roles as English teachers differed compared to LETs and NETs, the pre-service teachers agreed that their strengths were valuable as they understood the local curriculum more than their NET counterparts, meaning they could meet the local students needs and better prepare them. However, they also knowledged that this was an insignificant comparison as NETs role in the school differ from the start. On the other hand, compared to LETs, they were able to provide a more natural English speaking environment as they had more

native-like English and because they could not speak Cantonese, students would have to communicate in English. Abby believed that Non-Chinese teachers like herself were able to provide “best of both worlds”. Likewise, strengths of LETs, such as being able to use students’ L1 to enhance learning as reported by Crystal that “some of them (weaker students) need some Chinese to understand”, was a major advantage of LETs. While for NETs, an advantage they had over these pre-service teachers was the ability to provide cultural insight of the English language.

Overall, these pre-service teachers shared roles of both NETs and LETs as they were teaching the local English curriculum, performing duties and responsibilities as LETs, however, only communicating in English with students. This shows that even with native-like fluency, in terms of duties as English teachers, they lean more towards LETs. With such distinctiveness, perhaps it is necessary for a new formation of category to group these non-Chinese English teachers.

### **(3) Stakeholders Views on their Identity**

As teacher identity can be easily influenced by interaction from context, it was necessary to investigate their views on their relationship with stakeholders in schools, such as their support teachers, principals, fellow English teachers and students.

- ***Stakeholders’ expectation***

As a crucial part of the FE is to learn from mentors and to experience the lifestyle of teachers’ first-hand, it is also a powerful factor in shaping their identities based on expectations and roles



suggested by these stakeholders. When asked how other English teachers, students and principal saw them as English teachers in local schools, these stakeholders generally shared a higher expectation of them because of their “nativeness in their accent”. For instance, when faced with questions related to English, these pre-service teachers would be consulted first compared to their local peers. Many of them were also questioned why they were in a local school and casually, from fellow English teachers, were recommended to apply in schools that used English as the medium of instruction or even international schools, so that they could exercise their English potential and fit in more in the school culture. Though never confirmed by Abby, on her first class, she was actually introduced as a native speaker by her support teacher. In fact, the pre-service teachers stated that they were treated similar to a NET, where they were assigned activities usually done by NETs. In Crystal’s FE experience, she was even encouraged not to use Cantonese at all.

I don’t know if they liked us more but I had a feeling that they liked native speakers more and they asked us to do like... Storytelling even if I knew a little bit of Chinese, they asked me not to use Chinese and just use English.

- ***Relationship & Social acceptance in Context***

When the pre-service teachers were first introduced to their respective classes, all of their supporting teacher introduced them as “not knowing Chinese and only English speaking”. Abby shared that her supporting teacher saw it as an opportunity that would “force students to use

English” in order to communicate with her. The pre-service teachers also shared that their students at their FE schools were surprised and curious when they saw them. Though the students responded mostly positively to their teaching, expressing their lessons were “different” compared to their normal English teachers, some students expressed that it was difficult for them to understand because they were not used to their accent, which they regarded as being “too clear” or “too fast”.

One of the main challenges when it came to teacher-student relationship, the pre-service teachers explained that it was difficult for them to connect with the students when their peers were easily interacting with them. However, they expressed that they did build a good relationship with their students gradually.

On the other hand, they described their relationship with mentors and colleagues as distant and bleak. Renee stated that her supporting teacher was “not positive” in viewing her as an English teacher in local schools leading Renee to feel that she was an “inconvenience to the school” and thus, affecting her to believe that she could not work in a local school.

From the beginning, my relationship with my support teacher was disappointing... she is an English teacher and so are we (student-teachers), but she ran the whole meeting in Cantonese for the whole hour and she refused to translate it. At the end of the meeting, she walked me out and she said, “I think the first assignment for you is to learn

Cantonese because it's very difficult for you to be a teacher if you don't know Cantonese".

Though Crystal's FE experience was not as harsh as Renee's, she described her FE school as "not knowing what to expect" because it was the school's first time seeing a non-native, non-Chinese English teacher and because of that, she was only able to do "limited things". She reflected that this made her feel as "not being helpful enough" in the school. The pre-service teachers also expressed that their peers; local pre-service teachers, had a more friendly relationship with their supporting teachers, which they associate was because of the shared L1.

