

Article

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**The Investments and Identities of In-Service Non-native English Teachers
That Relate to Their Teaching Careers****Melinda Kong**

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ABSTRACT

With globalisation, in-service non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) from English as foreign language settings, are obtaining their further professional development from English-speaking countries. However, there seems to be little research on these in-service teachers' investments (a concept that builds on motivation), identities and views in studying in English-speaking contexts. This research aims to contribute knowledge to this gap by examining the investments, identities and perceptions of 14 in-service teachers of English from Korea, Japan, Taiwan and China, in the United Kingdom. Data were obtained mainly from the participants' individual responses to interview questions. Among others, findings suggest that although the participants invested in English, with some thinking that they could learn listening and speaking, vocabulary and English culture better from native English speakers (NESs), and many liked to socialise with NESs, many did not seek help from NESs for their written assignments because NESs may also have problems with writing. Since they were concurrently invested in teaching, they also invested in their Master's degree in teaching and preferred to be in groups with both non-native English speakers (NNESTs) and NESs to learn about various teaching methods. The majority seem to disinvest from Western classroom discourse by remaining silent in class. These findings suggest that the participants prioritize their investments, that in their identities as NNESTs, there are perceived power relations with NESs, and that the identity of NNESTs as proficient English speakers is increasing in prominence. The study suggests introducing empowering discourses and discussions that involve NNESTs as sources of information.

KEYWORDS: Investments, Identity, Native and Non-native Speakers / Teachers of English, Power Relations

INTRODUCTION

In countries that position English as a foreign language (EFL), for instance, Korea, Japan, Taiwan and China, the language is used mainly in restricted domains such as education and tourism (Williams, 2005). With global mobility, non-native English-speaking (NNEs) individuals from these contexts, are obtaining their further education from English-speaking settings (e.g. the United Kingdom / UK and Australia). However, there is also an increased appreciation of different models of English language teaching and learning, and a movement away from assumptions that native English speakers (NESs) from English-speaking contexts are ideal models for learning English (Kong, 2019). Instead, both native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) are viewed as having their respective advantages and disadvantages. Among others, NESTs are perceived as better in fluency (listening and speaking), possessing knowledge of the target culture, using appropriate pronunciation, vocabulary and idiomatic expressions, while NNESTs understand better the local education systems and culture of their students (Kong, 2019; Medgyes, 2017; Pae, 2017).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Investment and Identity

Individuals' motivation towards NESs and NNEs is connected to their attitude in improving their linguistic proficiency (Pae, 2017). In examining learners' perceptions towards NESs, Peirce (1995), later known as Norton (2013), suggests the idea of investment, a concept that builds on motivation. According to Peirce (1995),

... [An individual's] motivation to speak is mediated by investments that may conflict with the desire to speak. Paradoxically, perhaps the decision to remain silent or ... speak may both constitute forms of resistance to inequitable social forces. (pp. 19 - 20)

Investment proposes that individuals are organising the manners in which they relate to their identities and the social world. Although identity is complex, it is a site of struggle, multifaceted, linked to contexts and power relations (Norton, 2013) and connected to how one sees oneself (Santoro, 2002). Johnston (2003) and Teng (2019) add that identities are constructed and negotiated in various social interactions and practice. Teng proposes understanding EFL students' needs, expectations, social interactions and actions in socio-cultural communications in order to promote effective learning and develop suitable pedagogy and curriculum. These individuals' expectations are related to their investments, and people invest their time and efforts to fulfill their needs and expectations (Kong, 2019).

From the perspectives of EFL teaching and learning, Teng (2019) carried out a case study with three Chinese university students in China. His findings suggest that participants' identity shaped their investment in learning English, and vice versa. He asserts that his participants displayed non-participative characteristics as they chose to listen to their teacher quietly. Further, when the learners did not perceive the benefits connected to learning a language, they failed to have expectations or aspirations for future learning. However, Teng (2019) did not acknowledge that another plausible interpretation is that students can appropriate class participation in their own terms by engaging in discussions silently and mentally. As raised in Kong (2019), some students can be observing and listening attentively to their classmates' exchange of ideas. The findings of her study with both English as a second language (ESL) and EFL postgraduate students in Australia suggest that her participants chose not to opt out from discussions by reflecting upon classroom exchanges as they occurred. Her findings are similar to Gu's (2004) study on the perspectives of NNEs students in China who were learning in silence in class. Although Teng (2019) and Gu (2004) carried out their investigations in China, and Kong (2019) conducted her research in Australia, these studies provide insights into how NNEs EFL students perceive opportunities to (not) speak and practise using English in class.

