



## Research article

# “Would you take a pay cut? We’re looking for Caucasians”. How whiteness can affect White, Black and Muslim female ‘native-speaker’ English language teachers

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## ABSTRACT

This article sets out to investigate the interrelationships between native speakerism, Whiteness, ethnicity and appearance in the TESOL context. It explores whether Whiteness plays a part in TESOL teachers' recruitment and job opportunities when employers are seeking to employ 'native speakers'. It draws its data from focus group interview data with seven female TESOL teachers. Two were White, three were Black and two were White Muslims who wear the hijab. The findings show that when English language teaching job advertisements call for 'native speaker' teachers, recruiters are—consciously or unconsciously—looking for White teachers from ex-colonising countries such as the USA, the UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand whom they perceive as representing Whiteness. In this sense, Whiteness is inextricably linked to the concepts of the 'native speaker' and 'native speakerism' in English language teaching. The study concludes that native speakerism acts a veiled façade for Whiteness and consequently that White TESOL native speaker teachers are privileged over their Black and Muslim counterparts in a number of areas. These include: pay, objectification, acknowledgement of their professional achievements and visibility in advertising materials aimed at prospective students and their parents. The paper concludes with a call to confront such often-unacknowledged bias in favour of Whiteness by establishing open conversations with recruiters, parents, students and others involved in the TESOL field. It also recommends that countries should follow the European Union's lead and ban any language teaching job criteria that state a 'native speaker' requirement.

**Ethics statement**

This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee at King Faisal University, approval No. 1333.

**1. Introduction**

The binary distinction between those who are deemed 'native' vs. 'non-native' speakers of English has long persisted in TESOL scholarly debates. The terms 'native speaker'/'non-native speaker' [1] are therefore placed inside inverted commas in this study, because that is how these terms are widely used in the discourse. Holliday [1] however contends that that using the prefix 'non' implies a disadvantage and a deficit in the 'non-native' speaker compared to the 'native speaker'. Furthermore, both terms lack precision, first,

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since ‘native speakers’ themselves do not speak a form of English that is any more standardised than that spoken by ‘non-native speakers’ and secondly, because both groups are influenced by factors such as social status, age and geography [2]. Therefore, as Holliday [1] argues, both terms are politically and ideologically motivated rather than being objective realities. These divisions result in expressions of an ‘us’ and ‘them’ divide. Holliday [1] terms this form of discrimination ‘native-speakerism’ whereby there is “an established belief that ‘native-speaker’ teachers represent a ‘Western culture’ from which spring the ideals both of the English language and of English language teaching methodology” ([1], p. 6).

This ideological distinction between ‘native’ and ‘non-native’ speakers of English assumes that teachers who come from English-speaking Western countries such as the USA, the UK, Canada, Australia or New Zealand are ‘native speakers’ of English, whilst those who live elsewhere are ‘non-native speakers’ [3]. A number of studies (e.g., Ref. [4–7]) have shown that recruiters favour ‘native speakers’ over ‘non-native speakers’ when it comes to job opportunities in the TESOL field and that ‘native speakers’ receive higher salaries [8,9]. Holliday [1] terms this form of discrimination ‘native-speakerism’ For this reason, it is important that ‘native-speakerism’ is not viewed in isolation in the TESOL context, but rather that it is also examined in relation to concepts such as Whiteness.

Whiteness can be understood as a “socially constructed organising principle linked to institutionalised power/knowledge that (mainly but not only) privilege White people” ([10], p. 26). Irrespective of whether it is explicit or implicit, Whiteness is racially motivated [11,12] because it is predicated on a firmly established belief in educational institutions that a White English speaker is a “knower” and “owner” of English in a way that a non-White speaker is not (Ayanna & Bryan, 2020, p. 138). This belief originates from the power and hegemony that White people have “formed, and protected through colonialism, slavery, segregation, and oppression” ([13], p. 4). In line with this social construct, many recruiters believe that, in order to be considered a ‘native speaker’, an English teacher must be ethnically White. Or to put it another way, at the very least, being White is an advantage when it comes to securing an English language teaching job. This bias in favour of White TESOL teachers “is implicit in job advertisements that specify teachers from “Center” English-speaking countries. At the same time, “non-White” teachers who have spoken English from birth are categorized either implicitly or explicitly as ‘non-native speakers’” ([11], p. 2).

