Discriminatory Practices Against Non-Native English Speaker Teachers in Colombia's Language Centers: A Multimodal Study

Prácticas discriminatorias contra profesores no nativos de inglés en centros de lenguas de Colombia: un estudio multimodal

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This multimodal/multimedia discourse analysis explored institutional practices regarding native and non-native English speaker teachers in five language centers in Medellín, Colombia, as reflected in interviews with coordinators and teachers, language centers' websites, social media, and recruitment materials. Data were analyzed using content and multimodal discourse analysis. Findings unveiled that, in general, these language centers favor native English speaker teachers and discriminate against non-native English speaker teachers in multiple ways, as the former are privileged in job searches, are asked fewer hiring requirements, have more room for negotiation, earn higher salaries, and enjoy more perks.

Keywords: discriminatory practices, language centers, native speakers of English, non-native speakers of English

El propósito de este análisis del discurso multimodal/multimedial fue explorar las prácticas institucionales hacia los profesores nativos y no nativos de inglés en cinco centros de idiomas en Medellín, Colombia, mediante entrevistas a coordinadores y profesores y el análisis del discurso de las páginas web, redes sociales y materiales de reclutamiento de estos centros. Los hallazgos revelaron que, en general, estos centros de idiomas favorecen a los profesores de inglés nativos y discriminan a los profesores de inglés no nativos de múltiples maneras, pues los primeros son privilegiados en la búsqueda de empleo, se les piden menos requisitos de contratación, tienen más margen de negociación, reciben salarios más altos y disfrutan de más beneficios.

Palabras clave: centros de idiomas, prácticas discriminatorias, profesores de inglés nativos, profesores de inglés no nativos

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Introduction

As a result of the increasing worldwide influence of English, some Latin American countries—such as Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, and Mexico (González & Llurda, 2016)—have promoted the teaching and learning of this language among their citizens through nationwide government programs. In Colombia, the most recent version of the Ministry of Education's (MEN) bilingual program is called *Colombia Bilingüe* 2018–2022 (MEN, n.d.-a). The initial purpose of this program was to have, by 2019, "citizens capable of communicating in English, so that they can insert the country in universal communication processes, the global economy, and cultural openness, with internationally comparable standards" (MEN, 2006, p. 6).

As part of this program, the MEN has taken some measures, including importing the so-called "native English speaker teachers" (NESTs)[1] to work in local secondary and vocational schools and universities.

Such importation has been very controversial for two reasons: First, it has put these NESTs where they are least needed since primary schools lack licensed English teachers in their staff; vocational schools and universities already count on these. Second, the practice seems to correspond to what Phillipson (1992) calls the "native speaker fallacy" (p. 193). This fallacy consists of importing NESTs to replace non-native English speaker teachers (NNESTs) in some classes but also portraying them as better teachers than their counterparts (Ma, 2012). It also consists of representing them as (a) the owners of the language that "rightfully" belongs to them (Yoo, 2014, p. 86), (b) as Caucasian, white individuals who are "born in inner-circle countries, use English as their mother tongue, . . . and have deep knowledge of English Western Culture" (Manara, 2018, p. 127), and (c) as people who are automatically "superior" to their local counterparts (Mackenzie, 2021, p. 5) due to their

"linguistic authority" (Huang, 2018, p. 54). Although the NESTs that have arrived in Colombia do not necessarily meet the native criterion, their importation is still seen as a product of buying into this fallacy since the government presents them as NESTs and promotes the belief that they can perform much better than NNESTs.

Despite this, the MEN's official website suggests that, by 2018, the government had brought a total of 1,400 NESTs (MEN, 2017, 2018) from countries as varied as Serbia, Ghana, and the Czech Republic (Correa & Flórez, 2022). Several scholars have documented this phenomenon and have reported discriminatory practices that are occurring in public schools, such as not requiring NESTs to have any teaching credentials (González & Llurda, 2016), paying them higher salaries, assigning them less workload and responsibilities (Gómez-Vásquez & Guerrero Nieto, 2018), and not requiring them to have any teaching experience for job applications (Mackenzie, 2021). Nonetheless, only one study describes discriminatory practices in language centers (LCs), which consist of assigning NESTs to higher language levels (Ramírez Ospina, 2015). Therefore, it is unclear what institutional practices regarding NESTs and NNESTs are happening in LCs in Medellín, and if they are, how they are reflected in these centers' websites, social media, and recruitment materials.

Investigating this is essential for at least two reasons: First, the number of LCs has increased exponentially worldwide (Alarcon, 2017), particularly in Colombia in the last 20 years. Indeed, currently, in Colombia, there are 757 LCs (MEN, 2019), also called language academies, institutes, schools, and Educational Institutions for Work and Human Development (IETDHs for their name in Spanish).[2] Second, as Kellner and Share (2019) remind us, media, such as those mentioned above, "construct meanings, influence and educate audiences, and impose their messages and values" (p. 5). Also, they significantly

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1 So-called because they are perceived as NESTs and addressed that way in all government documents even though they come from all corners of the world, including many non-English speaking countries.

2 The latter are public and private profit-making organizations that offer and develop work or academic training programs and provide occupational aptitude certifications (MEN, n.d.-b).

affect people's minds and decisions regarding a myriad of aspects, including where to learn a language, whom to hire, or how much to pay. Thus, when LCs display information about NESTs and NNESTs on their websites, social media, and recruitment materials, they are simultaneously promoting discourses about both groups of instructors that people are likely to believe and buy.

Given this situation, we designed a research study which was guided by the following research question: What are the institutional practices regarding NESTs and NNESTs in the five most prominent LCs in Medellín, Colombia, and how are these reflected in interviews with teachers and coordinators, and the LCs' websites, social media, and recruitment materials?

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on Critical Applied Linguistics (CAL) views of LCs, NESTs, and NNESTs and Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) views of media representations and institutional practices.

Critical Applied Linguistics Views of LCs

LCs, in general, have been regarded as institutions that serve language learning (Mohammadian Haghighi & Norton, 2017). To CAL scholars, however, LCs are more than mere educational institutions. First, they are commercial enterprises since they "provide lessons in English or other foreign languages for a fee" (Alarcon, 2017, p. 25) and use the spread of English to open more schools and maintain themselves in the market (Phillipson, 2008). Following market practices, LCs see learners as consumers and use strategies to attract them (Ramjattan, 2015). For example, they may use their consumers' preferences to promote NESTs' hiring only (Ramjattan, 2015), which simultaneously discriminates against NNESTs.

Second, as Ramjattan (2019) argues, LCs are multilingual spaces that serve to reproduce "students' racist preferences for teachers" and enhance the existing inequality between NESTs and NNESTs (p. 129). Indeed, "these schools may strangely believe that the language is best taught by white native speakers" (Ramjattan, 2019, p. 126) and assign them a higher status. LCs may also have NESTs act as "the models for the acquisition of English" (Chang, 2017, pp. 32–33). Finally, they may follow "imperialistic standards of English and Anglophone culture" (Khan, 2019, p. 124) by reproducing stereotypes and exotification and by privileging some cultural and linguistic aspects over others.

NESTs and NNESTs

CAL theorists also question the "specific conception of the native English speakers . . . as the ideal model for learning English" (Khan, 2019, p. 133). To these scholars, NESTs, whose only qualification is having a high level of English, are not necessarily ideal speakers or "perfect teachers" of the language (Manara, 2018, p. 127). For example, some NESTs are reported to have poor classroom management (Tatar, 2019), show difficulty in explaining lessons (Alseweed, 2012; Ma, 2012), be less familiar with their students' learning styles and needs (Alseweed, 2012), create anxiety among learners (Ma, 2012; Walkinshaw & Duong, 2012), face difficulties to establish a close relationship with their learners (Ma, 2012; Walkinshaw & Duong, 2012), have little knowledge of teaching (Coşkun, 2013; Walkinshaw & Duong, 2012), have problems to communicate with students (Ma, 2012), and hold a low ability to explain grammar (Tatar, 2019). Thus, to be a competent teacher, it is not necessary to be a native speaker of English (Huang, 2018; Mahboob & Golden, 2013).

