

Discrimination in the Mexican TESOL Field: Are we Solving the Problem?¹

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Abstract

In the last few decades, it has been documented that the field of TESOL is filled with discriminatory practices that affect professionals who dedicate their lives, time and academic backgrounds to teaching English as a foreign language. Previous research evidence has shown that these practices are mostly initiated by issues concerning the language status of these professionals, (i.e., native-versus non-native English-speaking teachers). However, based upon our experience as English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers in Mexico, our argument is that discrimination in the field of TESOL is far more complex than just a distinction between native-versus non-native English teachers. To show this, the present article draws on extensive data collected through an online questionnaire administered to 78 EFL teachers working in Mexico regarding their perceived discriminatory acts that they felt they had experienced in their careers. The evidence shows that discrimination in the TESOL field is due to a wide range of discriminatory acts. Results of this research study show that discrimination is still alive, despite the fact that there are a number of position statements in TESOL that promote the idea of diversity of languages and peoples' backgrounds.

Resumen

En décadas pasadas, se ha documentado que en el área de la Enseñanza del Inglés para Hablantes de Otras Lenguas (TESOL, por sus siglas en inglés) existe discriminación que afecta a profesionales quienes dedican su tiempo y formación para enseñar el inglés como lengua extranjera. Investigaciones anteriores han mostrado que estas prácticas son comunmente iniciadas por la distinción entre docentes nativos y no nativos. Sin embargo, basado en nuestra experiencia como maestros de inglés, creemos que este fenómeno es mucho más complejo. Para mostrar esto, este artículo hace uso de datos recolectados a través de un cuestionario en línea el cual se administró a 78 docentes del inglés como lengua extranjera en México. La evidencia muestra que la discriminación en la Enseñanza del Inglés para Hablantes de Otras Lenguas es motivada por diversos factores. La contribución de este estudio es el mostrar que la discriminación en este campo aún existe a pesar de esfuerzos para erradicar o movimientos para promover la diversidad de lenguas y características raciales.

Introduction

For decades, research has shown the prevalence of discrimination as a phenomenon that has significantly impacted the field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). This previous research has extensively documented discriminatory acts initiated by the distinction between the native-speaker and non-native speaker status of professionals (see Braine, 2010; Holliday, 2005a, 2005b; Kachru, 1982; Kubota, 2004; Kubota & Lin, 2009; Llurda, 2005; Medgyes, 1994; Ruecker & Ives, 2014). This discrimination is despite the fact that the number of non-native speaking teachers continues to increase (approximately 80%) (Braine, 2010). Based upon this research evidence, efforts have been directed towards eradicating these discriminatory acts. However, discrimination in the field of TESOL still exists and continues to affect non-native speaking professionals (de Figueiredo, 2011; Garcia-Ponce et al., 2017; Lengeling et al., 2016, Louber, 2017; Mahboob, 2013; Ruecker & Ives, 2014; Selvi, 2010). The problem is that the nature of discrimination in the field of TESOL is far more complex than just acts against non-native English-speaking professionals. Evidence of this comes from another small-scale study that the current authors conducted with English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers working at a state university in Mexico (Garcia-Ponce et al, 2017). In that previous study, we found that discrimination in TESOL is motivated by not only the status of the language (native versus non-native), but also by a wide range of acts which are intricate in nature. We believe that if we intend to stop discrimination practices in the field of TESOL, we first need to understand the nature of the discrimination phenomena in Mexico and their effects on the professionals; we then need to communicate this information to the stakeholders in this field (i.e., students, teachers, parents, administrators and employers). Collecting this information has to be done in large-scale research projects

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conducted in different contexts because our recent evidence suggests that the nature of discrimination changes depending on the circumstances. More importantly, these projects would bring this evidence to light, raise the awareness of this issue to these stakeholders, and formulate appropriate strategies to advocate against this discrimination, (i.e., discrimination against teachers who are not native speakers of English).

Thus, the present study aims to examine the kind of discriminatory acts that Mexican professionals have experienced in the field of TESOL in Mexico. The following research questions guide the present study:

- To what extent have Mexican EFL teachers perceived discrimination against them in the profession?
- What kind of discriminatory practices have these professionals experienced in the field of English Language Teaching?

Background

Discrimination can be seen at different social dimensions. People can be discriminated against for many reasons such as their age, gender, physical appearance, religion and other characteristics. In education, Mickelson (2003) claims that discrimination “arises from actions of institutions or individual state actors, their attitudes and ideologies, or processes that systematically treat students from different racial/ethnic groups disparately or inequitably” (p. 1052). In the literature, several definitions of discrimination have been suggested. For example, Kohler-Hausmann (2011) defines the concept of discrimination as practices that merely put individuals at a disadvantage on the basis of some perceived traits. For the purpose of this study, we follow an adaptation of Garcia-Ponce et al.’s (2017) definition in which discrimination in TESOL is viewed as prejudiced actions or omissions motivated by gender, ethnicity, temporal or permanent physical impediment, and linguistic competence (involving pronunciation, accent or any linguistic aspect related to the language), or any other actions which initiate inequalities for the obtainment of resources or opportunities in the profession of foreign language teaching.

In the field of TESOL, many discriminatory acts have been documented in research. It is evident that non-native speaking teachers often face discrimination in the labour market simply because English is not their native language. One main problem in our profession is racism; ignorance and prejudice may be involved in the very use of the terms referring to English teachers who have a first language other than English. One of the most common manners of distinguishing between one teacher or another is through the dichotomy of native/non-native speaker. When students perceive the ability of non-native English-speaking instructors as not effective, their experience with their instructors can be limited and negatively affected. Eventually this can translate into their negative evaluation of the non-native English-speaking teachers’ teaching quality (Neves & Sanyal, 1991). However, in Lasagabaster and Sierra’s (2002) study, the attitudes of many students towards their non-native English-speaking teachers evolved positively as the course advanced and students gradually became used to the teacher. Time seemed to be an important issue regarding their attitude. This gives us an indication that perceptions might be subject to change over time; one of the elements on which the present study will focus attention. Of course, to sustain this claim, we would need to explore perceptions through longitudinal lenses.

Amin (2001) and Tang (1997) have also touched on the topic of racial discrimination against teachers who come from the “periphery” or what Kachru (1982) has called the “outer circle”. These authors argue that when teachers are not white Anglo-Saxon and do not meet the expectation of the public (i.e., they do not “look like” native speakers of English), they are subjected to racial discrimination when teaching, mainly in English speaking countries (see Kubota, 2001; Kubota & Lin, 2009; Parker et al., 1999). Further, discrimination in TESOL is motivated by factors beyond ethnicity and language status. Gender can also be an influential factor (Kamhi-Stein, 1999).

Hiring practices in the area of TESOL can be diverse, and an increasing number of advertisements can be found on the web, in mass media, and in other electronic and printed sources. However, employment opportunities for English language teachers can be discriminatory. That is, some advertisements signal a preference for hiring only native speakers, denying employment opportunities to those who are classified as non-native speakers (Jenkins, 2017). In a recent study, Lengeling & Mora Pablo (2012) found that the discourse used in job advertisements for hiring English teachers still promoted the idea that “in order to teach English, the person should be young, attractive and energetic” (p. 100). In the same study, the authors argued that most of the advertisements showed a preference for the native speaker in order to attract more customers in private and public institutions, and they mention that “this discourse [...] leads to

a social interpretation, placing pressure upon those who are non-native speakers and who do not fulfil the image set in the advertisements" (p. 99).

Despite the fact that the TESOL profession commonly allege that they are open to English varieties, there is still discrimination in this field (Mora Pablo, 2011). The fact that discrimination still exists in TESOL is indeed a problem—and a surprise to many given the number of position statements which promote the idea of diversity of languages and people's background. This principle can be seen in the following position statement of the TESOL International Association

TESOL is opposed to discrimination that affects the employment and professional lives of the TESOL members on the grounds of race, ethnicity, nationality, language background, disability, health/medical condition, including HIV/AIDS, age, religion, gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation. (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc., 2016)

Despite this effort, discrimination is still prevalent all over the world against TESOL professionals (Garcia-Ponce et al., 2017; Lengeling et al., 2016, Louber, 2017; Mahboob, 2013; Ruecker & Ives, 2014; Selvi, 2010). That is, discrimination against EFL teachers based on their mother tongue, physical appearance, perceived ethnicity and other elements is still present in the day-to-day EFL arena. According to Garcia-Ponce et al. (2017), "the reason that the problem of prejudice in TESOL still exists may be due in large part to ignorance, not malevolence, on the part of students, teachers and administrators" (p. 57). Thus, the consensus is that discrimination is still widespread (Llurda, 2005).

In Mexico, a limited number of investigations on this topic has been conducted to date. These studies have been centred on discrimination against the non-native speaker teacher (see Garcia-Ponce et al., 2017; Lengeling et al., 2016). However, we believe that the phenomena of discrimination in this field is far more complex, than just acts which relate to the native/non-native speaker dichotomy. Following this, the aim of this study is to develop an understanding of the complexity of discrimination in the Mexican TESOL field. The contribution of the study lies on the fact that it provides a new understanding of the nature of discrimination that participants felt they had experienced within their profession.

Methodology

In this project, the authors hoped to understand how EFL teachers perceived any discriminatory act that they felt they had experienced when applying for a job in TESOL and/or working as non-native speaking teachers in Mexico. A qualitative approach was appropriate for this research because we aimed "to describe social phenomena as they occur naturally" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 38). Dörnyei (2007) also mentions that "[q]ualitative research is concerned with subjective opinions, experiences and feelings of individuals and thus the explicit goal of research is to explore the participants' views of the situation being studied" (p. 38). Here we wanted to undercover the perceptions, experiences and feelings of the participants in relation to any action that they had regarding discrimination. In a similar vein, Nunan (1992) points out that qualitative research is "concerned with understanding human behaviour from the actor's own frame of reference" (p. 4). Here the actor refers to the non-native English-speaking teacher in Mexico and the human behaviour is the perception of a discriminatory action.

In order to gather the qualitative data, we chose to utilize the technique of survey, and specifically SurveyMonkey—a web-based survey platform. Wright (2005) mentions that this type of survey takes advantage of the ability of the internet to provide access to groups and individuals who would be difficult, if not impossible, to reach through other channels. This use of an internet survey provided us with a large number of participants throughout Mexico. The survey consisted of ten questions in English (see Appendix I), which were a combination of close-ended and open-ended questions. All the questions asked for information regarding any discriminatory action experienced by the EFL teachers. These survey questions were posted on social media for approximately four months, and people who were practicing EFL teachers and were non-native speakers of English in Mexico were invited to participate. The questionnaire provided a consent form to explain the aim of our research, our contact information, and the assurance that the data would be kept confidential.

A total of 78 Mexican EFL teachers responded to the survey in English: 52 females and 26 males. The two criteria for the participants were that they had to be non-native speakers and EFL teachers in Mexico. Once the data were gathered, we read through the answers a number of times to find emerging themes and compared the answers with a quantitative analysis in the form of percentages of the frequency of the

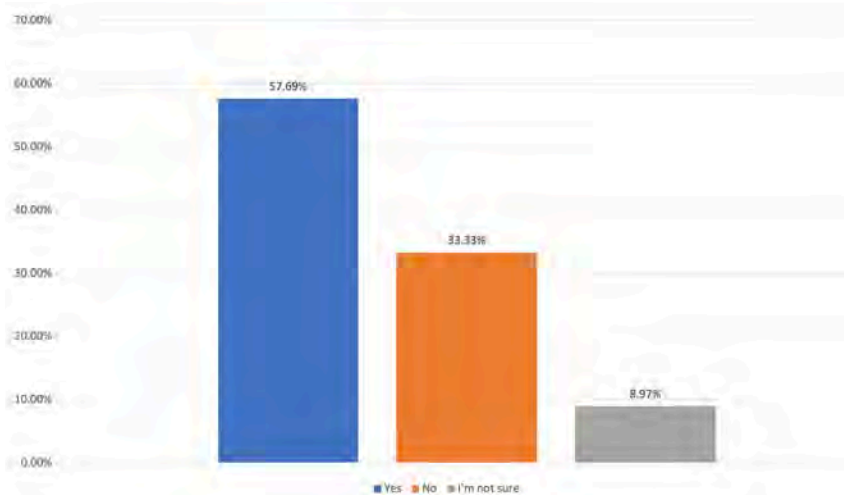
discriminatory acts that the participants have felt while applying for jobs or working the field of TESOL. To make this evidence more visible, we use graphs to show the gathered information.

Data Analysis and Discussion

The objective of the study was primarily to understand the discriminatory practices initiated against Mexican EFL teachers while looking for jobs and/or working in the profession. In this study, our argument is that discrimination goes beyond incidents related to native speaking status and pronunciation. Therefore, we explored the kind of discriminatory practices that these professionals have experienced in the field of TESOL. Overall, the evidence shows that the professionals who participated in this study have perceived a considerable number of discrimination practices initiated against them. The evidence provides support to our argument that discrimination in TESOL includes not only incidents concerning native speaking status and pronunciation, but other practices related to the professionals' race, physical appearance, gender and academic background.