This study is particularly interested in investigating the prevalence of Whiteness in English language teaching job requirements from the perspectives of English language teachers who were recruited on the basis of their ‘native speaker’ status. To do so and to establish a balanced spectrum of experiences, an exploratory focus group interviews was conducted with seven female ‘native speaker’ English language teachers with the aim of investigating how they viewed Whiteness in the field of TESOL and whether and how this construct has impacted them. Two of the participants were White; two were White Muslims who wore the hijab and the other three were Black. Five of the participants came from South Africa and two from the US. The diversity of the group is an advantage in this small-scale study because the data gathered from these individuals provides diverse perspectives, particularly those of White teachers who, it is believed, benefit from their Whiteness.

The paper begins with a brief review of the relevant literature on native-speakerism and its implications regarding job opportunities for ‘non-native speaker’ teachers in terms of discriminatory practices which privilege and prioritise hiring ‘native speakers’ when it comes to recruitment. The paper then discusses the prevalence of Whiteness in the field of TESOL, especially in job advertisements and in the ways in which White and non-White TESOL teachers feature in advertisements designed to attract prospective students and their parents. Next, this study considers the stories of the seven female participants who, although recruited for being ‘native speakers’, were affected by Whiteness in various ways which related to their appearances: i.e., whether they were White, Black, or identified as White Muslim through the wearing of the hijab. The study argues that any English language teacher in the TESOL area could be affected—albeit differently—by Whiteness, not only because of their ethnicity and skin colour, but also because of how closely they conform or fail to conform to an image of the ‘ideal White’ teacher. As a result, the study asserts that Whiteness is a social construct rather than a biological one [14] and that this construct carries a whole set of stereotypes, prejudices and assumptions about how Whiteness is or is not a precondition as regards concepts of a ‘native speaker’ in the minds and practices not only of recruiters, but also English language students and their parents.

Two provisos should be noted when reading this study. First, Whiteness should not be understood as synonymous with White people [15]. Having a white skin colour is a biological characteristic and in its own means nothing. However, the idea that an individual with White skin colour is superior to and is a more legitimate user of English than other individuals who do not share the same skin colour underlies the theory of Whiteness as used in this study. In her much acclaimed essay, McIntosh [16] acknowledges the realisation that being White brings many race-related privileges: “As a white person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something that puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage.” The aim in using the term Whiteness in this study is not to “make White teachers feel guilt or shame. Instead, it is to put a name to one set of behaviors, thoughts, and feelings” ([14], p. 22). Secondly, as already noted, the terms ‘native speaker’/‘non-native speaker’ are placed inside inverted commas to highlight the reservations about both these terms and to indicate that this study does not argue for the existence of two separate and distinct groups of TESOL teachers (i.e., natives/non-natives).

## 2. Literature review

Although many studies have problematised the ‘native speaker’ vs. ‘non-native speaker’ divisions in the TESOL field, Holliday [17] argues that both divisions continue to persist, causing discriminatory practices such as limiting job employment opportunities at English language schools (e.g., Ref. [1,11,18–27]) for those who are doomed to be labelled as ‘non-native speaker’ teachers. Such discriminatory practices are motivated by ‘native-speakerism’, a concept which is not based on any valid linguistic evidence; rather, it is an ideology whereby there is “an unequal power relationship between different regions of the world—between a well-resourced, politically and economically aggressive, colonising, Western ‘Centre’ and an under-resourced, colonised ‘Periphery’” ([1], p. 2).

