





Shorter Article

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Introduction

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The question of which English to teach has been an issue since the late-20th-century advent of the world Englishes (WE) paradigm. In the early 1990s, Quirk and Kachru conducted one of the most significant debates about this controversial issue in applied linguistics. Quirk (1990) argued that only standard native varieties that have no grammar deviations and adhere to mainstream vocabulary usage should be taught in order to counter the contamination of English resulting from tolerance of variations, observing that he was ‘not aware of there being any institutionalized nonnative varieties’ (p. 6). In contrast, Kachru (1991) argued that language variation due to language contact is a common sociolinguistic phenomenon, so Outer Circle varieties are not sub-standard or deficit languages. Therefore, he contended, traditional notions of standardization are no longer acceptable. He recommended that multiple localized varieties should be taught in Outer Circle contexts because they reflect learners’ linguistic and cultural identity. In relation to Kachru’s argument, English as a lingua franca (ELF) has developed as a recent paradigm in TESOL. Kirkpatrick (2012) has argued that a lingua franca approach to English language teaching (ELT) helps prepare learners to use the language successfully in multilingual settings like ASEAN countries, where English functions as a lingua franca. In these settings, the teaching of ELF, in which speakers retain their own grammatical forms, phonological features, and pragmatic norms, needs to be promoted (Kirkpatrick 2011; Kirkpatrick, Subhan & Walkinshaw, 2016).

Although it is important to understand teachers’ attitudes towards the target variety of English in order to determine the most effective instructional approaches (Rose & Galloway, 2019), there is a limited amount of empirical research available on this topic. This is especially true for studies that focus on teachers’ attitudes towards their preferred target variety. Cooper and Fishman (1974) defined language attitudes from two perspectives, that of the referent or language variety, and that of the consequences or outcomes of the use of that variety. The consequences of using a particular variety determine attitudes, ‘which influence language behavior and behavior toward language’ (p. 6). Gibb (1999), citing Edwards (1985), also affirmed that attitudes ‘tend to reflect certain beliefs and preconceived ideas about the target language community and the speakers of that language variety’ (p. 31).

As Ahn (2014) pointed out, individuals’ attitudes are not innate but ‘learned’, ‘created’, ‘influenced’, and ‘reinforced’ by external factors’ (p. 197). One of these external factors that has had great influence on the formation of students’ attitudes is the teacher, whose attitudes toward language varieties directly affect students’ learning. Rose and Galloway (2019) found that teachers’ attitudes, curriculum, and teaching materials could potentially influence students’ perceptions of diverse English varieties in specific ELT contexts. Mu, Lee and Choe (2023) also emphasized the pedagogical impact on shaping students’ acceptance of both their local and other varieties of English for ELF communication. Although not conducted in an ELT context, Jorgensen and Pedersen’s (1989) research on attitudes toward dialects in Danish schools has implications for English teachers’ language attitudes. When the teacher has a negative attitude towards the dialect that students speak, the students consider their dialect devalued and develop a feeling of inferiority. Teachers’ negative attitudes towards non-standard varieties lower the self-esteem of the students who speak them (Romaine, 2000), so they often become discouraged as learners and experience academic failure (Reaser & Adger, 2008). Thus, these studies suggest that teachers’

attitudes towards language varieties are critical as they can directly affect students' learning.

To fill the aforementioned gap in the literature, this research is a report of the attitudes of Korean EFL teachers towards target varieties. The following research questions are addressed in this study: (1) Which English varieties do Korean EFL teachers think should be prioritized as target varieties and why? and (2) Which English varieties other than the target variety do they think students need to be exposed to and why?

Methodology

Sixteen Korean EFL teachers (12 females and four males) participated in this study, all of whom were pursuing their master's degrees in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (MATESOL) at a Korean university. Their age ranged from 24 to 40 years, with an average of 32. Their years of English teaching ranged from two to 14 with an average of six years. All had completed their education through college in Korea. They had never lived in an English-speaking country except for short visits such as for a vacation or to attend a conference. They had gained background knowledge about WE- and ELF-related issues in their graduate courses. The profiles of all participants are provided in Appendix A. We used pseudonyms to keep their information confidential.

