

© *Journal of International Students*
Volume 11, Issue 1 (2021), pp. 103-121
ISSN: 2162-3104 (Print), 2166-3750 (Online)
doi: 10.32674/jis.v11i1.1200
ojed.org/jis

Supporting Nonnative English Speakers at the University: A Survey of Faculty and Staff

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ABSTRACT

This study reports on a survey designed to understand the experiences of faculty and staff who work with nonnative speakers of English (NNEs) at a U.S. public research university. Over 1,500 faculty and staff responded to the survey, and the findings highlight their perspectives on the benefits of having NNEs on campus, as well as the challenges that they experience in teaching and advising this population of students. We conclude with a discussion about possible resources and strategies that may provide enhanced support for NNEs and the faculty and staff who work with them.

Keywords: faculty development, internationalization, multilingual learners, nonnative English speakers

INTRODUCTION

In the past several decades, the internationalization of higher education has become an increasingly important priority for U.S. institutions. Many colleges and universities have expended greater efforts to not only send more students abroad, but also to internationalize their campuses by recruiting international students, facilitating intercultural interactions through co-curricular activities, and infusing the curriculum with global learning outcomes (Urban & Palmer, 2014). Recent studies have highlighted important benefits that intercultural contact can afford all students, such as growth in cultural awareness, an increase in critical

thinking abilities, and improved interpersonal communication skills (Loes et al., 2012; Soria & Triosi, 2014; Yefanova et al., 2015).

When actualized in a classroom environment, internationalization is intended to enhance students' learning experiences and prepare them to be successful in a global society (Galinova, 2015). However, one critique of internationalization is that faculty and staff have not been adequately prepared to support the growing numbers of diverse learners (Andrade et al., 2014; Crose, 2011; Peterson & Helms, 2013). Because of their diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, international and multilingual students have unique learning needs and may benefit from enhanced staff support and instructional adjustments (Anderson et al., 2012; Andrade, 2006; Kingston & Forland, 2008). Many scholars have placed responsibility on faculty and staff to make adaptations that will enhance the learning experience for international and multilingual students (Carroll & Ryan, 2007; Crose, 2011; Kingston & Forland, 2008), yet only a handful of studies address the perspectives of faculty and staff, what barriers they perceive students to face, what challenges they experience, and what strategies they use to help provide support to students. Addressing this gap in the relevant literature provides the rationale for our current study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Background

Andrade (2009) made the important point that institutions seeking to expand international student enrollments need to be accountable to providing effective support services for those students. As an integral part of the higher education system, faculty and staff play specific roles in providing both curricular and co-curricular support (Leask, 2009). According to Yefanova et al. (2015), faculty assume a vital role in orienting students to a new academic culture and structuring a classroom experience that helps to facilitate meaningful engagement between students of diverse backgrounds. Staff also play an important role in providing international students with various support services, such as academic advising, resource awareness, and emotional and psychological support (Harryba et al., 2012). Although there is extensive research about the experiences of international students and their academic, cultural, social, and personal struggles within the U.S. higher education system (Anderson et al., 2012; Andrade, 2006; Kingston & Forland, 2008), there are fewer studies that contribute to our understanding of the needs of faculty and staff who support these students. Furthermore, very little research exists to highlight strategies that faculty and staff can use to more effectively support the linguistic and cultural needs of nonnative English speakers (NNESs).

Research on Faculty and Staff Perceptions

A handful of studies provide some insight on how faculty in various institutions perceive the growing presence of NNESs and international students

on campuses across the United States and Europe. In a few studies, faculty reported to hold relatively positive regard for the goals of internationalization and the enhanced diversity on college campuses contributed by international students (Andrade, 2010; Haan et al., 2017; Jin & Schneider, 2019; Mantzourani et al., 2015; Trice, 2003). In addition to these positive perceptions, faculty have also described key challenges they experience in interactions with international and multilingual students, often primarily referencing language and communication challenges as prominent barriers (Kingston & Forland, 2008; Trice, 2003). Faculty in Robertson et al.'s (2000) study explained that in addition to language challenges, students struggled to adapt to a new academic environment, and to demonstrate critical thinking in the ways that were normalized in an Australian university.

Another point of interest in relevant studies is the degree to which faculty members adapt their teaching methods to be more inclusive of NNES students. Andrade (2010) found that faculty respondents in a private U.S. institution reported adapting their instructional methods with some degree of frequency to better support NNESs. However, the faculty indicated little interest in learning how to further accommodate their teaching methods to the needs of NNESs. Mantzourani et al. (2015) demonstrated that although faculty integrated some inclusive teaching practices, they also experienced some level of disconnect with the university's internationalization goals, and felt somewhat underprepared to support the linguistic and cultural needs of international students. Similarly, faculty in Haan et al.'s (2017) study voiced concerns regarding the complications internationalization posed for their teaching and indicated gaps in their understanding and their ability to implement best practices for instructing NNESs. Jin and Schneider (2019) also reported that faculty described some level of uncertainty regarding how to develop an inclusive pedagogy that effectively supports linguistically and culturally diverse learners.

Although inquiry about staff perceptions is less common in the literature, Harryba et al. (2012) investigated and differentiated between the challenges experienced by academic staff (faculty) and general staff when supporting international students at an Australian university. General support staff discussed communication barriers, concern with English proficiency standards, and extra time needed to support international students as some of the primary areas of challenge they experienced.

The current study contributes to the field by contributing to the knowledge base on how faculty perceive both benefits and challenges of working with NNESs. Staff were also included in our study since their perspectives are underrepresented in the current literature and they also have significant interactions with NNESs. Furthermore, since faculty in previous studies have indicated a need for understanding more inclusive strategies to better support NNESs, this study explores what strategies faculty and staff currently use in their support of NNESs, and what additional training or support they perceive to be valuable.

Research Questions

In this study, we sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What benefits do staff and faculty perceive NNEs to contribute?
2. What challenges do faculty and staff report when supporting NNEs students?
3. What strategies do faculty and staff perceive to be helpful in supporting NNEs students?
4. What further support resources would faculty and staff perceive to be helpful in their support of NNEs?

Definition of Terms

When conducting our survey, we chose to inquire specifically about the views that faculty and staff held toward supporting NNEs. We used “nonnative English speaker” as a term to provide a clear reference to students whose first language is not English, recognizing that this population may include domestic students whose first language is not English, as well as international students. In choosing to use the term, we were concerned that it could reinforce the possible perception that these students bring more challenges than opportunities to campus, which was not our intent. We also did not want to just focus on the language deficits of students (by using a term that highlights what they are not) because these are students who already have a high proficiency in at least two languages. However, while we did not want to overlook the strengths of multilingual students, the term “multilingual student” can be ambiguous and we wanted to ensure that everyone responding to the survey clearly understood the population about which we were inquiring. After discussion and consultation, we decided to use nonnative English speaker (NNEs) in this survey because it clearly describes the group we were asking about, but we highlighted the possible implications of using different terms in our reporting of the results. We included an explanation in the first section of the survey so terminology would be clear to respondents and we could also raise awareness about different terminology.

METHOD

Context

The context for our study was a large public research university in the United States. During the spring semester 2016, when our survey was administered, the student population was comprised of over 28,000 undergraduate students. NNEs domestic students accounted for around 9% of the undergraduate student population, and international students, most of whom are NNEs, accounted for another 9% of the undergraduate student population.

Survey Design

We developed and administered an online survey to learn more about how faculty and staff perceive the benefits and challenges they experience when supporting students who are NNESSs. The survey instrument was adapted, with permission, from the questionnaire utilized in Andrade's (2010) study "Increasing Accountability: Faculty Perspectives on the English Language Competence of Nonnative English Speakers." We also sought input from representatives of various campus offices, piloted the survey with instructors and staff who represented the target population, and incorporated revisions based on this feedback. Once all feedback was incorporated, approval for the study was granted from the university's Institutional Review Board.

