

Perceptions of English as an international language among Korean EFL students

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Abstract

This study investigated perceptions of English as an International Language (EIL) among Korean EFL students. It also examined factors that influenced their perceptions. To this end, English majors ($n = 206$) and non-English-major students ($n = 172$) completed a survey, along with follow-up interviews. The quantitative results showed that English majors, in comparison to their non-English-major counterparts, held more positive perceptions toward varieties of English and multicultural communication strategies. The qualitative data found that teacher-structured EIL pedagogy and student-driven EIL experience in extramural digital settings might have affected the discrepancy in their EIL perceptions.

Keywords

English as an international language (EIL); EIL perceptions; informal digital learning of English

Introduction

EIL can be conceptualized as “a function that English performs in international, multilingual contexts, to which each speaker brings a variety of English that they are most familiar with, along with their own cultural frames of reference, and employs various strategies to communicate effectively” (Matsuda, 2017, xiii). EIL-oriented researchers have consistently highlighted shifting sociolinguistic and sociocultural phenomena while challenging the traditional view of ELT with respect to its practices, textbooks, and tests for the past four decades (Kachru, 1976; Matsuda, 2017). Since language attitudes play a pivotal role in influencing L2 learning and behavior (McKenzie 2008), one strand of EIL research has examined perceptions toward varieties of English and multicultural

communication strategies. Although much of such EIL research has been conducted, the participants were recruited from one particular discipline (e.g., non-English major). Further, it is not clear what factors might have affected students’ perceptions of EIL. Thus, drawing on a mixed-method research design, this study examined English and non-English-major students’ EIL perceptions and their influential factors.

1 Methods

1.1 Settings and participants

English ($n = 206$; e.g. English education and English literature) and non-English-major students ($n = 172$; e.g. the Humanities, Business, Engineering, and Science) enrolled in 17 EFL classes participated in the study.

1.2 Instrument

EIL Perception Scale (Lee & Chen Hsiegh, 2018) was partially adopted to gauge participants’ two dimensions of EIL, namely, varieties of English (4 items; $\alpha = .85$) and multicultural communication strategies (4 items; $\alpha = .86$) on a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 “strongly disagree” to 5 “strongly agree”).

1.3 Data collection and analysis

Survey data ($n = 378$) were collected during the 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 academic years, respectively. Follow-up interviews ($n = 20$) were also conducted. An independent sample *t*-test was performed to examine the differences between two groups with respect to their EIL perceptions.

2 Results and discussion

English majors, in comparison to their

non-English-major counterparts, held more positive perceptions toward varieties of English and multicultural communication strategies. Specifically, the largest discrepancy between the two groups centered on their perceptions of *explaining Korean culture to foreigners*, followed by *varieties of Outer Circle English*.

The qualitative data revealed that teacher-structured EIL pedagogy and student-driven EIL experience in extramural digital settings might have affected the discrepancy in their EIL perceptions.

These results suggest that an EIL experience that occurs in a formal classroom may positively affect EFL learners' perceptions of EIL. In addition, students' engagement in extramural digital contexts – where teachers' EIL instructional intervention is absent – may also have made a significant impact on their EIL perceptions.

On these grounds of these results, pedagogically, it seems plausible to suggest that EIL practitioners should recognize that EFL students can experience diverse forms and accents of English both in and outside the classroom.

3 References and appendices

3.1 References

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