

Language Attitudes, Motivation, and Standards: A Case Study of Sociolinguistics in English Language Teaching

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Abstract

The global diversification of English challenges English Language Teaching to balance standardized forms with recognition of legitimate local and international varieties. This qualitative descriptive study examined the cognitive, affective, and conative language attitudes and investigated how these attitudes were associated with motivation and perceptions of appropriate teaching and assessment standards. Participants were purposively selected based on English grades, classroom performance, school records, and teacher recommendations. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and repeated non-participant classroom observations. The data were analyzed interactively through condensation, thematic display, conclusion drawing, and verification, supported by methodological triangulation, peer debriefing, member checking, an audit trail, and researcher reflexivity. The findings showed that learners cognitively associated American and British English with correctness, prestige, academic achievement, and employment. Affectively, they experienced greater comfort and confidence with Philippine English, while native-speaker comparison generated anxiety and linguistic insecurity. Conatively, learners preferred familiar, intelligible English for everyday interaction but selectively valued standardized forms for formal writing, examinations, presentations, and professional communication. Positive recognition of learners' linguistic identities strengthened participation and motivation, whereas public correction and rigid native-speaker expectations encouraged avoidance. Participants supported standards that combined accuracy with intelligibility, task achievement, interaction, effort, and improvement. The study concludes that inclusive ELT does not require abandoning standards; instead, standards should be scaffolded, transparent, and adjusted to communicative purpose. Diversified linguistic exposure, respectful corrective feedback, and context-sensitive assessment can provide academically vulnerable learners with more equitable opportunities to develop and demonstrate English competence.

Keywords: Language attitudes; Learner motivation; Philippine English; World Englishes; Language standards

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INTRODUCTION

The global expansion of English has transformed it from a language associated primarily with a small number of native-speaking countries into a multilingual and multicultural resource used across diverse educational, professional, and social contexts. English is now frequently employed among speakers who do not share it as a first language, making variation an unavoidable characteristic of authentic international communication (Jung & Crookes, 2024). This development has important implications

for English Language Teaching (ELT), particularly regarding which varieties should be taught, accepted, and assessed. Traditional ELT practices have often positioned British and American English as the principal models of correctness, pronunciation, grammar, and communicative competence. Such an orientation assumes that successful learning should ultimately lead to conformity with native-speaker norms (Boonsuk et al., 2021; Jung & Crookes, 2024). However, sociolinguistic perspectives, especially World Englishes, Global Englishes, and English as a Lingua Franca, challenge the notion that English belongs exclusively to native-speaking communities. They maintain that English develops legitimate forms in response to local histories, identities, communicative purposes, and cultural conditions.

Accordingly, any variety that enables speakers to communicate intelligibly and appropriately in naturally occurring interaction may function as a legitimate form of expression rather than an imperfect imitation of native English. This position does not reject the pedagogical usefulness of standard forms, but questions their exclusive authority in defining competence. According to Rose et al. (2020), the recognition of linguistic diversity is therefore central to contemporary discussions of language attitudes, learner motivation, identity, standards, and equity in ELT. It supports the view that learners should be prepared to communicate across varieties while retaining their own linguistic identities, rather than being required to suppress them in pursuit of an idealized native-speaker model.

The legitimacy assigned to different English varieties is closely connected to language attitudes. In sociolinguistics, attitudes are not understood merely as general preferences or personal opinions; they are multidimensional evaluations involving cognitive, affective, and conative components (Pan et al., 2021; Rose et al., 2020). The cognitive component consists of beliefs and judgments about a language or variety, including whether it is considered correct, prestigious, useful, modern, educated, or suitable for academic and professional communication. The affective component refers to emotional reactions toward a variety and its speakers, such as admiration, pride, familiarity, anxiety, discomfort, or prejudice. The conative component concerns behavioral intentions and tendencies, including whether individuals are willing to learn, use, avoid, imitate, promote, or accept a particular variety in specific contexts. These dimensions interact in complex ways. Learners may cognitively acknowledge that multiple English varieties are linguistically legitimate while continuing to feel that native accents are more attractive or prestigious.

Similarly, teachers may express support for linguistic diversity but still correct local pronunciation or grammatical features according to a single external norm. Attitudes therefore influence not only what people believe about language, but also how they respond emotionally and how they behave toward speakers and varieties. Research has shown that perceptions of legitimacy, correctness, and suitability remain important in shaping educational decisions and preferences for particular English models (Brdarević-Čeljo et al., 2025; Choe & Lee, 2023). Emotional responses to accents and dialects likewise affect openness toward linguistic diversity and willingness to communicate with speakers from different backgrounds (Pan et al., 2021; Rose et al., 2020). Meanwhile, the conative dimension becomes visible when teachers and learners translate their beliefs into curriculum choices, classroom practices, language use, and assessment decisions (Boonsuk et al., 2021; Jung & Crookes, 2024). Examining these three components is essential because stated support for diversity does not necessarily result in inclusive behavior.

Language attitudes are also strongly related to learner motivation. Motivation in ELT is shaped not only by individual goals but also by the social meanings attached to

English and its varieties. When learners perceive their own accents, linguistic repertoires, and cultural identities as legitimate, they may become more confident and willing to participate in communication. Recognition reduces the psychological distance between learners and the language because English is no longer presented as the exclusive property of native speakers. Instead, it becomes a shared global resource that learners can adapt to their communicative purposes. This shift can strengthen intrinsic motivation by allowing students to pursue meaningful communication rather than unattainable native-like performance. It may also enhance instrumental motivation when learners recognize that successful international communication depends on intelligibility, flexibility, and negotiation of meaning across linguistic differences.