The survey was categorized into four broad sections according to our research questions. Faculty and staff answered questions to explain their perceptions of the following: (a) ways in which NNESS students benefit the classroom and campus; (b) difficulties faculty and staff experience when supporting NNESS students; (c) strategies perceived to be most useful when working with NNESSs; and (d) interest in further faculty/staff training or resources. Within each section, respondents were asked to complete multi-option, Likert scale, and open-ended questions. The survey branched to different sets of questions depending on whether the respondent's primary role at the university was faculty or staff.

Data Collection

We collaborated with the university's institutional research office to design a sample for this study. We chose faculty and staff participants randomly from colleges and units on campus that work with undergraduate students. We then narrowed the pool to job titles within those units most likely to interact with students. We also invited survey respondents to recommend others who should take the survey, and we sent the survey to all those referred who were not already part of the sample. Because of this, the final sample is not a completely random sample.

Out of 6,727 people invited to take the survey, 1,502 faculty and staff completed the survey, resulting in a 22% response rate. Forty-eight percent of survey respondents identified as staff and 52% identified as a faculty member, instructor, or teaching assistant. From the staff respondents, 11% identified as advisors, 11% represented administrative staff, 9% reported from student services, and 21% did not specify their staff role.

When asked which population of students they primarily worked with, 44% of respondents reported working with undergraduate students, 22% indicated they worked with graduate students, and 35% responded that they served both undergraduate and graduate student populations. The majority of survey respondents, approximately 51%, indicated that they work with some NNESSs, 24% reported that they work with many NNESSs, 19% reported they work with very few, only 4% indicated that they did not work with any NNESSs, and just 1%

reported working with all NNEs. Appendix Table A1 demonstrates the various campus units represented by faculty and staff survey respondents.

Data Analysis

To analyze the quantitative data, we reported the descriptive statistics. For the qualitative portion of the data, we utilized NVivo software to conduct textual analysis, which included identifying and categorizing themes for responses to seven open-ended questions. We also facilitated an intercoder reliability check on a portion of the qualitative data. The intercoder reliability check was conducted as follows: the Principal Investigator (PI) of the study prepared a segment of survey responses for three collaborators from two different campus units to review and code. Each collaborator provided their coded responses to the PI, and the PI reviewed all coded responses for areas of discrepancy. The collaborators and PI met to discuss the text segments where different codes were applied, and after discussion and reconciliation, intercoder agreement of 93% was achieved on the data sample.

RESULTS

Faculty and Staff Perceptions Regarding Benefits

Our first research question was to identify the benefits that faculty and staff perceived of having NNEs on campus, specifically how the presence of NNEs enhances the learning environment for all students. A majority of faculty and staff respondents, 85%, expressed agreement or strong agreement that all students learn about diverse perspectives, whereas only 4% of respondents expressed that they either somewhat or strongly disagreed. Similarly, when asked if they agreed that all students develop intercultural communication skills, a majority of survey respondents, 82%, also indicated agreement or strong agreement, and only 3% of respondents indicated some level of disagreement in response to this item. Appendix Table A2 illustrates respondents' views about the various ways in which NNEs enhance the learning environment for all students.

In response to open-ended questions about the benefits of having NNEs on campus, staff and faculty respondents shared many comments, including that NNEs helped to bring diverse perspectives, provided opportunities for cross-cultural communication and networking, and often modelled hard work and academic excellence for their native-speaking peers. Table 1 provides an illustrative comment for each of the themes described in this section, representing both faculty and staff responses.

Table 1: Faculty and Staff Perceptions of How Nonnative English Speakers Enhance the Learning Environment

Benefits	Representative comment
Cultural diversity ($n = 178$)	<i>They [NNEs] are incredibly helpful in my field where international practice differs in many ways from practice in the USA.</i>
Communication skills ($n = 21$)	<i>Cross-cultural interaction/collaboration encourages students to build effective active-listening skills and the ability to explain complex information in multiple ways ...</i>
Learning languages ($n = 19$)	<i>It may encourage domestic students to learn another language and see the benefit of being bilingual.</i>
Building relationships ($n = 18$)	<i>I think students' lives are richer for having formed bonds with people from other cultures; they also learn that close relationships can form from underlying core values, despite any language or cultural barriers.</i>
Modeling excellence ($n = 18$)	<i>Non-native speakers who come to study at the [University] are often at the top of their class in their home country, smart and hard-working. They enrich the learning environment due to their intellectual capabilities, not just by bringing in a different perspective.</i>
Teaching ($n = 15$)	<i>Non-native English speakers push instructors to reflect more carefully on their course materials ... to write more careful exam questions, to avoid potentially confusing errors or telegraphic writing in power points and assignment descriptions. To include examples that are meaningful and useful to a wider range of students.</i>
Future preparation ($n = 11$)	<i>It prepares them to live in a multicultural world where opinions and means of expressing one's self varies.</i>

Although respondents' comments were primarily positive, it is important to note some faculty and staff respondents ($n = 59$) wrote about various factors that they felt could jeopardize the benefits of having NNEs in class. Specifically, faculty and staff respondents discussed how the benefits may not be realized when students (domestic or international) choose not to interact, when NNEs do not

participate in class, and when the course format does not foster interactions. For example, one respondent noted,

In my experience, the presence of NNEs has the potential to aid in the goals outlined above, but their presence does not automatically create these benefits. The course must be structured in a way that creates opportunities for cross-cultural interaction to occur and the students must be willing to interact. The potential positive impacts, therefore, are highly dependent on the course and the specific students and instructor.

Faculty and Staff Perceptions of Student Challenges

We asked our second research question to better understand the challenges faculty and staff experienced in supporting NNEs students. In response to a question about factors that may limit students' abilities to meet course requirements, the majority of faculty respondents, 59%, indicated either strong agreement or agreement that language proficiency posed the greatest difficulties for students, when compared to other possible factors such as cultural differences, prior academic preparation, and study skills. Appendix Table A3 summarizes faculty responses to this question.

When asked a similar question, approximately 50% of staff respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that NNEs experience communication challenges primarily due to low English proficiency. However, an almost equal percentage of staff respondents (48%) expressed agreement or strong agreement that students' communication challenges were related to confusion about university processes. Appendix Table A4 summarizes staff responses to this question.

In response to various open-ended questions, staff and faculty respondents shared more nuanced insights about a range of complex factors that may contribute to NNEs' learning barriers, including previous academic background, cultural difference, reticence to seek help, confidence levels, and difficulties interacting with peers and faculty. Some faculty respondents commented that students' language-related challenges seemed to overlap with academic tasks such as acquiring discipline-specific vocabulary and coping with heavy reading loads. Both faculty and staff respondents described how various types of cultural differences created barriers for students, particularly related to applying cultural norms in communication, understanding cultural references embedded in the curriculum, and meeting expectations in the U.S. education system. Some faculty respondents expressed how difficult it often was to discern whether a student was struggling with a cultural or a language challenge; for example, participation was often discussed as an area of concern, but some faculty were unsure if students did not participate due to differences in cultural norms or because they lacked the language proficiency necessary to do so. Table 2 provides a representative comment for each of the themes described in this section, illustrating both faculty and staff comments.

Table 2: Faculty and Staff Perceptions of Challenges for Nonnative English Speakers

