



Perceptions of Thai EFL Students Concerning their Teacher's Competency and Empathy

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Abstract

It has often been found that the 'white' native English instructors were the preferred facilitators in an EFL context because of their accent and fluency in the English language however teacher's competency and by extension teacher's empathy with their students remain overlooked from the initial application and hiring process of potential applicants. As they are most directly affected this study attempts to comprehend the perceptions of Thai EFL students of their EFL instructors by collecting and analyzing data collected through questionnaire and interview protocol. Samples for the study were taken from various international universities located in the Bangkok Metropolitan Area and findings of this investigation yielded a majority of responses to the effect that although the aforementioned Thai EFL students do prefer 'white' Native English Speaking Teachers they also admit that these teacher's 'non-white'/ non-native counterparts can possess equal levels Teacher Competency and in some cases an even higher level of Teacher Empathy in addition to utilizing the advantages of code-switching in the classroom context. This study has been undertaken with the anticipation of generating valuable conclusions and recommendations for future institutional implementation and to determine whether the traditional mindsets concerning the "Ideal EFL teacher" as being a Native English speaker do in fact hold true in the minds of the Thai L2 learner.

Keywords: farang, white, EFL teachers, NS/NNS, NEST/NNEST, ethnicity, code-switching, student's perceptions, teacher competency, teacher empathy

1.1 Introduction

According to Amin (1997), English as a second language (ESL) students perceive that the 'ideal' teacher model would be a white, native-English-speaking Caucasian male but this attitude neglects the proficiency of the teacher as a relevant variable when considering what is 'ideal'. In fact, Medgyes (1994), stated that if the 'ideal' teacher is the native speaker model, then that 'ideal' teacher would be a monolingual native speaker but logic suggests that this may not always be the case, especially when considering ESL/EFL contexts in Asia. Although it seems obvious as to the positive aspects of EFL instructors having strong relevant proficiencies, this misconception that one of the essential qualifications of an EFL teacher is an outward looking appearance which would suggest an ethnic origin from a native English speaking country a.k.a. 'Whiteness' has been a source of discrepancy in the hiring of potential EFL instructors. In fact interview data collected in a Thai educational context by Phohtongsunan and Suwanarak (2008) stated that:

“Non-white teachers will have an extremely hard time finding employment in most schools, even if they speak perfect English and have all the required degrees.”

In order to facilitate knowledge transfer to their L2 students, EFL instructors should possess teaching proficiency and skills (competency), an understanding of the challenges and hardships their students may face (empathy) and perhaps the ability to communicate in the student’s L1 (code-switching). “Native speakers know the destination, but not the terrain that has to be crossed to get there; they themselves have not travelled the same route”, Seidlhofer (1999), the understanding of the L2 student’s journey through EFL cannot be grasped by the native EFL instructor void of the experience of ever being ‘in the shoes’ of their students.

1.2 Background of the study

This research endeavor has grown out of intrinsic motivation which stems from first-hand experiences of the researcher as to the benefits of EFL teachers possessing teaching competency and empathy and how it affects student’s perceptions. Additionally this study will attempt to debunk the idea that ‘whiteness’ is a necessary and inherent qualification for hiring EFL instructors and thereby dispelling the notion that non-native English speaking teachers are as “second class” as compared to their NES counterparts and should be given equal opportunities for employment. Teachers should be sought according to their competency and empathy towards their EFL students in order to foresee, avoid or overcome the inevitable or common difficulties associated with learning English as a foreign language (Braine and Ling, 2007; Lee, 2000).

1.3 Research Questions & Purposes of the study

This study had strived to explore and understand:

RQ1: What relationship exists between EFL teachers’ outward ethnic appearance and their teaching competency?

RQ2: What relationship exists between EFL teachers’ outward ethnic appearance and their teaching empathy?

Null Hypothesis:

H_{0 1}: NO relationship exists between Thai L2 learner’s perceptions of their EFL teacher competency and ethnicity

H_{0 2}: NO relationship exists between Thai L2 learner’s perceptions of their EFL teacher empathy and ethnicity

Alternative Hypothesis:

H₁: A relationship exists between Thai L2 learner’s perceptions of their EFL teacher’s competency and ethnicity

H₂: A relationship exists between Thai L2 learner’s perceptions of their EFL teacher’s empathy and ethnicity

Research Purposes:

- To identify the relationship between EFL teachers’ outward looking appearances (of skin colors and ethnic names) and their English teaching competency.
- To identify the relationship between EFL teachers’ outward looking appearances (of skin colors and ethnic names) and teacher empathy towards their students.



2. Related Literature

2.1 Teacher Competency

“Competence” is the ability of a person to do a job adequately while “competency” is the quality or state of being legally qualified to do a job; in effect, competence and competency are “interchangeable”, though competence is more often used to describe a person’s general ability, while competency is more often used to describe a person’s ability to perform a certain task, Sinha (2016). According to the definition of the European Commission, competence is a combination of skills, knowledge, aptitudes and attitudes: 1) general pedagogical competence, that is, that which is typical of all teachers; 2) subject competence, that is, that which is typical of different subjects, Oder (2008). A foreign language (FL) teacher is a different breed as they are first a teacher and then a subject teacher; general pedagogical competence is necessary for FL teachers. The FL teacher is also special breed as compared to other teachers because their subject is also a medium by which the teaching of all other subjects is conducted. Effectively, the FL instructor’s subject competence can be broken down into of two ‘sub-competencies’ which are: pedagogical competence, the teacher understands what to teach and how to teach it, and FL communicative competence, the teacher needs proficiency in communicating using an FL in a variety of contextual situations involving the communicative activities of listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Qualifications for native and non-native EFL teachers should have consistency and Giague (1984) stated that even though it is essential for NNSs to attain a high level of knowledge of the target language to become teachers, it is equally important that NSs have good knowledge of contrastive linguistics and teaching strategies before being allowed to teach in their own language and this notion is supported by Rampton (1990, p. 101), who claims, “that being born into a language does not mean that one inherently speaks it well”. Kramsch (1997) goes on to argue the notion of the “ideal” native speaker stating that oral communicative competence in foreign language teaching should be adequate and most NNS teachers aren’t interested in achieving native-ness but would rather expose their students to their own language learning experiences and their multicultural backgrounds.

2.2 Teacher Empathy

Two informative characteristics that make a good English language teacher, regardless of their accent, are: (a) the quality of help students get from the teacher and (b) their relationship with the teacher. Both of these factors stem from (a) the teacher’s expertise, which includes knowledge and training as well as teaching techniques, and (b) the teacher’s intercultural personality, which directly influences the teacher-student relationship. According to Rogers (1995, p. 157), Empathy is “When a teacher has the ability to understand the student’s reactions from the inside, has a sensitive awareness of the process of how education and learning seems to the student...then the likelihood of learning is significantly increased.” Neito (2006) adds, “Empathy may be one of those necessary though largely unexamined traits that define good teaching.”

It’s often been witnessed that NNS teachers are admired by and inspirational to their students as they are held to be successful role models for English language usage, Lee

(2000). Cook (2005), stated that NNS teachers are considered models of proficient [L2] users in action and are also examples of students themselves who achieved success as [L2] users'. Phillipson (1992) has brought forth the idea that adult NNSs would be more empathic and able to teach L2, as most NNSs acquired their second language as adults as opposed to those who had learned the target language as children. NNS become archetypes to which their students can aspire and they are first hand manifestations of what is possible with second language appreciation, proficiency and culture. Empathetic teachers have more positive self-concepts, are more self-disclosing to their students, respond more to students' feelings, give more praise, are more responsive to student's ideas, and lecture less often, Rogers (1994).

2.3 Ethnicity

'Ethnicity' is defined by Webster's New World dictionary as classification or affiliation designating or of any the basic groups or divisions of mankind or of a heterogeneous population as distinguished by customs, characteristics, language, common history etc.). It is often used as a category to distinguish groups based on sociocultural characteristics, such as ancestry, language, religion, custom and lifestyle (Thompson & Hickey, 1994). A concept related to race is ethnicity, which is sometimes used as a politically correct code word for race (Miles & Brown, 2003). In the Thai context the term 'Farang' is defined by the Royal Institute Dictionary (1999) as a 'person of white race'.

2.4 NS &NNS in ELT

Native English speaking teachers (NEST) are perceived to be superior to that of non-native speakers; the reasons being that NEST's pronunciation conforms to accepted norms, use of vocabulary is more effective and appropriate, and lack of grammatical mistakes, Todd (2006). Non-Native English Speaker Teachers (NNEST) possess some unique characteristics in EFL settings as described by Medgyes (1994): They provide a good learner model for imitation. 2) They teach language learning strategies more effectively. 3) They supply learners with most information about the English language. 4) They anticipate and prevent language difficulties better. 5) They are more empathetic to the needs and problems of learners. 6) They make use of the learners' mother tongue.

At present global demand for English language teaching has grown exponentially which is evident in the increased amount of learners and the earlier age at which they begin, Graddol, (1999) & Seidlhofer, (2001). This is also clear when taking into account Expanding Circle countries, including ASEAN, where English language teaching has already been integrated into nationwide primary school curricula, most beginning since Primary one (Kirkpatrick, 2012). This has spawned a phenomenon in which NNS teachers, in fact, provide most of the instruction for these (EFL) settings (Liu, 1999) and it is in these contexts that the advantages of the multilingual competence of EFL instructors shines through.

A study of NNS teachers by Hayes's (2009) shows that primary schools in Thailand make use of their local NNS teachers advantageously by adapting classroom practices to situational realities and sometimes using explanations in Thai [L1] for grammar and instructional confirmation. Liu (2007) explains that the majority of EFL instructors worldwide are NNS speakers and, in EFL settings, learning of English



from teachers whose native language is the same as the students' [L1] has been very successful. That being said, *Diaza (2015)* has found that NEST are preferable for courses related to Listening, Speaking, Pronunciation and Culture, while NNEST are more conducive to teaching Grammar and/or Learning Strategies and both are equally skilled on Reading and Vocabulary.

