

Malaysian English Teacher Morale and the Presence of Expatriate English Teachers

Syringa Joanah D. JUDD

Ensign College, USA

Lynn E. HENRICHSEN

Brigham Young University, USA

Grant T. ECKSTEIN

Brigham Young University, USA

Benjamin L. McMURRY

Brigham Young University, USA

This study explored the impact of expatriate English teachers on the morale of Malaysian English teachers and attempted to identify the perceptions of Malaysian English teachers, expatriate native English-speaking teachers (NESTs), and expatriate nonnative English-speaking teachers (nonNESTs) regarding the practices that are prevalent in Malaysia in areas such as hiring, remuneration, and benefits. An initial questionnaire was completed by 10 teachers in Malaysia followed by two semi-structured interviews. Results showed a large discrepancy in wages between NESTs and nonNESTs, which contributes to the low morale of Malaysian English teachers. In addition, the presence of expatriate NESTs causes Malaysian nonNESTs to have low self-esteem as they compare themselves to their native counterparts. This study also revealed that participants felt that an emphasis on expatriate NESTs had no significant impact on improving the language proficiency of students. Participants agreed that hiring qualified English teachers (not on the basis of race or first language) is paramount in improving the language proficiency of Malaysian students. Recommendations are given for a more in-depth study of the impact of expatriate NESTs/nonNESTs on the morale of Malaysian nonNESTs and the improvement of the language proficiency of Malaysian students.

Introduction

Malaysia is a multilingual, multi-religious, multicultural, and multiracial country. Its racial diversity and independence from British colonization present a myriad of opportunities as well as challenges in the teaching of English and its role in extending the country's economic influence internationally. Nevertheless, the ongoing action of both the Ministry of Education (MOE) and private educational institutions in Malaysia in hiring expatriate native and non-native English-speaking teachers (NESTs/nonNESTs) has garnered a formidable reaction from local Malaysian English teachers, who are frustrated by these hiring practices.

To better understand the perceptions of Malaysian English teachers, this study evaluates the morale of Malaysian nonNESTs within government and private educational institutions who are affected by the hiring of both expatriate NESTs (teachers from the "inner circle" countries, in Braj Kachru's terms; see Kachru & Nelson, 1996, p. 77) and expatriate nonNESTs (teachers from both the outer and expanding circle countries) into the country. A second purpose is to identify Malaysian nonNESTs', expatriate NESTs', and expatriate nonNESTs' perceptions of the discrepancies in hiring, wages, and benefits. Most published studies have not addressed the perceptions of these three groups.

Review of Literature

Native and Nonnative Labeling

Native English speakers are generally described as people from countries where English is the primary language while nonnative English speakers are from countries whose primary language is not English. In the English language teaching (ELT) profession, the native speaker construct established by prominent linguists such as Chomsky (1965) and Stern (1983) puts native speakers as the custodians of the language. However, as English has spread around the globe, the English language community should acknowledge that English language standards are multi-faceted, not monolithic. The English language is no longer exclusive to native English speakers. Kachru and Nelson (1996) argued that labeling practices might not be straightforward and cautioned that upholding a strict native versus non-native dichotomy is a mistake (see also Faez, 2011, 2018). More recently, Holliday (2018) has lamented that terms like

“native speaker” and “non-native speaker,” which reinforce a misguided ideology of native-speakerism (see Holliday, 2006), remain common in professional ELT practice despite these terms’ reinforcing damaging and artificial professional differences that unduly elevate native speakers over non-native speakers.

The number of nonNESTs in the TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) profession has increased exponentially over the years, leading scholars to examine how nonnative-English speaking professionals affect ESL students and to explore teachers’ concerns and perspectives (Liu, 1999). Jenkins (2009) argued that native speakers’ influence over World Englishes is not likely to continue in the coming years, while Paikeday (1985) went so far as to claim that this native/nonnative dichotomy isn’t a natural division at all, but rather a “linguistic apartheid imposed on us by theoreticians” (p. 392) that could be redefined or abolished altogether.

Liu’s (1999) study challenged the stereotype that nonNESTs lack native proficiency due to their English education taking place in EFL contexts, while Davis (1991) posited that the native/nonnative dichotomy is driven by a desire for power, preys on identity labels, and affects the confidence of nonNESTs. Phillipson (1992) introduced the term “native speaker fallacy” to describe the baseless notion of NESTs’ superiority to nonNESTs, a concept further reinforced by Braine (2005), who pointed out the general but misguided perception that nonNESTs were inferior to NESTs in their education and acumen. While this fallacy continues to impact nonNESTs in terms of hiring policies and teachers’ own self-confidence (Floris & Renandya, 2020; Kiczkowiak & Wu, 2018), Medgyes (1994), argued that the difference between nonNESTs and NESTs is an asset and that both types of teacher backgrounds come with strengths and weaknesses to round out the education of students. Liu (1999) investigated how these differences affected teaching English and focused on the extent to which TESOL professionals label themselves as either NESTs or nonNESTs, who defines what are non-native speakers of English, the non-native speaker label’s impact in hiring, and the challenges that arise in classrooms for nonNESTs.

Liu’s (1999) study revealed that the participants commonly defined nonnative speakers as those with a first language other than English, but the narrow definition did not necessarily reflect their beliefs since all participants echoed the problematic nature of the native and nonnative dichotomy and recognized the labeling process as more complex and

multifaceted. In fact, participants felt that other factors must be considered in assigning someone's native or nonnative status, including precedence or competence, cultural affiliation or dual identities, and environmental factors. Liu's study also began exploring the impact of the native/nonnative labeling in both the morale and the hiring practices of nonnatives.

Labeling's Effect on nonNESTs' Morale

Since Liu's (1999) study, which showed that labeling can have an effect on nonNESTs' morale, other scholars have begun to explore the area. Rajagopalan (2005), for instance, conducted a study in Brazil to explore the impact of an influx of NESTs to the EFL teaching programs of the country. He found that as nonNESTs compared themselves to NESTs, they felt "handicapped" in their career advancement, "doomed to be chasing an impossible ideal," or "treated as 'second class citizens' in their workplace" (p. 289). He further claimed that nonNESTs felt inferior to NESTs and had prevalent thoughts of not being equal in the ELT profession despite their positive contributions to the field and in the classroom. Rajagopalan warned that these perceptions could lead nonNESTs to feel defeated and frustrated, resulting in a lack of enthusiasm that hampers their desire to invest in themselves as teachers.

