The NEST/NNEST Binary and Translingual Identity of U.S.-Educated EFL Instructors in Saudi Arabia: A Study on Linguistic and Cultural Navigation in the Classroom

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Abstract

This study contributes to the Global Southern epistemological debates on the professional identity negotiations of Global-North-educated English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructors. Using semi-structured interviews, the study analyses how two Saudi Arabian EFL instructors, during their PhD studies in the United States, and upon their return home, coped with the phenomenon of native-speakerism and navigated their way through the binary of Native English-Speaking Teachers (NEST) and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers (NNEST) in their teaching. They appreciated their Western education not due to the traditional privileged-Global-North-and-underprivileged-Global-South binary but because of the many ways in which it helped them negotiate their translingual identity. They saw themselves as better placed to give constructive feedback to learners but critiqued the NESTs' inability to base themselves in the local culture and positioned themselves above NESTs due to their knowledge of indigenous Saudi culture. Thus, they dismantled the traditional privilege associated with native-speakerism but did not hail one category over the other. Instead, they picked from both categories the materials, ways, means and attitudes that best served their purpose. They strove for hybridity. Through their negotiation of their foreign education and local challenges, they developed a unique translingual identity.

Keywords: *Translingual Identity, Native Speakerism, Cultural Linguistics, EFL, Translanguaging, Translingual Pedagogy*

Introduction

Education plays a pivotal role in not only developing the skill-set of learners but also in making and shaping their identity (Ellis, 2016; Nigar et al., 2023; Norton, 2010; Sawyer & Rodríguez-Valls, 2023). As a neo-racist ideology, native-speakerism wrongly advocates the binary of native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and non-native English-speaking teachers

(NNESTs), mainly on the basis of their nativity (Lee & Kim, 2023; Oda, 2022; Tupas, 2022). This essentialist-cum-monolithic conceptualisation not only labels teachers as native and non-native speakers of English but also results in a plethora of complications in terms of the teachers' biased perceptions of each other (Golombek & Jordan, 2005; Holliday, 2006; Meanard-Warwick, 2008; Park, 2017; Seo, 2023). With this problem in sight, researchers have conducted several studies in a bid to move beyond the NEST/NNEST binary and suggest a conducive and non-discriminatory working environment (Golombek & Jordan, 2005; Joen, 2009; Meanard-Warwick, 2008; Nigar et al., 2023; Oda, 2022; Park, 2017; Sawyer & Rodríguez-Valls, 2023). Interestingly, and perhaps as a strategy to counter native-speakerism, in some of the studies, second language (L2) learners declared that NNESTs were their preferred instructors, mainly because NNESTS were more empathetic towards the learning needs of the learners (Hong & Pawan, 2015; Tatar & Yildiz, 2010). This oversimplified and essentialist (over)emphasis on the binary contrast between what NESTs and NNESTs can or cannot do leads to the blind spot of either downplaying or completely missing the interplay of language teachers' agency, identities, cultural memories and dispensation of their professional responsibilities (Ellis, 2016; Favela, 2023; Hsu, 2023; Nguyen et al., 2023; Rudolph et al., 2018).

Foregrounding the translingual identity of two U.S.-educated English writing instructors, this study investigates the linguistic and cultural navigation of the instructors to analyse the interplay of their teaching and their maintenance of their professional identity. In an attempt to go beyond the NEST/NNEST binary, this study aims to describe the instructors' negotiation between the context in which they are teaching and their own professional agency, which results in the formation of their translingual identity.

Interplay of Home and Host Cultures in the Case of Western-Educated EFL Instructors
The investigation of the third space, or the *in-between identity*, as termed by Bhabha (1994), in such Western-trained EFL teachers became a pertinent area of research for a number of studies (Haim et al., 2022; Kir, 2022; Lee & Kim, 2023; Rose et al., 2022; Seo, 2023). In one such study, Phan (2008) asserted that 16 Vietnamese teachers who received EFL training in Australia established a third space in the form of morality, an important segment in Vietnamese teacher-centred pedagogy, when they returned to their country. This third space enabled them to teach on equal footing with NESTs. In a similar study, Ilieve et al. (2015) asserted that nine Chinese EFL instructors who negotiated their Chinese pedagogical culture and Canadian Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) programme to find the required in-betweenness developed a similar hybrid identity. Dobinson (2014) reported the same cultural negotiation in the case of Vietnamese teachers during their professional training in Australia. Several studies have proven that EFL instructors' creation of such a third space enabled them to reconstruct their hybrid identities by translating and negotiating all the resources available to them (Hiratsuka et al., 2023; Hsu, 2023; Liu, 2023; Nigar et al., 2023; Oda, 2022; Sawyer & Rodríguez-Valls, 2023; Seo, 2023).