Similarly, NNESTs are believed to have a "greater linguistic capital . . . over many of their counterparts" (Mackenzie, 2021, p. 17) and to be able to teach the language more effectively as they are aware of the possible challenges that students are likely to face (Coşkun, 2013). Besides, they are perceived by students as understanding their learning difficulties more easily (Viáfara González, 2016; Zhang & Zhan, 2014), having

more knowledge of their cultural background (Alseweed, 2012; Walkinshaw & Duong, 2012), explaining lessons more clearly (Alseweed, 2012; Ma, 2012), devising better strategies to tackle their needs (Zhang & Zhan, 2014) and foster their reading skills (Gutiérrez Arvizu, 2014), having better classroom management (Tatar, 2019), building closer relationships with them (Ma, 2012), and having a better knowledge of grammar (Díaz, 2015; Zhang & Zhan, 2014).

Media Representations

To CDS scholars, media—which include "television, cell phones, popular music, film, video games, digital platforms, and advertising" (Kellner & Share, 2019, p. 5)—are not just neutral tools used to sell products but powerful ideological apparatuses (Fairclough, 1995). They have "the power to influence knowledge, beliefs, values, social relations, [and] social identities" (Fairclough, 1995, p. 2). They "function ideologically in social control and social reproduction" (Fairclough, 1995, p. 47), and as such, they can shape people's minds. Moreover, media "do not merely 'mirror realities' as is sometimes naively assumed. They constitute versions of reality in ways which depend on the social positions and interests and objectives of those who produce them" (Fairclough, 1995, pp. 103–104).

Similarly, media texts "are neither neutral nor transparent" (Kellner & Share, 2019, p. 56). They naturalize messages in the eyes of the viewer and prevent audiences from inquiring about their actual purposes. They do this through media representations, which are "particular ways of representing the world . . . particular constructions of social identities . . . and particular constructions of social relations" (Fairclough, 1995, p. 12). Media texts are characterized by rarely having explicit messages and having an ideological objective (Fairclough, 1995). As such, they contribute to the reproduction of dominating and exploiting social relations, which means that in them and through them dominant groups often appear superior. In contrast, subordinate and marginalized groups appear as "the other" and "inferior" (Kellner & Share, 2019, p. 22).

Institutional Practices

For CDS scholars, there are institutional practices such as (a) hiring practices—recruitment policies and recruitment programs (Wang & Lin, 2013), job advertisements (Selvi, 2010), and professional and biographical criteria (Mackenzie, 2021; Mahboob & Golden, 2013; Tatar, 2019)—, and (b) working conditions practices—salaries, allowances, and distribution of tasks such as class planning and extracurricular activities (García-Ponce, 2020; Gómez-Vásquez & Guerrero Nieto, 2018; Kiczkowiak & Wu, 2018; Tatar, 2019)—that need to be looked at when examining LCs since many of them have been found to discriminate against NNESTs.

To Fithriani (2018), discriminatory practices are defined as "the act of inequitable treatment to a group of people, in this case is the NNESTs, because of their non-nativeness" (p. 742). Among these discriminatory practices, CDS scholars cite the following: (a) preference for NESTs in recruitment policies, programs, and job advertisements (Mackenzie, 2021; Mahboob & Golden, 2013; Selvi, 2010; Tatar, 2019; Wang & Lin, 2013); (b) unequal working conditions in terms of salaries, distribution of tasks, and allowances favoring NESTs (García-Ponce, 2020; Gómez-Vásquez & Guerrero Nieto, 2018; Kiczkowiak & Wu, 2018; Mackenzie, 2021; Ramjattan, 2019; Tatar, 2019; Wang & Lin, 2013); (c) rejection of NNESTs despite their pedagogical training and teaching experience (Mackenzie, 2021; Mahboob & Golden, 2013; Wang & Lin, 2013; Tatar, 2019); and (d) preference for NESTs based on biographical factors such as age, race, gender, and nationality (Mackenzie, 2021; Mahboob & Golden, 2013; Kiczkowiak & Wu, 2018; Selvi, 2010; Tatar, 2019).

Method

This research uses a multiple case study methodology since it takes several cases, collects information from

each (Yin, 2018), and analyzes them individually and across centers. Besides, it aims to "build a general explanation that fits each case, even though the cases will vary in detail" (Yin, 2018, p. 229).

