

# An Investigation Into Foreign Pre-Service Teacher's Intelligibility in an International Teaching Program

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## ABSTRACT

In this globalization era, schools have grown diverse where in one classroom both teachers and students do not share the same language and culture. This condition gains interests from pre-service teachers to be participating in international teaching practicum programs. To be successful in this program, teachers are required to acquire the requisite abilities to teach both linguistically and culturally diverse classroom. This issue highlights the interaction between students and teachers when both sides have different linguistic and cultural background. Thus, this study intends to see the pre-service teacher's intelligibility, which is important to see the success of learning and teaching process in the classroom. This study also aims to check how the pre-service teacher overcomes the challenges in communication within foreign country. The participants of this study are a foreign pre-service teacher with both linguistically and culturally diverse background and Indonesian junior high school students grade VII. This study employs qualitative case study design, with multiple sources to gather the data needed such as classroom observation and interview. The data analysis is expected to reveal the level of intelligibility from the pre-service teacher who is participating in the international teaching program and the elaboration from how to overcome the challenges within international communication during the teaching and learning process in the classroom.

**Keywords:** *Intelligibility, International teaching practicum, Teaching practice*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Schools have grown diverse in the last three decades, resulting in considerable interest among pre-service teachers in joining international teaching practicum programs (Kim & Choi, 2020). Teachers need to excel the abilities to teach linguistically and culturally diverse classroom in order to succeed in unfamiliar teaching environments (Kim & Choi, 2019). Intercultural communication has become one of many important skills which pre-service teachers need to acquire because the classrooms might have students with different sociocultural and sociolinguistic backgrounds. The awareness of English varieties will have risen from this context, since the international communication might happen between pre-service teacher and the students within the classroom. However, because of the differences which both pre-service teacher and the students have, it is inevitable to have misunderstandings within the interaction. Thus, the term intelligibility is highlighted in this study under English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and World Englishes (WE) to see the pre-

service teacher's interaction and teaching practice in the classroom.

Kachru's (1992) WE framework is associated with the emergence of English varieties around the world, which include three country groups: The Inner Circle (Australia, UK, and USA), the Outer Circle (e.g. Singapore and the Philippines) and the Expanding Circle (e.g. Indonesia and Korea). Many studies have been conducted within WE framework in Asia, with various topics such as World Englishes and English as a lingua franca (Ishikawa, 2016) and World Englishes and international intelligibility (Bayyurt, 2018; Berns, 2018). Thus, World Englishes has become a popular scope for language experts in conducting their study.

As multicultural and multilingual communication thrive across the three circles, English has been marked as a global language (Crystal, 2003), an international language (Sharifian, 2009), and a lingua franca (Kirkpatrick, 2010). The traditional statuses of English, such as English as a native language (ENL), English as a second language (EFL), and English as a foreign language (EFL), are taken over by these universal labels.

However, the labels are criticized for the semantic ambiguity, as the diversity in English pronunciation might create a shift in English language education (Kachru, 1992). Among these universal labels, the two widely known labels linked to the investigation are English as an international language (EIL) and English as a lingua franca (ELF). This study employs the second label, ELF, as it highlights the pronunciation and the intelligibility within the framework in international teaching practicum.

Many studies have conducted around the ELF framework, investigating different aspects and issues around the intelligibility issue, especially the pronunciation (O'Neal, 2015; Ren, Chen, & Lin.; 2016) and the classroom practice adapting the ELF framework (Kohn, 2015; Lopriore & Vettorel, 2015). However, not many studies have explored the intelligibility teaching practice within classroom, revolving around ELF framework (Lim, 2016), especially for a native pre-service teacher teaching in an expanding country which English implementation is scarce in the society. Thus, this study aims to explore a native pre-service teacher's intelligibility practice within the English classroom in Indonesian junior high school. The pre-service teacher's understanding about international intelligibility in pronunciation teaching and the English norm that he adopts in the teaching practice are investigated further in this study.

The discussion about intelligibility construct differs from the point of view, for instance EFL and ELF context. This means that each context has their own criteria. Within EFL context, the intelligibility is examined through the NES perspective who depicts the non-native English speaker's (NNES) intelligible speech by the suprasegmental features (Jenkins, 1988). Within ELF context, Jenkins (2006) proposes the basis of phonological features which needs to be considered to carry out the success of communication among non-native speakers of English from different L1s.

## **2. METHOD**

### ***2.1 Research Design***

This study aims to investigate the pre-service teacher's intelligibility practice in the classroom within international teaching practicum context. The method applied in this study was qualitative, with descriptive analysis design was used to explore the data in detailed description. The data collected was in-depth analysed, producing description of the data. This study was conducted during the pre-service teacher's stay in Bandung, during the program's duration.

### ***2.2 Participant***

The participant of this study was a foreign pre-service teacher, a Chinese-American who was studying in Japan for four years, then came to Indonesia to join SEA Teacher Program. The pre-service teacher under a pseudonym Barry was in his fourth year to complete his psychology degree. The participant was taken in this study considering his multilingual and multicultural background which fit the framework of this study. In Indonesia, he was assigned to teach English in a prestigious private junior high school grade seven.

### ***2.3 Data Collection Procedure***

Pertaining to the research design, which is descriptive qualitative, the researcher employed two instruments, namely classroom observations and interview. The researcher joined the English classes, setting two cameras to record the whole learning processes which became the support of the data gathered. The researcher also tried not to interrupt the whole learning process by staying in the corner of the room whilst taking notes.

Before collecting the data, permission from the school and the students were collected. The consent from the pre-service teacher was also obtained before processing to the school, as he was the main participant of this study. The recording of the teaching practicum and the interview were also obtaining permissions from the participants. The classroom observation was conducted to see the pre-service teacher's teaching intelligibility practice and the interview was conducted to see the pre-service teacher's view towards international intelligibility.

### ***2.4 Data Analysis***

The data of this study was analysed descriptively to identify the information given in-depth collected from the participants. The data then analysed using the relevant experts' opinions regarding the international intelligibility practice and the ELF field.

## **3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The investigation towards a foreign pre-service teacher's intelligibility within international teaching practicum highlights three points from the findings, which are the teacher's goal in pronunciation, the teacher's NES and NNES stance, and the teacher's attitude towards varieties of English. The elaboration for each point follows below.

The first finding is about the pre-service teacher's goal in teaching pronunciation within international intelligibility context. While the literature review comprises an elaboration about the intelligibility as the goal of teaching pronunciation, in his teaching practicum Barry explained that he wanted the students to have an

accurate pronunciation for English, especially their newly learned vocabularies during the day. It was apparent on the observation of the teaching practicum, how he always fixed the students' pronunciation of the new vocabularies and encouraged them to repeat after him for the correct way to say the word until they got it correctly. During the learning process, Barry usually would write the new vocabulary first on the board before showing the correct pronunciation. He wanted to know how students pronounced the word for the first time without his assistance, then guiding them to the right pronunciation by repeating the word after him.

**Excerpt 1**

B: "I personally think that I want my students to have good English pronunciation with a good accent. Maybe because I'm a native speaker and I'm a Chinese-American, on top of that."

From the interview, Barry stated that he was brought up in the USA, which caused him to acquire the native-like English since he moved there when he was five years old from China. His educational background and his environment made him automatically lean to the NES norm as the pronunciation goal's instruction when he was teaching in Indonesia. He also stated that the stress and the correct way of producing sound are important in English pronunciation. Despite his awareness to the fact that Indonesian students are not English speakers, he stated that he would like the students to still acquire the right pronunciation which is close to the NES norm. It was inevitable for him to have the mindset because of the background.

**Table 1.** Teacher's Intervention in Student's Pronunciation and Their Mode of Correction

Mode of Correction	Separated Instances
Direct correction, repetition	Barry: [writes "confident" on the board] What is it?
	Student: /'kon.fə.dənt/
	Barry: It's /'kɑ:n.fə.dənt/
	Student: /'kon.fə.dənt/
	Barry: /'kɑ:n.fə.dənt/
	Student: /'kɑ:n.fə.dənt/

As seen in Table 1, the pre-service teacher gave the students the chance to show their ability to pronounce the English word based on their knowledge first. Then, he helped the students to fix their pronunciation by directly providing the right pronunciation and made them repeat the word until they got the right pronunciation.

The second finding is about the pre-service teacher's stance regarding the NES vs NNES norm adopted in the teaching practice. Regarding Barry's stance in NES vs NNES norm in teaching practice, it is clearly stated that he prefers to adopt the NES norm in his teaching practice.

As an American, it is natural for him to adopt the norm since his educational, linguistic, and cultural background are all leaning towards the NES norm. However, his preference towards NES norm does not mean that he disregards the NNES norm. He acknowledges that the NNES norm has become popular within English language teaching (ELT) context, especially those who are from expanding circle countries, including Indonesia. He knows that the English learning scene nowadays has a more realistic goal which is international intelligibility, rather than to sound like a NES. He sees the change in a positive light as it helps people to be encouraged in learning and practicing English more without having the worry to make mistakes in pronunciation or the grammar. However, he still stands on his stance to lean more towards NES norm as he considers it to be important especially for test takers (e.g. TOEFL and IELTS tests).

**Excerpt 2**

B: "Of course, as a native speaker who grew up in the US I inevitably pick up the norm and implement it in my teaching practice. I also know that my students are not native speakers, but I want them to learn English well. But then, I won't force them to have the exact same accent like native-speakers. I think I'm lenient when it comes to the evaluation, as long as they have the courage to speak, I really appreciate that."

In line to the NES norm, Barry identifies himself as a native-speaker even though his first language is Chinese. He elaborates that he learned Chinese first when he was learning to speak as he was still living in the country before he moved to the US. The reason why he identifies himself as a native-speaker is because English is the language that he is most comfortable with. He does not speak Chinese in his daily life except to his parents and relatives and that makes his Chinese deteriorate.

The third finding is about the pre-service teacher's attitude about English varieties. In regard to the English varieties, Barry expressed his positive attitudes and acknowledges other English accents aside from the standard English (NES norm).

**Excerpt 3**

B: "Of course I know English varieties like Singlish, Chinese English, and I think I listened to African English before. It's good to know that people all around the world have their own unique accent and some of them have different vocabulary mixed with the local language like Singaporeans or Malaysians."

He mentioned in the interview that he did not mind with accented English as long as the utterances were intelligible enough for him to understand. In this context, the term intelligibility means that the words are clear enough to be recognizable and understood. However, in his teaching practice he compromised the English varieties in communication context. When it came to

showcasing students' ability, he would use the NES norm and parameter to measure the students' ability, even though he did not strictly apply the parameter and let some slips and mistakes done by the students in English pronunciation and grammar. He highlighted students' courage in speaking English more than obtaining the perfect English pronunciation like what he wanted initially.

Excerpt 4

B: "I know Indonesia has hundreds of local languages and the students inside the classroom might be from different places, especially the parents..."

Barry also mentioned how he acknowledged that Indonesian students might have linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds. How students produced and pronounced English words might be influenced by the local language, thus the accent. He also gave a remark about Indonesian's English in general, how it sounded clearer among Asian countries. Barry praised Indonesian for having good articulation and pronunciation among other Asian countries. That is also why he thought that he did not need to fix the students' pronunciation a lot because their ability in speaking English is beyond his expectation. For their level of education, the students have showcased incredible fluency in speaking English with minor mistakes. However, there also were students who did not have the courage to speak English in the class, especially when it came to communicating with his as he was the native speaker. He noticed how some students might be nervous and were afraid to speak English because of the accent. In other words, Barry was in a positive light towards the English varieties which happened within the classroom and outside the classroom during his stay in Indonesia.

Going through the findings, there are many things which are contradicting to the theories. The first one is about the pronunciation goal which ideally refers to the international intelligibility, as Indonesian students are not native speakers. The pre-service teacher aims for the NES norm as the goal with the correct way in pronouncing the word according to the standard American English. This finding is in line to Huensch's (2018) study where the teachers are viewing NES norm as the goal of pronunciation instruction despite promoting intelligibility as the goal. They stated that the NES norm was more desirable as a person with a good English should have pronunciation like a native speaker. The findings show the tension between the ideal goal which is the intelligibility, and the reality which is the NES norm. Uchida and Sugimoto (2019) also show the same result, as the majority of the English teachers wanted to acquire the standard American English accent and fluency in speaking English despite their lack of confidence in speaking the language. This phenomenon shows how intelligibility has been widely promoted and accepted within ELT context, however the majority of

both the teachers and the students still rely on the NES norm as it has been going as the parameter in learning English for decades.

The talk between NES vs NNES model has been there within ELT context for decades. The findings show how the pre-service teacher firmly takes his stance on the NES model because of his personal background. However, many previous studies reveal how both teachers and learners still favour the NES norm because of the accuracy and the standard English language (Guest, 2018; Wang & Jenkins, 2016). The studies show that L2 learners still desire to acquire the standardized English as they deem it to be more prestigious and the English tests are mostly leaning towards the NES norm. Besides, there is no standardized English tests which adapt the NNES model available up to this day.

However, as the interest towards ELF study has increased, there are many scholars who propose assessments to assess English in ELF area. This also means that the criteria for assessing English fluency does not rely on NES norm, like TOEFL and IELTS as the tests which are mostly used to measure learners' fluency. In Ockey and Hirsch's (2020) study, and oral assessment was proposed to measure NNES English adhering ELF principles. However, even though most part of the test catered to EFL principles, it was agreed that the experts could not determine to what extent the test assessed ELF. Agreement about the critical ELF aspects was called upon for future studies, as the proposal could be the starting point to actually employ ELF in reality, not only as a concept for NNES.

Regarding the English varieties, there are many studies which show the same result as the findings. As Barry has positive attitudes towards English varieties and acknowledges the existence, he still stands on his stance for preferably not implementing it in his English classroom. This goes in line with Khatib's and Monfared's (2017) study, Lee (2019), and Monfared's and Khatib's (2018) study which also show the same result. Teachers mostly have positive attitudes towards the existence of English varieties, however, when it comes to the learning goal, they still opt to have the standardized American or British English. They acknowledge the varieties in a more casual setting rather than in an academic setting. The decision is also encouraged by the reality which still does not provide a suitable assessment to assess English varieties. As they are many factors contribute to the variety, it is difficult to determine the principles and criteria in assessment which embrace the varieties existing.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings of this study showed the pre-service teacher's goal in teaching intelligibility, the stance between the NES and NNES, and his attitude

towards English varieties. While he had positive perception towards international intelligibility and acknowledged linguistic difference between native and non-native English speakers, he wanted the students to acquire the correct pronunciation as the learning goal. His view and decision were driven by his background as a native English speaker, even though the first language that he learned was Chinese. Spending longer time in the US has affected in his decision makings.

Second, as the pre-service teacher had positive attitude towards English varieties, he remained holding onto NES norm in learning context. However, he was an open-minded person as he acknowledged the language diversity that the students might have, as most of them spoke two languages at least. Thus, the pre-service teacher also did not mind with accented pronunciation, even though he still hoped for the students to pronounce English words that they learned accurately. He also made an acknowledgement how Indonesian English sounded clear enough for him to get the message relied, especially in his daily interaction with the locals. He even admitted that upon his arrival to Indonesia, he did not expect Indonesian to be well spoken in English.

This study only took the pre-service teacher's view and insight towards international intelligibility. The students' view towards intelligibility was not explored, as its main focus was to the pre-service teacher. This study provided a view towards the reality check in English learning, whether the standard in English fluency has changed or not after the promotion of English varieties and ELF. The result showed that albeit frequently promoted and studies, English varieties and ELF were not yet desirable in English classroom context. The absence of standardized assessment to ELF could be the factor to the situation. It is recommended for future studies to explore the proposals in assessing ELF and the development of the existing idea. More participants as in pre-service teachers can be obtained to enrich the data.

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