Various other studies have highlighted the impact of the professional training of EFL teachers in the developed Global North on their identities when they returned to their home country to teach. Most of these studies revolved around the teachers' knowledge and skills, as well as their pedagogical identities (Budianto et al., 2023; Burn, 2007; Chien, 2019; Seo, 2023;

Sheybani & Miri, 2019; Siebenhütter, 2023; Yu, 2022). As an offshoot of their pedagogical identities, they tried to apply the knowledge they acquired from their Western education inside the classroom in their home country upon their return. For instance, they endeavoured to make their classes more interactive, learner-centred and aligned with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles (Adem & Berkessa, 2022; Hu, 2002). In the same vein, Phan (2008) asserted that two Bangladeshi EFL teachers, upon their return to their country from the West, promoted Western values in their EFL classrooms. On the contrary, Lu and Moore (2018) found a marked improvement in the CLT approach of as many as 60 Chinese teachers who returned to their country after being trained in the West.

A more significant improvement was seen in the performance of these instructors who received training in the West than in that of the indigenously trained NNESTs. Shi (2003) reported extraordinary improvement in the English writing competence of nine Chinese TESOL university professors who were trained in the West. In a similar study, Liao (2015) asserted that the education and training of three Taiwanese teachers in the United States enabled them to rate themselves as advanced English language teachers. Kong (2017) also emphasised the positive impact on EFL teachers of their education and training in Australia.

Although many Saudi EFL instructors travel to the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and other developed countries in the West (and travelled to Canada in the past), few studies have been carried out on their translingual identities upon their return to their home country. This study investigates the linguistic and cultural navigation of Saudi EFL instructors who have lived and learned in Western countries and then resumed their teaching inside the classroom in their home country to determine how they constructed their professional identities and combined their foreign (U.S.) learning with their local setting.

Translingual Identity vis-à-vis Linguistic and Cultural Navigation inside the EFL Classroom

Wang (2023) asserts, "Understanding translinguality as a general picture and studying diversified particularities among ELF speakers from different L1 backgrounds are not mutually exclusive but complementary." Similarly, while highlighting the pivotal role of translingual literacy, Fall (2023) states that the identities of translingual students transcend various cultural and linguistic allegiances. Similarly, the need to move beyond the binary of NEST and NNEST has been emphasized by many critical applied linguistics (Nagashima, 2023). In their study on translingual disposition, Cavazos and Karaman (2023) assert that a translingual dispositions instrument can assist educators in designing linguistically inclusive assignments and assessments that respond to students' translingual identities, realities, and practices. On criticality in research and practice of translingual pedagogy, Qin and Llosa (2023) emphasize the need for re-centring criticality in a bid to spread students' critical language awareness in classrooms. Lee (2023) calls for recolonizing English through translingual activism. Lee and Canagarajah (2019), in their groundbreaking study, moved beyond language nativity, the erstwhile gauge of teachers' identities in the entire NEST/NNEST discourse, by developing the concept of translingual disposition, which challenges the compartmentalisation of language and culture in terms of ownership. Translingual disposition values the skill of speaking several languages mainly because this enables the speaker to manoeuvre through related or contextual cultural barriers. Canagarajah (2013) also assigned great value to teachers' awareness of

language multiplicity and cultural hybridity, which may shape their proclivity for seeing these languages as assets. This value-laden approach to language has been termed *disposition*.

This act of making concerted efforts to make sense of the world by bringing into play the very essence of multiplicity of languages is not only progressive in outlook but also emergent and generative in structure and, consequently, post-structural in ethos. This is an act in which speakers use their knowledge of multiple languages to make sense of who they are as well. This is how speakers create a translingual space by going between and beyond linguistic structures, systems and communicative contexts (Li, 2011). They end up creating lived experiences by joining various portions of their ideologies, belief systems, attitudes, environments, experiences and personal histories. In line with the theoretical concepts of translingual dispositions (one's acceptance of language hybridity) and translingual space (bringing together different personal experiences), this study explores how a translingual identity is constructed as two U.S.-educated EFL instructors make sense of who they are during interviews by drawing multiple semiotic resources from different dimensions of their linguistic or personal histories, experiences and environments. To better capture this meaning-making process, the sociocultural linguistic approach of Bucholtz and Hall (2005) is employed.

The Study

The study investigates how two Saudi Arabian EFL instructors, during and post their PhD studies in the United States, constructed their translingual identities and dealt with native-speakerism. It focuses on their use of diverse semiotic resources from their linguistic and personal experiences, and how they navigated the Native English-Speaking Teachers (NEST) and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers (NNEST) dichotomy in teaching.

The two EFL instructors were Sami and Yousuf (pseudonyms) who were both male and in their mid-40s and late 30s, respectively. Their consent was obtained prior to the conduct of the study, and they were assured that their identities would not be disclosed at any stage of the study. The criteria for their selection were, first, their homogeneity. Both of them were born in Saudi Arabia and earned a Master of Arts in English Language Teaching (ELT) degree in their home country, followed by five years (for Yousuf) and three years (for Sami) of teaching experience in the Preparatory Year Programme. The preparatory year represents the first two semesters of all undergraduate programmes in almost all Saudi universities. After this EFL teaching experience, Yousuf and Sami enrolled in and completed PhD programmes in the United States: Yousuf, in Applied Linguistics, and Sami, in Language, Literacy and Sociocultural Studies. At the time of the interviews for this study, Yousuf and Sami were on their 10th and 8th years of teaching in Saudi universities, respectively.

Research Methodology and Data Collection

For the data collection, three semi-structured interviews with both participants were conducted. They were asked three questions, one in each interview, in a manner that best elicited replies from them. The questions were focused on the participants' negotiation of their translingual identities. The first question collected their demographic information, which included their education, as well as their experiences while completing their PhD programmes in the United States. The second question focused on their strategies for teaching in their EFL classrooms upon their return to their home country. The third question dwelt on their views on the overall

status of English-language teaching and the variations in the same that they might have come across as they shuttled between their home and host countries. The three interview sessions were each guided by one of the following three guiding questions:

RQ1: You studied in the United States for your PhD degree. Having lived, studied and taught in Saudi Arabia, how was your overall experience as an EFL instructor or learner in the United States? Did you face any challenges there due to your and your professors' different linguistic and cultural backgrounds?

RQ2: Before leaving for the United States, you had been teaching a certain English course in your EFL classroom in Saudi universities for several years. After studying for more than five years in the United States and earning your PhD degree there, how differently did you approach the same EFL classes? How would you describe your approach in terms of the changes, if any, in your overall delivery of the course?

RQ3: You had the privilege of shuttling between your home and host countries – the East and the West – during your PhD studies and experienced the NEST/NNEST binary then. How would you sum it all up if you had to strategise the most beneficial way forward in an EFL teaching context, such as in yours in Saudi Arabia?

Although in each interview session, only one of the aforementioned guiding questions was asked, the interviewer and the respondents could go back and forth among the questions to support an idea if needed. Keeping in mind that in research interviews, the interviewees not only construct knowledge but also generate meaning (Talmy, 2010), the interviews were simultaneously held in English and Arabic to allow both Saudi EFL instructors to speak their minds in ways easiest and most suitable for them.

All the sessions were recorded, the recordings were transcribed, and the Arabic portions were translated into English. However, considering the essence and spirit of code-switching, which speakers intentionally do to convey an idea that is exclusive to a language and culture, no unnecessary effort was made to translate such an idea. This was done to maintain the essence of the idea and to carry forth the spirit with which the two respondents code-switched in the first place, which, even at its face value, contributes to their journey towards identity construction and expression.

In a bid to analyse the data as emergent products of the semiotic and linguistic resources that the respondents used, the sociocultural linguistic approach was employed to record and analyse their identity construction and negotiation through their dynamic social interactions (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Following the indexability principle, the expressions that countered native-speakerism were thoroughly analysed. Some examples are *Kabsa* instead of 'rice plate'; 'NESTs are bad teachers of grammar'; 'Saudi EFL instructors are more impactful teachers of grammar'; 'Expatriate teachers do not themselves experience the learning of English grammar as L2'; and 'Native-speakerism is unjustifiably promoted.' As Silverstein (2003) advocated going beyond the literal meaning of an expression to create indexicality, the participants' utterances were analysed beyond their surface meaning to unveil the woven or hidden ideologies and social constructs that are intrinsically implanted in such expressions.