2.5 Code-switching in the EFL classroom

Code-switching: "the way a speaker changes back and forth between two language varieties particularly in a single conversation as "code"- switching" (*Blom & Gumperz, 1972*). Extensive analysis of transcribed EFL classroom interactions has illuminated some of the strategies employed when these EFL instructors use code-switching (CS) to facilitate knowledge transfer and classroom management. Many researchers reserve the opinion that 'English-only' is a lazy rule because it fails to take advantage of a multi-sociolinguistic alternative to filling a void concerning classroom teaching strategies that are naturally applied in many non-native communication exchanges every day; the only core difference would concern CS strategic approach in a pedagogical context. While those in the establishment, in diverse multilingual pedagogical contexts, recognize the recurrent application of CS in the classroom, many argue that CS needs strict regulation by EFL instructors in classroom contexts (*Ferguson 2009*).

On the contrary, there is 'no empirical evidence to support the notion that restricting mother tongue use would necessarily improve learning efficiency, and that the majority of CS in the classroom is highly purposeful and related to pedagogic goals' (*Eldridge, 1996, p. 303*; see also *Macaro, 2001*). Code-switching is additionally applied to facilitate shifts in communicative interactions: Topic shift (discourse marker or sign post), Frame shift (move from informal socializing to formal learning) and CS can also create situations to signal social attitudes or group membership or solidarity (Metaphorical switching).

2.6 Literature Gap

There is substantial lack of research-based knowledge regarding why Thai English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students consider outward ethnic looking appearance (manifested by the skin color and/or ethnicity) of EFL teachers to be one of the most significant factors when selecting an EFL instructor taking priority over such factors as teacher competency and teacher empathy. With the dawn of the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) economic community (AEC) already in its infancy, it is our obligation and commitment to understand the Thai EFL learners' perceptions and preferences in relation to those who would facilitate their knowledge transfer of the English language, *Thongcharoen (2017)*. Past studies have shown that such teaching proficiencies are indispensable in the EFL classroom and can be viewed as more valuable than possessing 'perfect' spoken English. Research into student's perceptions regarding the impact their teacher competency and empathy in the EFL context warrants further investigation as it pertains to contextual factors relevant to creating academic environments conducive to the learning of the English language among tertiary level international university students in Thailand as they are the generation that will be most directly and immediately affected given that they



need to apply the English language on a regular basis at either school or in the workplace.

3. Methodology

3.1 Universities

Data collection was performed at three universities which include 1 private international university and 2 international departments within private universities, all located within the Bangkok Metropolitan Area of the Kingdom of Thailand. Conducting data collection in this specific academic environment afforded a combination of Thai and Foreign EFL learners, dealing with a variety of subject matter, as well as a diverse variety of ethnic backgrounds of EFL teachers, thereby providing a rich context for contrast and comparisons in this study. All data was collected on site during June of 2016.

3.2 Population and Sample

A total of 212 (n=212) Thai tertiary students were selected randomly from 7 different classes among the 3 separate universities. The total amount of students attending those classes was 300 however judgmental sampling was utilized to filter out only students of Thai nationality who were learning English as a second/foreign language to be included in the study. Initially students were requested to complete a questionnaire (see Appendix A) and some students (21) were also approached for personal interviews if in-depth probing was deemed useful according to their responses from the questionnaire. Any non-Thai students were omitted from the study and all respondents were required to sign a consent form as evidence of their voluntary involvement in the study and to inform them of their ensured anonymity in the final report.

3.3 Instrumentation

Instrumentation (see Appendix A) consisted of a combined adaptation of the Quita Survey, Plakans (1997), for assessment of international teachers of English combined with the AuQS (2000) Teaching Competency and Effectiveness Index (TCEI). The questionnaire consisted of simple dichotomous and open-ended questions and a simple binary coding system (no=0; yes=1) was used to tally responses. Data analysis software consisted of Ms. Excel and SPSS. Follow-up interviews for a limited number of respondents consisted of a non-structured interview protocol (see Appendix B). All data was collected on the same day at the respective locations allowing for concurrent triangulation to promote reliability and validity of the findings.

3.4 Data Collection

Respondents from the 3 universities (7 classes total) were divided into Thai students learning with farang or 'white' EFL instructors (Group A) and those learning with non-farang or non-white EFL instructors (Group B). 212 Questionnaires were completed and 21 interviews were also conducted across all 7 locations. Sample distribution was as follows: Group A students learning with farang teachers came



from Site A3 & Site C1 totaling 70 respondents and Group B students studying with non-farang teachers came from Sites A1+A2+B1+ B2 +C2 totaling 142 respondents (see Figure 1). All of the EFL instructors which included a Cuban/ American, a European Spaniard, 3 Thai teachers, 1 Indian teacher and 1 teacher from Myanmar, all received Bachelor's degrees or higher from abroad (U.S., U.K., AUS., FR). All Class lectures were almost completely in English. All textbooks, teaching materials, and assignments were only in English.

Location 1: This private university provided 3 classes for data collection during the summer session (June 15, 2016) held in the morning session, 9-12pm and the afternoon session, 1300-1600. Each class contained approximately 35-40 students of varying nationalities.

Location 2: This private university provided 2 classes for data collection during the summer session (June 20, 2016) held in the morning session, 9-12pm and the afternoon session, 1300-1600. Class size was approximately 45-50 of varying nationalities (Both Asian and Caucasian).

Location 3: This private university provided 2 classes for data collection during the summer session (June 28, 2016) held in the morning session, 9-12pm and the afternoon session, 1300-1600. Class size was approximately 30-35 of varying nationalities (Both Asian and Caucasian).