Studies suggest that acceptance of diverse Englishes can increase willingness to participate in communicative tasks and support intercultural engagement (Aslan & Özer-Altinkaya, 2024; Boonsuk et al., 2021; Jung & Crookes, 2024; Rose et al., 2020). Conversely, the continuing prestige of native-speaker norms may discourage learners who believe that their pronunciation, grammar, or identity will always be evaluated as deficient (Boonsuk & Fang, 2020; Brdarević-Čeljo et al., 2025; Grammon, 2021). Motivation should therefore be examined in relation to sociolinguistic legitimacy, identity, and classroom ideology rather than treated solely as an internal psychological characteristic. Learners' engagement may depend substantially on whether the educational environment recognizes them as valid users of English.

Despite the growing recognition of linguistic diversity, language standards remain necessary in ELT. Shared conventions provide guidance for academic writing, formal communication, curriculum development, testing, and institutional accountability. The central issue is therefore not whether standards should exist, but how they should be conceptualized and applied. A sociolinguistically informed approach views standards as context-sensitive reference points rather than inflexible hierarchies separating correct and incorrect speakers. Standardized forms may be appropriate in formal writing, examinations, or professional communication, but they should not automatically delegitimize other varieties that achieve communicative purposes effectively.

World Englishes and English as a Lingua Franca perspectives emphasize intelligibility, appropriateness, audience awareness, accommodation, and successful negotiation of meaning as important dimensions of communicative competence (Choe & Lee, 2023; Lindqvist & Soler, 2022; Rose et al., 2020). From this perspective, assessment should evaluate whether learners can convey meaning, respond to interlocutors, manage misunderstanding, and communicate across cultural and linguistic differences. Speaking and writing rubrics may therefore incorporate task achievement, pragmatic effectiveness, intercultural awareness, and audience adaptation alongside grammatical accuracy. Such an approach does not promote unrestricted language use or eliminate accuracy. Rather, it distinguishes between errors that obstruct communication and variations that reflect legitimate sociolinguistic use. Studies have consequently recommended assessment practices that recognize communicative outcomes across varieties instead of measuring performance exclusively against native-speaker pronunciation or usage (Boonsuk et al., 2021; Jung & Crookes, 2024; Rajprasit, 2021).

The interaction among attitudes, motivation, and standards has direct implications for curriculum design, teaching materials, classroom activities, and teacher education. Curricula that represent only British or American English may indirectly communicate that other varieties and identities are less valuable. By contrast, exposure to Inner-, Outer, and Expanding-Circle Englishes can help learners understand the actual diversity of global communication. Authentic materials, comparative listening activities, discussions of accent prejudice, and intercultural communication tasks can develop critical

sociolinguistic awareness. Such practices encourage learners to examine why particular varieties are associated with intelligence, authority, modernity, or correctness. They also allow learners to develop receptive flexibility when encountering unfamiliar accents and communicative styles. Global Englishes-informed courses and critical pedagogical interventions have demonstrated potential to improve receptiveness toward linguistic diversity and strengthen confidence in intercultural communication (Jung & Crookes, 2024; Rose et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, implementation remains challenging. Teachers may support diversity in principle while continuing to rely on native-speaker-oriented textbooks, examinations, institutional policies, and correction practices. Studies of pre-service and in-service teachers have repeatedly identified a gap between awareness of World Englishes or English as a Lingua Franca and the ability to incorporate these perspectives into teaching (Behzadpoor & Mansouri, 2023; Boonsuk et al., 2021; Kusumaningputri et al., 2022). National curricula, standardized examinations, parental expectations, and limited teaching resources may further reinforce conventional norms. These tensions demonstrate the need for context-sensitive empirical research rather than assuming that theoretical acceptance of linguistic diversity automatically produces pedagogical change.

The novelty of the study lies in its integrated analysis of the three components of language attitudes together with motivation and language-standard preferences. Rather than examining attitudes as a single general construct or discussing World Englishes only at a conceptual level, the study explores how beliefs, emotions, and behavioral tendencies interact with learners' motivational orientations and expectations of correctness. This integrated sociolinguistic approach is expected to provide a more comprehensive account of how learners negotiate the tension between standardized English and linguistic diversity, while offering practical evidence for inclusive curriculum design, teacher development, and equitable assessment.

The objectives of this study are to examine learners' cognitive, affective, and conative attitudes toward different English varieties and to investigate how these attitudes relate to their motivation and perceptions of acceptable language standards in ELT. The study is guided by the following research questions:

What cognitive, affective, and conative attitudes do learners hold toward native, local, and international varieties of English in ELT contexts?

How are learners' language attitudes associated with their motivation to learn English and their perceptions of appropriate language standards for teaching and assessment?

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to examine EFL learners' language attitudes, motivation, and perceptions of English language standards within the sociolinguistic context of English Language Teaching. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to understand how learners interpreted and responded to different varieties of English, including the beliefs, emotional reactions, and behavioral tendencies underlying their attitudes. These dimensions could not be adequately captured through numerical measures alone because they were closely connected to learners' personal experiences, classroom interactions, linguistic identities, and perceptions of academic success.

More specifically, the study used a qualitative descriptive design. This design enabled the researchers to provide a detailed account of participants' views and experiences using language that remained close to the participants' own explanations. It was particularly suitable for addressing the research questions concerning the cognitive,

affective, and conative components of language attitudes and their relationship with motivation and preferred language standards. Through interviews and classroom observations, the researchers were able to explore not only what learners believed about native, local, and international varieties of English, but also how they emotionally responded to these varieties and how such attitudes were reflected in their classroom participation and language-learning behavior.

The qualitative design was also appropriate for the characteristics of the participants. The learners involved in the study had low academic achievement and were categorized as slow learners. A flexible and interpretive approach was therefore needed to ensure that participants could express their views without the pressure associated with standardized tests or lengthy written questionnaires. Interviews allowed questions to be rephrased, clarified, or simplified when necessary, while observations provided evidence of behaviors that participants might have found difficult to explain verbally.

