



Indonesian EFL Learners' Preferences Toward English Accents: British vs Indonesian Accents

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Abstract. Reflecting on previous studies, this research discusses the impact of World Englishes and the sociocultural factors that shape students' attitudes towards their own accents and native accents. This study examines how English Department students in Indonesia perceive native-speakerism and its impact on their perception of Indonesian English, a term that refers to the variety of English spoken in Indonesia, and British English accents. The study highlights how the idea of native speakers as the ideal language learning model influences students' perceptions, specifically emphasizing British English accent. The research employed a qualitative design with semi-structured interviews as its data collection technique involving six participants—two graduate and four undergraduate students—to explore their preferences and perceptions regarding Indonesian English and British English. The findings of the study reveal that although Indonesian English accents are more favored in terms of comfort and flexibility, the British English accent is still regarded as higher in prestige than the non-native or Indonesian accent. This study provides new insights into the impact of native speakerism on EFL students' English language learning.

Keywords: Native speakerism, accent, English accent, EFL, native accent

1. Introduction

The widely-known ideology of “native-speakerism” in English language learning and teaching is defined by the idea that “native-speaker” are the ideal representatives of the Western culture and therefore, act as an exemplary source of English language learning and teaching (Holliday, 2006). The native speakerism phenomenon is commonly found in countries with English as a foreign language (EFL) such as Indonesia. Native speakerism can be seen as a stereotype between Indonesian EFL learners; speaking English with a certain accent or near-native proficiency means someone is well educated. On the contrary, Indonesian students who speak with an Indonesian English accent have negative views towards their own accent as found through a research conducted by Dharma and Rudianto (2013). According to Dharma and Rudianto (2013), Indonesian EFL learners who speak in an Indonesian English accent stated that their accent needs improvement, not clear, and not good enough.

This stereotype stems from one of the many effects of Westernization. The fracture of family groups, a decrease in parental authority, and the intentional implementation of Western family structures and social reforms are a few of the issues Westernization brings (Ata, 1984). With the influence of Western culture, Indonesians have been shifting their culture and social form according to Western cultures, including the ones that defy the norms and religious orders in Indonesia. One of the most prominent effects of Westernization is the shift in language use in Indonesia, most commonly in metropolitan areas. Athar (2022) claims that the impacts of Westernization are strongly seen in urban areas rather than rural areas. Urban areas offer better chances, facilities, and quality of life because they are more developed (Athar, 2022). Moreover, since urban areas are home to a large number of private educational institutions that draw young people from surrounding rural areas, it makes urban areas the center of socialization (Athar, 2022). Therefore, Indonesians in urban areas are more likely to use English on a daily basis, code-switching, and/or code-mixing.

As a country with English as a foreign language, mastering to speak English with a near-native proficiency is oftentimes seen as “cool”, “educated”, and “trendy”. This statement was proven through research conducted by Dharma and Rudianto (2013) where native accents are perceived to sound good and indicate higher education. In fact, 100% of participants of that research thought native accents sounded good, and 95% of participants said they sound educated (Dharma & Rudianto, 2013). Speaking English with a near-native proficiency can also act as an indicator of someone who is well-educated. Most Indonesians living in the capital city or metropolitan areas are more likely to receive a higher quality of education, which results in a higher percentage of mastering English with a near-native proficiency. There is no doubt that Indonesians living in urban areas have a higher capability to speak in near-native accent since these Indonesians are more open to global communication. A lot of these Indonesians are willing to practice their English accent, specifically British, because British accent is identical to elegance, prestige, and luxury. A survey of categorizing British accents was conducted by Giles (1970); a clear proof in favor of a hierarchy of prestige was found as a correspondence to the social foundations of accent prestige in Britain. Giles (1970) discovered that received pronunciation (RP), Scots, Southern Irish, and few foreign accents are categorized as the first class of prestige hierarchy in British accents. Many western movies also portray how these “first class” British accents are linked to people of luxury or prestige as depicted in a famous Western series ‘*Bridgerton*’.