The Language Centers

The cases are represented in five LCs from Medellín, Colombia. The criteria used to select those LCs were: (a) not belonging to a university because, in a previous study conducted by the authors, they were deemed to behave differently from other private LCs in Colombia, due most likely to the fact that the latter are for profit while they former are not; (b) having several branches, offering several languages, and having a significant amount of students, which would indicate that they were prominent and recognized institutions; (c) having a significant number of followers on their social media, which would speak of their popularity; and (d) having been in the market for several years, which would indicate that the community has accepted them. To preserve the anonymity of the participants, we assigned numbers to the LCs (e.g., LC1), and the participants were named according to their role in the LCs. Table 1 summarizes the most relevant characteristics of the five LCs.

Table 1. Characteristics of the Chosen Language Centers (*N* = 5)

Total No. of branches	Type of institution	Languages offered	Status
Between 3 and 30 branches	2 language centers 2 academies 1 institute	3 only English 2 English and other languages	1 international 2 national 2 local

The LCs self-describe as either language centers, language academies, or institutes, which seems to correspond more to a particular preference than to any specific feature since they are all considered IETDHs (MEN, 2019). Of the five centers, one is cataloged as international since it is a Colombian LC with some branches in other Latin American countries; two are described as national because they have branches in different cities of the country; and the other two are marked as local because they only have branches in the city of Medellín.

Data Collection

This study used three sources of data: interviews with selected participants, recruitment materials, and the websites and social media of the selected LCs. The interviews, conducted in Spanish, aimed to find the participants' views regarding their LC's institutional practices concerning NESTs and NNESTs. They were conducted with one local academic coordinator and one local English instructor from each LC who were chosen following an opportunistic sampling technique (Creswell, 2012), that is, those people willing to form part of the study after being contacted by the research group coordinator. The participants were contacted either because someone in the research group knew them, they were recommended to us by earlier contacts, or they appeared on the contact tab of the LC website. No NESTs were interviewed because, when establishing contact with the LCs, the available instructors were all NNESTs, and there was no reply from any NEST. Besides, as this was in the middle of the pandemic lockdown, it was difficult to go to the LCs' main branches to search for them. Interviews were semi-structured (Adams, 2015), with most questions focusing on the recruitment process, hiring requirements, working conditions, and differences between NESTs and NNESTs regarding workload, schedules, and salaries, among others.

Recruitment materials were found only for LC1 and LC3. For LC1, the information was obtained from

an associated website they exclusively used to recruit NESTs, which one of the participants mentioned in one of the interviews. For LC3, the information was retrieved from its official website. This data was collected to find the specific institutional practices regarding recruitment at these centers.

Website information was collected through 14 screenshots of each webpage tab. Finally, 11 images of the LCs' social media (Facebook and Instagram) referring to or portraying NESTs and NNESTs were also collected. Only one was stored when images on one of the media were repeated. The purpose of collecting these screenshots was to explore how institutional practices regarding NESTs and NNESTs were reflected in these media outlets. Table 2 shows the data collection summary.

Table 2. Data Collection Summary

	Interviews	Recruitment materials	Images		
			Website	**Facebook**	**Instagram**
LC1	2	8 images	7	7	1
LC2	3	0	0	0	0
LC3	2	1 PDF	2	0	0
LC4	2	0	4	3	0
LC5	2	0	1	0	0

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed differently depending on the source. For instance, for multimodal and multimedia resources—such as images from LCs' recruitment materials, websites, and social media—Kress and van Leeuwen's (2001) framework was used. This framework analyzes four elements: discourse, design, production, and distribution. However, for this study, emphasis was placed on the discourse and design domains. By analyzing design, it was possible to delve into image aspects such as gaze, the size of the frame, social distance, perspective, type of involvement, and angle (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006); and by analyzing discourse, it was possible to delve into the words and phrases used to describe and refer to NNESTs and NESTs, and the "characteristics of specific discourses" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 24) such as the font color and size and the use of upper and lower case, among others.

The analysis of interviews and text data was inductive, which, as Phillips (2014) explains, consists of creating themes and categories as they emerge from the data. Once the data were uploaded into NVivo, at least eight categories emerged, which were then refined into five: (a) NESTs as privileged in job searches, (b) NESTs as being asked fewer hiring requirements, (c) NESTs as having more room for negotiation, (d) NESTs as earning higher salaries, and (e) NESTs as enjoying more perks. The latter was subdivided into subcategories such as additional stipends and allowances, less workload, and allocation of intermediate and advanced levels.

