

Attitudes Toward Language Variation in English Education: A Sociolinguistic Investigation

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Abstract

This study aims to examine undergraduate students' attitudes toward language variation in English education within a higher education context in Indonesia, specifically among students enrolled in an English Language Education program at a university in Yogyakarta. The study examines attitudes across cognitive, affective, behavioral, and ideological domains. Adopting a mixed-method sequential explanatory design, quantitative data were collected through a Likert-scale questionnaire administered to 82 students, followed by qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with six selected participants. The study reveals that students generally favor linguistic diversity, showing cognitive awareness of various English dialects and their sociocultural importance. They express openness to different accents and display confidence in their interactions, although notions of prestige and familiarity shape their views. Behaviorally, they are inclined to incorporate language variation into future teaching, but still tend to mimic native pronunciation norms. Ideologically, they support linguistic equality and inclusive education, while recognizing the ongoing impact of native-speakerism in society. These findings suggest that students' attitudes are evolving, reflecting both greater acceptance of Global Englishes and continued adherence to standard-language pedagogy. This study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that language attitudes are multidimensional and characterized by ongoing ideological negotiations rather than a simple shift from standard-language norms to Global Englishes perspectives. The study provides insights for curriculum development and pedagogical practices that foster more inclusive approaches to English language teaching.

Keywords: attitude, english education, language variation, sociolinguistics, world englishes

INTRODUCTION

The expansion of English has shaped the sociolinguistics and the pedagogical view of higher education. As a lingua franca, English operates through commerce, science, technology, and academic, as well as the authority that has been destabilized (Isbell & Crowther, 2023; Rose & Galloway, 2019). In the contemporary linguistic landscape, bilingual or multilingual speakers who use dynamic repertoires are involved rather than following the monolingual norms

historically dominated by English-speaking countries. As stated by Jenkins (2013), this reality challenges higher education to recognize English as a pluricentric language with multiple centers of legitimacy. Therefore, there is an urgent need to reassess the varieties of English that are institutionalized and assessed within university curricula.

Despite these global transformations, higher education institutions persist in maintaining the ideology of native-speakerism. This ideology grants special privileges to individuals from countries such as the United States and England, treating them as authoritative models of linguistic correctness (Harsanti & Manara, 2021). This ideology strengthens a monolithic view of English, thus marginalizing multilingual practices and positioning the non-dominant varieties of English as deficient. In the teaching and learning of English, assumptions often take the form of rigid compliance with standardized norms that neglect learners' communicative reality. Ultimately, these institutional practices reproduce linguistic hierarchies that sustain inequalities in access and symbolic capital (Cushing, 2022).

Recent empirical findings show there is a generational shift toward varieties of English. A conceptual replication study in the United States indicates that Generation Z undergraduates demonstrate openness toward global Englishes and have lower preferences compared to previous generation (Isbell & Crowther, 2023). However, this inclusivity is still in proximity with persistent sociolinguistics hierarchies. Geopolitical power and racialized ideologies are still connected with the evaluation of truthfulness, prestige, and the beauty of its language. Thus, this contemporary language attitude showed a complex interaction between the increasing recognition of diversity and the strong influence of standard language ideology.

Although theoretical advocacy for Global Englishes Language Teaching (GELT) has gained momentum (Schreiber & Jansz, 2025), the implementation remains uneven. Current research has largely focused on language attitude trends at the macro level or conceptual arguments for pedagogical reform. Thus, leaving the interaction among behavioral, cognitive, affective, and ideological underexplored. By exploring those dimensions, this study provides a nuanced, multidimensional examination of undergraduate students' attitudes toward language variation, going beyond earlier approaches that focused on the macro level and on isolated dimensions within Global Englishes and native-speakerism research.

More specifically, this study makes two key contributions. The first contribution is theoretical and brings together cognitive, affective, and ideological components within a unified empirical model, rather than viewing language attitudes as a one-dimensional construct. Another is a contextual perspective, which tests these dimensions within the institutional and ideological landscape of the English Language Education program in Indonesia, a setting that has received little attention in Global Englishes research. In consequence, this study provides empirical findings that contribute to contemporary discussions on standard language ideology, Global Englishes, and native-speakerism, while also offering practical implications for curriculum designers and educational policymakers seeking to develop more inclusive and contextually responsive approaches to English language education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Nature of Language Attitudes

Attitude is a hypothetical construct that develops from early childhood through the influence of parents, peers, and affective factors in human experience (Brown, 2007). Scientifically, attitude is defined as a behavioral disposition or multidimensional tendency consisting of affective, cognitive, and volitional components to respond in a supportive or unsupportive manner to an object, person, institution, or event (Ajzen, 2005). These components shape a person's perception of themselves, others, and the culture in the environment where they

live. Furthermore, attitude is understood as a mindset or tendency to act in a particular way, shaped by experience or temperament. It is a complex combination of personalities, beliefs, values, and motivations that determine how individuals perceive and behave toward specific situations or objects (Pickens, 2005).

In the realm of English education, these attitudes dictate how students evaluate linguistic diversity. Importantly, the three-part cognitive, affective, and behavioral model of attitudes has been widely adopted in sociolinguistic research (Garrett, 2010). However, most previous studies have treated these dimensions separately rather than examining how they interact and sometimes conflict. For example, a learner might cognitively support linguistic equality while still preferring a native accent affectively. Furthermore, the ideological dimension of attitudes toward language, which reflects broader beliefs about the legitimacy and power of language, is often under-researched in studies focused on the Indonesian context. This gap limits our understanding of how institutional and social forces shape the attitudes of language learners in non-Western settings.

The Paradigm of World Englishes

The concept of language variation in sociolinguistic contexts has undergone a fundamental paradigm shift from a native-speaker-centered view to a recognition of the global diversity of World Englishes. This paradigm was developed by Kachru (1990) where he divided English into three concentric circles: the inner circle, the outer circle, and the expanding circle. This concept asserts that English is no longer an exclusive domain of Inner Circle countries like the UK and the US; it has been nativized and adapted across various socio-cultural contexts, including Indonesia, where it functions as a dynamic communication tool shaped by local characteristics. As emphasized by Fedorenko et al. (2024), language evolves alongside human cognition and cultural transmission, further supporting the view that varieties of English reflect legitimate and living forms of human communication.

Despite the theoretical advancement of the World Englishes paradigm, its implementation within formal education in Indonesia remains limited. Pedagogical practices are still heavily influenced by rigid native-speaker standards. Research conducted by Hariri et al. (2019) found that lecturers' attitudes toward English varieties are strongly influenced by their educational background. Lecturers with overseas educational experience tend to be more accepting of diverse accents than those who graduated domestically. This aligns with Raja et al. (2022) who revealed that although pre-service teachers possess knowledge of language variation, they still perceive inner circle English as the ideal model for professional competence. Overall, these findings reveal a critical inconsistency between theoretical recognition of global English varieties and their practical implementation in Indonesian educational institutions. Most notably, these studies have largely focused on teacher attitudes, leaving a significant gap in understanding how undergraduate students, who will become the next generation of English language educators, navigate these conflicting ideologies in their own learning experiences.

Previous Related Studies

Research on attitudes and perceptions towards varieties of English has emerged as a rapidly growing field within educational sociolinguistics, with studies revealing both general trends and important contextual differences across regions. In the European context, White (2025) conducted a series of studies in 2018 and 2019 on English students of online courses in Sweden and found a shift in tolerance towards non-native English, especially in the digital environment. He concluded that learners need to learn many types of English to communicate effectively and achieve mutual intelligibility. In addition, many non-standard features are now acceptable in both formal and informal settings. A similar trend was also found in a study in the Netherlands by Robinson-jones

et al. (2024) where students initially responded positively to English native speakers as their primary reference. However, the implementation of English-Medium Instruction and the introduction of cosmopolitan concepts helped reduce negative views and foster greater acceptance of the local Dutch English accent. Although these findings suggest that institutional interventions can reshape attitudes towards language, they are situated in a Western context with a distinct multilingual tradition, so their generalizability to Asian EFL contexts is limited.

In East Asia, the picture is more complex and somewhat contradictory. Studies of Japanese university students revealed that there is a rigid linguistic hierarchy where British and American English are viewed as the highest standard of correctness, even though they have a strong belief in local accents as a form of identity (McKenzie & Gilmore, 2017). A comparable situation occurred in South Korea: a study of 114 South Korean students showed a heavy reliance on native speakers as an ideal form of professionalism that has greater social appeal. Although these students are proud of their Korean identity, they often lack confidence in the Korean-English accent because it is considered incorrect and unprofessional. In addition, the education curriculum is considered to need to be more active in introducing the concept of World Englishes to help students reduce the psychological burden of imitating native speakers and better appreciate their own linguistic identity (Ahn & Kang, 2017). This is further confirmed by the findings of Saito (2021) that Japanese students initially had a strong dependence on the standards of native speakers. However, targeted interventions through English as an International Language courses can change these attitudes. Attitude change is possible but requires deliberate pedagogical design. This contrast between initial attitudes and post-intervention outcomes demonstrates the important but underexplored role of curriculum content in reshaping language ideologies.

In Southeast Asia, similar tensions are emerging, but with marked regional variations. Thai university students tend to use the American accent and perceive it as standard pronunciation. While many respondents thought that Asian accents were easy to understand and acceptable, their own country accents are even considered unfavourable (Sahrai, 2024). This is in line with the research by Thienthong and Uthakorn (2023) which found that college students prefer to use the English inner circle, which is considered standard, appropriate, and prestigious compared to the outer circle and expanding circle. Nevertheless, Thai English is considered the most intelligible. In line with Thailand, university students in Malaysia highly appreciate their local accent, Malaysian English (Manglish), viewing it as a vital tool for casual communication, a language that unites the various races in the country. However, in the context of the formal or international agendas, the appropriate standard English from the inner circle countries must be used because it is perceived as more standard (Lin et al., 2018). These regional variations in Southeast Asia suggest that contextual factors, including national identity, multicultural dynamics, and curriculum design, play different roles in shaping attitudes toward varieties of English, underscoring the need for context-specific, rather than generalized, pedagogical responses.

Studies in Indonesia reveal a particularly complex and sometimes contradictory landscape. Yanti (2020) found that students were initially unaware that Indonesian English accents were a legitimate variety, largely due to the dominant presence of American English in their prior schooling. Over time, students have become more aware of cultural diversity and have shown a positive attitude towards Indonesian accents, viewing them as intelligent, polite, and pleasant. However, this trajectory is not universal. Silalahi et al. (2023) found that pre-service teachers frequently reverted to treating American English as the sole standard, often citing insufficient curricular support. Khazanah (2023) further noted that students increasingly recognized cultural identity in their language use, yet Ikhwanudin et al. (2025) documented that Indonesian students in Malaysian multilingual environments actively maintained their Indonesian accent as a marker of cultural distinctiveness even when aware of potential social stigma. These findings, while

collectively rich, remain fragmented: most studies examine only one or two attitudinal dimensions, focus on either teachers or students in isolation, and rarely situate findings within a broader ideological framework.

This study aims to address three key gaps in previous research by comprehensively examining language attitudes, encompassing cognitive, affective, behavioral, and ideological aspects among undergraduate English Language Education students at a university in Yogyakarta. Through this holistic approach, this study goes beyond describing the situation and critically analyzing how students respond to language ideology on their campus, thereby providing an empirical basis for promoting more inclusive English language teaching practices in Indonesian higher education.

METHODS

Research Design

To investigate students' perceptions of language diversity in English instruction, this study used a mixed-method approach. In particular, the study used a sequential explanatory design, in which quantitative data were initially gathered and examined, and then qualitative data were added to provide more in-depth interpretations and justifications for the preliminary results (Fraenkel et al., 2022; Gay et al., 2012). By combining statistical patterns with participants' viewpoints, this strategy enabled the researchers to gain a thorough understanding of participants' opinions on linguistic variation. In this way, the quantitative phase summarized the overarching trends in students' perceptions of language variety in English instruction. Consequently, the qualitative phase enabled the researchers to investigate the motivations behind these beliefs through individuals' personal narratives and experiences. The combination of the two datasets enabled a more thorough analysis of the results. This method enhanced the study's validity by enabling researchers to triangulate results from several data sources.

Participants

The participants consisted of 82 undergraduate students (65 females and 17 males) from the English Language Education Program at a university in Yogyakarta who had previously completed a Sociolinguistics course. Purposive sampling was used to select participants because they were believed to have sufficient exposure to sociolinguistic concepts, including dialects, language variation, and attitudes toward language. Using this selection strategy ensured that the participants had the necessary educational backgrounds to answer the research questions intelligently. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the participants, including their gender distribution and academic background.

Table 1. Demography of Participants

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	65	79.3
	Male	17	20.7
Academic Background	English Language Education Program	82	100
Course Experience	Completed Sociolinguistics Course	82	100
Total		82	100

Before data collection, ethical concerns were carefully considered to guarantee that the participants' rights and well-being were protected. All participants received an informed consent form that explained the study's purpose, procedures, and the voluntary nature of their participation. The form further stated that participants' replies would be used only for research purposes and that their identities would be kept confidential and anonymous throughout the

process. Participants may ask questions before consenting to participate. By signing the informed consent form, they expressed their willingness to participate in the study. Participants were also advised that they might withdraw from the research at any moment with no penalty. Furthermore, the data gathered from the questionnaires and interviews were securely archived and were only available to the researchers. To protect all participants' privacy and confidentiality, any personal information that could identify them was removed during data processing and reporting.

Data Collection Technique

Semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire were the two tools used to gather the data. The purpose of the questionnaire was to gauge students' opinions regarding English linguistic diversity. It comprised a set of statements evaluated on a five-point Likert scale, with 1 denoting "strongly disagree" and 5 denoting "strongly agree." Perceptions of standard and non-standard variations, acceptance of various English accents, and the perceived importance of language variation in English education are only a few aspects of language attitudes captured by the questionnaire items. To better understand the viewpoints and experiences of a few selected participants regarding language variety in English learning, semi-structured interviews were conducted in addition to the questionnaire. Students' opinions on the use of various English dialects, their encounters with linguistic variety, and their opinions of its use in English instruction were the main topics of the interview questions.

The data collection occurred in two phases, following the sequential exploratory design. First, the questionnaire was distributed to the 82 participants who were enrolled in the Sociolinguistics course. The participants completed the questionnaire to indicate their attitudes toward language variation in English education. Following the collection and preliminary analysis of quantitative data, six participants were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews. Researchers designated them as P1-P6 (Participants 1-6) to protect their identities in this study. The interviews were conducted to elucidate the questionnaire data and investigate the rationale behind participants' opinions on language variation.

Before data collection, the research instruments were evaluated to ensure they were pertinent, understandable, and aligned with the study's goals. Two experts in sociolinguistics and English language education reviewed the questionnaire and interview protocol for content validity. Descriptive statistics in SPSS were used to compute the mean score for each item based on the experts' scores. Validation sheets referring to Rochmiyati (2020) were utilized to monitor the validity scores. The mean score of the questionnaire items is 3.7, indicating "Good", as they were suitable for measuring students' attitudes toward language variation. Before being used in the main study, several items were slightly revised to improve clarity and language, based on expert advice. Minor changes were made to improve the language of a few issues based on the experts' input.

Meanwhile, a small group of students with characteristics similar to those of the intended participants participated in a pilot study to ensure questionnaire reliability. Using Cronbach's Alpha, the instrument's internal consistency was 0.88, indicating high reliability. These findings indicate that the questionnaire was valid and reliable for measuring students' views about language variance in English instruction. The same experts examined the qualitative instrument's interview technique to ensure the questions were appropriate for eliciting participants' viewpoints on language variation. The mean score is 4.3, indicating "Excellent". The experts confirmed that the interview questions were appropriate for the research aims and could elicit in-depth responses about students' views on linguistic diversity in English training.

Data Analysis Technique

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the questionnaire data, namely by computing the mean scores for each item. Pimentel's adjectival rating scale (2010), which classifies attitudes by the numerical range of mean values, served as the basis for interpreting the mean scores. For qualitative data, a thematic analysis using the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) was conducted to examine the interview data. Initially, the researchers acquainted themselves with the data by transcribing the interview recordings and thoroughly reviewing the transcripts to gain a comprehensive picture of students' perspectives on language variation in English education. At this stage, preliminary concepts and observations concerning participants' perceptions of various English dialects and accents were recorded. The researchers subsequently created initial codes by systematically selecting significant portions of the data that represented participants' views, including acceptance of many English variations, preference for standard English, and knowledge of linguistic diversity.

Next, the codes were further categorized into prospective themes by aggregating comparable codes that reflected overarching patterns of attitudes towards language variation. Thereafter, the themes were evaluated and enhanced to guarantee their accurate representation of the coded data and the complete dataset. Subsequently, the researchers delineated and designated each theme to accurately encapsulate its core significance in relation to the research emphasis on attitudes toward linguistic variation in English teaching. The themes were ultimately analyzed and presented by selecting representative extracts from the interview data and correlating the findings with the research objectives and pertinent sociolinguistic literature. Through this procedure, the researchers identified recurring themes and patterns that clarified participants' opinions on linguistic diversity in English instruction. By integrating both quantitative and qualitative analyses, this study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how students perceive language variation within the context of English language education.

RESULTS

Students' Attitudes toward Language Variation in English Education

This section examines how students respond to language variation by drawing on both the questionnaire results and the interview data. The two types of data are considered together so that numerical patterns can be read alongside students' descriptions of their own experiences. The questionnaire provides a general picture of where students position themselves across different statements, while the interviews make it possible to see how those positions are understood and expressed in more concrete terms. Throughout this section, the interview participants are referred to as P1-P6.

Cognitive Dimension of Students' Attitudes toward Language Variation

Table 1. Results of the cognitive domain.

Domain	Indicator	Item Statement	Mean	SD
Cognitive	Awareness of English varieties	I am aware that English has many varieties (e.g., British, American, Australian, etc.).	4.67	0.73
	Legitimacy of varieties	Different English varieties are equally legitimate forms of English.	4.34	0.80
	Standard language belief	Standard English is the only correct form of English.	2.76	1.18
	Comprehension benefit	Exposure to different English accents helps improve comprehension skills.	4.35	0.70
	Perception of non-native forms	Non-native varieties of English are often grammatically incorrect.	3.16	0.98

	Sociolinguistic awareness	Language variation reflects cultural and social identity.	4.51	0.72
	Academic relevance	Learning about language variation is important for English Education students.	4.45	0.68
	Pedagogical belief	Teachers should introduce students to multiple English varieties.	4.24	0.77

The cognitive results show a strong tendency toward recognizing language variation as part of English rather than as an exception to it. The highest mean appears in awareness of English varieties ($M = 4.67$), followed closely by sociolinguistic awareness ($M = 4.51$) and academic relevance ($M = 4.45$). These values are consistently high, indicating that students are not approaching English as a single, uniform system. Instead, they recognize that English exists in multiple forms and that these forms are connected to different cultural and social contexts. The relatively high score for comprehension benefit ($M = 4.35$) also supports this pattern, suggesting that students do not see variation as something that disrupts understanding. Rather, they tend to associate exposure to different accents with improvement in listening and comprehension.

The way students describe language variation in the interviews reflects this orientation directly and simply. P2 said,

‘Each region has its own identity, so it cannot be generalized’. (P2)

This statement frames variation as a feature of identity rather than as error, and it shows that students can connect language use to place and community. P3 expressed a similar view, saying,

‘language is influenced by the community and how people use it in their society’. (P3)

Both excerpts point to the same understanding: variation is expected because language is used by different groups of people in different contexts. The explanations are not technical but consistent with the higher mean scores and show that students can make sense of variation on their own terms.

However, the pattern becomes less consistent when the focus shifts to ideas about correctness. The statement that non-native English is often incorrect has a mean of 3.16, which is noticeably lower than the other cognitive items, but still not in the low range. This suggests that some students continue to associate non-native forms with inaccuracy. At the same time, the statement that standard English is the only correct form receives a lower mean ($M = 2.76$), indicating that most students do not fully agree with it. The two results sit side by side, showing that the issue is not fully resolved.

The interviews make this tension more visible. P1 said,

‘All varieties are acceptable as long as the pronunciation is correct.’ (P1)

The first part of the statement suggests acceptance, but the second part introduces a condition. Variation is allowed, but it is still measured against a standard of correctness. This kind of response appears to bridge the gap between the higher and middle-range means. Students recognize that English takes different forms, but they still rely on certain expectations about how it should be used, especially in more formal or evaluative contexts.

Taken together, the cognitive dimension shows that students have moved beyond a narrow understanding of English, but their views are not entirely free from earlier assumptions about correctness. The higher means indicate a clear awareness of variation and its relevance, while the interview excerpts show that this awareness is grounded in students' everyday understanding of language. At the same time, the middle-range scores and conditional statements suggest that ideas

about correctness continue to shape how variation is interpreted. The result is not inconsistency in a negative sense, but a position that brings together both recognition of diversity and attention to standards.

Affective Dimension of Students' Attitudes toward Language Variation

Table 2. Results of the affective domain.

Domain	Indicator	Item Statement	Mean	SD
Affective	Accent preference	I prefer listening to American or British accents only.	3.10	1.22
	Comfort level	I feel comfortable interacting with speakers of different English varieties.	3.93	0.88
	Prestige perception	Some English accents sound more prestigious than others.	3.66	1.03
	Enjoyment	I enjoy learning about different English accents.	4.10	0.85
	Accent-based judgment	I tend to judge someone's competence based on their English accent.	2.24	1.14
	Confidence development	Exposure to various English accents increases my confidence in communication.	4.23	0.77
	Identity pride	I feel proud of my own English accent as a non-native speaker.	4.22	0.78
	Anxiety	I feel anxious when I hear unfamiliar English accents.	3.54	1.00

The affective results do not settle into a single, uniform pattern. Some of the values are clearly high, particularly confidence ($M = 4.23$), identity pride ($M = 4.22$), and enjoyment ($M = 4.10$), which suggests that students do not view language variation as threatening their ability to use English. Instead, exposure to different accents appears to support their confidence and, in some cases, even strengthen their sense of ownership over how they speak. The comfort score ($M = 3.93$) points in the same direction, showing that interaction with speakers of different English varieties is generally manageable. At the same time, the results are not entirely consistent. The scores for prestige ($M = 3.66$) and anxiety ($M = 3.54$) remain in the middle range, which suggests that emotional responses are shaped by more than one factor.

This becomes clearer when students describe their own experiences. In several cases, variation is treated as something ordinary rather than problematic. P5 said,

'it's normal... as long as we can understand each other, it's fine'. (P5)

The emphasis here is entirely on whether communication works, not on how the language sounds. P2 expressed a similar reaction, stating,

'it sounds interesting when I hear different accents'. (P2)

These responses align with the higher mean scores for enjoyment and confidence. They show that, in situations where meaning can be followed, students do not feel uncomfortable. Instead, they tend to respond with curiosity or neutrality.

At the same time, the interview excerpts show that not all accents are experienced in the same way. Even when students say they do not judge others based on accent, they still attach different values to different forms of English. P6, for example, said,

'using an American accent feels cooler'. (P6)

This statement does not directly reject other accents, but it shows that some accents are associated with a more positive image. This helps explain why the prestige score remains in the middle range rather than dropping lower. Students may not openly rank accents, but they are still aware that certain ways of speaking are received differently.

The moderate level of anxiety can also be understood through what students describe in practice. Some participants mentioned that unfamiliar accents require more effort to follow, especially when they are not used to hearing them. P4 said,

‘sometimes I need time to understand, especially if the accent is unfamiliar’. (P4)

This kind of response does not indicate rejection, but it does show that comfort is not constant. The difficulty lies not in accepting the speaker, but in processing what is being said. In this sense, emotional response is tied not only to attitude, but also to familiarity and exposure.

Another point that stands out is the difference between what students say in general and how they describe specific situations. The low mean for accent-based judgment ($M = 2.24$) suggests that students do not see themselves as judging others based on accent. This is reflected in statements such as P4’s,

‘I don’t judge from accent, but from whether I understand them’. (P4)

However, when they talk about particular accents, their responses show that some forms are still perceived more positively than others. This difference does not necessarily mean that students are inconsistent, but it does show that their attitudes operate at more than one level.

Taken together, the affective dimension indicates that students are generally open to language variation and often respond positively to it, especially when communication is clear. At the same time, their responses are influenced by familiarity and by how certain accents are perceived in a wider context. The numerical results and the interview excerpts point to the same conclusion: variation is accepted, but not experienced in the same way across all situations.

Behavioral Dimension of Students’ Attitudes toward Language Variation

Table 3. Results of the behavioral domain.

Domain	Indicator	Item Statement	Mean	SD
Behavioral	Active effort	I actively try to understand different English accents in media or lectures.	4.18	0.73
	Teaching intention	I plan to introduce various English varieties in my future classroom.	4.24	0.71
	Pronunciation adaptation	I adjust my pronunciation to sound more like native speakers.	3.98	0.83
	Material selection	I choose learning materials that include a variety of English accents.	3.76	0.80
	Avoidance behavior	I avoid speaking English when I feel my accent is different.	2.54	1.07
	Curriculum support	I would support curriculum changes that include World Englishes.	4.06	0.80
	Peer collaboration	I am willing to collaborate with peers who have different English accents.	4.41	0.64

The behavioral results suggest that students are generally willing to engage with language variation, although this willingness does not appear in the same way across all types of behavior. The highest mean is found in peer collaboration ($M = 4.41$), followed by teaching intention ($M = 4.24$) and active effort to understand different accents ($M = 4.18$). These values indicate that students are open to interacting with speakers who use different varieties of English and are prepared to bring that openness into their future teaching. The relatively high score for curriculum support ($M = 4.06$) points in the same direction, suggesting that students do not see variation as something that should remain outside formal instruction.

When students talk about their future role as teachers, this tendency becomes more concrete. P1 said,

'I will introduce different English varieties so students feel more confident and not afraid to speak'. (P1)

The focus here is not only on exposure, but on its effect on learners' confidence. P2 expressed a similar idea, stating,

'I will teach them that English does not have to be American or British, so they are not afraid to speak'. (P2)

These excerpts show that students are not simply agreeing with the idea of variation at an abstract level. They are connecting it to specific classroom practices, particularly in relation to reducing anxiety and encouraging participation.

At the same time, the results also show that this openness does not fully extend to how students use English themselves. The mean for pronunciation adaptation ($M = 3.98$) remains relatively high, which suggests that many students still adjust their speech to align with native-like models. This tendency appears clearly in the interview data. P1 said,

'I still want to learn a standard accent so I won't be underestimated'. (P1)

Similarly, P6 explained,

'I usually follow American pronunciation because it sounds more acceptable'. (P6)

These excerpts show that students are aware of how their speech may be evaluated by others, and they adjust their pronunciation accordingly.

There are also practical considerations that shape how students respond to variation in actual learning situations. The mean for material selection ($M = 3.76$) suggests that students are somewhat selective in choosing resources that include different accents. This is reflected in the interviews, where students describe challenges related to exposure. P3 said,

'student can be confused about which variety to follow'. (P3)

especially when they are still learning the basics. P6 added,

'if we only learn one accent, it's easier to understand, but if there are many, it can be confusing'. (P6)

These statements point to a concern that variation, if not introduced carefully, may create uncertainty rather than support learning.

The low mean for avoidance behavior ($M = 2.54$) suggests that students generally do not avoid speaking English because of their accent. This is an important point, as it shows that variation does not lead to withdrawal from communication. Instead, students remain willing to participate, even if they are aware of differences in pronunciation. However, their willingness to speak does not mean that they are completely unconcerned about how they sound.

Taken together, the behavioral dimension shows a balance between openness and adjustment. Students are willing to engage with variation and to introduce it in their teaching, but they continue to regulate their own speech in response to perceived expectations. The mean scores and the interview excerpts point in the same direction: variation is accepted as part of communication and learning, but it is managed carefully, especially in situations where clarity and evaluation are involved.

*Ideological Dimension of Students' Attitudes toward Language Variation***Table 4.** Results of the ideological domain.

Domain	Indicator	Item Statement	Mean	SD
Ideological	Native-speakerism	Native speakers should be the main model in English teaching.	3.29	1.13
	Linguistic equality	All English varieties deserve equal respect in academic settings.	4.57	0.58
	Curriculum orientation	English curricula should reflect global language diversity.	4.40	0.64
	Assessment fairness	Students should not be penalized for having non-native accents.	4.39	0.85
	Professional identity	Understanding sociolinguistics is essential for future English teachers.	4.68	0.56

The ideological results are more consistent than the behavioral ones, particularly in relation to equality and fairness. The highest mean appears in professional identity ($M = 4.68$), followed by linguistic equality ($M = 4.57$). These values suggest that students see an understanding of language variation as an important part of becoming an English teacher, and that they support the idea that different varieties should be treated equally. The relatively high scores for curriculum orientation ($M = 4.40$) and assessment fairness ($M = 4.39$) reinforce this pattern, indicating that students believe variation should be reflected in both teaching and evaluation.

This position is clearly expressed in the interview excerpts. P3 said,

'all accents are valid as long as they can be understood'. (P3).

The statement is direct and leaves little room for hierarchy. P5 also emphasized the importance of addressing negative attitudes in the classroom, saying,

'students sometimes laugh at different accents, so they need to understand that it's normal'. (P5).

These excerpts show that students are not only aware of variation, but also concerned about how it is treated in social and educational contexts.

However, the mean for native-speakerism ($M = 3.29$) does not follow the same pattern. It sits closer to the middle, which suggests that the idea of native speakers as a reference point has not been fully rejected. This is reflected in the interview data. P6 said,

'native-like accents sound more impressive'. (P6).

This indicates that certain forms of English are still associated with higher status. P1 also noted,

'outside the classroom, people still judge based on how you sound'. (P6).

These statements show that students are aware of the broader social context in which English is used.

What emerges from this dimension is not a contradiction, but a recognition of two different perspectives. On one side, students support the idea that all varieties should be treated equally, especially in educational settings. On the other hand, they recognize that outside those settings, certain accents are still valued more than others. The mean scores reflect this difference, with equality-related items scoring higher than the item related to native-speaker models.

Overall, the ideological dimension shows that students are aligned with the idea of linguistic equality, but they do not ignore the realities of how language is perceived in wider contexts. The interview excerpts reinforce this, showing that students are aware of both principles

and practice. Their views are shaped not only by what they learn in class, but also by what they observe in everyday use of English.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show that students' attitudes toward language variation are not uniform but shaped by the coexistence of inclusive perspectives and residual attachment to standard norms. Across the four dimensions, students demonstrate recognition of English as a diverse and global language, yet they continue to refer to correctness, prestige, and native-like forms in certain situations. This pattern suggests that students are not simply shifting from one position to another, but are navigating between different ways of understanding English. Similar observations have been reported in recent studies, which argue that learners' attitudes toward Global Englishes are often layered rather than fully transformed (Galloway & Rose, 2018; Rose et al., 2021; Tajeddin & Rajabi, 2025).

From a cognitive perspective, the strong awareness of English variation aligns with the broader shift toward recognizing English as a pluralistic language shaped by its users worldwide (Jindapitak et al., 2022; Wolfram, 2014). This is consistent with the World Englishes paradigm, which emphasizes the legitimacy of multiple English varieties across different sociocultural contexts (Fang, 2017; Jenkins, 2014; Kachru, 1992). More recent work has also shown that students in higher education are increasingly aware of linguistic diversity and can relate it to issues of identity and context (Darquennes et al., 2020; Galloway et al., 2020; Rose et al., 2021). The present findings support this trend, as students were able to articulate the relationship between language, culture, and community in their own terms.

However, the persistence of beliefs related to correctness indicates that this awareness does not fully replace standard language ideology. Students' tendency to associate certain forms of English with accuracy reflects what has been described as the continuing influence of "standard language ideology," even in contexts where diversity is acknowledged (Davila, 2012; Jenkins, 2014; Milroy, 2001). Recent studies have also noted that learners often hold hybrid beliefs, accepting variation while still relying on standard norms as a reference point (Huang & Ambele, 2025; Thienthong, 2022). The present study reflects this pattern, suggesting that cognitive awareness of variation develops alongside, rather than in place of, existing beliefs about correctness.

In the affective dimension, students' generally positive responses to language variation are in line with recent research showing that increased exposure to diverse Englishes can lead to more favorable attitudes and greater confidence in communication (Funada & Rose, 2026; Jindapitak et al., 2022). The finding that students feel more confident and comfortable when engaging with different accents supports the idea that familiarity plays a key role in shaping emotional responses to language variation. Studies have shown that learners who are exposed to multiple English varieties are more likely to develop flexible listening strategies and reduced anxiety (Kusumaningputri, 2020; Sung, 2016, 2018).

At the same time, the continued association of certain accents with prestige reflects a pattern that has been widely documented in both earlier and recent research. Accent perception studies consistently show that some English varieties are evaluated more positively than others due to social and cultural factors rather than linguistic features (Kutlu, 2023; Margić & Širola, 2014; McKenzie, 2008) (McKenzie, 2010; Dragojevic & Giles, 2016). Recent studies have confirmed that these perceptions persist even among learners who express support for linguistic diversity (Fang & Ren, 2018; Galloway & Rose, 2018). The present findings align with this, as students did not explicitly reject other accents, yet still associated native-like pronunciation with higher status or desirability.

The behavioral findings further illustrate how these attitudes are enacted in practice. Students' willingness to introduce language variation in their future teaching reflects a growing recognition of the importance of Global Englishes in English language education. This is consistent with research on Global Englishes Language Teaching (GELT), which emphasizes the need to prepare learners for communication in diverse linguistic contexts (Devlin et al., 2024; Henry et al., 2024). The intention to expose learners to multiple English varieties suggests that students are beginning to move beyond traditional models of English teaching.

However, the tendency to adjust pronunciation toward native-like norms shows that students' own language practices remain influenced by perceived expectations of correctness and professionalism. This reflects findings from previous studies indicating that learners often adopt native-speaker norms as a strategy for gaining legitimacy, particularly in academic or professional contexts (Arum, 2025; Holliday, 2006; Subtirelu, 2013). Recent research also suggests that learners may support linguistic diversity in principle while still conforming to dominant norms in practice (de Saint-Georges et al., 2020; Galante, 2017). The present study supports this view, as students appear to balance their acceptance of variation with pragmatic concerns about how their English will be evaluated.

Another important aspect of the behavioral findings is the recognition of practical challenges in implementing language variation. Students' concerns about confusion when multiple varieties are introduced reflect ongoing debates in the literature about how Global Englishes can be effectively integrated into teaching. While scholars argue that exposure to diverse Englishes is beneficial, they also acknowledge that it requires careful pedagogical design to avoid overwhelming learners (Kusumaningputri, 2020; Matsuda, 2019; Rose et al., 2021; Sung, 2016; Suzuki, 2011). The present findings add to this discussion by showing that students are not resistant to variation itself, but are aware of the need to manage it in ways that support comprehension.

The ideological dimension shows the strongest alignment with contemporary perspectives on linguistic inclusivity. Students' support for equality, fairness, and curriculum reform reflects key principles of Global Englishes, which challenge the dominance of native-speaker norms and advocate for the recognition of diverse Englishes (Sameephet, 2025; Sung, 2015; Xie & Fang, 2025). Recent studies have also found that pre-service teachers are increasingly open to these ideas, particularly when they are exposed to sociolinguistic perspectives during their training (Chen et al., 2023; Huttayavilaiphan & Injai, 2025; Peynado et al., 2022).

Despite this, the moderate support for native-speaker models indicates that native-speakerism remains influential. This aligns with Holliday's (2006) argument that native-speakerism is deeply embedded in English language teaching and continues to shape beliefs about what counts as "good" English. More recent research has confirmed that this ideology persists even in contexts where Global Englishes are introduced (Harsanti & Manara, 2021; Lu & Fang, 2025; Silalahi, 2021). The present study reflects this tension, as students support linguistic equality while still recognizing the social value attached to native-like forms.

When considered together, these findings are consistent with a growing body of research showing that learners' attitudes toward English are undergoing gradual change rather than rapid transformation. Studies across different contexts have reported similar patterns, where students express openness to linguistic diversity but continue to operate within existing hierarchies of English varieties (Huang & Ambele, 2025; Kim, 2024). The present study supports this view, suggesting that attitudes toward language variation are shaped by both new knowledge and existing social structures.

At the same time, the findings highlight the importance of context in shaping these attitudes. Students' awareness of how English is evaluated outside the classroom suggests that

their views are influenced not only by academic knowledge, but also by their experiences in broader social and institutional settings. This supports the argument that language attitudes are socially constructed and cannot be understood in isolation from the contexts in which language is used (Garrett, 2010; Hernández-Campoy, 2005; Kafabih et al., 2025, 2026).

Beyond the individual dimensions, the findings reveal a broader pattern of ideological negotiation in students' attitudes toward language variation. Rather than demonstrating a complete shift from traditional English norms to Global Englishes perspectives, students appear to draw simultaneously on both orientations. Across the cognitive, affective, behavioral, and ideological dimensions, they expressed support for linguistic diversity, equality, and inclusive educational practices, while also maintaining preferences for native like pronunciation, perceptions of prestige, and concerns about correctness. This suggests that attitudes toward language variation are not characterized by a simple acceptance or rejection of particular English varieties, but by the coexistence of multiple and sometimes competing beliefs. Such findings reinforce the view that language attitudes are dynamic, context sensitive, and shaped by ongoing interaction between educational experiences and wider sociolinguistic ideologies.

Theoretically, this study contributes to research on language attitudes and Global Englishes by demonstrating that awareness of linguistic diversity does not automatically lead to the abandonment of standard language beliefs. Instead, students appear to develop layered attitudinal positions in which inclusive views toward English variation coexist with residual attachment to standard and native speaker norms. This finding extends previous discussions of World Englishes and Global Englishes by highlighting the importance of examining attitudes as multidimensional constructs rather than as a binary opposition between traditional and pluralistic perspectives. The results therefore suggest that attitude development among future English teachers should be understood as a gradual process of ideological negotiation, where new understandings of linguistic diversity emerge alongside, rather than replace, established beliefs about language legitimacy and professional credibility.

Overall, the findings suggest that students occupy a transitional position in their understanding of English and its variation. While they demonstrate substantial awareness of linguistic diversity and strong support for inclusive educational practices, they continue to operate within broader social structures that privilege particular English varieties. This indicates that promoting linguistic diversity in English education requires more than increasing awareness of World Englishes and Global Englishes. Teacher education programs should also address the social meanings, prestige values, and institutional expectations associated with different varieties of English. By doing so, future teachers may be better equipped to critically evaluate dominant language ideologies and to foster more inclusive perspectives toward language variation in educational contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that students in the undergraduate program exhibited complex, multidimensional attitudes toward language variation in English education. While students exhibit awareness and acceptance of linguistic diversity, their perceptions are not entirely detached from traditional standard-language pedagogy. In the cognitive, affective, behavioral, and ideological domains, the results consistently indicate a balance between inclusivity and adherence to perceived norms of correctness, prestige, and professionalism. Students endorse integrating multiple English varieties in education and express a willingness to foster this inclusivity in their future teaching. In contrast, they remain influenced by native-like pronunciation when using their language in response to social expectations. These findings underscore that the transition toward Global Englishes is progressive. Currently, students are in an evolving stage in which new

sociolinguistic understandings coexist with established beliefs shaped by institutional and societal influences. Thus, instructional practices should move beyond fostering awareness and place more emphasis on critically addressing language ideologies and real-world language hierarchies. The limitation of this study stems from its small sample size and its focus on a single institutional context, which may restrict the applicability of the findings. Future research is suggested to involve more diverse research subjects from different regions and educational institutions.

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