As British accents have a significant impact on someone's status along with the globalization of Western movies, a lot of Indonesian EFL learners are trying to reach the native-like proficiency, especially students specializing in English-related majors. Most English Study Program students feel the need to reach native-like fluency in pronunciation and accent in order to “complete” their position as an English student. Not only does the pressure stem from the fact that they are specializing in English, but also the stereotype where students specializing in English should have native-like proficiency level by the end

of their study. The pressure and stereotypes given to English Study Program students may lead them to continuous effort in perfecting their accents. Therefore, it may lead to native speakerism, where they see that using the “standard” accent of English is better than using an Indonesian English accent. This possibility leads to the gap in this research field that will be further discussed in this research.

Aside from the stereotype influencing the native speakerism phenomenon among English Study Program students, another aspect, such as the desire to identify oneself as “native-like” (Inbar-Lourie, 2005, as cited in Lowe & Kiczowski, 2016), also influences native speakerism among EFL students. This desire can be found in recent studies that emphasize how students often perceive native accents—particularly British and American—as more prestigious and desirable. A study by Yuwita and Ambarwati (2023) discovered that university students have stronger preference for native English accents, associating them with higher social prestige and professional opportunities. Participants in their research stated that they have the desire to speak like native speakers in order to enhance their communication prospects and have better confidence in using English.

Another factor that supports native speakerism among EFL students is the behaviorism learning method that Indonesians have been receiving since early education in English. According to Vygotsky (1978), mind and language are tightly connected, one influencing and forming the other. Therefore, language learning is a process that happens as a result of social contact. Students are exposed to English accents through the following primaries: direct interaction with English-speaking nations and indirect interaction through viewing English-language TV shows and movies without dubbing (Mardijono, 2005). Vygotsky (1978) stated that having cultural aspects involved in the process is crucial since EFL students can interact with the “native speakers” of that language. Recent research by Kung and Wang (2019) highlights the role of cultural media in learners’ accent preferences, the research indicates that exposure to Western media significantly influences students’ attitudes towards accent acquisition. They found that many EFL learners develop a preference for native-like accents after their encounters with English through media sources, which often depict these accents as standard or ideal. Since Western movies have been pretty popular in Indonesia, a lot of Indonesians start to imitate how the characters speak in aspects such as pronunciations and accents. Most Indonesians see Western movies as the “correct” source of English speaking, native speakerism stems from this factor as a lot of Indonesian EFL learners have been taught that the way these “native speakers” speak is the correct way to speak English.

On the contrary, for some Indonesian EFL learners, using British accents may be challenging, especially if they are closely linked to Indonesian regional accents. Most of them may not be exposed to Westernization a lot, especially in rural areas (Athar, 2022), or if they do, they have difficulties in switching between regional accents and English accents. EFL students who speak in an Indonesian English accent may feel anxious due to the pressuring stereotype of English Study Program students. This anxiety is supported by findings from Yuwita and Ambarwati (2023), the research suggests that negative attitudes

towards non-native accents can lead to feelings of incompetence among learners who do not adjust to the idealized native-like pronunciation.

This research aims to fill in the gap surrounding this field by taking an in-depth analysis of English Study Program students' perspectives between Indonesian English and British English. Using a qualitative method, this research discovered answers to the following inquiries: preferences and superiority between Indonesian English and British English, English Study Program students' perception on British accent, and the necessity of having "native-like" accent on their image as English Study Program students. The motivation for this research is drawn from the findings of Yuwita and Ambarwati (2023) and Kung and Wang (2019), which highlight the various attitudes of EFL learners towards their own accents and native English accents, emphasizing the sociocultural factors that shape these views. Therefore, these questions helped the researcher to identify the existence and the role of native speakerism towards the academic and social aspects of students in the English Study Program.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 World Englishes in Native Speakerism

The ideology of native speakerism is deeply rooted in Indonesian EFL learners. One of the prominent factors is the indirect interaction with English through exposure to English-language TV shows, movies, and other media (Mardijono, 2005). This media exposure often presents English as spoken by idealized native speakers, strengthening the idea that native speaker English is superior. Another factor is the reliance on "native speaker-based" teaching materials in Indonesia's English language education system. Many ELT textbooks used in non-English speaking countries, including Indonesia, are produced in English-speaking countries. (Fitzgibbon, 2013; Litz, 2005; Melliti, 2013, as cited in Kirana & Methitham, 2022). These textbooks are developed by the idealized native English speakers (NES) which supports the native speakerism ideology (Gray, 2002; Litz, 2005 as cited in Kirana & Methitham, 2022).

