

# **SELF-PERCEPTIONS OF NON-ARAB NON-NATIVE ENGLISH-SPEAKING TEACHERS**

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## **Abstract**

The status of being native or non-native has been extremely important in TESOL job market because it is relevant to a large number of critical issues beginning from the recruitment, performance and evaluation of teachers as well students' perceptions and satisfaction. Aim of the present study is to focus on non-Arab non-native teachers teaching English as a foreign language to Arab students in the Middle East. These teachers neither share L1 with their students nor do they speak English as their mother tongue. The present pioneer study focuses on the self-perceptions of these non-Arab non-native EFL teachers in order to verify if they perceive themselves different from other non-native teacher fraternity and if so, how this perception influences their teaching practice. The results of this studies shows that non-Arab non-Native speaking teachers hold a very positive self-image of themselves and feel very confident about their command of English.

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**Keywords:** Native non-native English-speaking teachers, EFL/ESL/EIL, TESOL, Native Speaker Fallacy

## **Introduction**

### **Context of the Study**

The present study investigates the self-perceptions of non-Arab non-native English-speaking teachers (Non-Arab NNESTs) working as EFL instructors in university-based intensive English Language Programs (ELPs) in the Middle East. Until the turn of 21<sup>st</sup> century, NNESTs were openly and unquestioningly regarded unequal to native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) in terms of their knowledge and performance (Braine, 2005). This would diminish the self-confidence of NNESTs because it challenges their credibility in the field of TESOL (Braine, 1999). The existing body of

research on native non-native dichotomy is structured around two approaches: (1) self-perceptions of NNESTs and; (2) students' perceptions of NNESTs. The term NESTs is applied to those EFL/ESL teachers who speak English as their mother tongue whereas the term NNESTs is applied to those EFL/ESL teachers who speak English as a foreign or second language and may share L1 with their students. Such EFL/ESL teachers abound in the field of TESOL. For example, there are millions of Chinese EFL teachers who are teaching English as a foreign language to their Chinese countrymen in China besides a small amount of native teachers mainly imported from the US, UK or Canada. Same applies to thousands of Japanese EFL teachers teaching English to Japanese students in Japan. Many European African and Asian countries are included in this arena. All these NNESTs share L1 and culture with their students.

Interestingly enough, another variety of NNESTs has emerged on the scene. This variety represents thousands of EFL teachers who teach English to Arab students. These teachers are non-native by default. However, unlike other non-native teachers they do not share L1 with their students. Neither do they speak English as their mother-tongue. Hence, they are non-Arab NNESTs. This is the first study undertaken regarding the self-perceptions of non-Arab NNESTs so far.

English has recently become a compulsory subject in schools in the Middle East. It has also been adopted as a medium of instruction at university level for all professional faculties. Therefore, there is an ever growing demand of EFL teachers in the Middle East. Arab NNESTs are very few and do not fulfil the market demand which is why recruitment of expat EFL teachers is on all year round. Native teachers are the first choice of the ELP administrators, but qualified native teachers are not attracted. If they ever do, they do not stay for long. Eventually to meet the operational demands, ELP administrators have to recruit non-Arab NNESTs mainly from Asian countries. Part of these non-Arabs NNESTs come from Turkey, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka. However, it constitutes a tiny minority. The overwhelming majority comes from Pakistan and India. As mentioned earlier, the principal strength of NESTs is English as their mother tongue, and the principal strength of NNESTs is that they share mother tongue and culture with their students. What is the strength of non-Arab NNESTs then? It has yet to be determined whether being a non-Arab NNESTs surrounded by Arab EFL students is an advantage or a disadvantage.

### **Second vs Foreign Language**

Initially, the term *foreign language* was used in contrast to *native/indigenous languages*. Later, the term *second language* was

increasingly used for all types of *non-native languages*. These days, the two are mostly used synonymously, but in certain cases a marked distinction exists between the two. Thus, the acronym TESL (Teaching of English as a Second Language) is distinguished from TEFL (Teaching of English as a Foreign Language). TESL refers to the teaching of English in the USA, UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, etc. to immigrants or students who are speakers of other languages.

