

Research Article

English as an International Language: Perceptions of EFL Preservice Teachers in Higher Education Institutions in Indonesia

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It is widely known that the English language has rapidly spread across the globe and is now used for a wide range of purposes. Its status as a national/foreign language has shifted to that of an international language. Despite this awareness, however, studies on perceptions of English as an international language (EIL) among EFL preservice teachers in the Indonesian context are not commonplace in the literature. Therefore, this study was aimed at elucidating the perceptions of the four aspects of EIL among EFL preservice teachers in higher education institutions in Indonesia. This quantitative study adopted a descriptive approach using a five-point Likert scale questionnaire with a total of 14 close-ended statements. Data collected from the questionnaire were analysed using descriptive statistics. The findings suggest that EIL is positively viewed by participants as a means of global communication to achieve a variety of purposes. They welcome and accept various varieties of English, demonstrating a strong multilingual/multicultural understanding through their ability to accept different pronunciation patterns and adapt their behavior and conversational styles when interacting with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. They have a strong sense of ownership over their own English varieties. Finally, the study's implications for the four aspects of EIL including the current status of English, English varieties, multicultural communication strategies, and the identity of English speakers are also discussed, along with limitations and recommendations for future research.

1. Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that the world has become more culturally diverse in recent years. To conduct successful cross-cultural communication, we must now fully comprehend and utilize English as an international language (henceforth EIL) [1] since English's role as a national/foreign language has shifted to an international language [2] and its position in the world is markedly different from that of any other language [3]. Many researchers in the field of English language education around the world have become aware of the changing role of English and are interested in learning more about it (see, among others, [2, 4–7]). Despite the increasing awareness, however, real practical changes in the classroom and curricula are rarely found [2, 8, 9]. Therefore, a growing number of calls to integrate EIL-based peda-

gogical strategies into English language classrooms and teacher education now exist [1] since it is more relevant to the current multilingual and multicultural contexts [8].

Given the significant role of perception, which often travels under an alias in the literature, e.g., attitude, conception, preconception, perspective, repertoires of understanding, and belief [10], in regard to teachers' practices in the classroom, the issue of EFL preservice teachers' perceptions of EIL is surprisingly scarce [1]. Since the topic under investigation is not commonplace in the literature, a research gap, among others, is easily noticeable. To our knowledge, very few studies have been conducted among EFL teacher candidates studying in universities in the Indonesian context (see, for example, [5, 11, 12]). Therefore, this study was aimed at elucidating the perceptions of the four aspects of EIL including the current status of English, English varieties,

multicultural communication strategies, and the identity of English speakers [4] among EFL preservice teachers in higher education institutions in Indonesia. We believe that the findings of this study can help us gain a better understanding of this phenomenon and provide future EFL teachers with the knowledge essential to deal with such a culturally diverse world.

2. Literature Review

2.1. English as an International Language (EIL). The English language has spread rapidly around the world and is used for a wide range of purposes, as is well known [13, 14]. English is the only language that has spread widely throughout the world, making it “a truly international language” (EIL). However, the large number of speakers is not the main reason for this label. If it were so, then it would be certainly preferable to using another language with a far larger number of native speakers, e.g., Mandarin, for international exchanges of information (Crystal 1997 as cited in McKay [15]).

The terms EIL and World Englishes (WE) and English as a lingua franca (ELF) are frequently used interchangeably in the literature; however, they have their own focus and assumptions [13, 16]. The term WE refers to the global spread of English and the heterogeneity of English across the world [17]. To put it in another way, it has to do with numerous English varieties in various parts of the world [18]. WE has three perspectives [19]. Firstly, in the broad sense, it refers to all English language varieties spoken around the globe [13], either in (1) the inner circle (the majority of people speak English as their first language); (2) the outer circle (English is regarded as one of a country’s official languages); or (3) the expanding circle (English is a foreign language) (Kachru 1985 as cited in McKay [13]). Secondly, in the narrower sense, WE refers to all dialects of English spoken in what Kachru refers to as the outer circle, e.g., Malaysian English and Nigerian English. The third point of view emphasises a pluricentric approach in which all varieties of English are treated equally [13], and they are well recognized as legitimate English varieties within the paradigms of WE, EIL, and ELF [3].

