



Examining Iranian Doctoral Students' Attitudes toward World Englishes

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Abstract

This study investigated Iranian doctoral students' attitudes toward World Englishes (WEs). To meet the end of this study, 30 Iranian doctoral English students from Chamran and Islamic Azad Universities of Ahvaz, Iran were selected. Then, a Likert questionnaire with 20 items was administered to the participants. After answering the questionnaire, the collected data were analyzed by using One-Sample T-test. The results indicated that all the participants presented positive attitudes toward WEs and they considered WEs as valuable as SE. For example, participants stated that WEs can help us to communicate with all nations.

INTRODUCTION

World Englishes (WEs) are important since the majority of international communication occurs in English between non-native speakers of English, between individuals, companies, and organizations (Garside, 2019). Nowadays, English language not only belongs to the American, British, Canadian, and Australian people, but it is also the language of the whole world (Hashemifardnya, 2014; Namaziandost, & Çakmak, 2020). It is widely used all around the world. English language is an instrument to exchange experience and information through travel, email, phone and video-conferencing, so it is welcomed by many people. Tahmasbi, Hashemifardnia, and Namaziandoost (2019) say that "nobody can deny the powerful presence of English language in the world; it is seen everywhere serving different purposes. It is the universal language of diplomacy, academic conferences, business, commerce, manufacturing, and tourism (p. 1)."

Concerning the importance of WEs, students need to be familiar with them. The diversity of Englishes that international students will be exposed to in their future education and employment should be reflected in their exposure as learners. If not, there is a risk that their flexibility with language will not be sufficient to deal

with the wide range of English-language situations that they will find themselves in (Garside, 2019).

Rejecting the notion of a single normative, Standard English (SE), Kachru (1992) calls these varieties WEs instead of other terms referring to the international use of English such as 'global English,' 'world English,' or 'international English,' as they do not adequately reflect the sociolinguistic reality that "formally and functionally, English now has multicultural identities" (Kachru, 1992, p. 357). This framework suggests that there are different varieties of English, all of which, regardless of being native or non-native, must be considered equally legitimate and worthwhile linguistic varieties with systematic and independent structures.

Kachru (1992) divides these varieties of English into three subgroups represented by three concentric circles along the traditional distinction among ENL (English as a native language), ESL (English as a second language), and EFL (English as a foreign language) communities and labels them as the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle, and the Expanding Circle, respectively. The innermost circle refers to the "traditional cultural linguistic bases of English" (Kachru, 1992, p. 356), including the USA, the UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, where English is the primary language. The Outer Circle area refers to English as an additional institutionalized language in countries such as the former British colonies of Ghana, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, India, and South Africa; in fact, English is used as the second language in the mentioned countries (Kachru, 1992). The outermost circle refers to the societies and countries like Iran, Argentina, China, Japan, Russia, Taiwan, and the rest of the world, where "performance varieties" of English are used in limited domains such as academic circles, diplomacy, trade, and other contexts of international communication (Kachru, 1992). Linguistically, WEs refers to English as a foreign language and they really mean 'localized forms of English' used around the world (Bolton, 2005; Namaziandost, Rezvani, & Polemikou, 2020).

Regarding the importance and frequent uses of WEs around the world, this study aims to explore the Iranian English doctoral students' attitudes toward WEs. In the following sections, the related literature, the method, the results, and the discussion are explained.

WEs refers to English as a foreign language and they really mean 'localized forms of English' used around the world (Bolton, 2005). The use of the plural form

"Englishes", rather than the singular "English", has become common, for it emphasizes the diversity inherent to the language and that no particular English enjoys individual, centralized authority anymore (Almegren, 2018). The term WEs refers to localized English varieties, especially those which have been created under the influence of the United States or the United Kingdom. Regarding, the importance of WEs in today's world, several studies were conducted in this domain.

For example, He and Zhang (2010) used a 2-item questionnaire to measure learners' attitudes towards native or non-native pronunciation and grammar models. They gathered the data from 984 college students in China. The findings indicated that native-speaker model was favorable in Chinese universities.

Pishghadam and Sabouri (2011) inspected Iranian English learners' attitudes toward different varieties of English in relation to the perspective of the theory of "WEs". Making use of a modification of matched guise technique, 165 English students were invited to listen to a text read by native speakers of the following accent groups: British, Persian, American, and Arabic. Subjects, then, recorded their attitudes toward each of the readers using a semantic differential scale. The findings showed that participants viewed American accent to be quite superior to the others. They, also, viewed people with American accent to be better teachers. These outcomes revealed the fact that Iranian English students still believe in the existence of a World English rather than WEs.

In another study, Almegren (2018) examined the attitudes of young Saudi EFL learners' towards WEs, he also investigated Saudi learners' preference of one English variety over the others. In addition, Almegren inspected the reasons why one variety of English was preferred to others. To collect the needed data, the researcher selected 33 female and 35 male students and he used both interviews and a questionnaire as the instruments. The results showed that Saudi students were aware of some varieties of the English language, though they seemed to have different attitudes towards the varieties of WEs. The participants generally considered American and British English as the SE varieties and did not accept other varieties of WEs as standard. The findings also revealed that in spite of the fact that the majority of the respondents generally viewed a 'native' teacher's English as superior, they favored a Saudi teacher to teach them.

Tahmasbi, Hashemifardnia, and Namaziandoost (2019) examined Iranian EFL learners' attitudes toward WEs and SE. To achieve their objectives, they selected 40 students majoring in TEFL and extracted their viewpoints through three semi-structured interviews. The results indicated that the majority of the participants' views skewed toward supporting WEs. Moreover, they were more willing to call English as EFL learners' property. Although they appreciated the prestige of SE, they presented no negative attitudes toward either WEs or SE.

After reviewing the related literature, it was found that some experimental studies were done on the attitudes of young students and MA students toward WEs, and no studies was found to examine the attitudes of Iranian doctoral students WEs, therefore, this research intended to explore the Iranian doctoral students' attitudes toward WEs, accordingly, the following question was posed:

RQ. Do Iranian English doctoral students present positive attitudes toward WEs?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Participants

To conduct this research, the researcher selected 30 Iranian English doctoral students from Chamran and Islamic Azad Universities of Ahvaz, Iran. The selected participants were both males and females. One of the requirements needed for the participants to be chosen as the subjects of this research was their level of proficiency. That is doctoral students of English were preferred because they had the ability to answer the related questions in English more fluently; besides this, it was expected that these learners had already established a sense of what different varieties of English are. In fact, all these participants had already passed courses related to sociolinguistics. It was predicted that they had also formed attitudes toward the varieties of English –WEs and SE- and had probably selected one of these varieties as their own model.

Instrument

The main instrument used to gather the needed data was a Likert questionnaire which was adopted from Hashemifardnya's (2014) questionnaire. The reason for choosing the mentioned questionnaire is that the items of this tool are much related to the current research topic and purpose. There were 20 items in this questionnaire; they were about: Standard English and World Englishes

accents, and World Englishes advantages. It is worth mentioning that Hashemifardnya's questionnaire was open-ended but in this study the researcher changed it into an objective one (agree, completely agree, no idea, disagree, and completely disagree). The modified questionnaire was validated by a panel of experienced English professors. Its reliability was computed by using Crobach Alpha formula ($r=.835$).

Procedures

As stated previously, 30 Iranian English doctoral students from Chamran and Islamic Azad Universities of Ahvaz, Iran were selected. After selecting the participants, the researcher distributed the mentioned questionnaire among them. After answering the questionnaire, the collected data were analyzed through using One-Sample T-test. Some items of the questionnaire were: "WEs facilitates real life communications as SE", "WEs varieties can help us to have a good communication with native and non-native speakers", and "When I use WEs I am not worried about my accent".

Results

In this section, the researcher analyzed the data collected through the mentioned questionnaire. First, the descriptive statistics of the questionnaire are presented, second, the inferential statistics of the questionnaire are displayed.

Table1:

<i>Descriptive Statistics of the Questionnaire</i>			
N	M	Std.	Std. Error
	ean	Deviation	Mean
30	31.77	15.31	1.71

In the table above, the descriptive statistics of 30 students are presented. This table indicates that the mean is 31.77. The standard deviation is 15.31 which shows their homogeneous attitudes.

Table 2:
Inferential One-Sample Test Statistics of the Questionnaire

	One-Sample Test					
	Test Value = 0					
	T	D	Sig.	Mean	95% Confidence	
	f	(2-tailed)	Difference	Interval of the Differe		
				Lower	Upper	
S	2	2	.002	46.77	43.35	50.18
cores	6.31	9				

As revealed in Table 2, the amount of statistic T-value is 26.31 ($t=26.31$), $df=29$ ($df=29$) and the significance level is 0.002 ($sig=0.002$) which is less than 0.05. This indicated that Iranian EFL learners had positive attitudes towards WEs.

DISCUSSION

RQ. Do Iranian English doctoral students present positive attitudes toward WEs?

After collecting the data, the researcher used One-Sample T-test to analyze them in order to find the answer for the question. The results showed that Iranian English doctoral students present positive attitudes toward WEs. Based on the obtained data gathered through the questionnaire distributed among 30 English students, WEs were considered as valuable as SE. All students favored WEs because they believed that WEs can assist all nations to establish a comprehensible communication with each other.

All students supported WEs and showed positive views toward World English varieties; they saw English as an instrument to satisfy their international needs, this view of English is in line with that of Crystal (2003) who argued for a functional account of English. He considered English as a means to be used by people for achieving their goals and the primary means of gaining an international presence and being heard by the whole world. Iranian MA students hold a positive attitude towards WEs. They considered WEs to be important for their usefulness in international communication and educational/career advancements. The findings of this study are in line with Halliday (2006) who laid stress on the fact that the standard variety has "no intrinsic value" and that it is just another dialect, but one that happened to be wearing a fancy uniform.

The findings of this study are in line with Tahmasbi, Hashemifardnia, and Namaziandoost (2019) who indicated that the majority of the participants' views in their study skewed toward supporting WEs. The participants of their study were more willing to call English as EFL learners' property. Although the participants appreciated the prestige of SE, they presented no negative attitudes toward either WEs or SE.

The findings of the current study are in contrast with the results of Pishghadam and Sabouri (2011) who investigated Iranian English learners' attitudes toward different varieties of English in relation to the perspective of the theory of WEs and found out that Iranian English learners believe in the existence of a World English rather than WEs. In addition, the results of the current study are not in line with Butler (2007) who examined the Korean elementary students' attitudes toward teachers with American-accented English and Korean-accented English. Korean students indicated strong preference for American-accented English teachers.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Based on the results of this research, all students consider WEs as a practical means to meet some of their basic needs and purposes. It was found that all participants favored WEs and showed positive attitudes towards them. Participants believed that WEs are enough to satisfy their communicative needs. In addition, WEs, in their views, are global phenomenon, so they should be valued as SE.

It seems quite a difficult job to teach English and assist learners to love English as a friend who direct them to new horizons of knowledge, new identities, and new lands to embrace the world, and simultaneously try to warn learners to beware of English as imperialism's tool of linguistic and cultural hegemony. Ironically, the challenging job of EFL learners is to beware of not being hostilely squeezed while warmly embracing English as a friend (Pishghadam & Sadeghi, 2011; Namaziandost, Hosseini, & Utomo, 2020). This study confirms this view and concludes that loving English is an inseparable aspect of English, in other words, when students exposed to English language willy-nilly, they will be affected by it and its culture; English changes their minds and attitudes and it is a means for widening new horizon and understanding for the students. In short, English is a sort of intriguing window on its learners' world that causes them to see the world

differently.

This study suffers from some limitations; the participants of this study were limited only to 30 EFL learners, so next studies are offered to add more participants to increase the generalizability of the results. Only one instrument was used in this study that was a questionnaire, next studies are recommended to use both questionnaire and interview to get more reliable and valid data.

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