Challenges	Representative comments
English proficiency (n = 347)	<i>I feel it is primarily English proficiency that can negatively impact their performance in class.</i>
Academic skills (n = 187)	<i>... many students come to the classroom without the preparation in critical thinking skills ... that is necessary for success in this work; they are used to a model based more on memorization and recitation than interpretation and analysis.</i>
Cultural differences (n = 121)	<i>Cultural, political, and legal references may be unfamiliar to them.</i>
Campus resources (n = 91)	<i>Many seem reluctant to use the resources on campus and instead push themselves harder in studying to make up any deficits.</i>
Asking for help (n = 76)	<i>I have noticed that many students that struggle with fluency in English are hesitant to ask for assistance or clarification.</i>
Peer interactions (n = 58)	<i>When given the choice, students prefer to stick with partners or group members from their own cultures (both U.S. and international students).</i>
Confidence (n = 43)	<i>Their confidence level in their English-speaking abilities and the cultural differences in communication style.</i>
Attitudes & expectations (n = 22)	<i>Fear of making mistakes, shame/stigma about what they're dealing with, uncertainty about what information is needed and why it's important.</i>
Faculty interactions (n = 20)	<i>However, another very, very big barrier is the fundamental MOTIVATION for NN students to approach instructors. They are afraid!</i>

Faculty and Staff Challenges

Some of the most commonly cited concerns faculty and staff respondents voiced about the barriers they experienced when working with NNEs included insufficient resources and training, communication barriers, concerns about proficiency standards, grading difficulties, role limitations, uncertainty about how to offer help, and anxiety about offending students. Table 3 provides an illustrative comment representing both faculty and staff views for each of the themes that emerged from our data analysis in this section. Although these themes emerged based on combined feedback from faculty and staff, faculty tended to be more likely to articulate concerns about making sure students met proficiency

standards upon admissions, finding effective grading strategies, and not having time to address the unique learning needs of NNEs. Staff were more likely to express concerns about how to respond to specific communication challenges they experienced with NNEs, such as communicating policy information and confirming that students understood them. Respondents from both faculty and staff groups described concerns with resources and training, and difficulties they have knowing how to best approach students with their concerns without causing insult.

Table 3: Faculty and Staff Challenges in Supporting Nonnative English Speakers

Challenges	Representative comments
Challenges with resources & training (<i>n</i> = 109)	<i>I think instructors often feeling [sic] burdened by nonnative English speakers in their courses because they don't feel they have adequate resources to support them.</i>
Communication difficulties (<i>n</i> = 42)	<i>I think the hardest part is to comfortably figure out a way to communicate when I receive blank stares or lack of understanding body language. How do I respectfully communicate when their [sic] is a pause in understanding...visual, written, or verbal? What are we both trying to understand?</i>
Concerns about proficiency standards (<i>n</i> = 41)	<i>Increasing international presence on campus is a very important goal, but we are not serving anyone (students, faculty, staff) well by accepting students who are at the lowest end of language proficiency.</i>
Grading challenges (<i>n</i> = 29)	<i>It can be overwhelming to grade when the written English is so poor.</i>
Role limitations (<i>n</i> = 20)	<i>It is not my job to teach people how to speak English. I am prepared, willing, and always available to help my students with my course, but this is the university's responsibility.</i>
Uncertainty about how to help (<i>n</i> = 18)	<i>I can often identify a problem, but am utterly unable to give them the right sort of advice for addressing it or to direct them to the appropriate tutor or center on campus.</i>
Fear of offending students (<i>n</i> = 18)	<i>Feeling stigmatized or singled out when asked to get help can lead to further frustration and inhibit a student from taking advantage of existing resources.</i>

Table 4: Faculty and Staff Supportive Strategies for Nonnative English Speakers

Strategy	Representative comments
Communication strategies (n = 94)	<i>I check for clarification to make sure they understand me, restate what I think they are saying to me if I have difficulty understanding them, and follow up via email if it seems clear that they didn't get verbal instructions.</i>
Accommodations (n = 92)	<i>I always give nonnative speakers (along with anyone who has an accommodation) extra time to turn in written assignments.</i>
One-on-one support (n = 61)	<i>Working one on one in office hours, for me, is the only way to really successfully address nonnative speakers' individual needs.</i>
Visuals (n = 37)	<i>I provide handouts and PowerPoint slides to students before class so that they can follow along. I make all handouts and PowerPoint slides available on Moodle for follow up work.</i>
Campus resource promotion (n = 33)	<i>Offering them to talk with someone who works primarily with nonnative English speakers and suggest programs that help polish their English skills.</i>
Encouragement (n = 30)	<i>I recognize that there might be cultural barriers that would cause international students to feel intimidated by faculty, and I do my best to be as friendly and approachable as possible.</i>
Peer support (n = 25)	<i>Learning assistants who are well versed in biology but also speak Chinese or Korean (the most frequent languages of our international students).</i>
Linguistic resources (n = 8)	<i>I add a tab in Moodle available to all students that lists grammar and style worksheets and quizzes.</i>