The ELF refers to “interactions between members of two or more different linguacultures in English, for none of whom English is the mother tongue” (House 1999, p. 74 as cited in McKay [13]). Simply put, it is defined as a language when people with a variety of linguistic and cultural diversity interact [13]. According to the definition, ELF research does not include people whose first language is English [13]. However, the emphasis is on the interactional characteristics of English speakers who are not native speakers [16].

The EIL is, therefore, defined as “a function that English performs in international, multilingual contexts, to which each speaker brings a variety of English that they are most familiar with, along with their own cultural frames of reference, and employs various strategies to communicate effectively” (Matsuda 2017, p. xiii as cited in J. Lee and K. Lee [5, p. 2]). It is not referring to a specific variety of English, but rather to the fact that English comes in a wide range of

varieties [20], emphasizing that English “is a language of international, and therefore intercultural, communication” [14, p. 2]. As stated in the literature, the most fundamental similarity between the terms WE, EIL, and ELF is that they all refer to multilingual environments, emphasising a close relationship between English and other languages [17].

2.2. EFL Preservice Teachers’ Perceptions of EIL. Perception or belief refers to “implicit assumptions about students, learning, classroom, and the subject matter to be taught” [21, p. 66]. Perception influences the way teachers behave in the classroom [10]. For example, in comparison to those with negative perceptions of EIL, EFL teachers with positive perceptions appear to be more likely to plan, design, implement, and evaluate EIL-based activities [1]. Therefore, teachers’ and future teachers’ perceptions, which are rooted in their belief structures, should be taken into account to help them improve their professional training and classroom practices [10].

In terms of perception, a large body of data has been reported regarding EFL teachers’ and teacher candidates’ perceptions of EIL. In Indonesia and Korea, EFL preservice teachers from both countries hold positive perceptions of EIL; however, Indonesian EFL preservice teachers’ perceptions of communicative strategies used for cross-cultural communications are more positive compared to their Korean counterparts. In addition, despite the fact that Korean preservice teachers are aware of the existence of nonnative English varieties, they show hesitancy about including nonnative accents of English in English listening materials. This indicates that Indonesian EFL preservice teachers are likely more committed to incorporating pluralism in EFL classrooms. In other words, EFL preservice teachers in Indonesia are viewed as having a higher level of ownership of their own local accents [1].

Additionally, English major students in Korea have a more favorable view of EIL in terms of local varieties of English and multicultural communication than non-English majors. It is found that teachers’ EIL-based pedagogy and students’ EIL experience in informal digital learning of English (IDLE) settings influence the perceptions of the two groups of students. This suggests that students’ EIL experience in formal English language classrooms has a positive effect on their perceptions of EIL [5].

Another finding indicates that EFL preservice teachers in East Java, Indonesia, continue to regard native English speakers as more ideal teachers. This demonstrates their ignorance of World Englishes, English as a lingua franca, and EIL. However, they still hold positive attitudes towards the inclusion of home language in EFL classrooms, although they prefer authentic materials from inner circle countries for teaching and learning. They do not show much confidence in local EFL books for EFL instructions since learning the books might result in different varieties of English. However, they have two opposing opinions about the inclusion of English cultures within EFL instructions; some argue that the materials should reflect their local Indonesian cultures [12]. Additionally, it is reported that English is intrinsically linked to the West; however, English has influenced

someone's way of thinking positively. The Western influences through English have lost significant value in the Indonesian EFL contexts that English has a positive effect on ethnic identities, and even Muslim students do not associate English with their religion; otherwise, English is seen as having a positive effect on their religious lives [11].

In terms of accents and culture, EFL teachers in Iran also have a favorable attitude toward EIL. On the one hand, inner circle countries' English accents are viewed as an ideal model for EFL instruction; on the other hand, they believe that local culture should be as inclusive as possible in their EFL classrooms. This indicates that they view English as a more ideal model of pedagogy for a variety of external reasons, e.g., standardized tests (TOEFL, IELTS), comprehensibility issue, and their own EFL learning experience [22]. Finally, students in Taiwan and South Korea appear to have a favorable attitude toward EIL in terms of "Current Status of English (CSE), Varieties of English (VE), Strategies for Multilingual/Multicultural Communication (SMC), and English Speakers' Identity (ESI)" [4, p. 1]. However, Taiwanese students, in comparison to Korean students, are more receptive to listening materials and interactions that include nonnative English-speaking (NNES) accents [4].

