

Navigating Communication Challenges in Using English as a Lingua Franca: The Stories of Indonesian Students in Australia

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ABSTRACT

This research explores intercultural communication encountered by Indonesian students studying in Australia, where English serves as the lingua franca. Employing the narrative accounts of participants as a valuable source of qualitative data, this research aims to identify the distinct categories of understanding-related problems experienced by Indonesian students when engaging with non-native speakers of English and to explain the strategies employed in managing such challenges. Additionally, an evaluation of the efficacy of English language teaching and learning in Indonesia is conducted to ascertain its role in mitigating understanding issues. Data for this study were gathered through open-ended interviews conducted with eight Indonesian students enrolled in master's programs at Monash University, Australia. The findings reveal that students encounter three levels of understanding problems: 1) non-understanding, 2) partial understanding, and 3) misunderstanding. The analysis underscores two predominant strategies employed by students in managing these challenges: 1) signaling the problem and 2) allowing it to pass without clarification. Furthermore, the research reveals that although participants find their English studies effective in academic contexts like class discussions and written tests, they feel that their acquired language skills lack adequate guidance for daily interactions in Australia. The study proposes specific improvements in English language teaching (ELT) in Indonesia to better equip students for the diverse linguistic challenges in intercultural settings by incorporating three competences, namely interactional competence, strategic competence, and multidialectal competence.

Keywords: *English as a lingua franca (ELF), Intercultural communication, Indonesian students, Understanding-related problems, Communication strategies, Non-Native speakers.*

INTRODUCTION

Australia is a prominent global contributor to the field of international education. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Australian Department of Education and Training reported that in 2019, a total of 758,154 international students, including those from Indonesia, were registered in Australian higher

education institutions. Studying abroad promotes a more diverse and global experience for students since they will regularly engage and cooperate with others from various cultural backgrounds. However, Indonesian students originating from a non-English speaking nation may encounter significant challenges related to language and communication while studying abroad. Despite meeting the established benchmarks for English proficiency tests

like IELTS or TOEFL prior to entering Australia, these standardized assessments may not fully capture the complexities of everyday communication. Consequently, utilizing English as a lingua franca to interact with individuals possessing diverse L1 (first language) backgrounds presents a potentially significant hurdle for Indonesian students, in addition to their academic demands.

The term English as a lingua franca (ELF) has gained a lot of attention in many studies. Jenkins (2012, p. 486) defines ELF as “a means of communication between people who come from different first language backgrounds.” Although many have defined ELF as the kind of English used in interactions between non-native speakers with different L1 backgrounds, Seidlhofer (2011, as cited in Cogo, 2015) adds the definition as any use of English among speakers of different L1 across all three Kachruvian circles. By mentioning the three circles proposed by Kachru (1986), it means that in the context of ELF, native speakers of English might also use ELF as additional knowledge for intercultural communication (Cogo, 2015). For learners of English as a foreign language (EFL), the concept of ELF offers a valuable perspective – English is not solely shaped by native speakers but is dynamically influenced by a global community of users.

Studying in Australia provides a real-world context for observing how English functions as a communication tool among non-native speakers with varying L1 backgrounds. This environment showcases the ongoing evolution of English, shaped by its use among non-native speakers, resulting in a multitude of varieties (Schneider, 2007). However, utilizing ELF can be a new experience for Indonesian students, particularly for those embarking on their first overseas study program. Kaur (2011) emphasizes the potential difficulties associated with ELF communication stemming from the interlocutors’ shared status as non-native speakers and their inherent cultural differences.

Further, data shows that learners of English in Indonesia tend to use English with other non-native speakers in different places all around the world. According to the data from the manpower and transmigration agency, since 2010, there are 3.073.702 Indonesian diaspora working as migrant

workers all around the world: 62% work in Asian countries, 37% working in Africa and middle east countries, 1,1% in Europe, and only around fifty thousand Indonesians work in US (Irawan, 2015). Although the data from UNESCO show that 52% of forty thousand Indonesian students abroad are studying in English-speaking countries (i.e., Australia, the US, UK, New Zealand, and Canada), it should be noted that most of them study in International class and communicate with other non-native students. This brief description might imply the need to bring the context of ELF in English language teaching (ELT) in Indonesia to learn how people use English to communicate with other non-native speakers.