Tajeddin and Adeh (2016) later explored the perceptions of nonNESTs' and NESTs' professional identities and found that the majority of nonNESTs' self-perception was influenced by the concept of the native speaker. Respondents felt that they lacked the core characteristics of a proficient teacher, which led to low self-esteem (p. 50). Furthermore, the study revealed that nonNESTs had concerns regarding not being hired, paid, or treated in the same manner as their NEST counterparts.

To provide an individual perspective on nonNEST morale, Thomas (1999), an EIL instructor at College of Lake County, Illinois since 1992, shared how her personal experiences of being a nonNEST teacher had challenged her credibility, leading her to feel apologetic and unsure about her potential for success. Unfortunately, it is all too common in the ELT profession that nonNESTs experience low self-esteem in terms of their role and contributions when compared either by others or themselves with a NEST. Given that each country and culture brings

different variables to the table, looking at specific contexts may help inform change regarding the morale of nonNESTs.

Labeling's Effect on Employability

Regardless of location and culture, many ELT employers around the world express preferences for NESTs (Floris & Renandya, 2020; Kiczkowiak & Wu, 2018). Liu's (1999) study of nonNESTs in the TESOL profession found that nonNESTs were concerned about the label and potential hiring disadvantages. Clark and Paran (2007) investigated private language schools, universities, and colleges and found that 68.9% (62 institutions of a total of 90) did not hire nonNESTs while only 28.9% did; more recently, Mahboob and Golden (2013) reported that 79% of ELT job advertisements listed "nativeness" as a requirement—the most common criteria among seven identified, including education and experience. This suggests that being a NEST is an important factor in hiring along with more traditional factors like experience and education; however, when employers consider labeling applicants as NEST and nonNEST, it affects hiring practices and puts proficient and qualified nonNESTs at a disadvantage because the label alone becomes the gatekeeper.

Clark and Paran's (2007) finding—that being NESTs from the inner circle is an essential criterion in hiring—is further supported by policy and practices that are common in Asia. In 2006, China had no universal policy in hiring NESTs, so provinces had their own sets of criteria, resulting in 150,000 foreign English teachers being hired nationwide (Jeon & Lee, 2006, p. 53). Jeon and Lee also noted that some provinces hired NESTs with only a high school education. Other provinces, like Liaoning, required that NESTs be nationals specifically from the British Isles, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, or the United States (Jeon & Lee, 2006). This policy even discriminated against NESTs from inner circle countries what may have a non-English accent. In Hong Kong, where English has been woven into government, businesses, international trades, and law, the hiring of NESTs is also given priority. According to Li's (2002) study, the Hong Kong government spends around HK\$560 million annually in hiring NESTs. Jeon and Lee (2006) found similar policies in Taiwan, though a country-wide policy will hire nonNESTs with a degree or TEFL/TESOL teaching certificate.

Japan and Korea have similar policies or practices. After World War II, despite opposition to ELT in Japan (especially after the 1950s), Japanese nationalists recognized that the English language was essential in globalization. In 2005, the JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching) program had about 5,200 NESTs from the inner circle teaching in Japan. South Korea similarly increased the number of NESTs it recruited as the government instituted a policy of teaching English through English (Jeon & Lee, 2006), which alienated and frustrated the country's local nonNESTs, as few had the required proficiency to meet the new standards. The government reasoned that bringing in NESTs was essential in creating more cultural awareness with more English input in a more authentic English environment (Jeon & Lee, 2006).

The labeling of NESTs and nonNESTs in the ELT context in Malaysia, Kamhi-Stein (2014) argues, has given favor to native English speakers who are Aryan in their looks, with blond hair and blue eyes, a stereotype that discriminates against nonnative English speakers and presents a problem to NESTs who are second-generation native English speakers and not white, as their nativeness is challenged. The expatriate NESTs who meet the stereotype have a higher likelihood of getting hired and paid more than their nonNESTs counterparts or NESTs who do not fit the mold. Clark and Paran's (2007) study confirmed that a nonNEST's lack of clear native speaker status affects their employment prospects, and they may therefore not even be invited for an interview.

Wage Discrepancy Between Natives and Nonnatives

Jeon and Lee (2006) also found that most countries they studied did not always follow articulated hiring policies, which resulted in discrepancies throughout Asia between NESTs and nonNESTs. For example, some provinces in China have hired US high school graduates to teach English (Jeon & Lee, 2006). These NESTs teach an average of 16–20 hours a week and are paid from US\$365 to US\$629 a month, which is three times higher than the salaries of Chinese teachers, who earn US\$101 to US\$284 for working 36 to 40 hours a week (Jeon & Lee, 2006, p. 52). In Taiwan, the salary scale for NESTs was US\$1,540 to US\$1,870 a month while their local nonNESTs counterparts earned from US\$670 to US\$731 a month (Jeon & Lee, 2006, p. 55). In brief, NESTs were paid about three times more than their nonNEST counterparts were.

On the other hand, Jeon and Lee also found that wage discrepancies were not as clear cut in Hong Kong, Japan, and South Korea. In some cases, pay was higher for local nonNESTs than it was for NESTs. In some of these circumstances, NESTs' living accommodations were covered by their employer, work hours differed from those of nonNESTs, and NESTs were given additional responsibilities.

General Perceptions of NonNESTs in Malaysia

While Jeon and Lee (2006) did not look into Malaysia, whose history, culture, government, and geographical location contribute to issues with nonNESTs, other research (Aboshiha, 2015) has found that most NESTs in Malaysia are from the UK, are native speakers of the English language, and come to Malaysia with a current understanding of popular English discourse. Aboshiha (2015), as an example, examined the perception of British NESTs about themselves and their Malaysian nonNEST counterparts. The data were collected from multiple interviews, email correspondence, and field notes and revealed that, in general, the NESTs from the UK felt that they had superior language proficiency and classroom pedagogy compared to their nonNESTs counterparts. Some even added disparaging remarks about the nonNESTs' lack of linguistic ability.

Aboshiha's (2015) findings were further supported by Kabilan (2007), who found that based on his observation and direct interaction with nonNESTs in Malaysia, Malaysian nonNESTs lacked "fundamental pedagogical knowledge and understanding, awareness of meaningful classroom practices, linguistic capabilities, positive attitude, and relevant skills" (p. 682). However, as these future ELT professionals were asked to reflect on their proficiency as this study required, the participants demonstrated that they were aware of their own development and knowledge required of the profession, identified what changes were needed in their own practices to be more effective teachers, and had internalized sound pedagogical knowledge and practices to aid their teaching (Kabilan, 2007). This study demonstrates that though there may be unqualified nonNESTs in the Malaysian context and elsewhere, the same can be found among the ranks of NESTs as well.

This review illustrates the problematic nature of the native and nonnative labelling that favors one group and discriminates against the

other in the ELT profession. When labeling undermines the consideration of other factors that determine the competence of both NESTs and nonNESTs, there is a need to investigate the fallacy of this construct and challenge the ELT profession to build upon the principle of merit and equal opportunity, particularly in the Malaysian context, which has been under-explored in the literature. One of the purposes of this research study was therefore to determine if Malaysian nonNESTs' morale is impacted by the hiring of expatriate NESTs/nonNESTs. Based on previous studies, we assumed a negative effect. The challenge would be to determine the extent of the impact of the presence of expatriate NESTs/nonNESTs on the morale of Malaysian nonNESTs.

The following questions guided our research: (1) What are the attitudes of Malaysian nonNESTs, expatriate NESTs, and expatriate nonNESTs toward the discrepancies in teachers' wages and benefits? (2) What are the effects of the massive influx of expatriate NESTs and nonNESTs in Malaysia on the morale of local Malaysian nonNESTs?

Method

In order to answer these questions, we conducted a small-scale qualitative study designed to identify the impact of the expatriate NESTs and nonNESTs on the morale of Malaysian nonNESTs. We describe the perception of individuals from these three main groups toward the discrepancies that exist in hiring, wages, and benefits.

Participants

The snowball sampling procedure was used to find and attract participants among the primary investigator's acquaintances in Malaysia. A call to participate in the study (which included a link to the initial questionnaire) was circulated via Facebook (including FB messenger), LinkedIn, Google, and email. The primary investigator had worked as an English teacher in Malaysia and had a network of ex-colleagues in the ELT profession that fit the profile of this study's target population. In addition, this network of ex-colleagues could forward the survey link to other English teachers in Malaysia.

A total of 10 NESTs and nonNESTs in Malaysia responded to the questionnaire. This sample consisted of one expatriate NEST from the

UK (“inner circle”), two expatriate nonNESTs from Indonesia and the Philippines, and seven Malaysian nonNESTs. To maintain confidentiality, each survey participant was assigned a pseudonym based on the first letter of their place of birth. The 10 pseudonyms were as follows: Ms. I (Indonesia), Mr. P (Philippines), Mr. U (the UK), and Mr./Ms. M (Malaysia), with their corresponding numbers based on the chronological order of the submission of the questionnaire. The participants had varying levels of education and various types of employment. The demographics of the participants in the study are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Participants’ Demographic Information

Participants	Age	Birthplace	Where and How Did You Learn English While Growing Up?	Highest Level of Education	Employment Status in Malaysia	Employment Status
Ms. I	20–30	Indonesia	Malaysia / school	Associates in Occupational Studies	Expatriate nonNEST	Part-time
Ms. P	41–50	The Philippines	The Philippines / home and school	BA in Tourism	Expatriate nonNEST	Volunteer
Mr. U	31–40	The UK	Native language	BA in English, minor in Philosophy	Expatriate NEST	Full-time
Ms. M1	20–30	Malaysia	Malaysia / school	BA (Hons) Education Studies	Local nonNEST	Part-time
Mr. M2	20–30	Malaysia	Malaysia / home	BA, University of Oklahoma	Local nonNEST	Full-time
Mr. M3	20–30	Malaysia	Malaysia / home and school	High School	Local nonNEST	N/A
Ms. M4	41–50	Malaysia	Malaysia / school	High School	Local nonNEST	Part-time
Ms. M5	31–40	Malaysia	Malaysia and the UK / home and school	Professional certification in TESOL/TEFL	Local nonNEST	Part-time
Ms. M6	20–30	Malaysia	Malaysia and Australia / home and school	MA in TESL	Local nonNEST	Full-time
Ms. M7	31–40	Malaysia	Malaysia / school	MA in TESL	Local nonNEST	Full-time

Instrumentation

In this small-scale qualitative study, two instruments were used to collect data: a questionnaire (see Appendix) and a semi-structured interview. Each of these will be described below. These instruments and the data collection procedures were approved by the researchers' university Institutional Review Board.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire, a digital survey created with Qualtrics, was designed to gather demographic and salary/remuneration data to identify potential participants that shared relevant characteristics that were pertinent to this study, such as their country of birth, level of education, type of secondary school where they currently teach or taught, etc. Additional questions regarding self-perception in terms of being a NEST or a nonNEST were also included. Participants were asked to explain their perceived status as well. The participants were asked to select the degree of their agreement with 10 statements on a seven-point Likert-scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." These statements were used to determine how teachers perceived the impact of importing expatriate NESTs and nonNESTs and the discrepancy in hiring, wages, and benefits on the morale of Malaysian nonNESTs. Each Likert-scale statement also had a comment section that allowed participants to respond freely in order to provide insightful data, rationale for their responses, or clarification about their perceptions.

Participants indicated on the survey if they were willing to be interviewed, and three who fit this study's profile agreed; however, one of these participants did not respond to the primary investigator's subsequent email requesting an interview. The participants' responses to the questionnaire (especially item 14, their self-ascriptions, and their feelings about the hiring of NESTs) were analyzed later for the formation of interview questions relevant to this study.