Approval from the Institutional Review Board was obtained to follow ethical regulations, and the participants signed consent forms. As mentioned above, the participants' real names were not used, and the images found on the LCs' websites and social media were edited to remove any logos or proper names.

Findings

The data analysis suggests that, in general, in these LCs, NESTs are often privileged in job searches, are asked fewer hiring requirements, are given more room

for negotiation of time and class allocation, earn higher salaries, and enjoy more perks.

NESTs as Privileged in Job Searches

In terms of NESTs being privileged in job searches, this situation was evidenced in images from the official website and Facebook account from three LCs (LC1, LC3, and LC4) and in recruitment materials from LC1, where NESTs are either more visible or the only ones being addressed.

Concerning NESTs being more visible than NNESTs, the analysis reveals that LC1, LC3, and LC4 promote this practice. This situation was noted in images found on the official website and Facebook and Instagram accounts of these LCs. An example of this situation was found on the LC3 official website, on the "Contact" tab, in the option "Work with us." On the right, the image had the title "Work with us as a teacher" in blue capital letters and a screenshot of a video showing a white, green-eyed woman, whose name suggests she is a foreigner and who was portrayed as having the roles of "Teacher and Academic Support." On the left, there was a short text with the title "Apply for a Job at LC3", where they invited people to "send [their] current curriculum vitae along with three work and/or professional references to the Human Resources Department [e-mail address provided]" (Image from LC3 website). Although the short text and little information in the image do not have an explicit call for NESTs only, the fact that a foreign instructor is the one who appears makes NESTs more visible in those job searches and sends the message that the LCs may be looking for NESTs, not NNESTs.

Regarding NESTs being the only ones addressed, evidence was found in recruitment materials and the official website and Facebook account of LC1. An example comes from recruitment material explaining the conditions and requirements to apply for the job. LC1 requested candidates to be foreigners or to be able to prove a C1 level based on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). The material stated that "applicants must be from a foreign country where English is either the first language or an official language or have the capacity to show they have a C1 level of English according to the [CEFR] standards." Moreover, they claimed that "applicants with dual citizenship can apply when they are able to present proof that they have lived the majority of their life in another country (not Colombia) and currently live abroad" (Recruitment material, LC1).

Through these explicit conditions and requirements, it is visible that these LCs are eager to hire foreign instructors. Even though they accept Colombians, they must have dual citizenship or live abroad, which is discriminatory to those Colombians who do not meet these requirements.

NESTs as Being Asked Fewer Hiring Requirements

Regarding NESTs being asked fewer requirements than NNESTs when hired, evidence was found in LC1, LC2, LC3, and LC4. For instance, in recruitment material found on the "Home" section of the LC3 website showing the English courses on offer, there was a statement that require all instructors to certify their pedagogical and methodological skills. Additionally, NNESTs were asked to pass a language proficiency test.

> Our institution has highly qualified teaching personnel; some of them are from the United States, England, Canada, and Australia, also Colombian instructors who are fully certified for language teaching with a C2 or C1 level (CEFR). Additionally, the instructors who are not licenciados have certified their pedagogical and methodological skills through a CELTA, DELTA or TKT exam (Recruitment material, LC3).

As shown, NNESTs with an English teaching degree are also required to demonstrate a "fully certified" C2 or C1 level, and NNESTs who do not hold a teaching degree are asked to take methodological courses such as the TKT. The requirement is absurd since in Colombia,

although there is no required level of English for entrance to an English teaching preparation program, there is a required exit level, C1 (Resolución 18583, 2017). NESTs, on the other hand, are only required to be foreign. They do not need to certify their language level or take methodological courses.

Another example of NESTs having to meet fewer requirements than NNESTs was found in the interview with the current academic director from LC4, who confessed that NESTs working in that institution mainly were passers-by who did not have any teaching preparation.

> Throughout time, we realized that [NESTs] did not even have any pedagogical concepts clear, but they simply were people who came for a trip or to visit the country and who then stayed, working in these kinds of institutions, without any pedagogical or academic concept.[3]

Thus, because NESTs come from inner-circle countries (Kachru, 1985), some LCs automatically consider them qualified, prepared instructors who need to prove neither their language proficiency level nor their teaching skills. Conversely, NNESTs are sometimes asked for additional tests to prove their pedagogical and linguistic competence.

