STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE USE OF LOCAL ACCENTS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstract

This study aims to examine students' perceptions of the use of regional accents, especially the Surabaya (East Java) accent, in English language learning. This study involved 30 students, 6th semester English Education major, at Indraprasta PGRI University, with 15 selected responses analyzed in depth based on completeness and relevance. The study was conducted for one month using questionnaires and interviews, and triangulation was used to identify the data. With an emphasis on the case study of PuriViera, an Indonesian YouTuber living in the US, this study applied a qualitative descriptive method to analyze students' reactions to her YouTube Shorts and the perceptions that emerged. The findings of the study showed that most students expressed positive perceptions, recognizing the use of regional accents not as a deficiency but as an expression of identity that should be proud of, even introducing regional identities to a global audience. This study highlights the importance of inclusive pedagogical practices that support authentic communication and promote linguistic diversity.

Keywords: *English Language Learning, Javanese Accent, Linguistic Identity, Regional Accents, Students' Perceptions*

I. INTRODUCTION

In a globalized world where English functions as an international lingua franca, issues of pronunciation and accent have emerged as critical topics in language education. In the Indonesian context, English instruction has traditionally emphasized "native-like" pronunciation, which often causes learners to feel self-conscious or perceive themselves as inadequate. However, considering Indonesia's linguistically diverse landscape, with over 700 regional languages and dialects, such expectations may inadvertently undermine learners' natural linguistic identities. These regional language backgrounds inevitably shape the way English is spoken across the country, contributing to distinct local English accents.

For instance, speakers of regional languages such as Javanese or Batak may find it challenging to articulate certain English phonemes like "th," as these sounds do not exist in their native phonological systems. As a result, their English pronunciation is often marked by regional features, which, under prescriptive teaching approaches, may lead to anxiety or diminished confidence.

Amid these challenges, digital platforms offer new possibilities for representation and identity formation. Indonesian YouTuber PuriViera, for example, uses English with a distinct Surabayan accent, confidently presenting her speech as authentic and relatable. Her content challenges traditional norms by normalizing regional variation and encouraging learners to embrace their accents as legitimate expressions of identity.

Theoretically, this study draws upon Jenkins' (2000) concept of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), which emphasizes intelligibility over native-likeness. Similarly, Derwing and Munro (2005) argue that comprehensibility should take precedence over phonetic imitation. Crystal (2003) further reinforces the idea that accent is a core part of both cultural and individual identity. Within the framework of Kachru's (1992) World Englishes, localized English varieties, are recognized as valid forms of expression shaped by cultural and social contexts. In Indonesia, this framework supports the acceptance of regional English accents in educational settings.

Empirical studies also support this view. Dewi and Rukmini (2020) found that students gain confidence when encouraged to speak English with their own regional accents. Likewise, Sembiring (2019) observed that students often feel a stronger connection with speakers who share similar linguistic or cultural backgrounds. From a sociolinguistic standpoint, Giles' (1973) Accommodation Theory suggests that learners' choice to maintain their local accent may reflect a conscious effort to assert their cultural identity. This aligns with Krashen's (1982) notion of the affective filter, which posits that positive emotional states—such as comfort with one's own accent, can enhance language acquisition.

From a Global Englishes perspective, Canagarajah (2006) argues that local accents should not be viewed as deviations, but rather as legitimate linguistic resources.

In a similar vein, Norton (2000) contends that learners are more likely to invest in language learning when their identities—including their accents—are acknowledged in the classroom. As Hall (1997) suggests, the positive representation of local accents in media, such as through PuriViera's content, can help shift learner perceptions and foster a broader acceptance of linguistic diversity.

This study aims to explore students' perceptions of using regional Indonesian accents in English learning, with particular focus on the Surabayan accent as featured in PuriViera's digital content.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

The notion that dialect is an essential component of both cultural and individual identity is further substantiated by Crystal (2003). Localized English varieties are acknowledged as genuine forms of expression that are influenced by cultural and social contexts within the framework of Kachru's (1992) World Englishes. This paradigm promotes the acceptance of regional English accents in educational environments in Indonesia. This perspective is also substantiated by empirical research. Dewi and Rukmini (2020) discovered that pupils develop self-assurance when they are encouraged to speak English with their own regional accents. In the same vein, Sembiring (2019) noted that students frequently experience a more profound connection with lecturers who possess comparable cultural or linguistic backgrounds.

