Delving into International Students’ Attitudes to NESTs and NNESTs

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the attitudes of international students at university level towards native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs) in a Thai context. It also explored how the attitudes held towards these two groups of teachers shaped the participants’ learning practices and motivation to learn English. Two research instruments; the open-ended questionnaire and the semi-structured interview were employed for this study. The questionnaire administered with 31 participants was the primary data collection tool. The subsequent interview conducted with 14 of the participants served as a supplementary data. The findings indicated significantly differing attitudes towards native English-speaking teachers and non-native English speaking teachers in many areas. These domains comprised the teaching methods and styles; the understanding of students’ problems; grading and marking; language proficiency; personality, classroom behaviour and discipline; and the ability to communicate and interact with learners. Some differences were also reported in the way they assigned work and arranged learning activities and their attitudes towards students. Most participants given the choice had a strong favour to study with native English-speaking teachers. There appeared to be a strong positive rapport between studying with native English speaking teachers and the participants’ learning behaviours and eagerness to study English. Implications are made regarding teacher training, particularly for non-native English teachers and language teachers, be it native or non-native, having EFL teaching experience.

Keywords: Attitudes; Native English Speaking Teachers; Non-Native English Speaking Teachers; Learning Behaviours; Motivation

INTRODUCTION

Studies of students’ attitudes towards second language acquisition have received considerable attention over the past few decades. Gardner and Lambert (1972) state that attitudes are usually connected with language achievement irrespective of aptitude and intelligence, justifying that attitudes are a stable feature that influences and determines one’s progress in acquiring a foreign language. Students’ attitudes to learning a foreign language are also linked to motivation to learn to speak a second language, predisposed by two types of attitudes (Cooper & Fishman 1977). The first type is ‘integrative’, which refers to a sincere and personal interest in the people and culture of the other group of people. The second is attitudes towards the language learning situation as a whole, including the teacher and the course itself (Spolsky 1989). Thus, these attitudes or perceptions related to second/foreign language learning experience would consecutively impact learners’ behaviours and their ways of learning the language (Sevy-Bilo 2017).

English teachers teaching at university level in Thailand represent non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs) from various nationalities, not only Thai. Nevertheless, Thai English teachers are the majority of the university teachers of English in this study context. There are two main research questions in the study: