

EXPLORING EFL STUDENTS' AWARENESS OF THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN AMERICAN AND BRITISH VARIETIES

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Abstract: *The objectives of this research are to explore the EFL students' awareness toward American and British English and to know EFL students' perception towards both varieties that influence their learning experiences. This qualitative descriptive research conducted the ethnonarrative approach, which were analyzed descriptively through collecting the data, reducing inappropriate data, displaying and concluding data. The results revealed that the way how the EFL students aware toward American and British English were the participants watch television programs to do self-understanding, they learned both varieties in school and took the TOEFL and IELTS exam, they also frequently use American English to make a conversation as their process of socialization. The EFL students' perception towards both varieties that influence their learning experiences were different. The first participant thought that British English is way much professional, had unique grammatical and vocabularies. While the second participant thought that American English used for daily conversation.*

Keywords: *American English, British English, EFL students' awareness, Varieties of English*



INTRODUCTION

English is a lingua franca that is spoken all over the world and is used for more than just interlanguage communication among native speakers in many former British and American colonies (A. Al-Mutairi, 2019). Based on the classification of World Englishes using Kachru's three concentric circle model, this fact has emerged. The inner circle, the outer circle and the expanding circle are three concentric circles that he used to illustrate how English was distributed. These circles indicate the manner of dissemination, the pattern of acquisition, and the functional areas in which English is utilized across cultures and languages (Kachru, 1990).

The two primary native dialects of the English language are thought to be American English and British English (DaCosta & Arias, 2021). In Indonesia, where English is a foreign language, both American English (AmE) and British English (BrE) are used as material references for studying English. English used in the United Kingdom referred to as "British" (Crystal, 2003). According to Algeo (2006) the two varieties of English that overseas students most frequently study and speak are American and British English. There are many various ways that the English language has evolved around the world. Different varieties have different pronunciation, tone, intonation, spelling, vocabulary, grammar, discourse, sociolinguistics, and other characteristics (Han, 2019). If the differences between American and British English's written and spoken forms are not clearly grasped, EFL students may perceive English wrongly in some areas. The two varieties of English that have the most sway in nations where English is spoken as a second language are British and American. The distinctions between British and American English will be made clear to the students.

Several studies have been conducted to explore English varieties used both American English and British English in different contexts (Ali et al., 2020; Anwar & Qureshi, 2019; Audriyan & Putri, 2021; Baratta & Halenko, 2022; Boonsuk et al., 2021; Carrie & McKenzie, 2018; Chung & Miki Bong, 2019; Chvala, 2020; DaCosta & Arias, 2021; Dirgeyasa, 2015; Eriksson, 2019; Fares, 2019; Gunawan & Aminah, 2020; Hadjoudji, 2019; Han, 2019; Hermini, 2019; Kiavar & Yaghoubi-Notash, 2019; Leemann et al., 2018; Passakornkarn & Vibulphol, 2020; Raihan, 2021; Rezaei et al., 2019; Serrarens, 2017; Toscu, 2019; Yaman, 2015). In Indonesian context, there are several studies that have been conducted regarding students' awareness of the differences between the American and British English, a study from Gunawan & Aminah (2020) they found that although the students have demonstrated a greater level of mastery of American and British English, they still have trouble telling the two forms apart and frequently utilize both varieties. A study from Hermini (2019) shows that the students prefer American English in the learning process because they believe it is simple to pronounce and understand, and they frequently use it. Other results show that the students mostly pick up on the distinctions in pronunciation between American and British English. However, a small percentage of students continue to consider that British English is sophisticated, formal, and a good all-around English variant. A different context of study conducted by Yaman (2015) in Turkey, he stated that the participants are not entirely aware of the variations between American and British English in terms of spelling, word choice, and sound. All these relevant previous studies discussed about the variety of English

that the students used most and English students' knowledge of American English and British English.