Despite these advantages, the selected design had limitations. First, the findings were context-specific and could not be statistically generalized to all EFL learners in the Philippines. The study focused on a relatively small group from selected secondary schools, and participants' attitudes might have been influenced by their particular institutional, social, and educational environments. Second, qualitative interpretation may be influenced by researcher subjectivity. The researchers' prior assumptions about English varieties, academic ability, and slow learners could potentially affect data collection and analysis. This risk was mitigated through the use of a semi-structured interview protocol, systematic observation guidelines, reflexive notes, peer review of the coding process, and comparison of evidence obtained from different data sources. Participants' statements were also presented through direct excerpts where appropriate to ensure that the interpretations remained grounded in the data.

Participants

The participants consisted of 33 secondary-school EFL learners in the Philippines. They were selected because they demonstrated low academic achievement in English and were categorized by their respective schools as slow learners. In this study, slow learners were understood as students who required more time, repetition, scaffolding, and instructional support than their peers to understand lessons and complete academic tasks. The term did not refer to students with formally diagnosed intellectual disabilities but to learners who experienced persistent difficulty in meeting expected classroom learning outcomes.

Purposive sampling was used to identify participants who could provide relevant information regarding the research topic. This sampling method was appropriate because the study did not seek a statistically representative sample but rather participants who shared specific educational characteristics related to the research objectives. The selection criteria were as follows: the participant had to be enrolled in a secondary school in the Philippines, study English as a foreign or additional language within the school curriculum, demonstrate consistently low academic achievement in English, and be identified by teachers or school records as requiring additional instructional support.

Low academic achievement was determined through a combination of recent English grades, classroom performance, teacher recommendations, and school-based academic records. Participants were included when they had experienced recurring difficulty in areas such as reading comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, oral communication, written expression, or completion of English-language tasks. Teacher recommendations were used to confirm that the identified learners regularly required

slower instructional pacing, repeated explanations, simplified materials, or individualized assistance.

The sample size of 33 participants was considered adequate for a qualitative study because it allowed the researchers to obtain a broad range of perspectives while maintaining sufficient depth in data collection and analysis. The number also supported the identification of recurring patterns and variations across participants' experiences. Data collection continued until the researchers determined that the interviews and observations were producing sufficiently rich information and that major categories were repeatedly evident in the data.

The participants represented the adolescent age group commonly enrolled in secondary education. Relevant demographic information, including age, grade level, gender, home language, previous exposure to English, and years of English study, was collected through a brief participant profile form. These details were used to contextualize the findings rather than to classify or compare learners statistically. Because the participants came from multilingual backgrounds, their first languages and patterns of language use at home and school were considered important contextual factors in interpreting their attitudes toward English varieties.

Instruments

Two primary research instruments were used: semi-structured interviews and non-participant classroom observations. The combination of these instruments enabled the researchers to obtain both reported and behavioral data. Interviews provided access to learners' beliefs, emotions, preferences, and personal experiences, while observations revealed how these attitudes and motivational orientations were manifested during actual English lessons.

Semi-Structured Interview

A semi-structured interview guide was developed based on the objectives of the study and the theoretical dimensions of language attitudes. The interview questions were organized around four areas: cognitive attitudes, affective attitudes, conative attitudes, and motivation in relation to English language standards. Questions addressing the cognitive component explored participants' beliefs about the correctness, usefulness, prestige, difficulty, and appropriateness of different English varieties. The affective component included questions about learners' feelings toward native and non-native accents, confidence in speaking English, anxiety about making mistakes, and emotional responses to teacher correction. The conative component examined participants' willingness to speak English, imitate particular accents, communicate with speakers from different linguistic backgrounds, and use English inside or outside the classroom. Additional questions investigated learners' motivation, preferred learning goals, and perceptions of the English standards used in teaching and assessment.

The interview guide was written in clear and accessible language because participants had low academic achievement and might have experienced difficulty with abstract terminology. Technical concepts such as "language variety," "native-speaker norm," and "communicative intelligibility" were translated into concrete examples and familiar classroom situations. The interviewer was permitted to simplify or rephrase questions without changing their intended meaning. Follow-up prompts, such as "Can you explain further?", "How did that make you feel?", and "Can you give an example?", were used to obtain deeper responses. The interview guide was reviewed by specialists in English Language Teaching, sociolinguistics, qualitative research, and inclusive or special education. The reviewers examined the relevance, clarity, sensitivity, and developmental appropriateness of the questions.

Classroom Observation

A structured observation guide was developed to document participants' behavior during English lessons. The observation focused on classroom participation, willingness to speak, responses to teacher correction, reactions to different accents or language models, avoidance behavior, peer interaction, persistence in completing tasks, and use of English or other languages during communication. The observation guide was informed by the same cognitive, affective, conative, and motivational framework used in the interview protocol. However, the observation did not attempt to infer internal beliefs directly. Instead, it recorded observable indicators such as volunteering answers, hesitating before speaking, withdrawing from interaction, laughing at particular accents, seeking clarification, imitating teacher pronunciation, switching languages, or continuing a task after making mistakes.

Observations were non-participant in nature. The researcher did not take an instructional role and attempted to minimize disruption to normal classroom activities. Each class was observed on more than one occasion to reduce the possibility that the recorded behavior reflected an unusual lesson or temporary emotional state. Descriptive field notes were written during or immediately after each observation, while reflective notes were kept separately to distinguish direct evidence from researcher interpretation.

The use of interviews and observations facilitated methodological triangulation. Statements made during interviews were compared with classroom behavior to identify convergence, divergence, or additional contextual explanation. For example, a participant who claimed to enjoy speaking English could be observed for actual willingness to participate, while a learner who expressed anxiety could be examined for hesitation, avoidance, or dependence on peer support. Triangulation strengthened the credibility of the findings by preventing conclusions from being based on a single source.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data were analyzed using an interactive process involving data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. These stages were not treated as strictly linear. Instead, they occurred throughout data collection and analysis, allowing the researchers to move repeatedly between the raw data, emerging categories, and developing interpretations.

Data Condensation

Data condensation involved selecting, organizing, simplifying, and transforming the information obtained from interview transcripts and observation field notes. The first stage consisted of preparing the data. Audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, translated where necessary, anonymized, and checked for accuracy. Observation notes were expanded shortly after each classroom visit to preserve important details and contextual information. The researchers then read the complete data set several times to become familiar with participants' experiences and identify preliminary patterns. Initial codes were assigned to meaningful segments of data. Some codes were deductive because they were derived from the conceptual framework and research questions. These included cognitive attitudes, affective attitudes, conative tendencies, intrinsic motivation, instrumental motivation, native-speaker preference, local-variety acceptance, intelligibility, correctness, confidence, anxiety, participation, and avoidance.

Inductive coding was also used to identify ideas that emerged directly from the participants' accounts. Such codes could include fear of ridicule, preference for a teacher's accent, dependence on translation, pressure to pronounce words correctly, motivation from future employment, embarrassment about local pronunciation, or

comfort when communicating with other non-native speakers. Related codes were compared and grouped into broader categories. For example, codes concerning fear of mistakes, reluctance to answer, and discomfort during oral activities could be combined under a category such as speaking anxiety. Codes related to employment, grades, and future education could be grouped under instrumental motivation. The researchers continually compared interview responses with observation records to determine whether the categories were supported across data sources.

Data Display

After the data had been coded and categorized, they were organized into displays that facilitated systematic comparison and interpretation. The primary displays included thematic matrices, participant-by-theme tables, interview-observation comparison charts, and narrative summaries. A participant-by-theme matrix was used to show how each learner responded to the principal categories, including beliefs about English varieties, emotional reactions, willingness to communicate, motivation, and language-standard preferences. This format enabled the researchers to identify similarities and differences across participants. A second matrix compared interview statements with observational evidence. For instance, a participant's reported confidence could be compared with observed participation during lessons. Agreement between the two sources strengthened the interpretation, whereas inconsistency prompted further examination of contextual factors.

The researchers also created thematic summaries that combined representative quotations, observed behaviors, and interpretive notes. These displays prevented the analysis from becoming a collection of isolated quotations and helped reveal relationships among attitudes, motivation, and standards. Visual organization also made it possible to identify whether cognitive acceptance of diverse Englishes was accompanied by positive emotional reactions and inclusive behavioral tendencies.

Conclusion Drawing and Verification

Conclusions were developed by interpreting the patterns, relationships, and contrasts evident in the displayed data. The researchers examined how participants' beliefs about English varieties were connected to their confidence, willingness to communicate, classroom engagement, and preferred standards. Attention was given to both dominant patterns and negative cases that challenged emerging explanations. Conclusion drawing occurred progressively rather than only after all data had been collected. Preliminary interpretations were repeatedly checked against the transcripts, field notes, coding records, and thematic displays. Conclusions were considered credible only when they were supported by sufficient evidence and were consistent with the broader data set.

Several strategies were used to verify the findings. First, methodological triangulation was conducted by comparing interview and observation data. Second, peer debriefing was used to examine coding decisions, categories, and interpretations. Third, member checking was conducted through brief participant confirmation of selected meanings. Fourth, an audit trail was maintained, consisting of interview guides, transcripts, observation records, coding frameworks, analytic memos, and records of category development.

Reflexivity was also incorporated into the analytical process. The researchers maintained a reflexive journal to document assumptions, emotional responses, and possible biases related to slow learners, standard English, and linguistic diversity. This practice helped distinguish participants' perspectives from the researchers' prior expectations. The final themes were presented through detailed descriptions supported

by participant quotations and classroom evidence. Quotations were selected because they represented recurring patterns, important contrasts, or analytically significant experiences. The analysis aimed not merely to describe participants' opinions, but to explain how cognitive beliefs, affective responses, behavioral tendencies, motivation, and language-standard perceptions interacted within their EFL learning experiences.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

What cognitive, affective, and conative attitudes do learners hold toward native, local, and international varieties of English in ELT contexts?

The analysis of the learners' interviews and classroom observations produced three interconnected themes: the perceived authority of native English, emotional acceptance of familiar English varieties, and context-dependent willingness to use different varieties. Although the participants generally regarded British and American English as prestigious and academically desirable, they did not completely reject Philippine English or other international varieties. Instead, their attitudes reflected tension between the English they believed schools expected and the English they found accessible, familiar, and practical for communication.

Cognitive attitudes: Native English as prestigious but difficult

At the cognitive level, most learners associated native varieties, particularly American English, with correctness, intelligence, educational success, and employment opportunities. They commonly believed that native pronunciation represented the best model for classroom learning because it was frequently heard in textbooks, films, online videos, and teacher demonstrations. For these learners, "good English" was often defined in terms of accurate grammar, a broad vocabulary, and pronunciation resembling that of American or British speakers.

However, the learners also described native English as fast, difficult to understand, and demanding to imitate. Their admiration was therefore accompanied by awareness that native-speaker performance was not always an achievable or necessary goal. Several learners stated that communicating understandable ideas was more important than producing a perfect accent. This finding suggests that their cognitive attitudes were not wholly native-speaker-oriented. Although they accepted the prestige of native varieties, they also recognized intelligibility and communicative success as practical standards.

Philippine English was generally perceived as more understandable and relevant to the learners' daily experiences. The participants believed that its pronunciation and expressions were easier to follow because they resembled the English used by their teachers, classmates, family members, and local media. Nevertheless, some learners described Philippine English as less formal or less correct than American or British English. This belief appeared to result from repeated correction of local pronunciation and the classroom emphasis on externally recognized standards.

The learners' knowledge of other international English varieties was comparatively limited. Some participants initially interpreted unfamiliar accents as incorrect because they differed from the models they regularly encountered. After examples were explained during the interview, however, many acknowledged that Indian, Singaporean, Japanese, Korean, and other forms of English could be valid when speakers communicated successfully. Their responses indicated that unfamiliarity, rather than explicit rejection, largely shaped their perceptions of international Englishes.

Affective attitudes: Admiration, familiarity, anxiety, and linguistic insecurity

The affective dimension revealed mixed emotional responses. Native varieties generated admiration and interest, but they also produced anxiety, embarrassment, and feelings of inadequacy. Some learners reported enjoying American English because it sounded fluent or professional. At the same time, they worried that their own speech would be judged negatively if their pronunciation differed from the native model.

This anxiety was evident during classroom observations. Several learners avoided volunteering answers even when they appeared to know the content. Some spoke softly, paused frequently, or relied on classmates before responding. Their hesitation was particularly noticeable during oral reading, pronunciation activities, and individual presentations. When teachers emphasized correction without first acknowledging meaning, some learners became quieter or switched to Filipino or their home language. By comparison, Philippine English and familiar local accents produced feelings of comfort, belonging, and confidence. The learners reported that they could understand lessons more easily when teachers used familiar pronunciation and occasionally explained difficult concepts in Filipino or another shared language. They were also less afraid of making mistakes when communicating with classmates who spoke English in similar ways. Their affective reactions toward international varieties depended on exposure. Unfamiliar accents sometimes caused confusion or amusement, but learners generally became more receptive when they were given opportunities to listen repeatedly and focus on meaning. These responses demonstrate that negative reactions to variation were not fixed. Increased exposure and guided reflection could reduce accent-based prejudice and build perceptual flexibility.

Conative attitudes: Preference for familiar English and conditional willingness to communicate

The conative component concerned how learners' beliefs and emotions shaped their intentions and observable behavior. Most learners expressed a desire to improve their English, but few aimed to reproduce a completely native accent. Their immediate goal was to speak clearly enough to be understood by teachers, classmates, and future employers. They preferred familiar Philippine English in ordinary interaction while regarding American or British English as useful models for formal presentations, examinations, and future professional situations.

Classroom observations showed that willingness to communicate increased when learners were allowed preparation time, peer support, familiar topics, and flexible language use. Participation decreased when tasks demanded spontaneous speech, public correction, or precise imitation of unfamiliar pronunciation. This indicates that conative attitudes were strongly influenced by classroom conditions rather than by language preference alone.

Most participants were also willing to communicate with users of international English varieties, provided that the speakers used comprehensible language and were patient when misunderstandings occurred. Learners valued speakers who repeated, rephrased, slowed down, or used examples. Their responses suggest an emerging understanding of communicative accommodation, even though they did not use this technical term. Overall, the learners' conative attitudes favored communication that was supportive, intelligible, and free from ridicule.

Learner 4: *"American English sounds correct because that is what I hear in movies and in our listening activities. But when the speaker talks very fast, I cannot understand everything. I think clear English is more important than copying the accent."*

Learner 12: *"I am comfortable when my teacher speaks English with a Filipino accent because I understand the words. I become nervous when I must pronounce every word like an American speaker."*

Learner 25: “Before, I thought another accent was wrong because it sounded different. Later, I understood that the person was still speaking English. The important thing is that we can understand each other.”

Learners 2: “The learners often know the answer, but they hesitate because they are worried about pronunciation. They participate more when I tell them that they may speak naturally first and improve the form afterward.”

Table 1. Learners’ Attitudes toward English Varieties

Interview or analytical question	Synthesized responses and observed evidence
1. Which variety of English do learners consider most correct?	Most learners identified American or British English as the most correct because these varieties were associated with textbooks, media, examinations, and educated speakers. However, some emphasized that understandable English could also be correct in actual communication.
2. How do learners perceive Philippine English?	Philippine English was viewed as familiar, understandable, and appropriate for local communication. Nevertheless, several learners believed it was less prestigious or less formal than native English because of classroom correction practices and social stereotypes.
3. What do learners think about international English varieties?	Learners initially had limited knowledge of international varieties. Unfamiliar accents were sometimes interpreted as incorrect, but most participants accepted them as legitimate when communication remained clear and meaningful.
4. How do native varieties make learners feel?	Native English generated admiration and interest but also anxiety, embarrassment, and fear of negative evaluation. Learners often compared their speech unfavorably with native-speaker models.
5. Which varieties make learners feel most comfortable?	Familiar Philippine English and the English used by classmates and local teachers produced greater comfort and confidence. Learners felt safer when accents were recognizable and difficult concepts could be clarified through familiar languages.
6. Which varieties are learners willing to use?	Learners preferred Philippine English in everyday interaction but wanted access to American or British models for formal and professional purposes. They were willing to communicate across international varieties when interlocutors prioritized intelligibility and mutual understanding.

The findings indicate that learners’ attitudes were characterized by cognitive admiration for native norms, affective comfort with local English, and conative preference for context-sensitive language use. These dimensions did not always align. A learner could believe that American English was the most correct variety while feeling more confident using Philippine English and intending to prioritize intelligibility over accent imitation. This inconsistency confirms the importance of examining cognitive, affective, and conative attitudes separately rather than treating language attitude as a single positive or negative orientation.

The findings also suggest that the learners’ slow academic progress should not be interpreted as an absence of sociolinguistic awareness. The participants were able to distinguish between prestige, familiarity, formality, and communicative effectiveness when questions were explained through accessible examples. Their responses showed emerging recognition that different varieties may serve different purposes. Nevertheless, restricted exposure to global English varieties and repeated emphasis on native-speaker correctness reinforced linguistic insecurity and hierarchical beliefs about English.

How are learners’ language attitudes associated with their motivation to learn English and their perceptions of appropriate language standards for teaching and assessment?

The findings revealed that language attitudes were closely related to learners' motivation, classroom participation, and perceptions of fair assessment. Positive recognition of familiar linguistic resources strengthened confidence and willingness to learn, whereas rigid comparison with native-speaker norms frequently produced anxiety and withdrawal. Learners did not reject standards; rather, they favored standards that combined accuracy with intelligibility, effort, task achievement, and improvement.

Language attitudes and learning motivation

Learners who regarded English as a flexible means of communication displayed stronger willingness to participate than those who viewed it primarily as a set of difficult grammatical and pronunciation rules. When participants believed that their existing English was a legitimate starting point, they were more willing to answer questions, work with classmates, and attempt oral tasks. Positive attitudes toward Philippine English therefore appeared to support confidence and sustained participation.

In contrast, learners who strongly equated competence with native pronunciation frequently reported fear of making mistakes. They often described themselves as “poor,” “wrong,” or “not good in English” because they could not speak like the models presented in media or instructional materials. Such self-evaluations weakened motivation by making successful performance appear unattainable. Classroom observations similarly showed that learners who anticipated public correction often avoided speaking, even when they had completed the written component of a task.

The participants' motivation was both instrumental and personal. Many wanted to learn English to pass school subjects, complete examinations, obtain future employment, communicate with foreigners, and access online information. Some also wanted to gain confidence and avoid embarrassment. These goals became more achievable when the learning environment defined progress through effective communication and gradual improvement rather than immediate conformity to native standards.

Attitudes and classroom engagement

A clear relationship emerged between affective security and observable participation. Learners were more engaged when teachers responded first to the meaning of their answers, corrected errors respectfully, and permitted rehearsal before public speaking. They were less engaged when errors were corrected abruptly or when classmates laughed at pronunciation differences. This pattern demonstrates that motivation was not a stable personal characteristic. It was shaped continually by classroom responses to linguistic variation.

The teachers' role was particularly influential. When teachers used familiar English, provided repetition, and explained why particular forms were expected in formal contexts, learners perceived standards as useful guidance. When correction was presented as evidence that their English was generally deficient, learners experienced standards as exclusionary. Thus, attitudes toward language varieties and attitudes toward learning were mediated by pedagogical practice.

Perceptions of appropriate teaching standards

Most learners believed that standard English should remain part of instruction because it supported academic writing, examinations, formal presentations, and future employment. They wanted teachers to explain grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and pronunciation clearly. However, they did not believe that every difference in accent should be treated as an error. The learners favored a contextual approach in which teachers introduced standard forms without devaluing Philippine English or other intelligible varieties. They considered it reasonable to require greater grammatical and organizational accuracy in essays than in spontaneous classroom discussion. For oral

communication, they valued understandable pronunciation, appropriate vocabulary, and the ability to respond to others more than imitation of a native accent.

This position reflects a functional rather than unrestricted interpretation of linguistic diversity. The participants did not argue that all forms should automatically be accepted in every setting. Instead, they wanted explicit explanations of when and why particular standards were necessary. Such transparency was especially important for slow learners, who benefited from concrete examples, repeated modeling, and differentiated expectations.

Perceptions of fair assessment

The learners generally viewed assessment as fair when it considered task completion, comprehensibility, effort, improvement, and content knowledge. They accepted correction of errors that changed meaning or made communication difficult. However, they considered it unfair to lose substantial marks solely because their accent did not resemble American or British pronunciation. For speaking assessments, participants preferred criteria that included clarity, relevance, confidence, interaction, and understandable pronunciation. For written assessment, they accepted more attention to grammar, spelling, organization, and academic conventions because written work allowed time for planning and revision. This distinction demonstrates that learners perceived appropriate standards as dependent on mode, purpose, and communicative context.

Teacher feedback also influenced subsequent motivation. Specific, supportive comments encouraged learners to try again, whereas scores without explanation reinforced a sense of failure. Participants valued corrective feedback when it showed both what they had accomplished and what they needed to improve. These findings suggest that inclusive assessment does not eliminate standards; it makes standards transparent, attainable, and responsive to the purpose of the task.

Learner 7: “I want to learn English for my future job, but sometimes I do not answer because I am afraid that everyone will hear my wrong pronunciation. When the teacher lets me prepare with a partner, I can speak more.”

Learner 18: “Grammar is important in writing because the reader must understand the sentence. In speaking, the accent does not need to be American. The words should be clear, and the answer should be connected to the topic.”

Learner 31: “I feel motivated when the teacher says that my idea is correct and then helps me correct the sentence. When I only hear that my English is wrong, I do not want to try again.”

Teacher 1: “A single native model can discourage these learners. I still teach standard forms, especially for writing, but in oral tasks I assess whether the message is clear, whether they respond appropriately, and whether they show improvement.”

Table 2. Relationships among Attitudes, Motivation, and Standards

Interview or analytical question	Synthesized responses and observed evidence
1. How do attitudes toward English varieties affect learners' motivation?	Learners were more motivated when their existing English and local identity were respected. Motivation declined when competence was defined exclusively through native pronunciation or error-free performance.
2. What motivates learners to study English?	Major motivations included passing English subjects, improving grades, obtaining employment, communicating internationally, using online resources, and becoming more confident. These goals appeared attainable when instruction emphasized gradual development.

Interview or analytical question	Synthesized responses and observed evidence
3. How do correction practices affect participation?	Respectful, private, and explanatory correction encouraged learners to continue speaking. Immediate public correction, ridicule, or excessive attention to accent increased anxiety and avoidance.
4. What language standards do learners consider appropriate for teaching?	Learners supported teaching standard grammar, spelling, vocabulary, and formal conventions. They also wanted teachers to acknowledge Philippine English and explain that pronunciation variation is acceptable when speech remains intelligible.
5. What standards do learners consider fair in speaking assessment?	Learners preferred assessment of comprehensibility, task achievement, relevance, interaction, effort, and improvement. They opposed heavy penalties based only on failure to imitate a native accent.
6. Do learners prefer the same standards for all tasks?	No. They expected stricter accuracy in formal writing and examinations but greater flexibility in spontaneous speaking and intercultural communication. They preferred standards adjusted to audience, purpose, and task type.

The findings demonstrate that language attitudes were associated with motivation through confidence, perceived legitimacy, and expectations of success. Learners who considered linguistic variation acceptable were more likely to view English as accessible and useful. Those who internalized an inflexible native-speaker ideal were more likely to experience linguistic insecurity and avoid participation. The relationship between attitudes and motivation was therefore mediated by classroom practices, teacher feedback, peer reactions, and assessment criteria.

The findings further reveal that learners did not perceive inclusive ELT and language standards as incompatible. They expected teachers to provide clear models for academic and formal communication but wanted those models to function as learning resources rather than as measures of personal worth. Their preferred approach combined standard grammar and genre conventions with recognition of accent diversity, communicative effectiveness, and learner progress. For slow learners, this balance was particularly significant. Rigid standards risked confirming previous experiences of academic failure, whereas completely undefined expectations could deprive learners of the guidance required for improvement. The most appropriate approach was therefore a scaffolded and context-sensitive standard: teachers explicitly modeled expected forms, explained their purposes, provided repeated opportunities for practice, and assessed progress using criteria appropriate to the task.

Across the two research questions, the findings show that the participants held neither entirely native-speaker-oriented nor entirely pluralistic attitudes. Their cognitive beliefs continued to privilege American and British English because these varieties were connected with education, media, prestige, and employment. Affectively, however, learners felt safer and more confident when using familiar Philippine English. Conatively, they preferred to communicate through clear and understandable English while selectively adopting standard forms for formal purposes.

These attitudes directly influenced motivation. Recognition of learners' linguistic identities promoted participation, persistence, and willingness to communicate. In contrast, excessive emphasis on native-like pronunciation intensified anxiety and avoidance. The participants supported maintaining standards in ELT, particularly for formal writing and academic assessment, but preferred standards that differentiated between communicative variation and errors that obstructed meaning. The interview and observation evidence therefore supports a sociolinguistically responsive ELT approach. Such an approach would expose learners to native, local, and international English

varieties; explicitly discuss accent and language prejudice; teach standard forms according to purpose and genre; and assess oral performance through intelligibility, interaction, content, and task achievement. For learners with low academic achievement, these practices may reduce fear, strengthen motivation, and create more equitable opportunities to demonstrate English competence.

Discussion

The present study examined the cognitive, affective, and conative attitudes of 33 secondary-school EFL learners with low academic achievement in the Philippines and explored how these attitudes were associated with motivation and perceptions of appropriate standards in English teaching and assessment. The findings revealed a complex orientation rather than a simple preference for either standardized or localized English. Cognitively, the learners associated American and British English with correctness, intelligence, academic achievement, and employment. Affectively, however, they felt more secure when listening to and using Philippine English. Conatively, they preferred familiar English for everyday interaction while selectively treating American or British English as models for examinations, presentations, and professional communication. The interviews and observations therefore showed that beliefs, emotions, and language-use tendencies did not always develop consistently. A learner could assign greater prestige to native English while feeling anxious about reproducing it and choosing a local variety for actual communication.

The learners' cognitive privileging of American and British English confirms findings from previous EFL contexts in which learners continued to regard native-speaker norms as desirable despite recognizing the international character of English. For example, Iranian learners expressed a persistent preference for native-speaker pronunciation norms, while university students in mainland China and Taiwan similarly wanted native-like accents even though they understood and accepted many English as a Lingua Franca features (Alimorad & Tajeddin, 2014; Wang, 2016). Such preferences may result from the continued representation of native English in textbooks, examinations, media, and classroom demonstrations. In the present study, learners repeatedly connected "correct English" with the accents heard in films, listening materials, and teacher modeling. This supports the view that language attitudes are socially learned evaluations rather than judgments arising exclusively from linguistic properties. Prestige is constructed through educational and institutional practices that continually present certain varieties as authoritative.

Nevertheless, the findings extend earlier research by demonstrating that learners' cognitive admiration for native English did not necessarily imply a desire to imitate it fully. Participants described native speech as rapid, difficult to understand, and unrealistic as an immediate learning target. They increasingly emphasized clarity and successful meaning-making over accent replication. This distinction is important because it shows that learners can recognize the social value attached to a native variety while developing a more functional conception of communicative competence. Contemporary pronunciation research similarly distinguishes the nativeness principle, which treats native-like speech as the preferred outcome, from the intelligibility principle, which prioritizes understandable and effective interaction. A recent corpus-supported review argues that pronunciation pedagogy should avoid imposing a prescribed accent and should instead develop broad perceptual repertoires and shared responsibility for achieving understanding (Kiczowski & Lowe, 2025). The participants' emphasis on repetition, clarification, patience, and rephrasing demonstrates an emerging practical understanding of this principle.

The affective findings further clarify why the prestige of native English did not consistently produce active imitation. Learners admired American English but also associated it with anxiety, embarrassment, and fear of negative evaluation. Classroom observations recorded hesitation, low-volume responses, dependence on peers, language switching, and avoidance of oral participation when learners expected public correction. In contrast, familiar Philippine English created comfort, belonging, and greater willingness to speak. This pattern supports research showing that language attitudes and anxiety are closely interconnected. Studies have found that attitudes can predict EFL anxiety and that negative emotional experiences may reduce confidence and interest in language learning (Zhao et al., 2022). Research on young language learners also indicates that emotions, speaking motivation, and opportunities for spoken input collectively shape oral-language development, suggesting that competence cannot be understood independently of learners' emotional experiences (Sun et al., 2023).

The findings also support the multidimensional treatment of language attitudes adopted in this study. Research using the Learner Attitudes and Motivations for Pronunciation inventory identified cognitive attitudes, conative orientation, negative affect, and self-efficacy as distinct but related dimensions among adolescent EFL learners (Baran-Łucarz et al., 2015). The present qualitative evidence explains how these dimensions interact in the lives of academically vulnerable learners. Cognitive recognition of prestige did not automatically produce positive affect or sustained behavior. Rather, willingness to participate depended on whether learners felt emotionally safe and believed that successful performance was attainable. This result extends survey-based research by illustrating how attitudinal dimensions become visible through silence, hesitation, peer dependence, code-switching, persistence, and responses to correction.

