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## English Variation Used in Reading Class At Higher Education In East Kalimantan

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### Abstract

This study aims to identify the English accents that students use in English reading class and their perceptions about English accents in Indonesia. The research employed a qualitative design to elicit more detailed answers and utilized a modified interview as a research instrument. The researcher enlisted 38 students of English Language Education from a private university in East Kalimantan as participants in this study. Four out of the 38 students were selected for interviews. The results of the research indicated that 9.5% (N=34) participants used an American accent and 10.5% (N=4) participants used a British accent when reading a text in English. The interview result showed that American English was the favored accent for reading and general perception, likely due to its popularity and perceived ease in the media. Despite these preferences, students acknowledged British English as a formal and distinguished accent. They agreed that exposure to different dialects can help in speaking, listening, and vocabulary development. Media exposure played a significant role in influencing their accents.

**Keywords:** English variation; reading class; higher education

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## 1. Introduction

English is the predominant global language, spoken by an estimated 1.5 billion individuals. The extensive use of English has given rise to numerous distinct regional accents. There are over 24 distinct English accents within the British Isles, employed by speakers in various regions. Pradana, (2019) revealed that English ranks among the most widely spoken languages globally. According to Wahyana, (2022), the current global language count stands at 6,912, however, it is important to acknowledge that some languages classified as such may be perceived as dialects or variations. The linguistic variant in question is often denoted as "World Englishes."



Concerning World Englishes, American and British accents play significant roles in English language competency in Indonesia, particularly in cities and educational institutions. In line with the issue, Maharani, (2023) reported that the two most common accents in Indonesia are American and British, with the American accent being extensively used in the educational system. Moreover, Aprianto (2020) asserted that the linguistic variations are influenced by cultural and historical contexts. As investigated by Boonsuk & Fang, (2022) the variation in English accents indicates distinct social and cultural parties in each nation. In fact, the formation of English variations results from geographical and demographic diversity among speakers.

Furthermore, Pradana, (2019) explained that as a language spoken internationally, English inevitably has different varieties and accents. Additionally, An accent is the unique way that each person pronounces words, influenced by factors such as their place of origin, culture, and languages spoken. It adds personal touch to spoken language and shows how different experiences shape how people talk to each other. Moreover, (Aeni et al., 2021) stated that accents may be influenced by several factors including the geographical or regional background of speakers, their social status, racial identity, academic performance, and proficiency in their first language when speaking a second language.

Linguists, on the other hand, identify accents as unique pronunciation patterns exhibited by specific English speakers, not shared by speakers of other languages. To clarify, (McMahon, 2003) elaborated that linguists refer to the distinct pronunciation patterns of each English speaker as that person's accents.

The linguistic landscape of Indonesia has been greatly influenced by the English language, as evident in the variety of accents adopted by English speakers in Indonesia. American and British English accents are the two main sources of influence for Indonesian English speakers. According to Liao, (2023), British English is the official language of the UK island and the Commonwealth countries. It is the form of English spoken by people who



reside on the British Isles. Moreover, numerous individuals who do not speak English as their first language choose British English when learning English as a second or foreign language, including people in the European Union and Asian countries.

American English, originating from Great Britain and is now spoken in North America, emerged as people from England migrated to North America during the British colonization of the region. Americans initially acquired the basics of British English, refining and developing them in the Americas in the 1600s (Liao, 2023).

English is considered an essential skill for Indonesians due to its status as a global lingua franca. As mentioned by Fitria (2023), in Indonesia, most forms of English language learning often include American English or British English. The significance of proficient grammar usage and comprehension of various accents has increased due to globalization and Asia's rapid growth.

According to Katamba, (2020), there are only a few subtle distinctions between British and American English, such as the fact that the British word for "plow" is the same as the American word "plow" and that the British word for "traveling" is the same as the American word "traveling." Otherwise, the Additionally, (Sembiring, 2021) noted that in many ways, American and British English are quite similar.

In line with previous research, the study from Charpentier-Jiménez (2019), about students' perception of English accent varieties in a BA in English and a BA in English Teaching at the University of Costa Rica (UCR). The findings indicated that adding different accents to their major is crucial. The second study by (Pradana, 2019) revealed that students, despite having mixed feelings about accents, found having a recognizable accent helpful in learning English effectively. Participants benefited from familiarity with an accent and imitating the source of word input when learning the English language. The third study was carried out by Maharani, (2023) concluded that English language learners in Indonesia prefer American English over British English. Considering it a simpler, slower language. The last



study by Hermeni (2019) demonstrated that, despite their perceptions of mixing the two varieties of English and having encountered them both, students use the American English variety more frequently and prefer it when learning the language because they find it to be more easily pronounced and understood.