Faculty and Staff Strategies

We also asked questions to learn specific strategies faculty and staff were already putting to use when working with NNES students. When asked about how frequently they used various strategies to support NNESs, 63% of faculty respondents reported that they adjust their communication style to be clearer, and 55% indicated that they encourage NNES students to use campus resources, with higher degrees of frequency (combining responses for often, most of the time, and

always). Appendix Table A5 provides an overview of these responses, including other strategies that faculty indicated using with lower degrees of frequency. When asked a similar question about how often they used various strategies, 79% of staff respondents reported that they adapt their communication style to be more comprehensible with higher degrees of frequency (combining responses for often, most of the time, and always).

Appendix Table A6 demonstrates a summary of staff responses. Through response to open-ended survey questions, staff and faculty respondents offered additional insights about supports they offer when working with NNEs on campus, including specific communication strategies, accommodations, one-on-one assistance, visual materials, and promoting campus resources. Table 4 provides representative comments illustrating various methods faculty and staff respondents provide to NNEs students.

Support for Faculty and Staff

Faculty and staff respondents were also asked a series of questions to determine what kinds of support would position them to be more effective in their teaching and support of NNEs. Overall, a majority of respondents (72% or higher) reported either “interested” or “very interested” in learning about all of the topics and strategies we listed as options to support NNEs. Of these, faculty and staff expressed the strongest degree of interest (combining “interested” and “very interested” responses) in strategies to help NNEs improve comprehension (81%), strategies to encourage participation from NNEs (78%), and awareness about campus resources (76%). Appendix Table A7 illustrates a summary of this data. Regarding the format of how they would prefer to receive training or resources, over half of faculty and staff respondents indicated they preferred to receive support through online resources, such as a resource website (59%) or an online training course (52%). Other faculty and staff respondents expressed interest in attending an in-person workshop (49%) and receiving an e-newsletter (42%). A smaller number of respondents reported interest in participating in an individual consultation (20%). Appendix Table A8 summarizes this data.

Faculty and staff also provided further explanation of additional types of support they would perceive to be valuable in their responses to relevant open-ended questions. Several respondents expressed interest in specific support options being developed for NNEs students (such as enhanced transition support, language workshops, and one-on-one tutoring) and in learning more information about which campus resources were most helpful for NNEs. Some respondents also reported an interest in receiving culture and language training, communication support, and strategies for grading/giving feedback. Table 5 demonstrates the qualitative themes by providing an illustrative response from a faculty or staff respondent.

Table 5: Potential Resources for Faculty and Staff Who Support Nonnative English Speakers

Resources	Representative comments
Student support suggestions (<i>n</i> = 76)	<i>I think a range of support is needed, from intensive English language courses, to workshops on study skills / writing for American-style courses, to one-on-one tutoring around assignments.</i>
Information about campus resources (<i>n</i> = 37)	<i>... I wish I knew what university resources are available to help them [nonnative English speakers]. As far as I'm aware, none of the faculty in my department know where to direct these students, so this is a problem that goes beyond my individual class or experience.</i>
Culture & language training (<i>n</i> = 18)	<i>I would like to receive some training in at least the basics of a one or two of the languages that many of my nonnative English-speaking students speak. I also think we at the university should do a better job of gaining cultural competency ...</i>
Communication style (<i>n</i> = 11)	<i>I would love some tips on how to best adapt my communication style if I am noticing a language barrier. I want to make sure I am understood and the students know what is going on, but I also don't want to be condescending or "speak down" to anyone.</i>
Feedback & grading strategies (<i>n</i> = 9)	<i>General strategies for providing feedback on written work that is helpful to students but allows them to take ownership of making improvements in their English language skills.</i>
Student needs assessment (<i>n</i> = 7)	<i>Information / feedback about nonnative English speaker graduate students' background and experiences that would allow me to help with their transition and during their program of study in the department.</i>
Guidance on accommodations (<i>n</i> = 5)	<i>I always consider different backgrounds, but have no formal training in what changes to make to better accommodate such backgrounds.</i>