Questionnaires for all locations were distributed during their class session and any non-Thai respondents or those who were not learning EFL/ESL were omitted from the study. Respondents were selected for further interviewing according to responses on the questionnaire that were either vague or extraordinary thereby warranting further examination. Unstructured interviews took place on the same day in the same classroom immediately after class on an individual basis. Questions were asked from a predetermined list without any fixed sequence relying on the researcher to execute an effective line of questioning to illicit rich and valuable data.

3.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data collected from the questionnaire survey was analyzed using descriptive statistics for finding mean values using Microsoft Excel and inferential statistics for comparing mean values of two groups (Group A & Group B) was also done using the Independent Sample T-Test utilizing SPSS Software. Graphs and tables were also formulated using the aforementioned computer software. The qualitative interview data was analyzed using a thematic analysis of the responses (see Table 3).

The mixed method of concurrent data collection applied in this study had several purposes. Quantitative data was first collected (questionnaires) which assisted in providing concrete conceptual data which also filtered out outliers or those who provided salient responses to be approached for more extensive unstructured interviews. As suggested by Creswell (2009), 'When data are collected concurrently, both quantitative and qualitative data are gathered at the same time and the implementation is simultaneous'.

Internal validity in the study was maintained through the researchers attempt at understanding the participants' construction of reality through multiple accounts investigated by interview protocol. Qualitative research then captures an objective

‘truth’ or ‘reality’ and the best way to increase the credibility, validity, transferability and reliability of the research then is to use multiple methods, multiple sources of data, multiple investigators or multiple theories to confirm emerging findings, Denzin (1978).

4. Results & Findings

4.1 Research Questions

1) What relationship exists between EFL teachers’ outward ethnic appearance and their teaching competency?

Null Hypothesis: ACCEPTED (H_0)

H_0 2: **NO relationship exists between Thai L2 learner’s perceptions of their EFL teacher competency and ethnicity**

Table 1: Independent Sample T-Test for Teacher Competency

Group Name	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Percent Farang Teacher	70	.8564	.11265	.01346
Non Farang Teachers	142	.8399	.20215	.01696

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Percentage	Equal variances assumed	8.927	.003	.635	210	.526	.01650	.02596	-.03468	.06768
	Equal variances not assumed			.762	206.854	.447	.01650	.02166	-.02620	.05920

The Independent Sample t-test is designed to compare means of the same variables between groups. In this case we have Group A (70) which is the total number of students that were learning with a ‘farang’ teacher and Group B (142) consisted of those learning with ‘non-farang’ teachers. Confidence level was predetermined at the standard 95% with probability error of .05.

From above Group A has a mean of .8564 with Group B at a mean of .8399. From Levene’s Test for Equality of Variance there is a *sig.* value of .003 which is lower than the .05 probability error meaning the variability of the two groups is significantly different so this leads to a focus on the Equal Variance not assumed



(bottom row) where the Equality of Means *sig. (2-tailed)* value is .447. This value is greater than the .05 probability error meaning that there is no statistical difference between the means of Group A and Group B so therefore we accept the null hypothesis (H_0).

2) What relationship exists between EFL teachers’ outward ethnic appearance and their teaching empathy?

Null Hypothesis: REJECTED (H_2)

H_2 : A relationship exists between Thai L2 learner’s perceptions of their EFL teacher empathy and ethnicity

Table 2: Independent Sample T-Test for Teacher Empathy

Group Name	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Percent Farang Teacher	70	.6517	.14174	.01694
Non Farang Teachers	142	.7524	.14886	.01249

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Percentage	Equal variances assumed	.229	.633	-4.704	210	.000	-.10068	.02140	-.14287	-.05849
	Equal variances not assumed			-4.783	143.651	.000	-.10068	.02105	-.14229	-.05908

The Independent Sample t-test is designed to compare means of the same variables between groups. In this case we have Group A (70) which is the total number of students that were learning with a ‘farang’ teacher and Group B (142) consisted of those learning with ‘non-farang’ teachers. Confidence level was predetermined at standard 95% with probability error of .05.

