

University Students' Perceptions and Preferences Regarding Native-like English Accents in Academic Settings in Bangladesh



Nazmun Nahar

232055003

Department of English and Humanities

Summer 2024

**University Students' Perceptions and Preferences Regarding Native-like English Accents in
Academic Settings in Bangladesh**

A Thesis Submitted to
The Department of English and Humanities
University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
MA in English

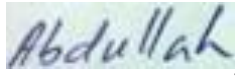
Nazmun Nahar
ID: 232055003

Thesis Supervisor:
Abdullah Al Mahmud, PhD
Associate Professor
Department of English and Humanities
University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh

Summer 2024

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

I hereby declare that this thesis is the student's own work and effort. All sources of information incorporated here have been duly acknowledged. This thesis has been submitted with my approval.

_09.10.2024_____

Abdullah Al Mahmud, PhD

Associate Professor

Department of English and Humanities

DECLARATION

This thesis is a presentation of my original research work. Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly, with due reference to the literature, and acknowledgement of collaborative research and discussions.



Nazmun Nahar

ID: 232055003

Department of English and Humanities

DEDICATION

To motherhood in all its forms,
and to the fathers who care for these mothers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am hopelessly limited in my capacity to even begin to express my gratitude to my Rabb, The Almighty Creator— all praises belong to Him. I am overwhelmingly grateful to all the prophets (may peace be upon all of them) and to all my family members. There are countless individuals, both known and unknown, who have guided, taught, and helped me throughout various chapters of my life, and I extend my heartfelt thanks to all of them.

My gratitude to ULAB— it has been a sanctuary for me during the limited time I spent here. I am deeply thankful to my fellow students, all staff, and everyone who has been part of one of the most significant phases of my life. And thanks to the writer of a thesis paper, I found in the ULAB library—though I cannot remember his name, I will probably always remember how his stories on death made me feel.

I am grateful to everyone who contributed to the preparation of this research work. I must acknowledge the invaluable contribution of Abu Saleh Mohammad Rafi, PhD, Associate Professor at ULAB, who monitored the early phases of this research and tolerated me in his Research Methods course for one and a half semesters. I am equally grateful to all my other teachers, both prior to and at ULAB, each of whom enriched me in profound and beautiful ways. Their advanced yet deeply humane approach to teaching has had a lasting impact on me, and I am immensely thankful for their wisdom.

Finally, my sincere gratitude and profound respect go to my supervisor and mentor, Associate Professor Dr Abdullah Al Mahmud. His constant support, encouragement, and backing have given me the courage to push forward and reignited a passion for knowledge, and his approach to life and learning will continue to inspire me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Approval.....	iii
Declaration	iv
Dedication	v
Acknowledgement	vi
Table of Contents	vii
List of Tables	ix
List of Figures	x
Abstract	xi
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
1.1 Aim, Objectives, and Research Questions	3
Chapter 2: Literature Review	5
2.1 Significance of the Study	7
Chapter 3: Methodology	9
3.1 Participants	9
3.2 Data Collection	10
3.3 Data Analysis	11
3.4 Validity and Reliability	11
3.5 Ethical Considerations	12
Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion	13
4.1 Perceptions of Native-like Accents	13
4.1.1 Overall Perceived Value	13
4.1.2 Perceived Impact of NLEAs on Academic Achievements	17
4.2 Preferences for Accents	19

4.2.1 Personal Accent Preferences	21
4.2.2 Preferred accents for teachers	23
4.2.3 British vs. American accents	25
4.2.4 Native vs. Bangladeshi and Mixed Accents	26
4.3 Perceptions vs. Reality	30
4.3.1 Native Accent as a Standard Model	30
4.3.2 Reality of Bangladeshi Context	31
4.3.3 Global Realities	31
4.3.4 Native-like Accent and Academic Accomplishments	32
4.3.5 What Really Matters?	33
4.4 Influencing factors on perceptions and preferences	34
4.4.1 Media, Internet, and Exposure	34
4.4.2 Colonial Legacy: Past, Present, and Future	36
4.4.3 Socioeconomic, Regional, and Educational Backgrounds	38
4.4.4 Academic Environment	42
4.4.5 Cultural Identity and Push for Authenticity	46
Chapter 5: Conclusion	48
5.1 Limitations of the Study	48
5.2 Educational Implications and Recommendations	49
5.3 Suggestions for Future Research	51
References	53

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1: Participants	10
--------------------------------------	----

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 4.1: Students' Overall Perceived Value of NLEAs	13
Figure 4.2: Perceived Benefits of NLEAs on Academic Performance and Opportunities	17
Figure 4.3: Students' Accent Preferences at University A and University B	20
Figure 4.4: Students' Preferred Accents for Teachers	23
Figure 4.5: Students' Accent Preferences for Academic Settings	27
Figure 4.6: Students' Accents	28
Figure 4.7: Students' Socioeconomic, Regional, and Educational Backgrounds	39
Figure 4.8: Pressure on Students in Academic Environment	42
Figure 4.9: Pressure on Students at University A and University B	43
Figure 4.10: Teachers' Emphasis on NLEAs	43
Figure 4.11: Teachers' Emphasis on NLEAs at University A and University B	44

ABSTRACT

In Bangladesh, perceptions of English accents remain a significant issue, shaped by the nation's colonial past and the demands of intercultural communication in a globalized world, particularly within the context of English education. The ongoing global discourse surrounding the use of native and non-native English accents, alongside the rise of World Englishes, necessitates a careful exploration of students' perceptions of native-like English accents and their preferences to better understand their classroom experiences. This study investigates university students' perceptions and preferences regarding native-like English accents in academic settings in Bangladesh. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research combines quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews of both teachers and students. Data collection is conducted through surveys and semi-structured interviews, with thematic analysis applied to interpret the results. The findings reveal a subtle, often unspoken preference for native-like English accents in academic environments, as well as a noticeable communication gap between teachers and students regarding the importance of these accents in academic contexts, with ongoing shifts toward greater inclusivity and awareness. The study advocates for practical, pedagogically sound approaches that foster holistic education by embracing diversity and promoting inclusivity with an aim to prepare students as articulate and skilled communicators while honoring their linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Throughout the history of the English language, worldwide debates and discussions regarding native and non-native ways of speaking English have remained prominent, especially in the area of English language education. With the emergence and spread of the concept of World Englishes in recent decades, the extensive discussion surrounding native and non-native English has become significant, bringing renewed attention from scholars and individuals worldwide (Bolton & Jenks, 2022; Patra, 2016; Kachru, 1985). It is now necessary to revisit and reassess the perceptions and preferences of English language students to construct a clearer and more comprehensive understanding of their experiences in English classrooms and its implications within the broader linguistic scenario, in Bangladesh and beyond.

English has stood as the predominant global language in various domains such as trade, commerce, sports, culture, knowledge, and research, exerting a greater influence on the world stage than ever before (Reagan & Schreffler, 2005). Its global dominance extends beyond native speakers, specific regions and extends to millions of non-native speakers worldwide. This widespread use has led to the development of World Englishes (WEs), a concept that acknowledges the global spread of English and its adaptations across various cultural contexts (Kachru, 1985). According to Kachru's model of concentric circles, English speakers are categorized into three groups: the Inner Circle, consisting of native speakers (e.g., the UK, USA, Australia); the Outer Circle, which includes countries where English has historical and institutional importance (e.g., India, Nigeria); and the Expanding Circle, where English is learned as a foreign language (eg., China, Japan, Russia, Brazil, etc.) (Kachru, 1985). Bangladesh, as part of the Expanding Circle, has traditionally leaned towards British English presumably due to its colonial past (Islam & Hashim, 2019). Additionally, the growing influence of American English due to global, political, and economic shifts has introduced additional variations in English usage and preferences (Chowdhury, 2010).

In the Bangladeshi academic context, native-like English accents (NLEAs), closely resembling those of inner-circle Englishes, play a significant and complex role. Although the education system does not officially require adherence to any specific accent, students and teachers often perceive native-like accents, particularly British and American, as markers of academic excellence and professionalism (Islam & Hashim, 2019). The historical connection to British colonialism

continues to influence perceptions, with the British accent being associated with prestige, whereas American English has gained popularity due to globalization and media influence (Chowdhury, 2010). However, this is not the only dynamic at play, as there has been a growing recognition of Bangladeshi English and the importance of communication over accent accuracy ((Hossain et al., 2015; Chowdhury, 2023b).

The exact impact of NLEAs on academic performance and social opportunities remains underexplored, making it vital to understand these preferences and perceptions within this context. This study attempts to explore these complexities without assuming whether these accents definitively influence academic or social success.

In pronunciation studies, Derwing and Munro (2015) emphasize the importance of intelligibility over native-like accuracy in second-language teaching, which challenges the emphasis on accent reduction. This view aligns with Levis's (2005) argument that pronunciation teaching should prioritize communicative competence over native pronunciation standards. Similarly, Jenkins (2000) advocates for English as an International Language (EIL), urging educators to recognize diverse global accents, as opposed to focusing solely on native models. Together, these works highlight the shift toward embracing linguistic diversity in English language pedagogy.