Semi-Structured Interview

Although there were three participants who agreed to an interview as a follow-up to their responses on the 10 statements, only two could be reached. The other participant did not respond to the primary investigator's correspondence. This study used a semi-structured interview

process to allow for digression and probing for additional information (Mackey & Gass, 2005) since participants' perceptions, feelings, and opinions were probably complex. Below are some of the interview questions participants were asked, including the questions formulated as a result of their written comments on the questionnaire (hereafter called *Scripted Questions*). The others are questions from the established train of thought as new issues or hypotheses emerged during the interview (hereafter called *Digression Questions*):

Scripted Questions

1. What kind of opportunities do you think students will gain from having a native speaker as their English teacher?
2. How do you feel about (the) proficiency of non-native speakers from different ESL countries? Can you cite an example of people you have worked with that are nonnative as an example for your answer?
3. In your experience, does the recruitment of expatriate native/nonnative English-speaking teachers affect Malaysian teachers negatively or positively?
4. How so? And has this been your general experience? What are your feelings about it?
5. Can you elaborate on this a little bit more? And what do you think is important in teaching English, then, if being native is not a qualification?
6. How do you think this shortage should be addressed?

Digression Questions

1. When you say in-depth, what degree of depth does the native speaker provide for students of English?
2. In your general experience right now with the current graduates, how prepared do you think, or how good is the English proficiency, of college students in Malaysia?
3. Why do you feel that the Ministry of Education or Malaysian government would want to hire expatriate native and nonnative teachers alike?
4. Regarding the lack of local teachers, do you think it's a lack of proficient teachers or just lack of a number in general?

Data Collection Procedures

At the conclusion of the survey, the data were downloaded and prepared for analysis. Participants who agreed to be interviewed were contacted.

An email was sent to them with two documents attached: a consent form, and a copy of their survey report to refresh their memory. The email asked about the time most convenient for the participants to do an interview.

The participants were interviewed for approximately 30 minutes. Each interview was recorded using the Voice Memos app of an iPhone. A separate phone was used to call the participants via FB messenger (video chat) and Skype (video chat). During the interview, a hard copy of the participant's questionnaire with scripted questions was available to the interviewer, so the interviewer could refer back to the participants' open-ended responses and pose guiding questions.

Data Analysis Procedures

As the data were qualitative, this study used open coding, which breaks down the main points that emerged from the data rather than adopting an *a priori* frame in order to allow the data to drive the coding (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Based on the participants' responses, this study identified four core perceptions (Table 2) that focused on answering the two research questions.

Table 2. Participants' Core Perceptions

Core Perceptions

1. The large discrepancy in wages;
 2. The impact of expatriate NESTs on the morale of nonNESTs;
 3. The importance of expatriate NESTs and nonNESTs;
 4. The self-ascribed and perceived English speaker identity.
-

Results

To answer the research questions, and to present participants' perceptions on other relevant issues that emerged from the data, the results will be presented based on the emergent categories and referred to as the core perceptions.

Core Perception One: The Large Discrepancy in Wages

The first core perception represents the reported discrepancy in wages among expatriate NESTs, expatriate nonNESTs, and Malaysian nonNESTs, and supports the data that were collected in the questionnaire.

Table 3. Participants' Monthly Salary, Employment Benefits, and the Type of School Where They Currently Teach

Participants	Monthly Salary	Employment Benefit	Type of Secondary School Where They Currently Teach	Employment Status
Ms. I	RM 4,001–6,000	Housing allowance	International School	Part-time
Ms. P	RM 1,001–2,000	N/A	N/A	Volunteer
Mr. U	RM 20,001–25,000	N/A	International School	Full-time
Ms. M1	Less than RM1,000	N/A	N/A	Part-time
Mr. M2	RM 4,001–6,000	N/A	N/A	Full-time
Mr. M3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Ms. M4	RM 2,001–3,000	N/A	Language Center	Part-time
Ms. M5	RM 2,001–3,000	Paid holiday— approx. 2 months	N/A	Part-time
Ms. M6	RM 4,001–6,000	Housing allowance; retirement; free medical consultations and treatment in government hospital	N/A	Full-time
Ms. M7	RM 4,001–6,000	Paid vacation; 3 days paid sick leave; and RM 300 allowance	N/A	Full-time

Column 2 in Table 3 shows a significant discrepancy in salary between NESTs and nonNESTs. Most notable is that Mr. U (full-time expatriate NEST), who teaches at an international school, was paid five times more than his nonnative counterparts, Mr. M2, Ms. M6, and Ms. M7 (full-time Malaysian nonNESTs). There were three part-time Malaysian nonNESTs that were paid an average of RM1,971, and one expatriate nonNEST that was paid 2.5 times that of their local nonNEST counterparts. Three Malaysian nonNESTs reported an average of RM5,001 monthly pay, while there was one expatriate NEST who reported a monthly salary that was 4.5 times more than that of the local English teachers' salaries. In sum, there are inconsistencies in wages based on educational level, but more so, there are the discrepancies between expatriate NESTs/nonNESTs and Malaysian nonNESTs.

Ten statements on the questionnaire were presented to participants who were asked to respond to a seven-point Likert-scale, ranging from 7 (*strongly agree*) to 1 (*strongly disagree*). In response to the statement

There is a large discrepancy in salary between local and expatriate teachers, the average response was 6.4. Three participants added comments that there is a salary discrepancy between Malaysian nonNESTs and expatriate NESTs. Mr. U strongly agreed, writing that NESTs are “automatically given higher salary [because] they are white.” Also, Ms. M6 commented that her expatriate NESTs friends “live a good life” and have “high salary, free car to use, accommodation subsidy and other allowances.”

For the following statement, *There is a large discrepancy in employment benefits between local and expatriate teachers,* there was a mean response of 5.0. On the subject of whether the discrepancy was justified (*The discrepancies in salary and employment benefits between local and expatriate English teachers are justified*), the analysis of responses showed a mean of 2.0—four participants disagreed and four strongly disagreed, while two responded neither. Mr. U stated, “I believe that everyone should have equal pay and benefits as it would cause less of a divide.” Ms. M5 felt that salary should be determined by English teacher’s qualification and proficiency. Ms. M6 argued that “some of us teachers are highly qualified with masters and PhDs, but the expat teachers don’t even have a proper degree in education.”

Furthermore, both interviewees agreed that there is a large discrepancy in wages between Malaysian nonNESTs and expatriate NESTs based on their own experiences, as well as anecdotes they had heard. Mr. U, an expatriate NEST, commented that “English teachers are automatically given a higher salary if they are white” and he was not comfortable with it as it “caused a lot of problems with...the staff [he] worked with.” Ms. M5 supported this belief as she mentioned that her expatriate NEST friend who was “receiving a much higher pay than someone who is in the same position as him, but...was [a] Malaysian,” and that the unhappiness of Malaysian nonNESTs could stem from this large discrepancy. Furthermore, Mr. U felt that this wage discrepancy is quite unfair, and although “a lot of people can argue about experience and knowledge,” all teachers are “basically...doing the exact same job.”

Core Perception Two: The Impact of Expatriate NESTs on the Morale of NonNESTs

The second core perception identified from the analysis of our data dealt with participants’ perceptions of whether the presence of expatriate NESTs/nonNESTs affects the morale of Malaysian nonNESTs. In

response to the statement, *The recruitment of expatriate teachers in Malaysia affects the morale of local English teachers NEGATIVELY*, the mean response was 4.2. For the statement, *The recruitment of expatriate English teachers in Malaysia affects the morale of local English teachers POSITIVELY*, the mean response was 4.0. This may indicate that participants were highly ambivalent about whether the presence of expatriate NESTs and nonNESTs affects the morale of the Malaysian nonNESTs negatively or positively.

Although the numbers said one thing, when the study probed further through written responses and interviews, the majority of the participants felt otherwise. For example, Ms. M5 said, "I've seen the way that teachers in my teaching/learning environment behave around the natives.... They seem to have a self-esteem problem.... I think, just bearing that in mind, that if someone were to be hired into that environment who's a native speaker, I think that would actually... negatively impact the morale of the teachers."

This was supported by Mr. U in the interview. He said that "the presence of expatriate English teachers in Malaysia causes [nonNESTs] to question their own confidence in their English language because... they teach English their way and their style...but then you have foreigners coming in and taking over their jobs, and they're like, but I can teach English, why can't I be in that position? So I think it affects them negatively." He continued, "On a flip side of it, if the person themselves were more of a challenge-oriented kind of person, they're probably tak[ing] it in positive way and say, well, I have to improve myself more to be better than people, obviously who have more experience than me. You know, so, but I think it affects them in a negative way more."

Mr. U and Ms. M5 both argued that the local English teachers' low morale is caused by comparing themselves to the expatriate NESTs. However, Ms. M6 felt that the morale of Malaysian teachers was affected negatively due in part to the alleged salary discrepancies, as expatriate NESTs are paid significantly more than their nonnative counterparts. Also, she argued that some expatriate teachers are not qualified to teach, but they are in Malaysia to teach English on the basis of race because they "have blue eyes and fair skin."

Participants were presented with another statement: *The recruitment of expatriate English teachers makes local Malaysian English teachers unhappy*. The participants had a mean response of 4.8. Ms. M6 argued that the government favors expatriate teachers and "show[s] little respect

to [the] local English teacher[s].” Ms. M5 argued that if there is a large discrepancy in wages, she thought this bias could be the cause of unhappiness among Malaysian nonNESTs.

Core Perception Three: The Importance of Expatriate NESTs and NonNESTs

The third core perception identified from the data addressed the participants’ perceptions of the importance of expatriate NESTs/nonNESTs in improving the English proficiency of Malaysian students.

In response to the statement, *The employment of expatriate native English-speaking teachers in Malaysia is important in improving the English proficiency of students*, participants as a whole seemed ambivalent: four participants strongly agreed, four somewhat disagreed, and two disagreed. Ms. M5 asserted, “I don’t think it’s important where you’re coming from or where you were born, but how you were qualified to teach, what qualifications do you have, and of course, what your own proficiency is.” On the other hand, Mr. U said that NESTs “go on to a lot more (subjective) ideology and to the actual language, the meanings, the hidden meanings behind the word. We just go on to a lot of more (thoroughly) than Malaysian teachers here, so it opens-up a realm, a lot of more possibilities for students when it comes to their writing.” Notably, Ms. M6 felt that expatriate teachers’ accents might hinder students’ understanding of the English lesson.

Only eight participants responded to the following statement: *The employment of expatriate non-native English-speaking teachers (e.g., foreign countries whose primary national language outside the classroom is NOT English) in Malaysia is important in improving the English proficiency of students*. The mean response was 3.3. Again, Ms. M5 felt strongly that the country of origin should not be a determining factor if one is qualified to teach English, and Ms. M6 argued that Malaysia should not look elsewhere for English teachers as she felt that there was enough local talent that “fail to get a job as an English teacher.” However, Mr. U felt that having expatriate nonNESTs will “expose students to different dialects of English.”

In response to the statement, *The importation of expatriate English teachers in Malaysia is unnecessary*, six disagreed, two somewhat disagreed, and two strongly agreed. Ms. M5 commented, “I don’t know if there’s a shortage. That’s what they say. They claim that there’s a

shortage and therefore they justify in bringing all these teachers in from outside of Malaysia.... I don't see a problem with it so long as it actually improves the situation in Malaysia, in terms of improving the standard of English in local schools, but actually, to be quite honest, I don't see that, uh, impact. They've been bringing these teachers in for quite a number of years, now, right?"

Core Perception Four: The Self-Ascribed and Perceived English Speaker Identity

For convenience, this study referred to all English teachers outside the inner circle as nonnative. Although self-ascription of English teachers was not considered in the research questions, the questionnaire data revealed that this native and nonnative dichotomy is much more complex and multifaceted and therefore worthy of mention. Question 13 of the questionnaire asked for participants' self-ascription (native or non-native), and question 14, an open-ended question, explored the reasons why the participants identified themselves as such. Table 4 shows the participants' responses to these questions.