Frequency of Discrimination in the Mexican ELT Profession

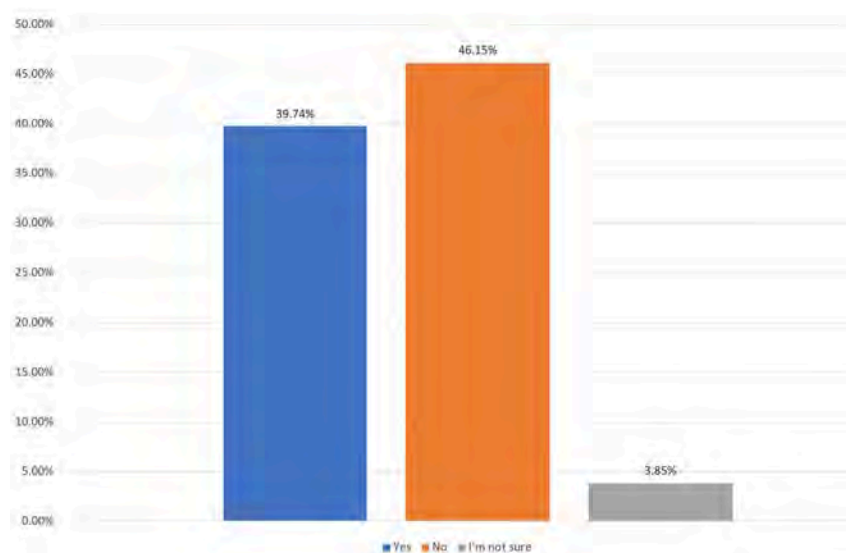
The following graph displays the percentages of the frequency of perceived discrimination participants experienced while applying for jobs in the EFL area.



Graph 1. Percentages of professionals who have perceived some kind of discrimination against them while trying to find a job in TESOL.

Regarding Graph 1, it is apparent that the majority of the participants (57.69%; n=45) has perceived some kind of discrimination initiated against them while trying to find a job in TESOL. Interestingly, similar results have been previously reported in other studies (for example, Garcia-Ponce et al., 2017; Lengeling et al., 2016).

As shown in Graph 2, the perceived frequency of discrimination is not only initiated while applying for jobs, but also while working in the profession.



Graph 2. Percentages of professionals who have perceived some kind of discrimination while working in ELT.

The percentage of 46.15% of the participants have not perceived any kind of discrimination initiated against them while working in the TESOL profession. What is remarkable to observe is that 39.74% of the participants (n=31) have felt some kind of discrimination against them while working in ELT. This evidence adds weight to our argument that discrimination in the TESOL area is still alive while looking for jobs or working in the English teaching profession, despite the Mexican laws and TESOL statements that intend to eradicate these practices. In the next section, we will present evidence that suggests that discrimination in the field of TESOL is multifaceted and motivated by employers, colleagues, students and parents.

Bases for Discrimination in the Mexican TESOL Field

In the online questionnaire, the participants were asked to state the kinds of discriminatory acts that they have perceived in the field of TESOL. Table 1 summarises the percentages of the kinds of discrimination practices that they have felt. The percentages on this graph were calculated by counting the number of times a given aspect was mentioned and then dividing this sum by the number of different discriminatory acts mentioned in the survey (n=17).

Native language status	67.64%	Better job opportunities for professionals from other fields	16.14%
Favoritism for other colleagues	50.00%	Inexperience	12.90%
Physical appearance	41.94%	Male gender	11.29%
Language certificates over degrees	32.26%	Female gender	9.68%
Pronunciation	32.26%	Sexual preference	6.45%
Clothes	27.42%	Motherhood	6.45%
Colleagues' misperceptions towards the profession	25.81%	Illness	4.84%
Age	24.19%	Pregnancy	4.84%

Table 1. Percentages of the bases for discriminatory acts that the professionals have perceived in the Mexican TESOL field.

As can be noticed in Table 1, the participants mentioned a wide range of discriminatory acts that they claimed to have experienced while applying for jobs or working within the Mexican TESOL field. As in our previous study (Garcia-Ponce et al., 2017), the discriminatory acts are varied, suggesting that discrimination in the field of TESOL is intricate and goes beyond the native/non-native status of the professionals. However, we can see in these data that the most recurrent kind of discrimination practice involves the language status of the teachers (67.74%). Moreover, the participants also perceived favouritism of other colleagues (50%) as a cause of discrimination against them. Other reasons for discrimination against the participants include physical appearance (41.94%), importance of language certificates over university degrees (32.26%), and pronunciation (32.26%). In the following section, we present qualitative data that show that discrimination in TESOL is still alive and can be initiated for different reasons, which in this article we categorise as: 1) language status; 2) physical appearance; and 3) negative perceptions of others (employers, colleagues, students and parents) concerning the profession.

In the qualitative analysis of responses to open-ended survey questions, the following seven themes were found regarding the bases and results of discrimination in the Mexican TESOL field:

1. Discrimination: Language status
2. Discrimination: Age
3. Discrimination: Appearance
4. Discrimination: Race
5. Discrimination: Gender
6. Discrimination: Language certificates
7. Results of discrimination

Discrimination Based on Language Status

As previously mentioned, much attention in the literature has been centred on the discrimination initiated by the distinction regarding the language speaking status of teachers (Braine, 2010; Holliday, 2005; Kachru, 1982; Kubota, 2004; Kubota & Lin, 2009; Llurda, 2005; Medgyes, 1994). Perhaps, this is because the native or non-native status of English teachers tends to be the characteristic which mostly influences the perceptions of others (for example, employers or students) positively or negatively. In this study, the speaking status of teachers was the most common aspect perceived by the participants to initiate discrimination practices when applying for jobs or working in the TESOL field. The responses of 46 participants suggested that their non-native language status was a reason of discrimination against them. The extracts below show this.

English is not my native language. Any native speaker will be first choice for any employer, no matter how good my language and academic credentials are. [Extract 2. Participant 13]

I've found schools and institutions where employers say you [are] require[d] to be a native speaker in order to be a good teacher. [Extract 3. Participant 28]

Employers prefer native speakers even if they are not teachers. It looks good to have foreigners as part of the staff, that's all. [Extract 1. Participant 8]

Employers usually ask candidates to be native-speakers as one of the mandatory requirements. In some cases, they don't even schedule interviews. [Extract 4. Participant 17]

Some employers rather hire native speakers even without teaching qualifications. [Extract 5. Participant 41]

In general, the above responses suggest that the participants have found limitations while applying for jobs because they are non-native English teachers. They perceived this as discrimination against them because, according to them, this limits their opportunities to find jobs in the education labour market. As can be seen in these data, these perceived discriminatory practices were mostly initiated by employers. However, other data suggest that discrimination involving the language status of teachers can also be initiated by students and parents, as suggested below.

Many schools prefer native speakers. This happens because many students regard native speakers as the perfect example, while this is not always the case. [Extract 6. Participant 33]

Because employers prefer native speakers even if their linguistic competence or training as teachers are scarce. Besides, some students get the same idea and consider a native speaker is the best teacher. Students sometimes imply that it would have been better to learn from a native speaker. [Extract 7. Participant 57]

A group of students didn't want to have me as a teacher because I am not a native speaker. Students show [scepticism] about my abilities for not being [a] a native speaker. [Extract 8. Participant 45]

Unfortunately, many Mexican people assume that native speakers are the best teachers, even though the parents might not even know whether or not those teachers have a degree in education. I am really shocked that some schools don't give natives and non-natives the same opportunity. [Extract 9. Participant 61]

The above data show that discrimination involving the language status of teachers has also been felt to be initiated by students and parents. By mentioning "the perfect example" [Extract 6, Participant 33], "the best teacher" [Extract 7] and "the best teachers" [Extract 8], the participants' responses suggest that employers, students and parents perceive native English teachers as better than non-native teachers to teach the language, suggesting practices which the participants considered as discrimination. What is interesting about these data is the fact that, in Mexico, the number of non-native English teachers has increased due to the high demand for English teachers for state and private schools in the last decade. This could potentially mean that more non-native English teachers in Mexico would continue to face more discriminatory acts initiated by the ideas of employers, students and parents that native English teachers are "the best teachers" [Extract 8]. It is not only the non-native language status of teachers that initiates discrimination practices, but also how they pronounce the language while applying for jobs or working in the field of TESOL. Of the population in our study, 11 participants have felt discrimination because of their non-native pronunciation. The following extracts show this.