In linguistic terms, an accent refers to the distinctive phonetic characteristics of speech associated with a particular geographical region or social group, encompassing variations in intonation, rhythm, and sound patterns (Wells, 1982). In contrast, pronunciation focuses on the correct articulation of sounds and the rules governing the formation of words (Derwing & Munro, 2005). According to Levis (2005), as students often confuse accent with correct pronunciation, it leads to the misconception that adopting a native-like accent equates to speaking English correctly. However, by allowing participants to express their perceptions of accents without intruding their understanding, it is possible to capture authentic insights into their experiences and beliefs. This approach provides a genuine representation of their views, irrespective of whether they fully comprehend the distinction between accent and pronunciation.

A native-like English accent typically refers to speech patterns that closely resemble those of native speakers from English-dominant countries, such as the United States or the United Kingdom (Jenkins, 2000). By “native-like” English accent, this study refers to the accents closely similar to the accents of English speakers from countries in Kachru's "Inner Circle" (Kachru, 1985) —

primarily the UK, the US, and Australia. These accents are often perceived as the standard or ideal forms of English within global contexts. Native accents refer to the accents spoken naturally by individuals from these regions, while native-like accents refer to attempts by non-native speakers to emulate them (Patra, 2016).

Understanding attitudes towards native English accents is crucial for effective language teaching practices globally. The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to the discourse on linguistic diversity and inclusivity in educational settings. By shedding light on the nuanced attitudes towards English accents among university students, the research aims to inform pedagogical practices, curriculum development, and language policy initiatives. Ultimately, this study aspires to foster a more inclusive and equitable educational environment, where diverse linguistic identities are recognized and celebrated.

1.1 Aim, Objectives, and Research Questions

The aim of the study is to investigate the perceptions and preferences of university students in Bangladesh regarding native-like English accents in academic settings, while also exploring the factors that influence these perceptions and preferences. Furthermore, the study aims to examine the potential implications of students' attitudes towards English accents for educational practices in Bangladesh.

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- a) To explore the perceptions and preferences of university students in Bangladesh regarding native-like English accents in academic settings.
- b) To identify the factors that influence students' perceptions and preferences towards English accents.
- c) To examine the potential implications of students' perceptions and preferences for pedagogical practices, curriculum development, and language policy initiatives in Bangladesh.

Correspondingly, the research questions are as follows:

1. What are the perceptions and preferences of university students in Bangladesh regarding native-like English accents in academic settings?
2. What factors influence their perceptions and preferences?
3. What are the potential implications of their perceptions and preferences for educational practices in Bangladeshi universities?

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review explores the complex landscape of perceptions and accent preferences among students and teachers across various regions, focusing particularly on studies conducted in Bangladesh, other Asian countries, and global contexts.

The studies conducted in Bangladesh present a mixed polarity in attitudes towards native accents among both students and teachers (Dhami, 2022; Rahman & Chowdhury, 2018). While there is a preference for Inner Circle English accents, such as American or British, in English Language Teaching (ELT), there is also negativity towards the legitimacy of Outer and Expanding Circle Englishes (Dhami, 2022). This preference is reflected in the findings, which indicate a positive attitude towards teaching intelligible pronunciation over international pronunciation standards such as British or American English (Rahman & Chowdhury, 2018). However, the studies also highlight challenges in incorporating Global Englishes (GEs) into ELT practices due to the exclusion of such materials from English textbooks and curriculum in Bangladesh (Dhami, 2022).

Rafi (2023) reveals that those who acquired the skill of speaking standard British or American English were highly regarded by teachers and peers implying that students and teachers were encouraged to abandon their Bangladeshi accents and identities in favor of those resembling their colonial masters. Zarin (2013) finds that the anxiety created from exposure to native speakers decreases learners' motivation, as many students express their discomfort and difficulty when listening to native English speakers. The study highlights the importance of providing opportunities for learners to engage with non-native English speakers to lessen anxiety and enhance motivation. Additionally, it finds a preference among learners for listening to materials delivered by non-native speakers, which they find easier to comprehend and less demotivating.

Al-Quaderi & Mahmud (2010) discusses the historical development and current challenges of teaching English literature in Bangladeshi English-medium schools, indicating a necessity for a post-colonial pedagogical approach to counter the dominance of Western literature in English literature education. Despite the eagerness expressed by participants in GE-informed teacher professional development programs, there are limitations in implementing such approaches effectively (Dhami, 2022). Furthermore, the studies emphasize the need for further research and

support for teacher professional development in this area to address the complexities surrounding the adoption of GE in ELT practices in Bangladesh (Dhami, 2022; Rahman & Chowdhury, 2018).

Studies involving participants from other Asian countries, for example, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Sri Lanka, found a predominantly positive attitude towards native English accents (Boonsuk & Fang, 2022). Despite being aware of different English accents, many international students still perceive native English accents as the standard (Boonsuk & Fang, 2022). This preference for native accents is reflected in their evaluation of English language teachers as well, where a significant preference is observed for NES-accented English (Buckingham, 2014; Buckingham, 2015).

However, there is also a degree of favorability towards accents from the non-native speakers (e.g., Arabic native speakers') in certain places (Buckingham, 2014). Interestingly, when controlling for the NES/NNES variable, no significant difference in student ratings of teachers was observed, indicating a potential flexibility in attitudes towards accents (Buckingham, 2014). Yuwita & Ambarwati (2023), a study conducted in Indonesia, also reveals a mix of positive and negative attitudes towards native English accents. While some participants embraced their accents as part of their cultural identity, most viewed their accents negatively, perceiving them as unnatural and trying hard to sound like native speakers for international acceptance. Regarding English Language Teaching (ELT), participants favored American or British accents due to exposure and perceived practicality. Overall, the study enriches understanding in applied linguistics and ELT, especially concerning English as an International Language perspective.

Moving beyond Asia, research from various global contexts provides valuable insights into attitudes towards native accents and their implications for English language education. Studies conducted in the Gulf region highlight a preference for NES-accented English among students, while also promoting the idea of accent diversity in teaching materials (Buckingham, 2014; Buckingham, 2015). Similarly, investigations in Dutch EMI contexts demonstrate the impact of accent strength on the evaluation of non-native lecturers by both native and non-native English-speaking listeners (Hendriks et al., 2023). Hendriks et al. (2023) also finds that non-native listeners, regardless of their L1 background, tend to perceive teachers with a native accent more positively than native listeners. Sadeghpour & Sharifian (2019) examines the perceptions of English teachers in Australia regarding the integration of World Englishes (WEs) into English

language teaching (ELT), expresses the need for teachers to navigate the practical challenges of incorporating WEs into ELT. Furthermore, Pilus (2013) explores the attitudes of 34 English as a Second Language learners in Malaysia towards British, American, and Malaysian English accents. While the learners displayed a preference for British English, they were also comfortable with their Malaysian accent. The paper concludes that, because of the absence of a standardized non-native spoken English variety in Malaysia, adopting a native accent as a pronunciation model appears more practical, though it emphasizes the need to view the native accent as a flexible reference rather than a rigid norm. These findings collectively represent a range of perceptions towards native English accent and emphasizes the importance of considering diverse attitudes towards native accents in shaping language teaching practices globally.

From the mixed perceptions observed in Bangladesh to the predominantly positive attitudes in other Asian countries and beyond, it is evident that accent preferences are shaped by a complex interplay of cultural, social, and educational factors. While some countries demonstrate a strong preference for native accents, others promote accent diversity and inclusivity in language education. Moreover, the challenges highlighted in integrating Global Englishes into ELT practices indicate the importance of ongoing research and support for teacher professional development. Moving forward, it is essential to recognize the diversity of accents and the dynamic nature of language attitudes to nurture a more inclusive and effective approach to language teaching that celebrates linguistic diversity while promoting effective communication skills. By embracing this diversity and adapting pedagogical practices accordingly, educators can better meet the needs of diverse learners in an increasingly interconnected world.

2.1 Significance of the Study

The significance of conducting research on University Students' Perceptions and Preferences Regarding Native-like English Accents (NLEAs) in Academic Settings rises from the ongoing demand for exploration in this area. Currently, there is an insufficient amount of research addressing this specific research area within the context of Bangladesh. Therefore, this research attempts to contribute more to the ongoing conversation. By examining students' attitudes and preferences towards native British accents in academic environments, this study aims to provide valuable insights into an underexplored aspect of language perception in the field of education. As

a result, the findings have the potential to inform pedagogical practices, curriculum development, and teacher training initiatives, therefore enhancing English language and literature education in Bangladesh and beyond.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-method approach including two steps. First, it begins with initial quantitative surveys aimed at (a) selecting a diverse range of student participants to capture multiple perspectives and (b) providing a quantitative overview that serves as the basis for deeper exploration through qualitative interviews. In the second phase, the selected participants were interviewed to gain more comprehensive insights into their perceptions. Additionally, teachers were interviewed due to their in-depth knowledge of students' perspectives and their broader understanding of the educational environment, practices, and systems at both local and global levels.

