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ELF Awareness and Teacher Education: A Comparative Study Between Prospective Japanese Teachers of English (PJTE) and International ELF Students (IS)

Yuji Nakamura

1. Introduction/Background

English is a global language and at the same time is embedded in a great variety of social contexts as well as classroom contexts. We have noticed the phenomenal rise of English as a lingua franca (ELF) and as a medium of instruction (Newbold, 2017).

ELF, in its simplest form, 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 considered? We need to think about the interfaces of ELF and pedagogy, teacher education, and English language learners. An implementation of ELF-aware teaching in EFL classrooms will be an integral part of teacher education (cf. Kordia, 2019).

In Japan, the new Course of Study has gone into effect in elementary schools since 2020. It will also start in junior high schools in 2021 and in high schools in 2022. The idea of ELF or EIL (English as an International Language) has been embedded at different learning stages of the Course of Study (cf. NIER, 2021). Also, the Ministry of Education,

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Sports, Science, Culture and Technology (MEXT) has started the core curriculum in the teacher education program, which states how prospective teachers should be trained. Part of this involves raising awareness of EIL or ELF concepts (MEXT 2021).

2. Purpose of the Study

This paper compares ELF awareness between Prospective Japanese Teachers of English (PJTE) and International ELF students (IS), placing emphasis on how EFL teacher trainers can make use of the questionnaire results of the Modified EILPS (English as an International Language Perception Scale) (Nakamura et. al, 2019). In other words, this paper reports on What an ELF-awareness survey tells us about ELF-aware teaching in the classroom contexts.

If an ELF context is an ideal situation for ELF-aware teaching practice, how can an EFL educator accommodate EFL-context students in the classroom? The Modified EILPS questionnaire was designed and administered to understand the differences between International students and Japanese students in an ideal ELF context. By comparing ELF IS and EFL JS responses from the viewpoint of PJTE, we might find what should be considered when we train prospective teachers and when we teach EFL students.

3. Method

a. Subjects: three groups

- 1) (IS) Students from countries belonging to the Inner Circle, Outer Circle and Expanding Circles. Their classes are conducted in English (100%) (N=23).
- 2) (PJTE) Japanese students planning to be English teachers. They are taking teacher training courses conducted in English (N= 18).

b. 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”).

4. Results

The results of the questionnaire show that there is a difference among the two groups (IS, and PJTE) regarding ELF awareness (Figure 1). IS and PJTE indicate similarities towards ELF-awareness items. There are, however, some crucial differences between the two groups primarily concerning native vs nonnative teacher issues and cross-cultural strategies.

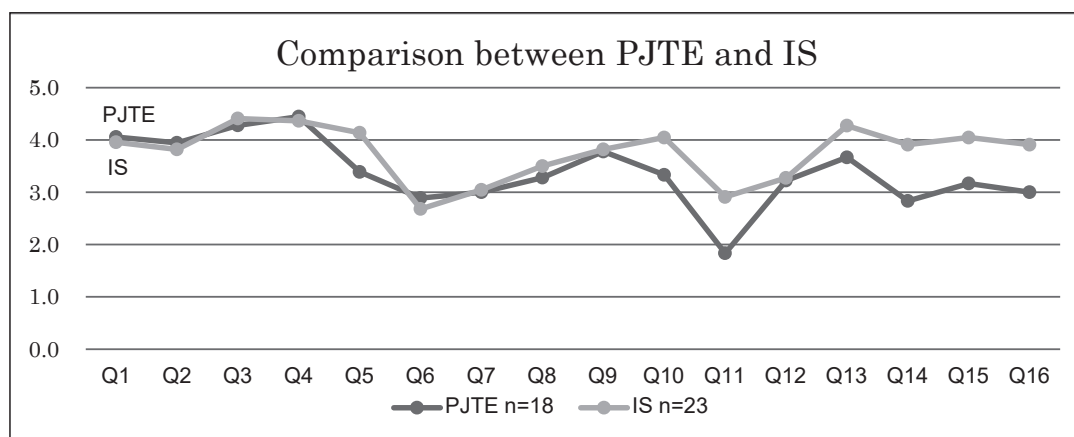


Figure 1

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

a. Open-minded attitudes toward varieties of English accent (OMVE)

		item 1	item 2	item 3	item 4
PJTE	n=18	4.1	3.9	4.3	4.4
IS	n=23	4.0	3.8	4.4	4.4

- (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.

