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**LEARNING ENGLISH FROM THE NON-NATIVE SPEAKER TEACHERS: THE  
UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF GOOD ENGLISH TEACHERS.**

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**THIS PROJECT PAPER IS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL REQUIREMENT FOR THE  
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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work in this dissertation is my own except for quotation and summaries which have been duly acknowledged.

3.07.2010

MUA'ZZAH BINTI ABDUL RAHMAN

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I thank Allah for giving me His blessings throughout the completion of this project paper. Peace be upon His prophet Muhammad SAW (p.b.u.h)

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## **BELAJAR BAHASA INGGERIS DARIPADA GURU BUKAN PENUTUR BAHASA INGGERIS SEBAGAI BAHASA PERTAMA : PERSEPSI PELAJAR UNIVERSITI TERHADAP GURU BAHASA INGGERIS YANG BAIK.**

### **ABSTRAK**

Kajian ini dijalankan untuk mengenalpasti perlakuan pelajar universiti terhadap guru Bahasa Inggeris yang bertutur dalam Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa ibunda dan sebagai bahasa kedua. Kajian telah dijalankan di dua buah universiti tempatan.. Kajian ini digunakan untuk mengenalpasti persepsi pelajar university terhadap guru Bahasa Inggeris dan ciri-ciri yang pelajar harapkan ada pada setiap guru Bahasa Inggeris. Jantina dan pengalaman pernah diajar oleh guru yang bertutur dalam Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa ibunda dianggap sebagai factor yang boleh mempengaruhi persepsi mereka. Sampel terdiri daripada 99 pelajar university yang pernah diajar oleh guru penutur Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa pertama. Instrumen kajian yang digunakan adalah soalan kaji selidik dan interbiu. Data dianalisa menggunakan SPSS dan data dari interbiu dikategorikan mengikut kesesuaian terhadap empat soalan kajian. Hasil kajian menunjukkan pelajar lebih cenderung untuk memilih guru penutur Baahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa ibunda, namun masih mengiktiraf kelebihan yang ada pada guru penutur bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua walaupun mereka mempunyai beberapa kekurangan. Implikasi dari kajian ini diharapkan dapat membantu guru Bahasa Inggeris di Malaysia untuk melakukan perubahan dari segi menyampaikan pengajaran dan juga pendekatan individual supaya persepsi pelajar terhadap guru Bahasa Inggeris tempatan boleh diperbetulkan.



## **LEARNING ENGLISH FROM THE NON-NATIVE SPEAKER TEACHERS: THE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF GOOD ENGLISH TEACHERS.**

### **ABSTRACT**

This study is designed to identify university students' attitudes towards English Language teachers, both, native and non-native. It was carried out at two local universities. This research determines the university students' perceptions towards English teachers and good English Language teachers' characteristics. The students' gender and experience of being taught English Language by the native speaker teachers were regarded as possible factors which might influence their preferences. The samplings were 99 university students with experience of being taught by the native speaker of English teachers. The instruments used were questionnaires and interviews. The data from the questionnaires was analysed using the SPSS and the data from the interviews was categorized according to their correspondence with any of the four research questions. The results showed a slight preference towards the native speaker teachers, however, the non-native speaker teachers were also recognized as having their own strengths despite their limitations in the language they are teaching. As the implication, the local English Language teachers can adopt some of the preferred teaching styles and personal approaches so that the students' perception towards the non-native speaker teachers can be changed.



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## DEFINITION OF TERMS

### A – Non-native speakers of English (NNS)

For the purpose of this research, the writer wishes to make a distinction of terminologies between native and non-native speakers. The ‘ideal native-speaker,’ is someone who knows a language perfectly and uses it appropriately in all social interactions (Celce-Murcia, 2001). And thus, non-native speakers are those whose first language is not English, but acquired the language sometime later in their lives (Smith, 1992).

### B – Native Speakers (NS)

Native speakers are referred to the people whose mother tongue or first language is English Language. The notion of native speaker as one who has intuitive knowledge he or she as a native speaker of, and has linguistic as well as communicative competence ( Smith, 1992).

### C – First language (L1) and Second-Language (L2)

L2 refers to a second language spoken by an individual, for this research L2 always refers to English Language. L1 means the first language or the mother tongue of a speaker.





## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1.1 Introduction

This chapter contains the discussion of the background of the study, the statement of the problems, the significance of the study and the research questions.



#### 1.2 The background of the study

Malaysia is among the Asian countries which is keen on hiring native speakers of English teachers to teach their young generation. (*The Sunday Star*, April 4 2010). One of the reasons, according to Malachi E.Vethamani of Universiti Putra Malaysia, could be the fact that many of the young English-language teachers are from the Bahasa Malaysia medium of instruction (*NST* May 22 2008), whose level of proficiency in English is rather low. Though it is the prerogative of the non-native speaking countries to hire teachers whom they see fit to teach English to their students, they should look beyond what a language teacher really is. To teach English





Language requires those who have the teaching background; credentials and skills. One cannot simply be hired because their mother tongue is English. Peck (1991, 364) says, "that teachers should individualize ESL instruction so that they teach in the ways in which students learn." Murcia and Goodwin (1991, 136) touch upon the quality, or at minimum, the desired quality of a 'teacher' saying; "The teacher is ideally a native or near native speaker of the target language..." The term 'near native' as used by Murcia and Goodwin can be interpreted as non-native speakers whose proficiency in English is high.

