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Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers and Self-Appreciation: How Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers Can Gain Equity by Learning to Appreciate Themselves

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Abstract: This research paper explores how non-native English-speaking teachers can consider using their multilingualism and transnationalism as assets in creating competitive portfolios fit for the 21st century linguistic marketplace. This enhancement in the portfolio to attract credit as ‘investors of the self’ is an aspect of human capital that can be utilized by non-native English-speaking teachers to enhance their self-esteem. This, in turn, can encourage potential investors to view non-native English-speaking teachers as relevant players in a global landscape that appreciates linguistic diversity and pluralism, as well as transnational experience. This research was conducted by performing interviews with non-native English-speaking teachers and an analysis of website 2.0 sources, aiming to gain insights into the opinions of non-native English-speaking teachers regarding their human capital and how new approaches can aid their equity within the field of English language teaching. The results demonstrated a desire in teachers to utilize their inherent skillsets comprising multilingual and transnational capabilities.

Keywords: non-native English-speaking teachers; human capital; plurilingualism; transnationalism



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1. Introduction

At the heart of this research lies the issue of non-native English-speaking teacher (NNEST) equity within the field of English language teaching (ELT). This paper aims to address the insidious structure of inequality that NNESTs face by putting forward a hypothesis under which NNESTs could be responsible for enhancing their professional legitimacy based on the accumulation of credit for their personal portfolios (a collection of examples and evidence to showcase one’s experience, capability, and potential for employment and professional development) and the enhancement of their self-esteem. I also seek to discover NNESTs’ opinions on their responsibility for enhancing their professional legitimacy and whether they would embrace such a concept. Credit accumulation is related to NNESTs embracing pedagogic change that suits their histories, skills, and linguistic trajectories. This could, in turn, enhance their self-esteem and see them become vital players in the ELT industry, which is evolving with the changing linguistic landscape of the 21st century. There have been calls for legitimacy for NNESTs [1–4], and research has been conducted into their skillsets [5–7], how they are perceived by students [8,9], their identity [10], and how they suffer from low self-esteem [4,11,12]. However, this research considers the subjectivity of NNESTs from a different angle, one which seems increasingly relevant in the 21st century and the changing way in which we promote ourselves as worthy competitors in the global market.

It is a reality that NNESTs are yet to achieve equity within ELT, so new insights into how this gap between them and their native English-speaking teacher (NEST) counterparts can be narrowed are needed. This paper aims to put forward progressive methods for NNESTs to gain equity that do not hinge on the dichotomizing of native and non-native

teachers. The NNEST perspectives offered by this study give insights into NNESTs' self-esteem, professional portfolios, competition, and advocacy, which demonstrate whether there is a desire to explore new methods for enhancing NNESTs' portfolios to become more creditworthy and whether this is a feasible means to gain equity in the NNESTs' chosen field. Focusing on NNESTs and the socio-historical surroundings in which they work is vital to understanding their realities; thus, NNESTs' insights, experiences, and opinions are shared here as indicators as to how viable their 'appreciation of the self' is. Just as the socio-historical positions of native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) have hitherto benefited NESTs within the ELT industry, the same can and perhaps should now be attributed to NNESTs, due to the linguistic landscape demanding it. This is not to negate the effectiveness and position of NESTs within ELT but to attribute to them changes that can be made on their part, particularly in the form of multilingualism and an understanding of trans-local cultures and identities. The future of ELT must embrace changes in social and linguistic landscapes, and NNESTs are ideally placed to exploit this.

2. Literature Review

2.1. NNESTs

A notable study conducted on NNESTs was carried out by [3], who studied the characteristics of both NNESTs and NESTs, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of both and highlighting a period of research that focused on the strengths of NNESTs and what they can bring to the classroom [6,7] What Mahboob [10] calls the NNEST lens has been the recent focus in NNEST research, and this is characterized by a multilingual, multinational, and multicultural perspective on NNESTs and the quest for their advocacy in the field of English language teaching [7,13–15]. Despite the positive connotations in NNEST research, NNESTs have traditionally been seen as inauthentic representatives of the English language in the monolingual environment of ELT. Their ability to benefit from the other languages they know has often been ignored or seen as leading to linguistic inaccuracy in the chosen language and even contamination [16]. Galloway [17] offered an insight into this indiscreet discrimination in a study of a qualified multilingual NNEST in Japan who was forced to take on a 'fake American' identity as a strategy to avoid the perils of being an NNEST in Japan. Another example of this mimicking comes from Perry's [18] research into a Filipino NNEST working in China who adopted an Australian accent, encouraged by his employers, to seem more 'native'. The participant began to believe himself in this adopted identity and felt shame towards his non-nativeness as a teacher. These serve as examples of what lengths it is sometimes necessary to go to in order to 'fit in' within various ELT institutions.

Recent research into NNESTs has focused on identity and the crises in self-confidence that NNESTs generally suffer. Lee, Schutz, and Van Vlack [12] studied NNESTs' insecurities and particularly their lack of self-confidence stemming from a perceived deficiency in communication skills. The strategies that their Korean participants developed included maintaining self-confidence by accepting their limitations, meticulously preparing classes, improving their English proficiency, utilizing other sources, and creating self-support. These methods are admirable but involve NNESTs comparing themselves with their NEST counterparts on terms that are not their own and ignore some of the inherent strengths that they possess. Huang [11] studied Chinese NNESTs and how they struggled to form a professional identity in an environment of native speakerism ideology in China. She concluded that, by othering NSs exploring their own unique strengths, taking special roles in ELT, and establishing their credibility through hard work, Chinese NNESTs could achieve a relatively balanced power relationship with their NEST counterparts. Although the study recognizes how human agency and subjectivity are vital to empowering NNESTs through the NNESTs' recognition of their own skills and identities, its conclusions still rely on exceeding expectations, and the dichotomy with NESTs remains strong. It also misses what can be argued to be the biggest strength of an NNEST, that is, their multilingualism and innate ability to negotiate meaning. This paper adds to the field of NNEST identity research

by highlighting the importance of asset appreciation. Asset appreciation, in this instance, relates to the increase in value of an NNEST due to their alignment with multilingual trends and internationalism.

Research has been conducted into improving NNEST's self-esteem and self-confidence [4,11,12], and the focus has tended to be on the process of teacher education, which is a site where new teachers can be influenced. Barratt [19] (p. 198) suggests that if teacher training programs do not:

Include awareness raising, discourse inclusion, equity management, and professional development for their students, their future teachers will be condemned to the status quo or to a changing world they are not prepared for.

Studies that wish to raise such awareness include Golombek and Jordan's [20] 2005 study of trainee teachers from Taiwan who were provided with readings that challenged the native speaker myth. These readings encouraged them to imagine new identities as legitimate speakers and teachers of English by recognizing other means they possessed that established their legitimacy. Lee [21] (p. 231) also focused on teacher training and documented how she attempted to sensitize trainee English teachers "to their specific needs and strengths and prepare them for challenges they are going to encounter". Away from teacher training, Reis [22] (p. 34) suggests "through critical reflection and collaborative inquiry, NNESTs can challenge disempowering discourses and conceive of legitimizing professional identities." This study of a Russian non-native speaker of English on a graduate program in applied linguistics in the US lent a sociolinguistic element to the research on the NNEST's legitimacy. He also claimed that "it is critical for teacher educators to create mediational spaces that allow NNESTs to collaboratively challenge disempowering discourses and conceive of legitimizing professional identities" [22] (p. 48). This leads us to question the very terms NNEST or NNEST, which have implications politically and socially. Mahboob [23] explains how these terms lack neutrality and are attitudinal, and therefore are loaded with bias. Furthermore, Matsuda and Matsuda [24] reason that it is not the prefix 'non' that creates the negative image but the comparison with the 'unmarked' native speakers of English, a comparison which creates negativity towards the image of the NNES. Therefore, in the very term NNEST there is inherent bias. Thus, Rampton [25] suggests the use of 'expert speaker', Cook [26] suggests 'multicompetent speaker', and Paikeday [27] puts forward 'proficient users of English' as more neutral alternatives.

NESTs are often seen as benefiting from the symbolic power of "native English" [28]. However, they are often perceived to be monolingual, disguising their own linguistic complexity. A study by Ellis [6] of in-service NESTs working globally revealed that they too advocate plurilingual competencies that this should be recognized and administered in ELT contexts, revealing that, whilst this would be a path to advocacy for NNESTs, it is not uniformly denied by their NEST colleagues. Regarding management in ELT, there was a directive from TESOL, an international association of English language professionals (<https://www.tesol.org/> accessed on 1 September 2022), who issued an anti-discrimination statement (TESOL, 2006), stating that teachers' native status or L1 should not be the basis upon which they should be hired. However, studies conducted into ELT hiring practices [9,29,30] would indicate that such directives have not been entirely adhered to. Other issues regarding NNESTs abound, such as the discrimination of gender, race, and sexuality, and further researching into addressing these issues is welcome, but this paper seeks to focus on NNESTs in a pedagogic context where their inherent bi/multilingualism is the asset they can appreciate.

2.2. Human Capital and NNEST Equity

2.2.1. Background

There are numerous incarnations of human capital. Adam Smith initially referred to it in *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (originally published in 1776), in which he saw it as a profitable enterprise for those who invest in training and education. The Chicago school of economics, however, was the first space in which

the term was widely used [31]. At its inception and in line with Chicago school theories, human capital was considered as a means of production and investment which would reap rewards further down the line. However, it is a viable option to look beyond the traditional Chicago school explanation of human capital and consider variations of it so we may gain new ideas as to how various groups that do not have equity in their chosen fields, such as NNESTs, can focus on their own subjectivity in bringing about change from the bottom up.

In discussing concepts of human capital, which I deem relevant to the equity of NNESTs, I wish to begin with Foucault's notion of the 'entrepreneur of the self', where subjectivity is based on the model of the entrepreneur through the form of homo economicus. Influenced by Gary Becker's understanding of human capital (extending into areas such as childrearing, education, and socializing) [31,32], Foucault [33] (p. 286) describes the wide range of skills, resources, and abilities that a human possesses that influence their income. Whilst seemingly like classical liberalism, according to Foucault, this concept of human capital differs due to it applying, "economic analysis to a series of objects, to domains of behaviour or conduct which were not market forms of behaviour or conduct". All human action has become economized; therefore, human activity is purely based upon the appreciation of its own capital and subsequent income. Homo economicus is now its own enterprise, Foucault's 'entrepreneur of the self', who competes and invests in their own capital to maximize their income and psychological appreciation.

The essence of competition is at the heart of Foucault's analysis, stating that competition is the 'essential thing' of the market, and to become better market competitors, individuals must invest in themselves as competing entrepreneurs of the self. He believed that society and the market had undergone "a shift from exchange to competition in the principle of the market" [33] (p. 118). Individuals reflect the competitive nature of the market and must adhere to these principles to survive and prosper. Education, training, social relations, health, and ability are among the components that are now exposed to competitive values and a lack of adherence to this reality sees you left behind. In the spirit of competition, investments are made in all aspects of our lives and cost and risk analyses are made to assess the returns; thus, homo economicus is primarily focused on rational calculations as opposed to morality and other ethical considerations, and the bottom line dominates decisions made at an individual level. Foucault saw individuals not as consumers but as producers, entrepreneurs and investors in themselves, a position in which they can appreciate themselves and distribute their assets accordingly [33].

Moving on from Foucault's analysis, Michel Feher laid out his stance on human capital in the article 'Self-Appreciation; or, The aspirations of Human Capital' [34], which was expanded upon in 'Rated Agency: Investee Politics in a Speculative Age' [35]. Feher's concept of human capital takes inspiration from Foucault's thoughts on human capital in the Birth of Biopolitics lectures at the College de France (2010), but advances on the themes of financialization and asset appreciation. Feher explains the shift from an economy of exchange and profit to a financialized economy of speculation and credit where corporations are more concerned with appreciation and stock value rather than immediate profits. This is mirrored in an individual's accumulation of human capital, whereby future profit is not the pure objective, but rather credit or value that allows the individual to appreciate themselves. Individuals are becoming less concerned with immediate income than appreciation of their capital goods, connections, reputation, and skills. This means that ratings take precedence over the product of activities; thus, activism against financialization and neoliberalism (David Harvey defined neoliberalism as such: "Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade" (2007, p. 2)) in any given field should shift its focus to how credit is allocated and who is deemed creditworthy. With an understanding of this, activists and those who are suppressed or exploited can create a path to resistance and equity [35].

2.2.2. Theoretical Framework

Feher [34,35] argues that human capital as a form of subjectivation is about the process of asset appreciation, where the “self”, and appreciation of it, functions as the most vital of assets. Here, the subject attracts credit to themselves as part of their subject formation and they go beyond investment in human capital solely for future earnings and consider a wide range of satisfactions. As an issue of self-esteem, it is vital for the subject to accumulate capital that may enhance it or protect it from depreciation, as Feher states:

Insofar as our condition is that of human capital in a neoliberal environment, our main purpose is not so much to profit from our accumulated potential as to constantly value or appreciate ourselves—or at least prevent our own depreciation [34] (p. 27).

The impact of a subject’s conducts and the satisfaction they draw from such conducts can be measured beyond income, for if the subject has low self-esteem, then their value will have decreased.

A vital element of Feher’s analysis is the portfolio of interests, which indicates our attractiveness to creditors. Our stock value conditions our position within society as individuals, thus:

As investors in their own human capital, the subjects that are presupposed and targeted by neoliberalism can thus be conceived as the managers of a portfolio of conducts pertaining to all the aspects of their lives [34] (p. 30).