There is an obvious difference between a non-native language learnt *within the speech community* termed as a second language and a non-native language learnt *outside the speech community* termed as a foreign language. It was considered politically incorrect to call a language *a foreign language* within its speech community so distinction was made between a second and a foreign language (Stern, 1983). For example, if students and immigrants are learning English in the US or the UK, it is considered politically incorrect to say that they are learning English as a foreign language. English is no longer a foreign language for them and it should not be called a foreign language within its speech community so the term second language was explicitly used to refer to such scenarios. These two different situations frequently have important consequences from curriculum, teaching, and assessment perspective to which attention has been drawn in the literature (for example, Stern 1969a, Hartmann and Stork 1972, Quirk *et al.* 1972, Christophersen 1973, Harrison *et al.* 1975). The objectives of second language learning are often different from foreign language learning. Since the second language is frequently the official language or one of two or more recognized languages, it is needed 'for full participation in the political and economic life of the nation' (Paulston, 1974:12-13); or it may be the language needed for education (Marckwardt, 1963). Foreign language learning is often undertaken with a variety of different purposes in mind, for example, travel abroad, communication with native speakers, reading of a foreign literature, or reading of foreign scientific and technical works. A second language, as it is used within the country, is usually learnt with much more environmental support than a foreign language whose speech community may be thousands of miles away. A foreign language usually requires more formal instructions and other measures compensating for the lack of environmental support. By contrast, a second language is often learnt informally ('picked up') because of its widespread use within the environment.

English is strictly taught as a foreign language for academic purposes at universities in the Middle East.

## Literature review

### The Non-native Speaker Movement

Non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) were generally regarded as unequal in knowledge and performance to native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) until some dramatic changes started taking place in the field of TESOL (Braine, 2005). TESOL (Teachers of English to the speakers of other Languages) is the largest international organization of English language teachers with over 12,000 members from over 156 countries and more than 100 worldwide affiliates. TESOL Quarterly, one of the best-known research journals in the field of applied linguistics and TESOL, is also published by the same organization. The first dramatic change took place when, in 2005, the first non-native speaker of English was appointed as an editor. A step further, the first non-native speaker of English was also elected as president of TESOL by the general membership (see [www.tesol.org](http://www.tesol.org)). These two unprecedented events were the core indicators that NNESTs were recognized by the mainstream and the principal reason behind these events was no other than the Non-native Speaker Movement.

Historical evidence suggests that English was being taught as a foreign language since 15th century. The rise of England as a maritime power during the 16th century, and the expansion of the British Empire made English an important international language besides French, Italian and Latin. Gabriel Meurier, a French who lived in Antwerp, may have been the first NNEST we know by name. A Treatise to learn to Speak French and English authored by Meurier was published in 1553 (Howatt, 1984 in Braine, 2010).

After the groundbreaking research by Medgyes (1992, 1994), there was a mysterious silence until the establishment of Non-native speaker Caucus in TESOL Organization in 1999 (see Braine, 1999). Medgyes (1992), took up a very sensitive and political issue which nearly all non-native teachers were aware of but probably no one was ready to openly discuss. In his pioneering article: "Native or non-native: who's worth more?" herecognized that the difference between native and non-native teachers is language-related and further reiterated: "I would contend that a deficient command of English may even have hidden advantages" (340). He admitted that there is no-clear or trenchant deviation a NEST and a NNEST. For example, British and Australians are natives whereas Hungarians and French are not. And questions can be raised when it comes to Indians for whom English has been the language of professional communication ever since. There is no distinct division between native and non-native in countries where English is a second language and Pakistan falls in this category too. Liberal minded researchers have long ago suggested more acceptable terms to replace native and non-native speaker. Edge (1998) suggests more or less

accomplished users of English while Paikeday (1985) suggests more or less proficient users of English. Medgyes (1992: 347) admits that those who use English as a first language obviously and undoubtedly have advantage over those who use it as a foreign language. However, he challenges the notion 'the more proficient in English, the more efficient in the classroom' to be based on wrong judgment. He maintains that language competence is the only variable in which non-native teachers are inevitably handicapped. However, non-native teachers have six advantages over native teachers when it comes to classroom practice (346-7):