For instance, Yousuf emphasised the use of *Kabsa* from the Arabic language as it is, advocating its rendition in the same language even for the inner-circle cultures. He insisted that instead of translating every cultural symbol from other Global Southern cultures through the

linguistic signifiers of the inner-circle cultures, concerted efforts must be made to retain the original words, such as the words used for Saudi local foods, customs, traditions, values and cultural artifacts. Translating these phenomena in the languages of the Global North will deprive them of their essence and uniqueness. This hints at the power relations embedded in the hierarchical positioning of standard and non-standard English as well as the inner circle and the rest, as discussed in previous studies (Green & Pappa, 2021; Hermessi, 2023; Seo, 2023; Smith, 2023). This also reveals the ideologies that are at play while associating languages with socioeconomic indicators (Dhami, 2023; Dominic, 2023; Manan et al., 2023; Monfared, 2019; Nelson & Chen, 2023). As another example, not only were both Yousuf and Sami fully aware of the concept of native-speakerism, but they also spoke vociferously about the NEST/NNEST binary. While discussing their identity negotiation and construction, their viewpoints were duly considered in their context.

Data Analysis

During the interviews and especially in response to the first question, it was found that Yousuf had studied various theoretical and methodological underpinnings of a number of debates on the wide-ranging intricacies of the Global Southern EFL context. Such discourses included native-speakerism, which left indelible marks on his identity as an EFL instructor. His approach to linguistic diversity was shaped into open disposition, as Lee and Canagarajah (2019) put it. Supporting Li's (2016) binary of languages that are politically and culturally labelled, he asserted:

> *English cannot be taught in a vacuum. As an EFL instructor, I must have the local Saudi cultural anchor to bind my explanations of a foreign concept [to] and to make it easy for my students to understand [them]. Without the local linguistic or cultural referent or reference point, I would not be able to explain things to my students. I need to refer to the Saudi culture to explain [things] from the foreign culture. Explanations are always relative, aren't they?*

Yousuf's aforementioned views support the concept of *World Englishes* (Kachru, 2001) and the legitimacy of the emerging varieties in the English language. To support his views on retaining Saudi culture as a referent, he preferred to use *Kabsa* instead of any other alternative from the English language, which could have denoted the Saudi version of the rice dish. To explain this in the Saudi cross-cultural setting, Yousuf said:

> *In our efforts and intentions to translate everything from Saudi culture into the target language, we lose the very essence of the concept that we are trying to convey to the listener. When we refer to Kabsa, for example, as a rice dish or a rice and meat dish, we deprive the listener [of] the whole cultural connotation of the food that represents a unique variety if rendered in the Arabic language. Just imagine how differently [Kabsa] sounds [from] 'a rice dish' (laughs).*

Here, Yousuf criticised Arabic speakers' act of translating *Kabsa* into 'rice plate', asserting that the act of translation is meant merely for the convenience of people from the inner-circle

cultures. In the process, they simply eliminate the whole concept of the purely Saudi dish of *Kabsa* and other similar things, which are exclusively based on Saudi culture. For Yousuf, *Kabsa* is a lot more than just a rice dish.

This criticism is perfectly in line with Phan's (2015) assertion that intercultural communication is gauged only by the cultural values of the inner circle, leaving out the values of other cultural groups. Yousuf, expressing his identity as a translingual speaker, denounced any such affiliation with, or support for, inner-circle values. Despite being an EFL instructor, he announced his preference for the Arabic language over English in the way he denoted *Kabsa*. Taking his stance from a non-deficit perspective, his orientation towards linguistic diversity was that of translingual disposition when he said, 'For me, [*Kabsa*] cannot be a simple rice dish (laughs); no way. *Wallahe* (by God); it is *Kabsa*, nothing else. It cannot be anything else. Any other name will signify anything but *Kabsa*.'