Feher’s portfolio of self-investments is designed to enhance the value of human capital, and within this portfolio childcare, health, appearance, and pensions are simultaneously enhanced. This represents a shift from profit maximization to portfolio optimization and holds the key to the those with lesser status in their fields, such as NNESTs, to take charge of their own enfranchisement.

It is important to analyze how these principles of human capital theory can be applied to NNESTs in a manner that can enhance their legitimacy within ELT and thus bring about equity within this field. Through a combination of employing then transferring the various forms of capital, establishing their positions as self-entrepreneurs, and embracing their self-esteem and creating relevant and unique portfolios, NNESTs can embark on a journey of enfranchisement that will travel alongside the transnational, fluid, and diverse linguistic pedagogies of the 21st century. As investors in themselves, NNESTs must take advantage of their transnationalism and current trends in global language use, such as multilingualism and using language and cultural knowledge as a means to communicate. They can distribute their assets according to the skills and socio-cultural trajectories they possess that align them with changes in the global linguistic landscape. The state-bound essentialization of language will seemingly be irrelevant to a subject, such as a language learner, unless they could profit from it under Foucault’s analysis of neoliberal-inspired human capital. With transnational trends influencing the use of languages, the essentialization of English will become less profitable and therefore other, more transformative, language policies will gain traction. This is where NNESTs entrepreneurialize their assets and increase their ranking in their profession [36].

3. Methodology

3.1. Interviews

To gain insights into the lived experiences and opinions of active NNESTs (the NNEST participants all self-identified as NNESTs and accepted the definition as being teachers who speak English as a second language), I chose to conduct interviews and employ website 2.0 analysis. Interviewing is a versatile research instrument that enabled me to “obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena” [37] (pp. 5–6). The participants were given space to elaborate on their accounts of events and experiences due to the qualitative nature of my interviews, which were exploratory. The semi-structured interviews allowed for this exploration but

followed an interview guide that contained a series of questions that maintained an element of structure to proceedings. They were not a ‘fact-finding’ exercise but an interpretation of the ‘how’ and ‘why’ as I explored my research questions in relation to the experiences of the participants.

The purpose of the interviews was to produce knowledge in collaboration with the participants, to hear the reflections of their experiences and opinions, and to interpret the meaning of the relevant data collected [38]. Three broad areas relevant to qualitative study in applied linguistics were all recognized in my interviews: individual lived experience, language and communication, and society and culture. The individual lived experiences of the NNEST participants offered me insights into their sociocultural histories, which lead to a reflective approach to analysis as I considered my position as a ‘native speaker’ of English. The experiences of language and communication were also vital to understanding how these concepts could play a vital role in the NNEST participants appreciating their assets and looking to improve their portfolios. Finally, society and culture were important concepts in developing insights into the social relations, identities, and power relations the NNEST participants had developed.

3.2. Participants

I conducted the interviews with 7 NNESTs working in either the Philippines or Japan (see Table 1) as this gave a more transnational perspective from which to tackle my research questions. The sampling was selective regarding the NNESTs in the Philippines because they were chosen according to their ability to give in-depth and detailed insights into the exploration of my research questions. They were in-service teachers who were working in ELT at the time of the study and had at least three years of post-qualification experience. I used selective and convenience sampling for the NNESTs in Japan, who were non-Japanese speaking NNESTs working at private language schools in the Kanto area. The NNESTs in Japan had predominantly only taught Japanese students, which offered a good insight into the differences in attitude of teachers in homogenous classrooms as opposed to those in more diverse classrooms. I myself am a British researcher working at a university in Japan, and I was identified by the participants as being a ‘native speaker’ of English, which influenced the narrative throughout the interviews. The participants positioned themselves as ‘non-native’ speakers and this may have impacted the results.

Table 1. List of participants.

| Participant | Source | Nationality |
|-------------|------------------|--------------|
| Cindy | Interview | Philippines |
| Jolie | Interview | Philippines |
| Elizaveta | Blog | Russia |
| Shina | YouTube comments | Unknown |
| Vijay | Twitter | India |
| Eugene | Interview | Philippines |
| Valerie | Interview | Philippines |
| Mindy | Interview | Philippines |
| Fay | Interview | Philippines |
| Liz | Blog | Philippines |
| Sergio | Interview | Spain |
| Moyo | Twitter | Panama |
| Sulaiman | Twitter | Saudi Arabia |
| Beth | Twitter | Japan |
| Jennifer | Twitter | Singapore |
| Sara | Twitter | China |