DISCUSSION

In this study, we sought to address a gap in the literature by better understanding the perspectives of university faculty and staff who support NNES

learners, and by identifying instructional and support strategies that faculty and staff perceive as valuable when interacting with NNESSs. One key finding is that faculty and staff report primarily positive views regarding various benefits of the diversity that NNES students contribute on campus, a finding which has been demonstrated in relevant literature (Andrade, 2010; Haan et al., 2017; Jin & Schneider, 2019; Mantzourani et al., 2015; Trice, 2003). However, as Haan et al. (2017) indicated, despite their apparent positive regard for diversifying the student population, faculty (and staff) in our study also demonstrated varying degrees of concern and bewilderment regarding the challenges NNES students experience, and how they can provide support to help students navigate the challenges they may encounter.

Understanding the Complexity of NNES Student Challenges

Our survey results confirm previous findings that even NNES students who have high levels of language proficiency are likely to experience challenges with language and cultural barriers in U.S. higher education (Andrade, 2006, 2010). We build on this previous understanding by illuminating a more nuanced complexity of the challenges that NNES students often encounter in their academic experience. Our survey findings indicate that challenges NNES students experience not only relate to language but also cultural differences, both of which often overlap with their abilities to adapt to new academic processes, policies, and expectations, and to interact with peers and faculty from a place of confidence. Further complicating these challenges is the finding that many students may be reticent to seek help for the complex pressures they face; as one survey respondent stated, “I have noticed that many students that struggle with fluency in English are hesitant to ask for assistance or clarification.” Another respondent commented, “Despite my attempts to be open and welcoming of conversation about challenges, students still appear reluctant to ask for my help or consideration on their assignments.” Students who see challenges with language as a deficit, may try to hide the challenges they are experiencing in an attempt to not lose credibility with their instructors instead of seeking out support resources. In previous studies, scholars have demonstrated that international students may resist seeking mental or emotional help due to cultural stigma (Becker et al., 2018; Tung, 2011). Our study demonstrates that some faculty and staff perceive NNES students are hesitant to seek help for academic or language related challenges. Further research is warranted to understand how NNES students seek support when navigating cultural difficulties and facing language barriers.

Gaining Insight on Faculty and Staff Challenges

Similar to recent studies illuminating the needs of faculty and staff who are working to support increasingly diverse student populations (Haan et al., 2017; Harryba et al., 2012), the findings in the present study confirm that faculty and staff encounter complicated barriers in providing support to NNES students. As in the findings reported by Harryba et al. (2012), staff and faculty in our study

indicated concern about navigating language concerns, proficiency standards, and clarifying communication with NNEs. Highlighting a more nuanced complication, our respondents indicated that it may be difficult to discern if an NNE is primarily experiencing language or cultural difficulty, when in actuality, it is possible that a combination of various factors may be influencing a student's experience. As noted by one respondent,

It is hard because culture confounds the relationship with a lot of these variables. A lot of my nonnative English-speaking students come from Eastern cultures where it may not be as culturally appropriate to ask questions, speak up in groups, etc. so I cannot tell you whether it is language or culture that impacts participation; thus, I answered not sure.

In fact, Sawir (2005) demonstrated how academic behaviors may be influenced not just by cultural values and norms, but by a student's previous learning experience and their beliefs about learning.