Despite the significant role of perceptions of EIL in EFL educational contexts and the growing number of studies on this topic, however, less attention has been paid to EFL preservice teachers. A very few studies have been conducted within the Indonesian context (see, for example, [1, 11, 12]). Therefore, to find out more conclusive findings as evidence regarding the topic under investigation in the Indonesian EFL context, this study was aimed at elucidating the perceptions of the four aspects of EIL including the current status of English, varieties of English, strategies for multilingual/multicultural communication, and English speakers' identity [4] among EFL preservice teachers in higher education institutions in Indonesia in the following research question: What are the perceptions of the four aspects of EIL among EFL preservice teachers in higher education institutions in Indonesia?

3. Research Methodology

This quantitative study adopted a descriptive approach to provide "thorough descriptions and interpretations of social phenomena, including its meaning to those who experience it" (Tesch 1991, pp. 17–25 as cited in Dey [23, p. 2]). We clearly clarified the details of the research purpose to the participants and guaranteed them confidentiality.

3.1. Participants. The data of the current study were collected from 152 EFL preservice teachers from a public university and 42 from private universities using a convenient technique of sampling, with a total of 26 male participants and 168 females. They were in the 18–25 age range, with an average of 20.58. All of them majored in English education. Female participants appear to be significantly more numerous in this study than male participants, which is consistent with previous findings in the literature that schools are perceived to be "feminised" environments, implying that

female teachers outnumbered male teachers [24–26]. The teacher training program in Indonesia is housed under the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, and it takes a minimum of four to a maximum of seven years to complete the formal preparation program. The program offers a wide range of coursework with a focus on content subjects (e.g., English Teaching Assessment, Curriculum and Syllabus Design, Lesson Plan, and Material Development), English language skills (e.g., reading, listening, writing, and speaking), and EIL-related courses (e.g., Cross Culture Understanding and Sociolinguistics).

3.2. Research Instrument and Procedure. To investigate the participants' perceptions of the four aspects of EIL including the current status of English (three items), varieties of English (four items), strategies for multilingual/multicultural communication (four items), and English speakers' identity (three items), we adopted the EIL Perception Scale (EILPS) questionnaire, which was developed by Lee et al. (2017) as cited in Lee and Hsieh [4]. This instrument, which was used to investigate perceptions of EIL in the expanding circle countries (see [1, 4, 5]) was considered valid and reliable.

The participants were required to respond to a five-point Likert scale questionnaire with a total of 14 close-ended statements ranging from 1 to 5 (strongly disagree–strongly agree). The instrument was electronically distributed using a free survey medium, Google Forms. Although the instrument was pilot tested [4], we also undertook validity and reliability tests prior to distribution to provide more evidence that the statements were reasonable in length and understandable [27] and appropriately designed to make sure each statement in the instrument could achieve the research purposes [28]. The questionnaire's validity was found to be acceptable ($0.00 < 0.05$) tested using Pearson's product-moment analysis. As an additional check to see if the items were accurate and consistent in measuring the variables under investigation, the correlation coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) was used to determine the items' internal consistency. All items were found to be reliable and internally consistent (>0.60) by this measure. By returning the research questionnaire to us, they gave us their consent to use the data we collected from them in the period of 21 March–17 April 2021 for research purposes.

3.3. Data Analysis. A descriptive statistics test was run using the IBM SPSS Statistics Version 25 for Windows to summarize the participants' responses to the questionnaire. The results were then descriptively presented and interpreted in an understandable and convenient way [29].

4. Results

4.1. Current Status of English. Regarding the current status of English, we looked at this construct using three items as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1 illustrates the results of the EIL survey regarding the participants' perceptions of the current status of English construct, with the first item receiving the highest positive response indicated by the agreement and strong agreement

TABLE 1: Participants' perceptions of current status of English ($n = 194$).