Alongside the interviews, the study used website 2.0 sources to gather data regarding NNEST experiences and opinions on their human capital and professional legitimacy. Website 2.0 includes social media, vlogs, blogs, wikis, and image sharing sites, and it has enabled researchers to use innovative methods to gain access to a diverse range of resources and information without having to be physically present onsite. In this website 2.0 research, the focus was on the participant's 'offline life' and as such the text analysis is a window to the thoughts and experiences of the participant. As the analysis of these texts focuses on the content, it is a qualitative study. Mine was a field study of naturally occurring conversation in the multimodal texts found on the website 2.0 sources, such as blogs, YouTube videos, Twitter posts, and Facebook feeds. Website 2.0 sources in their very essence are created through a need for recognition, self-expression, and introspection. The sources then serve as a platform to embrace a cause, or to promote an ideology. The researcher's paradox is absent from this dataset as there was no need for immediate face-to-face contact with the participants. Website 2.0 sources are unbiased by the research process as this is primary data uninfluenced by the researcher's presence. The results gained from website 2.0 studies are longitudinal, as the opinions of those documenting their experiences change over time. This is a study in time, however, so such temporal notions lend themselves to the authenticity of the study. Data were collected from 9 participants using website 2.0 sources (see Table 1), of which 6 datasets were from Twitter, 2 from Blogs, and 1 from YouTube.

4. Results

In the results, the participants' feelings of self-esteem are presented, relating to their lived experiences as educators and insights into how their self-esteem could be enhanced as they embrace their inherent skills. Following this, the participants' experience of building their portfolios is explored to frame how embracing Feher's ideas can aid them in achieving more status within ELT as creditworthy investees. Competition in the market is also addressed and how this influences the NNESTs' status as educators and the subsequent actions they deem necessary to gain equity.

4.1. Self-Appreciation/Esteem

The dichotomy of native speakers (NS) and non-native speakers (NNSs) was prevalent when discussing self-esteem. Cindy explained:

As a NNS I feel a bit of intimidation towards NSs. I know learners prefer NSs, but fortunately for me countries are becoming open to NNESTs, which is a good opportunity for us, but I still feel intimidated around NESTs (Cindy, personal communication, 14 May 2022).

Jolie referred to me as a NS during an interview by saying:

It's your native language so you know more about it.

Later in the interview, to create a relaxed and conducive environment for a narrative interview, I joked about her English being better than mine in response to her suggesting she was not clear. Her instant reply was:

You're the native one, not me.

I asked about this apparent insecurity, and she answered:

For a non-native English-speaker I still feel some kind of intimidation towards the NSs. It's not my language (Jolie, personal communication, 14 May 2022).

Cindy also did not see English as her language, despite making her living from teaching it and being highly qualified to do so. When asked what her weakness was as an English teacher, she said there were many, which led her to gain more certifications, hoping they would give her more confidence, self-esteem, and authority. She revealed that:

Frankly speaking, I have more qualifications now than most English teachers, but my self-esteem is still low (Cindy, personal communication, 11 June 2022).

Elizaveta went as far as to write on her blog:

I am starting to hate this title (NNEST) because this hinders me from my goal (Pachina, 2020).

This demonstrates how the term NNEST can serve as a restrictive term for many teachers and the dichotomy it creates is deficient and problematic.

Ethnicity and nationality were common themes when explaining their self-appreciation and were often deemed as negative concepts. Cindy opened up about being Filipino:

For us Filipinos, it's fine with us because we couldn't get that money (salary in Japan) working in the Philippines. It should start with us; we should demand more but we're not the types to demand more. We accept what we're given (Cindy, personal communication, 21 May 2022).

Cindy justified the lower wages she receives in Japan, in comparison to NESTs, by stating:

We're not the kind of people who like to demand more from our employers.

I asked whether this is because of the insecurity of being a NNEST and she replied:

Yes, it comes with confidence. We're not proud of ourselves, we still have a colonial mentality where we see foreigners as higher because we're just a poor country. . . Us Filipinos, we're not proud of ourselves (Cindy, personal communication, 21 May 2022).

It is at the institutions where they work that NNESTs have their low-self appreciation augmented by management, colleagues, and students. In response to a video of three Filipino assistant language teachers (ALTs) discussing their experiences, there was a comment from a user named Shina, which stated:

I am also currently working as an ALT here in Japan and during my orientation, the dispatch company has emphasized the word that you are not a "real" teacher so don't think of yourself as such. I am just wondering how you guys overcome the imposter syndrome? (Shina Takada. Life of a Non-Native English Teacher in Japan | Discrimination, Racism in Japan | Part 2. [Video], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6xmR3eTtNew>. Accessed on 10 February 2021).