Only non-natives can serve as imitable models of the successful learners of English.

Non-natives can teach learning strategies more effectively as they themselves have gone through the same learning process.

Non-natives can provide learners with more information about the English language because non-natives usually have more command over the language system.

Due to the above mentioned reasons ( 2&3), Non-natives seem more capable to anticipate language learning difficulties.

Non-natives can be more empathetic to the needs and problems of their learners.

Only non-natives can benefit from sharing the learner's mother-tongue.

More than 200 research publications have appeared since the formation of Non-native Caucus later turned into an Interest Section for Non-Native English Speakers in TESOL at TESOL Organization (see <http://www.tesol.org/connect/interest-sections/nonnative-english-speakers-in-tesol>). The first landmark anthology on native non-native issues was *Non-native educators in English Language teaching* (Braine, 1999). Afterwards four more anthologies were published: (1) *Learning and Teaching from Experience: Perspectives on Nonnative English-speaking Professionals* (2004), edited by Lia Kamhi-Stein; (2) *Non-native Language Teachers: Perceptions, Challenges, and Contributions to the Profession* (2005), edited by Enric Llurda; (3) *Teaching English to the World: History, Curriculum, and Practice* (2005), edited by George Braine; (4) *Nonnative Speakers English Teachers: Research Pedagogy and Professional Growth* (2010), by George Braine.

### **The Non-native Teachers & English as an International Language**

The British Council (<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learning-faq-the-english-language.htm>) estimates that English is spoken by 375 million people as first language (mother-tongue) and just about the same number of people speak it as a second language. However, 750 million people speak

English as a foreign language hence non-native speakers. Majority of those who speak it as a second language are also non-native but they live in English-speaking countries. It is an established fact that the majority of English Language teachers across the globe are non-natives. Similarly, English as an L2 is spoken by more people than as a mother-tongue. Therefore, English language is no longer exclusively owned by native-speaking communities, rather its ownership is also shared by non-native speakers, who therefore have a right to be heard in matters affecting the language (Widdowson, 1994). The transformation of English from being the language of a few powerful countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom to becoming the international language (EIL) as it is today has brought with it a number of changes to the TESOL profession.

The perceived ‘superiority’ of native speaker stems from Chomsky’s (1965) notions that the native speaker is the ultimate authority on language grammaticality. Philipson (1992), termed it ‘*native speaker fallacy*’ - the belief that – ‘*the ideal teacher of English is a native speaker*’. He challenged this fallacy by advocating that; (1) native teachers’ abilities could also be instilled in non-native teachers through teacher training; (2) non-native teachers undergo language learning process so they are better qualified to teach the language; (3) language teaching is no longer synonymous with the teaching of culture, thus could be taught by teachers who do not share the same culture.

Cook (1999) proposed to move beyond the native speaker as a model of language teaching. It is logical since, as an EIL, native speakers are only a part of the much larger group of speakers of the language. This notion is further endorsed by Modiano (1999) who asserts that proficiency in speaking English is no longer determined by birth but by the capacity to use the language properly, a capacity that is shared by some - but not all – regardless of being natives or non-natives.