No.	Statement	Response				
		SD	D	U	A	SA
1	English is now widely used as an international language for effective communication with people from all over the world.	2 (1%)	1 (0.5%)	6 (3.1%)	40 (20.6%)	145 (74.7%)
2	Numerous countries that are not native English speakers now use English as their official or working language.	2 (1%)	14 (7.2%)	47 (24.2%)	85 (43.8%)	46 (23.7%)
3	Today, English is the global language of business, culture, and education.	2 (1%)	5 (2.6%)	12 (6.2%)	66 (34%)	109 (56.2%)

SD: strongly disagree; D: disagree; U: undecided; A: agree; SA: strongly agree.

of the statement (20.6% and 74.7%, respectively), followed by the third (34% and 56.2%, respectively) and the second (43.8% and 23.7%, respectively). A total of 24% of the participants also show a neutral opinion or undecided when responding to the second item, meaning that they neither agree nor disagree with the statement. Other responses to the statements under this construct have an almost similar pattern.

4.2. Varieties of English. Regarding the varieties of English, we investigated this construct using four items, as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2 gives information about the participants' perceptions of the varieties of English construct, with most of them expressing their agreement and strong agreement to the four items under this construct. They agree and strongly agree with all the statements, with each having a similar pattern. They agree and strongly agree to accept various English accents for listening materials, 37.1% and 26.8%, respectively. They also show positive acceptance for the third statement, with the majority of them agreeing and strongly agreeing to accept different varieties of English, 40.2% and 22.7%, respectively. A similar pattern also applies in the first statement, with most of them expressing their agreement and strong agreement to this statement, 33.5% and 31.4%, respectively. Finally, the participants also agree and strongly agree with the fourth statement on including nonnative interactions in listening materials, 36.1% and 23.3%, respectively. However, it is also clear that they express a neutral opinion or undecided, either agreeing or disagreeing with the four statements, ranging from 26.8% to 30.4%. The other responses (strong disagreement and disagreement) show a similar pattern, with each statement receiving less than 10%.

4.3. Strategies for Multilingual/Multicultural Communication. Regarding the strategies adopted by the participants for multilingual/multicultural communication, we investigated this construct using four items as illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3 shows the participants' perceptions of the strategies for multilingual/multicultural communication. It can be clearly seen that each of the statement receives positive responses from the participants, with more than 60% of them expressing their agreement and strong agreement with each statement. They agree (34.5%) and strongly agree (46.9%) that they are open-minded about accepting different

pronunciation patterns. In line with this statement, they also agree and strongly agree that they can adjust their behavior when speaking to different English users (42.3% and 26.8%, respectively) and their conversational styles when interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds, 46.9% and 21.1%, respectively. Finally, they agree and strongly agree that they can explain their own culture to people from different cultural backgrounds, 40.7% and 19.1%, respectively. It is also clear that they express a neutral opinion or undecided, either agreeing or disagreeing with the four statements, ranging from 17.5% to 35.1%. The other responses (strong disagreement and disagreement) show a similar pattern, with each statement receiving less than 5%.

4.4. English Speakers' Identity. Regarding the English speakers' identity, we investigated this construct using three items as illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4 illustrates the participants' perceptions of English speakers' identity. They not only agree but also strongly agree that they do not really mind if people laugh at them when speaking in their own English accent, 32% and 37%, respectively. They also agree and strongly agree that English teachers should not insist them to produce a native-like English proficiency when speaking, 23.7% and 36.6%, respectively, since they believe that it is not necessary to speak like an American or British English speaker as long as others can understand them, with the agreement receiving 28.4% and disagreement 39.2%. The results also show that they express a neutral opinion or undecided response to each statement under this construct, indicating that they either agree or disagree with the statements, ranging from 20.6% to 24.2%. The other responses (strong disagreement and disagreement) show a similar pattern, with each statement receiving less than 14%.

