

STUDENT PREFERENCE IN AMERICAN VS BRITISH ENGLISH ACCENTS: A SURVEY IN NON- NATIVE SPEAKERS

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia is a country that does not use English as its primary language, and accent has emerged as a linguistic factor that influences understanding and the way Indonesian students view their language skills in social and academic contexts. English Accents play a major role in Students learning. Previous studies indicate that students in Indonesia are generally more familiar with and adapted to American accents due to the national education system's incorporation of several American-accented instructional materials. This research employs a qualitative case study design, the qualitative research relies primarily on the collection of the qualitative data. The research is precisely conducted with questionnaires via GoogleForm and interviews. The questions were carefully made and had about 15 items, and the questionnaire (in Google Form format) was given to the 37 students. The students selected to interview were non-native English learners in the age range of 13–18, who have studied and been exposed to English for five to ten years or even more to both American and British English through various media. The findings show a strong preference for American English, mainly by media exposure, perceived ease of understanding and the relevance for global communication. Students think American English is more modern and useful, while British English seems more formal and prestigious but less used. Although many students learn American English in a formal learning environment, their media consumption further strengthens this preference, students also said that schools should start by teaching one accent like American English, to give a strong base before bringing in other accents. At the end students recognize the functional benefits of both accents, yet more students think that American English is more helpful for their future academic or job prospects.

Keywords: Accents, American English, British English, Students' Preferences, Non-native

INTRODUCTION

Communication is one of many skills in this life that we must have. Language essentially is the core of communication skill, when we want to talk or write something. Indonesia itself is a multicultural country that has a wealth of languages. As unifying the nation, Indonesia was designated as the official language of the country spoken and mastered. English, as an international language, has a different accent influenced by region and cultural factors. While talking about foreign languages, it is common sense that we directly think about the English language. Indonesia is a country that does not use English as its primary language, and accent has emerged as a linguistic factor that influences understanding and the way Indonesian students view their language skills in social and academic contexts. In non-English speaking countries such as Indonesia, students frequently encounter different accents through media, education, and social interactions, influencing how they view and prefer these accents.

When learning English, the accent and attitude toward it play a major role. Perhaps, an accent is the first thing that may get the attention of the learners because the English language has two accents that are common in our knowledge. In reality, in non-native countries such as Indonesia, English exposure differs widely based on the students' habits, the educators or teacher, and their media preferences. Indonesian students use different accents and mixed usage between American and British accents because they are influenced by different media and education. These accents are the two most commonly used native accents in teaching materials, and both are considered ideal models (Maharani, 2023). First is the American English Accent, this accent is the form of English spoken in the United States, characterized by its own phonemic patterns, relatively uniform pronunciation, and simplified spellings and vocabulary that deviated from British norms after independence (Modiano, 1996). The second is British English accent, it refers to the standard pronunciation and spelling conventions that developed and remained in Great Britain after political separation from the United States. He notes that even though both use the same language, British English differs in certain spellings, terminologies, and phonemic patterns. British English has more regional variety, and its pronunciation, often called Southern British or Received Pronunciation, includes sounds and distinctions that differ from American phonemes (Thomas, 1958). According to Kachru's (1990) paradigm, American and British accents represent the inner circle and are often considered benchmarks for demonstrating high proficiency and social status (Wardana & Sahiruddin, 2025).

Previous studies indicate that students in Indonesia are generally more familiar with and adapted to American accents due to the national education

system's incorporation of several American-accented instructional materials. In academic and popular media, British accents are still considered as a sign of intelligence and status, many students naturally mix part of both accents, creating pronunciation styles that often match the standard taught in education. This unequal and inconsistent exposure causes different pronunciation styles and different views on which accent is more correct or preferable. However, most students choose to use an Indonesian-English accent when they talk to each other since it is easier to understand and more flexible (Maharani, 2023; Wardana & Sahiruddin, 2025). The gap between the expected mastery from standard English accent and the actual variety and inconsistency exposure highlights the need for further investigation. Although earlier research has examined non-native speakers' perception on English accents, limited research has focused on particular preferences of Indonesian students. With this background, this article aims to explore teenage students' perceptions of British and American accents, as well as how their preferences and expectations regarding these accents affect their academic identity, listening performance, and social attitudes in the context of English language learning in Indonesia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Study from Salah & Parapatics (2025) explored Tunisian learners' motivation and attitudes regarding English language learning across various educational levels. Their study highlighted the significance of early and consistent English exposure, along with the family and social support in shaping learners' engagement. The finding indicated that students generally possess positive attitudes and strong motivation toward learning English, primarily influenced by instrumental goals such as employment prospects, while integrative motivation also played a role. This observation suggests that students' exposure and motivation can influence their preferences for different varieties of English, including American and British accents. Understanding accents affects the speaking ability of English learners in Indonesia, according to Puspasari et al., (2025). Püski (2024) examined Hungarian EFL students' accent preferences (British English vs. American English) and their views of their own accents using questionnaires and verbal guise techniques. The results show that although participants often feel their accents are similar to American English and some associate this with a high level of proficiency, British accents are generally recognized as having higher overt prestige (status and solidarity). However, AmE still has strong covert prestige. These findings highlight that media, education, and personal experiences play an important role in shaping the linguistic identity and accent preferences of EFL learners.

In teaching, Fitria (2023) emphasizes the importance of understanding the differences between American and British English. She proposes that both accents

should be taught according to students' preferences and exposure. Similarly, with Sihombing et al., (2025) , their study conducted a contrastive analysis on British and American English pronunciation, emphasizing on varieties in vowels, consonants, stress patterns, intonation, and rhoticity. Their study highlighted the importance of understanding these phonological distinctions to improve clarity and communicative effectiveness, particularly for Indonesian learners who are exposed to both accent varieties through media and education. The study further encouraged flexibility in accent learning, indicating that students should prioritize intelligibility rather than rigidly adhering to one standard accent. This perspective supports the idea that learners' preferences could be influenced by practicality and exposure rather than by strict adherence to linguistic norms. Nasir (2024) investigates the origins and differences between AmE, BrE, and AusE, focusing on dialects and accents through a qualitative review of linguistic corpora. Key findings highlight phonetic differences: AmE is characterized by the presence of a distinct /r/ sound and rising question intonation, in contrast to the falling intonation and absence of the /r/ sound in BrE and AusE. Vocabulary patterns and stress also vary. This article concludes that differences in accents and dialects shaped by historical and social factors are the main factors in forming these different variations of English. Modiano (1996) in "A Mid-Atlantic Handbook" describes AmE and BrE as two main variations in English that differ in vocabulary, spelling, pronunciation, and meaning. BrE retains traditional forms (such as 'colour') and exhibits greater regional variation. On the other hand, AmE uses simpler spelling (such as 'color'), is more standardized, and has greater global influence, often considered easier to understand by non-native speakers.

Wardana & Sahiruddin (2025) conducted qualitative research on the accent preferences of six EFL students in Indonesia towards British and Indonesian accents, taking into account views on native speakers. The results showed that although British accents are considered prestigious and intelligent, most respondents preferred Indonesian accents for reasons of comfort and effective communication among friends. According to Mainake (2021), Indonesian students studying in the United States have different feelings about their own accents. They value their cultural identity and want to sound like native speakers. Because they often experience minor discrimination, they want to change their accents. Overall, this study shows that although awareness of various English accents is increasing, the belief that native accents are superior still influences learners' feelings, teaching practices, and their self-perceptions of English. Baese-Berk et al., (2020), in their article "Perceptions of Non-Native Speech," discuss the dynamics of native listeners' understanding and evaluation of non-native speech. This article focuses on the shift from placing the burden of communication solely on non-native speakers to emphasizing the important role

of active native listeners. They argue that accent perception is greatly influenced by the listener's experience, expectations, and social biases, and state that comprehension can be improved through training. Criticizing older models that focus on the speaker, the authors propose a balanced approach that recognizes that successful cross-linguistic communication involves the joint contribution of both native and non-native speakers.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative case study design. From many types of qualitative research in education, the design chosen is case study. As stated by Johnson & Christensen (2014) in a book entitled “Educational Research: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Approaches”, Case study research is more varied than phenomenology, which focuses on some aspect of culture; or grounded theory, which aims at forming a comprehensive explanation. What all pure case studies have in common, however, is a focus on each case as a whole unit as it exists in its real-life context. Also, Qualitative research relies primarily on the collection of the qualitative data, often follows the exploratory scientific method, used to describe what is seen locally and sometimes to come up with or generate new hypotheses and theories. The qualitative researcher constantly tries to understand the people is observing from the participants’ or “natives” or “actors” viewpoints.

