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A Comparative Study of Perceptions of WE/ELF/EIL between Australian In-service English Teachers and Japanese Pre-service English Teachers

Yuji Nakamura

1. Introduction/Background

Globalization and the unprecedented growth of varieties of English call for English Language Teaching (ELT) programs to take into consideration the relevance of World Englishes (WE) to the content and delivery of their curricula (Sadeghpour, 2020). In Japan, a similar idea has been included in the new course of study and the core curriculum of English for as well as the content of the English Linguistics course (cf. MEXT 2021).

A concept of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), refers to the function of English as a contact language in communications involving mainly nonnative users of English from various countries and multilingual backgrounds. Each user brings a variety of English which he or she is most familiar with and employs various strategies to communicate effectively (Sifakis & Tsantila, 2019).

Most recently, ELF is perceived as a highly malleable means of communication which adopts English as its primary vehicle but is appropriated by its users to adapt to the linguistic, pragmatic, and cultural elements for each individual interaction (Jenkins, 2015).

When it comes to ELF in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classroom contexts, what should be taken into account? We need to think about the interfaces of ELF and pedagogy, teacher education, and English language learners (cf. Kordia, 2019).

In Japan, the new Course of Study has gone into effect in elementary school in 2020, will start in junior high school in 2021 and in high school in 2022, where the idea of ELF or EIL (English as an International Language) has been embedded at different stages (cf. NIER 2021). Also, the Ministry of Education, Sports, Science Culture and Technology (MEXT) has also revised the core curriculum in the teacher education program, which states how prospective teachers be trained. And part of it is about the awareness raising of EIL or ELF concept (MEXT 2021).

This paper focuses on ELT in a teacher training program of a university to explore the perceptions of WE/ELF/EIN and related factors of pre-service and in-service teachers. The aims are to examine the extent to which pre-service teachers are aware of the paradigm of WE and to investigate their perceptions of the relevance of WE and cultures to their teaching practices.

2. Purpose of the Study

This paper compares WE/ELF/EIL awareness between Australian In-service English language teachers and Japanese Pre-service English teachers, placing emphasis on what should be considered at English Language teacher training programs. For this analysis, two case studies (the Australian case with in-service teachers was conducted through interviews and the Japanese case with pre-service teachers examined through the questionnaire format) were compared.

By comparing responses in each country from the viewpoint of WE/ELF/EIL, we might find what should be considered when we train pre-service and in-service teachers and when we teach EFL students.

3. A Case Study of Australian in-service teachers (Summary from Sadeghpour, 2020)

For the information of the Australian case, the data and results were taken from Sadeghpour (2020) in a summary format.

Participants: 56 ELICO English language teachers who volunteered to take part in the interviews.

In-service teachers in a special program of English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICO) in Australia, who appreciate the status of English and the multi-varietal nature of interactions, have decided to explore the teachers' perceptions of WE and cultures in teaching English. Their aim is to find the dominant view and position of teachers toward the current landscape of English and the possible grounds for those perceptions (Sadeghpour, 2020).

Their main issues were addressed as follows (Sadeghpour, 2020):

- 1) To what extent are ELICOS teachers aware of the existence of varieties of English and their status (in terms of their growth, and legitimacy) in the world and in Australia?
- 2) What are teachers' perceptions of the relevance of WE and culture (in terms of language and language use) to their pedagogical practices and teaching materials in ELICOS?
- 3) What are the impacts of professional course work, experience as language learners, and con-

textual factors on teachers' perceptions of WE and WE in ELT?

Their findings for each issue are respectively as follows:

Although many participants appear to be acquainted with the notion of WE, their perceptions (in terms of the emergence and the legitimacy of WEs, the ownership of English, and the growth in the number of WEs) remain partial.

More than half of the participants believed that the concept of WE is relevant to ELT. They argued for the authenticity of teaching materials and claimed that teaching resources should represent various Englishes. However, some felt incompetency in teaching more than one variety of English. They also claimed that inclusion of WE would create confusion for language learners, especially at early stages of language learning.

Although exposure to WE increases teachers' awareness of the existence of different varieties of English, it does not guarantee that teachers will endorse the pluricentricity of English and the legitimacy of WE. Therefore, it is imperative that teachers are supported at every level, particularly at the level of classroom implementation (Sadeghpour, 2020).

Some of the significant findings are as follows (Sadgefourt 2020):

All participants pointed out that English is spread to the world and adopted to the world.

The majority of participants were aware of only phonological and lexical variation in WE, and most participants did not recognize the Expanding Circle Englishes as legitimate WE.

All participants unanimously agreed that culture is an inextricable part of language teaching, especially in teaching English as a global language.

All participants confirmed that they integrate culture in their pedagogical practices.

Teacher education programs are encouraged to expose teachers to WE to develop their implicit awareness of WE and integrate linguistic and applied courses which introduce diversity-inclusive paradigms and help teachers teach English as a pluricentric language.

We should notice that teachers who recognized and endorsed the legitimacy of all WE, especially the Expanding Circle Englishes, had received formal education about diversity-inclusive paradigms. Some participants mentioned that they are not integrating WE into their teaching because it is against their students' expectations (Sadgefourt 2020).

4. A Case of Japanese Pre-service Teachers

For the Japanese case, the data and results are based on the questionnaire results administered by the present author.

4.1. Method

Subjects: Pre-service Japanese English language teachers, in other words, Japanese students planning to be English teachers. They are taking teacher training courses conducted in English (N=18).

Instruments: Modified English as an International Language Perception Scale: Modified EILPS (Nakamura et. al, 2019; Nakamura et. al, 2018): 16 items about English as a lingua franca or an international language with a series of statements using a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 “strongly disagree” to 5 “strongly agree”).

The overall results of the questionnaire (Figure 1) show as follows:

The midpoint of the 1–5 scale is 3, so only three items out of 16 are below the midpoint.

Item 11 is idiosyncratically far below the midpoint. All the items (items 1 through 4) in Factor 1 are high above the midpoint.

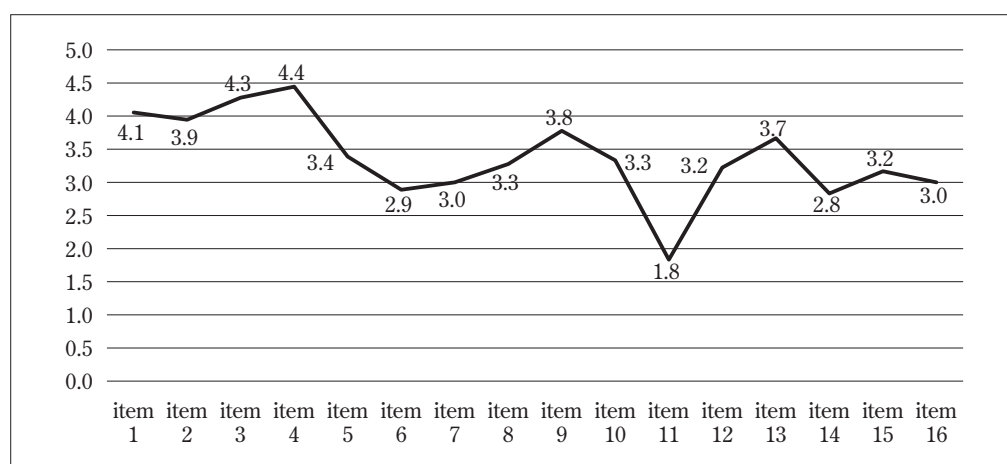


Figure 1 Pre-Service Japanese Teachers of English n=18

Here are the details of the results in terms of each factor.

Factor 1: Open-minded attitudes toward varieties of English accent (OMVE)

	item 1	item 2	item 3	item 4	Mean
n=18	4.1	3.9	4.3	4.4	4.2

- (1) Hong Kong English and Indian English are acceptable today.
- (2) Korean English and Chinese English are acceptable today.
- (3) It is important to understand diverse English accents such as Indian English, French English,

and Chinese English.

- (4) I am open-minded about different varieties of English accents such as Hong Kong English and Korean English.

In Factor 1, Open-minded Attitudes Toward Varieties of English Accent (OMVE), the pre-service teachers' awareness towards the varieties of WE is quite high. Also, they are lenient to the differences of Inner Circle, Outer Circle and Expanding Circle Englishes. It may be they are not so sure about the clear definition of these three Englishes. They are generous and lenient towards the variety of WE. They think it is important to comprehend varieties of English.

Their attitudes towards varieties of English accent are quite tolerant. They highly appreciate this OMVE factor about open-mindedness. The variety of English is significant for these prospective teachers.

Factor 2: Self-confidence for students' own English accents (SCEA)

	item 5	item 6	item 7	item 8	Mean
n=18	3.4	2.9	3.0	3.3	3.1

- (5) It is okay for me to have a local English accent.
- (6) It is okay if people laugh at my English accent because it is my own English.
- (7) Speaking with a local English accent is a great way to express myself.
- (8) I don't need to speak like American or British English speakers as long as people understand my English.

The mean score of four items of Factor 2, Self-confidence for Students' Own English Accents (SCEA) shows that their self-confidence overall about their English is not very low.

Item 5 seems to indicate that if "their English with their local accent is understood", it is OK to have a local accent. They think they need to have more opportunities to experience where they make themselves understood with their local accent.

Item 6 indicates that they do not find being laughed at due to their accent acceptable behavior. As most people would agree, no one feels comfortable if their English is laughed at.

Further, when we look at items 7 and 8, they do not care so much about native-like English speaking as long as their language is comprehensible to English speakers. Since they claim that speaking with a local English variety is a great way to express themselves, teacher education courses should enhance their mindsets by giving many chances where they can have a feeling of accomplishment or success using their local accent.