5. Discussion

With respect to the current status of English, the findings indicate that English is now positively deemed as an international language for worldwide communication to achieve a variety of purposes, e.g., business, culture, and education, by most of the participants under investigation [4]. This finding resonates with the previous findings [5, 8], suggesting that students' EIL experience in formal English language classrooms has a positive effect on their perceptions of EIL.

TABLE 2: Participants' perceptions of varieties of English ($n = 194$).

No.	Statement	Response				
		SD	D	U	A	SA
1	Today, various varieties of English are acceptable, e.g., Hong Kong English, Indian English, and Singaporean English.	1 (0.5%)	8 (4.1%)	59 (30.4%)	65 (33.5%)	61 (31.4%)
2	Teachers can utilize English listening materials that have been recorded by individuals with a variety of different English accents.	3 (1.5%)	15 (7.7%)	52 (26.8%)	72 (37.1%)	52 (26.8%)
3	Today, various varieties of English are acceptable, including Indonesian English, Taiwanese English, and Japanese English.	3 (1.5%)	10 (5.2%)	59 (30.4%)	78 (40.2%)	44 (22.7%)
4	Teachers can incorporate interaction between native and nonnative English speakers in their English listening materials (e.g., Indonesian-Japanese speakers).	4 (2.1%)	16 (8.2%)	59 (30.4%)	70 (36.1%)	45 (23.3%)

SD: strongly disagree; D: disagree; U: undecided; A: agree; SA: strongly agree.

TABLE 3: Participants' perceptions of strategies for multilingual/multicultural communication ($n = 194$).

No.	Statement	Response				
		SD	D	U	A	SA
1	I am capable of adapting my conversational style to my interactions with people from diverse cultural backgrounds.	2 (1%)	6 (3.1%)	54 (27.8%)	91 (46.9%)	41 (21.1%)
2	I am capable of clearly explaining my own culture and customs to people from other cultures in English.	1 (0.5%)	9 (4.6%)	68 (35.1%)	79 (40.7%)	37 (19.1%)
3	I am receptive to speaking/pronouncing in ways that differ from those in my native country.	0 (0%)	2 (1%)	34 (17.5%)	67 (34.5%)	91 (46.9%)
4	I am capable of behaving appropriately in front of English users with whom I communicate.	1 (0.5%)	3 (1.5%)	56 (28.9%)	82 (42.3%)	52 (26.8%)

SD: strongly disagree; D: disagree; U: undecided; A: agree; SA: strongly agree.

TABLE 4: Participants' perceptions of English speakers' identity ($n = 194$).

No.	Statement	Response				
		SD	D	U	A	SA
1	English teachers should not pressure me to speak English in a "native" manner.	4 (2.1%)	26 (13.4%)	47 (24.2%)	46 (23.7%)	71 (36.6%)
2	I do not mind if people make fun of my English accent when I speak; it is my own.	3 (1.5%)	17 (8.8%)	40 (20.6%)	62 (32%)	72 (37.1%)
3	It is unnecessary for me to speak English in the manner of American or British speakers as long as my English is understandable (or comprehensible) to others.	5 (2.6%)	13 (6.7%)	45 (23.2%)	55 (28.4%)	76 (39.2%)

SD: strongly disagree; D: disagree; U: undecided; A: agree; SA: strongly agree.

Looking at the varieties of English, the participants perceive that abundant varieties of English worldwide are acceptable [4]. This indicates that they have great multilingual/multicultural understanding for global communication purposes, implying they are also aware that they are not English speakers but users; therefore, achieving an almost native-like fluency is impossible. Moreover, Indonesia is a country rich in linguistic superdiversity with a complex linguistic ecosystem [30]; thus, multilingual connection across societies is prevalent in the country, as it is in African countries [31]. However, this finding also contradicts previous findings that EFL preservice teachers deem native speaker accents of English, e.g., British English, American English, Australian English, are more appropriate and acceptable for worldwide communication [32, 33] and native speakers of English as more ideal teachers in English language teach-

ing with authentic materials from inner circle countries [12, 22].

Regarding the findings related to strategies for multilingual/multicultural communication, the participants believe in adopting multilingual/multicultural communication, being open-minded of accepting different pronunciation patterns, adjusting their behavior when speaking to different English users, and adjusting their conversational styles when interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds [4]. These findings are also in line with the previous findings that Indonesian EFL preservice teachers are likely more committed to incorporating pluralism in EFL classrooms [1].

Finally, looking at the findings related to the English speakers' identity, they do not really mind if people laugh at them when speaking in their own English accent. This

indicates that they have a good sense of ownership over their own English varieties [4]. They are also aware that as English users, it is impossible to achieve almost native-like fluency. The main point is they understand what the native speakers of English speak about, and it is the other way around, which is the essential key to communication. This finding supports what J. Lee et al. [1] have reported that EFL preservice teachers from Indonesia are viewed as having a higher level of ownership of their own local accents, which is in line with what Dewi [11] reports that English has positively influenced someone's way of thinking, with participants under her investigation stating that English affects their ethnic identities in a positive way and the Muslim participants do not view that English is connected with their religion; otherwise, English is seen as having positive influences to their religious lives. Moreover, it is widely known that Indonesia is a multicultural and multilingual country [34], with more than 700 languages being spoken by 600 ethnic groups [30]. On the one hand, this provides its people with numerous opportunities to study various local languages and cultures; on the other hand, they have challenges in maintaining their identity while learning other languages [35].

6. Conclusion

Based on the findings discussed above, the current study has unravelled perceptions of the four aspects of EIL including the current status of English, varieties of English, strategies for multilingual/multicultural communication, and English speakers' identity among EFL preservice teachers in higher education institutions in Indonesia, with four key findings identified. First, EIL is positively perceived by the participants for worldwide communication to achieve a variety of purposes, e.g., business, culture, and education. Second, they welcome and accept the existing different varieties of English, indicating they have great multilingual/multicultural understanding. Third, they are open-minded of accepting different pronunciation patterns and of adjusting their behavior and conversational styles when interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds. Finally, they have a good sense of ownership over their own English varieties.

Therefore, the current study has several implications to better equip future Indonesian EFL teachers with the necessary training to deal with this culturally diverse world since it is getting more commonplace in the literature giving voice to integrate EIL-based pedagogical strategies into English language classrooms and teacher education [1], which is more relevant to the current multilingual and multicultural contexts [8]. Recognizing the current status of English as an international language of business, culture, and education, with many countries adopting it as their official language, EFL teachers should also encourage students to be open-minded and willing to suspend disbelief about other cultures in order to promote intercultural competence [36]. The current findings support the recommendation that English language teacher education focuses on extending teachers' perspectives of WE, EIL, and ELF

paradigms, introducing relevant multilingual/multicultural approaches of English teaching, for instance, developing a set of listening materials based on WE for use in EFL classrooms to raise students' awareness of English varieties [37]. Language teachers and curriculum developers can incorporate varieties of English, especially Asian Englishes, to classroom practices, placing a focused look at developing students' competencies for interactions [8] and assisting them in developing into global citizens who are linguistically and intercultural competent [38, 39]. In other words, during EFL teaching and learning, it is critical to consider the significance of cultural capital and linguistic ideology, as well as the construction of identity [40, 41]. Thus, political and academic efforts are required to develop a national language policy that promotes a multilingual and intercultural language education program on a national level, as well as a foreign language education policy that expands this objective globally [42].

However, this study is not without its potential limitations. We made a careful assumption regarding the phenomenon under inquiry because the sample size and additional empirical evidence are deemed insufficient. In other words, this study's findings may not be representative of all Indonesian EFL preservice teachers. Therefore, in order to fully comprehend this phenomenon in the Indonesian setting, we emphasize the importance of undertaking additional research on the topic at hand through observation of naturally occurring English classroom practices with a greater number of teacher and student participants. Future research should compare perceptions of EIL among EFL preservice teachers studying in both public and private higher education institutions within the larger context of Indonesia, using more advanced qualitative and quantitative research instruments and data analysis. In so doing, we would be able to provide more exact findings and solid conclusions, which may be used as a foundation for making a significant contribution to EFL education. Finally, given the fact that research on EIL is still in its infancy in the Indonesian context, this study serves as a springboard for future research on the topic.

Data Availability

The data and materials used during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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