Understanding about anything happening in the environment can be used to define awareness. Gafoor (2012) stated that the ability to notice, feel, or be mindful of an object or pattern is known as awareness. As a result of what people experience in their daily lives, such as socialization, learning, and self-understanding, awareness can be explained (Muluk et al., 2020). The researchers used this theory in order to know about the process of the EFL students' socialization, their learning process and their self-understanding of British and American English. The researchers also used the theory of Chopra (2012) related to the five aspects of awareness, there are feelings, perceptions, expectations, assumptions and beliefs of British and American English. All these aspects expected to become a description of their awareness. Although the topic is interesting and tends to attract researchers, the relevant literature, especially regarding students' awareness of the differences between varieties of English, is not as extensive as one might expect. As one of the relevant studies, in this case it is the problem of TOEFL, TOEIC or IELTS scores. By being aware of students' English vocabulary, it will enrich the vocabulary that students remember and not only understand vocabulary in American English. When they find words like bathroom, store, cookie, movie, cab, candy, gas which are American English vocabulary, they will also find the same meaning but with different words in British English such as toilet, shop, biscuit, film, taxi, sweets, petrol. Sometimes the students have difficulty in answering the TOEFL, TOEIC or IELTS questions and did not get a high score if they do not realize that the vocabulary is in British English or vice versa (Akmal et al., 2020; Mahmud, 2014; Matingfan, 2018; Rezkiani, 2019). Therefore, it is necessary for EFL students to be aware of the differences between American and British English in terms of vocabulary when they face the TOEFL, TOEIC or IELTS exams which are combined between American and British English. It is important for EFL students to observe, understand, and learn the differences in language use.

The urgency of this research is about the EFL students' awareness of the differences between the British and American varieties of English. If the EFL students are not aware of American and British English, they will use both varieties and cause problems. For instance, in the context of taking the TOEFL, TOEIC or IELTS exams, the EFL students will be confused when they find a word from American or British English with the same meaning, yet different vocabulary, e.g., schedule and timetable. They cannot identify which vocabulary they should use or choose because they think that one of the words is wrong or has a different meaning, which will affect their TOEFL, TOEIC or IELTS scores. The novelty of this research highlighted the EFL students' awareness toward American and British English and how both varieties of English influence their learning experiences such as taking the TOEFL, TOEIC or IELTS exams so that educators or other researchers can use this literature to prepare for future American and British English for education context.

There were many studies regarding to the EFL students' American and British English about what varieties that they prefer to use between both varieties

of English, their mastery level of both American and British English and the variations between American and British English in terms of spelling, word choice, and sound. The newest issues about this research are how the EFL students' aware toward American and British English when they are taking TOEFL, TOEIC or IELTS exams and their perception towards American and British English that influence their learning experiences. Therefore, the objectives of this study intended to explore the EFL students' awareness toward American and British English and to know EFL students' perception towards American and British English that influence their learning experiences.

METHOD

This qualitative descriptive research conducted the ethnonarrative approach. The ethnonarrative approach combines context and text as material construction, therefore it emphasizes the local context of production and using anthropological techniques to draw conclusions about how context creates meaning (Hansen, 2006). The researchers explored the stories told by the participants through interview. The stories used when the study has a specific focus such as students' life history (Mohajan, 2018). The participants were taken purposive through judgmental sampling. The purposive sampling technique also known as judgment sampling is the purposeful selection of an informant based on the informant's personal characteristics. It is a nonrandom technique so no underlying hypotheses or predetermined number of informants are required (Tongco, 2007). The participants are two EFL students with coding system (KNPK) for the first participant and (SAZ) for the second participant. The considerations that make the participants chosen purposively are (1) they had learned about pronunciation, grammar, spelling and vocabulary of both British and American English. (2) They have taken the TOEFL and IELTS exams which made them have difficulty recognizing these words in American or British English which affected their grades and learning experience.