The focus of this study is the perception and attitude towards different English varieties (American English vs. British English) as part of the linguistic and cultural phenomena experienced by a group of non-native English-speaking teenager students in a specific educational context. Thus, this study applies a qualitative research method using questionnaires and interviews. The intention is to investigate the students' perceptions, preferences, and attitudes towards both varieties and the factors influencing their choices.

Setting and Participants

The research is precisely conducted with questionnaires via GoogleForm and interviews. It involves several participants to obtain valid and reliable data to answer the research problems. The total participants involved were 37 students, taken from different schools. The students selected were non-native English learners in the age range of 13–18, who have studied and been exposed to English for five to ten years or even more to both American and British English through various media (e.g., textbooks, music, movies, or internet content). From the total number of students, several students were selected using a random sampling because mostly the participants are qualified with the rule and willing to participate actively in the interview.

Data Collection Techniques

The primary qualitative data are taken from the interviews, questionnaires/document analysis, and collecting data from other sources. Interviews were done with the researchers and the chosen participants. The participants who took part in the interviews answered a group of fixed questions, but there was also a chance to talk about new topics that came up during the conversation, like how they see accents, use of words, and connections to American and British English. A questionnaire (in Google Form format) was

given to the 37 students. It included both closed and open-ended questions. This mixed-type questionnaire was important for analysis.

The questions were carefully made and had about 15 items. They were designed to get detailed written answers and for students to choose their response about their exposure, preferences, and reasons for their attitudes towards the two varieties.

Data Analysis and Validity

Once the data was collected, the analysis followed three main steps: reducing the data, showing it clearly, and making conclusions or checking the results. To ensure the findings were reliable and correct, the researchers used a method called triangulation. This involved comparing information from different sources, such as interviews and questionnaires. They also did something called member checking, where they shared their key findings and interpretations with the participants to make sure the researchers accurately understood their experiences and opinions.

Ethical Considerations

In relation to the ethical issues, the researchers have conducted the research in certain ways to appreciate the subjects involved in the data collection process. The researcher has adopted the following procedures to ensure the ethical standard of the research: (1) Formal approval from the research site's principals/headmasters has been obtained; (2) Informed consent has been acquired from the students' parents/guardians, with students also providing assent; (3) All participants, especially the students, are guaranteed privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality regarding their responses and identities; and (4) The researcher has maintained professional distance during non-participant observation to minimize disruption and ensure the naturalness of the classroom activities.

FINDING

Student Profile and Dialect Awareness



Picture 1. Students Proficiency level

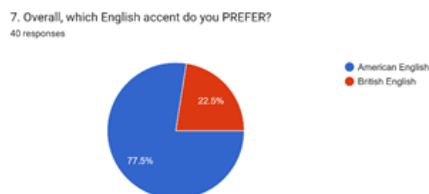
The majority of students surveyed rated their English proficiency at scale 3 and scale 4 (70%), indicating intermediate to upper-intermediate proficiency. Only a small percentage (10%) rated themselves as experts (scale 5) or beginners (scale 1 and scale 2).



Picture 2. Students' more exposed accent

However, when asked about their formal learning environment, the majority of students (70%) stated that they were more often exposed to American English (AmE) accents in their schools or English classes, mainly through textbooks or traditional teaching materials. Meanwhile, 30% reported balanced exposure or a tendency towards British English (BrE), often due to teachers' initiatives to use additional materials. Nevertheless, most respondents (60%) stated that they were familiar with the differences between American and British accents, indicating a high level of dialect awareness among students, regardless of their formal exposure sources.

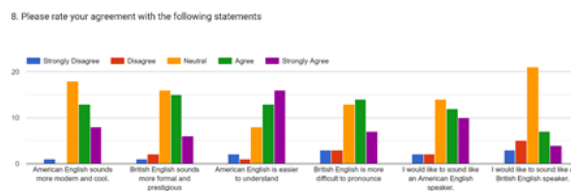
Students' Perception and Most Preferred Choices Accent



Picture 3. Students' preferred accent

When asked which accent they preferred overall, there was a clear dominance. A total of 77.5% of students said they preferred American English, while 22.5% chose British English. This preference became even stronger when students were asked to choose the accent they would like to have when speaking. A total of 57.5% of students chose to have an American accent, and the rest (25%) chose to have a British accent. In fact, 17.5% chose to continue using an Indonesian accent. The main reason behind this choice is that the American accent is considered easier to understand by non-native speakers and more relevant for everyday global communication, especially in non-academic contexts. Conversely, those who chose the British accent were motivated by the elegance, standard, and prestige associated with that accent.