Therefore, it appears that, when seeking to recruit only those who fit within the requirement of being a ‘native speaker’, recruiters may also consciously or subconsciously be influenced by Whiteness. In the field of Whiteness studies, Du Bois [28], originally published in 1920) presented one of the earliest opinions on Whiteness. He saw it as a false ideal not only for ‘other’ races, but also for White people. Thus, Whiteness, can be seen as both an externalised global social formation and as an internalised (if false) sense of superiority and related action. These themes were later taken up in Hooks [29] and Lipsitz [30] who explored different dimensions of Whiteness and what it entailed. Studies such as those of Widdowson [31], Hobsbawn [32] and Norton [33] have traced of the role of language in the Whiteness and ‘native speaker’ debate. Various they concluded that an interrelationship exists between ‘native-speakerism’ and Whiteness. Furthermore, some scholars have investigated the prevalence of Whiteness in the TESOL area. For example, Braine (2005) studied students’ perceptions of the ‘native speaker’ teacher and discovered that they viewed all Caucasians as ‘native speakers’ of English regardless of their nationalities. However, the same students in that study did not consider American-born Asians to be ‘native speakers’. Similarly, Javier [34] reported that the students in his study questioned the ‘native speaker’ status of two English language teachers because they were not White. When it comes to recruitment advertisements, Mahboob and Golden [6], who investigated English language teaching vacancies, found that being ‘White’ and Caucasian were explicitly stated in the job adverts as a job requirement. Similarly, Ruecker and Ives [35] examined English language teaching job advertisements on 56 websites in Southeast Asia and discovered that they used pictures of White teachers to convey an image of the ideal ‘native speaker’ teacher. More controversially, Sketchley [36] discovered a job advertisement in China which included the statement “no Asian face”. In addition to being racist, that statement disqualified any applicants with Asian features, regardless of their linguistic competence. Therefore, it can be concluded from these previous studies that being a ‘native speaker’ may of itself not be sufficient if the teacher is not ethnically White, as being White is perceived as a ‘native speaker’ characteristic. Such perceptions exhibit not only the dominance of Whiteness in TESOL, but also the effects of this dominance on non-White ‘native speaker’ teachers too. Here, however one limitation should be noted when it comes to discussing and analysing the role played by of native speakerism and White privilege in the educational field, that is, the paucity of previous studies or theoretical background research dealing with this topic. Such paucity of previous studies highlights the originality of this research topic and the necessity to explore native speakerism, white privilege and discrimination based on ethnicity, religious affiliation and gender in the field of English education in more depth.

### 3. Methodology and the study context

As indicated in the literature reviewed above, there is clear evidence that, whether explicitly or implicitly, Whiteness plays a dominant role in the TESOL area in terms of employment opportunities. The aim of this study is to further expand on understandings of the role of Whiteness in TESOL job requirements. It does so by tackling the issue from a new angle through insights from a group of White and non-White English language teachers who were hired on the basis that they are ‘native speakers’. They share personal stories and experiences drawn from their careers as English language teachers in various countries around the world. Based on these inputs, the study explores the following research questions.

- 1 How does Whiteness affect ethnically White English language teachers?
- 2 How does Whiteness affect ethnically non-White teachers?
- 3 Can Whiteness affect ethnically White Muslim teachers who choose to wear the hijab?

To answer these questions, a focus group interview with seven female English language teachers who had worked in various parts of the world and had been recruited on the basis that they were ‘native speakers’. A focus group approach is chosen for its efficacy, when, amongst other things, a study aims to explore the degree of consensus on a given topic [37]. Five of the participants come from South Africa, whilst the other two are from the United States. The names given to the participants are pseudonyms and do not relate either directly or indirectly to their real identities. However, the ethnic profile of each participant is identified in this study for two reasons. First, given that the study’s objective is to investigate the participants’ experiences of Whiteness during their work as English language teachers, and how these experiences were influenced by their ethnicities and religious attire, they consented to their ethnic profiles or religious affiliation being highlighted in the study. Secondly, as Parker [38] argues, it is important to conduct qualitative studies that centre on racism in educational research and which describe “racialized conditions of discriminatory impact and treatment and [which] could serve as a data form to discuss policy, legal action, or social and political trends and their impact on racialized communities” ([38], p. 201).

Name	Nationality	Ethnic background and religion	Years of TESOL teaching experience
Gina	South Africa	Black	10 years
Diana	South Africa	Black	8 years
Sharon	South Africa	Black	6 years
Elena	South Africa	White	15 years
Suzanne	South Africa	White (Muslim)	4 years
Mira	United States	White	10 years
Mandy	United States	White (Muslim)	6 years

The participants currently work as English language instructors in a state university in Saudi Arabia.