While Yousuf made a unique comparison between the efficacy of NESTs and NNESTs through his workplace experience in the Saudi EFL setting, he mentioned certain pertinent points. Referring to his teaching of the *English Unlimited* course pack with reference to the traditional NEST/NNEST binary, he sounded visibly critical of the role of NESTs vis-a-vis the traditional privilege associated with native-speakerism (Kang, 2022; Lee, 2023; Oda, 2022; Seo, 2023; Tupas, 2022). Countering this misplaced privilege of NESTs over NNESTs, he emphasised that Saudi EFL instructors – NNESTs – have often been found more impactful in teaching not only the *English Unlimited* course pack but also other courses, such as Academic Writing, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), and the English *Unlock* course pack, etc. in the Saudi EFL context. He argued for this effectiveness on the part of NNESTs in exactly the same way that he explained the *Kabsa* and rice dish dichotomy: by highlighting that NESTs are heavily handicapped in grounding the semantic rendering of foreign cultural concepts in or into Saudi EFL learners' home culture, unlike Saudi EFL instructors. The act of gauging every concept with the monolithic inner-circle culture referent deprives NESTs of the facility of the much-needed knowledge of the host culture. This inability of NESTs mars the learning process in the Saudi EFL classroom and thus, dismantles the misplaced privilege associated with NESTs.

To further explain his viewpoint, Yousuf asserted:

> *Saudi teachers in a Saudi EFL classroom are better placed to explain to Saudi students the concepts in the Saudi edition of [the] English Unlimited course pack, [for] which Cambridge University Press has done a great deal of work to make the content as Saudi-culture-specific as possible. How can you expect [NESTs] to do justice to the explanation of Saudi cultural symbols or artifacts [that they are perhaps seeing] for the first time? They merely explain the English words with the help of other English words (laughs). We teach it better. We refer to our culture to contextualise concepts for our students. [The italics show the respondent's stress on the words.]*

Invoking Stokoe's (2012) standardised relational pair of 'they' for expatriate instructors and 'we' for Saudi instructors, Yousuf hailed the latter as more qualified and impactful than the former. He stressed that Saudi instructors' translingual identity enabled them to be more

impactful than expatriate instructors. He opined that he, like many other L2 learners, had learnt the rules of grammar from his childhood days and had developed his English language skills based on those rules, which enabled him to teach them to similar L2 learners in the Saudi EFL context. By saying this, Yousuf pronounced his translingual identity as an EFL instructor who, despite his exposure to, and experience of, various linguistic and cultural landscapes, was able to mould himself into a translingual teacher. Zheng (2017) also advocated the integration and embracing of these multiple identities.

With this identity, as Yousuf asserted, he was able to identify himself with Saudi L2 learners of English and support their efforts to master English grammar, unlike the NESTs he had encountered, who were unable to explain the underlying rules of grammar when they were teaching the grammaticality of sentences or tenses. He explained that most of those NESTs, whose first language (L1) is English, never learned the basic and advanced intricacies of English grammar and hence, could not identify themselves with the Saudi L2 learners in the latter's efforts to learn grammar and could not explain the grammar rules to these learners. Hence, the NNESTs taught grammar better to these Saudi learners. Yousuf said:

> *The ability to speak on the part of the expatriate instructors in an accent that is associated with L1 speakers of English does provide an edge to these NESTs. However, when it comes to [digging] deep [to explain] the subtle differences between English [forms of usage], the formal education on grammar comes in really handy, and that's where NNESTs garner the appreciation of the learners. Be it in the form of […] basic categories [such] as word classes, tenses, narration, direct [objects] versus indirect objects, gerunds and transitive versus intransitive verbs, or the complex intricacies of syntax, the knowledge of the NNESTs has mostly been found deeper than [that of] most of the NESTs who opt [to shoulder] the responsibility of teaching in the Saudi EFL context.*

As Hong and Pawan (2015) also observed, local instructors teach L2 learners better than expatriate teachers do not only because they are more aware of the English grammar needs of such learners but also because they have gone through the same process as L2 learners of English. Thus, Yousuf considered Saudi EFL teachers more effective in teaching English grammar than the expatriate teachers.

As with Yousuf, Sami's professional identity was strongly influenced by his EFL learning and teaching experience in Saudi Arabia, as well as by his PhD studies in the United States. However, Sami took greater pride than Yousuf in his foreign qualification, crediting the Western academia for having a long-lasting impact on his overall development as a well-rounded EFL instructor, as he jokingly asserted that he was no longer merely a traditional-grammar-translation-method EFL instructor but is now more knowledgeable about the theoretical intricacies of what to teach and how to teach in the Saudi EFL context. This is how he differentiated himself from his colleagues who have not experienced and been exposed to Western training, especially in the United States. He said that his foreign studies have changed him into a completely different person:

> *I am no [longer] the traditional grammar-translation-method local teacher*

> *of English. I, unlike many others, now know the latest [developments] in teaching pedagogy. I know I can now engage my disinterested students (laughs) through [CLT] strategies. I can now involve them [in English-language learning] through [a task]-based approach […]. This is not how I was taught […] and this is not how I was teaching before I went to the United States for my PhD. I believe I am a new teacher […] now.*