### **Sharing Learners’ Mother-tongue or not**

Sharing learners’ mother tongue can be a lead at times. Medgyes (1992) enlisted six advantages non-native teachers have over native teachers when it comes to classroom practice. Sharing learners’ mother-tongue is probably the most important among them. Inecay and Atay (2007) in a qualitative study conducted at an English Prep School in Istanbul found out that most of the learners thought that it was suitable to have non-native teachers during the early stages of L2 learning process. The reason behind this perception was the explanations provided in Turkish which were much easier for them to understand and remember. Al-Omrani (2008) in his doctoral dissertation discusses the similarities and differences of Arab EFL and ESL learners towards native and non-native teachers. He found that the

beginners of Arab EFL learners preferred Arab non-natives teachers as they could communicate with these teachers more readily, while advanced ESL learners preferred native teachers because they assumed these teachers could provide meaningful language practice. Nevertheless, there is always a risk of overdoing L1 explanation in the class. It is happening in the Middle East. English is a compulsory subject and students learn it approximately for 6 years in state/National schools before entering universities. Because of the excessive use of Arabic in English Language classes during their schools years most of the high school graduates are enrolled onto an intensive English Language Program and start with beginner's level (A1 on CEFR) when they enter university. Due to this concern, non-Arab non-native teachers were recruited on a small scale in 2002 and later on a large scale in 2008 onwards to teach English in public schools in Saudi Arabia.

## **Procedure**

### **The Study**

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the self-perceptions of non-Arab non-native EFL teachers who are teaching English as a foreign language to Arab EFL learners in Saudi Universities. The study was conducted with the help of an online questionnaire administered to English Language teachers working in several universities across the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. 120 English language teachers who were invited to participate in the study on the basis of their voluntary participation. Finally, 49 teachers responded to the questionnaires.

### **Methodology**

The study is based upon a survey which seeks information about the self-perceptions of the non-Arab non-native teachers teaching in Saudi Universities. A questionnaire is always considered the best tool for conducting a survey type research (Mackey and Gass 2005, Seliger and Shohamy 1989). The questionnaire mainly produced quantitative data because it was based upon 17 close-ended items. Now we discuss the construct of the data collection tool (questionnaire) in details.

### **Data Collection Tool (Questionnaire)**

The questionnaire consists of 5 parts containing 17 items. Part-1 consists of three items, Part-2 also comprises three items, Part-3 covers five items, Part-4 consists of four items, and Part-5 comprises two items. The questionnaire served as an instrument which was developed to assess the self-perceptions of the participants in five important areas: (1) Academic/Professional Training Background; (2) Native Non-Native Distinction; (3) Linguistic Competence; (4) Exposure to/Stay in English-

speaking countries; (5) Focus of Teaching.

### **Data Collection**

An online survey was sent to 120 non-Arab EFL teachers teaching English as a foreign language at different universities in Saudi Arabia. There are mandatory intensive English language programs for all students who want to join professional colleges after graduating from schools. The questionnaire was addressed to only those non-native teachers whose mother tongue was not Arabic and they were part of this intensive program. Majority of participants were from Pakistan. However, 5 participants were from India, 3 from Malaysia, 2 from Turkey, and only 1 from Indonesia.

### **The questionnaire**

The questionnaire asked 20 questions. All of them were close-ended, i.e. they elicited answers from a number of options given to the respondent. First three questions intended to solicit information about personal background of the teacher and the rest of them were intended to elicit participants' opinions about their teaching practice and self-perception. It was expected that the responses would shed some light on the views of non-Arab non-native teachers in the field of TESOL, especially their self-perceptions while teaching in Saudi Arabian universities.

### **Findings**

In this part, initially the findings of each section will be analyzed separately and then a final report of these findings will be discussed in details.

#### **Findings of Part-1**

Part-1 consists of three items seeking information about the teachers' academic and professional background. The results of Part-1 are presented in Table-1. The covered items are: (1) the length of experience of teaching English as a foreign language to Arab learners learning English as a foreign language; (2) the participants' highest level of education in the field of TESOL/TEFL/Applied Linguistics; (3) the participants' highest level of professional certification in the field of TESOL/TEFL/Applied Linguistics. The results of Part-1 are shown in Table-1.