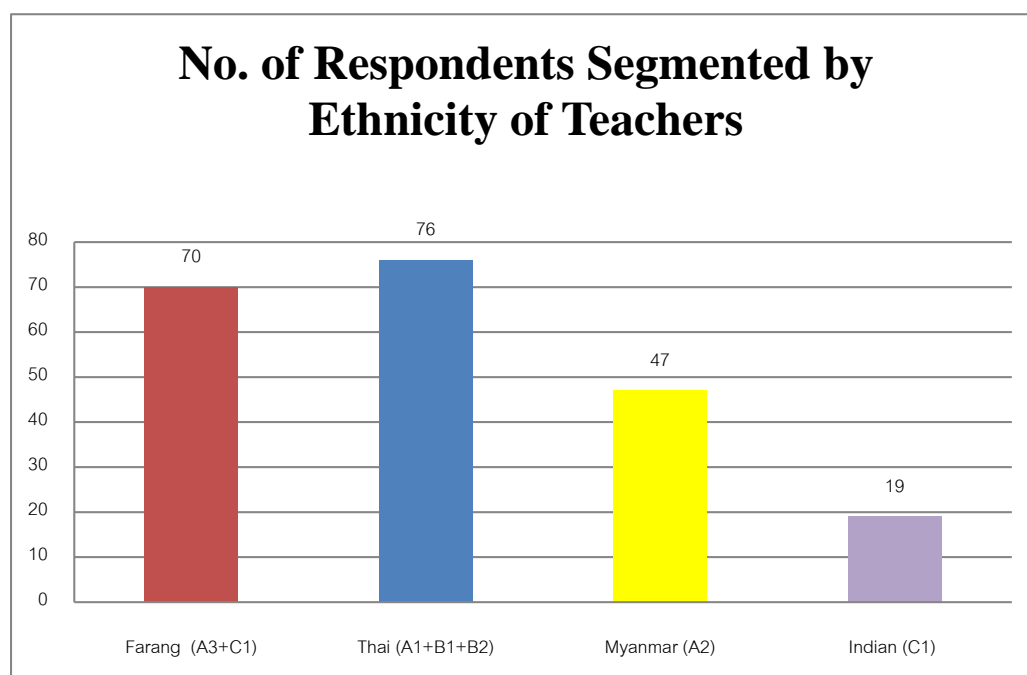
From above Group A has a mean of .6517 with Group B at a mean of .7524. From Levene’s Test for Equality of Variance there is a *sig.* value of .663 which is greater than the .05 probability error meaning the variability of the two groups is not significantly different so this leads to a focus on the Equal Variance assumed (top row) where the Equality of Means *sig. (2-tailed)* value is .000. This value is less than the .05 probability error meaning that there is a statistical difference between the



means of Group A and Group B so therefore we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis (H_2).



Figure 1: Sample Distribution



4.3 Questionnaire Findings for Teachers Competency

Of the 212 respondents surveyed, 70 out of 212, or 33% of them studied with ‘farang’ teachers while 67% of them did not however 54% of the total sample, or 116 out of 212, said that their teacher is a ‘native’ English speaker. This shows that although only 1/3 of the students studied with ‘farang’ teachers, more than 1/2 of total respondents perceived that they were studying with a NEST. Additionally 72%, said that their teachers spoke both Thai and English meaning that since there were only 76 respondents learning with Thai teachers, a large portion of the non-Thai (American, European Spanish, Burmese and Indian) teachers must be bilingual in English and Thai or at least have learned some Thai vocabulary during their years of teaching to help them to explain concepts in class. 75% of the total sample also responded that they ‘prefer to study with bilingual teachers’ and 79% said that ‘it is possible for someone who is not ‘farang’ to be a ‘native’ English speaker’. Although a large number of respondents acknowledge that they believe a ‘non-farang’ can be a ‘native’ English speaker, 51% admit that when they register for classes, they would ‘prefer to learn with a ‘farang’ or white teacher’ and; in addition, 52% percent responded that it is ‘easier to understand English from a ‘farang’ teacher’, possibly attributable to the L1 accent, but in fact 71% or respondents agreed that non-white teachers can teach just as effectively as white teachers. So about half of respondents believe that a non-white person can be NES and a significant number of respondents said that a non-white teacher can be just as effective as white teachers but their perception is that 1 of every 2 students still prefer to learn with a ‘farang’ teacher. Furthermore, 79%, or 168 out of 212, of the respondents said ‘having white teachers in the faculty provides a better image for the university and 50% of these respondents perceive that white teachers ‘make more salary than other nationalities of teachers.’

Throughout the gamut of this investigation, all three sites received highly positive scores in regards to Teacher’s Competency so whether there does exist a double or triple tiered compensation structure, rest assured that the hiring practices of the institutions who cooperated with this study are discovering talented and skilled faculty members indeed. That being said, 95%, or 202 out of 212, of respondents said that their teacher ‘knows the subject matter well’ 95%, 92%, and 86% said ‘yes’ when asked if their teachers are ‘well-prepared for class’, ‘have the ability to explain subject matter clearly in English’ and ‘use different teaching methods’, respectively. 93 %, 87% and 87% off respondents replied that their teachers ‘give guidelines for assignments in the class,’ ‘gives them useful feedback’ and ‘shows students their mistakes and how to correct them’, respectively. Only 44% of respondents replied that their teacher is ‘very strict with grades’ but with 19% NA answers as it seems many students at Site C1 and C2 felt that it was too early in the summer session to confidently answer this question.

4.4 Questionnaire Findings for Teachers Empathy

Concerning Teacher’s Empathy teachers at all sites received rather high scores overall. 92% of respondents answered ‘yes’ when asked whether their teacher ‘encouraged students to participate in class. 92%, 91%, 92% and 94% of respondents answered positively when asked whether their teachers ‘wanted students to ask questions’, ‘gives useful feedback’, is ‘open to students’ comments and suggestions’ and are ‘understanding when their English is not perfect’, respectively. When asked about whether their teachers expected ‘perfect grammar on written assignments’, ‘on oral assignments’ or ‘perfect pronunciation in class’, respondents who answered ‘yes’ amounted to 60%, 55% and 51%, respectively. One interesting find was that 127 out of 212, or 59% said that their teachers ‘use both Thai and English to explain concepts in class’ and of those respondents who learn with ‘farang’ teachers, 22 out of 70, said that their teacher is bilingual although their teachers claimed not to be. Another interesting find was, 56% or 120 out of 212, of respondents said that they ‘prefer when teachers use both Thai and English in class with 73%, or 155 out 212, also saying that they ‘understand concepts more when their teachers use both Thai and English.’

