



Exploring EFL Students' Attitudes toward British, American, and Indonesian English Accents at Tadulako University

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Abstract

This study explores English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students' attitudes toward British, American, and Indonesian English accents at Tadulako University, as well as the internal and external factors influencing their preferences. Employing a qualitative descriptive design, this research involved five undergraduate students from the English Education Study Program, with three selected for in-depth semi-structured interviews. Data were collected through informal observation, interviews, and field notes, and analyzed using thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke's framework. The findings reveal that students prioritize clarity and intelligibility as the most important characteristics of a good English accent, particularly in academic communication. While British and American accents are perceived as more fluent, prestigious, and associated with higher language proficiency, Indonesian English accent is valued for its familiarity and role in representing cultural identity. Additionally, students' attitudes are shaped by social expectations, peer perceptions, and exposure to media, which often create pressure to adopt native-like accents. Despite this, participants generally recognize that effective communication does not require imitation of native speakers. This study highlights the complexity of students' attitudes, which balance admiration for native accents with acceptance of local identity. It supports the perspective of English as an International Language (EIL), emphasizing intelligibility over native-like pronunciation. The findings suggest the importance of fostering inclusive language teaching practices that promote confidence, respect accent diversity, and prioritize communicative effectiveness in EFL classrooms.

1. Introduction

English has become a global lingua franca, functioning as a primary medium of communication across diverse linguistic, cultural, and geographical contexts. As English spreads globally, it has developed into multiple varieties influenced by local contexts, including British, American, and localized forms such as Indonesian English. From the perspective of English as a Lingua Franca: Attitude and Identity, English is no longer owned by native speakers but is used as a shared communicative resource among people from different linguistic backgrounds. This perspective is further supported by the framework of Understanding English as a Lingua Franca, which emphasizes intelligibility rather than adherence to native-speaker norms.

In Indonesia, English is taught as a foreign language (EFL), where learners' exposure is largely limited to formal education and mediated input such as textbooks, films, and digital media. As a result, British and American accents are often positioned as standard or ideal models of pronunciation. Studies have shown that learners tend to associate these accents with correctness, fluency, and professionalism due to their dominance in global media (Kung & Wang, 2019). This perception reflects what *The Other Tongue: English Across Cultures* describes as the continuing influence of inner-circle English norms, despite the global diversification of the language.

However, contemporary research challenges the prioritization of native-like pronunciation. Scholars argue that intelligibility should be the primary goal of language learning, rather than imitation of native accents. For instance, *Intelligibility, Oral Communication, and the Teaching of Pronunciation* emphasizes that successful communication depends on clarity and mutual understanding rather than conformity to native norms. Similarly, Derwing and Munro (2009) highlight that accent is often mistakenly perceived as a barrier to communication, whereas intelligibility plays a more crucial role.

Despite these theoretical developments, many EFL learners continue to experience tension between aspiring to native-like pronunciation and maintaining their linguistic identity. This tension is shaped not only by individual beliefs but also by social expectations and exposure to dominant language models. According to *Belief, Attitude, Intention, and Behavior*, attitudes are influenced by beliefs and subjective norms, which in turn shape behavioral intentions. In the context of language learning, students' perceptions of English accents can affect their confidence, participation, and communication practices.

Previous studies on accent attitudes have primarily focused on learners' preferences for specific varieties of English. However, limited research has examined how these attitudes are formed through the interaction of psychological and social factors, particularly in regional Indonesian contexts. While recent studies suggest that Indonesian learners are beginning to value clarity and identity over native-like pronunciation (Khazanah, 2023), further investigation is needed to understand the mechanisms underlying these attitudes.

Therefore, this study aims to explore EFL students' attitudes toward British, American, and Indonesian English accents at Tadulako University, as well as the factors shaping these attitudes. By integrating perspectives from English as an International Language (EIL), World English's (WEs), and the Theory of Reasoned Action, this study seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how students negotiate between global linguistic norms and local identity in their language use.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore EFL students' attitudes toward different English accents. This approach was selected because it allows researchers to gain a deep understanding of participants' perceptions, experiences, and emotional responses within their natural context. According to John W. Creswell (2014), qualitative research "explores and understands the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 4). Therefore, this design is appropriate for examining students' attitudes toward English accents, as it emphasizes participants' perspectives rather than numerical measurement.

The research was conducted at the English Education Study Program of Tadulako University during the 2024–2025 academic year. The participants consisted of five undergraduate students selected through purposive sampling. This sampling technique allows researchers to select participants who meet specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. As noted by Ibrahim Etikan (2016), purposive sampling enables "the selection of participants based on characteristics that are most relevant to the study" (p. 2). The criteria for participant selection included being active EFL learners, having exposure to various English accents, and willingness to participate voluntarily. From these participants, three students were further selected for in-depth interviews based on the richness and diversity of their responses.