The Accommodation Theory of Giles (1973) suggests that learners' decision to preserve their local accent may be indicative of a deliberate endeavor to assert their cultural identity from a sociolinguistic perspective. This is consistent with Krashen's (1982) concept of the affective filter, which asserts that language acquisition can be facilitated by positive emotional states, such as comfort with one's own accent. Canagarajah (2006) contends that local dialects should not be perceived as deviations, but rather as legitimate linguistic resources, from the perspective of Global Englishes. Similarly, Norton (2000) posits that learners are more inclined to engage in language acquisition when their identities, including their dialects, are recognized in the classroom. As Hall (1997) suggests, the positive portrayal of local accents in media,

such as through PuriViera's content, can alter learner perceptions and promote a broader acceptance of linguistic diversity.

III.   RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach within a case study design, focusing on the Short PuriViera YouTube channel, where English is spoken with a distinct regional accent. The participants consisted of 30 sixth-semester students from the English Education program at Universitas Indraprasta PGRI. From this group, 15 responses were selected for in-depth analysis based on the completeness of their answers and their familiarity with PuriViera's content. Data collection involved three primary methods: online questionnaires containing both closed and open-ended questions, structured interviews, and content analysis of selected YouTube Shorts. The questionnaire was developed with reference to relevant literature and was piloted with a small group of students to ensure clarity and appropriateness. Thematic analysis was applied to interpret the responses. Sample questions included:

1. "How do you feel when hearing English spoken with a local Indonesian accent?"
2. "Has PuriViera's content affected your confidence in speaking English?"
3. "Do you think local accents hinder or support English communication?"
4. "Should English teaching embrace local accent diversity?"

Scaled item asking students to rate their motivation after seeing someone confidently use a local accent in English communication.

IV.   FINDINGS

Among the 15 valid and complete responses, students from various backgrounds with different regional accents, including Javanese, Sundanese, Batak, and Betawi. The responses showed a strong appreciation for the use of local accents in English learning. Before watching the PuriViera videos, many participants reported feeling embarrassed by their accents. However, after watching several PuriViera videos, they had a very positive impression. Here are some of the answers obtained from student respondents:

Local Accent as a Source of Motivation and Relatability

The analysis of students' responses revealed that local accents—specifically as used by PuriViera—play a significant role in enhancing learners' motivation and relatability toward English. The participants expressed that hearing English spoken with a regional Indonesian accent made the language feel more familiar, achievable, and emotionally accessible.

Participant 1 stated, "Yes, PuriViera's use of a local accent makes English feel more relatable and less intimidating for Indonesian learners. It shows that clear communication matters more than sounding perfect, She made me realize that fluency matters more than sounding native."

This response highlights two central themes: relatability and redefinition of fluency. The notion of fluency is no longer bound to native-like pronunciation but instead associated with the ability to communicate clearly and confidently. This perspective supports Jenkins' (2000) argument in English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) contexts, where intelligibility is prioritized over native conformity.

Participant 2 echoed this sentiment, emphasizing the impact of shared linguistic experience, "Yes, I do think so, because most Indonesians use local accents when speaking English. and the existence of PuriViera makes them feel related and inspires them to speak English more confidently."

This statement emphasizes the importance of linguistic representation, namely by seeing that people who share the same language background can successfully use English confidently. PuriViera's use of regional accents helps normalize local variations in pronunciation and at the same time challenges the dominance of "standard" or "native" English norms. This sends a strong message to learners that the way they speak English is legitimate and meaningful.

The participants' responses showed a shift in attitudes towards learning English: from an aspiration to imitate the native speaker model, to an acceptance of their own linguistic authenticity. This is in line with recent research trends in language education that emphasize the importance of local identity in the learning process.

Thus, local accents in English learning, as demonstrated by PuriViera, are not only tolerated, but are valued by learners as a symbol of authenticity, confidence, and

linguistic empowerment. Local accents act as a motivation trigger as well as an accessible language use model, especially for learners who previously felt alienated from the English model that was too focused on native speakers.

Reducing Anxiety and Promoting Linguistic Identity

Participants expressed reduced fear of making mistakes, especially in relation to pronunciation. Prior to watching content like PuriViera's, several students shared that they often held back from speaking English due to fear of being judged for sounding "improper" or "too local." The presence of a confident speaker using a regional accent in a public digital space helped normalize their own ways of speaking.

One respondent noted, "Seeing someone speak English with a Javanese accent made me feel like I didn't have to pretend to be someone else." This illustrates how representation can reduce internalized anxiety and support more authentic self-expression. According to Krashen's (1982). Affective Filter Hypothesis, emotional barriers such as fear, embarrassment, or low self-esteem can hinder second language acquisition. When these barriers are lowered, through exposure to affirming and relatable content, language input becomes more accessible and retention improves.