The learners' attitudes toward international English varieties were initially characterized by unfamiliarity rather than firm opposition. Some perceived Indian, Singaporean, Japanese, or Korean accents as incorrect because these forms differed from the English models they usually encountered. After guided exposure and explanation, however, they became more accepting when communication remained understandable. This finding is consistent with classroom-based research showing that structured engagement with World Englishes can broaden learners' perceptions, although attitudes toward accents may remain unequal even when comprehension does not differ substantially (Lee, 2019). It also supports the pedagogical value of exposing learners to multiple Englishes rather than assuming that awareness will develop naturally. World Englishes scholarship has emphasized that students and teachers require opportunities to investigate language variation, identity, and linguistic discrimination through concrete classroom activities (Baratta, 2019).

The second major finding concerned the association between language attitudes and motivation. Learners who considered their existing linguistic resources legitimate were more willing to answer questions, participate in group work, and attempt oral activities. Conversely, those who defined proficiency exclusively through error-free native pronunciation often characterized themselves as poor English users and avoided speaking. This confirms that motivation is not solely a stable internal characteristic; it is also shaped by linguistic ideology, anticipated evaluation, and the learner's perceived chance of success. Earlier research found meaningful relationships among anxiety, attitudes, motivation, and language proficiency, including evidence that low-proficiency learners may retain substantial motivation despite difficulties (Awan et al., 2013). The current study adds that this motivation may remain behaviorally hidden when learners fear ridicule or public correction.

Teacher feedback emerged as a particularly important mediator. Participation increased when teachers acknowledged the meaning of learners' contributions before correcting form, allowed rehearsal with peers, and explained the purposes of particular standards. Participation decreased when correction was abrupt, public, or concentrated excessively on pronunciation. This finding is compatible with recent evidence that reductions in speaking anxiety, personalized feedback, and emotional support from teachers and peers can coincide with stronger self-directed speaking motivation and social interaction confidence. It also illustrates why the learners' classification as slow learners should not be interpreted as an absence of motivation. Their engagement depended substantially on whether instructional conditions transformed English from a repeated experience of failure into a manageable communicative activity.

The participants did not reject standard English. They valued explicit instruction in grammar, spelling, vocabulary, organization, and formal conventions, especially for essays, examinations, presentations, and future employment. However, they opposed using native accent imitation as the primary criterion for oral competence. They preferred speaking assessment based on clarity, relevance, interaction, task achievement, effort, and improvement, while accepting stricter formal conventions in planned writing. This context-dependent position aligns with research arguing that intelligibility in lingua-franca communication is produced through interaction and may not correspond to conformity with native-speaker models (Pickering, 2006). It also resembles assessment frameworks that seek to preserve shared standards while accommodating the realities of English as a lingua franca and ensuring fair access for diverse users (Elder & Davies, 2006).

At the same time, the results do not support the unrestricted acceptance of every form in every setting. Learners differentiated between spontaneous speaking and formal writing, as well as between accent variation and errors that obstructed meaning. Their preferred standard was therefore neither rigidly native-oriented nor entirely relativistic. It was a scaffolded, purpose-sensitive standard in which teachers explained expected forms, demonstrated their functions, allowed repeated practice, and assessed learners according to the communicative demands of the task. This nuanced position extends Global Englishes discussions by foregrounding the perspectives of low-achieving secondary learners, a population less frequently represented than university students or language teachers.

The findings carry practical implications for inclusive ELT. First, curricula should expose learners to Philippine, native, and international English varieties through carefully scaffolded listening and interaction tasks. Second, teachers should explicitly distinguish accent difference from communication breakdown. Third, oral assessment should evaluate intelligibility, interaction, content, accommodation, and task completion rather than native resemblance alone. Fourth, corrective feedback should preserve learners' dignity by responding to meaning, identifying a manageable number of errors, and providing opportunities for repair. Finally, standard conventions should remain visible but be taught as contextually useful resources rather than measures of learners' intelligence or legitimacy.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the participating EFL learners held layered and sometimes contradictory attitudes toward English varieties. Cognitively, they continued to associate American and British English with correctness, education, prestige, and future opportunity. Affectively, however, Philippine English and familiar local accents generated greater comfort, confidence, and belonging, whereas native-speaker

comparisons frequently produced anxiety and linguistic insecurity. Conatively, learners preferred English that enabled clear, supportive communication and selectively adopted standardized forms for formal academic or professional purposes. These findings demonstrate that language attitudes cannot be reduced to a single favorable or unfavorable orientation. Beliefs about prestige, emotional responses, and actual language-use tendencies may diverge, particularly among learners whose previous academic experiences have repeatedly positioned them as unsuccessful language users.

Language attitudes were also closely connected with motivation and perceptions of fairness. Learners became more willing to participate when their linguistic identities were respected, communication was valued before correction, and standards were presented as attainable guidance. They nevertheless recognized the importance of grammar, vocabulary, spelling, organization, and formal conventions, particularly in writing and examinations. The study therefore recommends a sociolinguistically responsive approach that balances access to standard English with recognition of Philippine and international varieties. Teachers should provide diversified linguistic input, supportive and specific feedback, opportunities for rehearsal, and task-sensitive assessment criteria. Such practices may reduce fear, sustain motivation, and allow learners with low academic achievement to demonstrate competence without being judged primarily against an idealized native-speaker identity.

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DECLARATION OF USING AI TOOLS

Generative artificial intelligence tools were used to support language editing, structural organization, and clarity. All AI-assisted content was critically reviewed, revised, and verified by the author. The author remains responsible for the study design, data, interpretations, citations, ethical compliance, and final manuscript. No confidential participant data were entered into an AI system.

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