4.5 Interview Findings for Teacher Competency

Table 3: Thematic Codes

Thematic code: (AC, B,CS, ID, IN, L, NS, NNS, TC, W, WP)		
AC: Accent	B: Biliteracy/Bilingualism	CS: Code Switching
ID: Ideal Speaker Model	IN: Interpersonal relationship	L: legitimacy/Ownership
NS: Native Speaker	NNS: Non-Native Speaker	TC: Teacher Competency
W: Whiteness	WP: White Privilege	

With regard to the interview data collected there were some emergent themes which mainly supported those findings concerning Teacher Competency consistent with the questionnaire data analysis. Most students interviewed agreed that (TC) is a



primary factor for teachers and NNS can be just as effective as NS but (AC) can also have a significant role in student's preference of their EFL instructors.

Respondent T3 responded, (TC) "Some non-native English [teachers] can teach well, same as native English teacher. Every teacher can teach well". While Respondent F75 additionally claimed "I don't mind native or non-native teachers or 'farang'. For me it's the attitude of good instructor who can make me understand or not"... (TC) native or non-native doesn't matter it depends on the person if they are good at teaching or not...some teachers have lots of training and experience. Some non-native teachers have spent a lot of time abroad so the accent can be good" (AC). Another Respondent T100 answered, (AC) "Nope, some of instructors [non-native] have a bad accent or low in English skill"...[it] depend on their teaching skill, some of non-native teacher I come to study [with] which has a great teaching skills (TC)...I think it is more of individual skill more than non-native or native instructors I had met many bad native speaker instructors before, 'farang' too, so I don't judge by that".

One interesting opinion which came from Respondent T123, (AC) "I only have problems if the teacher is bad at teaching and has a bad accent as well. Not all 'farang' have good accents...I don't think that non-native instructors are better than native but they are cheaper for the university expense...because the salary should vary with the cost of the teacher's degree, graduating abroad costs more so it should pay more". This was definitely an interesting point as she has the perception that NS teachers are, in fact, more costly for the university to hire (WP) when compared to NNS and legitimately so while another Respondent T125 said, "Not many non-native teachers can teach as effectively as native teachers because of language and accent (AC)...non-native speaking instructors can teach just as well as native but sometimes it's a problem because their accent, such as Phillipine instructors or India instructors, they might have more problems teaching to the international students... not many non-native instructors will teach effectively just because of the accent but if I have Australia or New Zealand or UK teachers I have also had problems with the accent". Similarly Respondent F159 answered, "If I can choose I will choose a teacher who is non-native because they know how it feels to be a student 'like' me...I don't think it matters about native or non-native or 'farang' instructors but must look at each individual teacher. They are all different".

4.6 Interview Findings for Teacher Empathy

With regard to the interview data collected there were some emergent themes which mainly supported those findings concerning Teacher Empathy consistent with the questionnaire data analysis. Most students interviewed agreed that teacher empathy (IN) is an important variable in relation to teacher's competency and (CS) plays a significant role in teacher's empathy and by extension in student's preference of their EFL instructors.

Respondent T2 stated, "No since I myself are non-native, I prefer being acquainted by non-native but it depends on the instructor too...I actually recommend they do [use Thai], it will help them better...I would prefer a non-native teacher, yes but I have a few native teachers that I happen to like...it depends on the instructors and how responsive they are. Doesn't matter native or non-native, farang or not farang. This notion was further supported by respondent B22 who stated, "We speak the same

language in our lives so non-native teacher matches better with non-native students...sometimes they [NNS] can communicate effectively. It depends on their pronunciation. I like UK and US accents. It's REAL. Non-native teachers can be better because I can ask directly and to the point [in Thai]...if I have problems I can ask him in Thai. It is harder to make friends with native teachers". Respondent B23 also added, "Its great if non-native teachers have good accents (AC)...they should get training from abroad to improve their teaching skills...A foreign teacher with a native accent would be great! It depends on the instructors past experience it would be better to train abroad before teaching, learn from Europe or America".

Respondents F72 claimed, "Foreign teachers feel they are not supposed to be our friends...Like I said we are not friends so we cannot talk about problems with foreign teachers. Thai teachers are more comfortable" (IN). Respondent F74 also gave supporting statements, "I think non-native teachers can know more than 3 languages so they know how I feel, how difficult for me to study" but then he goes on the mention that "native teachers are strict with grades".

Respondent F158 also stated, "I enjoy learning with non-native English speakers, they are more helpful and understanding...I think that some non-native English instructors are more understanding with the students (IN). It's not about the accent as long as they can communicate together...I think it's easier to talk about my problems with non-native instructors. I can explain things in my language and this will give a higher level of education". "Well some non-native speakers can have a fluent accent. Institutes have to choose them wisely, don't just look at the face and name".