NESTs as Having More Room for Negotiation

Concerning NESTs having more room for negotiation of time and class allocation, this was seen in LC1 and LC3. For instance, in an interview with a former instructor from LC3, she stated that the LC was flexible with NESTs and respected their schedule, which usually included later classes. At the same time, NNESTs were assigned 6 a.m. courses without being asked.

> NESTs have a different recruitment process, requirements, and some privileges regarding the schedule. For instance,

at LC3, there is the impression that NESTs do not like getting up early; therefore, those instructors were rarely given a class at 6 a.m. However, the Colombian instructor was not even asked and was simply given the course.

As can be seen, NNESTs have little room for negotiation. Regardless of the circumstances, they must comply with working shifts, class schedules, last-minute class allocations, and course levels. Meanwhile, NESTs have some benefits for which they do not have to ask.

NESTs as Earning Higher Salaries

Regarding NESTs' higher salaries, this situation was noticeable in the interviews with two academic coordinators and three instructors from LC1, LC2, and LC4. For example, in an interview with a former instructor from LC2, he noted that NNESTs earned less than NESTs.

> There was very much difference in salary, so to speak; instructors from here, from Medellín, or other places in Colombia had an hourly salary, but it was a lower salary than it was for a native instructor.

This example unveils how some LCs overvalue NESTs or believe they are better than NNESTs and, therefore, deserve different and better working conditions (in this case, a higher salary).

NESTs as Enjoying More Perks

The data analysis unveils that NESTs are given more perks: additional stipends and allowances, less workload, and allocation of intermediate and advanced classes. However, this practice has an exception: NESTs have fewer opportunities to get a promotion than NNESTs.

Additional Stipends and Allowances

LC1 and LC3 promote this practice. An example of this situation was found in some of the recruitment materials from LC1, where they explicitly offered "local

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3   All interview excerpts have been translated as interviews were conducted in Spanish.

transport expenses for business days, international and national flight tickets, housing, tourist travel pack within the country, help with the visa process and also the visa cost, and a monthly stipend of 300 US dollars" (Recruitment material).

The practice was confirmed by a former coordinator from that LC, who explained that the institution did everything possible to have NESTs working for them.

> There was a program that LC1 tried to carry out to attract NESTs; it was called "Be an Ambassador," in which they were given the chance to travel, to have some trips every two months . . . to Cartagena, Eje Cafetero. I mean, the LC did everything so that NESTs would not leave. (Interview)

This demonstrates that NESTs receive more perks than NNESTs, even when these share similar circumstances with NESTs, such as migrating to the city where the LC is located. In other words, the LCs discriminate against NNESTs by depriving them of the same benefits their NEST counterparts have. Although NNESTs would not need some perks, they would benefit from local transportation expenses, travel packs, and trips to other places in Colombia.

Less Workload

In terms of workload, the data analysis unveils that these same two LCs (LC1 and LC3) assign less workload to NESTs, representing another benefit for them. This unfair distribution of instructors' workload is suggested by a former instructor from LC3 when she stated that NNESTs had to work all day on Saturdays, whereas NESTs had fewer class hours, meaning they worked half or less time than NNESTs.

> On Saturdays, the schedule is from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m.; however, many NESTs only worked until noon, whereas NNESTs had to work the whole working day, around 8 to 10 class hours. There were even some cases in which NESTs did not have a workload for the whole day; I mean, they could have just one two-hour course, and then they were "available" up to midday. (Interview)

This excerpt reveals how, besides being paid less and getting fewer or no allowances, NNESTs must work longer or more working days. It also shows how LCs are more concerned with the well-being of NESTs: These are effectively given less work and more free time compared to their NNEST counterparts.

Allocation of Intermediate and Advanced Levels

The last perk NESTs have is related to them being mostly or only assigned to teach intermediate and advanced levels. This is a perk because advanced courses require less preparation and planning, so much so that NNESTs want to be assigned advanced courses and complain when they are assigned only basic levels. The data analysis reveals that this practice is promoted in LC1, LC2, LC3, and LC4. For instance, in the interview with the current academic coordinator from LC2, he expressed that the LC hired NESTs to teach in intermediate and advanced levels (B2 and C1) because, for basic levels, they had *licenciados*.