This small-scale research project, conducted through interviews with eight Indonesian Master’s degree students at Monash University, aims to identify and explain the problematic communication encountered by Indonesian students when they interact with other non-native English speakers and how they manage such problems. Furthermore, the research seeks to identify specific competencies that might be crucial for overcoming communication issues in intercultural settings. This additional aim will allow the research to not only diagnose communication problems but also explore potential solutions and analyze how the students’ prior English education prepared them for these challenges.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study relates to the literature on ELF communication and problems with understanding. Many researches on ELF communication have been conducted by many researchers. Jenkins’ (2000) study of pronunciation and mutual intelligibility is one of the influential studies. Her study explains that pronunciation plays a very significant role in developing mutual intelligibility among speakers from different English varieties in ELF. Jenkins (2000) also points out that speakers still can understand one another even though they use an irregular grammatical structure or an incorrect expression. Jenkins (2002, p. 96) emphasizes that in order to be successful in using ELF, the learners should be able to identify and categorize certain features of pronunciation that “seem to be crucial as

safeguards of mutual intelligibility in interlanguage talk.”

Another research related to ELF communication was conducted by Xu and Dinh (2013), which explores the lexical meaning differences between people from different cultural backgrounds. Their finding shows that the meanings of certain lexical items might be interpreted differently by people from different backgrounds. Therefore, co-construction and negotiation of meanings are needed in ELF communication. Their finding also relates to Kaur's (2011) studies exploring the source of misunderstanding in ELF communication, which mentions that ambiguity is one of the factors in misunderstanding.

Meanwhile, Pawlas and Paradowski (2020) offer a comprehensive analysis of misunderstandings in ELF communication, focusing on causes, prevention, and remediation strategies. Their study highlights the significance of understanding in linguistic interactions and language acquisition, drawing on findings from an extensive analysis of conversations in the Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE). The authors explore how speakers navigate communication challenges through strategies such as accommodation, the let-it-pass principle, the make-it-normal principle, negotiation of meaning, and enhanced explicitness. They emphasize the collaborative nature of ELF communication and discuss various aspects of talk-in-interaction, including turn-taking, simultaneous talk, pauses, completions, repair strategies, repetitions, metadiscourse, and code-switching. This study provides valuable insights into the complex dynamics of ELF communication and provides practical recommendations for enhancing communication effectiveness in diverse linguistic settings.

In a more specific context, Thongphut & Kaur (2023) further emphasize the importance of explicitness in their study of communication in hospitality and tourism settings. The study investigates how front-desk staff in Thailand use communication strategies characterized by increased explicitness when interacting with international tourists in ELF within hospitality and tourism (HT) settings. Analyzing 15 hours of authentic interactions at a tour service counter, an airport

information counter, and a hotel front office, the research reveals staff's orientation to explicitness through strategies such as repetition, explication, circumlocution, and self-reformulation to enhance clarity and preempt misunderstandings. Despite the absence of overt non/misunderstandings, the staff's use of explicitness strategies highlights its significance in ELF HT service encounters, emphasizing the need for English for specific purposes course development to incorporate awareness and practice in employing such strategies for effective communication. This study contributes to understanding how ELF is utilized in diverse HT settings and sheds light on communicative practices crucial for delivering quality service to international guests.

While these studies provide valuable insights into understanding-related problems and communication strategies in ELF, there is a gap in the literature regarding the specific challenges faced by Indonesian students navigating an ELF environment while living outside their country. By focusing on a specific student population and educational context, this research offers a nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by Indonesian students. Additionally, the study proposes specific recommendations for improving the ELT curriculum in Indonesia by incorporating interactional competence, strategic competence, and multidialectal competence. This proposed framework can contribute to the ongoing conversation about preparing students for effective communication in a globalized world.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The following concepts and typology, such as problems with understanding and communicative competence, are applied in the analysis of the study.