The data for the study were collected through individual interviews, which lasted approximately 60 minutes. We prepared a set of guiding questions in English and gave it to the participants before the interviews to allow them to contemplate their responses in advance (see Appendix B for guiding interview questions). We adopted thematic analysis to analyze qualitative data collected from interviews (Dörnyei, 2007; Braun & Clarke, 2021). We followed the multiple stages of the thematic analysis method, including coding data, organizing codes into themes, drawing inferences, and positing interpretations supported by data excerpts. First, we carefully read the transcript of each audio-recorded interview a few times to understand the participant's overall attitudes towards and opinions about the topics. We did not underline or take marginal notes at this stage. Second, we highlighted the words, phrases, and sentences that emerged constantly and wrote codes in the margin. Third, we singled out codes directly related to the goal of the study from the codes created in the second stage. We then categorized the selected codes to develop tentative themes. Last, we re-examined the tentative themes to ensure that each theme was meaningful and distinctive from the other. We then selected the most illustrative excerpt(s) for each theme and reported our answers to our research questions.

Findings

Which variety should be taught and why?

The participants overwhelmingly favored American English. Twelve out of the sixteen participants (75%) considered American English as most appropriate for Korean ELT,

with the other four (25%) stating that any ENL variety can serve as an educational model.

The native speaker model: It's the unquestioned target

All of the participants agreed that educational targets in Korean ELT should be native varieties and never be non-native varieties, as illustrated by the following excerpts:

Nonnative varieties are spoken in ESL and EFL countries, in particular those where English is not used frequently in daily life. They are inappropriate for Korean ELT because they're like dialects and they're not standardized. We have native varieties available for language teaching. Why do we have to teach and learn non-native varieties? Teachers have a responsibility to teach students properly. To me, 'teaching students properly' means 'teaching native English.' (Eunju, 33 years, female)

I accept diverse varieties of English. But the acceptance of them and the issue of the educational target are completely separate matters. As a teacher, I want to teach a native variety to students, and I think that's right. EIL or ELF might be an alternative, but I don't think they really exist. I'm not positive about whether they will appear or develop in the future. EIL or ELF is something that is needed, but the issue is, what criteria should it be based on? (Mina, 34 years, female)

In the first excerpt, Eunju referred to non-native varieties as 'dialects,' and 'not standardized,' which implies that they are deficit languages, less valuable than native varieties. In the second, Mina stated that teaching a native variety is the 'right' thing for a teacher to do. She additionally claimed that English as an international language (EIL) and ELF had not been reified, so they were not real.

Despite their strong engagement with the native speaker model, some teachers were also concerned that dependence on it would have a negative impact on students' attitudes, as expressed in the following excerpt:

I think it's right to focus only on the native speaker model, especially in the EFL context. But I'm also worried that learning the native speaker norms will have a negative impact on students. They will consider native speakers [of English] superior, create fantasies about Anglophone culture, and follow their rules and regulations blindly. (Bodam, 24 years, female)

Standard variety only: Why teach non-standard?

All participants argued that among native varieties of English, only those considered standard should serve as an educational model. In the following excerpt, Solmi stressed the benefits of learning standard English:

We have to select a standard variety for education. Students should learn standard English to avoid miscommunication. People speaking non-standard varieties are considered socially disadvantaged. In America, a southern accent is often associated with a lower socio-economic class. We teach only standard Korean in Korean classes, so why should we teach non-standard varieties in English class? Also, I think students will earn respect from others if they speak standard English well. (Solmi, 26 years, female)

Here, acknowledging that language usage is often regarded as a marker of social position, Solmi suggested that as non-

native speakers Koreans can enhance their status by speaking a prestigious version of English.

In a practical vein, the participants pointed out that all achievement tests are based on standard English. For example, one participant emphasized that as a teacher, she had no choice but to teach standard English for assessments:

All courses are based on standard English, and student achievement tests also evaluate their standard English skills. I'm a teacher, so I have to teach standard English. I would feel awkward teaching non-standard because I also learned a standard variety only, the so-called General American. (Jinsol, 36 years, female)

Besides considering it her duty to teach students the variety of English on which their achievement will be evaluated, Jinsol considered herself unqualified to teach any other varieties of English, which is likely to be the case for most teachers, who learned only standard English.

American English is preferred world-wide

Another reason why twelve out of the sixteen participants selected standard American English as the best target for Korean ELT was that it was considered the language of the world's greatest power and the most widely spoken variety in the world, so learning it would be most useful, as argued below:

I think only American English should be an educational model. It's the most widespread variety. That is, it's universally used and understood by the largest number of people. (Namjun, 32 years, male)

It's necessary for us to take American English as an educational model because America is the wealthiest and most powerful country in the world. We need to learn it not only for better and wider communication but also for full access to resources made and provided by America. (Ruri, 29 years, female)

In the second excerpt above, Ruri emphasized that learning American English would have the most socio-economic value for Korean learners. Similarly, Gayun shared her perspective that the close political and economic ties between Korea and the United States necessitate choosing American English as the target variety:

The reason why American English is prioritized is that the United States is Korea's main trading partner, and the two countries share the same political ideology and often speak with one voice in the international community. Therefore, it is natural to educate students focusing on American English. (Gayun, 39 years, female)

Any ENL varieties are okay: Korean ELT has adopted them

The remaining four participants also preferred native standard varieties but considered any Inner Circle varieties acceptable as the educational target for Korean learners and, as stated in the excerpts below, have been used as such in Korean ELT:

When the need to be aware of various varieties of English was raised about a decade ago, Korean ELT accepted native varieties of English other than American English. For example, listening comprehension

tests in secondary schools were still mainly American English, but British English was added. (Taein, 28 years, female)

The most recent national ELT curriculum [announced in 2020] requires teachers to provide students with opportunities to understand various English-speaking cultures. The curriculum doesn't define what 'various English-speaking cultures' are in detail, but they are normally interpreted as those in the Inner Circle. Therefore, I'm fine with any Inner Circle native variety being an educational goal, but any non-native variety is unacceptable. (Yechan, 34 years, male)

As Taein referenced in the first excerpt, the Korean Ministry of Education, influenced by international English tests, such as TOEIC, which featured four Inner Circle varieties (American, Australian, British, and Canadian) included British English in the secondary school curriculum. Referring to the term 'various English-speaking cultures,' in the most recent national curriculum, Yechan confirmed that the phrase was generally understood as referring to Inner Circle cultures, which were the only ones now considered acceptable in Korean ELT.

Which varieties do students need to be exposed to?

Six of the Korean EFL teachers (37.5%) said that it was enough to expose students to the target variety only. Eight teachers (50%) argued that students should be exposed to ENL varieties besides the target variety. Only two participants (12.5%) believed that students needed to be exposed to a broadly diverse range of varieties of English.

Exclusive exposure to the target variety: Teach better, learn faster

The primary reason given by the six participants who suggested that students should be exposed only to the target variety was that it is unrealistic to teach multiple varieties of English in the EFL context:

It's impossible to introduce various varieties of English in the EFL context. Many of them are very difficult for teachers to teach, and it's very inefficient. I think there's no need to teach varieties other than the target variety, even those that are native. Concentrating on the target variety enables the teacher to focus more clearly in class. (Chaerin, 30 years, female)

In Chaerin's view, trying to teach different varieties of English in the EFL context would provide no advantages but could entail disadvantages in terms of efficiency and focus.

The six teachers also pointed out that being exposed to diverse varieties would distract students from learning the target variety while increasing the cognitive burden of learning English:

It is too idealistic to expect students to learn different varieties of English. It is very burdensome and not effective for them to learn many varieties. Rather, it will interfere with their acquisition of the target, and students will feel heavily burdened. (Dabin, 28 years, female)

Students will be confused by the exposure to various accents spoken in the world. Learning only American English [the target

variety] is sufficient to achieve the purpose of English education. After I mastered it, I could easily understand other varieties, which also goes for my students. Learning only the target provides maximum and consistent exposure, so students are more motivated and learn faster. (Haesan, 35 years, male)

Both Dabin and Haesan stressed that exposing students to various varieties would not help them learn English at all and would be a burden. They said that students would learn English more 'efficiently' and 'faster.' Haesan added that students could easily get used to other accents if they learned the target variety well.

One target variety with exposure to other native varieties is needed
Eight participants mentioned that teaching one target variety is reasonable, but it is also desirable for students to be exposed to all ENL varieties, which have been accepted in Korean ELT, because Koreans were becoming interested in native varieties other than American English:

Having one target variety is suitable for teaching, but I think students need to be exposed to the rest of the ENL varieties. In recent times, Koreans' interest in other native English varieties has increased tremendously, especially in British and Australian English, and these are already in our curriculum even if they're not the main focus. Thus, we need to expose students to them. (Naye, 31 years, female)

However, the eight teachers also argued that students should not be exposed to non-native English, stating that ESL and EFL varieties feel 'unfamiliar,' 'unsatisfactory,' and 'uncomfortable' to them. Their negative attitudes toward non-native varieties are clearly well described in the following comments:

We don't need to include Outer and Expanding Circle Englishes in our curriculum. The accents of these varieties are so unfamiliar that it feels like fake or mock rather than authentic English. Only Inner Circle Englishes are authentic. Even if more varieties of English emerge, this would not change. I think students should be exposed to Inner Circle Englishes, but not to others. (Hiseon, 33 years, female)

The global spread of English: Students need to be exposed to many varieties

Only two participants, while agreeing that there should be one educational target, claimed that students should also be exposed to as many varieties as possible. They stressed that the current sociolinguistic reality of English is its status as an international language, so anybody who speaks English should be recognized as a legitimate speaker of English:

Speakers of English are found in every corner of the world. English has been globalized and turned out to be the most important international language in today's world, which no languages have experienced. We use English to communicate with people from other countries who can be either native or non-native speakers. Hence, students need to be exposed to many varieties of English as well as major varieties. (Wonki, 40 years, male)

The other participant pointed out that students' early exposure to world Englishes would increase their versatility in global communications:

It's beneficial for students to be exposed to varieties of English, which help them develop an awareness of and familiarity with world Englishes. The younger they are exposed to world Englishes, the more naturally they will accept them. (Yechan, 34 years, male)

Discussion and conclusion

This study was an investigation of Korean EFL teachers' attitudes toward which varieties of English should be the focus of instruction and which varieties students should be exposed to. Regarding the first research question, all of the participants argued that only standard native varieties could serve as educational models. 12 participants specified American English as the target because it is the most widely recognized variety, and Korea and the United States are strong allies, while four participants considered any Inner Circle variety as an appropriate target because all were accepted in Korean ELT. Regarding the second research question, six teachers argued for exposing students to only the target variety because exposure to many varieties of English would make it difficult for teachers to teach and students to learn. Eight participants considered that it was desirable to have one educational target but to expose students to all ENL varieties in light of Koreans' increasing interest in them. Only two participants said that there should be one educational target but students should be exposed to many varieties of English, both native and non-native, because of the global spread of English.

With regard to the issue of the target variety of English to teach, all participants stressed the native speaker model, that is, prioritized 'nativeness' as an essential criterion, and no one mentioned a variety of non-native English as a possible educational target. Moreover, they tended to prefer American English as a target variety while acknowledging the value of exposing students to other native varieties. Another significant point is that they emphasized teaching standard native English varieties, by which they meant institutionalized varieties, even though an alternative dialect was still native. They were also certain that no standard varieties of English were practiced in the Outer and Expanding Circles, which left all non-native varieties out of their consideration as educational targets. This adherence to standard native English reflected their position that students would benefit most from following native speaker norms, so these were what they should teach.

By choosing a standard native variety as an educational target, the teachers in this study defined their identities as responsible professionals who fulfilled their students' language learning needs to their best advantage, similar to those in Sung's (2020) study, who distinguished themselves by emphasizing their language expertise and identity as English majors. They were also attentive to what they considered the superior teachability and learnability of a single target variety. They believed that introducing many

varieties of English would be inefficient and ineffective for both teachers and students in EFL contexts. They emphasized that Korea is an EFL country, so students would not have the same access to the amount of language input and opportunities for output as those in the Inner Circle and possibly in the Outer Circle, which would be further complicated by adding multiple non-target varieties to the curriculum as proposed by the Korean Ministry of Education. In particular, they would have been uncomfortable with any deviation from the curriculum because assessments are based on standard English. Their sense of responsibility as teachers was also evident in their awareness of the problems caused by excessive esteem for native speaker norms, such as the risk that students would uncritically accept native speakers' cultural and ideological values.

It is also important to note that the teachers considered EIL/ELF to be a potential alternative, but they did not believe in its reality. Rather, they viewed it as an unrealized ideal variety that will be difficult to establish in the foreseeable future, so they remained skeptical about its potential and dismissed it as an option for the present. Many scholars have been discussing EIL/ELF for years only at the theoretical level, such as debating its possible characteristics and features, but there is a lack of practical ideas as to how to implement a universal English variety globally. Only when this universal variety has been fully formulated, and curricula and teaching materials based on it have been created and adopted globally, will it be possible for EIL/ELF to be the target variety in ESL/EFL instruction (Rose & Galloway, 2019).

As Jinsol said, the finding that American English is greatly preferred to other varieties in Korean ELT may reflect the fact that the teachers themselves were educated only in American English. Petzold (2002) argued that 'the teachers' own education' is a factor that influences their 'specific variety choice[s], . . . [their] attitudes toward models,' and their judgments of a 'model's prestige or usefulness' (p. 424). Interestingly, the position of the four teachers who responded that any native variety could serve as a target variety may reflect a change in Korean ELT toward embracing all native varieties. A decade ago, the Korean Ministry of Education announced that all native varieties besides American, especially British English, would be part of its English curriculum. This national-level policy change might have led these four teachers' attitudes to change sooner than those of other teachers.

Ultimately, policy changes are more imperative than individual attitudinal changes, suggesting that there will be greater acceptance of multiple native varieties in Korean ELT (Ahn, 2014). The importance of national policy is also evident in the fact that, although the teachers in this study had already completed WE- and ELF-related courses and were knowledgeable about the related issues, this knowledge had little influence on their attitudes and teaching practices because of national policy strongly favoring standard native English. In contrast to widely accepted

sociolinguistic theories advocating integration of diverse varieties of English in ELT, all but two of the teachers in this study found exposing students to non-native varieties unnecessary and unfeasible. As some participants in Galloway and Numajiri's (2020) study suggested, in order for stakeholders such as teachers and students to fully accept the WE- and ELF-paradigm, national-level policy changes must first overcome barriers that prevent GELT (Global Englishes for Language Teaching) curricular innovation. Thus, if Korean ELT accepts non-native varieties of English at the policy level, they are included in the national curriculum, the awareness of and need to teach them emerge throughout the whole society.

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Appendix A. Profiles of the participants

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Years of Teaching English
Bodam	24	F	2
Chaerin	30	F	4
Dabin	28	F	3
Eunju	33	F	5
Gayun	39	F	11
Haesan	35	M	7
Hiseon	33	F	6
Jinsol	36	F	10
Mina	34	F	7
Namjun	32	M	6
Naye	31	F	5
Ruri	29	F	3
Solmi	26	F	2
Taein	28	F	3
Wonki	40	M	14
Yechan	34	M	8

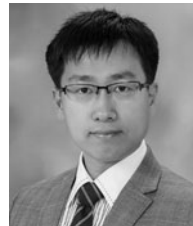
Appendix B. Guiding interview questions

1. Which variety of English do you think should be the target of Korean ELT?

2. What are the reasons for choosing that variety as the target?
3. Do you believe that students should be exposed to different varieties of English besides the target?
4. If so, to what extent should students be exposed to different varieties of English? And why?
5. If not, why do you think so?



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