Although investment has received significant attention in EFL learning and teaching (Teng, 2019), the focus has been on learners. There seems to be a lack of research on the investments and identities of in-service NNESTs who are teaching the language. As an attempt to fill this perceived gap in knowledge, this research aims to explore the complicated interface between these in-service teachers' thought processes and investments which can be linked to different facets of their identity (Kong, 2019; Norton, 2013). The current study explores the investments of individuals who possess multifaceted identities, among others, as in-service NNESTs (from EFL contexts) who were pursuing their further education in an English-speaking country, as advanced language learners (as they continued to learn the language), as postgraduate students, and/or as NNESTs. The assumption is that the participants who were in-service NNESTs were more successful language learners when compared to their own students because they used to teach English to students in their home countries. Further, previous research (e.g. Kong, 2019) suggests that NNESTs continue learning English their whole lifetime.

Norton (2013) proposes that individuals will only make investments in English if they perceive positive returns to their efforts, such as symbolic (e.g. international friendship and communication) and material resources (e.g. finance and careers). When people invest in English, they are also investing in their social identities. Norton also postulates that people's social identities can be elucidated from the angle of power relations that affect social structures. The relations of power influence interactions between different speakers of English. An awareness of investment in a language sheds light on how power relations restrict the opportunities for NNESTs to use and speak English (Teng & Bui, 2018). In refining and extending Norton's notion of investment, Kong (2019) suggests that NNESTs may not only invest in English, but also in their expectations of obtaining a Master's degree, in their teaching careers and in their identities. Her findings suggest that her participants desired strongly to be proficient in English, but concurrently, maintained some aspects of their sociocultural identities and cultural values in Australia (Kong, 2019). The NNESTs in her study were interpreted as complex social beings with conflicting expectations, desires and needs, which cause them to keep renegotiating their identities (Kong, 2014) and have changing priorities at different times based on their different investments. The current study examines how EFL in-service NNESTs' views of their identities (as NNESTs) and NESs influence their investments in continuing to pursue both language and teaching developments in the UK. It examines the extent to which in-service NNESTs invest in English, their Master's degrees, teaching careers and identities, as well as engage in negotiations of power in an English-speaking country. It explores factors that affect their investments and identity construction in an English-speaking setting. This study is important because it provides further understanding of EFL in-service NNESTs' reticence in class in the context of their negotiations of investments and identities in an English-speaking country.

Factors Affecting Investment and Identity Construction

Teng (2019) highlights that individuals' investments are dynamic, similar to their identity construction. These individuals' symbolic capital, such as their previous knowledge, mother tongues and culture, affect their investments in learning practices. Individuals' investments are also affected by their views on the advantages gained through the language. Teng also suggests that it is important to investigate the personal and social aspects of identity by exploring how individuals' identities are constructed in connection to these persons' values and views, social interactions and socio-cultural settings.

Darvin and Norton (2016) argue that individuals can make investments in or disinvest from collective endeavour and shared practices. These people can exercise agency by actively constructing their identities at times and in certain contexts (Kong, 2019). They can relate with

others and build networks, but also seek imagined communities which can reproduce inequities. Consequently, these individuals' imaginations and desires need to be interrogated. The notion of investment assists in capturing existing inequities, scaffolding more equitable imaginations, and addressing inequitable learning and language practices. Individuals also need to overcome obstacles to agentive possibilities and cultivate characteristics that contribute to not only their personal benefits but also the greater good (Darvin & Norton, 2016).

Although some individuals are more willing to improve and practise using the language by exercising agency in joining relevant social networks (Kong, 2019), some NNESTs may still be affected by discourse concerning native speaker fallacy, with the assertion that NESTs are ideal models in English teaching and learning (Braine, 2010). In relation to this myth, Kong (2019) carried out a study on the investments, expectations and overall experiences of eight NNEs in-service teachers from Brunei, Taiwan, China, Indonesia and Vietnam who were pursuing their professional development in Australia. Among others, her findings suggest that most of the in-service teachers seemed to encounter challenges related to perceived relations of power because they appeared to link power with language proficiency. It can be interpreted that the participants viewed themselves to be lacking power when compared to NESs because they thought of themselves as having lower language proficiency. This is seen especially when some of them initially aimed to achieve "native-like" proficiency. In particular, one participant's desire was linked to her investment in teaching and learning English in China. It can be inferred from her aspiration that NESs with native-speaking proficiency are regarded as possessing status and power in her home country. The idea of power may also be interpreted as projected by NESs at times, especially when the NNESTs cannot understand NESs who are observed as speaking very fast, and subsequently feel that they have poor proficiency in English (Kong, 2019).