Factor 3: Generosity towards nonnative-centered teaching (GNNCT)

	item 9	item 10	item 11	item 12	item 13	Mean
n=18	3.8	3.3	1.8	3.2	3.7	3.2

- (9) It is okay for teachers to use listening materials that contain different English accents.
- (10) It is okay for teachers to include the interaction between nonnative English speakers (e.g., Korean-Chinese speakers) in listening materials.
- (11) Teachers shouldn't teach American or British pronunciation as a model.
- (12) Teachers shouldn't push me to speak like a "native" English speaker.
- (13) English teachers don't necessarily be native speakers of American or British English.

Factor 3, Generosity Towards Nonnative-centered Teaching (GNNCT), is crucial for recognizing pre-service students' real intentions as prospective teachers. In this factor (GNNCT), they showed the lowest points in item 11 (American/British pronunciation, native speaker model), while they give high points to other items. This means that they value the variety of English(es) and agree to include a variety of listening materials containing different accents. However, as far as native speaker issue is concerned, they have a different idea. They extremely value the native speakerism as a model pronunciation. Although they think they can express themselves in their local accent, they have little confidence in modeling pronunciation as a prospective teacher.

The results illustrate that relatively speaking, these prospective students tend to put more value on American/British pronunciation than other varieties. They think teachers need to have a model pronunciation (either American or British) and show a native speaker model in English lessons. They agree as prospective teachers that they need a model or standard to show students as a benchmark, even though they value expression in their local accent. Therefore, it seems that they will probably using audio recordings, videos, etc. of native speakers such as American or British. Their responses are quite understandable as teachers, and the issue is how they will deal with students' responses with a local accent after showing the sample native speakers' model. The ultimate issue is whether their English is intelligible or comprehensible in their encounters.

Factor 4: Cross-cultural Communication Strategies (CCS)

	item 14	item 15	item 16	Mean
n=18	2.8	3.2	3.0	3.0

- (14) I can adjust my conversational style according to partner's cultural backgrounds.
- (15) I can behave appropriately according to English users I speak with.

(16) I can explain my own culture clearly in English to people from other cultures.

Factor 4, named Cross-cultural Communication Strategies (CCS) indicates that pre-service students think that they themselves are not able to control their linguistic and cultural skills sufficiently. Presumably, they think they should improve their English proficiency as well as their communication strategies, not only as students now, but also as prospective teachers as well. This phenomenon is quite clearly reflected by lower levels of confidence in their responses in Factor 2 of self-confidence element.

In their future EFL classes where they will be teaching as teachers, content (cross-cultural topics) and language (linguistic and communication skills) should be the target of their lessons. These aspects should be taken into account in their learning as students as well as in their future teaching as teachers. Furthermore, in teacher training courses, the teacher trainer should enhance these competencies of prospective teachers by providing them with opportunities and practices.

4.2. Summary of the factor analysis of Japanese preservice teachers and implications are as follows:

- 1) These preservice teachers are aware of the variety of English and find the significance of WE.
- 2) As they recognize the insufficient capability of language skills (both productive and receptive) and knowledge of cultural aspects of WE, they naturally tend to be less confident about their ELF/EIL/WE competencies.
- 3) They also have rather strong dependency on the Inner Circle native speakers as a role model of teacher pronunciation.
- 4) What is expected of the teacher training programs are: a) to strengthen their language skills using variety of materials, b) to provide more opportunities for preservice teachers to familiarize themselves with variety of English, c) to let them have more confidence in their English use, and d) to let them raise their self-esteem about English communication.

5. Conclusions

The overall results of this comparative study of two teaching contexts show the importance of implementing WE/ELF/EIL awareness in language classrooms, especially in teacher training courses. The results may be highly beneficial for learners and prospective teachers who will have a significant impact on future learners.

We need to keep in mind that ELF-aware teaching does not involve adopting any techniques or practices different from well-established methodologies in ELT. We should rather enrich our

current practices with ELF research results which are relevant to our local contexts in terms of pronunciation teaching or error correction (cf. Kordia, 2019).

Pre-service and in-service teacher training programs should provide opportunities for teachers to a) make their pre-existing perceptions about WE explicit, b) challenge the adequacy of teaching English as a mono-varietal language or as the Inner Circle Englishes, and c) conduct classroom action research to develop their mindsets more appreciative of the diversities in the landscape of English (Sadeghpour, 2020).

Findings of these case studies suggest that teacher education programs which include courses to aim at enhancing teachers' knowledge of WE from all circles (Inner, Outer and Expanding) would provide learners with opportunities to develop their necessary competencies for intercultural communication. These skills and knowledge will eventually enable learners to successfully interact with speakers of various Englishes and negotiate with their interlocutors from different WE countries during international and intercultural communication (cf. Sadeghpour, 2020).

Since it is English teachers, or the prospective English teachers who ultimately decide the extent to which WE/ELF/EIL is relevant to the ELT in their specific contexts of teaching, findings of this type of research should be reflected on their curriculum and their practices (cf. Jenkins, 2012).

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