Understanding-related problems

This study is focusing on understanding problems in ELF communication. However, there are several terms used by researchers that refer to problems of understanding. Gass and Varonis (1991, p. 123) state that every study might use different terms for the same situation and, on the other hand, the same term

might be used for different situations. Many studies have used the term “misunderstanding” to refer to problematic communication. Hua (2014, p. 113) mentions the term ‘misunderstanding’ to refer to what goes wrong in a conversation between people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds or where there are differences in linguistic proficiencies. However, Bremer (1996, as cited in Hua, 2014) distinguishes the terms ‘misunderstanding’ and ‘non-understanding’ as two different levels of problems with understanding. According to Bremer (1996, p. 40, as cited in Hua, 2014, p. 113), non-understanding refers to the situation when the listener fails to make any sense of what has been said by the speaker. This could be due to factors like unfamiliar vocabulary, complex grammar, or a heavy accent. On the other hand, misunderstanding refers to the situation when the listener gets a different interpretation of what the speaker meant.

Building on these ideas, Vasseur et al. (1996) suggest that the problem of understanding exists on a continuum. This continuum ranges from a complete lack of understanding (non-understanding) to a complete misunderstanding, with various degrees of partial understanding in between. Thus, to make it easier to classify the problems found in the data, problems with understanding can be defined as follows:

1. Non-understanding: This refers to a complete breakdown in communication where the listener cannot grasp the speaker’s message at all.
2. Partial understanding: This exists on a spectrum between non-understanding and misunderstanding. Here, the listener picks up some elements of the message but not the whole picture.
3. Misunderstanding: This occurs when the listener interprets the message differently than the speaker intended.

Communicative competence

In the area of language education, the notion of communicative competence has been known as the main goal of language teaching and learning. Historically, communicative competence was coined

by Hymes (1972) in response to Chomsky’s (1965) dichotomy of linguistic competence and performance in the study of language acquisition. Hymes (1972) disagreed with Chomsky’s theory of language acquisition, which excludes the sociocultural aspect, and proposed communicative competence in response. Hymes (1972) argues that to be successful in language learning, one should acquire communicative competence, which is the combination of linguistic competence and sociolinguistic competence.

This concept of communicative competence was then adopted to develop the communicative approach, also known as communicative language teaching (CLT), in language education. Among the elaborated models of communicative competence, the model proposed by Celce-Murcia et al. (1995) was one of the most comprehensive models for English language pedagogy. This model was then improved again by Celce-Murcia (2007). As an attempt to continue the work of Canale & Swain (1980) and Celce-Murcia et al. (1995), Celce-Murcia (2007) proposes six correlated components of communicative competence model as follows:

1. Linguistic competence: knowledge of the sentence patterns and types, the constituent structure, the morphological inflections, and the lexical resources, as well as the phonological and orthographic systems.
2. Formulaic competence: knowledge of fixed and prefabricated chunks of language that speakers use heavily in everyday interactions.
3. Sociocultural competence: The knowledge of appropriateness within the overall social and cultural context of communication, knowledge of language variation with reference to sociocultural norms of the target language.
4. Interactional competence: knowledge of how to perform common speech acts and speech act sets in the target language involving interactions.
5. Discourse competence: the ability to select, sequence and arrange words, structures, sentences and utterances to achieve a unified spoken or written text.

6. Strategic competence: communicative, cognitive, and metacognitive strategies to negotiate meanings, resolve ambiguities, and compensate for deficiencies in any of the other competencies.

This research extends the scope by examining Canagarajah's (2006) concept of multidialectal competence. In response to the spread of English and the rise of new varieties, Canagarajah (2006) argues that fluency necessitates a multidialectal approach. However, he clarifies that multidialectal competence is not about active production in all varieties but rather the ability to "negotiate diversities to facilitate communication" (Canagarajah, 2006, p. 229). Thus, this competence emphasizes the receptive skills to understand more than one variety of English.

METHODS

In this qualitative study, the aim was to explore the initial experiences of eight Indonesian students pursuing master's degrees at Monash University, Melbourne. These participants were specifically selected due to their status as first-time international students living outside their home country, offering a unique opportunity to dig into their initial impressions and challenges encountered while using English as a lingua franca in their daily interactions.

The sample comprised an equal gender distribution, with four male and four female participants, each assigned a code ranging from P1 to P8. For clarity, male participants were coded as P1 to P4, while female participants were coded as P5 to P8. All participants had resided in Australia for over a year, ensuring they had ample exposure to intercultural communication within both academic and non-academic contexts.

To initiate the interviews, the primary researcher, identified as P0, encouraged participants to recount personal anecdotes of instances where they experienced difficulty in understanding non-native speakers and how they navigated such challenges. This approach aimed to elicit rich, firsthand narratives that would provide insights into the participants' adaptive strategies and coping

mechanisms within cross-cultural communication scenarios.

The interviews were conducted individually, ensuring that each participant had the opportunity to share their experiences in a comfortable and confidential setting. Prior to each interview, informed consent was obtained from the participants, outlining the purpose of the study and the voluntary nature of their participation. Subsequently, the narratives extracted from the interviews were presented in a scripted format. This scripting process involved condensing the participants' accounts into coherent narratives that retained the core elements of their stories while ensuring clarity and readability for the readers. Prior to finalizing the script, each participant was given the opportunity to review and confirm that the written account accurately represented their responses. This confirmation process ensured that the participants were satisfied with how their stories were portrayed and that their consent was obtained for the inclusion of their narratives in the study.

The narrative inquiry method was selected for its suitability in capturing the intricate stories and lived experiences of the participants. By focusing on personal narratives, this method allows for a deep exploration of individuals' subjective interpretations and reflections (Lieblich et al. 1998). This method can also provide a holistic understanding of their experiences with language and intercultural communication. Through the lens of narrative inquiry, the study aimed to uncover not only the surface-level challenges faced by the participants but also the underlying meanings, emotions, and cultural nuances embedded within their stories.

Following the initial narrative prompt, participants were further asked about their expectations of facing language barriers before coming to Australia and whether their English education in Indonesia prepared them for such challenges. These inquiries aimed to understand their anticipatory attitudes towards intercultural communication challenges and evaluate the effectiveness of their language preparation.

The interview protocol also included a series of targeted questions designed to extract nuanced details relating to the research question. These inquiries investigated various facets of the

participants' experiences, including their perceptions of language proficiency development, the impact of cultural differences on communication dynamics, and strategies employed to overcome language barriers in social settings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data analysis reveals a continuum of comprehension issues faced by students, ranging from non-understanding to misunderstanding. A thematic analysis of students' narratives revealed a three-level typology for categorizing comprehension issues: non-understanding, partial understanding, and misunderstanding.

The first level is non-understanding, a condition where the listener fails to grasp the speaker's message. This phenomenon occurs in unanticipated conversations, such as small talk or sudden questions from strangers in public places. The story from P6 below is one example of how non-understanding happened.

P6: There was this funny thing that happened early on in Australia that really highlighted the communication challenges. I was heading into the city on the train one Sunday. I was all settled in, lost in my thoughts, when this old man, whom I presumed to be of Asian descent, sits down next to me. Out of nowhere, he just starts talking to me and I wasn't expecting it at all. While his sentence wasn't particularly long, I was caught off guard and unfortunately couldn't understand him clearly due to his accent. I felt awful – here I was, the new guy in a new country, and I couldn't even hold a conversation with someone who was probably just trying to be friendly.

P0: but did you hear what he said?

P6: I was clueless, and all I heard was just the word "station". Then I said "sorry" hoping for a bit of clarification. Then he said "is it going to stop at Malvern station?" then I said "oh yes, that's right." I think because I

did not know the context so I could not get a clue of what he was saying. After that he asked me "you go with this train?" then I said "yes". For the second sentence I could understand him because I was ready.

P0: So, you apologized for asking for repetition?

P6: Yeah, I guess because I felt bad that I couldn't understand him and saying sorry seemed like the easiest and politest way to ask him to repeat himself.

Based on P6's story, non-understanding happens in unanticipated conversations in public places, such as small talk or a sudden question from a stranger, which results in mishearing. However, her narrative also underscores the critical role of context in facilitating understanding. She noted that her comprehension improved when the conversation shifted to a topic she was familiar with. This highlights the significance of context in communication; without sufficient context, understanding can be significantly impeded.