### 3.1. The participant recruitment process

Initially, an email was sent to the university's direct recruiter in Saudi Arabia, explaining the objectives of the research and seeking help in recruiting any instructors who might be interested in taking part in the study. Seven female teachers expressed an interest in taking part in the study. Since most of them were on holidays back in their countries of origin, it was not possible to conduct in-person interviews. The researcher therefore decided to conduct the focus group interview via Zoom, a communications platform that enables users to communicate via the internet. Video conferencing programmes have become popular in qualitative research because they "provide researchers with a cost-effective and convenient alternative to in-person interviews" ([39], p. 1292) and so conducting a focus group via Zoom was deemed to be the most appropriate method to facilitate discussion of the study's research questions in these circumstances. The duration of this one-time meeting was for about an hour.

Focus groups are recognised as effective ways to gather qualitative data and to offer in-depth insights into a wide range of subjects when conducting research in the social sciences [40,41]. Focus groups also have the advantage of providing the researcher with a real-time evaluation of participants' reactions and emotions which, in turn, can yield some valuable, immediate insights into their experiences and perceptions, along with a clear understanding of their initial responses to the questions. Overall, the using focus groups helps in obtaining comprehensive and nuanced insights across occupational contexts.

During this study's focus group interview, the researcher played a limited role as a facilitator and so was free to make notes as the discussion progressed. The focus group interview afforded in-depth discussions, which captured the teachers' perspectives in their own words and uncovered views and ideas that might not have emerged in individual interviews. In addition, the group dynamic enabled the participating teachers to build on the responses of others, thus fostering rich data collection.

To ensure the purity of the data gathered, the interview questions were carefully worded to provide ample space, scope and freedom for the interviewees to articulate their honest opinions. The questions were open-ended, flexible, unambiguous and targeted at stimulating relevant discussion. There was no scope to provide simple yes/no responses. The reliability of the responses lay in the variety of possible responses, as the participant group were both homogenous (in terms of occupation and native language) and heterogenous (in terms of ethnicity and religious affiliation). Moreover, all were equally competent to answer the questions or participate in the discussion. Reliability was also ensured by the well-defined goals of the study and final participant checking of the focus group transcript.

The focus group questions centred on the interviewees' personal definitions of who a 'native speaker' is, their views on the 'native speaker' requirement for English teaching jobs and finally, whether they had experienced or witnessed discriminatory practices against those who were labelled as 'non-native speaker' teachers. Initially, the interview questions did not focus on Whiteness or racism as main topics for discussion. However, as both themes emerged repeatedly during the discussion, they could not be ignored or excluded when analysing the data.

## 4. Data analysis

Since the study data was collected via the focus group interview method, thematic content analysis [42] was used to analyse its transcript and video data. When analysing content thematically researchers first need to immerse themselves in the data they are analysing before they start the initial coding, which then produces larger themes [43]. During the analysis process, a number of themes related to the interview questions and the study's objectives emerged. In particular, data related to racism and forms of discrimination that the participants had experienced throughout their careers as English language instructors were coded to create one large theme i. e., the appearance of the participants. Initial analysis of the participants' experiences showed that this theme was subordinate even to the theme of native-speakerism. In turn, the larger theme of appearance was divided into two smaller themes: the first related to the White 'brand', which affected both the White and Black teachers, while the second related to the wearing of the Islamic headscarf, as this theme also affected those who wore it regardless of their ethnicities or skin colour. After the focus group data had been transcribed and analysed, it was sent back to each participant for evaluation and to validate that the results and findings were an accurate representation of their beliefs. After their individual responses were obtained, a review was conducted with all the participants via Zoom in order to validate the findings.

## 5. Findings and discussion

### 5.1. The White brand

The findings in this study show that, despite having been recruited on the basis that they were 'native speaker' teachers, the participants were nonetheless influenced by Whiteness in differing ways, indicating that Whiteness could influence any teacher regardless of their ethnicity or language identity. The White participants believed that their professional identities were reduced to the simple image of 'a White person' when recruiters included images of them as part of their branding and to advertise the fact that they had a 'native speaker' teacher. On the other hand, the Black participants' identities were hidden in language school advertisements designed to attract new students. Although the Black teachers' voices were included to demonstrate their linguistic fluency, their faces were not shown because these did not fit the image of a 'native speaker' teacher who is assumed to be White. The Black teachers were further discriminated against in terms of pay and allowances. Finally, the Muslim teachers, though White, did not meet the image of a 'native speaker' because they wore a headscarf which signified their religious affiliation.

Elena (White South African) and Mira (White American) reported that during their teaching experiences in South Korea and China,

English language schools used their White ‘native speaker’ image as a branding device to attract students to enrol. For example, Elena noted:

There [in South Korea], you [as a White teacher] are a brand. They stick your picture on the local bus. The blonder your hair, the better.

Mira noticed the same thing in China:

I’ve been to China before, a while ago; I don’t want to say an extreme example of this, but, yes, they certainly do hire teachers that are Caucasian, that are typically blonde and they love it when you have blue eyes. And that’s because it’s a cultural thing there. It’s pushed by the government .... Not by the government, but by the people that if you’re White, that means you speak English. And that means you hold a certain power in the world, which I don’t agree with at all.

Both remarks show the overt influence of Whiteness in some South Korean and Chinese advertisements aimed at recruiting English language students and where being White becomes part of a school’s brand and equates to the ‘ideal’ ‘native speaker’ profile. Because they are White, they are treated as the custodians of the language and, as Kubota (2006) pointed out, are considered as being superior to the Asian face. Here, we can see an example of the intersection between race and language that is reflected in the ‘native’/‘non-native’ issue in TESOL.

Other studies (e.g., Ref. [12,44]) also show the ways in which being a ‘native speaker’ is inextricably bound up with Whiteness. For instance, Ruecker and Ives [35] found that meeting the definition of a ‘native speaker’ was not in itself sufficient if the applicant was not White, thus privileging White teachers over their non-White counterparts. In this case, the TESOL field was a

vehicle by which to privilege British and American colonizers, and create colonial subjects modelled after their own image ... affording linguistic, cultural and academic authority and “superiority” to individuals with the category of “NS”, while Othering the identities of individuals grappling with the epistemic and actualized violence of colonialism. ([45], p. 1)

As Leung and Yip [46] argue however, Whiteness can bring with it undesirable outcomes even for White teachers. First, many White teachers’ professional identities are denied since they are not recruited on the basis on their qualifications or experiences. Rather, they are recruited on the basis of their White looks, and hence they are not expected to be ‘real teachers’. Their purpose is to represent English culture and to present a Western image [46]. Therefore, they are reduced to a mere device for attracting customers. Leung and Yip [46] point out that the participants in their study “spoke of how they were “shuffled around” from one classroom to another to showcase their “whiteness”, which some students/parents believe is what they are paying for” (p. 168). In some cases, these teachers were not required to teach anything; instead, they were asked by their recruiters to show up in the last 10 min of a lesson and reenact comic videoclips taken from English TV shows in order to exaggerate their foreignness. Such demeaning practices had led some of the teachers who participated in Leung and Yip’s study to move to another country to teach English, whilst others had quit the English language teaching profession altogether.

Secondly, because they are recruited on the basis of their White looks rather than solely on their qualifications, White teachers may feel insecure about their jobs because they could be replaced by another more qualified teacher once their original contracts have ended, especially if they do not comply with their recruiters’ requests to perform tasks such as those mentioned above. Under such circumstances, token White teachers may feel “disposable” ([47], p. 8) and “replaceable” ([46], p. 171), which could result in limiting their voice, their development of self-efficacy and identity [46].

Nevertheless, the negative influence of Whiteness on the experiences of the White teachers interviewed for this study does not match with the experiences recounted by one of the current study’s other participants, Diana (a Black South African). She shared a story about her employers in the Middle East. Although she was hired because of her ‘native speaker’ status, according to Diana, her recruiters hired White ‘non-native speaker’ teachers merely because they were White.