In addition, Norton (2000) emphasizes the role of identity in language learning. Learners are more likely to invest in the process when they feel their identity, including their accent and cultural background, is accepted and valued. By seeing their own way of speaking reflected in someone successful and confident, students in this study reported feeling reassured that their local identity has a place in the global landscape of English use. This supports the idea that fostering linguistic self-acceptance can directly impact language learners' willingness to communicate and their confidence in participating in English-speaking environments—both in the classroom and beyond.

Alignment with Theoretical Frameworks

The participants' statements showed that there was a compatibility between their experiences as learners and a number of theories that have been developed for a long time in the field of sociolinguistics and language teaching. Participant 3 revealed,

"After seeing her speak English without hiding her accent, I feel less afraid to speak with my Javanese accent."

Meanwhile, Participant 4 added, "Yes, I believe PuriViera's use of a local accent in her English videos makes English more approachable for Indonesian learners. It helps reduce the fear of sounding "wrong" and shows that fluency is not about having a native like accent, but about being able to communicate clearly and confidently. It also creates a more relatable and encouraging environment for learners who might feel insecure about their pronunciation".

Both of these quotes reflect Giles' (1973) ideas in Communication Accommodation Theory, in which language becomes a means of asserting social identity. When individuals choose to maintain their local accent in formal situations such as the use of English, it can be understood as a form of identity assertion—that is, an affirmation of the linguistic identity inherent in their cultural and social background.

This finding also corroborates the results of Sembiring's (2019) research which states that learners tend to have a stronger emotional attachment to speakers who use a variety of accents similar to them. In this context, the representation of local accents in digital media is not only a matter of linguistic freedom, but also related to the psychological aspect—that is, creating a sense of security, acceptance, and emotional connection to the learning process.

`Furthermore, these findings support the framework of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) introduced by Jenkins (2000), which emphasizes that the main goal in international communication is not to standardize the way of speaking, but to ensure comprehension. Within this framework, phonological variations—including local accents—are recognized as a natural and legitimate part of global English usage.

Thus, the students' experience in this study is not only in line with previous theories, but also shows that linguistic accessibility and acceptance of phonological identity are important factors to consider in the design of inclusive and culturally relevant English language learning.

V.   DISCUSSION

The findings affirm Jenkins' (2000) view that intelligibility is more important than accent conformity in ELF contexts. Students also reported that local accents made the speaker more relatable, echoing Sembiring's (2019) claim about emotional connection. The use of local accent was not seen as a weakness, but as a communicative asset.

From a pedagogical perspective, this suggests that teachers can use content like PuriViera's to foster positive attitudes toward phonological diversity. For example, instructors could encourage class discussions on identity in English speaking and emphasize that communication not accent perfection is the goal. As one respondent put it, "PuriViera shows that we don't need to sound like foreigners to be good at English. We just need to be confident and clear."

This perspective encourages a critical rethinking of traditional pronunciation goals in language classrooms. Rather than aiming for an unattainable native norm, learners are empowered to express themselves confidently using their own linguistic resources. Teachers should integrate media such as PuriViera's videos to promote discussion about accent diversity. They can ask students to reflect on their own accents, increasing comfort and reducing anxiety (Sifakis, 2014). This reflection process can be formalized through learner journals or audio self-assessments, helping students track their progress not only in pronunciation but also in confidence and self-perception. Wahyuni (2021) supports such inclusive classroom practices, emphasizing that affirming students' linguistic identity leads to a more engaging and empowering learning environment.

Moreover, adopting a pedagogy that embraces linguistic variation allows students from underrepresented communities to see their cultural background reflected in the curriculum. This contributes to equity in language education, challenging implicit biases that favor Western-centric norms. By incorporating locally-relevant content and embracing phonological variation, educators can help students feel accepted and confident in their English use, promoting not just language proficiency but also linguistic pride.

Ultimately, this approach moves English learning beyond a skill-based framework into a more holistic practice—one that nurtures voice, identity, and belonging. In doing so, it prepares learners not only to speak English, but to speak it with authenticity.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that using and accepting local accents in English learning fosters learner confidence, motivation, and identity affirmation. PuriViera's confident use of the Surabayan accent provides students with a model of empowered, authentic language use. Her example demonstrates that English learners can thrive globally without conforming to native speaker norms. Educators are encouraged to adopt inclusive strategies that validate students' linguistic backgrounds. Recognizing accent diversity not only affirms identity but also enriches classroom communication and creates more equitable language learning environments. Future studies can explore how other regional accents are represented and received in digital content, and how this can further support diversity in English language education.

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