In addition, in managing non-understanding, P6 employed the strategy of apologizing to signal their lack of comprehension and request clarification. Her use of the word "sorry" exemplifies the cultural norm of politeness and respect, indicating a socially acceptable way to navigate communication barriers. By proactively seeking clarification, P6 demonstrated an effective approach to overcoming comprehension obstacles in conversation.

The second problem of understanding is classified into partial understanding. This situation is when the listener knows the context of the conversation and can understand some parts of the conversation but fails to get all the information or ideas. All of the respondents claim that this is the most frequent problem they encounter in their daily communication. The stories from P2 and P4 are examples of this case.

P2: While I was at the hospital, I approached one of the staff members, who I think was an Asian woman, to ask for directions to the pharmacy. But, her speech was a bit unclear to me, so I missed some words. What I could hear from her was instruction like

“turn right and then turn left” and so on, and I couldn’t piece together the full information. But, I didn’t ask her to repeat because it would be annoying for her I guess, so I just tried to figure it out by myself with some information that I understand.

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P4: When I visited my internet provider’s office, I met the customer service representative, who had an Indian accent and spoke rather fast. As she explained the details of my contract, I struggled to fully understand the information, but I heard she mentioned some prices and some facilities like international call and other things. Sometimes I had to clarify which price is for which facility by asking, “so 80\$ for international call?”

Both P2 and P4 struggled to grasp the full conversation due to misinterpretations caused by unfamiliar accents and unclear pronunciation. This highlights a common barrier in communication – acoustic dissonance. It arises when a listener encounters speech patterns that differ from their expectations, making it difficult to process the sounds and decipher the meaning. For instance, P2 likely struggled with the woman’s specific sentence structure or word choices due to her accent.

To navigate this issue, the participants adopted different strategies. P4 attempted to verify understanding by paraphrasing the interlocutor’s sentence (“so 80\$ for international call?”). This approach demonstrates the value of confirmation. By rephrasing what they heard, P4 ensured they grasped the key details of the internet provider’s plan and avoided potential misunderstandings about pricing and services.

However, as seen with P2, the fear of being perceived as rude often leads to passive listening, where participants let misunderstandings pass to avoid confrontation. This can be particularly common in intercultural interactions, where social norms around directness might differ. Tsuchiya and Handford’s (2014) notion of face-threatening acts helps explain this behavior. In many cultures, directly asking someone to alter their way of

speaking, such as asking to speak more clearly or slowly, can be seen as a criticism or a challenge to their communication skills. This creates a dilemma for listeners who want to understand the information fully but hesitate to cause offense. The following accounts from P5 and P1, wherein they share similar opinions in handling partial understanding, illustrate the case.

P5: It really depends on how important the conversation is for me. You know, if it’s something crucial, like a contract or payment details, I’ll definitely speak up and say I don’t quite understand everything. In those cases, I’ll ask for clarification to make sure I’m on the same page. But for casual chit-chat, well, sometimes I might just smile and nod along, even if I miss a bit. Basically, I will just pretend to understand and try to change the topic.

P1: I used to feel terrible when things went over my head in conversations. Like, I’d just say “yeah, yeah” or nod to avoid seeming lost. But it depends on the situation, really. With close friends, like my friend from China, I wouldn’t hesitate to ask for clarification if something wasn’t clear.

Interestingly, none of the participants mentioned directly asking the speakers to slow down or speak more clearly, fearing it might be insulting. This aversion to seemingly “correcting” the speaker highlights the complex interplay between the relationship between interlocutors and the importance of the conversation. In casual situations (as P5 suggests), social harmony might take precedence, leading to smiles and topic changes despite partial understanding. Conversely, close relationships (like P1 with his Chinese friend) allow for more direct communication, making clarification requests less awkward. Their stories highlight the perceived power imbalance, level of formality, and cultural norms surrounding directness that influence how they navigate communication problems.

The last problem found in the stories is a misunderstanding, the situation in which the listener achieves an interpretation different from what the speaker meant. The experience from P7 below is an example of this problem.

P7: At the time I wanted to buy a tempered glass for my mobile phone. I was having a small talk with the shop keeper, and she said that she was a Malaysian but had been living in Australia since she was five. When I asked her the price of the tempered glass, she said it was 40 dollars, so I spontaneously said, "Oh my God it's really expensive." But then, I said, "mmm but I think I am okay". At this moment we had misunderstanding because what I mean by "I am okay" is "I still want to buy that tempered glass" but the shop keeper thought that I didn't want the product, so she put back the product. So, I said, "no no I still want to buy it," then she said, "oh I thought you were okay", then I said, "I mean I am okay with the price".

From the story above, it's clear that the expression "I am okay" can be subject to different interpretations. As noted by Kaur (2011), ambiguity in a speaker's utterances is a common source of misunderstandings, often stemming from a "lack of explicitness." In the case of P7, the seemingly straightforward phrase "I am okay" carried dual meanings, contributing to the confusion.

This misunderstanding likely arose from P7's unfamiliarity with the informal usage of "I am okay" to imply refusal or reservation in casual conversation. It is due to the fact that P7 learned English in a more formal setting, where the phrase retains its literal connotation of being all right or in agreement. Consequently, when faced with a more casual and spontaneous interaction in a shop setting, P7 may have unintentionally used the phrase without considering its potential ambiguity. Nevertheless, P7 also demonstrated awareness of the misunderstanding and took proactive steps to clarify her intent. This underscores the importance of effective communication strategies in resolving misunderstandings. P7 could benefit from being more explicit in their communication and considering alternative ways to convey their response to avoid potential misinterpretations. This experience highlights the value of not only learning formal English but also familiarizing oneself with the nuances of informal expressions commonly used in everyday interactions. Such knowledge can greatly enhance cross-cultural communication skills and

minimize the likelihood of misunderstandings in diverse social contexts.

Finally, after listening to their story, participants were asked whether they had expected those problems and whether they had been assisted with the English learning process in Indonesia. Apparently, all of the respondents have quite similar responses. The answers from P3, P4, P7 and P8 below generally represent the participants' opinions in general.

P3: Actually, I was aware that I would experience that kind of problem, but I didn't expect 'that much'. I thought that because I got enough IELTS score, I won't have any problems communicating in English. But in fact, we do not only meet native speakers here, even here I have more conversation with other non-native speakers rather than with native speaker, and that's even more difficult. You know even sometimes I got confused with very simple word such as "very" when it was spoken by my Japanese friend.

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P4: In Indonesia, I only learn the "standard English" which refer to American English. What I mean by standard is we always try to use the perfect grammar and complete sentence. But this doesn't help me when I have a conversation with other non-native speakers. Because after having a lot of problem, I start to realize that there is more than one variation of English, and I think using the perfect grammar is somehow inefficient.

.....

P7: In listening skills classes, people in the audio speaks clearly and slowly, with perfect grammar and the accent was either American or British. It's great practice, but not very realistic. In the real world, you meet all sorts of people with different accents and speaking styles. Sometimes they talk really fast, which can be tough to understand!

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P8: It really helps me in term of my study, but you know I think what we learn is always about academic English, I think. You know, following the grammar and making perfect sentence. But, outside the class, grammar is not a matter, I think. So, every time I visit Chinese store, I try to make my sentence as simple as possible.

The responses from P3, P4, P7 and P8 offer insightful perspectives on the experiences of Indonesian students grappling with English communication challenges and shed light on the potential gaps in their preparation and educational approaches. P3's reflection highlights a common misconception among language learners, as they express initial confidence stemming from achieving a satisfactory score on an English proficiency test. However, they soon discover the limitations of standardized testing in preparing for real-world interactions, particularly with diverse non-native speakers. Similarly, P4's account underscores the influence of educational paradigms in shaping language proficiency. They reveal the focus on "standard English," which mostly refers to American or British English standards and is characterized by strict grammar adherence, prevalent in Indonesian educational contexts. Yet, despite this emphasis, P4 recognizes the inefficacy of rigid grammar rules in navigating conversations with non-native speakers, acknowledging the existence of diverse English variations.

Similar to P4's statement, P7 emphasizes the significance of exposure to various dialects in listening classes. One notable challenge in listening comprehension is the multitude of English varieties present in Australia, each characterized by its distinct accent. This poses a difficulty for respondents, as their exposure has primarily been to American and British accents during their studies in Indonesia. P7 noted that the majority of their listening materials focused on standard English, failing to accurately mirror the real-life conversations in Australia, where speech patterns may deviate from formal standards. Consequently, understanding diverse English varieties presents a challenge for respondents, given their limited familiarity with such variations. Participant

anecdotes vividly illustrate the struggles they face in comprehending speakers employing different English dialects.