Table-1. Academic/Professional Training Background

1	How long have you been teaching EFL to Arab EFL students?	1-5 yrs.	6-10 yrs.	11-15 yrs.	16 yrs. /above
		44.9%	24.5%	22.4%	8.2%
2	What is your highest level of education in the field of TESOL/TEFL/Applied Linguistics?		BA	MA	PhD
			0.0%	91.8%	8.2%
3	What is your highest level of professional certification in the field of TESOL/ TEFL/Applied Linguistics?		CELTA	DELTA	Others
			40.8%	2.0%	57.1%

The overall results of Part-1 show that the participants hold a very strong educational and professional background. 55% of the participants have taught EFL to Arab EFL learners for more than 6 years. For non-Arab teachers who are recruited on the basis of prior rich teaching experience, above six years of post-recruitment experience shows very strong professional background. Similarly, participants' academic background is also very strong. The base qualification required for the position of English Instructor in English Language Programs in the Middle East is BA with at least 2 years of teaching experience. Any certificate/diploma in the relevant field is an advantage. However, the data shows that overwhelming majority is (91.8%) highly qualified teachers with master's degrees in the relevant field with an exception of (8.2%) doctoral degree holder. This is also interesting to note that all the participants hold relevant professional certifications. The only difference is that less than half (42.8%) hold international & highly reputed Cambridge certifications such as Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA) & Diploma in English Language Teaching to Adults (DELTA) and more than half (57.1%) hold similar certifications from universities in their home countries.

So the results of Part-1 show that the participants of the study have rich teaching experience. They are highly qualified in the relevant field and hold professional certifications.

### Findings of Part-2

Part-2 consists of three items. It elicits participants' perceptions towards native non-native distinction. The three items cover following notions: (1) the perceptions of participants towards native non-native divide; (2) perceived superiority of native teachers over non-native teachers; (3)

perceived superiority of Arab non-native teachers over non-Arab non-native teachers. The results of Part-2 are shown in Table-2.

Table 2. Native Non-Native Distinction

4	Do you agree with Native Non-Native distinction?	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
		40.8%	8.2%	51%
5	Do you think a native English teacher is relatively a better English teacher?	Yes	No	Not Necessarily
		0.0%	30.6%	69.4%
6	Do you think an Arab non-native English teacher is relatively better than a non-Arab non-native English teacher for Arab EFL learners?	Yes	No	Not Necessarily
		8.2%	32.7%	59.2%

The data shows that there is a distinctive division in the opinion. Nearly half of the participants (51%) think that native and non-native teachers are not different from each other. However, a substantial number of participants (40.8%) believe in the difference between native and non-native teachers. A tiny minority (8.2%) remains undecided/neutral about this distinction. Participants expressed their perceptions very clearly by rejecting NESTs' superiority. No one agreed (0.0%) that a NEST is a better teacher whereas a significant number of participants (30.6%) remained indecisive. Majority of the participants (69.4%) was of the opinion that a native teacher is not necessarily a better teacher. It obviously means the only nativeness cannot make someone a better teacher. In the same vein, whether an Arab non-native English teacher is relatively better than a non-Arab non-native English teacher for Arab EFL learners? In another question participants again expressed very clear opinion if an Arab non-native English teacher is relatively better than a non-Arab non-native English teacher for Arab EFL learners. A tiny minority (8.2%) thought that knowing learners L1 was an advantage. However, a significant number of participants (32.7%) remained neutral and the majority of participants (59.2%) thought that unknowing L1 was not a disadvantage.

So the results of Part-2 suggest that the participants of the study are aware of the differences between native and non-native teachers. However, the results clearly show that the participants do not believe that native status makes any teacher a better teacher.

### Findings of Part-3

Part-3 consists of five items. It elicits participants' perceptions towards their linguistic competence. The following notions are covered in these three items: (1) the perceptions about the command of English; (2) strength of language skills; (3) strength of language areas; (4) participants' linguistic difficulties and their self-confidence; (5) linguistic difficulties of participants and their influence on teaching effectiveness. The results of Part-3 are shown in Table-3.

Table 3. Linguistic Competence

7	Please rate your overall command of English.	Poor	Average	Very Good	Excellent
		0.0%	0.0%	34.7%	65.3%
8	What language skill is your strength?	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing
		6.1%	34.7%	24.5%	34.7%
9	What language areas are your strength?	Grammar & Vocabulary	Pronunciation	Fluency	Idioms & Phrasal verbs
		77.6%	46.9%	44.9%	24.5%
10	Do your language difficulties affect your self-confidence as an EFL teacher?	A lot	Quite a bit	A little	Not at all
		0.0%	4.1%	34.7%	61.2%
11	Do your language difficulties hamper the effectiveness of your teaching?	A lot	Quite a bit	A little	Not at all
		0.0%	0.0%	16.3%	83.7%

The data shows that the participants are very confident and hold very positive self-image of their command of English. No one rated his command of English to be poor or even average whereas majority (65.3%) rated it to be excellent despite their interactions with native teachers on a daily basis. However, participants seem to be facing problems with receptive skills especially listening skills. They also seem to be finding difficulties with Idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs. On the contrary, they reported to be more confident about their productive skills, grammar and vocabulary. Quite a significant majority of the participants (83.7%) reported that despite their problems with language skills and sub-skills, they do not think that their

personal difficulties hamper the effectiveness of their teaching at all. So the results of Part-3 reveal that the participants of the study are very confident about their command of English and they think their language problems (if any) do not upset the effectiveness of their teaching at all.

#### Findings of Part-4

Part-4 consists of four items. It elicits participants' responses about their exposure to/ presence in English-speaking countries. The four items cover following notions: (1) if they have lived in an English-speaking country; (2) the length of their stay in an English-speaking country (if any); (3) if they have studied in an English-speaking country; (4) the length of their studies undertaken in an English-speaking country (if any). The results of Part-4 are shown in Table-4.

Table 4. Exposure to English-speaking countries

12	Have you lived in an English-speaking country?		Yes	No
			51.2%	48.98%
13	How long have you lived in an English-speaking country?	Less than 6 months	1-3 years	More than 3 years
		52.0%	20.0%	28.0%
14	Have you studied in an English-speaking country?		Yes	No
			48.98%	51.0%
15	How long have you studied in an English-speaking country?	Less than 6 months	1-3 years	More than 3 years
		54.2%	29.2%	16.7%

The data reveals that more than half of the participants have exposure to English-speaking countries although their length of stay varies greatly. Again among those who have lived in English-speaking countries, majority (52.0%) has lived for less than six months. Slightly less than half of the participants stayed there for more than one year. A significant minority (28.0%) has been there for more than 3 years. In the same vein, nearly half (48.98%) of the participants have studied in English-speaking countries although the duration of their courses differs. The majority (54.2%) studied for less than 6 months, however, a sizable number (45.9%) studied there for

more than one year.

So the results of Part-4 show that nearly half of the participants of the study have had somehow exposure to English-speaking countries.

### Findings of Part-5

Part-5 consists of two items. It elicits participants' methodological priorities while teaching oral skills and grammar. The two items cover the following questions: (1) If they focus more on fluency or accuracy while teaching oral skills; (2) whether they focus more on meaning or form while teaching grammar. The results of Part-5 are shown in Table-5.

Table 5. Focus of Teaching

16	What do you focus on more while teaching oral skills?	Fluency	Accuracy
		83.7%	16.3%
17	What do you focus on while teaching grammar?	Meaning	Form
		57.1%	42.7%

The data reveals that the overwhelming majority (83.7%) of the participants focus on fluency while teaching oral skills and majority of participants (57.1%) focus on meaning while teaching vocabulary.