I’d like to bring an interesting fact to your attention. The school I taught at in the Middle East started hiring Eastern European (Ukrainian, Bosnian, Serbian etc.) English teachers. Our H.O.D [Head of Department] advised me that this was part of the school’s financial and marketing strategy, as Eastern Europeans are “cheaper” than US/UK teachers and they fit the “white skin, blonde hair, blue eyes” image of an ESL teacher purported by the media. In terms of teaching calibre, my Eastern European colleagues were excellent educators. (Diana)

As a Black woman, Diana was not included in her school’s advertising campaign. Instead, White, yet ‘non-native speaker’, teachers were included, as they fitted the image of what a ‘native speaker’ is assumed to look like. Although Diana’s remark demonstrates how the recruitment process at her school was racially motivated, and hence affected her negatively by excluding her from any advertising campaigns, it also shows how this form of discrimination also affected her White colleagues, but in two different ways. First, as in the case of Leung and Yip’s [46] participants, the ‘non-native speaker’ teachers were not hired because of their qualifications and teaching skills but because of their White appearance. As with Diana, their status as teachers was diminished in that the White teachers’ Whiteness was used as a marketing tool to attract students and their parents. Secondly, these Eastern European teachers were paid less compared to teachers from the USA or the UK. Such discriminatory practices are not uncommon. Zwysen et al. [48] for example found that, amongst all White individuals, Eastern Europe workers tend to be paid the least. This study found that both Diana and her White Eastern European colleagues were exploited by their recruiters. First, they were paid less and secondly, their Whiteness acted as a promotional tool. Furthermore, although Diana was not treated equally because she was not White, her employer continued to benefit from her teaching expertise and status as a ‘native speaker’ in the eyes of students, parents and prospective clients. These findings uphold Garner’s [49] perspective on contemporary societies which draws from a variety of cultural contexts and integrates multiple

empirical data on the theoretical topic of Whiteness. He holds that local and global power dynamics modulate Whiteness as its status is fluid, multifaceted, and unpredictable. As seen in Diana's case earlier, the common identity that Whiteness created for the 'native' and 'non-native' speaker teachers was brought about merely by their positioning at a given time, else the latter occupy a position of relative powerlessness outside of that milieu.

Sharon's (Black South African) story is even more disturbing than the experiences that Diana shared. Although she was hired on the basis that she is a 'native speaker', her recruiters favoured her 'non-native speaker' colleagues over her because they were White. As she explained:

[This discussion] made me emotional because it brought back memories of my life as a Black South African in China. I will tell you my story. I was [the] only South African with a valid work visa, so should the authorities arrive at the training centre, I was the only teacher that would provide them with legal documents. This would save the school from a lot of trouble. My other two colleagues were non-native English speakers from Russia but they earned a salary that was three times higher than mine. If I enquired about this, the answer would be .... "it's because parents think they are from America because of their skin". Even the free apartments given to us were not in the same condition. During advertising, the school would publish flyers and make videos of the Russian teachers with captions like "Hey, we have English native speakers at our school" but they would use my voice in the background. (Sharon)

Unlike Diana, who did receive equal pay with her White colleagues, Sharon's 'non-native speaker' colleagues lived in better housing and earned three times as much as she did. Further, unlike Diana who was excluded from participating in her school's advertisement campaign, Sharon's fluency in English was used. However, in her case it was used as a cover to mask the fact that her White colleagues were Russians and therefore could not be classed as 'native speakers'. The image of White individuals as a representation of the epitome of a 'native speaker' is widely used in some parts of Asia Ruecker & Ives, 2015. For example, Kiczkowski [50] found that educational institutions recruit White teachers as an enrolment tool to attract parents. However, manipulating the facts as in the case of using Sharon's language skills in a voice-over while showing her White colleagues on screen takes such discriminatory practices to a different level of exploitation.

Similar to Sharon, Gina (Black South African) received a reduced pay offer because she is not White. Although she had already secured an English language teaching job in the Middle East, her recruiters decided to change her contract when they saw a picture of her and realized that she was Black.