> The recruitment of [NESTs] is primarily done for levels B2 and C1 where people can already produce more in the language. Nevertheless, at basic levels, the LC does not recommend it. At basic levels, we also have instructors who hold a bachelor's degree in education, people who have their international language proficiency tests, pedagogical knowledge, and tests that can prove their teaching skills.

This practice was also evidenced in one recruitment material from LC1, where they explained some characteristics of the job NESTs would do in the institution, such as the classes these instructors would be in charge of. The LC explicitly assured: "You will deliver regular classes to advanced level students and in speaking rooms."

The examples in this section demonstrate that NESTs have more perks as they are given additional benefits NNESTs lack, including extra stipends and

allowances, less workload, and allocation of intermediate and advanced levels. The only exception to this is found when it comes to getting promotions. The data analysis reveals that this is the only practice favoring NNESTs more than NESTs. This situation was verified in interviews with four coordinators and three instructors from LC1, LC3, LC4, and LC5.

For instance, the academic coordinator from LC5, the only LC that does not promote any of the practices described above that favor NESTs and disfavor NNESTs, claimed that he started to work as an instructor in the LC and that some months later, he was given the possibility to become one of the coordinators, being in charge of administrative tasks, which required other sorts of abilities apart from those for teaching. Similar examples were found in the interviews with the other coordinators and instructors.

> At LC5, I started working as an instructor in 2016. I had that role for a year, and then I started to get promoted to more administrative-academic posts. In the beginning, I was an administrative coordinator for two months, which is a kind of first step to getting ready for handling administrative issues; one can stay a long time in that post. However, when my probationary period was over, some academic coordinators quit. Thus, I got promoted to academic coordinator. (Interview, LC5 former academic coordinator)

This practice of giving NNESTs the possibility of getting a promotion may happen because they tend to work in the LCs for a long time. In contrast, NESTs are temporary instructors who need or desire to return to their hometown countries after some time in Colombia.

Discussion and Conclusions

The findings revealed that, in general, NESTs are favored through the institutional practices these LCs hold, and NNESTs are discriminated against. These findings are similar to those obtained by García-Ponce (2020), Gómez-Vásquez and Guerrero Nieto (2018),

Mahboob and Golden (2013), Ruecker and Ives (2015), Tatar (2019), and Wang and Lin (2013). Indeed, although none of these studies was conducted in LCs, all these scholars found that NESTs are privileged in job searches and teaching positions and have to fulfill fewer hiring requirements by not proving their training in language teaching.

The study also corroborates the findings of many other scholars. For example, it confirms those obtained by Mackenzie (2021), which revealed that NESTs are preferred for teaching positions over NNESTs and that, sometimes, NESTs were only asked to have an alternative teaching certification. It also backs up Gómez-Vásquez and Guerrero Nieto's (2018), Mackenzie's (2021), and Wang and Lin's (2013) findings that NESTs are paid higher salaries. Next, the study verifies the findings by Ruecker and Ives (2015), Senom and Othman, 2014, and Tatar (2019), who uncovered that NESTs receive more perks than NNESTs and these were reflected in additional benefits, including airfare, transportation, free stipends, free accommodation, less workload, reduced working hours, and a different division of tasks which puts NESTs in an advantaged position over NNESTs. Finally, this study corroborates the work done by Ramírez Ospina (2015) in LCs in the sense that it also revealed that NNESTs are usually confined to the teaching of basic levels, possibly because their language awareness (i.e., knowledge *about* the language) is taken for granted due to their pedagogical training, while their language proficiency (i.e., knowledge *of* the language) keeps on being a concern (Andrews, 2003). Conversely, instructors holding an alternative certification (in this case, NESTs) may be mostly given intermediate and advanced levels, mainly based on conversation, since these courses do not require NESTs to have language awareness but language proficiency (Andrews, 2003).

However, the findings of this study differ from those of at least two studies. First, Selvi (2010), whose study was not carried out in LCs, found that, although NESTs were privileged in job searches and sometimes

were not asked for any teaching credentials, on some occasions, they were required to have a bachelor's degree, a master's in TESL/TEFL, or even a doctorate. Second, García-Ponce (2020) found that not only did NESTs earn higher salaries and have extra benefits (such as more holidays), but also enjoyed more promotions. This aspect is different in our research, as we found that the only exception to the additional perks NESTs received in LCs was not having many opportunities to get a promotion.

