

## ENGLISH TEACHERS

# *Private institutions can help*

**I** REFER to the report “Indian teachers to teach English” (NST, Dec 21). There is a simple answer to the question “Who is to teach English language?” The answer is: “English language should be taught by graduates of English language, who have appropriate and internationally recognised qualifications to teach English, and their teaching and training experience should be relevant to the learners.”

This makes nonsense of the debate whether Indians, African-Americans, Japanese, Koreans, Malays and Chinese are best for teaching English.

In every country, teachers of a subject should be graduates in that field, whatever their skin colour, culture, national origin or mother tongue. The simple principle is that applied by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency — only those who possess the appropriate qualifications and have the relevant experience should be eligible to teach the subject. Why should it be different for teaching English?

I think the debate is sparked by two matters of concern: the lingering post-colonial mentality that only the “England-born” can teach English language well, and Malaysians’ bias against English spoken with an Indian accent. Both are based on misconceptions and stereotypes.

There is no single correct or best accent for the language that is called English. Britons and Americans speak English with a variety of accents. So do Canadians, Aus-

tralians and New Zealanders, South Africans, Jamaicans, Trinidadians, Hawaiians, Nigerians, Chinese and Japanese.

All over the world, when English is spoken using its correct forms, structures and syntax, following every grammar rule, people sound different but they can communicate well.

I think that our Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak’s suggestion to bring in a number of teachers of English from India to teach Malaysian students is good for the economy as well as for broadening our outlook.

If there are qualified and experienced teachers of English in India who are willing and able to make the transfer to work in Malaysia at an affordable cost to the government, it would be good for our schools and students.

Our prime minister and deputy prime minister, who is also the education minister, are exploring both long-term and stop-gap measures to improve proficiency in English of teachers and pupils in our schools as part of the government’s response to national reviews.

Bringing Indian teachers and American graduates are short-term measures. For the long term, there are about 600 trainee teachers of English for primary schools being trained in Malaysian teachers’ education institutes (IPGMs) and four institutions of higher learning (IPTSS). Once qualified, these teachers, with their Bachelor of Education (Hons) specialising in teaching English, will be in our

primary schools in 2016.

Two hundred of these trainee teachers of English are placed at four IPTSS: Kirkby International College, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, SEGI and UCSI.

The four IPTSS were selected by the teacher training division of the Education Ministry after verification and evaluation to ensure the trainees are exposed to an English speaking environment.

These students have just completed their foundation programme and will be starting their degree programme next month. I hope there will be funds to provide for an additional 600 students next year, and the government will continue to involve the IPTSS.

If the government can provide funds to train 600 teachers of English a year, by 2020 we shall have 3,000 qualified and that trained Malaysian teachers of English language to add to our supply at a local cost of training.

There is no shortage of Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia students who want to go into teaching as their first career choice. Every year, many hundreds apply. Among them are those who have a good foundation in English and who would make good teachers, provided they have the right environment to practise their use of English. In the long term, we should train our own teachers of English.

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