Lastly, P8's narrative echoes themes of academic English proficiency gained in formal educational settings, contrasting with the practical challenges encountered in everyday interactions. They emphasize the disparity between academic grammar-focused learning and the pragmatic simplicity required for effective communication outside the classroom. By sharing her strategy of simplifying language when interacting in non-academic contexts, P8 highlights the adaptive strategies employed by Indonesian students to bridge the gap between formal language education and real-world communicative needs. These stories underscore the need for a holistic approach to English language education that accommodates both formal instruction and exposure to diverse linguistic contexts to foster comprehensive communicative competence.

Implication on English Language Teaching (ELT)

The findings discussed above have significant implications for English language teaching in Indonesia, particularly in promoting more communicative competencies and understanding the context of ELF. Studying abroad offers students not only academic enrichment but also opportunities to enhance their communication skills by interacting with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds using English as a common language. This highlights the importance of integrating three competencies, namely interactional competence, multidialectal competence, and strategic competence, into classroom instruction and teaching materials.

Interactional competence, as defined by Celce-Murcia (2007), encompasses a range of abilities related to effective communication in social interactions. This includes performing speech acts, engaging in interpersonal exchanges, expressing opinions, and understanding the nuances of turn-taking and nonverbal communication cues like body language and eye contact. Given that interaction in English is ubiquitous in various daily scenarios, such as purchasing groceries or asking for directions, it is crucial for learners to develop strong interactional

competence. Teachers can facilitate the development of interactional competence by designing activities that simulate real-life interactions. Role plays, debates, and group discussions provide opportunities for learners to practice speech acts and interpersonal exchanges in a supportive environment. Additionally, incorporating video clips or audio recordings depicting authentic interactions can help learners observe and analyze the use of nonverbal cues and turn-taking in context. By providing feedback and guidance during these activities, teachers can help learners become more proficient in navigating social interactions in English. Learners can also observe conversations between English speakers (both native and non-native) in various social contexts, paying attention to their use of language and nonverbal cues, and try to emulate them in role-plays or conversations with peers. Practicing active listening and being mindful of cultural norms and social conventions in English-speaking contexts can also contribute to the development of interactional competence.

Furthermore, strategic competence should also be promoted in ELT. Canale and Swain (1980) define strategic competence as verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that are used to compensate for the deficiency of linguistic competencies and help learners effectively manage communication challenges. In the classroom, teachers can explicitly teach communication strategies and provide opportunities for learners to practice them in context. For example, learners can engage in activities where they role-play communication breakdowns and brainstorm strategies to overcome them, such as paraphrasing or using visual aids. Furthermore, raising students' awareness of the importance of strategic competence can be accomplished through discussions and reflective activities. Teachers can prompt students to reflect on their own communication experiences and identify effective strategies used by proficient speakers. For example, students might discuss instances where they encountered communication challenges and brainstorm potential strategies for overcoming them.

Authentic materials might also play a crucial role in providing students with exposure to real-world communication challenges and opportunities to practice strategic competence. Teachers can

incorporate authentic materials such as videos, podcasts, and news articles that feature diverse linguistic features, accents, and cultural contexts. For example, students might listen to a podcast featuring a panel discussion among speakers with different accents and linguistic backgrounds. Afterward, students could engage in a discussion where they employ communication strategies such as seeking clarification or paraphrasing to ensure mutual understanding.

Task-based learning activities also offer another opportunity for integrating strategic competence into classroom instruction. By presenting students with authentic tasks that require problem-solving and effective communication strategies, teachers promote the development of strategic competence in context. For instance, students might participate in a collaborative project where they must negotiate meaning and employ communication strategies to achieve a shared goal. Through such activities, students not only enhance their language skills but also develop the confidence and proficiency to navigate communication challenges in real-world settings.