The mixed methods research methodology is appropriate for this study as it allows for a comprehensive understanding of university students' perceptions and preferences regarding native-like English accents in Bangladesh. By combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, the research captures both broad trends and in-depth individual experiences, enhancing the reliability and validity of the findings through triangulation. Purposive sampling ensures diversity in participant selection, representing various university types and providing a wide range of perspectives. The combination of thematic analysis of qualitative data and quantitative survey results provides richer and more nuanced interpretations. This methodology ensures that the findings provide a robust and nuanced understanding of the research topic.

3.1 Participants

A purposive sampling technique was utilized to ensure diversity in terms of university types (private and public Universities). The initial survey was conducted among 58 students of English Departments from two universities, including 32 students from university A (public) and 26 students from university B (private). The sample for the interviews consisted of 10 participants: six students, including three representing each university, and four teachers, two from each university.

The student participants were selected from graduate fourth-year or postgraduate students, as they have been present in the academic environment for an extended period, gathering substantial

experiences. Prolonged exposure also allows them to provide insights into the consistency of their experiences and perceptions over time. Besides the students' input, interviewing experienced teachers provides complementary perspectives and contextual insights based on their years of teaching experience that can enhance understanding of the learning environment. Their input helps validate students' responses, identify influencing factors, and formulate practical recommendations for improving educational practices.

Table 3.1: Participants

Category	Total Participants	Female	Male	University A (Public)	University B (Private)
Student Survey Participants	58	40	18	32	26
Interview Participants	10	-	-	3 (Students) Referred as: SA1, SA2, SA3	3 (Students) Referred as: SB1, SB2, SB3
				2 (Teachers) Referred as: TA1, TA2	2 (Teachers) Referred as: TB1, TB2

3.2 Data Collection

Survey and semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection instruments in this study. This approach provided the flexibility to explore participants' perspectives while maintaining consistency across interviews. The data collection process was carried out in three stages:

Survey:

The survey comprised multiple-choice questions and took approximately two minutes to complete.

It was designed to gather initial insights into students' general perceptions of native-like English accents.

Student Interviews:

The semi-structured interviews with students consisted of 10 questions. These were developed based on the research objectives and survey findings, covering topics such as students' perceptions of various English accents, preferences in academic settings, reasons for these preferences, firsthand experiences, and whether their views had remained consistent throughout their academic lives.

Teacher Interviews:

Similarly, the semi-structured interviews with teachers also comprised 10 questions. These questions focused on the teachers' perceptions of students' attitudes towards English accents, their own views on the importance of accents in academic contexts, and the broader educational implications.

3.3 Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis followed a thematic analysis approach. Transcripts from the interviews were systematically coded and categorized to identify recurrent themes and patterns. The analysis process involved multiple stages, including familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. Survey findings were added accordingly.

3.4 Validity and Reliability

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research findings, several measures were implemented. Firstly, the research instruments, including interview protocols and survey questionnaires, were pilot tested to identify and address any potential issues or ambiguities. Secondly, multiple data collection methods, such as interviews and surveys, were employed to triangulate the findings, enhancing the credibility of the results.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before their involvement in the study, ensuring they are fully informed about the research objectives, procedures, and potential risks. Participants were assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Confidentiality measures were strictly adhered to, with all participants' identities anonymized to protect their privacy. Additionally, participants were treated with respect and sensitivity throughout the research process, and their autonomy and right to self-determination were respected at all times.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Perceptions of Native-like Accents

4.1.1 Overall Perceived Value

Student perceptions of the importance of native-like English accents (NLEAs) in academic settings vary, ranging from viewing them as highly valuable to moderately or conditionally valuable, to non-essential. For the majority of participants, NLEAs are regarded as highly valuable both in academic settings and beyond.

In the student survey, majority of 56.9% of students found native-like English accent in academic settings important (with 29.3% considering it very important and 27.6% somewhat important). Meanwhile, 29.3% remained neutral, 12.1% considered it not that important, and only a small portion, 1.7%, found it not important at all. Notably, there is a difference between the responses from students at University A and University B. Students from University A placed slightly more importance on NLEAs compared to those from University B. At University A, 65.6% of students found NLEAs highly important (very important: 40.6%, important: 25.0%), whereas at University B, 46.2% of students held this view (very important: 15.4%, important: 30.8%). Thus, perceptions of NLEAs at both universities lean toward moderate to high significance.

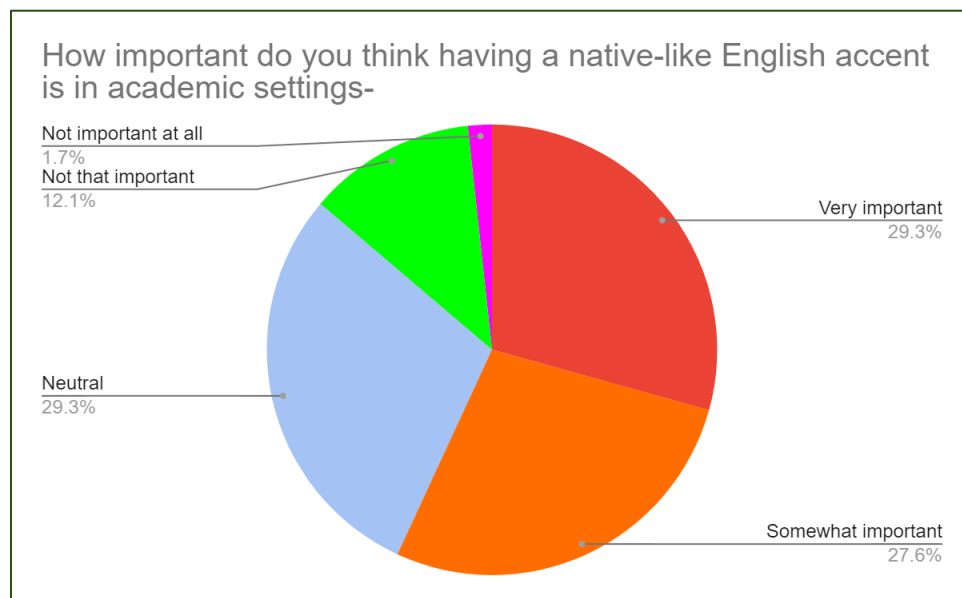


Figure 4.1: Students' overall Perceived Value of NLEAs

At the higher end of the spectrum, students viewed NLEAs as essential. One interviewee (SA3) emphasized that native-like accents, particularly the British accent, which they referred to as the "original" accent, are crucial for mastering "proper" English. They believed their classmates and teachers also considered NLEAs important and recommended practicing the British accent from an early stage. Similarly, SB3 also regarded NLEAs as highly valuable, particularly in academic contexts such as presentations, viva voce, and job interviews. They argued that speaking with a native-like accent provides social and professional advantages, as people tend to pay more attention to those who use such accents, perceive them as smarter and more knowledgeable, and offer greater opportunities (SA3, SB3). For these students, mastering a native-like accent is seen as a critical skill that enhances future prospects by reflecting an advanced level of linguistic competence.

Other students placed moderate importance on NLEAs, specifying contexts where they are more suitable (SA2, SB2). In formal contexts like presentations, viva voce, or academic communication, NLEAs are considered appropriate and are sometimes expected as markers of professionalism. However, for casual interactions among students and teachers, they are perceived as undesirable (SA2). SB2 presented two arguments for when NLEAs are feasible. First, SB2 considered native accents as reasonably favorable models for learning English as a second language, particularly in the initial stages of language acquisition. However, they noted that as students advance, particularly at the university level, the importance of NLEAs diminishes, while communication and diversity become more significant. Second, SB2 stressed that native-like accents help preserve the "authenticity" of the English language. This view reflects a balance between acknowledging the role of native-like accents in learning and recognizing that clarity and effective communication take precedence at higher education levels.

At the other end of the spectrum, some students viewed NLEAs as unimportant or rarely relevant in academic contexts. For example, SA1 considered native-like accents completely unnecessary for teaching and learning, emphasizing that they are "irrelevant" to knowledge acquisition. Similarly, SB1 acknowledged that although NLEAs are often seen as an "extra skill" in academic settings, overemphasizing them could harm students' self-esteem, as the pursuit of a native accent is unnecessary (SA1) and unachievable (SB2). Instead, they argued that clarity and effective communication should take priority. SA2 felt that native-like accents seemed "unnatural" or "fake" in informal teacher-student interactions, especially since most students are accustomed to the local

Bangla accent. These perspectives suggest that while native-like accents may hold some relevance, they are not essential and can have negative consequences in many everyday academic contexts.

The teacher interviews moderately confirm the perceptions of students gathered from the surveys and interviews. TA1 and TA2 both stated that a massive portion of their students view NLEAs as highly important, while TB1 and TB2 estimate these numbers to be much lower. This indicates a disparity in how teachers perceive the importance that students place on NLEAs.

“A significant percentage of students do hold native accents (more American than British these days) in high regard. They believe it provides some sort of authenticity to their speaking, thereby giving a boost to their academic results, social status, and future career prospects.” (TA1)

“As a university teacher in the Department of English at A, I have observed that our students often place a high value on acquiring a native-like English accent, whether British or American, but they don’t make much effort to achieve it.” (TA2)

It was also mentioned that students value NLEAs because accents can influence academic evaluations by many teachers in Bangladesh, as well as social interactions and job interviews (TA1). Furthermore, the influence of native English-speaking countries—renowned for their social, political, economic, military, and academic achievements—has a substantial impact on students. Students’ favorable perceptions of native English accents are largely shaped by societal observations. In the Bangladeshi context, individuals who speak "natural" English or have native-like accents are generally regarded with high esteem (TA1)

TA2 similarly noted that students idealize NLEAs and aspire to speak in that manner, though they lack the effort to achieve this, which is perhaps because it is “unachievable” (TB1, SB2). This aligns with student survey data, which showed that only a small percentage (5.2%) of students pursued training for NLEA development, though 56.9% of students believe these accents to be important in academic settings. TA2 attributes this perception to the global influence of these accents in academia, media, and professional settings. Regular exposure to American and British accents in movies and online content leads students to associate them with prestige, fluency, and correctness.

In contrast, another perspective suggests that only a small segment of students admire and aspire to NLEAs, which does not align with the survey results. Both TB1 and TB2 acknowledge that this smaller group indeed admires NLEAs, but they believe the majority of students are unconcerned with them. For those in favor of NLEAs, they view native English as the standard, with some simply finding it "beautiful" (TB2). For others, this admiration stems from societal notions that NLEAs carry high "market value," a mindset rooted in colonial influences (TB1). However, the majority of students focus more on accuracy and fluency (TB2), as well as comprehension and communication (TA1). Additionally, due to internet access and global communication, students now have exposure to various English dialects worldwide (TB1), and they no longer blindly imitate native accents.

“...and I will not disagree that a section of students used to admire those 'native accent users' as potential role models—but in the overall theme, the majority aspired to attain fluency and accuracy, not the native accents.” (TB2)

"Their sources are no longer limited to native-speaking sections. Most students today probably don't care much about British or American accents. If a few pay exceptional attention to it, that's fine, but for the majority, it's unnecessary. I want to focus on the majority, and they are quite okay." (TB1)

One teacher mentioned that there is a psychological subjugation—a voluntary, preferred submission rather than an imposed one. In the absence of overt rulers like the British, people's "slave minds," still seeking new rulers to govern them, may have found many through global spaces like the internet, particularly in British aesthetics and American media and films.

Despite this high social value, some participants expressed a divide between personal comfort and societal expectations (see 4.2.4). While comfortable with their local Bangladeshi accents, they felt pressured to adopt native accents for professional or formal purposes. This duality is seen in comments such as, “While I personally feel comfortable with a Bangladeshi accent, I see the value of using a native-like accent in professional settings.” Psychological pressure students face to conform to native-like accents. Those who struggle to adopt such accents often feel psychological pressure (SB1), “low self-esteem “and socially inadequate (SA3, SB1). One interviewee explained, “Native English is definitely seen as a tool of power, as that's how it was presented to us” (SB2)

native-like accents are not just linguistic markers but also cultural indicators of authority and power.

The perceptions of students are not black and white but exist on a spectrum, fitting together like puzzle pieces in a larger societal and political picture. This picture reflects the third phase of colonial dominance, where people conform to this dominance without being fully aware of it. There is a psychological subjugation—a voluntary, preferred submission rather than an imposed one. In the absence of overt rulers like the British, people's "slave minds," still seeking new rulers to govern them, may have found many through global spaces like the internet, particularly in British aesthetics and American media and films (see 4.4.1).

4.1.2 Perceived Impact of NLEAs on Academic Achievements

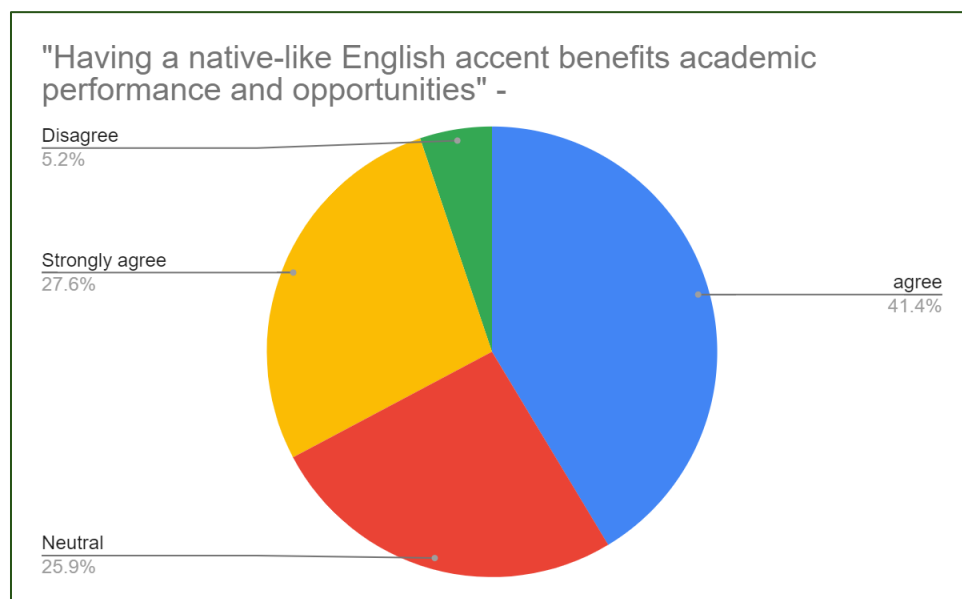


Figure 4.2: Perceived Benefits of NLEAs on Academic Performance and Opportunities

According to the survey and interview participants, NLEAs are often associated with competence and status in academic settings. NLEA holders are believed to be potentially getting better grades and opportunities for academic growth (SA2, SA3, SB1) as well as positive regard and favorable, respectful perception from peers and teachers. The belief that native-like accents (NLEAs) positively impact academic performance, especially in oral assessments, was suggested by some students. One participant with native-like accent noted, "I always got good marks in presentations

and viva," suggesting that students with native-like accents receive more favorable evaluations in such oral exams (SB3). Another participant reflected, "If I could speak like the British, I think I would have been valued more" (SA3), emphasizing how pronunciation can shape the way students are perceived by teachers and classmates.

A major portion of the students believed that NLEAs are definitely beneficial in academic settings, though for many of them, the benefits were rather subtle and indirect, but powerful. NLEAs are also perceived as a status symbol in academic settings. For example, one participant highlighted how native-like accents are seen as a marker of competence, remarking that "People who speak with a British accent, even if they are not grammatically correct, are seen as good speakers or competent" (SA3). Similarly, another participant described native-like English as an "extra skill" that enhances one's status in the academic environment (SB1), showing that the accent is not just about communication, but about gaining recognition and respect.

However, in terms of results or grades, SA2 informed that having a native-like accent does not affect their academic results, as exams are mostly writing-based anyway and there's a 1-credit viva each semester. Speaking accounts for 10% of marks in each course, but students can sometimes opt for a class test or assignment instead. So, they can get through university with limited speaking skills without affecting your CGPA much. However, they predict other kinds of advantages from some teachers and classmates, in terms of attention and opportunities, as one participant noted, "It might have led to better treatment from some teachers and classmates." (SA2). While these advantages may not directly influence grades, they could still affect a student's academic journey by creating a more supportive and engaging learning environment.

Institutions offering programs to train students in native pronunciation further reinforce the idea that such accents can provide academic advantages. One participant observed, "There are programs offering speaking skills development in English, including pronunciation development, which is, needless to say, actually British pronunciation. I enrolled in one, continued for a little while, then dropped it. Could not relate. Maybe because even the materials were from British, foreign culture?" ... These are always programs to train students in native pronunciation, rather than actual speaking skills or communication skills" (SB1). Another mentioned that adopting a native-like accent could lead to more opportunities, explaining, "I believe I did get more opportunities and benefits. They select you for hosting programs, giving speeches; when you get

that kind of practice for a long enough period, you will naturally get better at communication, speaking skills as well” (SB3). This view ties into the perception that native accents, while not essential for mastering academic content, provide social and academic advantages in terms of visibility and access to opportunities, such as hosting or public speaking roles.

However, other students expressed contrasting views. They believed that NLEAs do not significantly impact academic results, particularly in writing-based exams. One participant remarked, "I don't think having a native accent has academic benefits because accent is irrelevant to knowledge. Knowledge is about comprehension" (SA1). These students suggested that while NLEAs may come with certain opportunities, intelligibility and effective communication are far more important for academic success.

According to the responses from the students and teachers, while maintaining a NLEA is not mandatory, it does otherwise come with certain soft, subtle yet profound advantages in the forms of status, power, appreciation, and positive perception- benefits that are more often felt than explicitly observed.

4.2 Preferences for Accents

The survey results reveal distinct accent preferences between students from public and private universities in Bangladesh, shedding light on the influence of institutional and social factors on language choices.

Combining data from both University A (public) and University B (private), 39.6% of respondents expressed a preference for native accents, including British, American, or both, while 20.7% preferred a Bangladeshi accent. A significant portion, 34.4%, opted for a combination of native and Bangladeshi accents, highlighting a degree of flexibility in preferences. Specifically, when comparing British and American accents, 46.4% of students showed a preference for the British accent (including combinations), whereas 38.2% favored American accents. These figures illustrate the variety of accent preferences among students across both types of institutions.

The combined results from University A and B suggest that native-like accents retain a strong hold in academic settings, particularly the British accent. However, the notable preference for a mix of native and Bangladeshi accents reflects a growing tendency toward linguistic inclusivity, where

students may aspire to balance global intelligibility with their cultural identity. Furthermore, the contrast between preferences in public and private universities shows that students from different educational contexts have varying perceptions of which accents are most prestigious or useful in academic and social life, reflecting broader trends in globalization and local linguistic identity formation.

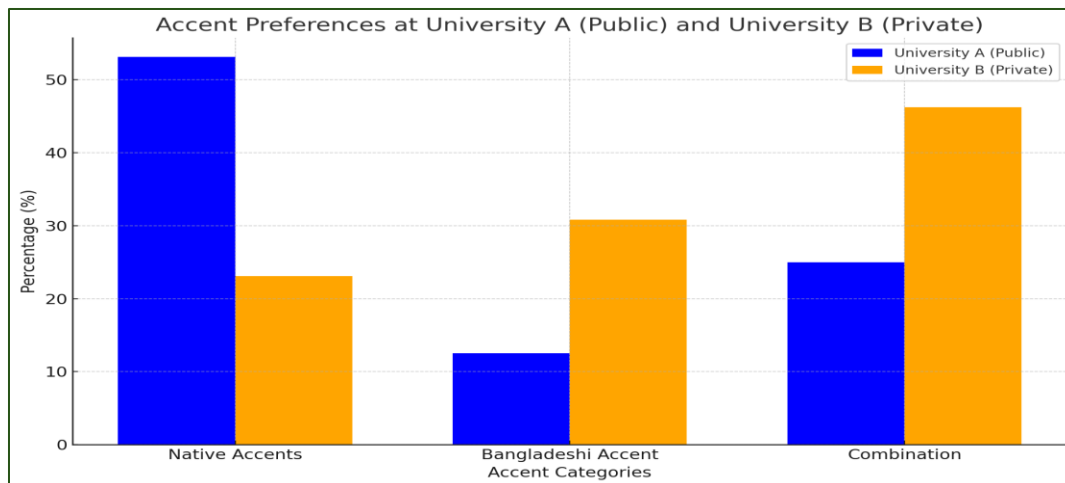


Figure 4.3: Students' Accent Preferences at University A and University B

At University A (public), 53.1% of students favored native accents (British, American, or both), with a stronger inclination toward British accents (46.8%) compared to American accents (37.5%). The relatively lower preference for the Bangladeshi accent (12.5%) suggests that students at this public institution might view native-like accents as markers of academic and social prestige. The 25% of respondents preferring a blend of native and Bangladeshi accents may indicate an openness to hybrid language use but still favoring the global recognition native accents provide.

At University B (private), preferences shifted. Only 23.1% favored native accents, while a larger proportion, 30.8%, preferred the Bangladeshi accent. Interestingly, 46.2% preferred a combination of both native and Bangladeshi accents, highlighting the private university students' tendency to adopt a more inclusive or flexible linguistic identity. The marked preference for American accents (61.6%) over British accents (46.2%) reflects a more global, perhaps Americanized outlook, which could stem from the increasing influence of American culture and media in private education contexts.

The differences between the two universities highlight that public university students, who might have more traditional academic settings and exposure to the British legacy, lean toward British accents, while private university students, often more exposed to global trends and Western media, show a higher preference for American accents and Bangladeshi accent combinations. These preferences may also reflect broader societal attitudes toward the cultural and economic advantages linked to certain accents, further influenced by the type of education and social environments students are immersed in.

4.2.1 Personal Accent Preferences

The students' preferences for accents reveal a complex relationship between prestige, practicality, and comfort. Many students expressed admiration for native accents, particularly British and American, which they associate with professionalism and global status. According to the survey, 39.6% of respondents expressed a preference for native accents (including British, American, or both). This perspective was also reflected in the interviews, where students like SA3 and SB3 indicated that native accents were “appropriate” and better suited for formal academic contexts, highlighting the prestige linked to these accents. SB3 emphasized that such accents are often considered a marker of sophistication and professionalism, especially in competitive, formal settings.

However, despite the prestige associated with native accents, there is a notable contrast in the way students feel about their own accents. Many students, such as SA2, admitted feeling more comfortable using their Bangladeshi accent in informal settings. SA2 remarked,

“British English is like ‘posh’ English, beautiful... But speaking in a native accent feels kind of fake, almost theatrical, like I’m not myself, I’m someone else. Speaking in my Bangla accent feels more natural.”

This tension between the aspiration for a globally accepted accent and the comfort of their native accent illustrates an internal conflict many students face. It also reflects a broader theme of identity negotiation, where students balance the desire for global recognition with the authenticity of local identity.

From the survey data, 20.7% of respondents expressed a preference for a Bangladeshi accent, and 34.4% opted for a combination of native and Bangladeshi accents. This indicates that while native accents are admired, there is also a significant portion of students who appreciate the familiarity and practicality of Bangladeshi or mixed accents. SA1, for instance, preferred the American accent, largely due to frequent exposure to American media, mentioned that imitating the American accent might enhance global communication, even though they didn't consider it essential for academic success in Bangladesh. Similarly, SA2 found British English aesthetically appealing but felt more at ease using their Bangladeshi accent in everyday interactions.

At the same time, some students highlighted the pressure to adopt native accents but questioned the authenticity of doing so. SB2 observed, "It's like you're performing, and it doesn't feel right," reflecting the tension between societal expectations of sounding native and personal comfort with local accents. Despite these concerns, others, like SB3, took a more pragmatic approach, emphasizing the utility of native-like accents in securing better job opportunities and gaining more recognition in academic settings. SB3 stated, "A native-like accent opens more doors in the job market and boosts participation in academic discussions."

Interestingly, several students showed an evolving preference for Bangladeshi or mixed accents over time. SB1 acknowledged that they initially preferred native accents but later embraced a more localized form of English, saying, "I used to prefer the way natives speak English because I believed that is how it should be, for it is their language that we borrowed or learned, but that has changed." SB3, who works as both a student and a teacher, echoed this sentiment, arguing that Bangladesh should develop its own recognized accent, similar to India's establishment of Indian English. SB3 remarked, "We have enough exposure to English to create our own version of it, and it would help if people respected our way of speaking as part of who we are."

In conclusion, the students' personal preferences for accents reflect a balance between the prestige of native accents, practical considerations for communication, and comfort with their own cultural identity. While native accents may still hold a sense of global prestige, many students acknowledge the importance of clarity and authenticity in their spoken English, favoring a more localized or mixed approach over time. These evolving dynamics highlight the complex interplay between societal expectations and personal comfort, underscoring the need for greater acceptance of linguistic diversity in academic and professional settings.

4.2.2 Preferred accents for teachers

While students' preferences for their own accents varied, their expectations for teachers were also notably different. According to the survey data, students' preferences regarding their teachers' accents are diverse. A significant portion of respondents favored native accents, with 24.1% expressing a preference for British accents and 29.3% for American accents. Interestingly, 24.1% of the students preferred their teachers to use a Bangladeshi accent, while a smaller group favored Indian English or felt that British or other foreign accents sounded artificial. The data reveal no overwhelming majority for any single accent, indicating that students' preferences are varied.

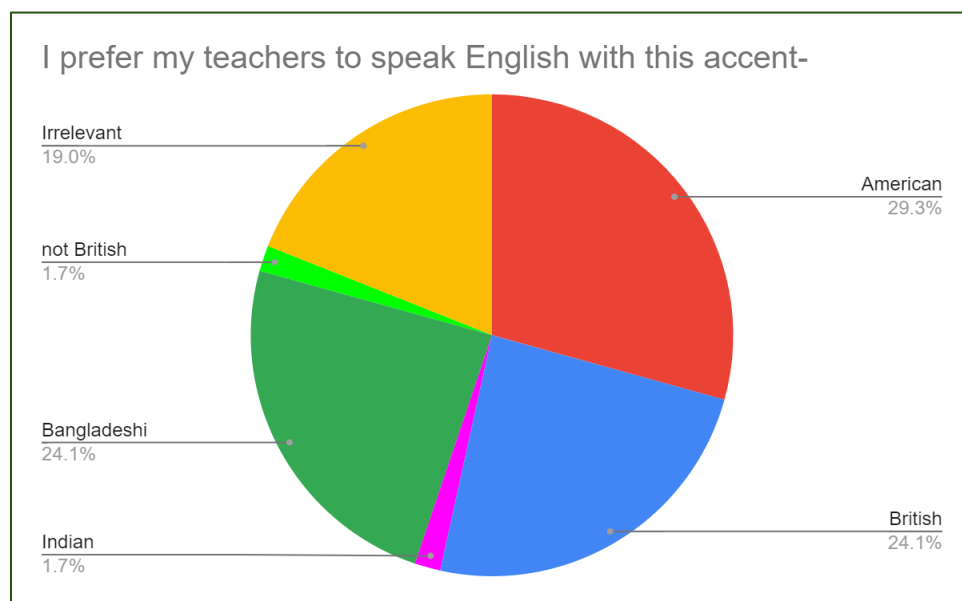


Figure 4.4: Students' Preferred Accents for Teachers

Students' interviews revealed a noteworthy dimension to be investigated. Some students SA1, SA2 and SB3 expressed that a teacher with clear pronunciation and a slight native accent often receives more respect from students. SA2 reflected, "Teachers who sound more 'proper'—especially if they have a British or American accent—are taken more seriously by both students and other teachers-

"I've noticed that teachers with near native accents are viewed in a certain way in the academic community. Even students... we appreciate them, even though we don't always fully understand them."

Interestingly, SA2, although they started with the opinion that native accents are more preferred for teachers to speak, in the middle of the interview changed mind about it-

“Actually, now that I’m thinking about it, I do find it easier to understand those who speak with a Bangladeshi or mixed accent. We had one teacher with a very British accent; only a few of us could properly follow his lectures.”

Similarly, several students advocated for a shift away from native-like accents among teachers. SB1 noted that teachers with better clarity, communication, and fluency, regardless of accents, tend to command more authority and are often regarded as more preferable. SB2 suggested that Bangladeshi teachers should embrace their natural accent and focus on being clear and confident communicators. “We are Bangladeshis after all; we shouldn’t hold our teachers to impossible standards of sounding like they’re from somewhere else,” SB2 argued, reinforcing the notion that clarity and effectiveness communication should take precedence over accent authenticity in academic settings.

Among teachers, TA2, TB2 and TB1 mentioned the issue of “native speakerism” in local and global academia. They noticed that while there have been biases in the case of teachers, which may have been noticed by the students as well, things have changed and are changing much faster. TB1 explained-

“As for teachers, we do not speak in native-like accents. You might find one in 20 teachers who do, but that’s an exception. The rest may have native-like fluency but not the accent or intonation. In this non-native context, they are seen as superior or advanced speakers, like scoring an 8 or above in IELTS. Our priority is mutual intelligibility—when the teacher speaks, students should understand. When students enter their professional settings, they should be able to interact fluently, and that is sufficient. Chinese students are often taught by native speakers, yet they still speak with their own accents. Similarly, Arabic speakers cannot sound like native English speakers. If something is nearly unattainable and unnecessary, why should we put so much emphasis on it? Some still do, out of an old-fashioned colonial mindset. Teachers must be more aware of this than students.”

“I once met a native teacher who had a degree in sports science and only three months of language training. Would he be a better teacher than a local teacher with an MA in TESOL, experience, and a few publications? Of course not. The competent local teacher would be better because they understand the learners and their culture.”

The preferences for teachers' accents among Bangladeshi students reveal a dynamic perspective, where native-like accents are often seen as prestigious but not necessarily more effective for communication, teaching, and learning. While some students appreciate the perceived authority and status associated with native accents, many favor clarity, fluency, and relatability, which they often find in Bangladeshi or mixed accents. Teachers themselves recognize the shifting dynamics in academic settings, where competency, pedagogical expertise and cultural understanding are becoming more valued than simply mimicking a native accent.

4.2.3 British vs. American Accents

The data reveals a clear wrestle between preferences for British and American accents among students. In the survey, 46.4% of students expressed a preference for British accents or combinations that included British accents, while 38.2% favored American accents or combinations with American accents. This close competition appeared distinct across both universities.

At University A, 46.8% of students preferred British accents, compared to 37.5% who leaned toward American accents. The historical and colonial legacy of British English in Bangladesh may have shaped this preference, especially among students who associate the British accent with academic prestige. During interviews, some students emphasized that speaking with a British accent often led to more favorable evaluations in oral exams. The connection to British English seemed almost ingrained, as though students subconsciously linked it to a sense of rigor and excellence. The echoes of colonial history reverberated through these preferences, casting a shadow that still shapes linguistic ideals.

In contrast, at University B, 46.2% of students expressed a preference for British accents, but 61.6% preferred American accents, marking a clear tilt in favor of the latter. This higher percentage might reflect a broader access to American media and a more globalized outlook. Students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds and those with English-medium education appeared more inclined toward American accents, signaling the powerful role of media and cultural exposure in shaping linguistic preferences.

The divide between British and American accents also emerged in student interviews. SA1 favored American English for its familiarity, a feeling nurtured by constant exposure to American movies and television. On the other hand, students like SA3 and SB2 were more drawn to the prestige of the British accent, particularly in formal academic settings. “The British accent is well-accepted all over the world,” SA3 remarked confidently, reflecting a common perception that British English carries more weight in academic and social circles, particularly within the post-colonial context of Bangladesh.

However, some students found the American accent easier to navigate. SB1 speculated, “The American accent might be linguistically closer to our Bangla accent than British is to Bangla. It feels easier on my tongue and is also easier to understand.” This insight suggests that linguistic familiarity plays a significant role in shaping accent preferences, where students perceive certain accents as being more natural or intuitive to their own speech patterns.

The ongoing tension between British and American accents can reflect the lasting influence of colonial history, coupled with the rising prominence of American media. The student responses revealed this tug-of-war between prestige and familiarity, as both accents competed for their place in academic and social domains. As TA1 observed, “Students seek to imitate the American accent these days. It may have some connection with internet connectivity and the growing popularity of American movies and TV shows.” TB1 and TB2, however, did not express strong opinions on this particular debate, focusing more on communication clarity rather than accent specifics.

This divide captures a complex interplay between tradition and modernity, where students continue to navigate the legacies of the past while embracing the cultural shifts of the present. The conflict between these two linguistic spheres—British and American—illustrates how deeply rooted accents are in identity, social mobility, and global connectivity.

4.2.4 Native vs. Bangladeshi and Mixed Accents

Despite the dominance of native English accents, some students expressed a preference for a Bangladeshi or mixed accent. The preference for native-like accents versus Bangladeshi or mixed accents in academic settings is a key area of interest in understanding students' linguistic choices. The survey data reveals a nuanced view: while native accents such as British or American remain

highly desirable, there is a notable acceptance of Bangladeshi and mixed accents among a significant portion of students.

In terms of preference for native-like accents in academic settings, the survey results show that 39.6% of respondents favored native accents (British, American, or both). A further 34.4% preferred a combination of both native and Bangladeshi accents, while 20.7% preferred a purely Bangladeshi accent. This suggests that while native accents are viewed as prestigious and valuable for academic success, there is considerable comfort and pride in using a Bangladeshi or mixed accent. In terms of students' self-reported current accents, 56.9% described their accents as mixed, a figure higher in University A (59.4%) than in University B (53.8%), indicating that students naturally blend influences from native and local accents in their spoken English. Meanwhile, 27.6% overall identified their accent as Bangladeshi, and a small percentage described their accent as British (5.2%) or American (3.4%).

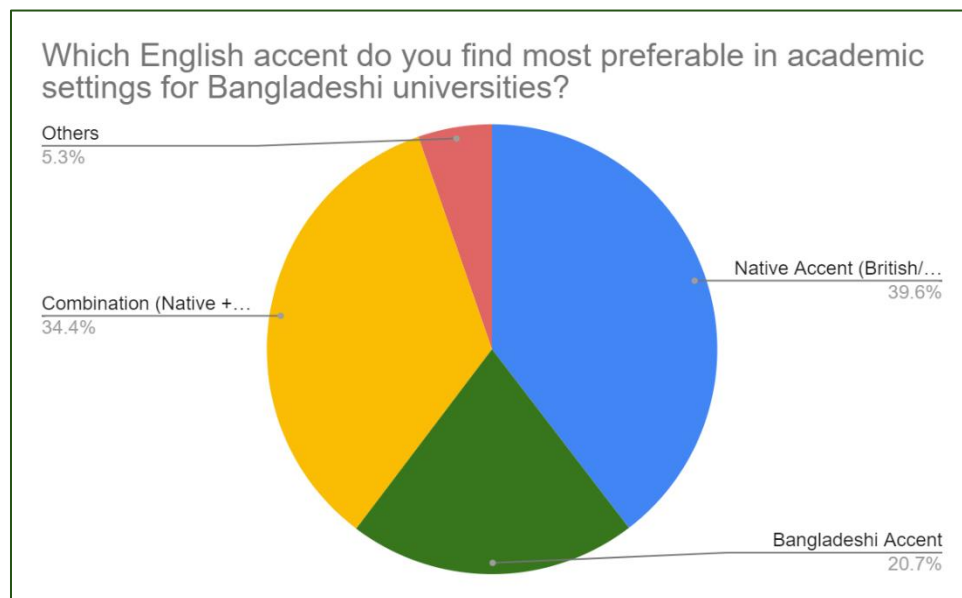


Figure 4.5: Students' Accent Preferences for Academic Settings

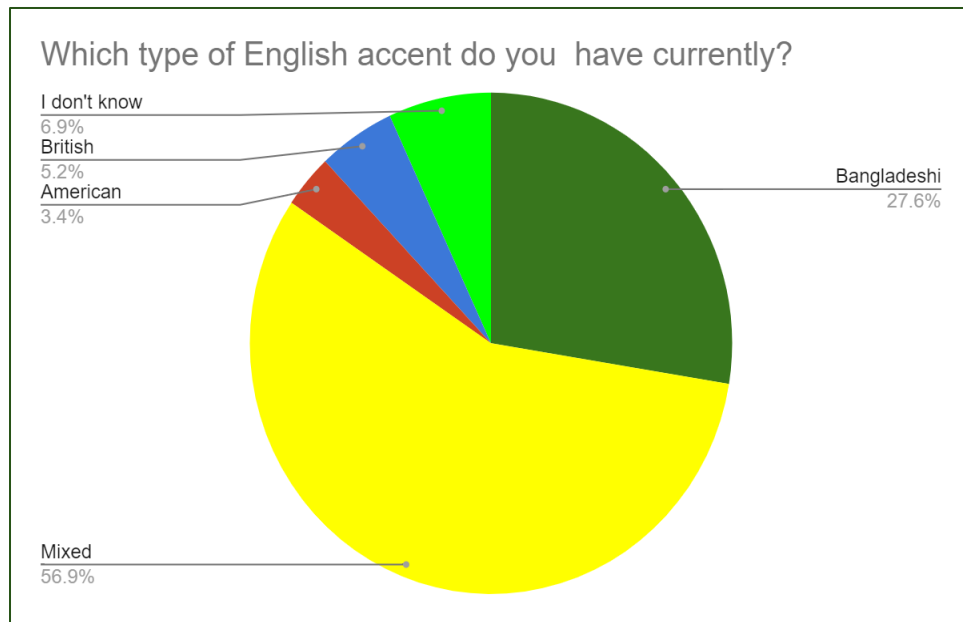


Figure 2.6: Students' Accents

The interviews provide deeper insights into these preferences. SA1, for example, preferred the American accent but believed that accent should not be overemphasized compared to communication skills and comprehension. Similarly, SA2 felt that while a native-like accent may be important in formal settings, using a Bangladeshi accent in more informal or comfortable environments was more natural for them. This illustrates the practicality students attach to accents—where native-like accents may be associated with formality, professionalism, or prestige, and Bangladeshi or mixed accents are seen as more comfortable and accessible for day-to-day interactions.

SB3 commented, “I think there should be a recognized Bangladeshi English accent,” indicating a desire for an authentic expression that still aligns with global expectations. This perspective also reflects a shift toward greater tolerance and acceptance of non-native accents.

Some students suggested that Bangladeshi English can offer a unique form of linguistic authenticity. SB3, for example, praised the way Indians have adapted English while retaining their own cultural nuances, suggesting that Bangladesh could follow a similar path. Teachers such as TB1 also noted this trend, with students increasingly seeking a balance between adapting to global standards and maintaining their national identity.

The teachers provided a balanced view on the issue of native vs. Bangladeshi or mixed accents. TA2 emphasized the importance of students valuing their own linguistic identities, noting that students' unique backgrounds and accents should be considered assets rather than liabilities. According to TA2, the focus should be on achieving clarity and precision in communication, which will better equip students for the global, multilingual environments they will likely face-

“Students need to understand that their unique linguistic backgrounds and accents can be assets rather than liabilities. Embracing one's own identity while striving for clarity and precision in English should be the ultimate goal. Encouraging students to focus on these aspects will better prepare them for the diverse and multilingual environments they are likely to encounter in their careers.”

TB1 brought a practical perspective, citing a BBC survey that revealed non-native English speakers often understand each other better in international business settings than native speakers. He further commented that accents like Nigerian or Egyptian English might be more comprehensible in certain contexts than American or British accents, highlighting the real-world advantages of embracing diverse forms of English. Both perspectives indicate a shift towards valuing non-native accents, moving beyond traditional preferences for native-like accents, and encouraging students to embrace their linguistic diversity while ensuring effective communication.

While native-like accents are still highly regarded, the growing acceptance of Bangladeshi and mixed accents indicates a broader move toward linguistic inclusivity and authenticity. The fact that a large portion of students speak and prefer a mixed accent highlights global influences and reflects something unique about their evolving linguistic identity—it's no longer purely native accent, or even Bangladeshi accent. Students and teachers alike recognize that clear communication and confidence are more important than striving for a perfect native accent. As this shift continues, it may contribute to the development of a more distinct Bangladeshi English that reflects both local and global linguistic influences.

4.3 Perceptions vs. Reality

4.3.1 Native Accent as a Standard Model

One common perception among students is that native-like English accents, particularly British or American, represent the prevailing idea of “standard” English in language learning. For instance, the necessity of adopting a native-like accent, stating that it serves as "a good model for learning English" (SB2), or it is the “original,” “authentic” English (SA3), or a “borrowed” language, and therefore the standard model, is highly contradicted by the teachers’ views.

The teachers challenge the assumption that native-like accents are the optimal model. TB1 notably dismissed the emphasis on native accents as outdated and irrelevant in many practical contexts:

“I have to consider Kachru’s model, the post-modern era, and World Englishes. As a trained, experienced English teacher, I emphasize mutual intelligibility. So, focusing too much on a native-like accent is not important.”

Also, TB1’s expresses very strong stance on the issue of native accents as standard models for learning- “There’s no need. It’s a less suited model for today’s world—I would harshly say, a ‘trash model’, in academic words, less respective, less useful model.”

the evolving understanding of English as a global language, where rigid adherence to native standards has little relevance. TB2 also informs,

“Modern approaches toward language teaching tells that language is not anybody's monopoly. English, being the prime language of wider communication has taken diverse shapes and shades in terms of spoken and written forms. The reason is simple: English across the globe has undergone variation in terms of cultural social and ecological dimension. Thus, there is hardly anything called "standard English". "World Englishes" or "new Englishes" has removed the stereotype notion of "correct accent" of English.”

This perspective challenges students’ perceptions that a native accent is universally beneficial. The reality, as teachers point out, is that English is a versatile, global language, and the emphasis should be on mutual intelligibility, not an aspirational native standard. TB1’s invocation of Kachru’s (1985) model of World Englishes highlights how global English has moved away from being dominated by inner-circle varieties (like British or American) and is increasingly shaped by non-native speakers.

4.3.2 Truth in the Bangladeshi Context

Despite the shift away from native-like accents in global settings, the Bangladeshi context presents a more complex reality. Teachers acknowledge that students' perceptions of native accents, though somewhat misaligned with global trends, do have validity in local academic and social contexts. TA1 noted, "Though accents are not given much credence in internationally acclaimed institutions nowadays, I do feel it still plays some part in our own country." This suggests that while the global reality may prioritize functional communication and diverse accents, in Bangladesh, native-like accents still hold social and academic currency.

In academic evaluations, particularly oral exams or presentations, students with native-like accents may be viewed more favorably, whether consciously or unconsciously. As TA1 pointed out, "Accents can and do play important parts in academic evaluations (made by many teachers), social interactions, and job interviews." This reflects the duality of the situation: while globally, non-native accents are gaining recognition and importance, locally, the preference for native-like accents persists, influencing students' experiences and their desire to master these accents.

Furthermore, this preference is not merely rooted in academic performance. It also carries significant social implications, as students often feel that adopting a native-like accent will afford them greater respect and recognition. SB3's experience of being mocked for not speaking with a "proper" accent further illustrates how the pressure to conform to this standard operates at both academic and social levels.

There appears to be a gap between the views of teachers, who largely prioritize communication and comprehension, and the views of students, who value the subtle benefits of being noticed and appreciated as much as, if not more than, academic results.

