

# Exploring Identity of Non–Native Teachers of English through Narratives of their Experience

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*The teaching profession, particularly in the field of TESOL, seems to be in the midst of transition, with teachers facing questions in regard to content, methods, audience, underlying principles, and goals of their teaching and, perhaps most importantly, their own professional identity in and out of the classroom. This chapter explores the issue of teacher identity and position in the fast-changing setting of the Qatari educational system, based on the author's own story as a non-native English-speaking teacher of English in Qatar and incorporating other NNES teachers' narratives. Using interviews and focused analysis of teachers' stories, the author investigates commonalities and contrasts in the way we formulate and practise teaching philosophies, examining how we are/can be teachers, native and non-native alike, in the TESOL landscape of Qatar.*

## INTRODUCTION

In this study I set out to investigate how non-native English speaking teachers (NNEST) of English re-interpret themselves and re-formulate their pedagogic identities and practice through professional experience and reflection while working with Arab students in a Gulf country. While drawing on my own experience as a Polish teacher of English in Doha, Qatar, I also include stories by other teachers, my colleagues from the Academic Bridge Program (ABP) in Qatar Foundation (QF), whose backgrounds are similar to mine.

I explore our professional and personal motivations which have led us to teaching English and teaching it here, in Qatar. I want to find out what concerns we share, what challenges we come up against and how we feel about what we do, with the teaching profession's ethos undergoing transformation both in Qatar and around the world. At the heart of my inquiry there are two fundamental questions about who we are as teachers and how we approach teaching in the changing context of the Qatari educational landscape. Inevitably, new questions and issues emerge in the discussion: are we, expatriate teachers working in Qatar, trying to redefine education, in particular language education here, or is it redefining us through various cultural and institutional boundaries existing in the country? Where do we position ourselves and how are we shaping our individual and professional selves in this complex environment? Are our *Qatari* experiences and dilemmas reflective of broader, more universal trends or are they idiosyncratic and localised?

Although I am primarily interested in non-native speakers' experiences teaching English in Qatar and their hybrid identity development in inter-cultural settings, in considering these issues, I do not wish to focus exclusively on the native versus non-native dichotomy. Instead, I would like to look beyond that, investigating the different ways we formulate and practise our teaching philosophies, examining *how* we are/can be teachers, native and non-native alike, in this exotic Arabian nouveau riche environment, where oil money buys big, political ambition rides high, ideas come and go in a blink, but the teaching and learning "soul" may get lost in the process, unable to keep up with the pace.

I refer my discussion to Bill Johnston's conceptualisation of the identity of expatriate language teachers as redefined paladins, fulfilling their "errant" destiny in postmodern conditions (Johnston, 1999). To what extent does Johnston's metaphor apply to the current situation of the TESOL profession in Qatar? How is it reflected in the professional lives of non-native teachers teaching English to other non-native speakers and creating a new cultural and educational space in their classrooms?

Lee S. Shulman's thoughts on knowledge growth in teaching (1986) have provided another, secondary source of inspiration for this inquiry. The issue that seems especially pertinent in the Qatari context is the academic and social status of teachers. In

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