So the results of Part-5 suggest that the majority of the participants of the study employ communicative approach especially while teaching grammar and vocabulary.

### Conclusion and discussion

Before the inception of Non-Native Movement in 1996, it was a widespread strongly-held belief that non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) were second in knowledge and performance when compared to native English-speaking teachers (NESTs). While in the English-speaking countries, NESTs were accepted as a norm and there was a little or no room for employment even for highly qualified NNESTs. Qualification, ability and teaching experience were of little value in the job market and the NNESTs were advised "no non-native need apply" (Braine, 1998:4). This uncritical assumption conferred status on a selective group. ELP administrators wanted to hire NESTs because of 'native speaker fallacy' and they adduced that students expected to be taught by NESTs (Medgyes, 1994). As a matter of fact, such students expected to be taught by NESTs because of falsified notion prevailed and bruited by students and educators against NNESTs (Ling and Braine, 2007). However, ESL students in the US and Hong Kong held very positive perceptions and it became even more positive when they

were taught by NNESTs. (Linang, 2002; Mehboob, 2004 ; Moussu and Braine, 2006; Ling and Braine, 2007).

It is generally assumed that the most vital variance between native and non-native teachers is the level of their language proficiency. NESTs are considered superior to NNESTs because of their high proficiency in English. NNESTs usually do not feel very confident especially when they have to interact with NESTs. They feel certain problems in some areas and usually admit that they are not expert users of English. The realization of this inadequacy is the strongest factor biasing non-native teachers' self-perceptions and teaching attitude. Medges and Reves (1994) identified two important cause and effect chains which could influence the non-native teachers' command of English. The cause chain that could positively influence is teaching qualification, the time spent in English-speaking country and the frequency of NNESTs' interaction with NESTs. The effect chain that may influence is their success in teaching, the difficulty felt in teaching caused by language problems and the provision of collaborative environment between NESTs and NNESTs. In their pioneer international survey administered to 216 ESL/EFL teachers from 10 different countries, Medges and Reves (cited in Braine ,2010:18), found that the majority (74.7%) considered their English to be 'good' or 'average' and only a tiny minority (10%) considered their English to be 'excellent'. On the contrary, in this study the non-Arab NNESTs hold very positive self-image of their command of English. 65.3% rated their command of English to be excellent and 34.7% rated it to be 'very good'. Interestingly enough, no one rated it to be 'average' or 'poor'. There seems to be a strong co-relation between their confidence in their command of English and their exposure to English-speaking community. 86% of the subjects in the international survey (Medges and Reves, 1994) had never been to English-speaking countries whereas 51.2% of the non-Arab NNESTs in this study have lived in English-speaking countries and all of them have interacted with NNESTs on a daily basis as they worked and are working with them side by side.

Medgyes (1992) enlists six advantages NNESTs have over NESTs when it comes to classroom practice. One of them and probably the most important one is the NNESTs' ability to share the learner's mother-tongue and culture. This is the area where non-Arab NNESTs might be handicapped because they do not share Arabic language with their Arab students. Beginner's EFL learners prefer teachers who can explain things in their own language (Atay and Incecay 2008, Al-Omrani 2008, Ling and Braine, 2007). Although in beginner level classes it can be a serious disadvantage, it has a lot of hidden advantages for EFL students and teachers simultaneously as Medgyes claimed that deficient command of English among NNESTs may have hidden advantages (Medgyes, 1992). Obviously, teacher's inability to

speak Arabic compels students to interact in English, hence more fruitful in an EFL class.

In a nutshell, non-Arab NNESTs appear to be very qualified and experienced in the TESOL job market. They hold very positive self-image of themselves and feel very confident about their command of English. They seem to be very successful in their classroom practice and their inability to speak Arabic does not appear to be any serious disadvantage at all or hinders their performance as EFL teachers.

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