METHODOLOGY, PARTICIPANTS AND SETTING

The current study was carried out among in-service teachers of English who were pursuing their further professional development in an MA TESOL programme (Master of Arts in Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages) at a top-ranked university in the United Kingdom. The programme lasts for one year for full-time international students. In order to recruit participants, MA TESOL international students in the programme were briefed and invited to be involved in the research. Volunteers came from 14 NNESTs who originated from EFL countries such as Korea, Japan, Taiwan and China. These participants had different lengths of teaching experiences (from 3 months to 20 years). Data were collected qualitatively mainly from participants' individual responses to semi-structured interview questions and informal conversations up to 45 minutes. The questions elicited the in-service teachers' background details, their attitudes towards English, length of teaching experience, their views towards NESs and their interactions with NESs. The central problem to be investigated in this research is related to EFL in-service NNESTs' various investments that are connected to English, their teaching careers, their MA TESOL degrees and their identities as NNESTs. In particular, the study has the objectives of researching this problem in relation to these NNESTs' perceived characteristics of NESs and power relations in their interactions and how their classroom discourses are structured.

The main research question that guides this article is:

1. How are EFL in-service NNESTs' investments related to their interactions with NESs?

In relation to their investments, a subsidiary question under the main research question is:

- (i) How do these in-service teachers structure their opportunities to speak inside the classroom?

In order to answer the research questions, the qualitative data were analysed and coded based on keywords and theories related to investment and identity, as well as factors affecting investment and identity construction, as discussed in the preceding section. The emerging themes were also derived from commonalities among codes and patterns found across participants. The themes exemplify key issues from the literature that has been previously discussed.

FINDINGS

In order to answer the main research question adequately, firstly, the participants' investments in English, their English-teaching careers, their MA TESOL degrees and their identities as NNES/Ts are examined by looking at how important English is to them (Kong, 2019), and secondly, their views of interactions with NESs. They are perceived as having an investment in English if they think that the language is important and continued to invest their time and efforts in learning the language when they were teaching (Kong, 2019) in their respective countries prior to joining the MA TESOL programme. Their investment in English is closely linked to their investments in their Master's degrees and careers since they taught the language and were pursuing their further education in MA TESOL. Their interactions with NESs are reported in terms of findings related to their perspectives and identities as NNES/Ts on NESs (whether they think that they can learn better from NESs, like to socialise with NESs and to have NESs correct them, prefer to work in groups with only NESs and seek help from NESs). Findings to the subsidiary research question are reported in terms of whether the participants invest in (by speaking spontaneously) or disinvest from and resist common Western classroom practice (by being silent). All the findings are reported in the following sections.

Investment in English

All the participants had high investments in English because they regarded English as either very important or important. The majority of the participants thought that English is important because of symbolic resources (Norton, 2013), with findings reported as: the language being an international language, enabling one to communicate with friends from other countries, and granting access to a wider range of knowledge. The participants also felt that English is important because of access to material resources (Norton, 2013), by giving instances such as earning more money when teaching English in one's country and increasing one's career prospects.

Investments in English Teaching and MA TESOL degrees

All 14 participants had teaching experiences before attending the MA TESOL programme. The length of their teaching experiences ranged from 3 months to 20 years. Their investment in teaching is closely related to their investment in English, as they continued to learn the language when they were teaching. Of these 14 participants, 12 considered that teaching English helped them to continue learning the language, while they were teaching or preparing for their lessons. R10 gave an interesting comment: "To teach is to learn." Three participants commented that they learned more about the language while preparing for their lessons. R14 said that she had to study the language in order to teach effectively.

The 12 participants gave different ways in which teaching English had helped them to continue learning the language. Firstly, four participants reported that they gained a better knowledge of English and its usage. R1, R5 and R14 said that they gained better understanding of particular aspects of the language such as grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. R10 learned to differentiate British English from Japanese English. Secondly, three participants said that because they were teaching English, they had to use it for speaking and writing. R1 said that she had to be "accurate in speaking and writing." Similarly, R4 reported that she was made aware of her accuracy in speaking and writing, and tried to improve her skills. R8 stated that

teaching improved her proficiency in the language. In addition to personal language command, three participants benefited from the language use and misuse of their students. For example, R13 pointed out that she could analyse her students' language use as well as learning styles. According to her, "I can analyse good students and not good students and find out what characteristics make better learners." (Note: Quotations from participants have not been edited and are presented verbatim for authenticity purposes). R2 stated that her students' improvement in English motivated her. R4 had to learn more vocabulary to help her students. Lastly, three participants said that their English improved because they had access to material and human resources while teaching. R1 stated that she was "[e]xposed to English when looking for teaching materials." R8 said that teaching helped her to improve her proficiency because she had "...access to different, new resources [and] ... English-speaking colleagues." R6 noted that she was shown how to learn English effectively. This can be interpreted as something that she gained from teaching resources.

From these findings, it can be interpreted that the participants have been obliged by their role and identities as NNESTs to not only focus on their students and their learning, but also to improve in the language. Furthermore, in their function as teachers, they have had access to material and human resources in their responsibility as teachers, which they did not have before. It can be seen that, other than their investments in English, they had investments in teaching that were closely connected to the language. Besides investing their time and efforts in improving their language proficiency while teaching, they also invested in their teaching by pursuing their MA TESOL degrees in the UK.

Investments and Interactions with NESs

In order to understand further the participants' investments in English, their teaching and Master's degrees and identities, as well as factors that influence their interactions with NESs, the following findings report their perspectives (as NNESTs) on NESs, their group preference in class, whether they sought assistance from NESs in their assignments, and how they structure their speaking opportunities inside class.

• *Identities as NNESTs and Perspectives on NESs*

With regard to their identities as NNESTs and in-service NNESTs, eight participants said that they could learn English better from NESs as compared to other NNESTs. Specifically, seven participants alleged that NESs could use words accurately, for instance, by using appropriate phrases in different circumstances (R2) and colloquial expressions (R6). R7 and R16 stated that they could learn about the English culture from NESs. R2 and R7 pointed out that "cultural difference ... is very interesting." R14 highlighted "the authentic use of English, while R4 stated that "I can practise actually speaking and social skills." 12 participants liked to socialise with NESs to improve their listening and speaking skills, and be exposed to a wider repertoire of words. 14 participants reported liking NESs to correct their choice of words for appropriacy in varied situations (e.g. R5) and for better communication (e.g. R13 and R14). All the foregoing participants, except for one, also reported liking NESs to correct their pronunciation so that they would not make the same mistakes repeatedly (e.g. R1), to be understood (e.g. R5) and to facilitate communication (e.g. R6 and R7). Although R4 did not want to repeat the same mistakes, she concurrently did not want to be embarrassed by NESs who may correct her without giving her any face.

• *Liking to Socialise with NESs but not Preferring to Work in Groups with only NESs*

Although 12 participants liked to socialise with NESs, only one of them preferred to work in groups with only NESs. In contrast, three of them preferred to work with those who speak the same language and eight of them preferred to work in groups with mixed nationalities, which

could include both NESs and NNEs. The same pattern can be observed for those who thought that they could learn English better from NESs. Eight participants thought that they could learn English better from NESs, liked NESs to correct their choice of words and pronunciation, yet none of them preferred to work in groups with only NESs. Seven of these eight preferred to work with groups with mixed nationalities, while the remaining one preferred to work in groups with those who speak the same language as them.

- ***Not Seeking Help from NESs in Writing their Assignments***

As NNEs, a number of participants thought that they could learn better from NESs and liked to socialise with NESs in order to improve their listening and speaking skills, yet they did not seek NESs' help, especially in writing their assignments. Eight participants thought that they could learn English better from NESs compared to NNEs, liked to socialise with NESs to improve their listening and speaking skills, but only three of them sought help from NESs for their writing and five of them preferred to learn academic conventions on their own.

Disinvesting from and Resisting Common Western Practice by Being Silent in Class

The findings also suggest that most participants may disinvest from and resist assumed Western classroom participation by being silent when they are expected to speak spontaneously or when a native-speaking lecturer extends a general invitation to the class. 14 participants preferred to speak only when the lecturer asked them to and called on them personally. Furthermore, 13 participants preferred the lecturers to initiate any communication between them. One of the reasons may be that they lacked self-confidence and they did not want to be embarrassed. This is particularly salient when 11 of them reported that their level of English was not good enough.

DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

Negotiating Priorities in Investments, Identities and Interactions with NESs

As previously mentioned, the participants were regarded as having (high) investments in English if they regarded the language as (very) important (Kong, 2019). To reiterate, the majority of the participants thought that English is important because of symbolic resources (Norton, 2013); the examples that they gave were that the language is an international language that enables them to communicate with friends from other countries, and grants them access to a wider range of knowledge. The participants also felt that English is important because of access to material resources (Norton, 2013) by giving instances such as earning more money when teaching English in one's country and increasing one's career prospects. Concurrently, the participants also had investments in teaching that were closely related to English, which were connected to their identities as NNEs/Ts. The majority, 12 out of 14 participants who had teaching experiences, considered that teaching English helped them to continue learning English. They also invested in their teaching careers by investing considerable money and efforts to obtain a Master's degree in TESOL, with identities as postgraduate students, at a reputable university in the UK.

In terms of their views of interaction with NESs, as indicated earlier, the majority of them, who have identities as NNEs and in-service NNEs, liked to socialise with NESs to improve their listening and speaking, and did not mind being corrected in their choice of words and pronunciation. Slightly more than half of the participants also thought that it was better to learn English from NESs compared to NNEs. However, most of these participants did not want to work as the sole NNE in a group of NESs. The findings suggest that despite having (high) investments in English, these participants may not necessarily seek the opportunity to learn the language from NESs (Kong, 2019). For instance, although R11 "would like to have [NESs'] correction[s]", she did not have the opportunities. Like the postgraduate students in Kong (2019), the current participants invested not only in English, as seen in their identities as

advanced English learners (who continued to learn the language when they were teaching), but also prioritised their investments in their Master's degrees and their identities as postgraduate students, as suggested in their priority not to socialise in order to improve their listening and speaking, but to complete their written assignments with accurate referencing.

Moreover, the participants were invested in teaching the language and their identities as NNESTs. They may prefer not to work in groups with only NESs because group work is about much more than opportunities to learn language, and learning English may not be their chief focus when working in groups on their MA course. They may be more interested in learning about the teaching experiences of course mates who come from different parts of the world, and it is an eye-opener to learn of diverse education systems, beliefs and practices. At such times, their investment in learning English seems to be compromised but it is because they prioritise their investment in English-teaching by learning about different teaching methods and experiences from not only NESTs but also NNESTs. Hence, the participants had options in their identities that they constantly negotiate and renegotiate; they were not only advanced learners of English but also in-service NNESTs and postgraduate students in TESOL.

Power Relations with NESs and the Increasing Identity of NNESTs as Proficient Speakers

In addition, like the NNESTs in Kong (2019), the participants may not find it easy to interact with NESs. Eight participants thought that it was better to learn English from NESs because of what they possessed (e.g., having a better knowledge of English and its usage). The perception that these participants have regarding NESs may influence how they behave because NESs may project a subtle form of power although they do not do it on purpose (Kong, 2019). This is highlighted by R14 who stated that it was better to learn from NESs because they possessed a wide repertoire of expressions and accurate pronunciation. Yet, at the same time, she noted: "But I sometimes feel that I can't catch up with NESs' conversation, when I talk with only NESs because it's too fast." The issue of power can be implied from R14's comments, where NESs are seen as "more powerful" because they can speak and understand English more quickly than her.

The responses of those who did not like to socialise with NESs and thought it was not necessarily better to learn English from them also reflected issues of power relations. According to R1, "...some NESs are nice, but some (especially when they're sitting in a group) are quite exclusive." R5 added,

If I have friends who I have many things in common and if they happen to be NESs, it would be very lucky for me. But I don't want to make or find NES friends deliberately for the purpose of English learning.

Although there are many advantages of learning English from NESs, there are also drawbacks. Moreover, it can be seen that quite a number of the participants were also invested in the identities of NNESTs, as they can learn the language from NNESTs who are proficient users (Medgyes, 2017). This is reflected in R8's comments: "[I can learn] ...correct use of words, correct pronunciation from NESs. On the other hand, Japanese speakers share the same problems and so this helps me, too." Her point seems to be strengthened by R1 and R10 who said that NNESTs were more tolerant. R10 added that he could not contribute much to a conversation with NESs because he felt that they had greater power relations. He said, "I have language anxiety in front of NESs." Therefore, it was easier for him to communicate with NNESTs. He noted further that there were many NNESTs around him who could speak grammatically correct English; some with the standard of NESs. R10's point is also supported by R11's remark that "...we can learn a variety of expressions from English-speaking people all over the world..."