Table 4. Participants' Self-Ascribed and Perceived English Speaker Identity

Participants	Perceived English Proficiency	Explanation
Mr. U	Native	I have only spoken English from when I could talk.
Mr. M3	Native	I have spoken English my entire life and now reside in England with little to no difficulty when communicating with the locals.
Ms. M4	Advanced	(No response)
Ms. M5	Native	I grew up speaking English and consider English my first language. I read voraciously as a child, and I still do. In my experience living abroad as well as communicating with native English speakers via the internet, I speak and write as well as they (and often even better, if I may say so myself).
Ms. M6	Native-like or near-native	I grow up speaking English and watching English programs. When I studied in Australia, my friends are foreigners and we communicate in English all the time. I passed my TEFL exam with high scores and my lecturers' comment of my English language competency is "near native."
Ms. M7	Advanced	I feel like there is always room for improvements.

Table 4 shows that 6 out of 10 participants responded to the self-ascription question. Mr. M3 and Ms. M5 ascribed themselves as native speakers of the English language, as they had spoken it their entire life and found no difficulty communicating with native speakers of English. Mr. M3 also added that he currently resides in England. Ms. M6 ascribed herself as native-like or near-native, as she has spoken English her entire life, passed her TEFL exam with high scores, and her lecturers in Australia commented on her English language competency as “near native.” Two Malaysian nonNESTs perceived their proficiency as advanced—Ms. M7 explained that she felt that “there is always room to grow” while Ms. M4 did not offer any explanation. Lastly, Mr. U naturally ascribed himself as native because he was born in the inner circle.

Discussion

Our attempt to identify the perceptions of expatriate NESTs/nonNESTs and Malaysian nonNESTs on the issue of wage/benefit discrepancies as well as the perceived effects of the presence of expatriate NESTs/nonNESTs on the morale of Malaysian nonNESTs was inspired by the researchers’ desire to bring to light the issues pertaining to native/nonnative labelling in the ELT profession in Malaysia. Liu’s (1999) study with seven nonnative-English-speaking professionals provided the framework for this study. Although the result of this research should not be generalized because there were only 10 participants, this study offers opportunities to probe further the issue of the effects of the native and nonnative labeling.

Analysis of the participants’ responses to the questionnaire and semi-structured interview suggested that there is a large wage discrepancy between expatriate NESTs and Malaysian nonNESTs, which is consistent with Jeon and Lee’s (2006) report on wage discrepancy in Asia. Another wage discrepancy was revealed between a part-time expatriate nonNEST and three full-time Malaysian nonNESTs, as the latter were paid the same but worked 40 hours a week. Nonetheless, the salary discrepancy was supported by the interview data where the participants had experienced this issue personally or knew of someone who had. All participants felt that this practice is unfair; they also agreed that a large discrepancy in pay causes a divide among English teachers (local and expatriate) and unhappiness to the less favored group.

In response to the effect of the presence of expatriate NESTs/nonNESTs on the morale of Malaysian nonNESTs, although the quantitative data revealed that the participants were highly ambivalent, the written and interview responses suggested that the majority of the participants agreed that the morale of Malaysian nonNESTs was affected negatively. Participants perceived that Malaysian nonNESTs often compared themselves to expatriate NESTs and felt inadequate, which resulted in low self-esteem. In addition, the large discrepancy in wages and the low employability of nonNESTs made the local English teachers unhappy. Similar results were reported by Rajagopalan (2005) with Brazilian nonNESTs, as participants felt like second class citizens in their workplace, and that they were “doomed to be chasing an impossible ideal” (p. 289). Moussu (2010) asked 96 ESL teachers and administrators in an Intensive English Program about their perceptions on the weakness of the nonNESTs. Both the ESL teachers and administrators noted that lack of self-confidence was one of the major weaknesses of nonNESTs.

Furthermore, this study supports the claim that native/nonnative labelling has a huge impact on employability; participants agreed that NESTs are more likely to get hired than nonNESTs based on race. Similar results were reported by Clark and Paran (2007) and Jeon and Lee (2006). In our study, participants argued that in hiring English teachers qualification, training, and relevant teaching experience should take precedence over the teacher’s country of birth or language background. This idea is supported by Medgyes (1994), a pioneer in the topic of nonnative English teachers in the ELT profession, who argued that language teachers should be hired based on their professional abilities rather than language backgrounds, since both NESTs and non-NESTs can be effective teachers. Likewise, this concept of equality is supported by the international TESOL International Association’s effort to eliminate discrimination in hiring and pay as a result of such labeling (native or nonnative). In fact, TESOL (2006) released an official statement that calls for the ELT profession to focus on English teachers’ qualifications, experience, and skills, and not just their native speaker status.

A surprising finding in this study was the participants’ perceived importance of bringing in expatriate NESTs/nonNESTs in Malaysia to improve the English proficiency of the students. One participant who is an expatriate NEST felt that expatriate English teachers provide more opportunities in terms of the depth of the language as well as exposure

to different dialects of English. On the other hand, a Malaysian nonNEST felt that the recruiting of expatriate NESTs/nonNESTs is unnecessary as there are enough qualified teachers in Malaysia, and argued that some of the expatriate NESTs/nonNESTs did not even have qualifications to teach. Another participant, who is also a Malaysian nonNEST, felt that the recruiting could be justified as the government reported that there is a shortage of qualified Malaysian nonNESTs; however, she felt that the presence of expatriate NESTs does not really have an impact on improving the English proficiency of Malaysian students as the Ministry of Education reported on the continuous decline. The issue of whether the presence of expatriate NESTs improves the overall English proficiency of Malaysian students needs to be studied and explored in depth.