Some coordinators or directors in universities have the belief that native speakers are better than you because of the accent. They commonly confuse accent with pronunciation and they conditionate you to improve your "pronunciation" (accent) when they don't even have any training about the English learning process. [Extract 10. Participant 28]

I was giving an English class for some parents in a school I worked for. It was the beginning of my teaching practice and with children! So, I knew that they had complained about some things but particularly the way I pronounced some words. I felt sad and confused. [Extract 11. Participant 34]

Once, while giving a presentation to some parents from a primary (or elementary) school, they criticized the way I pronounce a word... not directly but I knew they did. [Extract 12. Participant 58]

These extracts show that the three participants have perceived discrimination initiated against them because of their non-native pronunciation. Perhaps this refers to their accent. This can be observed as disturbing because these discrimination practices can be carried out not only by employers or administrators [Extract 10], but also by parents who are involved in English learning of their children [Extracts 11 and 12], as in the case of most private schools. Of course, this growing evidence comes as a surprise in this era, given the

fact that the field of TESOL strongly opposes discrimination of any kind. All English language educators should be proficient in English regardless of their native language. English language proficiency should be viewed as only one criterion of many in evaluating a teacher's professionalism. Teaching skills, teaching experience, and professional preparation should be given much more weight when hiring teachers.

Discrimination Based on Age, Appearance, Race and Gender

When asked about the kinds of incidents during which the professionals have experienced any kind of discrimination, a variety of perspectives and experiences were expressed concerning race, skin colour, dress code, gender and age. For example, 26 participants associated race, and specifically skin colour, as a reason for discrimination in the Mexican TESOL field, as suggested below.

A boss I worked for only hired blonde people 'cause they looked "more native" and as he said students don't wanna learn from people that seems to be low class. [Extract 17. Participant 67]

I am really shocked that some schools don't give natives and non-natives the same opportunity. I was raised in the U.S. for 13 years, speak like a native, but I look Mexican (and I am proud of my nationality). It's really disappointing to know that I'm discriminated because of the color of my skin. [Extract 18. Participant 61]

As can be seen in these two extracts, these participants have felt discrimination against them because of their race and skin colour. Presumably, these incidents take place when Mexican professionals look for job opportunities, as suggested in "A boss I worked for only hired blonde people" [Extract 19, Participant 67].

Related to physical appearance, other participants felt that discriminatory acts have been initiated against them because of their gender. This is suggested in the data excerpts below.

It's hard to remember one specific thing. I must say that as a woman in a school ruled by men, it's difficult to be included or to express your opinion freely. [Extract 19. Participant 3]

I've [been] discriminated [against] for being a woman. When I see a peer being discriminated [against], [it] makes me mad because I know how it feels. Hence, I try to support my peers. [Extract 20. Participant 19]

In these examples, these two female participants have perceived discrimination against them because of their gender. In our previous study (Garcia-Ponce et al., 2017), we also identified discrimination practices perceived by female English teachers. Even though we are unable to corroborate whether or not these incidents occurred in the Mexican TESOL field, the recurrence of this discourse suggests that discrimination might be initiated against female teachers in schools. Our data indicate that male English teachers have also perceived some kind of discrimination because of their gender. This is indicated in the two extracts below.

Many schools, elementary schools, do not accept male teachers just because they are males. [Extract 21. Participant 17]

Mexico lacks discrimination laws regarding these two aspects. Most of primary and preschool schools hire women. 90% of other employers hire people under 40 years old. [Extract 22. Participant 64]

What stands out from these data is the idea that these discrimination practices against male teachers tend to be carried out at the elementary level. Again, we continue to see the recurrent evidence and discourse that both female and male professionals perceive discrimination against them because of their gender. This evidence is surprising because there are current laws in Mexico that protect employees from any kind of discrimination, including gender discrimination (see Article 6 of the *Ley General para la Igualdad entre Mujeres y Hombres* published in the *Diario Oficial de la Federación* in 2006, http://www.diputados.gob.mx/LeyesBiblio/pdf/LGIMH_140618.pdf).

As suggested by Participant 64, in "90% of other employers hire people under 40 yrs. old," eight participants have also experienced discrimination against them because of their age. More specifically, their responses show that young teachers have experienced discrimination because of their age.

Because of my age and my appearance, people believe that I am too young and not able to teach adults. [Extract 23. Participant 51]

They make comments about my age and their "advices" because they think I don't know anything about teaching when they didn't even look at my résumé. [Extract 24. Participant 10]

Another issue is age because they think it will be difficult for us to be in front of a group and not be able to manage it. They are maybe afraid that students will not respect us. [Extract 25. Participant 46]

From these data, we can see that the young age of English teaching professionals can: 1) be perceived as a disadvantage by employers and perhaps students; 2) undermine the credibility of their teaching skills and knowledge; and 3) thus increase the professional's feelings of being discriminated against. In the next sections, the participants reported other incidents during which their credibility as English teachers was compromised and thus increased their perceptions of discrimination against them initiated by employers and other colleagues.