The non-native speaker teachers are helped through some teaching preparation programmes held in universities, colleges and higher learning institutions throughout the country, the non-native English Teachers are equipped with sufficient knowledge and skills for second language learners to learn English. (NST May 22 2008). Through these programmes, these non-native teachers who are still on the process of learning how to teach English, all the possible problems to arise would be thoroughly discussed and evaluated even though some issues pertaining to the non-native speaker teachers maybe unusually sensitive to Malaysian culture's context. In Malaysia in the 90s, for example, the reversal of the national language policy toward favoring English indicates "compromise over its cultural convictions" (*The Economist*, January 15, 1994).

In Malaysia, where most English Language teachers are the non-native speakers, the commonly accepted view in language pedagogy has been that non-native English Speaker Teachers (NNESTs) are second in knowledge and performance to native speaker teachers (*The Sunday Star* April 4 2010). The non-native English-language teachers are also labelled as not very competent and proficient but have the



passion and desire to teach. (*NST* May 22 2008). Acting on that belief, the Perak State Education Department started hiring native speakers as trainers for local non-native English teachers. These selected teachers were periodically given courses to enrich their proficiency in English. The writer herself attended three such training session in 2007. The most recent step announced by the Ministry of Education is the hiring of 350 native speakers to teach in various states (*The Star* April 4 2010). Some learning institutions have native English speaker teachers on their staff, for example, the Universiti Teknologi Petronas and Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris in Perak. The native speakers are also hired by private institutions, and this is becoming common in primary, secondary and university education (Lipata 2008). This is becoming a trend because many still consider that foreign languages should be taught by native speakers of the language. (Lasagabaster & Sierra 1999)

Phillipson (1992) describes this situation as the “native speaker fallacy” where NSTs are hired solely based on their native status. Some countries, for example, Japan and Korea have actively recruited native speakers as their English teachers, even though, as Samimy and Brutt-Griffler (1999) point out that the NNESTs teachers from these countries have opposed this policy, claiming that the NSTs often lack adequate qualifications, and gain entry into the profession only because they are native speakers. Some NSTs lacking Teach of English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) qualifications have positions at language academies because of their native speaker status. Jung Sung-ki reported that the American GIs teach Korean soldiers conversational English, vocabulary and grammar during the one-and-half-hour weekly class as their bilateral partnership programme. (*The Korea Times Special* March 3 2008)

Most non-English speaking countries will employ a native English speaker to "teach" English provided that person presents any degree from his countries university (Lipata 2008). That degree may range from Science with a major in Botany, to Psychology. In other words, anyone with a university degree can travel to non-English speaking country and become a "teacher of English as a second/foreign/another language." Often it is these teachers that fall within the negative connotation of being an "...elitist or purist..." teacher. (Offner, 1995). According to him also, these pseudo teachers often force 'their superior form of language' onto the foreign language students.

As pointed out by Offner (1995), it can be assumed that the majority of native English teachers teaching English in a given foreign country do not have formal second language teaching qualifications and often it is these teachers that fall within the negative connotation of being an "...elitist or purist..." teacher. They, nevertheless, are English teachers by virtue of their contract, albeit they may not have any idea or understanding of what it means to be a teacher, let alone the basic knowledge that goes to make up being an English teacher and its attendant responsibilities. This is mentioned by Lipata (2008) when she writes in her article:

"Teachers are trained to teach with their chosen field even if he/she is a non-native teacher of English. It is true that a native English speaker will be a good teacher of the language, but this is through imitation purposes only. Unless of course if the teacher is a qualified teacher who graduated as an English teacher. (Lipata 2008).

Many studies have been conducted to find out the differences between NSTs and NNESTs so that NNESTs can use the information to close the gaps. Some findings revealed that popular characteristics ascribed to native and non-native



English teachers are native speakers can use English Language more fluently with accurate pronunciation. These teachers are also known to use various flexible teaching methods during their lessons and are not examination oriented which can sometimes lead to boring activities. The use of more informal communicative English is also an attractive factor why these NS teachers seem to have more advantages.

Generally speaking, the NNESTs are perceived by many as more examination oriented. Thus, their lessons become unattractive, monotonous and do not involve various techniques (Gardner & Lambert. 1972). Their lessons are especially void of communicative approaches, they rely heavily on printed materials and textbook too. Sometimes they tend to code-switch or code-mix in their first language. Medgyes (1994) also gives his opinion regarding this issue when he writes :



“We suffer from an inferiority complex caused by glaring defects in our knowledge of English. We are in constant distress as we realize how little we know about the language we are supposed to teach.”