Maybe my relationship with my support teacher would have been better if I could communicate in Chinese. Not knowing Cantonese became kind of like a language barrier.

Student and colleague relationship is an important aspect, especially for beginning teachers as environmental experiences contribute to the construction of their teacher identity, such as how well-accepted one is in the context. From the pre-service teachers responses, building good relationship with the students and especially their colleagues are one of their biggest challenges. The interpersonal experience within the school affects their sense of belongingness in the school community and thus, shape the construction of their teacher identity.

## Discussions

As reviewed in the literature section, the construction of teacher identity is a complex matter where different factors affect different individuals in varying degrees. From the results, the different experiences encountered by the pre-service teachers in their FE school impact them differently in constructing their teacher identity.

Interestingly, a major contrast from the finding to what is discussed in literature is how these non-Chinese pre-service teachers did not seem to struggle with authority to the language in comparison to NNEST in the English speaking context (Choi, 2007 & Braine, 2013) and the non-local pre-service teachers from the Mainland (Benson, 2012). This is an interesting phenomenon that can be explained by using Trent's (2012) concept of '*being positioned*', which refers to the influence on the position of the teacher based on the decisions made by the institution. The schools' expectations of these pre-service teachers reflect the way they were positioned in the schools, where they were already given the authority to the language due to their non-Cantonese speaking characteristic and the nativeness in their tone. Ma (2012) mentions that not knowing Cantonese is a particular trait of NETs and which is in fact regarded as one of their advantage as it forces students to speak English with them. Similarly, from the pre-service teachers' FE experiences, they were encouraged only to speak English with the students, seeing that it was more beneficial to the students. This suggests that sharing traits similar to NETs positioned these pre-service teachers the authority to the language automatically.

Another related factor that perhaps influenced these schools to hand in authority to these teachers

might be linked to ethnicity. Inbar-Lourie (2005) explains that the ambiguousness of teachers' background can lead to misconception by students that these teachers are native speakers, even if they are non-native speakers (as cited in Subtirelu, 2011), though she mentions 'students' specifically, the same can be assumed of other stakeholders in the school. This assumption can be confirmed as Crystal expressed that her FE school was unprepared to deal with non-Chinese teachers like her since it was their first time. This suggests that the lack of awareness of teachers like them, which includes knowing their cultural backgrounds led stakeholders in schools to believe that these teachers are native speakers of English. This explains why these pre-service teachers expressed that they were treated more like a NET as well, linking it back to the assumption. Therefore, due to the stakeholders' expectations and lack of knowledge of these groups of teachers, they were positioned to act more like NETs. Because of such positioning by the schools, these pre-service teachers did not have the need to prove authority to the language during their teaching.

Described as "awkward" or "in-between", it is evident that the categorization of NEST and NNEST in the ELT field is limiting, which makes it difficult to identify these groups of teachers. Moussu and Llurda explain there is still no theoretical evidence for the need to distinguish between these two categories as it is often based on individual cases and the educational context (2008 as cited in Benson, 2012). Thus, even if these teachers do not exactly fit into the categories, it is highly dependent on their individual perception of how they choose to present themselves, such as whether they want to be referred to as a NEST, NNEST or an identification

in their own terms. For instance, Renee who is comfortable with stating English as her L1 can choose to present herself as a NEST, though whether she is qualified to apply for the NET scheme is still questionable. On the other hand, Crystal, who believes that learning Cantonese would help her blend in more easily in local schools can choose to present herself as an English-speaking local teacher with limited Cantonese competencies, which is a term she self-identified with. Despite the binary categorization, there is no specific or even an urgent need to identify which category one belongs to as it is something that is internally and individually based on different factors. Thus, even though it may cause confusion to oneself and related stakeholders, it is part of identity where one has to make a choice, which contributes in constructing their teacher identity.

Similar to Benson's study (2012), these pre-service teachers felt distant from the students and even the teachers. While most of their peers saw the FE experience as a chance to relive their secondary school years, these pre-service teachers felt out of place, unable to relate to the school culture, even for the two pre-service teachers who were educated through the local system. It was soon realized that part of being a local English teacher was not only sharing the local language but also the work ethics and lifestyle that are culture-dependent. For instance, the pre-service teachers emphasized that the local English teachers were more grade-conscious compared to them, who were looking forward in incorporating more enjoyable aspects of English, that they experienced in their schooling. Because of these differences, fitting in and gaining acceptance was a struggle, which influenced some of them to only seek application at English-medium

schools or semi-international schools, such as schools with ethnic-minority students, which Abby and Crystal attended.