R1 stressed that there was no difference between learning English from NESs and NNEs. She pointed out that the difference might not lie between whether a person was NES or NNE. She said that she could learn a lot from friends regardless of whether they were NESs or not. According to her, it all depended on the personalities of the people (Kong, 2019). She highlighted further that some NESs were “exclusive”, but if the proficiency level of NNEs were too low, it would also be difficult to communicate with them even if they were more tolerant than NESs. R5 made a pertinent point, especially in showing that two of the advantages of having NNEs as teachers are that they share the same language, and also, they are good models of successful learners (Medgyes, 2017).

The findings also suggest that some of the participants are affected by the native speaker myth (Kong, 2019) by desiring to be native-like, wanting to be at a “more native-speaker like level” and asserting that “only NESs know accurate pronunciation”. NESs are considered by some of them as models in learning English (Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2014), as seen in their use of adjectives such as “appropriate”, “accurate”, “good”, “proper” and “correct” to describe how NESs could help them in their choice of words. It can thus be interpreted that NESs use “appropriate”, “accurate”, “good”, “proper” and “correct” expressions. Nevertheless, the participants’ perceptions may be affected by the context because they were in an English-speaking country and they wanted to be understood by NESs in their communication. However, learning English from NESs may not necessarily be easy because some NESs may be exclusive especially when they are in groups (R1). Likewise, there may be restrictions in the participants’ contribution to conversations with NESs due to perceptions of power relations (Kong, 2019), which places limitations in opportunities to practise speaking skills (R10). Furthermore, it may not necessarily be crucial to actively exercise agency to look for NESs to speak English because one can learn from NNEs who speak grammatically correct English (R10). In fact, according to Ives-Keeler in 2014, the British Council estimated that there were 700 to 800 million people who spoke English as a second language and approximately one billion who used it as a foreign language. This number was more than the number of NESs who added up to approximately 400 million people. In addition, there are advantages of learning from NNEs because they may share the same language learning problems (R8) and mother tongue (R5), they are generally more tolerant (R1 and R10) and easier to communicate with (R10), and they are models of “successful target language learners” (R5).

Investments in MA TESOL degrees and Help from NESs may not be Necessary

When it comes to their investments in their MA TESOL degrees, the participants may think that it is not an advantage to seek help from NESs, especially in the matter of writing assignments. The participants who did not seek help from NESs in writing their assignments were the same people who reported that they could learn better from NESs and who liked socialising with NESs in order to improve their listening and speaking skills. It may be the case that these participants thought that NESs could help them in improving their listening and speaking skills but not in their writing skills. The participants did not seek help from NESs in order to improve their writing probably because NESs may also have problems with writing (Kong, 2019), especially in an academic context where a particular register and style is required, especially with regard to academic conventions. This point is made by R6 who commented that it might not be necessarily better to learn from NESs for academic purposes because NNEs could be just as good as NESs in academic English.

Listening, Instead of Speaking in Class

As mentioned earlier, the findings suggest that, as postgraduate NNEs students, the participants may learn actively, albeit in a silent manner in class, as with the case in Kong’s (2019) study of in-service NNEs in Australia. Nine participants reported that they listened and learnt from

others. This finding supports the hypothesis that these NNEs students may disinvest from the common Western academic practice of contributing ideas verbally and spontaneously in the classroom (Kong, 2014) by setting up a counter-discourse (Norton, 2013) and challenging the Western expectation that they will speak in the classroom. Instead, they structured this communication opportunity differently by using it to listen to the classroom exchange and reflect upon it as it occurs. They seemed to be exercising agency to a certain extent by resisting Western academic conventions and appropriating classroom participation in their own terms by engaging in discussions silently and mentally (Kong, 2019). According to R10, “I want to express my opinion after thinking deeply. So, I need time to think than other friends need.”

Another possibility is that they prefer to express their opinions only if they have something meaningful or correct to contribute. This could be because they come from countries where there is a strong emphasis on success in examinations (and therefore, correct answers) [Kim-Renaud, 2002, Moriguchi & Pfeiffer, 2002, Ting, 2002; Wyatt, 2002]. Therefore, it is highly likely that the desire to be accurate and correct has previously been cultivated in them. This can be seen in R4’s comments: “Sometimes I just don’t know what goes wrong. I seldom have questions in my mind, either I think it’s right or I don’t understand the course content.”