To understand why native speakerism exists in Indonesia, it is essential to take a look at Kachru's (1990) model of the three circles of English, which categorizes countries based on the status of the English language in these countries. Countries in the inner circle, such as the UK, US, and Australia, use English as their primary language, and their citizens are considered native speakers. Meanwhile Indonesia is part of the expanding circle, where English is taught as a foreign language and is not commonly used in daily communication. Unlike countries in the outer circle, such as Singapore, where English has been adapted as a second language due to colonization, Indonesia does not go through a similar process in adapting the English language. This limited exposure to English contributes to Indonesia's

education system's strong reliance on native speaker-based teaching materials, as they view native speakers as the most authentic model for English language learning and teaching.

Kachru (1990) argues that English is no longer the sole property of inner circle native speakers; it has been nativized and adapted in outer and expanding circle countries. However, native speaker models continue to dominate English language teaching, especially in expanding circle countries like Indonesia. Studies have shown that both students and teachers, if they are given the choice, prefer inner circle accents, particularly British and American English (Dirham, 2022). The dominance of native speakerism in ELT has far-reaching implications for countries like Indonesia, where inner circle accents, particularly British and American English, continue to be the preferred model in teaching materials and classroom instruction. Despite the global spread of English and the increasing recognition of acculturated varieties, native speaker-based ideologies remain strong, shaping the attitudes and preferences of both learners and teachers in Indonesian EFL contexts (Kirana & Methitham, 2022).

2.2 Native Speakerism and Its Influence Towards Perceptions and Preferences

The perception of English native speakers as "superior" is often linked to how their accents, particularly British ones, are viewed. Observing how an individual applies certain accents to their English speaking strongly influences one's perception of the speaker's image (Tévar, 2015). Diversity in accent is crucial due to the fact that people have linked different images to different accents (Stockwell, 2002, as cited in Tévar, 2015). A study by Yuwita and Ambarwati (2023) found that Indonesian university students see native English accents, especially British, as more prestigious. Participants described British accents as "formal" and "classy," implying the connection between accent and social status. Similarly, Kung and Wang (2019) reported that 76% of participants desired to have native-like accents, specifically mentioning British and American accents.

Western movies have also contributed to the stereotype in Indonesia that speaking with a British accent reflects high education and social status. Indonesians who adopt native-like British accents may be viewed as part of the upper class. This belief extends into the world of English education in Indonesia; learners with near-native proficiency are more regarded by teachers and peers, even though achieving perfect native-like fluency is not quite necessary for foreign learners. The growing influence of Westernization has led Indonesian EFL learners to prioritize native-like accents over regional varieties when speaking English. Research by Dharma and Rudianto (2013) supports this, showing that 95-100% of Indonesian EFL learners found native accents pleasant and associated them with education and status. Additionally, 27% viewed their own Indonesian English accent negatively, believing it needed improvement. This reinforces the stereotype that British accents symbolize intelligence, success, and prestige (Giles & Powesland, 1975; Giles & Coupland, 1991, as cited in Tévar, 2015).

2.3 The Role of Native Speakerism on Students' Academic Prospects

The daily academic pressures faced by English Department students are closely tied to expectations around English speaking proficiency. These students often encounter the stereotype that they must speak English “perfectly,” using native English accents instead of regional Indonesian ones. English Department students often feel pressured to attain native-like accents, which are seen as the ideal for English proficiency in Indonesia. If students fail to demonstrate excellent native-like speaking ability, their competence as English majors may be questioned by both society and themselves. This pressure aligns with the desire to be seen as “native-like” (Inbar-Lourie, 2005, as cited in Lowe & Kiczowski, 2016), as English Department students are often perceived as models of “authentic” English accents in Indonesia.

Students in metropolitan areas tend to have more opportunities to develop native-like English accents, particularly British accents, due to better access to education, facilities, and media (Athar, 2022). In these areas, exposure to international media and social interactions with parents or peers contributes in forming the habit of speaking English both inside and outside the classroom. This supports Vygotsky's (1978) behaviorist theory, where social interaction plays an essential role in language learning, and Western media exposure allows students to engage with native speakers indirectly (Giles, 1970).

In contrast, rural EFL students face different challenges. The strong usage of local dialects in daily life limits their exposure to English outside the classroom, making it harder to develop native-like proficiency (Athar, 2022). These students may struggle to adapt to native speaker standards used in Indonesia's English education. Silalahi (2019) argues that native speaker-focused teaching is only truly effective when students have developed a solid linguistics foundation in the language. The pressure to conform to native speaker standards can create anxiety and self-doubt, as suggested by Yuwita and Ambarwati's (2023) research, which found that learners who do not adopt native-like pronunciation often feel inadequate or less competent. Additionally, the use of native speaker models in teaching can create feelings of inferiority among students, particularly those from rural areas, potentially leading to discrimination between native and local accent speakers (Dey, Amelia, & Herawati, 2023).

In conclusion, English Department students in Indonesia often face pressure to achieve native-like proficiency, particularly in using British accents, due to societal expectations and the ideology of native speakerism. Students in metropolitan areas have more opportunities to adopt native accents through better access to education and media, while rural students struggle due to limited exposure. Native speaker standards in English teaching can create feelings of inferiority and discrimination among students, with native-like accents seen as symbols of prestige, education, and social status.

3. Methodology

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This study applies a qualitative thematic approach to explore participants’ perspectives on British English accents. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying and interpreting patterns or “themes” in qualitative data, offering flexibility in coding and theme development while involving the researcher’s participation (Clarke & Braun, 2016). It helps organize observations into meaningful units relevant to the research questions, rather than just summarizing content. This approach works with various data sizes and types, from small case studies to large interviews, and allows for understanding participants’ thoughts, feelings, and behaviors across different contexts.

The data used to obtain answers in this research are taken from transcripts of interview recordings containing answers from the participants of this research. Therefore, in order to obtain relevant data, the data source for this research is taken from six Indonesian English literature majors. Convenient sampling was used in this study where participants were given the opportunity to voluntarily join the study at their convenience. In this study, convenient sampling was employed as the method for participant selection. This approach was chosen due to its practicality. Participants were selected based on their accessibility and willingness to participate in the research. The recruitment process allowed individuals to join the study at their convenience voluntarily. While this method is practical, it is important to acknowledge the potential limitations, such as the less generalizability of the findings.

Table 1. Participants’ Background

No.	Participant	Age	Semester	Education
1.	H.S	21	7	English Program
2.	G.C	20	5	English Program
3.	D.N	20	5	English Program
4.	N.P.A	21	7	English Program
5.	I.	22	9	English Program
6.	A.	22	9	English Program

The data were collected through a semi-structured interview, where participants were interviewed separately. Six interview questions (see Appendix I) were used for this research’s interview and are categorized into these three categories:

- 1) **Accent Preferences.** Participants were asked to share their view and preferences between Indonesian English and British English, along with their image of both accents' speakers.
- 2) **Accent Representation.** Participants were asked to share their overview of the British accent from the experiences they gain either in early education, sociocultural settings, or real-life situations.
- 3) **Accent Mastery and Identity.** Participants were asked to share if the impact of having near-native proficiency escalates their reputation as an English Department student in society or not.

The sub-categorization and the interview questions used in this research is adapted from a similar study conducted by Yuwita and Ambarwati (2023). Sub-categorizing the interview questions supported the researcher's aim of obtaining detailed data that is relevant to the research questions. The researcher used an abductive thematic analysis method to analyze participants' answers, focusing on identifying themes, patterns, and relationships in the data. This method allows for flexible interpretation, switching between theory and data as new insights emerge. By employing a thematic analysis, the researcher aims to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and research findings for a deeper understanding of the data. The process involves transcribing interviews, familiarizing with the data, generating data segments, identifying patterns and relationships, and refining these findings to address the research problem coherently.

4. Finding and Discussion

In this section, this research aims to take an in-depth analysis of students' perspectives and preferences between Indonesian English and British English and its effect on their academic journey. This research seeks answers to the following inquiries: preferences between Indonesian English and British English, perception on the role and the use of British accent in academic and non-academic settings, and the necessity of having "native-like" accent on their academic prospects. The data shown in this study were a sample from all data observed (see Appendix 2 for all excerpt data).

Accent Preferences

This study revealed that although few participants chose British English accents to be used in classroom settings, most of them chose Indonesian English over British English due to easier understanding for themselves and their peers and also more comfortable in conveying their messages in another language as evident in excerpt 1 and 2.

Excerpt 1 (P1:Q1):

"I'm actually more comfortable in using Indonesian English in speaking or listening. I think not everyone we talk to really understands English, especially British English with its unique accent. I purposely speak English with regional accents so that my friends understand, so I think Indonesian English is more comfortable and easier to use for English communication in Indonesia..."

Excerpt 2 (P6:Q2):

"Being completely honest, speaking like a native is not our tongue to speak with. It will be harder for our friends to comprehend what we are saying if we talk in native accents. While British accents spoken by Indonesians are enticing to me, I think I'm going to stick with Indonesian English."

In excerpt 1 up to excerpt 2, the choices of these participants break the ideology of native speakerism, where native speakers or accents are seen as the model of the English language (Holliday, 2006). These preferences brought a new light into multiple research of similar topics, breaking the reliance in expanding countries that only the native standards are better for their English language learning (Kirana & Methitham, 2022). These participants preferred comfort and flexibility rather than the opportunity to be seen as cool or well-educated by choosing an Indonesian English accent. Other than that, by choosing a non-native accent, these participants also considered the importance of their peers' understanding of the language and getting the message across by breaking the barrier which is accent comprehension.

Meanwhile, excerpt 3 still shows a dependence on the native speaker model. Two participants in this research who prefer a British English accent stated that they wanted to hone their English skills or to just look good in front of teachers and peers. It can be seen that these opinions are aligned with the findings from previous studies, one of them coming from Dharma and Rudianto (2023), who discovered that 95-100% of their participants agreed that native accents sound good or pleasant and well-educated. Another previous study that is supported by these findings is by Dirham (2022) which stated that some participants expressed a desire to speak with a native-like accent, specifically mentioning American or British accents. Although these participants stated so, surprisingly most of the participants rather speak in an Indonesian English accent in classroom settings. These participants emphasize more on how Indonesian English accent gives them better understanding of the language along with comfortability in speaking.

Excerpt 3 (P2:Q2):

"I prefer British English for class presentations. My reasoning might be that when we present in classes we have to use full English. It helps us to hone our language

skills, because British English is complex and it will be a good way of learning when we use British English in class."

Accent Representation

The second concern of this study regarding attitudes toward accent showed that most participants viewed the British English accent and its speakers as intelligent and elegant, especially if the speaker has a non-native background. These participants thought that Indonesian EFL learners who spoke in a British English accent must have put more effort than others when it comes to acquiring and practicing a native-like accent. They see these students as smart, educated, and cool as elaborated in the following excerpts.

Excerpt 4 (P1:Q3):

"I think I would label the British English accent as intelligent. Because in my experience, when there is a person who talks in that accent our view must be like 'wow this person must be smart' or 'wow that's so cool' because I think Indonesian see British English as difficult to learn and understand. So if I see someone speaking in British English, I would see them as cool and smart."

Excerpt 5 (P5:Q4):

"I have one friend who fluently speaks in a British accent, and I see him as an intelligent, educated, and a very confident person. And the person who can speak British accent very well means that they study more deeply about the accent, they are serious about how to use the accent very well. So, yeah, they are educated and intelligent."

These excerpts showed that three of the participants profiled the British English accent and its speakers as intelligent, especially if their peers were one of the speakers of this particular accent. They viewed that these students have put more effort into learning for them to acquire a native-like accent. It is argued that these students who spoke in a British English accent were more educated in their English learning background, they also viewed these students as smart because they were able to pick up a difficult accent for most Indonesian EFL learners. One of the participants (excerpt 6) in this study also viewed this particular accent and its speakers as being elegant, due to its correlation to royalties. This participant argued that students who used a British English accent wanted to look more elegant. Another participant viewed the British English accent differently; seeing the accent as traditional due to its adaptation from Old English (excerpt 7). Furthermore, this participant argued that most old literary works used British English, further implying the traditional view on this accent.

Excerpt 6 (P4:Q4):

"I would say that British English is more elegant than other accents, because it is tightly linked with royalties. But if an English Department student speaks in British English, I would say they want to look elegant. They could've used American English but that's too basic, so they use a British accent because they want to be more elegant or posh."