This demonstrates real-world discrimination against the NNESTs who seek work outside of their own country, a point emphasized by Vijay, who shared:

For racially minoritized English language teachers, the first day of school can be especially awkward. Not only do they have to establish a rapport with new students, but they might also have to deal with student disappointment in not having teachers "who look like the language" (Ramjattan, [Tweet]. http://twitter.com/vijay_ramjattan?lang=en. Accessed on 4 August 2022).

It was interesting that Vijay used the term 'racially minoritized language teachers' as an alternative to the term NNEST. It is an attempt to use a term that diminishes the dichotomy that exists among English language teachers and demonstrates awareness of concepts such as the idealized and racialized native speaker, racialization and teacher identity, and how language teachers lives are shaped by a global history of racist practices.

Beyond the institutional level, it is vital that NNESTs appreciate themselves for what they are and for what skills they possess, but there was sufficient evidence of this being in short supply. The participants exclusively believed that their knowledge of the English language, and how it is perceived in ELT was insufficient, as demonstrated by Eugene:

As it stands, it's insufficient my knowledge and what I know about language teaching (Eugene, personal communication, 18 May 2022).

When asked to rate herself as a teacher, she replied:

Somewhere between low to middle. I try to build enough credibility to say I am worthy to teach the language (Eugene, personal communication, 20 May 2022).

To the same question, Valerie stated:

If I think I'll be in front of NSs I'll be nervous and not confident, I feel they'll question me.

4.2. Portfolios

NNESTs are very active in gaining qualifications and enhancing their portfolios, predominantly by gaining certifications to seek parity with NESTs. Mindy had negative experiences in recruitment when she was passed over for a less qualified NEST, which encouraged her to enhance her portfolio. She stated:

It's why I took it upon myself to improve my portfolio to be able to get a better job.

I asked how she went about that, and she replied:

Enrolling myself into professional enrichment programs, maybe different to the seminars for English teaching. I tried to gain more credibility by enrolling myself into training programs to improve my portfolio (Mindy, personal communication, 18 May 2022).

Valerie was adamant that further study was vital to improving the portfolio:

As a teacher, it's like it's not enough if you haven't finished a master's degree. I feel I need to study more (Valerie, personal communication, 17 May 2022).

Fay explained how NNESTs have to:

Get certifications. If you have TESOL you are the standard, no more additional interviews. If you have it, you're good. . . if you want to become sought after get certifications (Fay, personal communication, 11 May 2022).

Valerie added to this by saying NNESTs have to:

Get more trainings or certifications. . . like IELTS. Also, there's courses on LinkedIn (Valerie, personal communication, 10 May 2022).

On the website for Filipino English teachers in Japan, the following answer to the question "Do I get a certificate after each workshop?" is provided:

You will be given certificates when you attend major workshops such as Teaching Guidelines Seminar (TGS), Advanced Teacher Training (ATT), English Grammar Overview, and English as Foreign Language (EFL) Teaching Techniques. Other mini workshops done by the chapter core officers do not issue certificates (<http://fetjglobal.org/faq>. Accessed on 1 August 2022).

This demonstrates how institutions recognize the desire among NNESTs to gain more qualifications within their chosen field of ELT, which is exploited by numerous companies issuing certificates for a multitude of qualifications that do not appear to be designed for NNESTs to tap into their multilingual skills which could potentially set them apart. It did not seem to be an issue that there was a constant need to grow and expand the repertoire of qualifications. Irene explained:

I have a craving to grow my skills (Irene, personal communication, 13 May 2022).

When asked what assets she already possessed on her portfolio, Eugene replied:

I can't use my passport to vouch for my credibility but with what I already have. . . I am not content with what I have (Eugene, personal communication, 20 May 2022).

The ability to speak English was a common thread in ascertaining what made a good portfolio. Jolie was assertive in stating that:

It's an innate factor for them (people in the Philippines) speaking English means you're smart (Jolie, personal communication, 27 April 2022).

Liz also stated, regretfully, on her vlog how:

Sadly, in the Philippines someone's intelligence is judged on how well they speak English (Liz Alonzo. Why Filipinos Speak English Well | Is it a good thing or bad? [Video], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x-XBvgxUOm4>. Accessed on 10 November 2021).

The participants did not state that they had deliberately based their portfolios on traditional Chicago school notions of human capital [32] where investment would reap rewards, but the discussions implied that they had. Few suggestions were made about alternative ways to expand their portfolios and there were not many indications given of a desire to reach out into language concepts that would set them apart from NESTs, nor to train for pedagogies that would embrace current multilingual trends in the linguistic landscape. I probed about whether English as a lingua franca (ELF) and translanguaging would be useful additions to their portfolios and the responses indicated that there is awareness. Fay replied:

Having knowledge of it is good enough. You're knowledgeable if you know how these things work. It means you have knowledge.