You would find that sometimes a 'non-native speaker' is doing a better job than a 'native speaker', but is still getting a pay cut. That is disheartening. I've been in that situation when I was in some country in the Middle East. I had an interview 3 years ago and they offered me a job, and then later on they said to me, "Can you send us your picture?" I sent them a picture. They said, "Oops, would you be able to take a pay cut?" I said to this lady, "Why?" She said, "Because we're looking for Caucasians. I thought you were a good fit." I said, "Thank you very much. I would rather walk away. I'm not taking a pay cut". What I want to say is that, it would be nice to see people getting these jobs based on what they've acquired, which is their qualifications, rather than being classified by their places of birth. (Gina)

Gina's experience here clearly illustrates the struggle that Black teachers of English endure when pursuing a career in TESOL, since they have to compete with other 'native speaker' and even 'non-native' candidates who are White. As 'native speakers', and particularly White 'native speakers', are assumed to own the language and the profession as a whole [51], Black English teachers are assumed to be less competent than their White counterparts because "English has most often been transmitted from Whites to minorities within an inequitable power dynamic" ([52], p. 77). On such a basis, Gina may not have been seen by the recruiters—or the audience they were targeting—as a valid speaker of English, which indicates how "political and truly isolating language teaching and learning can be for Black ESL professionals" (p. 134). This study therefore found that even though Whiteness had affected both White and Black participants in quite different and quite particular ways, in all cases, it served to disadvantage or exploit them in some way.

## 5.2. White but ... Muslim

Two of the study's participants who were White wore the headscarf because they were Muslims. For that reason, their appearance did not fit the image of what a White 'native speaker' teacher 'should' look like. Both participants faced discriminatory practices or at least were not treated fairly. Mandy (White American Muslim) had converted to Islam a few years previously and started wearing the headscarf. She points out:

I'm an American Muslim, so I don't apply for jobs in China anymore because of the way that Muslims are viewed there. They wouldn't hire me, even though I am White, but that's based off the way I look and how I choose to dress. I went to China in 2016; this was before I became a Muslim. I was accepted by many schools and organisations and was asked to teach. I converted to Islam shortly after my visit and was not met with the same eagerness to hire. (Mandy)

Similarly, Suzanne (White South African Muslim) concurred with Mandy's comments, stating:

Yeah. I also have that problem. I'm also Muslim, I've also had that problem where I wouldn't be considered for a position, although I'm fully qualified. So, I've also kind of had a similar struggle with Amanda [Mandy]. (Suzanne)

As in the case of Elena and Mira, Mandy's White looks were the main reason why she was recruited in China before she became a Muslim. After converting to Islam and starting to wear the hijab, she said she was not met with the same eagerness to hire her, as in the

eyes of recruiters she no longer conformed to the stereotypical conception of a White Caucasian female. Suzanne, on the other hand, was born into a Muslim family. As she had always worn the headscarf, she could relate to what Mandy was enduring when it comes to recruitment in China. Mandy and Suzanne were both excluded from English language teaching jobs in China. They believed they encountered negative experiences there for two reasons. First, wearing the headscarf is a visual sign that emphasises a Muslim woman's religious identity. This sign goes against the preconceived image of a White 'native speaker' and, instead, presents an individual who looks more like someone from the Middle East rather than a White Caucasian. The second reason is related to the tension that has existed between the Chinese government and the Uyghur Muslim minority since the 1980s [53,54] and the ways in which it is viewed by other Muslims. This tension has resulted in substantial discrimination against Muslims who want to work in China [55].

Since China may be an extreme example because of the political issue that it has with the Uyghur Muslim minority, the participants were asked whether they encountered any form of discrimination in countries other than China. Mandy replied:

I think I was kind of smart when I applied for jobs. I specifically applied for jobs in countries where the majority of the population is Muslim.

Mandy's decision to apply for English teaching jobs in Muslim-majority countries may however have resulted in a different form of discrimination against her. Since Whiteness is linked to the colonial period, most Muslim-majority countries are ex-colonies, and therefore in these countries she may not be seen as a fellow Muslim, but rather as a White foreigner. Similar findings were reported in Galonnier's [56] study. She studied a group of White French Muslim converts, who reported that they were not fully welcomed by their fellow Muslims. She points out:

converts who don the visible attributes of Islamic belonging (specifically the hijab, but also the beard, various types of Muslim clothing, typical Muslim-sounding names, etc.) become exposed to new forms of racial discrimination and loose dimensions of their whiteness. Yet, it can be argued that by becoming Muslim, white converts also "become white," in the sense that they become hyper aware of their whiteness, especially because some of their non-white coreligionists make frequent references to it. Such racial objectification came as a surprise for many, but also as an offense. (p. 9)

While neither Mandy nor Suzanne should take the blame for the Whiteness that led individuals from ex-colonised countries to treat them unfairly, as teachers, they do have a responsibility to be aware of Whiteness and its influence on their students. As Lynch [14, p. 22) says:

It is the responsibility of White teachers to recognize the role Whiteness plays in the classroom and with students of color ... Choosing the system of privilege and power that Whiteness represents is often done so unconsciously. Whiteness is normative; the standard to which all other behaviors are judged. If not named, it remains invisible and unmarked, and subsequent problems of color blindness and race evasion can occur. By naming Whiteness, White teachers can be brought into the conversation of race, with the goal of active allyship.

Therefore, choosing to work with non-White Muslims to avoid any discriminatory practices against them because of their wearing of a hijab may inadvertently have led to both Mandy and Suzanne's being discriminated against by their Muslim fellows—whether recruiters or students—because their White looks represent Whiteness in their eyes. In this case, the type of discrimination around Whiteness was seen to differ from the type of discrimination related to Whiteness that these participants had experienced in China. In China, White English language teachers are viewed positively and seen as superior and ideal 'native speaker' teachers, whilst in Muslim-majority countries Whiteness represents colonising imperialism. Neither situation is ideal; however, as educators, TESOL teachers need to establish mutual respect and understanding through an understanding of the influence that Whiteness can be having on themselves and others.

## 6. Conclusion

This article has investigated the interrelationship between Whiteness and native-speakerism in the context of the 'native'–'non-native' dichotomy. It has argued that native-speakerism derives from Whiteness and therefore that, when recruiting English language teachers, recruiters' criteria—whether implicit or explicit—are influenced by this social construct. Two conclusions can be drawn from the literature and from the experiences of this study's participants. First, native-speakerism is a nuanced façade that masks beliefs related to Whiteness. Given that meaning is established through language [15] and the ways in which it is used, when a recruiter stipulates that a TESOL position requires a 'native speaker' teacher, he or she is implicitly (if not explicitly) asking for a White teacher. In this case, being White "is no longer about the color of someone's skin (a socially-constructed default understanding of race) but the position or power someone has. It is more than color; it is construed, identified, and applied as power" ([14], p. 22). This position of power explains some recruiters' persistent adherence to recruiting teachers from ex-colonised countries with predominantly White populations, even when applicants from those countries are not ethnically White. This point leads to the second conclusion of this study: any teacher—regardless of their ethnicity—can be negatively impacted by Whiteness. As this study shows, although Black teachers endure more negative disadvantages of Whiteness than do their White counterparts, the latter group is also not immune from its impact, although it can affect them quite differently. They are objectified and their professional identities are ignored. They are alienated and reduced to representatives of foreignness and unfamiliar Others, rather than qualified teachers with quality experiences and skills. In this study, White teachers who were Muslims were not welcomed by their fellow Muslims and were seen as representative of ex-colonising powers. Hence, it should not be assumed that White—or 'native speaker'—teachers always benefit from their White looks or 'native speaker' status. Whiteness is an ideology that impacts every teacher, and it should be confronted. Confronting

Whiteness can be achieved in two ways. The first is to establish open conversations with recruiters, parents, students and all those involved in the TESOL field about the underlying fallacies inherent in the constructs of Whiteness and native speakerism and the negative impact that these have on all teachers regardless of their ethnicities. The criticality and intelligence of these key players should not be denied or underestimated [57]. If, and when, these faculties are engaged, progress may be made in establishing different attitudes to the issues surrounding Whiteness and native-speakerism. Secondly, by establishing regulations to make the inclusion of a ‘native speaker’ requirement in job applications illegal, the EU has pointed to the way in which progress can be made. More countries should follow the EU’s lead to ensure the social justice and equality which are the main goals of any educational system.

Finally, while this small-scale study has revealed and explored a limited number of links between Whiteness and the recruitment and treatment of ‘native’ speakers in the TESOL context, “how Whiteness intersects other social categories such as gender, class, age, sexual identities, religious identities, and so on” ([58], p. 483) calls for a larger and more detailed investigative study.

### CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Muneer Hezam Alqahtani:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft.

### Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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