

## Negotiating Identity in a Globalized Era: How Indonesian and Kazakh Students Perceive English

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This study explores how university students in Indonesia and Kazakhstan perceive English using qualitative method as its methodological framework. It focuses on why they learn it, how it affects their social lives, and its impact on their local culture.

**Method:** Based on interview data, the research shows that students in both countries share a strong "instrumental motivation." **Results:** This means they view English as a necessary tool for getting good jobs, becoming freelancers, and accessing information on the internet. However, the study finds a clear conflict between the economic benefits of English and the social pressure it creates. Most students admitted that they learn English best through digital media (like movies and songs) rather than just in the classroom. A key difference was found between the two nations: the Kazakh participant viewed English simply as a bridge to the outside world. In contrast, Indonesian students expressed anxiety about social judgment (being seen as "pretentious" or sok Inggris) and worried that local languages are being forgotten. **Novelty:** The study concludes that for these students, learning English is not just about mastering a skill; it is a difficult balance between wanting to be global and wanting to protect their local roots.

## INTRODUCTION

The increasing global prominence of English necessitates a re-evaluation of English Language Teaching methodologies in higher education, particularly within diverse linguistic contexts such as Indonesia and Kazakhstan [1]. There is an urgent discussion about the role of English as a dominant lingua franca in academia, and the potential implications this has for linguistic equity and cultural identity in multilingual regions [2]. In Indonesia, for example, the course of English Language Pedagogy in all levels of education is an open area to discuss because there are still debates in the "identity" of English that should be taught from elementary level to higher education. This ongoing discourse often revolves around the imposition of Inner Circle English norms, which can inadvertently diminish the multilingual rights and cultural identities of Indonesian students [3].

On the other hand, Kazakhstan has actively embraced trilingual education, with English as a medium of instruction becoming a central component of its higher education strategy, presenting both opportunities and challenges for graduates' employability and career prospects [4]. However, there are also doubts that the English used can be completely let go from native speaker-centered norms. This policy underscores the critical need for effective English language instruction that not only imparts linguistic

competence but also prepares students for the rigorous demands of academic discourse and research dissemination in an international arena [5].

This paper aims to explore these complexities by examining student perspectives on English language pedagogy in Indonesian and Kazakhstani universities, drawing on their experiences with current teaching methodologies and their implications for academic identity and future opportunities. Specifically, this study investigates how pedagogical approaches in both contexts align with or diverge from student needs and expectations, particularly regarding the development of academic writing skills and preparation for the globalized professional landscape [6].

It also considers the unique challenges faced by students from these regions, such as lower average English proficiency and limited prior exposure to international academic environments, which can influence their learning trajectories and outcomes [7]. This comparative analysis will illuminate potential areas for pedagogical innovation that cater to the specific linguistic and cultural contexts of these nations, fostering more inclusive and effective English language education. Such an investigation is crucial for understanding how to best equip learners with bi/multilingual proficiency, a key instrument for global communication in the 21st century [8].

Further, it delves into the tension between developing students' international and national or local identities within English language teaching, especially in Indonesia, where the emergence of new vocabularies and language variations through digital communication modes significantly influences language evolution [9]. Conversely, in Kazakhstan, the trilingual strategy aims to integrate English into the educational fabric while maintaining Kazakh and Russian, thereby fostering a distinct national identity within a globalized academic sphere [4]. Seeing from combined lens from this two different regions may give a more comprehensive understanding upon the needs of developing a firm and efficient trajectory of English Language Pedagogy to empower students ability in using English as language for global communication.

The evolving landscape of international relations further emphasizes the necessity for individuals to acquire robust language abilities to participate effectively in the global community [10]. This underscores the critical role of higher education institutions in refining English language pedagogy to meet the complex demands of an interconnected world, moving beyond traditional communicative competence to encompass academic and professional discourse. Moreover, ideological views on language use in academic settings often shape students' academic identities and sense of belonging, highlighting a persistent divide between native and non-native English speakers that requires institutional support systems beyond mere language skill improvement [2].

This includes addressing challenges such as academic writing proficiency, navigating unfamiliar accents, and fostering active classroom participation, which are frequently encountered by non-native English speaking students in international higher education contexts (Shakti et al). This complexity is further compounded by the integration of English as a Medium of Instruction policies in countries like Kazakhstan, where it influences curriculum design and graduate employability [2], [4] In Indonesia,

the pedagogical enhancement policies under the National Education Policy 2020 have shifted the education system from teacher-centric to student-centric, allowing students to choose subjects and evaluate their skills through competency-based assessments [11].

This shift necessitates a re-evaluation of English language pedagogy to align with student-centered learning principles and to foster both linguistic and content mastery. This approach emphasizes the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills, crucial for navigating complex global challenges, while simultaneously enhancing English language proficiency within specific academic and professional domains [11]. Additionally, the integration of technology-based and job-oriented tools is paramount to ensure that pedagogical approaches are student-friendly and effectively enhance skill acquisition for future employment opportunities [11].

Furthermore, a comprehensive approach to language education extending beyond traditional classroom instruction is essential, embracing experiential learning and real-world applications to effectively prepare students for the dynamic and interconnected global job market [6].

Historically, English language teaching in Indonesia has undergone significant transformations, driven by national education policies and global influences, moving from grammar-translation methods to more communicative and student-centered approaches over time [12]. Despite these advancements, persistent challenges in achieving high English proficiency levels among Indonesian university students suggest a disconnect between policy design and actual classroom outcomes [13], [14]. This gap often highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of how cultural contexts, resource limitations, and teacher training impact the practical application of pedagogical theories, especially considering Indonesia's national education roadmap aims for 21st-century skills and world-class higher education achievement [12], [15].

The current Merdeka Learning Curriculum, for instance, emphasizes simplicity, depth, independence, and interactivity, advocating for student-centered learning that grants educational units, teachers, and students autonomy to innovate and tailor curricula to specific needs and potentials [16]. This paradigm shift necessitates a re-evaluation of teacher training programs and resource allocation to ensure educators are adequately prepared to implement these student-centric methodologies effectively [17].

In higher education, this translates into a critical need for English as a Foreign Language instructors to not only possess strong linguistic and pedagogical skills but also to continuously adapt their teaching strategies to align with evolving curriculum demands and student proficiency levels [18]. This adaptability is particularly crucial given the constraints on universal curriculum implementation in Indonesia, which include diverse student motivations, limited resources, and large class sizes [19].

#### Historical Context of English Language Teaching in Kazakhstan

The historical trajectory of English Language Teaching in Kazakhstan has been intricately linked with its post-Soviet transition, marked by a deliberate policy shift towards trilingualism, where English is positioned alongside Kazakh and Russian as a strategic language for national development and international integration. This

governmental emphasis has catalyzed significant reforms in educational policies and pedagogical practices, aiming to enhance English language proficiency across all levels of education, particularly in higher education institutions.

These reforms have led to the widespread adoption of English as a Medium of Instruction in many universities, profoundly influencing curriculum development and the professional development needs of faculty [20]. Kazakhstan's commitment to adopting 21st-century skills and integrating the 4C model into its curriculum further underscores the urgency for teachers to acquire sufficient knowledge and skills to meet these updated educational standards (Salybekova et al). Moreover, the integration of the 4C model necessitates a fundamental shift from traditional, teacher-led methodologies to more innovative, student-centered approaches that foster active engagement and deeper learning [21].

Such an evolution in pedagogical philosophy requires a comprehensive retooling of teacher training programs, ensuring educators are well-equipped to facilitate critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity in the English language classroom [21]. This aligns with the broader national educational goals of Kazakhstan, which prioritize the development of an internationally competent education sector and the establishment of robust global political, economic, and social contacts through enhanced foreign language competence (Salybekova et al).

#### Current Pedagogical Approaches in University Settings

In both Indonesia and Kazakhstan, university-level English language teaching has increasingly gravitated towards communicative language teaching and task-based learning to foster practical language skills, although implementation faces unique challenges in each context. In Kazakhstan, for instance, Content and Language Integrated Learning has gained traction, driven by educational reforms promoting trilingual education, despite its recent widespread implementation [22]. This approach, which simultaneously focuses on subject content and English language development, is increasingly being leveraged to prepare students for international economic competition and employment opportunities (Costa et al). However, the effectiveness of English as a Medium of Instruction programs and the consistent characteristics of English-taught itineraries at the university level still require empirical validation [5].

This validation is crucial for ensuring that these programs not only enhance language proficiency but also effectively deliver disciplinary content, addressing concerns about potential compromises in academic rigor when instruction occurs in a non-native language. This calls for a closer look at teacher training, curriculum design, and assessment practices to make sure these innovative teaching methods truly boost both language skills and content knowledge – without accidentally weakening one or the other. More research is also essential to track the long-term effects of these changes on student results and pinpoint the best ways to embed them sustainably in Indonesia and Kazakhstan's unique educational contexts.

These empirical investigations should also consider the impact of cultural nuances and socio-economic factors on the adoption and efficacy of such pedagogical innovations

[23]. Specifically, there is a recognized need to explore the impact of English as a Medium of Instruction on language acquisition and the specific contexts that foster improved L2 competence, alongside understanding participant perceptions of their learning process in English-taught programs [5].

Based on the explanation, a set of research questions is formulated to guide an in-depth exploration of student voices regarding English language pedagogy within the Indonesian and Kazakhstani higher education landscapes. The research questions are as follows.

1. What are students' perceptions of the current English language teaching methodologies employed in universities in Indonesia and Kazakhstan?
2. What are the perceived challenges and benefits of English as a Medium of Instruction from the students' perspective in both contexts, particularly regarding its impact on content learning and language acquisition?

## RESEARCH METHOD

This research applied qualitative method to collect and analyze the data. This method was chosen to explore the subjective experiences and perceptions of university students regarding English language pedagogy in Indonesia and Kazakhstan, allowing for a nuanced understanding of their voices. This approach is particularly suitable for capturing the complexities of educational phenomena from the participants' viewpoints, aligning with an interpretive case study framework [24]. Specifically, an exploratory qualitative design was employed to delve into the intricate perceptions and experiences of students, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the pedagogical landscape in both countries [25].

The primary data collection instruments included semi-structured interview, designed to elicit detailed narratives and shared perspectives from the student participants [26]. These interviews allowed for probing questions and follow-up inquiries, enabling researchers to explore emergent themes and gain deeper insights into students' perceptions of English language teaching methodologies, challenges, and benefits of English as a Medium of Instruction [26].

The interviewees are higher education students from both Indonesia and Kazakhstan. They are voluntarily participating in the study, ensuring their perspectives are genuinely represented. One participant from Kazakhstan that had voluntarily joined in the interview is a second-year of a bachelor's degree program in Business. On the other hand, there are three Indonesian participants voluntarily contributed to this research. Two of them are third-year students specializing in Education and another student from Public Administration. The diverse academic backgrounds of these participants offer a broad spectrum of experiences and insights into the role of English in various university disciplines, enriching the qualitative data gathered [27].

The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and subsequently analyzed using thematic analysis, a systematic approach to identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within qualitative data. This rigorous process involved

familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and finally producing the report [28]. This methodical approach ensures that the interpretation of student experiences and perceptions is grounded in the data, enhancing the trustworthiness and validity of the research findings [29], [30].

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Result*

This study explored the perceptions of university students regarding English as a Global Language, specifically focusing on its perceived utility, social implications, and its relationship with local cultural identity. The data, gathered through semi-structured interviews with four undergraduate students from Business, Communication, IT, and Management faculties, reveals a complex landscape where the desire for global connectivity often conflicts with the desire to preserve local heritage.

The findings are organized into five distinct themes: Instrumental Motivation and Career Mobility, The Sociolinguistic Paradox of Prestige vs. Pretentiousness, Attitudes Toward Code-Switching, The Marginalization of Local Languages, The Shift to Digital Learning Environments, and the comparison of two sides.

#### Instrumental Motivation: English as a Tool for Upward Mobility

The participants demonstrated a predominantly "instrumental" motivation for learning English. Rather than viewing the language as a cultural interest, they perceive it as a pragmatic necessity for economic survival and career advancement in a globalized economy.

Interviewee Student D explicitly stated that she "probably wouldn't" learn English if it were not a global standard, highlighting that the motivation is external rather than internal. This sentiment was reinforced by Student A, who provided a nuanced view of the labor market. Student A argued that while English is not necessary for blue-collar roles (e.g., factory workers), it is non-negotiable for high-level creative and international careers.

"As a freelancer with clients from Germany, Australia, the US, and even Spain, I need to prioritize English to understand and communicate effectively... If you want to rule the world, you must master the language." (Student A)

Similarly, Student B and Student C emphasized that English serves as a gatekeeper for specific industries, particularly technology and multinational corporations. Student C noted that even the tools of the trade—software and digital interfaces—are English-dominant, making the language an "added value for professional competence" (Student B). The consensus among all participants is that English is the primary currency for social and professional mobility.

#### The Sociolinguistic Paradox: Prestige versus Pretentiousness

A significant finding of this study is the "context-dependent" nature of English usage. While English is globally prestigious, the participants revealed that its usage in local settings is fraught with social risk.

The respondents described a dichotomy between metropolitan areas and smaller regions. Student A noted that in major hubs like Jakarta or Bali, speaking English is normalized due to tourism. However, in smaller towns like Bangil, the same behavior is interpreted negatively.

"It depends on the setting... In smaller towns like Bangil, it may be perceived as pretentious." (Student A)

Student C supported this, stating that using English in informal situations with peers from the same background can seem "arrogant" or "exclusive." This suggests that students must constantly navigate a social minefield: they must master English to succeed professionally, but they must suppress it socially to avoid alienating their peers. Student B further critiqued the association of English with modernity, arguing that intelligence should be judged by the "content of what is said," not the language it is delivered in.

#### Diverging Attitudes Toward Code-Switching

The practice of code-switching (mixing English with Indonesian or local dialects) elicited the most divergent responses among the participants, reflecting a generational struggle between tradition and globalization.

Student C represented the "modernist" view, accepting code-switching as a natural evolution of the digital era where youths are exposed to dual linguistic inputs.

"Most youth are living in a digital era where both English and local languages are present. Mixing them in conversations is still reasonable." (Student C)

Conversely, Student A represented a "purist" perspective, describing the practice as "inappropriate." This participant argued that mixing languages dilutes the quality of communication and risks misunderstandings. Student B took a middle ground, acknowledging it as a form of "creative expression" but warning that excessive use could reduce linguistic sensitivity to both languages. This finding indicates that while English is embraced, its intrusion into daily Indonesian sentence structures remains a contested topic.

#### Cultural Anxiety and the Marginalization of Local Languages

While the study focused on English, a strong sub-theme emerged regarding the "endangerment" of local languages (e.g., Javanese). All participants expressed anxiety that the prioritization of English and the National language (Indonesian) is leading to the erosion of local cultural identity.

Participants shared personal experiences of "linguistic shaming" when using local dialects in formal spaces.

1. Student B recounted suppressing laughter from an audience when using a local accent at a national seminar.
2. Student C mentioned receiving "sharp looks" for speaking a local dialect in Bali.

Despite their professional preference for English, the students revealed a deep emotional attachment to their local tongues. When forced to choose between mastering a local or foreign language, Student C prioritized the local language because it is "more heartfelt and respectful." However, the majority (Students A and B) pragmatically chose

English, citing the need to "stay updated" and "career opportunities," further confirming that economic pressure is overriding cultural sentiment.

#### The Role of Digital Media in "Incidental" Learning

Finally, the findings highlight a shift in how English is acquired. The participants attributed much of their proficiency and comfort with English not to formal classroom instruction, but to "incidental learning" through digital media.

Student D cited "watching movies and listening to songs" as her primary method for learning natural speech patterns and overcoming the "awkwardness" of speaking. Student B and Student C similarly pointed to the "digital era" and internet content as the environment where English is most frequently encountered. This suggests that students perceive the internet as an English-speaking domain, which normalizes the language for them in a way that traditional textbooks do not.

#### Comparing Students Voices (Similarities and Differences)

Building upon the thematic analysis, this section delves into a comparative examination of how students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, specifically Indonesia and Kazakhstan, articulate their engagement with English, revealing both convergence and divergence in their perceptions and experiences. This comparison underscores the complex interplay between instrumental and integrative motivations for language learning, reflecting how geopolitical and socio-cultural contexts shape attitudes towards English (Sari & Junaidi).

**Instrumental Motivation: English as an Economic Necessity** Both datasets reveal that the primary driver for learning English is instrumental – meaning it is viewed as a tool to achieve a goal rather than a subject of intrinsic passion. Student D admitted she "probably wouldn't" learn English if it wasn't popular, citing "career growth" and "studying abroad" as primary reasons. The focus group echoed this exact sentiment. Student A noted that while not needed for factory work, English is "essential" for higher-level careers (freelancing, writing). Student B called it an "added value for professional competence." In conclusion, all participants see English is commodified as a skill required for survival in the modern job market, rather than a cultural preference.

The findings suggest that digital media serves as a primary "teacher" for all participants, with a shared consensus that immersion through "watching movies, listening to songs" and engaging with "global issues on the internet" provides a more effective facilitator for language acquisition than traditional formal education. While individual and group participants agree on the importance of this "digital era," they diverge significantly regarding the nature of the pressure they feel. The individual perspective, represented by Student D, focuses on internal anxiety and personal competence – fearing "saying something wrong" or not "finding the right words" – while viewing mistakes as a "part of the learning process." In contrast, the group dynamic reveals a more external, sociolinguistic struggle characterized by a fear of social stigma, where speaking English in local contexts is often perceived as being "pretentious," "arrogant," or "showing off."

These differences extend to attitudes toward cultural identity and local heritage. Student D approaches English as a neutral tool for "expressing myself" and a means for outward mobility, viewing it as an additive resource for "study abroad" and "traveling" without expressing fear of cultural loss. Conversely, the Indonesian group participants display a defensive stance toward their local identity, navigating a complex "triple burden" that involves balancing local languages like Javanese or Balinese for "intimacy and heritage," Bahasa Indonesia for "formal unity," and English for "career mobility." For these students, prioritizing a global language is viewed as "endangering" the local language, leading to debates where code-switching is sometimes labeled as "inappropriate."

The social cost of language proficiency further highlights these distinct national perspectives. In the Indonesian context, language use is heavily regulated by communal norms, forcing students to navigate the fear of being "sok Inggris" or seen as "showing off" to maintain social survival. Meanwhile, the Kazakh perspective reflects an individual pragmatism where challenges are internal rather than external. While the Indonesian students seek to integrate English into their local economic reality—focusing on "multinational companies," "tourism," and freelance work within their own borders—the Kazakh student views English primarily as a passport to the "world's information," illustrating a fundamental split between English as a tool for inward integration versus outward expansion.

### *Discussion*

The qualitative insights from Indonesian and Kazakhstani students reveal the current pragmatic needs often intersect with cultural concerns, mirroring global trends in English language acquisition [31]. It cannot be avoided that English is the main part of the global needs for students because it can help them to compete in the global world. This shows a significant point that English is seen as a functional tool for upward mobility and access to global opportunities, particularly for non-English majors seeking to enhance their professional and personal prospects [32].

The result has also shown that this instrumental motivation is often reinforced by exposure to English-language mass media, which students actively consume to improve their proficiency and confidence, thereby integrating informal learning with their formal education objectives [32], [33]. This active engagement with digital content, while enhancing English proficiency, also contributes to a perceived linguistic hierarchy, where English often supersedes local languages in terms of practical utility and perceived prestige, despite students' emotional attachment to their native tongues [34].

It is also interesting of how English has foster perspective and been fostered by perspective upon globalization. Both sides (Indonesian and Kazakhstan) had agreed upon the necessity of English as a global communication device, but the fact that they had seen it to be applied domestically and internationally is intriguing.

There is also a proof of how digital literary products, like songs and movies had involved in enhancing the students English skills. The likes of movies and songs can

provide independent and authentic language input and cultural context, fostering a more engaging and less anxiety-inducing learning environment than traditional classroom settings [35]. This means that literary products can serve as powerful tools for incidental learning, enabling students to acquire nuanced linguistic features and cultural understandings organically [27], [36].

Another interesting finding is that there are concerns among students from both countries related to diglossia in terms of English as a foreign language. Indonesian students mentioned there is fear of being seen as "pretentious" or "showing off" which shows that English is perceived as the higher language compared to the local languages. This social-related anxiety did not appear in Kazakh student's response. This may be an indication of how Indonesian student are still hegemonized by the Euro-centrism in language. This linguistic hierarchy, where English is positioned as a marker of sophistication and aspiration, creates a subtle yet pervasive pressure on students to prioritize its acquisition, often overshadowing the perceived utility of indigenous languages [37]. This dynamic also underscores the complex interplay between global linguistic trends and local cultural identities, shaping students' motivations and anxieties in English language learning.

Moreover, the emotional impact of language learning, particularly the mitigation of anxiety through translanguaging, represents a critical area for pedagogical intervention, suggesting that fostering a supportive linguistic environment can significantly enhance student performance and reduce negative affective states (Agustin & Wahyudi). Such interventions could include embracing translanguaging strategies within the classroom, which have been shown to boost confidence and reduce apprehension among learners by validating their full linguistic repertoire [38].

## CONCLUSION

**Fundamental Finding :** The study conclusively demonstrates that students across both national contexts view English primarily through an instrumental lens, regarding it as a prerequisite for professional survival rather than merely a subject of academic interest. Participants consistently identified English as the "key" to global mobility, accessing information, and securing employment in multinational sectors, often prioritizing it over local languages for its economic utility. Furthermore, the findings highlight a significant shift in language acquisition, where digital media—such as movies, songs, and the internet—has superseded formal education as the primary driver of proficiency and natural speech patterns. The comparative analysis uncovers a distinct divergence in how these pressures are navigated, with the Kazakh perspective reflecting an outward-looking approach and the Indonesian perspective revealing a more complex inward-facing struggle shaped by a triple-layered linguistic hierarchy. **Implication :** The study concludes that while the economic value of English is universal, its social cost is highly context-dependent, forcing students to constantly negotiate their identity between the demands of the global market and the expectations of their local communities. Given these complex dynamics, policymakers in Indonesia and Kazakhstan should consider

pedagogical approaches that explicitly acknowledge and address the socio-cultural tensions inherent in English language acquisition, rather than exclusively focusing on linguistic competence. **Limitation** : Due to the time and geographical constraints, this result has not been comprehensive enough to understand how students' attitudes towards English might differ across various regions or institutions within each country. **Future Research** : Next research can focus on investigating the efficacy of English as a lingua franca-aware pedagogies in mitigating these anxieties and promoting more inclusive communication strategies in diverse EFL contexts.

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