Data were collected through two main techniques: informal observation and semi-structured interviews. In the initial stage, informal questioning was conducted to gather general insights into students' exposure to and familiarity with English accents. This stage helped identify preliminary themes and select participants for deeper exploration. In the second stage, semi-structured interviews were conducted to examine participants' beliefs, feelings, and experiences related to accent use. Semi-structured interviews provide flexibility while maintaining a clear focus on research objectives. According to Steinar Kvale (2009), "semi-structured interviews allow participants to express their experiences in their own words while enabling the researcher to guide the discussion" (p. 3). Each interview lasted approximately 30–40 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' consent to ensure data accuracy.

The research instruments included observation notes, an interview guide, a voice recorder, and field notes. These instruments ensured systematic data collection and allowed the researcher to capture both verbal responses and contextual information, such as participants' tone and expressions. Secondary data from relevant literature were also used to support the analysis and strengthen the theoretical foundation of the study.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis following the six-step framework proposed by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2006): familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. Thematic analysis is widely used in qualitative research to identify patterns and meanings within data. Braun and Clarke (2006) state that thematic analysis is "a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (p. 79).

Furthermore, the analysis was guided by the Theory of Reasoned Action to interpret how students' beliefs and social influences shape their attitudes toward English accents. According to Icek Ajzen (1991), attitudes are influenced by beliefs and social norms, which in turn affect behavioral intentions. This theoretical framework helped explain how students' perceptions of English accents influence their confidence and communication practices.

Overall, this methodological approach enabled the researcher to capture nuanced perspectives and provide a comprehensive understanding of students' attitudes toward English accents in the EFL context.

3. Result

The thematic analysis revealed four major themes reflecting EFL students' attitudes toward British, American, and Indonesian English accents. To enhance credibility and transparency, participants' responses are presented using coded labels (P1, P2, and P3).

1. Clarity as the Primary Criterion

The most dominant theme identified from the data is the emphasis on clarity and intelligibility as the key characteristics of a good English accent. All participants agreed that the main goal of speaking English, especially in academic contexts, is to ensure that the message is clearly understood.

P1 explicitly stated:

"The important thing is that you speak clearly and people understand you. It doesn't have to sound like a native speaker."

Similarly, P2 emphasized the functional role of pronunciation in communication:

"Pronunciation is important because it helps people understand what we are saying. If it's not clear, communication will fail."

P3 reinforced this idea by relating it to academic situations:

"In presentations, what matters is clarity. If the audience understands, then it is already good."

These responses indicate that students prioritize communicative effectiveness over accent imitation. Rather than striving for native-like pronunciation, participants focus on delivering their ideas clearly and meaningfully. This suggests a shift toward a more practical understanding of English as a tool for communication.

2. Prestige of British and American Accents

The second theme highlights students' perceptions of British and American accents as symbols of prestige, fluency, and professionalism. Participants associated these accents with higher levels of English proficiency and social status.

P1 described the British accent as formal and impressive:

"When someone speaks with a British accent, it sounds more professional and formal. It makes them look more fluent."

P2 also expressed admiration for native accents:

"People who speak with British or American accent usually sound more confident and are often appreciated more."

In contrast, the American accent was perceived as more familiar and accessible. P3 explained:

"I feel more comfortable with American accent because I often hear it in movies and social media."

These findings suggest that students' perceptions are strongly influenced by media exposure and social norms. While both accents are viewed positively, British accent is associated with formality and prestige, whereas American accent is linked to familiarity and ease of understanding. However, this admiration may also lead to self-comparison, where students evaluate their own pronunciation as less competent.

3. Indonesian Accent as Identity and Familiarity

The third theme reflects students' recognition of Indonesian English accent as a representation of identity and familiarity. Participants acknowledged that their local accent plays an important role in expressing cultural background and facilitating communication.

P1 highlighted the role of shared linguistic features:

"Indonesian students usually speak clearly because our language has clear syllables, so we can understand each other easily."

P2 emphasized identity:

"If we speak with Indonesian accent, it shows that we are Indonesian. It's part of who we are."

P3 expressed a sense of connection when hearing Indonesian English accent:

"When I hear Indonesian accent, it feels more comfortable and connected because it's familiar."

These responses indicate that students view their accent not as a limitation, but as a natural and meaningful part of their identity. The familiarity of Indonesian English accent also creates a supportive communication environment, especially among peers. However, despite this positive perception, some participants still considered it less prestigious compared to native accents.

4. Social Pressure and Expectations

The final theme reveals the influence of social pressure and expectations on students' attitudes toward accent use. Participants reported feelings of anxiety, self-consciousness, and fear of being judged when speaking English.

P1 expressed nervousness related to pronunciation:

"I feel nervous when I speak English because I'm afraid of mispronouncing words."

P2 described pressure from media exposure:

"Sometimes I compare my English with native speakers in movies, and it makes me feel not good enough."

P3 highlighted peer expectations:

"Some classmates expect us to speak with British or American accent, especially during presentations."