Besides confirming and differing from some of the studies mentioned above, this study is significant in five ways: First, it reveals that the discriminatory practices against NNESTs that happen at school and other settings and that have been uncovered by scholars (García-Ponce, 2020; Gómez-Vásquez & Guerrero Nieto, 2018; Senom & Othman, 2014; Tatar, 2019; Wang & Lin, 2013) also happen in LCs. This is important because, thus far, few studies have suggested that LCs discriminate against NNESTs (Mackenzie, 2021; Ramírez Ospina, 2015).

Second, it is significant in that it unveils an important fact that had not been reported in the NESTs and NNESTs' literature before regarding both NESTs and NNESTs in LCs or any other type of setting. This fact is related to NESTs having more room for time and class allocation negotiation based on their preferences and requests for the LCs. In contrast, NNESTs cannot negotiate the schedules and course levels they are assigned to teach.

Third, this study demonstrates that, just as other institutions around the world and in Colombia, these LCs have bought into the idea that English belongs to specific groups (Yoo, 2014), that NESTs are "the experts" in the language (Senom & Othman, 2014), whose "nativeness" is enough (Mackenzie, 2021), and that, regardless of NNESTs' pedagogical training and linguistic skills, they are not a model to follow (García-Ponce, 2020; Gómez-Vásquez & Guerrero Nieto, 2018; Ruecker & Ives, 2015), despite the literature that speaks to the contrary (Huang, 2018). Consequently, these LCs

have bought into the idea that NESTs are better prepared to teach the language (Ramjattan, 2019), which creates inequality in how both groups of instructors are treated (Tatar, 2019) in LCs.

Fourth, this study suggests that, just as many LCs around the world, the LCs in this research are driven by market forces (Ramjattan, 2015), and therefore, they use media (recruitment materials, websites, and social media) as a tool to attract consumers (Ramjattan, 2015) and send particular messages which seem to be neutral and devoid of hidden intentions (Kellner & Share, 2019). Nonetheless, these messages promote the discrimination, disempowerment, and marginalization of NNESTs (Aneja, 2016) since they render invisible or overlook this type of instructor. Conversely, these same messages reinforce the existing hierarchy between NNESTs and NESTs (Huang, 2018), showing the latter as an idealized figure (Khan, 2019) and assigning them a superior status (Mackenzie, 2021) by making them more visible and giving them credibility. They are also going against the tenets proposed by critical scholars, who challenge the wide acceptance and naturalization of NESTs' superiority in English language teaching and who argue that it is not necessary to be a native speaker of the language to be a competent teacher (Huang, 2018; Mahboob & Golden, 2013), so NNESTs' linguistic capital can be seen as a strength (Mackenzie, 2021).

Finally, this study demonstrates that the ideologies that LCs have bought into about English, LCs, and NESTs, among others, cannot only be seen through an analysis of the LCs' practices but also through their websites and social media, which are powerful ideological apparatuses (Fairclough, 1995) through which LCs promote discriminatory institutional practices as "neutral or objective" (Kellner & Share, 2019, p. 100). Thus, LCs should be a research focus due to their exponential growth in the country and their impact on English teaching and learning.

The findings have implications for language policy and LCs' administration. Regarding the first aspect, the

results suggest that the government, specifically the MEN, should regulate LCs more strictly so that all LCs, not merely the ones that choose to do it, have the same regulations for NESTs regarding language proficiency and pedagogical skills. By doing so, the LCs create equal working conditions for both groups of instructors. As a result, through these regulations, the LCs would have to guarantee NNESTs the same rights and benefits NESTs receive, which, simultaneously, would lead to a more equitable hiring approach. Regarding the second aspect, the findings suggest the need for LCs to educate themselves by reviewing the literature regarding both NESTs and NNESTs. This way, they can demystify the former's perceived superiority and the latter's inferiority, allowing them to use their media more favorable to NNESTs and organize NESTs and NNESTs' workload, among other things.

Further research could delve into what institutional practices are reflected through the flyers, posters, and advertisements the LCs produce and how NESTs and NNESTs are represented in those media artifacts. Another avenue for future research is to explore, from the perspective of NESTs, what institutional practices the LCs promote and how they feel about those practices that privilege and favor them. Lastly, further research could be conducted to unveil to what extent these representations influence different stakeholders' perceptions about the language and the instructors teaching it, mainly parents and students.

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