The first factor is named Open-minded Attitudes Toward Varieties of English Accent (OMVE). Overall PJTE and IS share almost the same value towards OMVE factor items. As a whole, IS and PJTE showed a rather similar pattern (showing higher points) on

this factor (open-mindedness towards varieties of English accents). In other words, their attitudes towards varieties of English accent are more tolerant. Especially, concerning Item 1 (English in Outer-circle countries) and Item 2 (English in expanding-circle countries), they recognize the significance of the variety.

b. Self-confidence for students' own English accents (SCEA)

		item 5	item 6	item 7	item 8
PJTE	n=18	3.4	2.9	3.0	3.3
IS	n=23	4.1	2.7	3.0	3.5

(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 second factor is called Self-confidence for Students' Own English Accents (SCEA). In this factor (SCFA), the general trend of the two groups is nearly identical except Item 5. This is probably because IS students have had more successful experiences with their local English in a variety of contexts. So, for them, provided that "their English with their local accent is understood", it is acceptable to have a local accent. From Japanese students' viewpoints, they need to have more opportunities where they can make themselves understood with their local accent.

In Item 6, both groups have low points. This indicates that they do not find being laughed at due to their accent acceptable behavior. As a common knowledge, no one feels comfortable if their English is laughed at.

Further, when we look at Items 7 and 8, neither group cares about native-like English speaking as long as their language is comprehensible to English speakers. Because both groups agree that speaking with a local English variety is a great way to express themselves, teacher education courses enhance their mindsets by giving many chances where they can have a feeling of accomplishment or success with their local accent.

c. Generosity towards nonnative-centered teaching (GNNCT)

		item 9	item 10	item 11	item 12	item 13
PJTE	n=18	3.8	3.3	1.8	3.2	3.7
IS	n=23	3.8	4.0	2.9	3.3	4.3

(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 is named Generosity Towards Nonnative-Centered Teaching (GNNCT). Factor 3 is crucial for recognizing PJTE students' real intentions as prospective teachers. In this factor (GNNCT), PJTE showed the lowest points in item 11 (American/British pronunciation, native speaker model).

Both give high points for each item, except item 11. This means that they both value the variety of English(es) and agree with including a variety of listening materials containing different accents. However, concerning the native speaker issue, they have a different idea, especially in the case of the PJTE students. They highly value the native speakerism as a model pronunciation. Although they think they can express themselves in their local accent, they have little confidence in a model pronunciation as a prospective teacher.

The results illustrate that relatively speaking, PJTE tend to put more value on American/British pronunciation than other varieties. PJTE students 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 if indicated in previous factors that they value expression in their local accent. Therefore, it seems that they will probably use American or British pronunciation or a native speaker model using audio recordings, videos, etc. 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. Currently in their teacher training classes, they must be trained to be

mindful of ELF-aware teaching methods to address this need.

d. Cross-cultural Communication Strategies (CCS)

		item 14	item 15	item 16
PJTE	n=18	2.8	3.2	3.0
IS	n=23	3.9	4.0	3.9

(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 is named Cross-cultural Communication Strategies (CCS). Three items in this factor indicate that PJTE students think, compared with IS students, 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. This phenomenon is quite clearly reflected in the lower confidence indicated by their responses in factor 2 of the self-confidence element.

In their future EFL classes where PJTE will be teaching, content (cross-cultural topics) and language (linguistic and communication skills) should be the target of their lessons. These aspects should be considered 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.

5. Conclusion and Implication

The overall results show that PJTE and IS had similar attitudes towards the ELF awareness items. However, rather interestingly, in three items (local English accent, American/British pronunciation, native speaker model), PJTE had rather different responses. The results show us the importance of implementing ELF-aware teaching in language classrooms, especially in teacher training courses. ELF-aware teaching may be highly beneficial for learners and prospective teachers who will have a significant impact on future learners.

As the results of Factor 3 show us, the key issue is whether their English

is intelligible or comprehensible. PJTE will hopefully be tolerant of a variety of their students' Englishes in their future classes. For this future classroom context, current teacher education classes should try to foster understanding attitudes toward ELF varieties under the condition of intelligible English or comprehensible English.

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

In their future EFL classes, content (cross-cultural topics) and language (linguistic and communication skills) should be taken into account in ELF-aware teaching. Furthermore, in teacher training courses, the teacher trainer should assist prospective teachers in developing in these content and language competencies by considering ELF-aware teaching.

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