5. Discussions

5.1 Teacher Empathy and Teacher Competency

Regarding teacher's empathy, scores for all instructors were also high across the board but scores for non-white teachers were slightly higher. It seems white teachers have higher expectations from their L2 learners which was perceived by the students as higher level of strictness when compared to their Thai counterparts. Apart from the anxiety that the students in study may have experienced from perceived strictness of the instructor, it was also recognized that they appreciated the hardships that the NNS instructors must have endured in order to attain their level of English language proficiency. Seidlhofer, (1999) said, "native speakers know the destination, but not the terrain that has to be crossed to get there; they themselves have not travelled the same route". Findings within this study have shown that; even though students prefer to study with white or 'farang' teachers, non-white or non-'farang' teachers can be native speakers and can teach just as well as their white counterparts. If this is the case then there must be some strength to the proposition that since the majority of English usage in Expanding Circle contexts, such as Thailand, involve NNS communicating with other NNS, then the NNEST may have something to offer which would be distinctly different than that of the monolingual NEST.

5.2 Views on Code-switching and Teacher Empathy

Code-switching is another important issue which warranted attention in this investigation which found that the majority of students, 75%, prefer if they're EFL instructors spoke both Thai and English, at least at a basic level which, help them to



explain concepts in class. Some students explained, “Sometimes speaking with native speaker is frustrating because they cannot explain in local language” or “Students’ attitudes effects learning in class and I think attitudes about non-native speakers are better because they are same as us”. That being said, there is ‘no empirical evidence to support the notion that restricting mother tongue use would necessarily improve learning efficiency, and that, in fact, the majority of (CS) in the classroom is highly purposeful and related to pedagogic goals’ (Eldridge, 1996, p. 303: see also Macaro. 2001).

6. Conclusions

I. Non- white teachers can be just as effective as white teachers; Non-native teachers can be just as effective as native teachers.

There has been evidence revealed within the scope of this research study which suggests that Thai tertiary students accept that non-white teachers can teach just as effectively as non-white teachers. A significantly high percentage of respondents answered positively of the Teacher Competency and Teacher Empathy of all the instructors involved in in this study regardless of their ethnicity or their (non)-native-ness. The fact that all of these (7) instructors and the (n= 212) respondents came from 3 different field sites yet yielded such positive scores is a testament to the fact that ethnic looking appearance and ‘native-ness’ does not have a bearing on a teacher’s ability to transfer knowledge to students and understand and anticipate student’s problems in the classroom.

II. It’s not always easier to understand ‘farang’ teachers but students still do prefer to learn with ‘farang’ or white teachers because of the accent.

According to results of this study, a majority of students surveyed agree that it is not always easier to understand English from a ‘farang’ teacher; there are some ‘farang’ accents that Thai students find difficult. A study by Kim (2007) discovered that ESL students do, in fact, have more positive attitudes towards ESL teachers with a less foreign accent because it was perceived as being more easily understood, that being said, this shows results of perceived intelligibility and doesn’t definitively prove whether NS accents are truly easier to understand or not. Most often the primary determinant for this social recognition is the speaker’s accent as people maintain a significant affinity in noticing accented-ness in speech (Munro & Derwing, 1994; Munro & Derwing, 1995). However there also exists a contradiction here as Thai EFL students prefer white instructors because of the accent but they also prefer instructors who can code-switch so essentially they are searching for a rare breed indeed; in order to bridge the gap institutions ought to initiate teacher training programs for improvement of accented English and teaching of the student’s L1, in this case Thai, at least at a simplified yet functional level for application in the classroom.

III. Lastly, students want a native speaker, preferably ‘farang’ who can also explain concepts in Thai.

Perhaps teaching competency, accent, and ability for code-switching would be more effective grounds for evaluating potential applicants in Thai EFL hiring practices. Non-native-speaker teachers have been reported to have several advantages over native speakers, especially over those who are monolingual speakers of English. An instructor with the ability for code-switching strengthened Teacher Empathy and was thereby preferred by students but since they also prefer the ‘farang’ teacher there should be a way train them in the Thai language while concurrently hiring capable non-farang instructors to provide these students a successful [L2] learner model which can help reshape their perceptions and biases against the ethnic looking EFL instructor.

Although it was found that Thai tertiary EFL students prefer ‘farang’ teachers, it seems that it is the native accent that is appealing as opposed to the skin color of the teacher and students’ seem to want the best of both worlds by stating that they also prefer a teacher who can explain concepts in their own [L1]. This would culminate into the ‘ideal teacher’ being a native English speaker with a clear accent with the ability to code-switch in class. The preference of said teacher being white is a perception whose genesis lies within the hiring practices of stakeholders and unofficial policies which proliferate and strengthen the ‘invisible’ judgment of status and legitimacy known as ‘whiteness’ or ‘white privilege’ and proliferates ‘racism’ in the realm of EFL.

7. Limitations

The researcher effectively became the primary instrument for data collection and data analysis and with this emerged the inevitable realization that the data could be biased, tainted or misconstrued, Merriam (2009) so in essence when a researcher interprets qualitative data this constitutes both a necessary action and a possible weakness of the study. Also Group A and Group B in this study contain unequal amounts of respondents stemming from limited access to the locations for data collection as well as NNEST instructors (especially Thai) being much easier to find than their NEST counterparts however the Independent T-Test used in the study does not require equal sizes of both groups to be compared. Perhaps if multiple data collection sessions had taken place the researcher could have had more opportunity for more in-depth follow-up interviews.