The instruments are interview protocol and researchers' audio-visual recording devices. To collect the data, the researchers conducted interview face to face with the participants while they have a free time. The aim of this interview was to get the information from the participants. The researchers use interview protocol and the type of interview is semi-structured interview. The researchers adapted the interview questions from Alftberg (2009) that consist of five in-depth questions. The interview process did twice for two participants, once for the first participant and once for the second participant in order to get the information related to their awareness toward American and British English and their perceptions when learning both. The results of interview recorded through researchers' audio-visual recording devices. In order to analyze the data, the qualitative data analysis theory applied by the researchers from Miles et al., (2019). Four phases are involved in this type of analysis. They are collecting the data, removing unnecessary data, displaying the data and drawing a conclusion from the data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study were written to explore how The EFL students' awareness toward American and British English. The results of interview in the

form of story as the explanation from the participants. The researchers analyzed the story from the interview results by simplified and reduced the unnecessary data and displayed the data in a table below. Both participants of the study have answered the interview questions conducted by the researchers.

	Aspects of awareness (Muluk et al., 2020)		
	Self-understanding	Learning	Socialization
Participant 1 (KNPK)	Watching a television program " <i>the Great British Bake Off</i> "	She spoke frequently American English in her school and took the TOEFL and IELTS exam.	She used American English to make a conversation with her friends.
Participant 2 (SAZ)	Watching a television program " <i>World news</i> "	She learned both American and British English since in elementary school and took the IELTS exam.	She used American English to make conversations with her friends and her teachers

The first participant revealed her awareness of American and British English through watching a television program namely "the Great British Bake Off" as her self-understanding. For the learning aspect she frequently spoke on American English in her school than British English and took the TOEFL and IELTS exam. In socialization aspect, the first participant also used American English to make a conversation with her friends because she thought that American English is more casual than British English which she used it for formal situation. The second participant expresses her awareness of American and British English through watching a television program namely "World news" as her self-understanding. For the learning aspect, she learned both American and British English since in elementary school and took the IELTS exam. In socialization aspect, she used American English frequently in her school program namely "English day" which makes her more trained with many conversations with her friends and her teachers, including native speakers of British English that invited by the school. Based on the analysis of the present study about the EFL students' awareness toward American and British English, it demonstrated that they had covered some aspects of awareness by Gafoor (2012) and Muluk et al., (2020). A quantitative research from Audriyan & Putri (2021) revealed with a total score of 81,62 % as the social domain, the students' language awareness of how they will interpret the connection between language and society, the students confirmed how they can comprehend the meaning and what was intended to be said after reading or listening to something in English with 73,13% total score as the power domain and the students are proficient enough to engage in language activities that will enhance their performance, whether it is their fluency, communication, or writing skills with 65,86% total score as the performance domain. Another study from

Gunawan & Aminah (2020) their findings revealed that American movies and music is the most participants prefer for their process of self-understanding, followed by British movies and music and Indonesian movies and music. In the socialization aspect, participants only used English in the classroom, which causes them to utilized inconsistent amounts of American English and British English or even feel confused about the variety of English they were using. In learning process aspect, Although the participants have demonstrated a greater ability of comprehension of American and British English, they still occasionally have problems identifying the two versions apart. They can also complete all tests, however not all of their responses are accurate. Based on the results of research conducted by the researchers and related previous studies, it can be concluded that students' awareness of American and British English can be explored through their self-understanding aspect through watching television shows, listening to music, reading magazines and doing things they like while learning both American and British English. Aspects of the learning process or performance of English skills can also be honed through studying in the classroom and taking a kind of test that will test their ability to understand the context of the language. Aspects of their socialization process can be through interaction with friends, teachers, parents and other people in the community to practice language skills as well as American English or British English.

In this section, the researchers explored more about EFL students' perception towards American and British English by simplified and reduced the unnecessary data and displayed the data below. The first participant explained her perception related to American and British English that influence their learning experiences.

“When I'm studying American and British English, of course there are some differences between learning both of those because like British English is way too much complex. There are difficult vocabularies to remember that are not similar to the American vocabularies. Like for example, aubergine that means eggplant, appetizer, queue, maize and so on. I would say British is harder to learn than American English.” (KNPK)

“British English is way much cooler and much professional than American English make it much suitable for formal occasion, while American English for daily occasion, I'm studying British English and American English in a different situation. For British, I learned it from the school because in my school the system education for English subjects were using British. So that's where I'm learning British English. Well, for American English, I'm studying it from my daily location not only in my school, like watching YouTube or maybe like daily conversation with my friends, etc.” (KNPK)

“My expectation after learning the language will probably make me much understand grammar in English and maybe could get along or maybe fit in with other native.” (KNPK)

The second participant also shared her opinion.

“I never studied British before, but I feel so excited when I study American. Now I know more about English that has many varieties” (SAZ)

“I’m not only study American English, but also British English. I think British accent is different than American accent. British has unique grammatical and vocabularies. But I have met many people speak British accent. Then American and British have different characteristics that can use by many people in different countries. But I assume that everyone prefers understand American.” (SAZ)

“I’m expecting to learn how to apply this knowledge to real life. I can speak English is a small special flair, I hope there is a simple way so everyone can learn English easily.” (SAZ)

The first participant believed that British English is significantly cooler and more professional than American English, making it much more appropriate for formal occasions while American English is more suitable for everyday situations. As a result, she studied American and British English in a different situation. For British English, she learned it much from the school and for American English she learned it much from outside her school. Same statement from a study by Ali et al., (2020) that the participants agreed that American English tends to be more colloquial and informal, whereas British Standard English is extremely formal and academic in terms of vocabulary. Eriksson (2019) also revealed in her study that many students prefer AmE (American English) because it sounds pleasant, that it is cool, and that it is simple. BrE (British English), on the other hand, is also said to be pleasant, but students also prefer it because it is more authentic and prestigious. The second participant thought that she learned not only American English but also British English. Therefore, she thought British English accent is different than American English accent, British English has unique grammatical and vocabularies and she met many people that spoke British accent. Related study comes from Munjin (2008) stated that the two languages are generally almost the same, but there are some differences such as grammar, speech, and most of all in vocabulary. Ling (2015) added that even though British English and American English share a common language, there are some differences between them in terms of grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, synonymy, homonymy, spelling and lexicology. The second participant also assumed that everyone preferred understand American English. Hermini (2019) in her study also stated that the students prefer American English in the classroom because they believe it is simple to speak and understand, and they use it frequently. Ali et al., (2020) also stated in their study that approximately 60% of the students mentioned that they preferred American Standard English because it is clearer and easier for them to comprehend because it has a similar accent to their native English. Based on the results of research conducted by the researchers and related previous studies, it can be concluded that American English or British English can be learned anywhere depending on the environment of someone who is studying both, as explained in the sentence above, many results from several studies show that

students preferred to use American English more than British English because American English is more common and used in everyday conversation, rather than British English which is more often used in formal event situations. In addition, it is necessary for students to recognize different vocabulary but have the same meaning from the use of American and British English. Not only vocabulary that needs to be learned but also grammar, pronunciation, synonymy, homonymy, spelling are also aspects that have many differences between American and British English so that when they face exams such as TOEFL, TOEIC or IELTS, they will not be confused and understand what the text means.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and the objectives of the study, the researchers could draw the conclusion that the way how the EFL students aware toward American and British English were the participants watch television programs to do self-understanding regarding the understanding of American and British English, they learned both American and British English in school and took the TOEFL and IELTS exam, they also frequently use American English to make a conversation and practice rather than British English as their process of socialization.

The EFL students' perception towards American and British English that influence their learning experiences were different. The first participant thought that British English is way much cooler, professional, had unique grammatical and vocabularies that makes it much suitable for formal occasion. While the second participant thought that American English used for daily conversation and everyone prefer understand American English.

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