But the point Medgyes is making is that native speakers do not need this knowledge in an explicit form, while NNS do because that is their way into the language. The non-native speaker teachers are said to rely on textbooks, materials, use L1 as medium and examination preparation oriented (Leon 2006)  
<http://www.idiomas.ugto.mx/teachersinfo/irasema/students.pdf>.

On the other hand, the NNESTs are accepted because they are known to be more sensitive to the learning needs of their students and more efficient because they know their students' backgrounds and are very aware of the psychological aspects of





learning a second language (Willing 1988), partly because they also experienced the same difficulties during their second-language learning process.

Even if It is true that a native English speaker will be a good teacher of the language, but this is through imitation purposes only ( Lipata 2008) .Unless of course the teacher is a qualified teacher and graduated as an English teacher. The learners will surely imitate their teacher's diction and articulation and so on, because most second language learners believe in the power of learning by imitation (Fromkin & Rodman 1983). But, if the teacher has the knowledge, techniques and strategies on how to impart the language is another thing. Whether the teacher is a native English speaker or a non-native English speaker, as long as they both pass to a certain qualification and have the necessary requirement to teach English, both should be treated equally, as observed by Arva and Medgyes (2000), both types of teachers have assets and drawbacks to offer.



### 1.3 The statements of the problems

The issue of English language in schools has been constantly debated in Malaysia lately. Gaudart (1987) states that Malaysian society is constantly regaled with opinions about the falling standards of English. The declining standard of English among school children and the younger citizens in general, has pushed the Ministry of Education to take a drastic measure in requiring Year 1, Form 1 and Lower Six students to learn Mathematics and Science in English from 2003 onwards.( Hassan & Selamat 2002) Lasagabaster & Sierra (1999 ) agree that teaching English as a second





or foreign language is not an easy task because English Language has its standard which will determine whether the users are competent and proficient users or otherwise. The issues of Received Pronunciation (RP) and perfect grammar put NNESTs on constant evaluation by the society which has become more exposed to the language especially with the advent of the Internet. ESL teachers have been blamed for the negative feedback received from employers regarding their local university graduate workers (*The Star* October 28 2009) There have been many complaints about these graduates, published in major newspapers, who are said to lack communicative skills and competence in English Language. The university graduates still speak with both major and minor grammatical errors which is related to their insufficient knowledge of the basic structures of the language (*The Star* October 28 2009) This is what Lim (1994) found when he studied fluency and accuracy in spoken English through a survey questionnaire conducted among EFL in-service teachers. Her survey revealed 84.1% of the respondents who taught at the primary, secondary and *tertiary levels*, agreed that their learners were not able to speak English well and that speaking is the weakest skill among the four language skills.

#### 1.4 The purpose of the study

This study is set forth to look into the university students' perceptions towards their native and non-native speaker teachers. It is also to understand what they think are the characteristics of good English teachers. Their attitudes and preferences will be explored and explained so that any advantageous conditions can be used to improve the way the students look at their teachers especially the non-natives. A similar





suggestion was made by Madrid (2004) in his article in which he analysed Matsuda's (2001) "deficit model of teacher development". Madrid came up with new terms including incorporative, collaborative and additive elements of strengths between native and non-native speaker teachers (Madrid 2004).

### 1.5 The significance of the study

This research will pave ways for Malaysian language researchers and educators, as well as the rest of the society to embrace the fact that English is spoken by more people as a L2 than as a mother tongue, which means the non-native users of English outnumber the native users. (Kachru 1998). This will encourage people to think of English as a lingua franca, and is spoken in different accents and not as language exclusively owned by native speaking communities. Through this study, the public can be made more aware of the prime role of English Language teachers which is NOT to produce native English Language speakers but COMPETENT English speakers. The results of the study will be beneficial for native and non-native teachers in terms of realizing their deficiencies and raising awareness. As Braine (1999) observes:

"Perhaps the first thing of importance is the realization that teachers, like all other members of society, hold perceptions concerning different language varieties. They are not immune from the attributions of prestige (or the lack of it) made of certain language variants."





## 1.6 The research questions

This study is aimed at uncovering the opinions and the attitudes of university students in Malaysia towards their English Language teachers . Specifically, four research questions will be addressed:

1. What are the Malaysian university students' attitudes towards the native and the non-native speaker teachers?
2. How does gender determine students' preferences towards native and non- native speaker teachers?
3. How does experience of learning English Language with the native speaker teachers influence the students' preferences towards the native speaker and the non-native speaker teachers?
- 4 . What are the characteristics of good English Language teachers according to Malaysian university students?

The research questions are complex with regard to perceptions and identity. The latter depends on the social context; and how you want to be identified is incomplete without considering how others might perceive you. Students' opinions are likely to reveal and challenge existing stereotypes or labels about teachers, cultural differences, and identity. Likewise, the former can only be assessed by inferring from their responses to questions in the research instrument.





## 1.7 Summary

This chapter discusses the background of this study and the statement of the problems, its purpose and significance and the research questions. The next chapter will look at the previous researches as the literature reviews relevant to this study.