Excerpt 7 (P2:Q3):

"I think British English is traditional because some vocabularies used in British English are taken from Old English. Why not intelligent? Because I think English counts as a general knowledge in today's world, there are a lot of requirements that require us to be fluent in English. Also because in old literary works, most of them used British English."

Looking at the participants' answers above, it can be concluded that almost all of them agreed that the British English accent along with its speakers does sound and is intelligent. This further supports previous findings by Dharma and Rudianto (2023) where 95-100% of their participants agreed that native accents sound well-educated. These opinions align with a finding by Yuwita and Ambarwati (2023) that discovered how university students mentioned that the British accent is often associated with luxury, specifically the Royal Family. Although the participants barely mentioned Indonesian English accents, the answers of these participants supported the ideology of native speakerism; associating the positive images with native accents.

Accent Mastery and Identity

The last concern of this study is about the importance of accent mastery for their identity. This study revealed that native speakerism (popularly defined as considering native speakers as the only ideal accent model to master) did play a role in influencing the participants' accent preferences when it came to academic and non-academic identity. From opening opportunities to maintaining reputation, these participants had their own reasons as to why they desired to speak or at least achieve a near-native accent. Most of these participants argued that having a near-native accent can be useful for them to maintain pride and image, and provide higher professional service (see excerpt 8-10).

Excerpt 8 (P3:Q6):

"Whenever you speak in a certain foreign accent they will see that you are well aware of the entire language, thinking that you are better than other people. Although I don't really agree with that notion, I feel like it is quite important for

anyone to have that degree of expertise because it will be influential and useful for you in the workplace."

Excerpt 9 (P1:Q6):

"I think we do have to learn how to speak with a near-native proficiency, because we have this pride as English Department students so if we're not fluent in English, we'll be ashamed and it can affect people's view on us. If we have an occasion to study abroad and we have to communicate in English, it is also important to have near-native proficiency. Otherwise, people might not understand us and assume that our country is bad at speaking English."

Excerpt 10 (P4:Q6):

"For me, it's important if you can speak English well in academic settings because we are English Department students. We just want to look good in front of our lecturers and it's for our reputation so I really need to excel in speaking English in an academic context."

In the aforementioned excerpts, it can be taken into conclusion that these participants viewed mastering a near-native accent as essential for them in terms of maintaining their identity as English students and in the workplace. Their perspectives were based on how when they speak in a native-like accent, people will perceive them as better than other people, fear of people's negative views, and the necessity to excel in speaking in front of lecturers. It is argued that mastering a native-like accent contributes to not only their reputation as English students but also representing how their country makes use of the global language in international settings. Aside from maintaining identity, another participant stated that having a near-native accent is essential for her career prospects. This participant aimed to contribute in providing higher quality education and building fun in learning, which could be achieved through mastering a native-like accent.

Excerpt 11 (P5:Q6):

"I think a reputation is very important. I would like to become a teacher, so if I can speak near to the native speakers in the classroom, it will make my students excited to learn about the language. It makes things easier and possible to provide high quality education."

The excerpts of these participants' answers shows that English Department students perceive that having a near-native English accent is important for their social, academic, and professional prospects. Many of these participants believe that speaking English with a native-like accent signals higher competence and enhances their social standing,

particularly in academic and workplace settings. Reputation is a key motivator, with some aspiring to teach and believing that near-native accents inspire confidence in students. The answers of these participants further supports the idea that native speakerism does play a role in determining students' accent preferences in various contexts. Overall, these students view near-native English as essential for being respected and successful in various domains.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this research highlight the complex attitudes that English Study Program students hold toward accent preference, perception, and recognition. Despite the growing recognition for Indonesian English accents, many of these students still see British English accents as prestigious, intelligent, and desirable, aligning with the ideology of native speakerism. While some prefer British English accents for reasons related to status and reputation, most of these students still go for Indonesian English in academic settings, mentioning the importance of understanding and comfort in speaking. However, regarding academic performance and future prospects, almost all participants prefer acquiring near-native accents, associating them with competence, professionalism, and social reputation. These findings support the idea of the ongoing influence of native speakerism in shaping learners' accent preferences, strengthening the belief that near-native proficiency, especially in terms of accent, is a key determiner of success in educational and professional settings.

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