Additionally, some faculty and staff indicated they are simply unsure of how to help a student who is experiencing a language challenge. For those faculty and staff who try to intervene, they may face difficulties in talking to students about support resources, either because they are unaware of the correct resource to refer students to, or they are concerned that they may offend students by making a referral. Some faculty may even see English language support as a form of othering, or marginalizing students. This is an important phenomenon that is not addressed by current literature. Although our findings help to illuminate some of the complexities, we recommend that further research highlighting student perspectives would help to clarify how faculty and staff can offer support in ways that are perceived to be helpful and not insulting or marginalizing to students.

Offering Enhanced Resources for Faculty and Staff

Although a few recent studies document faculty perceptions on instructing multilingual student populations (Andrade, 2010; Haan et al., 2017), our study expands on these studies by demonstrating the types of additional support that would be helpful for faculty and staff who work with NNEs students. Our respondents demonstrated high levels of interest in receiving support in various formats for working with NNEs students. To effectively develop this support, it would be helpful if campus experts who specialize in language, culture, and faculty development could collaborate to provide more accessible resources for those who work with NNEs. Strategic collaboration across the curriculum is essential to support faculty and staff in determining what student support will be most useful in each situation (Zamel & Spack, 2004). Faculty and staff need training on the language acquisition process and how to differentiate a grammatical mistake from a more important language issue (Carroll & Ryan, 2007). Further, faculty and staff need to be informed about relevant campus resources and promote the use of these resources in ways that normalizes seeking support for NNEs.

Reframing Language Development

As mentioned previously, some of our survey respondents expressed confusion over how to normalize support seeking for NNEs. Our survey data also revealed that there is a range of perspectives from faculty on what their role should be in supporting NNEs. Some instructors felt it was not their job to support students in respect to language issues. Some people have a lower tolerance for language errors, while others recognize that language development is a natural process that should be supported for all students as we prepare them to succeed in the global marketplace. As one respondent described,

Instead of creating an environment where students expect native fluency (a maximum of communication), why not promote tolerance of diversity by creating an expectation that speakers and audiences, writers and readers, must SHARE responsibility for making meaning? What if their non-native speaker status was an asset, rather than an inconvenience?

Although no one would argue that students need a high level of English in order to access the curriculum and thrive at a university, we need to also recognize that all students come to study at the university in order to acquire the language of their discipline (Swales, 1990). For students for whom English is not their first language, we must strike a balance between maintaining rigorous standards of academic excellence which include language use, and teaching NNEs the skills they need to meet those standards. As an institution, we have an opportunity to recognize the strengths that NNEs bring to our classes and community and help them further develop their language abilities. This may be more easily accomplished if we openly recognize multilingualism as a strength and also recognize that second language development is an ongoing process for students who study in a second language.

We must move away from seeing English language development as remedial, and instead encourage students to continue to develop their English skills throughout their time at the university. Supporting and encouraging language development through a variety of means benefits everyone and can help all students prepare to communicate cross-culturally and cross-linguistically.

LIMITATIONS

While this study built on previous work with student perspectives (Anderson et al., 2012), it only includes the views of faculty and staff from one institution. Although there are clearly some parallel themes that emerged between the previous data collected from students and this current data from faculty and staff, there are also some key gaps. For example, some of the questions that were asked of faculty and staff were not addressed with students, or vice versa. Furthermore, some of the data reported here by faculty and staff necessitate a clearer understanding of student perceptions on certain topics. Therefore, future research should incorporate the viewpoints of students and faculty using an intentional

study design to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the key issues from both groups.

When inviting participant feedback on the survey, we clearly specified that our goal was to learn about faculty and staff perceptions of NNEs. We clarified in the opening text of the survey that “this population may include international students, as well as domestic students whose first language is not English.” It may be, therefore, beneficial for future research to explore the different challenges that domestic and international NNEs students face.

This study was conducted at a university in the United States where English is the language of instruction. Future studies could also include nonnative speakers of other languages studying in an environment where the instruction is not in their native language.

Note

Appendices for this article can be found on the JIS website at <https://www.ojed.org/index.php/jis>

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