Furthermore, there were other coursemates who would contribute spontaneously, and these coursemates were usually NESs. According to R14, “I believe ‘just stating your opinion’ is not necessarily meaningful. So, what’s the point of speaking out? Besides there are some coursemates who are always happy with speaking out.” This may indicate that the participants believe that what one says in a discussion is not meaningful until a final ‘answer’ is arrived at. In other words, what is said in a discussion as part of a learning process may not be viewed as important as the correct answer arrived at. They may focus more on the product rather than the process (Phan, 2008) where there may be false starts and mistakes.

CONCLUDING WORDS AND IMPLICATIONS

In line with features of qualitative research, the current research does not aim for generalisations of findings. The participants’ various investments in English, in obtaining MA TESOL degrees and in gaining different views on teaching have to be seen as connected to their investments in their English-teaching careers and identities as NNESTs when they return home (Kong, 2019). However, these in-service NNESTs may make strategic investments (Kong, 2019); at times, their priority is to invest in their Master’s degrees (which were obtained through passing their assignments, and not through socializing with NESs); if they were to fail any subject in their Master’s degree, they would need to pay additional fees to repeat the subject. This study extends Norton’s (2013) concept of investment by proposing that in-service NNESTs can invest strategically because they have various investments other than learning English. They may prioritise their investment to complete their Master’s degree in a timely manner, without any financial repercussions, and during these times, they may prefer not to actively socialise with NESs. Their investment in their Master’s degree is directly related to their investment in their teaching careers. They may also choose to be silent in class, as a counter-discourse to Western classroom expectations (Kong, 2019) despite being motivated (Norton, 2013). The participants in this study differ from Norton’s research because the in-service NNESTs’ had options of identities other than English language learners, they were also in-service NNESTs who had investments in their Master’s degrees and teaching careers.

It can also be seen from the current research that, although the participants possess (high) investments in English and continue learning the language their entire lifetime (many even when they were teaching), there may be perceptions of power relations that discourage these NNEs EFL in-service teachers’ actual interaction with NESs while pursuing further education in an English-speaking context. Since some of these NNEs may be affected by native speaker

myth (Braine, 2010), seek imagined communities in which they become native-speaker-like, and are affected by power relations, a practical implication is that, teacher educators can introduce discourses that can empower them (Kong, 2019). Further, teacher educators need to be aware of NNEs' cultural and linguistic capital, and respond appropriately to their unequal lived realities (Darvin, 2015). They need to understand the restrictions and possibilities of TESOL classroom communities and institutions, and deal with power relations in class. NNEs in-service teachers can reconstruct their relationships with others to have more powerful identities (Norton, 2017).

Since the participants did not want to work only in a group of NESs, so that they may learn about various teaching experiences (including those of NNEs) throughout the world, the TESOL classroom needs to be a space to exchange ideas respectfully between NNEs and NESs who are pursuing further TESOL development (Phan, 2008). Teacher educators and the classroom community need to provide the necessary legitimacy to the contributions of NNEs and treat them as intellectual and cultural resources (Morita, 2004). Teacher educators can include discussions that involve NNEs as knowledge sources (Kong, 2019). They need to encourage these students to share their linguistic and cultural differences and experiences, and conceptualise their backgrounds as positive pedagogical resources (Lutersz, 2011). These strategies may help the NNEs in-service teachers contribute their ideas orally since they are familiar with the content of discussion. The strategies may also assist them in appreciating the value of questioning, critical engagement with ideas and extended discussions (Kong, 2019). Additionally, if and when necessary, teacher educators can call these in-service teachers by name personally in order to elicit responses from them.

Both NNEs and NESs can contribute their expertise, experiences (Kong, 2019; Phan, 2008) and reflections on teaching and their relationships with English (Oda, 2017). Teacher educators can form groups that involve both NESs and NNEs so that they can support and learn from one another (Phan, 2008). Some class sessions can be used to raise awareness among NESs concerning issues that affect NNEs, and discuss what these NNEs can contribute to the TESOL classroom community, such as the cultural and social aspects of English teaching and learning, and linguistic needs and challenges in different countries (Brady & Gulikers, 2004, Kong, 2019). Likewise, NNEs can benefit from NESs as linguistic, cultural and social resources in English-speaking environments (Carrier, 2003).

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