About the Author

Yuth Thongcharoen is currently a full-time lecturer in the Department of Business English, Faculty of Arts, at Assumption University, Bangkok- Thailand and a PhD candidate at the National Institute for Development Administration (NIDA) in the Graduate School of Language and Communication. Courses taught include: Business Communication, Public Speaking, Business Research Methodology and English for Entrepreneurship. He also has frequently been invited as an adjunct lecturer by Sripatum University, Bangkok University, and Naresuan University to speak on such



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Appendices

Appendix A



Adapted from AuQS 2000 (Teaching Competency and Effectiveness Index) and The International Teaching Assistants (Quita) questionnaire by Plakans (1997)

This survey has been developed to collect data for a research project entitled, “Perceptions of Thai EFL Students Concerning their Teacher’s Competency and Empathy”. All the data collected will be used only for academic purposes for partial completion of a Doctoral Degree from the School of Language and Communication, National Institute of Development Administration. Your information will be kept with the strictest confidentiality and omission of all names of individuals and institutions is guaranteed in the final report and the presentation of this project.

Section 1: Student Profile

Name: _____ Email: _____

1) Are you registering for summer subjects? ____yes____no

If yes, for which subjects have you enrolled?

1st Subject: _____ Section: _____

2nd Subject: _____ Section: _____

3rd Subject: _____ Section: _____

Is your nationality Thai?

____yes____no

Are you learning English as a second/foreign language?

____yes____no

Researcher’s signature (x) _____ Date

(m/d/y): _____

Respondent’s signature (x) _____ Date

(m/d/y): _____

(must be dated by respondent)



Section 2: Student's Perceptions

(‘Farang’ is defined by the Royal Institute Dictionary 1999 as a ‘person of white race’.)

1) My teacher for this subject is a ‘farang’ (white person)? Yes No

2) My teacher for this subject is a “native” English speaker? Yes No

*Not Sure

*If you are **not sure** please explain why

3) My teacher for this class can speak Thai and English? Yes No

4) I prefer to study with bilingual teachers who speak both Thai and English?

Yes No

5) Is it possible for someone who is not “farang” (white) to be a “native” English speaker?

Yes No *Not Sure

*If you are **not sure** please explain why

When I register for subjects taught in English, I prefer to learn with ‘farang’ or white teachers?

Yes No

7) It is easier to understand English from a ‘farang’ speaker?

Yes No *Not Sure

*If you are **not sure** please explain why

8) When I have communication problems with my teacher, he/she will try different ways to overcome this problem? Yes No

9) Having white teachers in my faculty provides a better image for the university?

Yes No



10) White teachers make more salary than other nationalities of teachers?

Yes No

11) There are non-white teachers who teach just as effectively as white or 'farang' teachers?

Yes No

Section 3: Teaching Competency

(Please circle 'Y' for yes and 'N' for no)

12) My teacher for this subject knows the subject matter very well	Y/N
13) My teacher for this subject is well-prepared for class (e.g. ppt. hand-outs, etc.).	Y/N
14) My teacher for this subject explains the subject matter in English clearly.	Y/N
15) My teacher for this subject uses different teaching methods to explain concepts and topics.	Y/N
16) My teacher for this subject gives guidelines for assignments, class activities, presentations and explains how the students would be graded.	Y/N
17) My teacher for this subject regularly provides students feedback on their work and performance.	Y/N
18) My teacher for this subject shows students their mistakes and how to correct them.	Y/N
19) My teacher for this subject is very strict in giving marks.	Y/N



Section 4: Teacher's empathy towards student's L2 context

20) My teacher for this subject encourages students to participate and share their thoughts, ideas and experiences? Yes No

21) My teacher for this subject wants me to ask questions when I don't understand?

Yes No

22) My teacher for this subject gives useful comments/feedback that help me to improve my performance? Yes No

23) My teacher for this subject is open to students' comments and suggestions?

Yes No

24) My teacher for this subject is understanding when my English is not perfect?

Yes No

25) My teacher expects perfect grammar on my written assignments? (papers, reports, exams, etc...)

Yes No

26) My teacher expects perfect grammar on oral assignments? (presentations & discussions etc...)

Yes No

27) My teacher for this subject expects perfect pronunciation/accent from me in class?

Yes No

28) My teacher for this subject sometimes uses Thai to explain concepts in class?

Yes No

If yes, do you prefer this to using **English only**? Yes No

29) Does it help you to understand concepts more if your teacher can speak Thai and English?

Yes No



Appendix B

Unstructured Interview Protocol

- ❖ Do you prefer learning with non-native or native English speaking instructors?
 - ❖ Do you think non-native speakers can teach as effectively as native speakers?
 - ❖ What do you think about the accent of both non-native and native speakers?
 - ❖ Do you feel that all native or 'farang' accents are better?
 - ❖ What good/bad experiences have you had with non-native, native or 'farang' instructors?
 - ❖ Do you like to learn with 'farang' teachers?
 - ❖ Do you like to learn with 'non-native' teachers?

 - ❖ Which teachers are easier for you to talk to when you have problems?
 - ❖ Which teachers do you prefer and why?
 - ❖ Are native or 'farang' teachers more effective than non-native teachers in class?
 - ❖ Do you have good relationships with non-native and native teachers?
 - ❖ What do you do when you can't understand something in class with non-native and native teachers?
-