I asked about whether employers would be afraid of an attachment to such concepts and Fay was adamant in her response:

I don't see it as something to be afraid of it. It means you know the concepts and all that (Fay, personal communication, 11 May 2022).

Sergio was sure of the benefits of ELF being a component of a teacher's portfolio, claiming that:

ELF is the truth, the global truth. If you look at the global reality you have to think of ELF (Sergio, personal communication, 8 September 2022).

Mindy was less enthusiastic. I asked her whether all English teachers will need to be multilinguals in the future, and she surprisingly responded:

I don't need to know about economics to be an expert teacher of maths. To teach English I shouldn't need to know another language (Mindy, personal communication, 20 May 2022).

Thus, demonstrating that a keenness to develop multilingualism in the ELT classroom among NNESTs is not universally recognized as being an essential skillset in the current linguistic landscape. However, there was a common decree that the current pedagogic state of affairs is not conducive to a high level of self-esteem/appreciation among NNESTs.

In a discussion about multilingualism, Eugene explained how:

It is an advantage on the portfolio. In employment you can see the bias comparing an applicant with one language against others with several, but NNESTs don't see it yet. I am only recently realizing! (Eugene, personal communication, 20 May 2022).

This response was indicative of the general attitude to multilingual concepts that could benefit NNESTs in the evolution of the ELT market. There was knowledge and an acknowledgment of the concepts and a sense of correlation with how it could benefit them, but little immediate desire to pursue this as a path to advocacy.

4.3. Competition

Directly related to their portfolios and self-appreciation is the essence of competition and how the participants perceive it (Foucault, 2010; Feher, 2009). There is intense competition among NNESTs as they seek positions that do not represent their numbers as a demographic. The participants explained how the popularity of becoming teachers in ELT is expanding in the Philippines. Fay stated:

Because a lot of ESL companies are popping up here and there... A lot of ESL companies are coming from nowhere, for all nationalities. Filipinos now are in demand internationally. There's lots of ads on Facebook encouraging you to become an ESL tutor (Fay, personal communication, 11 May 2022).

In Japan, Sergio shared his experience of working in an eikawa (private English language school) and how competition is at the heart of the school:

When you work for an eikawa you're competing for signups. After the trial lesson the students decide to sign up or not. The prestige of the teacher helps. Some don't sign up because it's not a native speaker. Native teachers get booked very fast.

NNESTs, he explained, were constantly under-booked simply due to their nationality. As such, the school where he worked, which had between 60 and 70% NNESTs, found a solution. Sergio explained:

The receptionist will sign up the student for the first lesson with a NNEST but only tell them after, so they can see how good the NNESTs are. It works (Sergio, personal communication, 8 September 2022).

To be competitive, NNESTs must be inventive. NNESTs currently suffer from the competitive environment within the dichotomy with NESTs, and as such should seek to diminish or eradicate this dichotomizing of the ELT industry by exploring new solutions to enhance their human capital within a competitive globalized world by exploiting their inherent strengths in multilingual environments.

4.4. Summary

The interviews with NNEST participants and analysis of NNESTs' experiences and opinions from website 2.0 sources offered a deeper insight into how they perceive their human capital through discussions about their self-esteem, portfolios, and competition. The participants shared how they have enhanced their human capital with certifications and embracing elements of competition. These concepts align with previous studies conducted into NNESTs [6,15,39], but questions into their alignment with multilingualism and transnationalism opens a new avenue of study and a new option for advocacy. Future research should delve deeper into how NNESTs perceive their bi/multilingualism as assets, and how this can be incorporated into ELT curriculums and materials. The NNEST participants are aware of changes in the 21st century linguistic landscape, but, despite the difficulties in agency and influence of the institutions in which they work, they do not appear to have positioned themselves within this according to their own human capital. However, most importantly, there was an acknowledgment of these concepts and a keenness to explore them more fully as traditional investment in their human capital reaped few rewards thus far.

5. Conclusions

Using a traditional perspective of human capital, it is questionable whether there has been institutional investment into the human capital of NNESTs. Very few institutions have sought to enhance the prospects of NNESTs within their spheres and have instead maintained the dichotomy with NESTs, even when they know there is little justification for it. At the level of the individual, NNESTs have invested considerably in their human capital to gain access to the ELT market and then maintain their positions within it, but it has reaped few rewards. This thesis advocates the enhancement of NNEST human capital through the lenses of Michael Foucault and Michel Feher in a manner in which they entrepreneurialize themselves, appreciate themselves, attract credit to themselves, and establish new power relations within their chosen field.

If we position NNESTs as Foucauldian entrepreneurs of the self, then we should see their actions as economic decisions in the field of ELT, where they seek to enhance their human capital. As the neoliberal homo economicus, NNESTs must be "the person

who accepts reality or who responds systematically to modification in the variables of the environment" [40] (p. 270). In doing this, they must activate the technologies of the self, which "permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and ways of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" [33] (p. 18). An example of this would be NNESTs taking responsibility for their own enfranchisement and well-being by adapting to their field in a manner that displays their multilingualism and international experience.

Taking Feher's definition of human capital, where appreciating the 'self' is the most vital asset in a world of asset appreciation, we can thus break down how this may affect NNESTs:

(1) Regarding NNESTs as subjects that seek to appreciate and to value themselves, this is an essential component to changing the NNEST psyche. How they position themselves in the field of ELT ensures that the appreciation of the self is void due to the dichotomy that exists with NESTs. This dichotomy results in low NNEST self-esteem in the field, ensuring that power relations are skewed to the ideology of NS standards and its inner-circle practitioners.

(2) Looking at the behaviors and events affecting NNESTs, we can ascertain that, by embracing hybrid language policies and adjusting their lessons to accommodate them, NNESTs have great potential to appreciate themselves.

(3) NNESTs can attract credit to themselves in relation to their skill at using and teaching multilingual language concepts, such as ELF and translanguaging. Many of the participants recognized the importance of multilingualism, ELF, and translanguaging and saw them as 'the truth' (Sergio, personal communication, 8 September 2022; Eugene, personal communication, 20 May 2022; Fay, personal communication, 11 May 2022). This recognition and possible alignment with such concepts could enhance the ratings of NNESTs and lead to an accumulation of credit, as they will be deemed creditworthy. In turn, this will magnify their positions within the field of ELT.

(4) NNESTs must ensure their portfolio of interests is optimized so they may take control of their own advancement. The portfolio relates to all aspects of their lives, most notably their sociocultural and professional background and multilingualism, and it must be managed to maximize credit. The accumulation of credit, through recognition of their skills and relevance, will translate to a higher level of self-appreciation and prestige within their field.

This paper aims to contribute to the existing literature on NNESTs by offering an alternative stance to seeking equity within the field of ELT. Much of this paper has focused on individualism, which contradicts traditional leftist opposition to forces that promote inequality and oppression. Many leftist policies of indignation towards inequalities misread how asset appreciation has superseded moral righteousness, meaning that individuals appreciating what they possess as valuable assets is a viable position. It allows them to define who and what deserve to be appreciated, so new investees can make themselves valuable by showcasing their skills, social networks, and flexibility. Thus, elitist conditions set to demean a person's progress can be defied, as asset appreciation is now a yardstick of a person's value and the individual is now in an endless pursuit of credit. Those in charge of ELT institutions may need to adapt to the individual portfolio managers in their field and appreciate their assets in relation to global norms. As such, being an NNEST is an asset in the evolving linguistic and demographic marketplace, meaning those in power must adapt to them and reassign their credit, a sentiment felt by the participants of this study. Progressive opposition should understand that deciding who and what deserve to be appreciated is a decisive stake and the political ascendancy of creditworthiness is not a curse to reverse but a challenge to meet. In an era when continuous ratings preside over economic, social, and political fortunes, speculation is a tool to exploit. Thus, we are appropriating financialization instead of entirely rejecting it, and turning it towards a different purpose.

NNESTs' propensity must be to "appeal to the legitimacy of the aspiration to appreciate or to value oneself—or, more precisely, to the legitimate desire to have access to the resources required for meeting the physical and cultural conditions for self-appreciation" [34] (p. 40). There can be common ground among NNEST advocates in this regard. NNESTs can share a desire to increase their value, for "Such a desire is ultimately what puts their demands in competition, if not on a par, with the prerogatives of the company's shareholders" [34] (p. 41), thus tackling inequities from within, because "what is now likely to be held against these owners is that they violate the conditions required for the lives of the stakeholders to be valued or to appreciate (the quality of what they consume, the cleanliness of their environment, respect for their work, etc.). And there, too, it is not so much in the name of a common interest or of a recognized right that the stakeholders are challenging the shareholders' power, as in the name of their common desire to make their lives valuable" [34] (p. 41). From this, we can deduce that by strategically optimizing their portfolios, NNESTs can force the hand of the institutions that employ them to adapt their policies in a manner that represents the 21st century linguistic landscape, which will ensure that the value of their institution will be appreciated more due to its relevance.

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