Discrimination Based on Language Certificates

A variety of perspectives were expressed concerning the need to show language certificates while looking for jobs in TESOL. For 14 participants, this requirement was considered as undermining their credibility as English teachers and created perceived discrimination against them. Examples of this are shown below.

I didn't get my English certification yet, but I had already got my BA certificate in English. They didn't give me the job because I wasn't certified, though I had some experience teaching. [Extract 31. Participant 21]

Schools want teachers with a high level of English but the only certification they care about is TOEFL, schools (because SEP told them) still don't know what papers/diplomas/certificates they need in an English teacher, they just rely on the TOEFL test or if you're a native speaker you have the job. [Extract 32. Participant 56]

Now, as a language coordinator, I think I have also practiced discrimination against those colleagues who were looking for an opportunity with the same sentences: Do you have any language certification? What level? Are you an undergraduate or graduate student? In my experience, I had to follow the recommendations given by Place 1 in my university, in order to enrol English teachers. [Extract 33. Participant 21]

It seems that schools and administrations place greater importance on language proficiency certificates than English teaching degrees, such as a BA or MA. Based on our experience as English teachers in Mexico, we feel that an English teaching degree must be compulsory in the language education labour market, but we are aware that some administrators only require a language certificate in order to meet their needs quickly. In general, these three extracts are interesting for three reasons. First, they suggest that having or not having a language proficiency certificate may result in finding or limiting job opportunities for English teaching professionals. Second, as suggested by Participant 56, this evidence reveals again the perception that native English teachers are better than non-native English teachers, and this motivates the idea of hiring first the native English teachers. Finally, there may be other more pressing administrative factors that compel previous English teachers and now coordinators to put emphasis on language certificates rather than university degree certificates of teacher training programmes. This is suggested by Participant 21 in "I had to follow the recommendations given by Place 1 in my university, in order to enrol English teachers." Therefore, it is possible that if we want to start fighting against discrimination in TESOL, we should begin to inform and work with those that are in positions of making decisions and hiring English teachers. This refers to administrators, directors, and coordinators. However, as evidenced in this study, it seems that the efforts should be directed towards raising awareness of the whole community, involving students, teachers, colleagues, parents and administrators, concerning discrimination that is intentionally or and perhaps unintentionally initiated. Requiring a degree in TESOL could be the beginning of what is needed to stop the discriminatory acts previously discussed. Having a degree might also change how our profession is perceived.

The Results of Discrimination

A recurrent theme found in the online questionnaire was participants feeling that their credibility as English teachers was jeopardised by different incidents which they considered as discriminatory against them. Some of these incidents are can be seen below.

Once in a job interview the person [questioned] my curriculum and thought that because of my native Mexican appearance it could be false that I spoke foreign languages, and when he started talking to me in English he was surprised. Afterwards he asked me about experiences abroad. To my surprise I was hired. [Extract 26. Participant 2]

I had more class observation and curiously, I never did something good according to my supervisor while my students expressed their satisfaction with my lessons. [Extract 27. Participant 35]

Again, these extracts indicate that perceived discrimination might be present while applying for jobs or while working in the Mexican TESOL field. Participant 2's response suggests that because of his racial features, the employer thought that he did not have the required English proficiency. In the case of Participant 35,

the fact that her class was continuously observed by the coordinator encouraged her to think that her credibility as an English teacher was at stake. What would be valuable to know is what specifically motivates these participants to think they are discriminated against. We believe that they felt discrimination tends to be undoubtedly based on perceptions. Therefore, we were unable to confirm if these incidents took place in practice. However, the growing number of professionals' claims that their credibility as English teaching professionals was at risk suggests that something crucial to consider is taking place. We, therefore, need to find the solutions to these social and perceptual problems. The following data add weight to our argument that the credibility of English teachers can be undermined by not only employers but also by other colleagues.

In general, English teachers are belittled by content teachers. We don't know how to teach, we don't really have any preparation, etc. These are comments that are made, and attitudes that are shown. [Extract 28. Participant 18]

Well, when I started working in my university, some teachers didn't accept three of us and tried to make students [not] accept us. [Extract 29. Participant 50]

After I finished the Master, I was sent to give classes to the BA where I studied, and some teachers didn't like that and asked the students to talk [to] the coordinator of the program to say they didn't want me to be their teacher. [Extract 30. Participant 50]

In general, the participants' expressions show how they feel about discriminatory acts. What is not known is what motivated the other teachers to underestimate these professionals and their teaching practices. However, these data indicate that in the field of TESOL, professionals might be misperceived and devalued by colleagues from other fields, putting them at a disadvantage and even limiting their access to resources for teaching activities in the workplace. One example of this was the participants' claims that employers, students, and parents prefer native English teachers, which may result in limiting their opportunities to find jobs in the TESOL field in Mexico, as suggested in the extracts below.