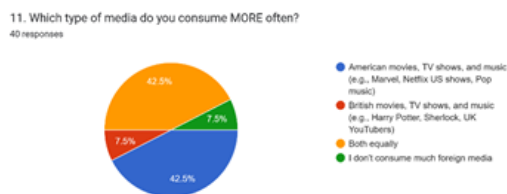
Students' Perceptions of Quality Associated with Accents



Picture 4. Students' agreement about accents

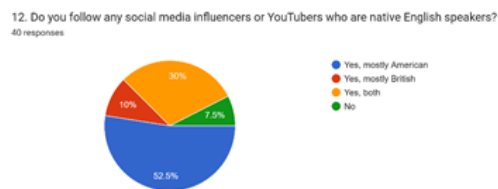
Students associate very different qualities with the two dialects. Studies show that most students consider American English to sound more modern, cool, casual, and easier to understand because they hear it often. On the other hand, British English is often considered more formal, prestigious, and polite, although it is more difficult to pronounce quickly. This reinforces the view that British English is seen as the authoritative standard, while American English is the functional standard.

The Influence of Media and Popular Culture on Students' Preferences



Picture 5. Media Consumed by Students

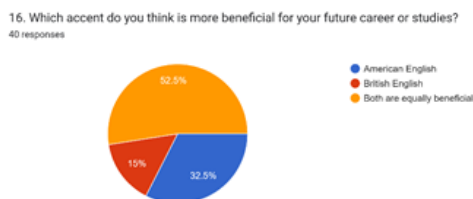
Media exposure plays an important role in shaping student preferences. As many as 42.5% of students cited American films/TV series and music as the types of media they consume most often, followed by students who cited both American and British content (42.5%).



Picture 6. Influencers Followed by Students

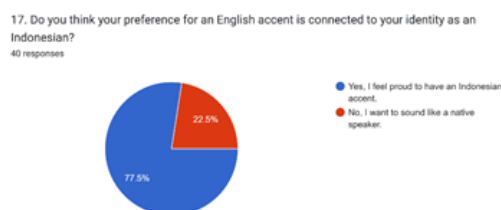
Additionally, the majority of students (52.5%) confirmed that they follow native-speaking influencers or YouTubers, most of whom use an American accent, effectively reinforcing their exposure outside of the academic environment. Therefore, it is not surprising that American Pop Culture (Music, films, internet trends) has a much stronger influence (37.5%) on students than British Pop Culture (15%).

The Relevance of Accents for the Future and Identity



Picture 7. Students' Answers of Beneficial Accents

Based on the data above, most students (52.5%) believe that both American English and British English are beneficial for their future careers or studies. However, compared to British English (15%), more students (32.5%) believe that American English is more beneficial for their future careers or studies, associating it with opportunities in global business and technology. This shows that their accent decisions are driven by functional and career considerations, not just entertainment.



Picture 8, Students' Answers of Their Identity as Indonesians

Interestingly, most students disagree that their accent preferences are connected to their identity as Indonesians. They tend to see accent choice as a pragmatic decision based on global utility and media exposure, separating their functional language choices from local cultural identity. In fact, most students (77.5%) feel proud of their Indonesian accent, and only a handful (22.5%) feel the desire to sound like a native speaker.

Students Interview

Question 1: Do you think the choice of accent affects how people perceive their English ability?

Participant 1 believed that accents does not really affect how others judge their English skills. The participant states, *“In my opinion, the choice of accent does not really affect how people perceive their English Ability. As long as they understand the subject of conversation, no matter what kind of accent they have, it will remain clear for both sides.”* (P1)

When asked why understanding the topic is more important than accent, Participant 1 explained, *“Let’s say I have the perfect American or English accent.*

Then I go to talk to people with my perfect accent, but they do not understand what I am actually talking about from the way I phrase my words or the subject I use is irrelevant to them. Then the conversation will not go as smooth as it could be.” (P1)

Question 2: Have you ever tried to imitate or learn a specific accents? If yes, which one and why?

Participant 2 stated that they had attempted to imitate a specific accent, and focused on practicing the American accent. They explained that their preference was influenced by American media such as movies, Netflix shows and YouTube content. They practiced the accent to help them improve listening comprehension and reduce reliance on subtitles. They believed that American accents are widely recognized, making communication smoother, and also increased their confidence in presentation and everyday English conversations.

Question 3: Should schools teach one accent, or both American and British?

Participant 3 suggested that school should initially focused on teaching one accent, specifically American English. They argued the American accent is commonly used in global media, easy to learn and more widely understood, which make it a good beginning for students. The participant 3 mentioned that this approach would help students build a strong base and communicative clearly with people internationally.

DISCUSSION

This study looked at Indonesian teenage students' preferences for American and British English accents and the factors that affect these preferences. The results showed a strong preference for American English (AmE), with 77.5% of students choosing it mainly because they find it easier to understand, more modern, and relevant for global communication. Only 22.5% preferred British English (BrE), which is seen as more formal and prestigious. This section discusses these results in light of existing research on accent perception, the influence of media, identity, and practical implications for teaching English.

The clear preference for the American accent among Indonesian students matches global trends in American culture and media. Our findings reveal that 42.5% of students mostly watch American films, TV shows, and listen to American music, while 52.5% follow English-speaking influencers, mainly American, on platforms like YouTube. This consistent, casual exposure makes the accent feel familiar and improves understanding and preference. This aligns with the work of Bent et al., (2024), which shows that familiarity with a specific accent significantly boosts word recognition accuracy, especially in difficult listening

situations. Students feel that AmE is "easier to understand," which can be explained by their frequent exposure, reducing the "phonetic distance" that Bent et al. identify as a major factor in understanding challenges.

Moreover, students associate AmE with better future prospects in global business and technology, with 32.5% believing it would be more useful for their future. This shows a practical motivation. This finding aligns with research by Robinson-Jones et al., (2024) on students in English-Medium Instruction (EMI), which distinguishes between practical motivation (learning a language for benefits like job advancement) and integrative motivation (wanting to connect with a language community). Our participants leaned heavily toward practical goals, valuing the usefulness of AmE more than the perceived prestige of BrE.

The role of formal education in shaping these preferences is complicated. While 70% of students reported increased exposure to AmE in school, their media consumption outside class strongly reinforced this preference. This suggests that teaching efforts to show a balanced view of English varieties often fall short against the strong influence of popular culture. This has direct implications for Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) technology, as noted by Oye et al., (2025). If ASR systems, usually based on standard native-speaker models (often AmE or BrE), want to serve global users effectively, they must adjust to the mixed and inconsistent exposure found in places like Indonesia. Our students' tendency to blend accents and their preference for a clear, understandable model support Oye's argument for creating custom, accent-adaptive ASR models to improve recognition for non-native speakers.

A key finding of our study is that students clearly separate their accent preferences from their cultural identity. Most students (77.5%) take pride in their Indonesian accent and view their choice of an American or British accent as a practical decision rather than a shift in identity. This reinforces the idea that, for these learners, English is a tool for global communication, a "lingua franca" rather than a marker of cultural integration with native speakers. This practical view of accent challenges the idea that native accents are superior, which still influences many language learning settings, as noted in the EMI study by Robinson-Jones et al.

In summary, the preferences of Indonesian students are shaped by a mix of factors: the strong impact of American media, the practical advantages linked to AmE, and a desire for clarity over strict adherence to a prestigious norm. The findings suggest a need for teaching approaches that recognize this reality, focusing on promoting accent flexibility and clarity rather than enforcing a single native-speaker standard. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of ensuring that technologies and educational materials are as diverse and adaptable as the global English-speaking community.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore students' preferences between American and British English accents and finding the factors influencing these preferences. The findings show a strong preference for American English, mainly by media exposure, perceived ease of understanding and the relevance for global communication. Students think American English is more modern and useful, while British English seems more formal and prestigious but less used. Although many students learn American English in a formal learning environment, their media consumption further strengthens this preference, students also said that schools should start by teaching one accent like American English, to give a strong base before bringing in other accents. The findings also showed students recognize the functional benefits of both accents, yet more students think that American English is more helpful for their future academic or job prospects. Significantly, students keep their accent preferences from their identity as Indonesian, suggesting that their choices are influenced more by practicality than cultural connections.

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