Another critical finding in this study is that the self-ascriptions of the Malaysian nonNESTs were varied because of their perceived exposure to the English language and acceptance by the English language community. This finding supports the notion that language identity is affected by the acceptance (or rejection) of the speech community (Inbar-Lourie, 2005). According to Inbar-Lourie (2005), native speaker norms will evolve and change with the global spread of English and may therefore include populations currently excluded from native speaker status. This proposition supports the problematic nature of the native and nonnative dichotomy that Medgyes (1994) feels should be scrutinized closely rather than simply rejected, overlooked, or blurred.

Limitations of the Study

The major limitation to this study is its small number of participants. There were only 10 respondents to the survey (one expatriate NEST, two expatriate nonNESTs, and seven Malaysian nonNESTs). Three of the 10 agreed to do a semi-structured interview, but one opted out. The two interviewees consisted of one expatriate NEST and one Malaysian nonNEST. The small number of participants in this study cannot be considered representative of each category of the population of teachers in Malaysia. One reason for the small number of participants could be that the issue of wage and recruiting of expatriate NESTs/nonNESTs is a highly charged topic in Malaysia that the target population might feel uncomfortable discussing.

Another potential limitation would be that the data collected were self-reported and NEST and nonNEST issues may be so highly charged that participants may not be willing to divulge their real feelings. This study assured the participants that any information given would be treated with the utmost discretion and that their names would not, in any way, be revealed.

Conclusion

This research study is the only study to the knowledge of the researchers that addresses the perception of local Malaysian nonNESTs, expatriate NESTs, and expatriate nonNESTs in the context of ELT in Malaysia with regards to the massive influx of expatriate teachers in the country. Also, the salary discrepancy in Malaysia between local and expatriate teachers has not been reported or studied in any publications.

The findings of this study showed that there is a self-reported large discrepancy in wage and benefits between Malaysian nonNESTs and expatriate NESTs/nonNESTs. The reliability of the evidence to this claim is questionable, as this self-reported salary is comparing one NEST's salary to those of seven nonNESTs. In addition to wage discrepancy, this study also revealed that participants were highly ambivalent as to whether the presence of expatriate NESTs/nonNESTs affected the morale of Malaysian nonNESTs positively or negatively. However, the written and interview responses revealed otherwise. The majority of the participants felt that the morale of Malaysian nonNESTs is impacted negatively. In addition, this study points to Malaysian nonNESTs' low self-esteem as they compare themselves with NESTs.

This study calls for a more in-depth study in identifying the wage gap between expatriate NESTs, expatriate nonNESTs, and Malaysian nonNESTs, as well as the hiring practices for English teachers in Malaysia. The hope is that this study can inform lawmakers and hiring agents and raise their awareness of their role in improving the morale of Malaysian nonNESTs by providing them equal opportunities as they create policies that could diminish or eliminate discrimination and the wage/benefits discrepancy.

Another finding of this study suggests that although the presence of expatriate NESTs/nonNESTs provides opportunities for students to be exposed to different dialects of English and learn the language in depth, most participants felt that the presence of expatriate NESTs over the years

had not had a significant impact on improving the English language proficiency of Malaysian students. In fact, the Ministry of Education reported a continuous decline of students' English language proficiency, attributing this decline to the shortage of qualified Malaysian nonNESTs, thus justifying the recruitment of expatriate NESTs/nonNESTs. We recommend a thorough investigation of the cause of the decline of English language proficiency in Malaysia. The impact of expatriate NESTs on the improvement of students' English proficiency must be examined.

Furthermore, this study revealed that all participants felt that qualifications and teaching experience are paramount in hiring English teachers and should take precedence over the teachers' country of origin or L1 background. The native/nonnative labeling often favors race in lieu of merit. This study suggests that this native/nonnative dichotomy is more complex, as some nonNESTs ascribed themselves as native speakers. Although this labeling offers convenience in identification, it should be scrutinized and viewed as multi-faceted.

Although this study is limited in terms of its generalizability because of the small number of participants, its implications have a potentially broader impact. This study brings to light the plight of Malaysian nonNESTs and we hope it serves to start a proactive conversation to affect change in the education policy and the mindset of Malaysian nonNESTs.

References

- Aboshiha, P. (2015). Rachel's story: Development of a "native speaker" English language teacher. In A. Swan, P. Aboshiha, & A. Holliday (Eds.), (*En*) *countering native-speakerism* (pp. 43–58). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137463500_4
- Braine, G. (2005). A history of research on non-native speaker English teachers. In E. Llorca (Ed.), *Non-native language teachers: Perceptions, challenges and contributions to the profession* (pp. 13–23). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/0-387-24565-0_2
- Chomsky, N. (1965). *Aspects of the theory of syntax*. The MIT Press. <https://doi.org/10.21236/AD0616323>
- Clark, E., & Paran, A. (2007). The employability of non-native-speaker teachers of EFL: A UK survey. *System*, 35, 407–430. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2007.05.002>
- Faez, F. (2011). Reconceptualizing the native/nonnative speaker dichotomy. *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*, 10, 231–249. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2011.598127>

