

“WE-PRACTICES WILL HELP BUILDING OUR NNETs IDENTITIES”: STUDENT TEACHERS’ WE-AWARENESS

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Abstract: The research explores Bangladeshi student teachers’ perceptions about World Englishes (WE) and integrating them into the instructional process. It analyses the teacher learners’ attitudes towards the standard and local varieties of English as a learning goal. Data were obtained from 148 teacher learners pursuing masters in applied linguistics & ELT at a public university. A survey consisting of two demographic and four Likert scale items were used to collect quantitative data on the participants’ WE-awareness. Six respondents participated in the online semi-structured interviews to inform about their perceived values and roles of World Englishes in EFL pedagogies. Results show the student teachers are unaware of WE and its increasing acceptance worldwide. Many participants hold exonormativity about the traditional British varieties despite supporting the integration of local English types in the classrooms. However, having attended a WE-awareness session before interviews, the respondents acknowledge about an impractical and invisible colonial impact on teachers’ mindsets. WE-awareness can promote the use and acceptance of local varieties by constructing the non-native English teachers (NNETs) and ELLs’ identities. Effects of gender and curricula on these perceptions have also been observed. The research calls for integrating WE-awareness into the university teacher preparation curricula to decolonize those.

Keywords: *WE-awareness, WE-practices, EFL pedagogies, Teacher education.*

INTRODUCTION

Researchers report a theory-practice gap in teachers’ views about WE since they favor the WE theories despite rejecting the WE norms in the standardized ability tests. English is seen “as a uniting medium for the speech community,” referring to correctness and standard ideology. Although

grammatical evidence of the local norms shifts away from the exonormativity, users show discomfort about accepting regional forms. This tension between local and Standard English is more robust in the ESL context than in EFL (Peters, 2020, p. 1). Students’ eccentric views generate from inadequate knowledge, misperceptions of the terminology, high awareness of the English varieties, low awareness of the varieties’ features, etc. (Biliková & Seresová, 2021). Hence, raising teacher-learner WE awareness is essential to sustain diversity in English language teaching (Monfared, 2020). However, teachers’ negative attitudes towards Expanding or Outer Circle English varieties and perceived deficit of the discourses hinder non-native teachers’ linguistic, individual, and occupational identity building and conceptualization changes about English language and ELT (Lim, 2020).

Despite the continual socio-cultural, economic, or geopolitical changes broadening English use in the south-Asian regions, how the Bangladeshi English teachers perceive the changes and respond through pedagogies is little known. The concepts of native speakers and the perceived dominance of Standard English still overwhelmingly influence the EFL-oriented pedagogies in the country (Saha, 2020). However, English language has been linguistically diversified and used across many multicultural milieus. The current developing concepts of WE-awareness have critically revised the local ELT approaches and accepted regional varieties.

This research investigates the local student teachers’ beliefs and preferences about the English language varieties, which intends to fill the literature gap and construct a motivational framework of social language understanding. It analyses how the non-native trainee teachers view the world Englishes by exploring their attitudes to the standard varieties and academic significance of all varieties in a post-colonial setting. The research itself attempts to raise positive attitudes towards English diversity and WE-aware ELT classroom innovations and practices. The study counts as an informal intervention the researcher uses as a teacher educator for the university student teachers’ professional development. Since WE-awareness is yet to be added to the mainstream English education and teacher preparation in Bangladesh, inquiries can inform the research participants.

WORLD ENGLISHES AND TEACHER EDUCATION

Language belongs to L1 speakers (Matsuda, 2003) in an international communication setting, where LX users interact more than the L1 users (Dewaele, 2018). Since EFL speakers have already outnumbered ESL or native English users (Hu & McKay, 2012), investigating EFL users’ language ideologies about norms and practices has been crucial to ensuring the LX users’ inclusion into the global circle. The increased number of EFL speakers has also given rise to the anti-normative discourse including English as an International Language (EIL), English as Lingua Franca (ELF), and World Englishes (WE). Also, the increased number of EFL users has resulted in several initiatives challenging Anglo-centric English language usage and teaching. These focus on the Expanding Circle users and incorporating emerging indigenized English language varieties developed in the Outer Circle countries (Sifakis, 2019).

The term World Englishes is used to name different English language varieties spoken in different countries. These classified language varieties often impose a nationalistic twist on the global linguistic realities. However, the division and the boundaries between the national varieties of Englishes are considered problematic since they incorporate some discrete linguistic features of World Englishes. That can result in language change allowing or restricting worldwide communications. Therefore, more research is needed to understand the contrasts and the process of meaning interpretation or exchanges across these varieties (Mahboob & Szenes, 2010).

WE recognizes the linguistic and pragmatic characteristics of the nativized English language varieties. In addition, the concept accepts the pluricentric nature of English language, the criticality of English conceptualizations, language changes and adaption, democratic language view, etc. It resists the English as a native language (ENL) superior position, predictability of language users varieties, setting a standard English variety, inner circle ELT approaches, etc. (Zein, 2019). Therefore, the general WE-aware pedagogical features include learner perceptions about English diversity, learner readiness for negotiating strategies, teacher awareness about integrating world cultures, teacher acceptance of multilingualism, sensitivity towards language identity, etc. (Matsuda, 2017).

However, the traditional ELT pedagogy emphasizes near-native language proficiency instead of the bilingual English speakers (BES) skills, language

context, and communication purposes focused in EIL pedagogies (Vettorel, 2016). Research reveals that even higher education EFL learners are concerned with language accuracy, grammar, pronunciation, wrong accent, etc. Also, the traditional ELT trainee teachers emphasize teaching grammar and communicative activities, instead of integrating learner languages and proficiencies into the instructional practices (Saha, 2021). Therefore, teacher perspectives changes are needed and significant in any pedagogy, hopefully creating a long-lasting impact on culturally responsive classroom practices (Vettorel & Corrizato, 2016).

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The WE instruction can raise student teachers’ awareness and grow positive outlooks about the WE concept and inclusive ELT practices. Some students intend to practice WE in the future and believe every teacher should study this compulsorily (Solmaz, 2020). Receiving inventive WE-awareness can develop positive beliefs about linguistic diversity and improve perceptions of sociolinguistic reality (Rajprasit, 2021). Students develop increased tolerance for English diversity, appreciation for English pluricentricity, understanding hybridizing and dehegemonizing processes, etc. (Boonsuk, Ambele, & McKinley, 2021). Despite being aware of different English language varieties, students often have negative attitudes towards the World Englishes. They define British or US English as a Standard variety excluding other World Englishes (Al-Ahdal & Al-Qunayeer, 2020; Saha, 2020).

Generally, World Englishes and SLA research outputs seldom change language education policies and practices in the Expanding Circle countries. Consequently, Inner Circle standardized English preferences, teaching English to younger learners, and monolingual English teaching approaches have grown high in these contexts. Hence, examining neoliberalist impressions in macro-level language ideologies and the roots of practices is essential in addressing real-world problems (Kubota, 2018). Implementing WE interventions are pedagogically and methodologically challenging, although the effects are evident (Hamid et al., 2021). Only WE-informed teachers can inspire students to value English language varieties since teaching world Englishes to the learners still looks unrealistic (Rajprasit & Marlina, 2019). International teaching-learning experiences can raise awareness of inclusive pedagogy, ELF- and WE-perspectives, creative and critical thinking, and intercultural

responsiveness. Therefore, incorporating the concepts of language varieties, cultural diversity, and intercultural awareness into the local university language teacher education is emphasized (Kaçar, 2021). That enhances the perceived representation of local speech communities, language identities, foreign language cultures, etc. (Ishikawa, 2021).

Hence, the study discusses the notions of norms and standards in conceptualizing the evolutionary status of World Englishes. This qualitative study focuses on the influence of WE-instructions on prospective English language teachers from many aspects, such as their WE-awareness, WE-instructions beliefs, and indented WE-inclusive practices in future classrooms. The analysis includes their perceived value and functions of English national variety called ‘Banglish’ in English foreign language learning and using across the country. Hence the research questions comprise: (a) If Bangladeshi trainee teachers are aware of WE practice integrating local varieties or not? (b) What are the sources of student teachers’ WE-unawareness? (c) How do the teacher education curricula affect their WE-awareness?

METHOD

The author has chosen a mixed-method approach since the research explores student teachers’ WE-awareness and analyses the reasons and effects of the respondents’ beliefs.

Participants:

The study participants consist of 150 teacher learners attending masters in applied linguistics and English language teaching (ELT) at a public university in Dhaka. Two of the responses were incomplete and rejected. Eighty-one of them are regular master’s students (N = 81), while the other sixty-seven respondents attend Evening (professional) master’s courses (N = 67). The professional master’s students attend a compulsory course called ‘English as a Global Language’ integrating WE- and ELF-concepts while the course is not taught in the regular master’s program.

Tools:

Data were collected surveying 148 trainee teachers with an original questionnaire consisting of four Likert scale items (Yes=3, No=2, Not sure=1)

about WE-knowledge and attitudes towards the local varieties. Later, six randomly chosen student teachers from both groups attended semi-structured online interviews discussing the reasons for unawareness and effects of teacher preparation curricula on their perceptions and future practices.

Analysis:

The quantitative survey data on WE-awareness and its correlation to gender, and curriculum were analyzed numerically and statistically. The qualitative data on the causes of unawareness and the relationships between curricula and perceptions were analyzed manually and thematically. Some relevant and significant responses are reported in transliterated forms responding to the research questions.

RESULTS

Quantitative Analysis

Results show that most 58% of trainee teachers believe Bangladeshi EFL teachers should teach the standard British English while 26% prefer the Standard US English form. Nonetheless, only 16% of respondents accept Bangladeshi English (Banglish) as the target teaching variety, and none of them aspire to teach the Outer Circle varieties, including Indian or Singaporean English.

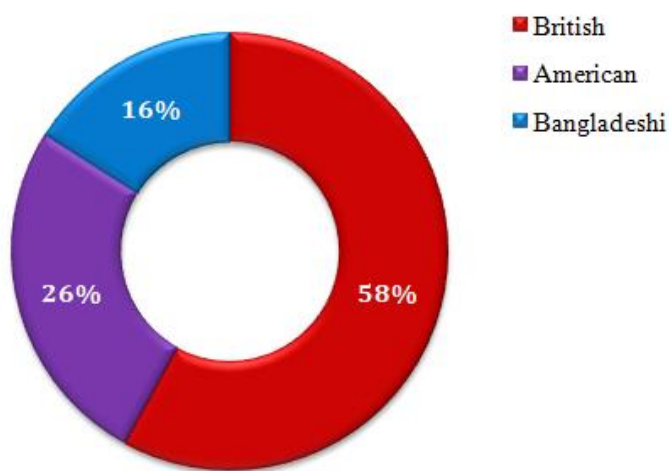


Figure 1. Standard vs. local variety in percentages

Also, a substantial majority of the 72% of student teachers are utterly unaware of the meaning and features of WE; the rest of the 28% of respondents know about it, while none of them are unsure about the cognitions.

As figure 2 shows, many of the teacher learners either do not plan (49%) to use learners’ L1 (Bangla) in teaching or are not sure (6%) about it. However, the rest of the 45% of them believe they will need to use Bangla for some reason.

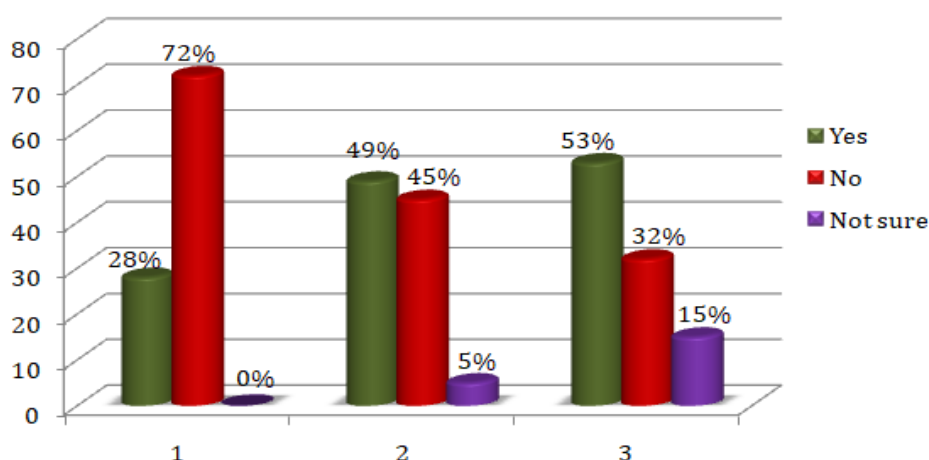


Figure 2. Awareness in percentage

However, 53% of student teachers show positive attitudes towards teaching and learning the local English varieties in Bangladesh. The other 47% are either reluctant to teach this variety or unsure about its educational value and acceptance.

Table 1: Male (N = 78) vs. Female (N = 70)

Items	Male		Female		t-value	95% CI	p-value
	M	SD	M	SD			
1	2.167	0.438	1.671	0.768	-4.882	(-0.6958, -0.2948)	< 0.0001
2	2.30	0.588	1.386	1.280	-5.724	(-1.2403, -	

	8					0.6037)
3	2.46 2	0.752	1.286	1.294	-6.842	(-1.5154, - 0.8362)
4	2.57 7	0.839	1.286	1.294	-7.272	(-1.6421, - 0.9403)

As table 1 shows, gender greatly impacts the Bangladeshi teacher learners' WE-awareness ($p = <0.0001$). For example, female teacher learners are more aware of WE-knowledge, acceptance of local varieties, preference for Standard varieties, L1 use in the class, etc.

Table 2: Regular (N = 81) vs. Evening (N = 67)

	Regular		Evening				$df = 146$
Items	M	SD	M	SD	t-value	95% CI	p-value
1	2.20 9	0.40 9	1.62 7	0.851	-5.454	(-0.7943, -0.3717)	<0.0001
2	2.34 6	0.61 6	1.43 3	1.193	-5.991	(-1.2140, -0.6118)	
3	2.18 5	0.88 2	1.41 8	0.979	-5.010	(-1.0700, -0.4646)	
4	2.37 0	0.78 2	1.23 9	1.280	-6.608	(-1.4701, -0.7931)	

Also, student teachers attending the Evening (professional) program are more aware of the concepts since they have participated in the ‘English as a global language’ course.

Qualitative Analysis

Trainee teacher (Evening course) 1:

“The course ‘English as a global language’ was interesting; we learned enough about how it was originated and how modern English developed. But we heard about the words WE and local varieties but not in detail; the teacher talked about the Hindi-English mixed language as an Indian local variety.” (17.07.2021)

However, the teacher was not trained in English language teaching (ELT) and only superficially introduced the concepts given in the curricula without discussing them in-depth.

“If WE-awareness is excluded in the curricula, teachers will always look for standard writing, speaking, or pronunciation, although they do not use these. Integrating these concepts will open the door to find our identity as non-native teachers of English.”

Trainee teacher (Evening course) 2:

Local teachers are always obsessed with accuracy and language quality. As a result, many students avoid expressing their ideas using English only because they might be mistaken.

“If teachers always focus on pronunciation, grammar, and so on, they become scared and hesitant for being ridiculed. But if the teachers accept the broken language, they will find the expressions easily and encouraged. Finding all other people expressing in Pidgin or Creole forms would make the local variety established, and English would be extensively used.” (17. 07. 2021)

The course taught was not much relevant or helpful:

“The course taught us why we need a global language, how English has been the global language, and what makes a language global. But I do not think I learned about World Englishes.” (17. 07. 2021)

Trainee teacher (Evening course) 3:

Since the country people do not have any local variety creating their speaker identity and language ownership, they try to prove themselves by comparing to the other standard varieties.

“English is not locally used for communication in the country; hence, we rely on either British or US English. We do not use it country-wise. So, we neither create a variety nor learn the standard ones accurately. A local variety could create a strong identity when it comes to global

communication. We follow the standard variety compared to global people’s proficiencies.” (19. 07. 2021)

Thus, the local teachers can practice innovative teaching confidently by getting the rights of language, proficiencies, and culture. Otherwise, there will be no change and development. Also, only integrating the WE-awareness into the curricula is not sufficient if not taught and discussed effectively.

“We learned about World Englishes neither in ‘English as a global language’ nor in Sociolinguistics. We were taught only the history of the development of English as a global language.” (19 . 07. 2021)

Student teacher (Regular course) 1:

These trainees do not study English as a global language’ and are less aware of the WE concept. Explain why our teacher learners prefer British Standard English and underestimate the local varieties they reported many perceptions.

“It has been a trend because of the lengthy colonial regime in the Indian sub-continent, but this preference is neither visible nor practical. That is emotional and affected by socio-cultural mindsets. The then language-in-education policies impacted on the current trends too.” (23 . 07. 2021)

Native countries are considered the norm-providing agents; local non-native speakers can slightly change the norms, but they never substitute those with local varieties. But the teachers need to change their perceptions about accepting the use of translanguaging, local varieties, and Bangla in the English texts, same as English is often quoted in Bangla writing.

“I will need to count the learners’ organization and content of written discourse, instead of language accuracy, which will value their other socio-cultural and intellectual capability. Banglish should not be stigmatized; it should be established and accepted to prove the learners with identity and empower them.” (23. 07. 2021)

Those teachers who like only standard varieties need to gain WE-awareness immediately:

“Both the teachers and learners feel helpless since we can never acquire the standard variety, but accepting local variety would empower them and widen their views on language, learning, and teaching.” (23. 07. 2021)

Excluding WE-awareness in the curricula is a significant barrier to accept WE as a pedagogy, although the concept is still limited to learning. Finally, the teachers focus on accuracy, not on the expressions and content. Hence, teacher educators need to be WE-aware too.

“Even most of the teacher educators coming from literature or non-ELT background are fossilized about the acceptance issues of the local or standard variety. They often undermine the local literature, which is easier for the learners.” (23. 07. 2021)

Student teacher (Regular course) 2:

Since the local students need to prepare for the international standardized tests using the native-speakers-made materials, they quickly become interested in British, American, or Australian English. WE-awareness can make a long-desired change in developing school learners’ language skills-

“Teachers like us need to learn the WE-concepts to understand the significance of local varieties and create or establish our own. Gradually the teachers and students will be free of fascination about the standard variety and fear of producing English.” (23. 07. 2021)

Even the English language learners need to know about World Englishes in addition to the teachers or student teachers:

“Once I would correct all my students’ pronunciation to follow the British RP standard; later I realized it was too much interference and imposition that might discourage them from talking. Then I started to accept them with whatever they say, they became easy!” (23. 07. 2021)

Only the advanced learners can acquire the standard variety; hence the Bangladeshi variety needs to be recognized and accepted worldwide.

Student teacher (Regular course) 3:

“The perspectives and circumstances are different from India, which already uses English as a lingua franca locally. English is not localized there; we think of its usage only globally, and that is why we always conceptualize English by associating it to the native standard.” (27. 07. 2021)

The local people take English as fancy and luxury, not as a communication need. That leads to the aspiration of learning a standard variety:

“Since we do not acknowledge any local varieties, we go for native speakers’ variety.” (27. 07. 2021)

WE-unawareness has been setting the local English teachers back with the traditional views and practices that are ineffective. Teachers often hold high and unrealistic expectations about language skills and proficiencies from the learners for not accepting the local varieties.

“Learning English itself is like enslaving ourselves; targeting standard varieties makes it acute and prominent. Learners lose spirits for counting all errors and seeking perfections.” (27. 07. 2021)

Besides, local authors have similar responsibilities to include and promote local varieties and translanguaging in their writing. Literature teachers also should encourage studying the local and migrant literature through formal curricula.

DISCUSSION

Overall, this research's quantitative and qualitative findings substantiate the recent local and international research results, including high awareness of the terminology, low awareness about the WE features, acceptance of hybrid varieties, change of language ideologies upon receiving instructions, and perceived NNETs identity, etc. The findings also confirm the

traditional ELT perspectives, including Standard English, accuracy, and native-like competence as the points of teacher reference (Vettorel, 2016).

Phillipson’s (2001) explanation of the spread of English from two procedural perspectives in the post-colonial era connects the impact of language status on the user identity. The Diffusion of English theory promotes English language and culture through linguistic imperialism, including exploitation and expansion, while the Ecology of Languages approach promotes linguistic or cultural diversity and equity. The post-colonial power culture reflects in acknowledging language as a tool to form, perform, and tie the power to identity irrespective of race, gender, and social class (Bourdieu, 1991; Delpit, 1988). Identity is the way an individual recognizes himself as a specific type of being in a particular situation, and “*identities are complex, varied, and tied to one’s varied affinity groups*” (Gee, 2000). Bangladeshi English language learners and teachers construct their language identity from post-colonial culture and global need perspectives. Teacher learners’ identity relevance to the WE-awareness exposes the impact of linguistic colonialism and globalized language identity or ownership needs.

Teacher learners’ WE-unawareness involving post-colonial linguistic mindsets and socio-cultural influences in the micro-level context reflects the increasing perceived value of the recent English medium instruction (EMI) macro-level language policy at the local context. WE-unawareness at micro-level context is the translated action of macro-level dominant language-in-education policies. The current research findings of the relationships between WE-awareness and teacher identity confirm the Othering involved in constructing language identities at English higher education in Bangladesh. The practicing macro language-in-education policies promoting hierarchies among languages and institutions demonstrate the self-and other-language representations. Hence, the urgency for WE-awareness assures the student teachers’ knowledge needs about individual language potential or social capital growth to adjust to a globalized world (Hamid et al., 2013). Also, a training intervention can change teachers’ language ideologies and practices in a global language view framework.

Respondents’ statements about accepting non-standard, Pidgin, and Creole varieties, which can ease and inspire learner language use and meaning-making, coincide with learners’ perceived deficiency. In English educaion,

academic discourse and students’ socialization experiences create systematic exclusion in classroom discussions and activities (Sultana, 2014). Thus, English-only instructions often obstruct their learning opportunities and identity development through hegemonic introductions. Teachers’ unrealistic goals and traditional top-down practices make the learners insecure and inhibited. It influences learners’ desire to assimilate into the target language and culture, perceiving success lies in colonial English-only policies and product-based testing (Garcia, 2009). Learners’ L1 or LX variety is often viewed as unrelated to learning the language and academic achievement in English instructions. When students are constantly discouraged from using their first language, heritage languages are disregarded as a deficit (Little, 2017). English language teaching and learning intensify inequalities among the learners, which needs to be balanced with integrating local varieties and mother tongue policy in the tertiary and teacher education in Bangladesh (Saha, 2020).

The trainee teachers’ NNETs identity awareness developed through the concepts of international education and global market involves the knowledge of classification and categorization of English. Future teachers see themselves in the hierarchy of global language users. Hence, they need to develop worldviews as linguistically, socio-economically, and educationally diverse teachers. They need to interpret the space where they grow as a part of standard higher education and relational linguistic participation. The local teacher-learners need to understand the context where they practice the languages and make their meaning (Sultana, 2018). In their identity negotiation and local spatial realization, WE-awareness can help create a language's social meaning and develop a collective feeling. Teachers need to understand and undergo both the excitement and struggle of the local English language learners to raise confidence and inspire as a global language user against the Standard English concepts. Observing the EFL and ESL learners’ alternative identity formation through resisting activities can facilitate English language teachers’ roles and NNETs identity transformation to realize the critical language ownership.

The present findings on the respondents’ recommendations about integrating WE-awareness and globalization of English coincide with the current EMI language-in-education policies implementing throughout the K-12 and university settings. That is a dominant approach to push the educational, socio-political, and economic goals directly responding to language

globalization and Englishization. As the respondents report, the need to raise EFL students’ WE-awareness implies the needs of the global language knowledge base in tertiary instruction (Rahman & Singh, 2020). English has long been the global second language in higher education for advantages in the current international language order (Zhang, 2017). Integrating the WE-knowledge in teacher education can promote teachers’ understanding of teaching EFL to meet global communication skills needs instead of a post-colonial standard language.

CONCLUSIONS

Bangladeshi university English teacher learners are generally unaware of the meaning and features of the world Englishes, neutral about the L1 needs, likely to prioritize British language as pedagogic variety, and unsure about accepting the local English varieties. These demonstrate the further need of acquiring WE-knowledge for the student teachers. The current awareness is limited to knowing the terminology, and the perceptions are biased with a post-colonial sentiment. Teaching culturally responsive pedagogies, including EIL, WE, and ELF, is essential in decolonizing local teacher education. English language learners and teachers need the space to reflect upon their worldview, experiences, first language community relationships, and contextual adjustment. WE knowledge can enable the teachers to critically see the EFL pedagogy and view the differences between dominant vs. non-dominant languages (Meighan, 2019). That can promote decolonizing the local colonial concepts. Before attending the focus group discussion, the respondents had regarded the standard varieties as the only accepted pedagogic forms. Later, they realized these are barriers to perceive competence and form NNTes identity. As a result, teachers exhibit intolerance, underestimation, dissatisfaction, and depreciation of non-native English varieties (Boonsuk et al., 2021). The respondents conceptualize the necessity of integrating WE-awareness into teacher education with various goals in mind. These include recognizing the local varieties, breaking down the top-down pedagogic culture, empowering teachers-learners, reducing challenges in achieving learning objectives, etc. Further research should address how to incorporate WE-awareness into ELT courses, the effects of WE-awareness on beliefs and practices, etc. Larger samples and different contexts could produce more in-depth results.

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