To address a research gap, a few research discussed accents used by undergraduate students and their voice concerning on accents in reading course particularly in East Kalimantan, Indonesia. Thus, the contribution of this research will help university learners in Indonesia interact with various English accents and enhance language learning effectively in reading course.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Research Design, Setting and Context

This study employed qualitative descriptive research in the form of interviews. As defined by Johnson & Christensen (2014), qualitative research is employed in situations when there is limited knowledge of a certain subject or phenomena, and the objective is to explore and gain a further understanding of it. This research investigated the experiences of the participants in relation to (1) the English accents that students use in English reading class and (2) students' perception about English accents in Indonesia. The study took place at a private university in East Kalimantan due to accessibility for data collection. Furthermore, the researcher noticed that the location has phenomena related to preferred accents. Regarding the participants' site, it is the English department major at a private university in East Kalimantan where the students are familiar with the use of English accents in the classroom.

### 2.2. Participants

The current research intended to examine the accents that students utilized in reading class and explored their perception toward English accents in the Indonesian setting, the researcher selected the first-semester students from a private university in East Kalimantan majoring in the English department to participate in this study. The class consists of 38



students, including 11 male and 23 females. Before approaching the participant, the researcher sought approval from the lecturer who taught reading class for first-semester students. The researcher then discussed the research with these students, including the benefits and risks of participating, to obtain their permission to be part of this research. The participants are studying in the same classes and will be referred to by pseudonym, chosen to protect their confidential information.

### 2.3. Data Collection and Instruments

The data collection procedure is as follows: First, to determine the accents that students used in the reading class, the researcher asked students to read a text and record their voice using their own devices. Second, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with an interview guide containing ten questions to understand students' perception. The use of the interview approach in this study was driven by the researcher's objective to gain comprehensive insights through the collection of narrative statements. In this step, the researcher contacted the participants through mobile messaging and email. Then, the researcher and participants decided on a time for the interview based on the participants' availability. As for the location, the interviews took place on campus. The researcher adopted the interview questions from (Musdalifah, 2022) and (Hermini, 2019) to ensure that the data collection technique is objective. To avoid misunderstandings and ensure accurate data, the interviews were conducted in Indonesian. The researcher used a cell phone with video recording capability to record the interviews.

### 2.4. Data Analysis

To analyze the data, the first researcher listened to each students' recording to identify the accents used by students in reading English text. The researcher then took notes on their pronunciation while reading each word. After that, researcher represented and displayed the data, providing a detailed count of students using various types of accents.



For the interviews, the researcher transcribed the recorded interviews into a Microsoft Word document. The results of the interviews were presented in the form of tables. Subsequently, the researcher read the transcriptions and made notes. Finally, the researcher created a coding system for evidence from interview data sources using codes, for example: (S1/F/Q1), where 'S1' (Student number 1) indicates the data is from the first interviewed student. 'F' denotes the student's gender (female), and 'Q1' signifies question 1 of 6 questions. The researcher then selectively coded the document by combining the results of the interviews and interpreting main ideas from the result.

### 3. Findings

#### 3.1. The Accents Used By The Students

In this section, the researcher presents the study's finding based on the students' reading recording. All findings are correlated with the research questions. The accents employed by participants when reading the text are detailed below:

Table 1 the accents used by the students

| No | Variety of English | Percentage |
|----|--------------------|------------|
| 1  | American English   | 89.5%      |
| 2  | British English    | 10.5%      |

The table above reveals that 89.5% (N=34) of the students used an American accent when reading a text in English. However, 10.5% (N=4) of the students used a British accent in the same context. In summary, the results indicate a significant preference for the American accent among the students.



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### 3.2. Students' perceptions of English variety

There are six questions related to students' perception. Findings from the interviews were elaborated into six themes; 1) accents known by the students, 2) students' perception of which accent is more difficult, 3) students' perceptions on the most noticeable aspects of English accents, 4) students' perceptions of what influences them in the use of English accents, 5) students' perceptions on how English accents can help in learning English, and 6) students' opinions on how the use of English accents is related to the reading class

The data are displayed based on the question categories, detailed as follows:

#### 3.2.1. Accents Known by The Students.

In this interview, the researcher aims to assess the students' familiarity with various types of English accents by asking them to identify the accents they know. This was done to ensure that participants were able to identify every accent with which they are familiar. Our interviews with the students revealed that they are acquainted with various varieties of English accents. They shared that:

##### Excerpt 1

"American and British only" (S1/F/Q1)

##### Excerpt 2

"I know American, British, Singlish, (singapore English) that's it" (S2/F/Q1)

##### Excerpt 3

"There are more or less up to 5, if I mention it, it's from several accents that I have tried, including Indian, American, British, and Japanese" (S3/M/Q1).

##### Excerpt 4

"The ones I know are British and US (American)" (S4/M/Q1).



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The participant seems to have varying levels of awareness regarding English accents. Based on the interviews, it is inferred that the English accents most recognized by the students are the American and British accents. The responses of four participants (S1, S2, S3, and S4) support this conclusion. S1, S2, and S4 specifically mentioned only American and British accents as the ones they are familiar with, while S3 recognized four different English accents, including American, British, Indian, and Japanese.

### 3.2.2. Students' Perception of Which Accent Is More Difficult

This section delves into the students' perceptions regarding which accent is more challenging. Its purpose is to ascertain the accents that students find more difficult. They expressed:

#### **Excerpt 5**

"The most difficult thing is actually in British and Japanese. In British, the sound is more different or more difficult to pronounce compared to the American accent. (S3/M/Q2)

#### **Excerpt 6**

"The British one is more difficult, the pronunciation is a bit challenging, more formal in my opinion, while the American one is more casual" (S4/M/Q2).

#### **Excerpt 7**

"For me, the difficult thing is British. Actually, I like the accent, but sometimes, for example, any event that uses a British accent is sometimes too fast. British people really talk fast. Then, sometimes it's so different from what we usually use (American). The language changes so much that not only how to read it but it also changes" (S2/F/Q2).

In these interviews, the students share their perspectives on the challenges of British and American English accents. S3 emphasizes that British English poses the greatest difficulty, particularly with its complex pronunciation compared to the American accent. This highlights a linguistic challenge specific to British English sounds. Moving on to S4, the participant



restates the idea that the British accent presents more challenges, highlighting not only pronunciation but also identifying it as a more formal variation. Conversely, the American accent is portrayed as more relaxed. S2 expands on this topic with the interviewee stating a preference for the British accent but recognizing challenges, specifically regarding speed. She mentions that British people tend to speak quickly, which is a barrier to understanding. Additionally, they note that the language undergoes a more comprehensive transformation when comparing British and American English, not just in terms of pronunciation.

### 3.2.3. Students' Perceptions on The Most Noticeable Thing About English Accents

This chapter portrays the students' voices on the aspects they find most noticeable in the English accents.

#### Excerpt 8

"In British, I can notice from his voice, his voice is more royal." (S4/M/Q3)

#### Excerpt 9

"From the pronunciation, sometimes the Americans are more assertive in their pronunciation, while the British are more polite in theirs. I can tell whether they are speaking with a British or American accent; I can tell the difference" (S3/M/Q3).

#### Excerpt 10

"The most noticeable thing about the accents that I hear is the way they read, the intonation and the speed" (S2/F/Q3).

The above excerpts offer detailed insights into students' views on distinct characteristics of English accents. S4 notes the notable regality of British accents, emphasizing the distinctive quality of the voice as more regal. S3, shifts the discussion to pronunciation as a critical element in distinguishing between British and American accents. The student expresses that Americans may have a more assertive pronunciation, while the British are viewed as more formal in their speech. S2 focuses on the way English is spoken, particularly emphasizing



intonation and speed. The mention of intonation points to an awareness of the tonal or pitch variations in speech, while the consideration of speed highlights its role in distinguishing accents.

### 3.2.4 Students' Perceptions of Influences On Their Use Of English Accent

Further analysis portrays students' perception on how their English accents are influenced by exposure to entertainment media on their everyday lives.

#### Excerpt 11

"Video game compilations often feature English scenes. The channel focuses on playing games and showcasing a compilation of every game scene, by the way" (S4/M/Q4)

#### Excerpt 12

"For myself, I often watch movies like Rush Hour movie. Chris Tucker often uses his American accent there and I prefer to listen to his accent. One of his friends uses a Chinese accent, yes. I also come across American accents in video clips from podcasts. So, the sound, we enjoy listening to it more" (S3/M/Q4)

#### Excerpt 13

"For me, I like watching movies and listening to music. For example, the singer is Adelle, her songs include 'Easy On Me,' All I Ask" (S1/F/Q4)

#### Excerpt 14

"For me, I usually enjoy it, including listening to songs. I like listening to Bruno Mars' songs, because sometimes he uses different terms and phrases to other people" (S2/F/Q4)

The excerpts above provide insight into students' perceptions of the factors influencing their use and preference for English accents. S4 mentions exposure to English accents through video game compilations, suggesting that individuals can encounter various accents even in non-educational contexts like video games. Moving to the discussion about movies, S3 citing 'Rush Hour' as a significant influence, expressing a preference for Chris Tucker's American



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accent in the film. This indicates that actors and media choices play role in shaping their affinity for specific accents.

S1 links exposure to English accents with movies and music, mentioning Adele's tracks such as "Easy on Me" and "All I Ask" as examples. This suggests that consuming media featuring well-known artists with unique helps individuals become familiar with and potentially favor specific accents. Additionally, she expresses an interest in English accents, particularly in songs. The inclusion of Bruno Mars as a favored artist highlights the influence of musical tastes on one's appreciation of particular accents.

### **3.2.5 Students' Perceptions on The Impact of English Accents on English Language Learning**

This section addresses how English accents may facilitate the learning of the English language.

#### **Excerpt 15**

"If it helps, yes, sir, it helps more, especially when listening and speaking. We usually engage in direct listening or speaking. In my opinion, using American accent is more helpful. Although sometimes I think it's more polite to be British." (S2/F/Q5)

#### **Excerpt 16**

"I think it helps, because by learning the accent we learn and familiarize words that we might not know, and maybe we can communicate with American speaker better." (S4/M/Q5)

The findings from the interview above provide valuable insights into students' perceptions on the role of English accents in the language learning process. S2 acknowledges the advantages accents offer for listening and speaking, expressing a preference for the practicality of the American accent. However, they also acknowledge that the British accent may be perceived as more polite on certain occasions. S4 believes that learning English pronunciation is



advantageous, as it assists in acquiring unfamiliar vocabulary and facilitating improved communication, particularly with American speakers.

### **3.2.6 Students' Perceptions On How The Use Of English Accents Is Related To Reading Class**

This chapter explores students' perceptions regarding the use of English accents in reading class.

#### **Excerpt 16**

"Actually, we can be more capable of speaking in English if we read it better; Americans can catch it in speech. But I find I am more able to catch the meaning in reading when I use American accent, while with British, I am really lacking."  
(S3/M/Q6)

#### **Excerpt 17**

"I prefer American when reading because it's easier to pronounce. If it's British, the challenge is that it's rarely used in the environment. For instance, when watching people who use English, the subtitles are more often American than British. So, I prefer American" (S2/F//Q6)

The data above provide insight into students' perspectives on the connection between English accents and reading classes. S3 suggests a correlation between reading proficiency and spoken English abilities, asserting that using American English can lead to improving one's reading skills. Interestingly, he reports difficulty comprehending the meaning of text when reading in a British accent, indicating a potential link between the accent reading materials and spoken language. S2 expresses a preference for the American accent while engaging in reading activities, with ease of pronunciation being a key factor driving this preference. Additionally, the scarcity of British usage in their environment, especially in subtitles, leads them to prefer the more commonly used American accent.



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## Discussion

This section discusses the implications of the findings based on the result of the research, where the data were obtained from reading recordings, audio, and interview. In this study, researcher discusses the results of the research which include the English accents students used in reading class and their perception toward English accents in Indonesia.

The first study's findings indicated that the majority of participants use American English when reading a text. The data reveal significant preference for the American accent, with (89.5%) of participants using it, while only a small minority (10.5%) opted for the British accent. It is evident that the English variety preferred by the students is American English. This is in line with (Hermini, 2019) who proposed that the majority of students employ American English. The primary reason is their perception that American English is widely spoken and simple to pronounce. The students appear to favor the American accent because it feels cozy and familiar, especially since they are surrounded by people who use the American accent. This factor has contributed to the prominence of the American accent (Alzahrani et al., 2022). In summary, the students predominantly prefer the American accent over British accent.

The second study's finding revealed that the students have numerous perspectives regarding the English accents. The first perception is about varieties of English accents that students know. All students mentioned American English and British English as the accents that they familiar with. ~~This indicates that American and British accents are indeed the most popular English accents in Indonesia.~~ This is in line with the statement from Fitria (2023) that American and British variations of English are the two most frequently utilized varieties. The British and American countries have had a significant historical and cultural impact on the Indonesian education system. Additionally, due to their prevalence in global media and communication, British and American accents are the most familiar and widely recognized among Indonesian students (Yuwita & Ambarwati, 2023).



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The second perception focused on providing valuable insights into the complex world of accent perception, specifically addressing the challenges students face with British and American English accents. All participants who took part all agreed on one thing: British English is more challenging, primarily due to its pronunciation. This result aligns with a study conducted by Maharani (2023), which showed that students find it challenging to comprehend the British accent. Moreover, it appears that the majority of Indonesian students acquire their English language skills by utilizing American accents. This is because the British accents seem to be somewhat challenging to apply to the language of the Indonesian people (Pratama Irwin Talenta & Rahmat Ari Wibowo, 2022).

The third perception about how students notice the English accents revealed that the students notice various aspects, such as the sound, intonation, and speed of speech. They all believe that British accents sound more polite and formal than American accents. This results support the findings of (Hermini, 2019) who asserted that students distinguish between American and British English based on sound, spelling, grammar, and vocabulary. British English is characterized by a more formal pronunciation, with differences in vocabulary, grammar, spelling, and pronunciation compared to American English (Fitria, 2023; Sembiring, 2021).

The fourth perception is about how students' English accents are influenced by the exposure to entertainment media in their everyday lives. The interview results are intriguing because they demonstrate how various factors influence how students use English accents. The findings of this study correspond to other study from Fitria (2023), who indicated that American English has been significantly exposed in Indonesia due to the prevalence of American media and cultural products, specifically through films, television programs, and music. Further, as emphasized by Yuwita & Ambarwati (2023), the students admitted that they had a significant amount of exposure to American and British English. They had largely learned American English in school, viewed content and listened to music both from the United States or the United Kingdom which has influenced their accents.



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The fifth perception is about the way English accents could possibly help them for learning English. The interview provides captivating insights into students' viewpoints on the potential advantages of English accents for language learning. The students recognize the advantages of interacting with English accents, particularly the American one, for learning vocabulary and improving both listening and speaking abilities. This affirms the findings from (Sembiring, 2021; Yuwita & Ambarwati, 2023) who argue that learning English accents enhances communication, interaction with native speakers, and communication skills, benefiting both students and lecturers in successful English learning.

The sixth perception is about the students' regarding the use of English accents in the reading class. The interviews provide an intriguing look at how students interpret the connection between reading experiences and English accents. The students suggest that there may be a connection between reading with an American accent and enhancing one's ability to speak English fluently. Therefore, integrating a variety of accents into reading activities could improve one's ability to pronounce words accurately and enhance overall oral communication skills. Similarly, Hermini, (2019) suggested that the students have a preference for incorporating accents in the teaching and learning process. They believe that utilizing accents could make it easier for them to pronounce and understand words.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The present study aimed to examine the English accents used by undergraduate students in a reading class and their perceptions towards them. The results revealed that majority participants used American accent when reading a text in English. In these six ways; 1) accents known by the students, 2) students' perception of which accent is more difficult, 3) students' perceptions of the most noticeable thing about English accents 4) students' perceptions on what influences them in the use of English accent 5) students' perceptions on how English accents can help in learning English and 6) students' perceptions on how the use of English accents is related to reading class, the students shared their perspective regarding English accents in Indonesia.



From the interview results, the researcher concluded that American English was the favored accent for reading and general perception, most likely due to its popularity and perceived ease in the media. Despite these preferences, students acknowledged British English as a formal and distinguished accent. They agreed that exposure to different accents can help in speaking, listening, and vocabulary development. Media exposure played a significant role in influencing their accents.

This research may still have limited data. Firstly, the data were collected from only four undergraduate students at one of the private universities in East Kalimantan for the interview. Therefore, the data could not be generalized to all the undergraduate students in East Kalimantan province. Thus, exploring more numbers and detailed undergraduate students can be considered for future research. Secondly, this research only focuses on analyzing the accents students use when reading a text and excludes other skills that require the utilization of accents. Therefore, it can be a consideration for future researchers to research the use of accents in relation to other skills.

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