Sami indexed how he considered himself different from his pre-PhD version and from the rest of the indigenously educated instructors whom he had encountered in three expressions: (1) 'I am no more the traditional grammar-translation-method local teacher of English'; (2) 'I, unlike many others, now know the latest [developments] in teaching pedagogy'; (3) 'I know I can now engage my disinterested students…'; (4) 'I can now involve them [in English language learning] through [a task]-based approach […]'; (5) 'This is not how I was taught'; and (6) 'This is not how I was teaching before I went to the United States for my PhD.' These statements showed Sami's discontent with his older version and hinted at his negotiation of his older self, as well as his construction of a new identity. His repetitive use of the word 'now' in sentences (2), (3) and (4) foregrounded his post-PhD identity as a well-equipped, markedly improved and remarkably aware EFL instructor compared to his pre-PhD version. This was not only an appraisal of his own identity but also a critique of the overall EFL context of which he has been a part for so long.

While responding to the question related to his PhD studies in the United States and the making of his translingual identity, Sami expressed his affiliation with Saudi language and culture:

> *This is something very intriguing. When you are in Saudi [Arabia], you take everything for granted. You do not value anything. I mean the little things – the way your people look, [the way you dress], your language, your foods and [your] customs; especially, the way you speak the English language here in the Kingdom (laughs). All of a sudden, when you land [in the United States], you find yourself different] […] in terms of almost everything. Their academic landscape is far ahead of [ours], so you really value that while being there. [At] the same time, you start missing your own people, your culture and everything [else] that you had been taking for granted. Strange, isn't it? [Again] at the same time, you, instead of […] melting in that American cultural crucible, make concerted efforts to maintain your identity, which means your identity as a Muslim and as a Saudi. However, you do make a lot of efforts to work on your English speaking, not to mimic the American accent, but to make it intelligible to your professors and other people there. This is how your accent gets refined. So, you no longer remain the traditional Saudi EFL instructor (laughs).*

Sami's take on the outcome of his revised teaching methodology during the post-PhD phase of his professional life also hints at certain interesting aspects of his EFL experience. Commenting on the use of the CLT and task-based teaching approaches in Saudi EFL classrooms, he emphasised that most of the NNESTs lacked the required knowledge of any such instructional skills and merely explained texts and encouraged their students to learn the

meanings of difficult words by rote. He asserted that there is a need to pull learners out of their comfort zone to enable them to learn English in new and more interesting ways. He added, however, that this was not easy for him at the start:

> *When I opted for [CLT] and task-based learning in my English Unlimited classes, the learners did not like it much. I have been part of the system since my school days. I knew the reasons. The students, as they had been used to, expected me to lecture only, and that's all. I stuck [to] the new approaches [that] I had learned during my PhD studies in the United States. It had consequences, of course. [The students] reported it to the [director] of the English Language Centre (laughs).*

Sami's transition into constructing a translingual professional identity was not an easy journey, as it had to be a package of his indigenous identity, local context, the foreign language infused with the local culture, and global challenges, which had to be dealt with in accordance with the established theoretical underpinnings of the field (Itoi & Mizukura, 2023; Kato & Kumagai, 2022; Kubota, 2023; Muhalim, 2023; Oda, 2022; Susilo et al., 2023; Tian & Lau, 2023; Xiong et al., 2023). Along with his knowledge and understanding of the local systems and power hierarchies, his education in TESOL proved to be a handy resource. The development of the resultant translingual pedagogy worked along the same lines as is known of identity formation. The micro level of translingual pedagogy pertains to the context in which it is developed, keeping in view the learners' needs and learning levels. In this case, the micro level was Sami's *English Unlimited* EFL class. The meso level is related to the institution, which, in this case, was the English Language Centre of Sami's university. The macro level covers the society's overall ethos towards the teaching and learning of a particular language, especially the relevant ideologies that are at play and the people's approach towards that language. NNESTs are more empowered in this important area than NESTs. When Sami's case was reported to the director of the English Language Centre, Sami defended himself as follows:

> *I know everyone and the values here, inside out. I am [a] son of the soil. Nobody can twist and tweak facts in the garb of the belief system and values against me. I put the facts straight in front of the director and the students. The director knew all the theoretical and methodological intricacies; so, he was convinced. I quoted to my students a number [of] instances from the holy book and the life of the Prophet (SAW), emphasising the value of hard work in general and knowledge in particular. Can [NESTs] do any such thing that is soaked in the local value system? No, they cannot. This is why NNESTs are better placed because of many such advantages, including this one.*

On the issue of student counselling in the Saudi EFL context, Sami recalled his pre-PhD teaching experience as limited to lecturing. He said his assessment mainly involved merely marking the papers and communicating the marks to his students, without counselling regarding their attitude and academic performance. He said there was an invisible 'barrier' between him as an instructor and his learners. On the contrary, his post-PhD teaching was a

completely different ballgame mainly because he is now more equipped with the ways and means to counsel his students not only regarding their studies but also in their affective domain. He said his valuable learning experience during his PhD studies in the United States enabled him to grasp an overview of 21st-century skills, which include emotional intelligence and critical thinking. He said:

> *Now, I am better placed to counsel my students. I encourage them to be critical of their approach. I also talk to them about their problems, which fall [under] their affective domain. I believe [that] this is one of the greatest goods that my Western education has done to me.*

Sami's critical approach towards his past performance and his acknowledgement of the improvement that he saw in his ethos as an EFL instructor are symbolic of his identity construction as a translingual teacher. His reference to the improvement in his performance, starting with 'now', shows his intentional foregrounding of his present state of teaching. This marks a change in his outlook and his celebratory attitude towards it.

Discussion

The insights of both U.S.-educated EFL instructors prove that the NEST/ NNEST binary is not only unjust and misleading but also monolithically stereotypical and essentially biased. Instead of compartmentalising the identities of EFL instructors into these two pre-decided leagues, which are formed on the basis of the instructor's geographical location, this study found that the EFL instructors' personal and professional pursuits of excellence are the results of their translingual identity. The participants' journey between Saudi Arabia and the United States, interactions with expatriate instructors inside the Kingdom, teaching experience in their native country before and after staying in the United States, and interactions and discussions with their professors in the United States helped them dismantle many of their presuppositions, which were mainly the results of the oft-quoted NEST/NNEST binary, wherein the former is always privileged. The participants' whole journey was quite interesting, starting with their usual idealisation of NESTs mainly because of the concept of native-speakerism, followed by their disillusionment with the expatriate instructors in their teaching of grammar and ending with their ultimate shift, wherein they discarded any such stereotyping and advocated their translingual identity.

Thus, this new identity was the result of the participants' lifelong experiences, which included their L2 education in the early days of their academic careers, their teaching profession before and after their PhD studies, and their transition from being EFL instructors with a purely Saudi accent to ones mainly due to their stay in the United States. This translingual identity proved pivotal in their approach towards EFL teaching in ways that are unique to them both. Zheng (2017) also asserted that translingual pedagogy and its development are not immediate outcomes of translingual identity and disposition. The same is evidently discernible in Yousuf's and Sami's transition from being believers in native-speakerism to their complete transformation as EFL instructors. On the same note, Nagashima and Lawrence (2022) emphasised that the development of translingual pedagogy works along the same lines as is known of identity formation. They said that the micro level concerns the

context in which the translingual pedagogy is developed, keeping in mind the learners' needs and learning levels; the meso level pertains to the institution; and the macro level covers the society's overall ethos towards the teaching and learning of a particular language, especially the relevant ideologies that are at play and the people's approach towards that language.

In the case of Yousuf, the prevailing of NEST/NNEST binary, in which the former is always privileged, was challenged when he opted for the Saudi variety of English by introducing *Kabsa* as it is and thus, deconstructing the inner circle's cultural appropriation of other cultures. Similarly, in Sami's interplay of his professional identity and cultural ethos during his teaching, he not only unveiled the drawbacks of the oft-celebrated NEST category when it comes to teaching grammar in the Saudi EFL context but also laid bare the fact that NNESTs are more impactful mainly because of their local cultural rootedness, indigenous training and foreign education. Both participants had insightful views on how and why NNESTs are more well equipped to perform their teaching responsibilities – because they can associate themselves with any L2 learner in the Saudi context and can identify themselves and their experiences of the same nature from their past, which was also emphasised by previous research (Canagarajah, 2013; Hong & Pawan, 2015; Tatar & Yildiz, 2010). Through all these experiences, they are in a better position to develop pedagogical approaches that best suit these learners. Yazan (2018) also confirmed that the experience of an L2 instructor in a given sociocultural context plays a pivotal role in devising and designing pedagogical resources that are learning-centred and impactful for similar L2 learners.

Sami's appreciation of his Western education may be accepted by many people in the Global South mainly on the basis of the privileged-North-and-underprivileged-South binary. However, his critique of the NESTs' inability to base themselves in the local Saudi culture hints at dismantling the privilege associated with the NESTs. Yousuf shared the same observation in his comments on the same phenomenon. Similarly, Sami credited his PhD from the United States for his strength as an EFL instructor who was now better placed to give constructive feedback to learners. He felt that he was now better off with the relevant skills required for counselling and feedback. Several studies have highlighted the impact of the professional training of EFL teachers in the developed Global North on their ' knowledge and skills, as well as their pedagogical identities (Budianto et al., 2023; Burn, 2007; Chien, 2019; Seo, 2023; Sheybani & Miri, 2019; Siebenhütter, 2023; Yu, 2022). This crediting and discrediting debate shows that both Yousuf and Sami were picking the impactful aspects of their academic and professional journeys in a bid to mould themselves into unique packages. This was also emphasised by various studies which have confirmed that EFL instructors' creation of such a third space enabled them to reconstruct their hybrid identities by translating and negotiating all accessible resources (Hiratsuka et al., 2023; Hsu, 2023; Liu, 2023; Nigar et al., 2023; Oda, 2022; Sawyer & Rodríguez-Valls, 2023; Seo, 2023).

The detailed analysis of the interviews of both participants showed that they did not talk against either NEST or NNEST as a monolith in itself. They did not hail one category over the other. They did not take sides in this struggle between the two seemingly warring leagues. However, they did dismantle the traditional privilege associated with native-speakerism. On the contrary, they picked from both sides the categories materials, ways, means and attitudes that best served their purpose. They strove for hybridity in their professional standing as EFL instructors. Thus, they developed their own translingual identity in a bid to negotiate their

foreign education with local challenges. The main reason behind their advocacy for the acceptance of a hybrid set of features, from both the leagues, is mainly based on the essence of translanguaging. The openness towards this oft-shunned fluidity enables the teachers to opt for the best from both sides of the binary, enabling learners to think in multiple language simultaneously. This essence of this partial acceptance of both sides of the otherwise opposing sides is rooted the strategic importance that is famously outlined in the oft-quoted concept of hybridity by Bhabha (1994). This act of simultaneous sticking to one's cultural roots and partial acceptance of the foreign language plays a role beyond language teaching by means of diluting the absolutist binaries.

Conclusion

Most studies in this field either problematised native-speakerism or discussed the seemingly absolutist NEST/NNEST binary. This study found that when U.S.-educated EFL instructors of Saudi origin returned to their home country, they were able to develop a translingual professional identity. They experienced an overall shift in their pedagogical approach in terms of how they perceived the NEST/NNEST binary, with special focus on the context in which teachers in both categories performed their duties. The findings imply that the oft-followed one-size-fits-all pedagogical recommendations cannot be adopted in teacher training modules. Instead, in such training programmes, the varying values and belief systems that EFL instructors may have to deal with inside the classroom must be considered.

This study showed that the Saudi EFL teachers who earned their PhD degrees in the United States appreciated the subsequent strengthening of their theoretical knowledge but also emphasised that based on their relevant knowledge of Saudi culture, their experience of being L2 learners of English themselves in their school days, their well-thought-out endeavours to learn English grammar as part of their L2 learning, their ability to explain concepts from the English language in the learners' L1, and the facility of their educational journey and exposure to the L1 and L2 cultures of the learners gave them significant advantages over their expatriate colleagues. These imply that teacher training programmes and degrees in TESOL may incorporate modules that guide EFL instructors in how to better develop a translingual professional ethos mainly to keep them from feeling foreign in their home country due to the sheer burden of the value system that they have imported from the Global North. Thinking globally and acting locally seems to be the appropriate catchphrase, which also works well in forming a translingual professional identity.

Further studies may be carried out to triangulate data using more data collection tools rather than merely interviews. To stay true to the essence of the macro, meso and micro dimensions, as discussed in detail in this paper, students' feedback and feedback from the administration may also be noted to trace and investigate the variables in foreign-trained instructors' formation of translingual professional identities. Although this study discursively analysed the professional navigation of the U.S.-educated Saudi EFL instructors by basing the debate on the relevant epistemologies, more studies may be carried out with a more triangulated approach.

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