I was told I was not a native speaker of English. Therefore, there were other candidates better suited for the job. [Extract 13. Participant 23]

Once I was asked to give a demo class for 2 hours and the coordinator after days just contacted me by email to tell me he couldn't hire me because they preferred foreign teachers who are native speakers. [Extract 14. Participant 28]

When I started teaching, people with better/more natural pronunciation would get more training and promotion opportunities than me. I had to work very hard to improve on my accent [pronunciation] in order to get better opportunities. [Extract 15. Participant 11]

The above responses show the participants' feeling that native English teachers are often perceived to be "better suited for the job" [Extract 13]. According to these participants, this preference initiates discrimination against them by limiting job opportunities [Extracts 13 and 14] and possibilities for training and work promotions [Extract 15]. However, delving more deeply into the data analysis, some participants claim that in their workplaces, there are payment inequalities between non-native and native English teachers, as suggested in Extracts 15 and 16.

In fact, in Mexico if you aren't a native speaker of English you will earn less money than a native one who didn't even study something related to teaching. [Extract 15. Participant 9]

I was passed over for promotions to foreigners, mostly white. I am paid salary much lower than foreign "native speakers", despite having much better qualifications (and being a native speaker myself... but not being white). [Extract 16. Participant 34]

In both extracts, we can see that the participants have perceived discrimination against them by receiving lower salaries than native English teachers. Despite the fact that we are unable to confirm these payment inequalities, more and more teachers continue to report experiences and practices that suggest this kind of discrimination in the field.

In summary, a wide range of discriminatory acts have been perceived by the participants while applying for or working in the field of Mexican TESOL. The data indicate that discrimination within TESOL can be motivated by factors related to the profession, perceptions, physical appearance and work conditions. The fact that the data were based on perceptions, their relevance in number clearly reveals the alive existence of discrimination which likely influences teachers' cognitions and decision making.

Conclusions

In this study, the objective was to examine the discrimination and its complexities that English teachers have perceived in the Mexican TESOL. As previously mentioned, the participants' responses were treated carefully because their insights and experiences were mostly based on their perceptions. In general, the evidence suggested that a high number of Mexican professionals have perceived a wide range of discrimination practices within the field of Mexican TESOL which appeared to be profession-related, linguistic and physical in nature. All in all, these findings point to the prevalent existence of discrimination in our field, and this undoubtedly has an impact on English teachers' careers and practices.

One limitation was that the online questionnaire was not designed to include information about the proportion of the participants in relation to years of teaching the language, the specific parts of Mexico they come from, their English teaching contexts (such as public and private sectors, preschool, and levels of primary, secondary, high school and university). Therefore, we cannot be certain to have surveyed a representative sample of teachers. Future research should focus on more extensive and varied forms of outreach for participants. However, we believe that our discussion and the data that we provided show that discrimination in the Mexican TESOL field is a serious problem that needs closer attention.

In order to fully understand these phenomena, we need to continue carrying out further research. A further study could include students, teachers, and administrators to have a wider picture of the discrimination within the TESOL profession. The study would also need to be design as a large-scale and longitudinal research project to track the complexity and nature of these phenomena. However, we believe that this study has gone some way to gain a further understanding of discrimination within TESOL in Mexico. We hope that this study raises awareness in the TESOL community.

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Appendix I

Survey Questions from SurveyMonkey

1. Do you provide consent to participate in this study, and use your data for analysis?
2. Have you ever been discriminated against while trying to find a job in TESOL?
3. If you answered 'yes', can you describe why you felt discriminated upon looking for jobs in the field of TESOL?
4. How often have you faced discriminatory practices while applying for TESOL jobs?
5. Have you ever experienced discriminatory practices initiated against you while working within TESOL?
6. If you answered 'yes', can you tell us how often these discriminatory acts happened?
7. Can you provide more information about the discriminatory act that you experienced?
8. What kind of discriminatory acts have you experienced within the field of TESOL?
9. How did these discriminatory acts influence your perception of yourself and your feelings?
10. How did these discriminatory acts influence your perception of the TESOL profession and your teaching practice?