Finally, another competence that should be one of the goals in teaching ELF context is to help learners build multi-varietal competence. Multi-varietal competence, or what Canagarajah (2006, p. 229) called multidialectal competence, refers to the ability to understand different varieties of English and the skills to "negotiate diversities to facilitate communication." Sharifian (2014) reports that Australia is home to many varieties of English, and the communication is frequently multi-varietal. The above stories also confirm this report. We can see that Indonesian students need to be able to understand more than one variety of English since the environment that they are going to enter is very multicultural and multidialectal. The stories from the respondents show that familiarization with some varieties of English can be helpful in increasing communicative competence. One way to familiarize students with different varieties of English is by listening to podcasts or watching videos that include different varieties of English (McKay & Brown, 2016).

According to Bowles (2015), the ELF approach puts more emphasis on pragmatics, culture, and

intelligibility. ELF suggests that English local and regional varieties, as well as the cultural and pragmatic norms of English speakers whom learners most likely interact with, should be provided in English language teaching materials. While English learning in Indonesia is now only focused on following the grammar and using English like a native speaker, by adopting a lingua franca approach, the focus of the class activity turns into how to successfully communicate in a multicultural community and create mutual understanding with other non-native speakers from different L1, instead of acquiring some “idealized” rules. This is in line with the above proposals for promoting interactional, strategic, and multidialectal competence.

However, implementing an ELF-oriented approach requires careful consideration of regional linguistic features and communication dynamics. Jenkins (2012) states that further research about linguistic features that might influence intelligibility is needed and documented to develop ELF-oriented materials. Cogo (2015) adds that the ELF-oriented approach in ELT suggests teachers consider ELF research findings for their class materials and consider all varieties of English, not just British or American English, to help students join global interaction. While the ELF approach emphasizes the importance of pragmatics and intelligibility, the availability of well-documented materials remains a challenge. Further research is needed to identify linguistic features that influence intelligibility in different contexts and develop ELF-oriented materials that reflect the linguistic realities of global communication.

Considering these challenges, English language teachers play a pivotal role in fostering interactional, strategic, and multidialectal competence by actively researching and incorporating real-world scenarios into their classrooms. This can involve going beyond textbooks and curriculum materials to curate authentic resources like news articles, social media discussions, or interviews featuring diverse speakers and accents. Collaboration with educators in other English-as-a-second-language contexts can also be immensely valuable for sharing best practices and regionally-specific resources. By staying updated on current research in ELF communication, teachers can tailor their instruction to address the evolving

needs of their students in a globalized world. This proactive approach empowers students to become more effective communicators by equipping them with the tools to navigate the complexities of real-world interactions across diverse linguistic landscapes.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this qualitative study has provided valuable insights into the initial experiences of Indonesian students encountering communication challenges while using English as a lingua franca (ELF) in Australia. Through narrative accounts, a continuum of comprehension issues emerged, ranging from non-understanding to partial understanding and misunderstanding. These challenges were attributed to factors such as unfamiliar accents, rapid speech, cultural references, and the dynamic nature of ELF communication.

The findings underscore the importance of equipping Indonesian students with the necessary competencies to navigate diverse linguistic contexts effectively. Participants employed various strategies to overcome these challenges, including seeking clarification, paraphrasing, and adapting communication styles based on the context. However, their experiences also revealed a gap in English language education in Indonesia, with participants expressing a desire for better preparation for real-world ELF interactions.

Moving forward, there are significant implications for English language teaching (ELT) in Indonesia. An ELF-focused approach is crucial, promoting three types of key competence: interactional competence, strategic competence, and multidialectal competence. By integrating authentic materials, designing relevant tasks and activities, and fostering awareness of strategic communication strategies, ELT programs can better prepare students for the complexities of ELF communication.

Implementing an ELF-oriented approach requires collaboration, innovation, and a commitment to addressing the specific needs of Indonesian students. By leveraging regionally specific linguistic features, sharing best practices with educators in other EFL contexts, and

continually adapting teaching methods, English language programs can empower students to thrive as confident communicators in a globalized world.

Furthermore, it is suggested that for students intending to study abroad, particularly in countries where English is used as a lingua franca, pre-departure English programs should include multidialectal competence. This entails introducing students to the dialects or varieties of English commonly encountered in their destination country, thereby better preparing them for the linguistic diversity they will encounter upon arrival.

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