Additionally, concerns about judgment were evident:

"I worry that people will judge me because of my pronunciation." (P2)

These findings demonstrate that social influences significantly shape students' attitudes and speaking behavior. The expectation to sound native-like creates pressure that may reduce confidence and participation. Although students understand that clarity is more important, social norms still push them toward accent imitation.

Overall, the findings reveal that EFL students at Tadulako University hold complex attitudes toward English accents. While they prioritize clarity and effective communication, they also perceive British and American accents as prestigious and desirable. At the same time, Indonesian English accent is valued as a marker of identity and familiarity. However, social pressure and fear of negative evaluation continue to influence students' confidence, creating tension between communication goals and social expectations.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that EFL students' attitudes toward English accents are shaped by a complex interaction of beliefs, social norms, and communicative needs. While British and American accents are associated with prestige and fluency, students increasingly prioritize intelligibility as the primary goal of communication. This dual orientation reflects the ongoing negotiation between global linguistic norms and local identity

The perception of native-speaker accents as prestigious aligns with previous studies indicating that British and American English continue to dominate learners' perceptions of correctness and professionalism. According to English as a Lingua Franca: Attitude and Identity, native-speaker norms still strongly influence language ideologies despite the global diversification of English. Similarly, Kung and Wang (2019) found that learners tend to associate native accents with higher social status due to their prominence in global media. In this study, participants' admiration for these accents appears to be socially constructed through repeated exposure to films, social media, and educational materials

However, the findings also indicate a shift toward a more functional perspective of language use, where clarity and intelligibility are prioritized over native-like pronunciation. This supports the principles of English as an International Language (EIL), which emphasize effective communication rather than imitation. As highlighted in *Intelligibility, Oral Communication, and the Teaching of Pronunciation*, the primary goal of pronunciation teaching should be intelligibility, not nativeness. In multilingual contexts where English functions as a lingua franca, mutual understanding becomes more important than conformity to a particular accent (Seidlhofer, 2011). This explains why participants in this study viewed clarity as the key indicator of successful communication.

Despite this awareness, students continue to experience social pressure to conform to native-speaker norms. This phenomenon can be explained through Belief, Attitude, Intention, and Behavior, which posits that behavior is influenced by both personal attitudes and perceived social expectations. In this study, students' desire to sound native-like is shaped not only by their beliefs but also by their perception that others expect them to adopt such accents. This pressure often results in anxiety, self-consciousness, and reduced confidence when speaking English. Supporting this, Derwing and Munro (2009) argue that learners' concerns about accent are more closely related to social judgment than to actual communication barriers.

At the same time, the recognition of Indonesian English as a marker of identity reflects the influence of World Englishes (WEs), which acknowledge localized varieties of English as legitimate forms of communication. As discussed in *The Other Tongue: English Across Cultures*, English has developed into multiple varieties shaped by sociocultural contexts. In this study, participants viewed their accent as a natural representation of their cultural identity and a means of fostering familiarity in communication. This aligns with recent findings that Indonesian learners increasingly value identity and intelligibility over native-like pronunciation (Khazanah, 2023).

Importantly, the findings can be synthesized into a conceptual process in which beliefs (about prestige), social norms (expectations to sound native-like), and identity (local affiliation) interact to shape students' attitudes and communication behavior. While students cognitively recognize the importance of clarity, social pressures may still lead them to pursue native-like pronunciation, creating internal tension. These dynamic highlights that attitudes toward accents are not static but are continuously negotiated within social and communicative contexts.

This study contributes to the literature by integrating sociolinguistic perspectives (EIL and WEs) with a psychological framework (Theory of Reasoned Action) to explain how accent attitudes are formed. Unlike previous studies that focus primarily on preference, this research demonstrates that attitudes emerge through the interaction of beliefs, social expectations, and identity, particularly in a regional Indonesian EFL context.

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings suggest the need to shift language teaching practices from native-speaker norms toward intelligibility and communicative effectiveness. Teachers should create supportive classroom environments that reduce anxiety related to pronunciation and encourage students to value their own linguistic identity. Exposure to diverse English varieties can also help challenge the notion of a single "correct" accent and promote more inclusive attitudes toward language use. As emphasized by *English as a Lingua Franca: Attitude and Identity*, teaching practices should reflect the global reality of English rather than focusing solely on native-speaker standards.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that EFL students at Tadulako University prioritize clarity and intelligibility over native-like pronunciation in English communication. While British and American accents are admired for their perceived prestige, Indonesian English accent remains meaningful as a representation of identity and familiarity. Students' attitudes are influenced by both internal beliefs and external social pressures, which can affect their confidence in speaking.

The findings highlight the importance of promoting an inclusive approach to English language teaching that values accent diversity and emphasizes effective communication. Encouraging students to accept their own accent while improving clarity can foster confidence and enhance participation in EFL contexts.

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