- . (2018). Empowerment of NNESTs. In J. I. Liontas & M. DelliCarpini (Eds.), *The TESOL encyclopedia of English language teaching* (pp. 1–7). Wiley-Blackwell. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118784235.eelt0016>
- Floris, F. D., & Renandya, W. A. (2020). Promoting the value of non-native English-speaking teachers *PASSA*, 59, 1–19.
- Holliday, A. (2006). Native-speakerism. *ELT Journal*, 60(4), 385–387. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccl030>
- . (2018). Native-speakerism. In J. I. Liontas & M. DelliCarpini (Eds.), *The TESOL encyclopedia of English language teaching* (pp. 1151–1157). Wiley-Blackwell. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118784235.eelt0027>
- Inbar-Lourie, O. (2005). Mind the gap: Self and perceived native speaker identities of EFL teachers. In E. Llorca (Ed.), *Non-native language teachers: Perceptions, challenges and contributions to the profession* (pp. 265–281). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/0-387-24565-0_14
- Jenkins, J. (2009). *World Englishes: A resource book for students*. Routledge.
- Jeon, M., & Lee, J. (2006). Hiring native-speaking English teachers in East Asian countries. *English Today* 88, 22(4), 53–58. https://doi.org/10.1007/0-387-24565-0_14
- Kachru, B. B., & Nelson, C. L. (1996). World Englishes. In S. L. McKay & N. H. Hornberger (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics and language teaching* (pp. 71–102). Cambridge University Press.
- Kabilan, M. K. (2007). English language teachers reflecting on reflections: A Malaysian experience. *TESOL Quarterly*, 41(4), 681–705. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511551185.006>
- Kamhi-Stein, L. D. (2014). Non-native English-speaking teachers in the profession. In M. Celce-Murcia, D. M. Brinton, & M. A. Snow (Eds.), *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (4th ed., pp. 586–593). Heinle Cengage.
- Kiczkowiak, M., & Wu, A. (2018). Discrimination and discriminatory practices against NNESTs. In J. I. Liontas & M. DelliCarpini (Eds.), *The TESOL encyclopedia of English language teaching* (pp. 1–7). Wiley-Blackwell. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118784235.eelt0014>
- Liu, J. (1999). Nonnative-English-speaking professionals in TESOL. *TESOL Quarterly*, 33(1), 85–102. <https://doi.org/10.1093/her/cyt148>
- Mackey, A., & Gass, S. M. (2005). *Second language research methodology and design*. Routledge.
- Mahboob, A., & Golden, R. (2013). Looking for native speakers of English: Discrimination in English language teaching job advertisements. *Voices in Asia Journal*, 1(1), 72–81.
- Medgyes, P. (1994). *The non-native teacher*. Macmillan.
- Ministry of Education (2014). Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025. <http://www.moe.gov.my/userfiles/file/PPP/Preliminary-Blueprint-Eng.pdf>

- Moussu, L. (2010, December). Toward a conversation between ESL teachers and Intensive English Program administrators. *TESOL Journal*, 1(4), 400–426. <https://doi.org/10.5054/tj.2010.234767>
- Phillipson, R. (1992). *Linguistic imperialism*. Oxford University Press.
- Rajagopalan, K. (2005). Non-native speaker teachers of English and their anxieties: Ingredients for an experiment in action research. In E. Llurda (Ed.), *Non-native language teachers: Perceptions, challenges and contributions to the profession* (pp. 283–303). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/0-387-24565-0_15
- Stern, H. H. (1983). *Fundamental concepts of language teaching*. Oxford University Press.
- Tajeddin, Z., & Adeh, A. (2016, October). Native and nonnative English teachers' perceptions of their professional identity: Convergent or divergent? *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research*, 4(3), 37–54.
- Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. (2006, March). *Position statement against discrimination of nonnative speakers of English in the field of TESOL* [Data file]. <https://www.tesol.org/docs/default-source/advocacy/position-statement-against-nnest-discrimination-march-2006.pdf?sfvrsn=2>
- Thomas, J. (1999). Voice from the periphery: Non-native teachers and issues of credibility. In G. Braine (Ed.), *Non-native educators in English language teaching* (pp. 5–13). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Syringa Joanah D. JUDD earned her MA in TESOL from Brigham Young University. She is Adjunct Instructor at Ensign College where she teaches college writing. Her research interests include language policy and planning as well as ESL teacher development.

Lynn E. HENRICHSEN is Emeritus Professor of TESOL at Brigham Young University. His specialties include ESL teacher education, language planning, curriculum development, and second language pronunciation.

Grant T. ECKSTEIN is Professor of linguistics at Brigham Young University where he teaches graduate academic writing and teacher training courses. His research interests include second language reading and writing development and pedagogy. He is the associate editor of Journal of Response to Writing.

Benjamin L. McMURRY is Program Coordinator at Brigham Young University's English Language Center where he also mentors undergraduate and graduate students. He researches instructional design, the Psychology of Language Learning, and materials development.

Appendix

Demographic and Salary/Remuneration Questionnaire

Part I: Demographic Information about Participants

1. Sex
 - Male
 - Female
2. Age
 - 19 years below
 - 20–30 years old
 - 31–40 years old
 - 41–50 years old
 - 51–60 years old
 - 61 years old and above
3. Do you consider yourself a native English speaker?
 - Yes
 - No
4. Where is your country of birth?

5. Where and how did you learn English while growing up? (List all the countries, environments/institutions, and the length of your English study)

6. Highest level of education (completed)
 - High School
 - Associates
 - Bachelor
 - Masters
 - Doctorate
- Post. Doctorate
- Professional certification in TESOL/TEFL/Applied Linguistics, etc. (e.g., ICELT, CELTA, DELTA, etc.)
7. Employment status in Malaysia
 - Local Malaysian Non-native English teacher
 - Expatriate Native English-speaking teacher (from countries whose primary national language is English)
 - Expatriate Non-native English-speaking Teacher (from other foreign countries whose primary national language is NOT English)
 - None of the above
8. Employment status
 - Part-time
 - Full-time
 - Volunteer
9. Monthly salary
 - Less than RM 1,000
 - RM 1,001–RM 2,000
 - RM 2,001–RM 3,000
 - RM 3,001–RM 4,000

- RM 4,001–RM 6,000
- RM 6,001–RM 8,000
- RM 8,001–RM 10,000
- RM 10,001–RM 15,000
- RM 15,001–RM 20,000
- RM 20,001–RM 25,000
- Over RM 25,000

10. Employment benefits (check appropriate boxes)

- Paid vacation/holiday
- How many days/weeks/months? _____
- Paid sick leave
- Housing allowance
- Travel/Transportation allowance
- Utilities allowance
- Medical & Dental Insurance
- Retirement
- Other benefits not

mentioned, please specify:

11. Type of Secondary School (High School) where you currently teach

- International School (Private)
- National School (Public)
- Language Center
- Others, please specify: _____

12. Length of residence in Malaysia

- Less than a year
- 1–2 years
- 3–4 years
- 4–5 years
- Over 5 years
- Resident/Citizen

Part 2: Perception of Participants

13. I perceive my English proficiency as...

- Native
- Native-like or near-native
- Superior
- Advanced
- Intermediate
- Novice

14. Please explain why you feel this way:
