



The Pedagogy of English as an International Language: Indonesian Pre-Service Teachers' Beliefs

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Introduction

This study was designed to examine how pre-service teachers' beliefs on the teaching of English as an international language in Indonesia were constructed. Fifty participants were recruited by means of convenience sampling. They were asked to fill out a questionnaire and five of them were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews. Many of the participants viewed English instrumentally for securing job positions imposed by globalization. This reflected on their passive tenets of studying English. In terms of NESTs, they preferred native speakers to teach speaking and pronunciation. Another finding was that L1 use was perceived as a tool for checking students' understanding, explaining new words, and giving instructions. When asked about teaching materials, respondents preferred using materials from the inner circle countries. Most of them also agreed to including Western cultures in teaching English. These findings call for the attention of both curriculum designers and future researchers.

Literature Review

English as an international language has gained prominence recently. One visible fact is represented by its robust deployment in a plethora of areas such as science, business, intercultural communication, and technology, which pervasively position English as a means of international communication (Floris, 2013). People from multicultural countries around the world speak English, and thus may have influenced some aspects of it. One of which is English language teaching. The common conceptions of two mainstream varieties of English, British and American, have been considered as being irrelevant in some EFL contexts (Richards, 2002).

The current status of English has consequently affected the way English teachers perceive and teach English to their students. According to McKay (2003), "the teaching of English as an International Language (EIL) should be based on an entirely different set of assumptions than has typically informed English language teaching (ELT) pedagogy" (p. 1). The focus should now be on ELT for international communication with people of different cultures learning it.

Debates and discussions underpinning the status of English have risen from time to time. Specifically, there is a question of whether English is owned by an international community or by people in countries

where it is a native language. However, this debate is on the periphery of the pedagogical issues that English teachers should be primarily concerned with.

Many English language researchers have done their studies in ESL contexts such as in Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, and Western English-speaking countries. In the Indonesian context, however, such research is far removed from actual language pedagogy (Zacharias, 2003).

Given the lack of a clear-cut alternative in EIL and its pedagogical trends, this study is designed to investigate the belief systems of pre-service English teachers about ELT for international communication. It is worthwhile to consider that they are future English teachers of the expanding circle countries who are now developing teaching strategies, knowledge, and beliefs about ELT in a teacher development program. What they believe will influence the way they teach English in the future. This study puts a focus on (1) the importance of studying English, (2) the native speaker fallacy, (3) L1 use, (4) teaching materials, and (5) English-speaking cultures.

Method

Employing a survey research design, 50 pre-service teachers who were enrolled in the English Department of the Islamic University of Malang, East Java, Indonesia, participated in this study. The sample consisted of 15 males and 35 females. Their English learning experiences varied, with 78% having studied English for 1-10 years, 20% for 10-20 years, and 2% for 20-30. To ensure anonymity, all names in this report are pseudonyms.

The participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire consisting of nine questions, and five of the participants were invited to join semi-structured interviews. These interviews lasted between 20-30 minutes. Interviews were done in the participant's first language (L1), and excerpts used in the results below were translated into English by the researcher. The data gathered from the questionnaire were then analyzed quantitatively. The interview data were transcribed then analyzed qualitatively. This mixed-method research was deployed since "both forms of data provide a better understanding of a research problem than either quantitative or qualitative data by itself" (Cresswell, 2012, p. 12).

Results

The Importance of Studying English in Indonesia

Among the fifty respondents involved in this study, the most commonly selected reasons for studying English were 'globalization era (78%)', 'to communicate with people of different countries (78%)', and 'to get better jobs (48%)'. The full results are depicted in Figure 1.

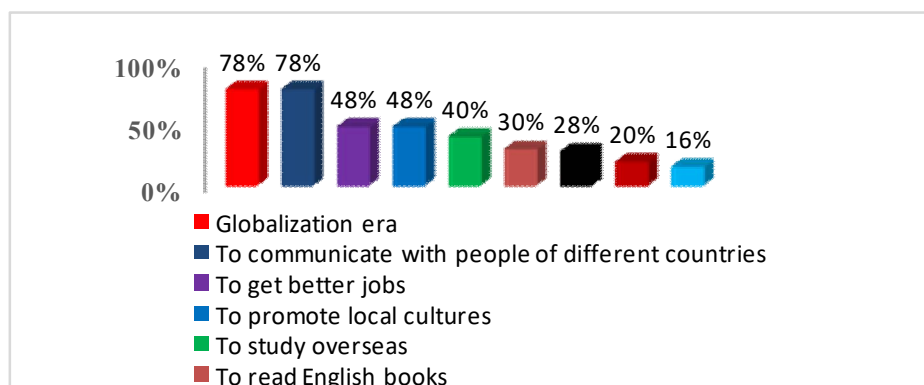


Figure 1. The importance of studying English in Indonesia.

The first and the second reasons related to the status of English as an international language. As said by one of the interviewees:

Yaa ... in my opinion English is used for global competitions ... I mean, English is used internationally, isn't it? Today is globalization, right? So speaking and learning English is necessary to promote our cultures. (Eli)

The third preferred reason was 'to get better jobs'. This indicates that English, as perceived by these respondents, functions to open the doors of employment. When this tenet is held, studying English is thus instrumentally motivated. Nita conveyed her belief on this issue as follows:

Looking for jobs of course ... Actually ... not only do English teachers need English ... in fact, (students) of international relations also need English to negotiate with other countries (international people) ... Commonly, people who seek for jobs are required to have English proficiency both written and spoken. (Nita)

Native English Speaker Teachers (NESTs) Paradigm

Data from this section indicate that participants think that NESTs should be responsible for teaching speaking (60%) and pronunciation (48%), as indicated by Figure 2 below.

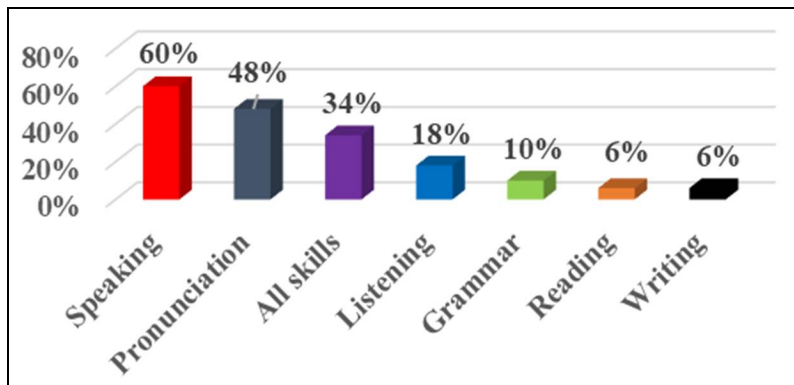


Figure 2. Native English speaker teachers (NESTs) paradigm.

The reasons for favoring native speakers in teaching speaking and pronunciation varied, as can be seen by statements from two respondents below:

Students can imitate the pronunciation and speaking styles of NESTs. (Questionnaire response)

The more we have communication with native speakers, the most we will have better in English, especially in speaking. (Questionnaire response)

These comments may indicate that the respondents consider native speakers who are from the inner circle countries as 'the providers of better English', because they have acquired the language since their childhood. This idea was supported by Eli in the interview:

I prefer they teach speaking and listening so that students can train themselves and learn how native English speakers speak. So they can imitate their styles. (Eli)

When this tenet is held, people may discourage the other varieties of English, particularly from the outer circle and expanding circle countries. Their interpretations indicated that the pre-service teachers are not fully aware of the issue of global English spoken by multicultural speakers who far outnumber the native ones of inner circle countries.

One interesting finding in this study is that 34% of the respondents believed that native speakers should teach all skills in English. Responses from two participants are given below:

... and all of the skill that already exist also will be better if the teacher is NESTs because I believe that it is better to study from native speaker itself. So the main point or content won't be contaminated. (Questionnaire response)

... NESTs is the one who knows their own language well. So it is make sense for them to teach all skills... (Questionnaire response)

The results of this section indicate that native speakers are strongly viewed as the 'providers of better English' for teaching speaking, pronunciation, and, in some cases, all skills. Indirectly, this fact shows the distrust toward non-native English speakers when teaching speaking and pronunciation of English.

The Use of Students' Mother Tongue in Teaching English

Interestingly, the data in this section demonstrates that most of the respondents (93%) preferred to use their mother tongue when teaching English. Only 7% of them supported the use of English-only medium in the classroom. The three most cited reasons for using their mother tongue were 'checking students understanding' (58%), 'explaining the meaning of new words' (40%), and 'giving instructions' (30%)'.

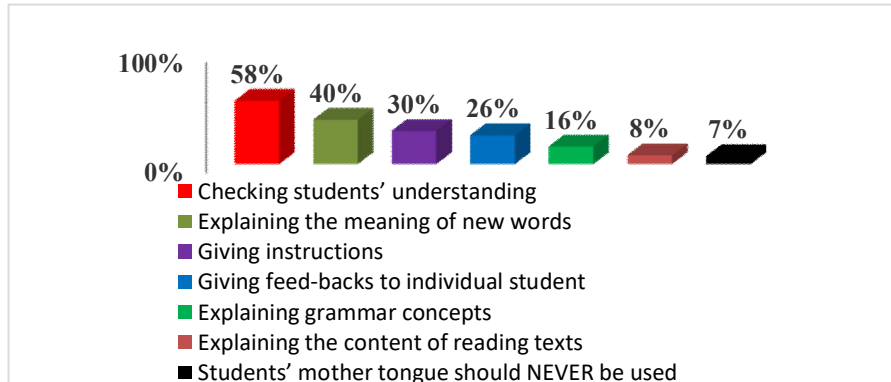


Figure 3. The use of students' mother tongue.

When teaching a foreign language, teachers need to check their students' understanding of the explanations. Albeit the elaborations below refer mostly to checking students' understanding, these respectively also serve the second and third most common responses as well:

Even though we study English and must use English in the class. The teacher also has to use students' mother tongue. Because it helps to check students' understanding. I mean, to get ease in understand the material. (Questionnaire response)

Mother tongue should be used or may be used only for explaining the meaning of new words because it's sometimes difficult to understand new words if we explain it in English too. (Questionnaire response)

These findings indicate the positive beliefs that the respondents had towards using L1 in class. However, many of them also stated that the use of the mother tongue should not be practiced excessively. Some respondents thought that L1 should only be used to partially help students understand the materials, and that L1 use acceptable when students' levels of English are basic. One interviewee, Sofa, voiced this belief as follows:

Actually ... It is conditional. I think the use of mother tongue is only to help raise students' understanding ... eee since the school that I did practice teaching was categorized as low level. It is a must for me to use both English and mother tongue I used both. (Sofa).

What is intriguing in this study is that the respondents are also concerned with minimizing students' use of L1 in class. They argued that the goals of studying English would not be obtained if the students are exposed minimally to the target language. Moreover, in Indonesia, the daily language is not English, so it will be a hindrance to acquire the language well. The comments taken from the questionnaire do reflect this idea:

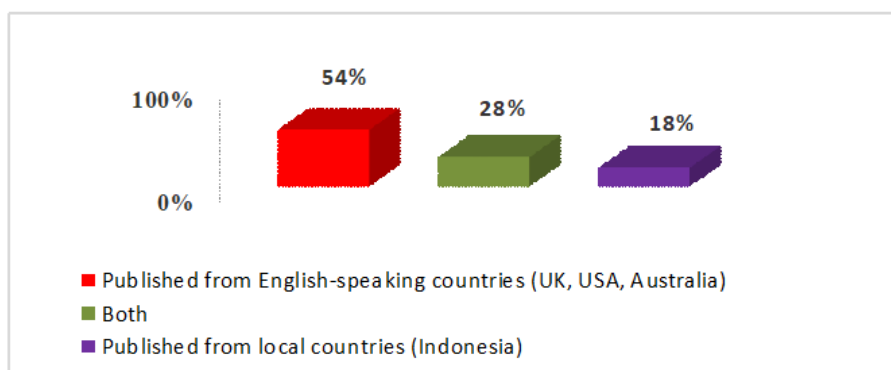
Try to minimize using students mother tongue because it will make students enjoy their mother tongue and difficult to understand English contexts. (Questionnaire response)

It's better not to use students' mother tongue. Try to avoid it, use mother tongue only if there is an urgency that can disturb teaching-learning process. (Questionnaire response)

To sum up, this section shows that respondents in general thought that L1 use should not be excessive. This attitude accepts a proportional practice of L1 use seen in many other EFL countries.

Teaching Materials in EFL Classes

The respondents prefer using materials published in English-speaking countries (54%) more than locally published materials (18%). Nevertheless, some respondents also indicated that they like to use both (28%).



Figures 4. Teaching materials in EFL classes.

The comments supporting the use of materials from English speaking countries are evidenced in the following excerpts:

Because USA book is better that Indonesia book. English is their language. So it is easy for them to make good strategy and good English book. (Questionnaire response)

Because materials that published from English speaking countries provide more explanation and detail about English itself. (Questionnaire response)

For some respondents, the preference for imported books was accompanied with a distrust for using locally published materials, as depicted in this comment:

The book from local countries in this case Indonesia sometimes confusing and lead students to ‘a different kind of English language’ (mixed – language between English in Indonesia). (Questionnaire response)

While it is true that many favored the materials from English speaking countries and showed a sort of distrust for using the local ones, 24% of the respondents opted to use both internationally and locally published materials).

Both of them are appropriate. Handouts from local countries are important to beginners to introduce English in simple language, when they have improved their English, they should use handouts from English-speaking country to make their English better. (Questionnaire response)

In the interview, one pre-service teacher, Nita, shared her opinion why using both is preferable in teaching English:

For me ... maybe use both ... for example in CCU class certainly we need a book from English speaking countries since we learn their cultures ... but if in language assessment, for example, we also have the book from Mr. Yahya whose writer is an Indonesian and I think it is understandable ... so we can use both... the important one is the books from Indonesia ... heeee (laughing)... can be trusted in terms of validity and quality. (Nita)

The findings from the questionnaire and the interviews revealed that most respondents preferred materials from English speaking countries. It may be partly the result of having low-quality, locally produced materials. The pre-service teachers see materials from English speaking countries as being of higher quality.

The Inclusion of English Speaking Cultures in ELT

Figure 5 indicates that the preference for including English culture in EFL classes was mostly agreed upon by the respondents (66%), whereas 8% disagreed and 26% were unsure.

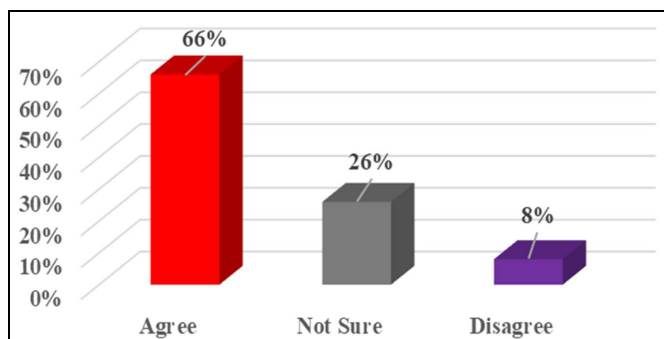


Figure 5. The inclusion of English speaking cultures in EFL classes.

Comments from those who agreed included the following:

... it is needed for teachers to teach English culture to avoid misunderstanding when we have communication with native speaker. (Questionnaire response)

Of course teaching the culture of English countries is important to know English culture, so there will be now misunderstanding when they meet the native. (Questionnaire response)

The remarks taken from the questionnaire indicated that the respondents were not aware of the uniqueness of English as an international language. They seemed to accept the assumption that teaching English should incorporate its cultures regardless of its mismatched values with the students' own culture. Nonetheless, two interviewees (Nita and Zara) emphasized that some aspects of culture, such as Thanksgiving and Halloween, were not appropriate to teach in Indonesia. However, they valued other cultural aspects such as being on time and being disciplined:

So like Halloween I think no need for us to practice, so does thanksgiving oh come on we have Allah no need to practice so ... but if being on time and discipline these all are important to practice ... and being well-scheduled which is also on time.... (Nita)

... I have the same idea like Nita ... I also agree with being on time and well scheduled ... If Halloween and thanksgiving these all are in contrast to our religion ... So no need. (Zara)

This section has indicated that most respondents were in agreement with including the cultures of English speaking countries. They emphasized that those cultures should be firstly screened, and that English teachers should only teach valuable and appropriate cultural practices and traditions. They felt that cultural aspects that are inconsistent with the norms and religious values of Indonesia should be excluded from ELT classes.

Discussion

The results of the study lead to five points for discussion addressed below:

The importance of studying English in Indonesia. Participants consider English as a key for securing better jobs since it is demanded in the era of globalization. Their reasons for studying English can be divided into passive and active reasons. The respondents tended to neglect the active benefits of English (e.g., to promote cultures and to write in English), and most of them opted for the passive benefits which deploy receptive skills, such as 'globalization era' and 'to get better jobs'.

This finding confirms what Zacharias (2003) has previously pointed out. On researching tertiary teachers, she found that the active benefits of English are considered less important than the passive benefits of this language. This finding opposes the pedagogical characteristics of EIL as suggested by Smith (1976) who argued that EIL is used for sharing ideas and cultures (as cited in McKay, 2003). These two points may have indicated that the traditional belief of EIL remains alive in this pre-service teacher program.

The native English speaking teacher (NEST) paradigm. Most of the respondents view native speakers as the 'providers of better English'. This interpretation comes from the lack of awareness of world Englishes, which acknowledges multicultural speakers as users of English. The assumption of favoring speakers of inner circle countries to teach speaking and pronunciation could result in the perception of a lower identity of non-native English speaking teachers (NNEST) when teaching those

skills in the periphery. In fact, the status of NESTs does not fully determine that they will be good English teachers (Mahboob, 2010), and this privileged status of NESTs has long been questioned (Richards & Schmidt, 2010).

The use of students' mother tongue. This section highlights that the respondents possess positive attitudes on the use of the students' mother tongue in EFL classes. The responses mostly preferred L1 for giving instructions, checking students' understanding, and explaining new words. These choices aim at encouraging students to understand the English lesson taught in the class and thus the use of L1 is considered as a tool for better understanding. This is similar to what Kathi (2011) found regarding the reasons teachers use L1 in EFL classes. Nevertheless, the respondents still believe in maintaining exposure to English so that students can learn the target language maximally, which is in accordance with findings from Manara's (2007) study.

Teaching materials in EFL classes. The majority of the respondents prefer materials from English speaking countries. This attitude is also accompanied by some respondents' distrust in the use of local books (published by the Indonesian government) which sometimes lead students to learning a 'different English', as stated by one respondent in the questionnaire. This finding is consistent with Floris' (2013) study.

The inclusion of English speaking cultures in EFL classes. Most of the respondents agree that teaching culture in EFL classes is a good idea. The most cited reason is simply because language and culture are intertwined. Interestingly, this tenet is theoretically held but ignored in practice. The respondents largely agreed about the importance of teaching culture, but some participants felt that they should only teach cultural content or norms that are appropriate or relevant to Indonesian learners. Similarly, Renandya (2013) suggested that English teachers "provide cultural content reflecting the country's values of local cultures rather than just adopting the inner circle countries' cultural contents" (p. 74). The mismatch cultural values need to be explored deeply. As McKay (2003) pointed out, "the traditional use of Western cultural content in ELT texts needs to be examined" (p. 19). Ubaidillah et al. (2014) also suggested that EFL teachers should include their own students' local culture in class.

Conclusion

When asked about the importance of studying English, most of the respondents view English instrumentally as a door to employment as demanded by globalization. In terms of the native English speaker issue, they feel that native speakers are the 'providers of better English' and feel that they are better at teaching speaking and pronunciation, and for some, even at teaching all skills. The use of the students' L1 is perceived as a tool for providing understanding about the materials but that it should not be excessively used. On the topic of teaching materials, respondents believe that internationally published materials are of high quality, and some respondents feel a distrust for nationally published materials. Lastly, the inclusion of English speaking cultures is considered important to the participants, but they feel that consideration must be given to include locally appropriate materials and topics.

Because this study is not designed to generalize, it is advisable for future researchers to employ a wider sample from populations in all areas of East Java or Indonesia and to utilize probability sampling. This would yield more comprehensive, valid, and reliable findings. The participation of pre-service teachers from sub-districts or remote regions should also be considered in future studies, as their voices may not be in line with the urban pre-service teachers from the current study.

This study also found that the pre-service teachers are not fully aware of EIL issues. It should become the major concern of pre-service teacher education programs to cater for relevant access and information about the issues so that pre-service teachers can better view English as a lingua franca and extinguish the

belief that English is forever owned by the inner circle countries. Among the many ideas offered, one practical solution is to include the study of world Englishes in the curriculum of every English department.

The Author

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