Based on the results, we understand that the construction of non-native, non-local English teachers' teacher identity highly depend on their self-perceived identity of who are they in the local school context, how they differ or are alike with their counterparts; NETs and LETs and how stakeholders' perception and expectations affect their teacher identity. These aspects influence each individual differently and it is dependent whether they choose to adapt to it as part of their identity or negotiate. Therefore, from the FE experience of these non-Chinese pre-service teachers and probably the first batch of these emerging teachers, the construction of teacher identity at this stage highly depends on their individual experiences and perhaps will be more legitimate when they enter into the real teaching world. However, at this point, some aspects, such as strengths and weaknesses of these teachers and responses from stakeholders on their views of these teachers have been identified in this research.

### **The Insider's Reflection**

The motivation to pursue this specific subject goes back to my own identity as a non-Chinese pre-service English teacher in Hong Kong. Like most non-Chinese and more specifically an ethnic-minority living in Hong Kong, I attended primary and secondary schools that catered to ethnic-minority students similar to Abby and Crystal. Reflecting back to my own FE experience after learning about these other non-Chinese pre-service teachers' experiences, there were many

aspects that I can empathize with. On the first day of my FE, curiosity to my cultural background, the reason why I could not converse in Cantonese and where I got my English accent were the highlights of the day. In fact, after discovering I was not Chinese, my supporting teacher went ahead and introduced me to the NET, stating that I was a NET too, which I apprehensively had to decline as I had never identified myself as a native-speaker. For the most part, I also struggled with maintaining relationship with other local teachers and students. Even though my FE school considered itself an English medium of instruction school, English classes were still heavily supported with Cantonese input and the dominant language used outside of classes was still Cantonese. Personally, for me the FE experience was a completely new culture compared to the school culture in my education years, which challenged my teacher identity, making me feel as an outsider. However, with more time in my FE, my identity came more in place as I learnt my own teaching style, my values as an educator, my strengths and how students and stakeholders in school perceived my teacher identity.

## **Limitations & Implications**

As it is only recently that non-Chinese teachers are arising, one of the limitations of this study was the limited number of participants that were available for the sampling. Moreover, these participants are all female, thus making the scope of this research even smaller. Without any male participants, it is difficult to recognize issues that may be more gender-specific. Another limitation is the limited teaching experience of these pre-service English teachers, where data is based on one FE experience. Perhaps, with more teaching experiences, overall experience of



working in local schools may result in different outcomes and opinions. Moreover, there are various aspects of these non-Chinese pre-service teachers that can be considered for further research. For instance, competitiveness of these teachers' compared to LETs when applying for local English teaching positions or hiring practices in general as previous research has pointed that discrimination in hiring practices for NNEST exists (Braine, 2013).

In terms of implications, a significant role for teacher education programs has been identified. The research suggests teacher education programs to be more proactive in providing support that is necessary for these non-native, non-local pre-service English teachers, thus they are better prepared in dealing with challenges that they might face in local schools. As most of their challenges were linked to their inability to speak Cantonese, perhaps teacher education programs in Hong Kong can consider providing Cantonese language courses for these teachers or courses that focus on the local school-culture, thus these pre-service teachers are able to overcome issues that were discovered in this research and increase their adaptability. Having experienced the local teaching context, these pre-service teachers should remain open and positive to new experiences and embrace the situation they might confront. It is also important for them to adopt a more malleable teacher identity as the schools they enter in the future may have different expectations of them.

## **Conclusion**

In the ELT field, the identity of English teachers rests on the distinctive categories of NEST and

NNEST, however, when one does not exactly fit into the categories, the construction of teacher identity can be a perplexing process. For these non-Chinese pre-service teachers, who are likely the first generation, there are limited sources they can rely on to construct their identities, thus, at the pre-service stage, it is their personal experience in their FE that plays a significant role in the construction of their teacher identity. The aim of this research paper is to investigate how non-Chinese pre-service English teachers construct their teacher identity and from the experiences of these teachers, it is understood that the construction of their teacher identity is heavily influenced by their personal experience during the practicum and their own choice to accept the positioning or negotiate depending on their internal beliefs of who they are as a teacher.

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