4.3.3 Global Realities

Globally, however, the dominance of native accents is diminishing, with non-native English speakers playing an increasingly influential role in shaping the language. TB1 referenced Kachru's Three Circles Model to explain how the "expanding circle"—which includes non-native English speakers in countries like Bangladesh—now represents the majority of English speakers

worldwide. "In the future, non-native English will dominate—it already is," TB1 remarked, emphasizing the shift in how English is used globally.

English is no longer confined to the norms and standards set by native speakers in countries like the U.K. or the U.S. Instead, it is evolving into a truly global language, with multiple varieties and accents gaining legitimacy. TB1 further noted, "We should not glorify the native way of speaking. If, as teachers, we do so unnecessarily, we are still nurturing a colonial mindset." This powerful statement reflects the need to move beyond the colonial legacy that has long equated British or American English with linguistic superiority. TA1 AND TA2 also assert that in today's world, students are more likely to encounter multilingual environments in future careers; they need to be ready for that.

The concept of "World Englishes" emerges as a critical framework for understanding the current state of global English. TB1 highlighted how, in a global village, speakers must be prepared to engage with English in its many forms: "If I only listen to British or American English, I might not be able to comprehend a Chinese speaker of English." This practical consideration drives home the importance of expanding students' exposure to diverse accents and varieties of English, as this will better equip them for international communication, whether in business, academia, or other fields.

4.3.4 Native-like Accent and Academic Accomplishments

In Bangladeshi academic settings, there is still a perceived advantage for students who can speak with a native-like accent. TA2 observed, "Students who speak with native-like accents do sometimes seem to perform better in spoken exams, but that is more about their confidence and fluency than the accent itself." This points to a complex relationship between accent and language skills, where students with native-like accents may project greater fluency and confidence, which in turn leads to higher evaluations.

However, TB1's observation also suggests that the accent itself is not necessarily the deciding factor—rather, it is the broader set of skills that accompany it, such as ease of communication, comfort in speaking, and fluency. Similarly, TA2 emphasized that "effective communication and clarity are far more crucial than sounding like a native speaker." This reinforces the idea that

students may be overestimating the importance of accent in their academic success, and that teachers value clarity, confidence, and mutual understanding above the ability to mimic native speech patterns.

Moreover, TB2 critiqued the overemphasis on accent in academic settings, arguing that it often detracts from other essential language skills: “A strong focus on accent can sometimes overshadow critical language skills such as writing, critical thinking, and cultural literacy.” TA2 also suggests, “an overemphasis on accent can detract from other important aspects of language learning, contribute to anxiety, and stress, and negatively affect students' academic and social experiences. It is crucial to foster an environment where students are encouraged to value clarity, confidence, and their unique linguistic backgrounds, helping them to thrive both academically and personally.” This aligns with the idea that students, in their pursuit of a native-like accent, may be neglecting more fundamental language competencies that are crucial for success in both academic and professional environments.

4.3.5 What really matters?

The teachers agree that effective language skills, communication, confidence, and clarity are the most important markers of proficiency in English. While students like SB2 may continue to hold native-like accents in high regard, teachers such as TA2 and TB1 encourage a broader focus on intelligibility and the ability to engage with diverse English-speaking communities. TA2 emphasized, “A comprehensible and confident command of English, regardless of accent, often holds more value in both academic and professional contexts.”

This suggests that students should be focusing on building a more holistic set of language skills—skills that will allow them to navigate a multilingual, multicultural world where English is spoken with a variety of accents. By embracing their own linguistic identity and working on clarity, fluency, and effective communication, students will be better equipped for success in diverse contexts, whether local or global. Ultimately, the goal should be to empower students to embrace their unique linguistic identities while developing the skills necessary for global communication. By aligning students' perceptions with the realities of English as a global language, educators can help them succeed in a world where non-native accents are not only accepted but celebrated.

Teachers suggest that students should be focusing on building a more holistic set of language skills—skills that will allow them to navigate a multilingual, multicultural world where English is spoken with a variety of accents. By embracing their own linguistic identity and working on clarity, fluency, and effective communication, students will be better equipped for success in diverse contexts, whether local or global. TB1 suggests, “Language teaching today isn’t just about grammar and communication—it’s about raising awareness of global issues. A language teacher must be aware of topics like climate change, world events, and ICT, as these are important in today’s world. You can’t teach language or literature in isolation.”

The gap between students’ perceptions and the broader global reality highlights the need for a more nuanced approach to teaching English in Bangladesh. While students may continue to strive for native-like accents, teachers like TB1 and TA2 advocate for a shift in focus toward mutual intelligibility and effective communication. The pursuit of a native accent, though perceived as valuable by students, may not align with global realities.

4.4 Influencing Factors on Perceptions and Preferences

4.4.1 Media, Internet, and Global Exposure

Easy access to the internet and the impact of globalization has significantly shaped students’ perceptions and preferences regarding native-like English accents. One of the most frequently mentioned factors across the interviews was the role of the internet. The widespread availability of social media, digital platforms, movies, TV shows, YouTube, and online content has made various languages and accents accessible to students worldwide, including in Bangladesh. While this exposure offers learning opportunities, it also shapes students’ expectations and ideals about language use, influencing how they perceive their own accents in comparison to others. This influence manifests both positively, by fostering a broader appreciation for diverse forms of English, and negatively, by reinforcing capitalist and hegemonic agendas that result in accent-based hierarchies in social and academic settings.

Students frequently referenced the internet and social media as major sources shaping their preferences. SA1, for instance, pointed out that constant exposure to American movies and TV shows has made the American accent more familiar and preferable, a sentiment echoed by many

others. Similarly, SA3 highlighted how British English, often encountered in films and formal settings, is perceived as prestigious and desirable, associating it with academic excellence. However, this exposure can also lead to a sense of inadequacy, as SA2 experienced when they initially struggled to imitate British accents due to their perceived formality. TB1 noted that some individuals on the internet capitalize on the prestige of native accents, often promoting them under the guise of teaching pronunciation-

SB3 admitted that they frequently use these resources to improve their pronunciation and align themselves with native-like speech.

At the same time, internet exposure has broadened some students' perspectives, helping them become familiar with a variety of accents. One student shared, "Initially, I found different accents dry and harsh, and I didn't think much about them. But then, after watching Japanese, Korean, and African movies, I began to appreciate accent differences." The student also mentioned how a Bollywood actor' mimicry of British accents sparked an interest in exploring other accents, eventually leading to exploring and developing a preference for Spanish and Middle Eastern English accents. Similarly, SB3 advocated for a recognized Bangladeshi English accent, drawing inspiration from India's adaptation of English. SA2 also described a positive experience, recalling a video of an Indian woman who stressed that language should be a natural medium of expression, not constrained by native accents.

Teachers also observed the role of media and the internet in shaping students' views on accents. TA1 noted the growing popularity of American media content, which has contributed to a preference for American accents among students, despite the colonial legacy that associates British accents with formality and prestige. TB1 highlighted the positive impact of digital exposure, observing that students are increasingly aware of global varieties of English, which can foster an appreciation for accent diversity. TA2 emphasized that the omnipresence of global media—movies, TV shows, and online content featuring American or British accents—often leads students to associate these accents with prestige, fluency, and correctness. However, TB1 also pointed out that social media and globalization encourage students to engage with different linguistic identities, especially as students travel, study abroad, and communicate with people from different countries through both academic endeavors and social platforms. This exposure helps them engage

with diverse accents and cultures, which in turn helps them navigate between global expectations and local realities.

The influence of media and internet exposure on students' accent preferences can thus be seen as a double-edged sword. On one hand, it perpetuates the dominance of native accents, creating pressure to conform to these standards and potentially undermining students' confidence in their own accents. On the other hand, the vast variety of Englishes available online has expanded students' horizons, encouraging them to see non-native accents, including Bangladeshi English, as legitimate and valuable forms of communication. This reflects a broader tension between traditional notions of prestige attached to native accents and the growing recognition of linguistic diversity, particularly in a globalized, multicultural world.

Media and internet exposure play a complex role in shaping students' perceptions and preferences regarding native-like English accents. While they reinforce the status and desirability of British and American accents, they also provide a platform for exploring and appreciating the diversity of global Englishes. This dual influence highlights an important shift: students are not only aspiring toward native-like accents but are also beginning to embrace their own linguistic identities, striking a balance between global norms and local authenticity.

4.4.2 Colonial Legacy: Past, Present, and Future

The colonial legacy of British rule in Bangladesh has profoundly shaped the country's linguistic preferences, particularly the high regard for British English accents. Historically, the British established English as the language of administration and education, creating an elite class that associated British English with power, intelligence, and social status. This historical influence has persisted into the present day, affecting how both students and educators perceive native-like English accents.

In the present, these colonial mindsets continue to manifest in academic and social settings. Many students still view British English as the standard for educated speech and professional success. As TA2 emphasized, "In countries like Bangladesh, where English has a colonial history, the British accent, in particular, might carry a legacy of authority and correctness. This historical context can lead to a preference for a British accent as a mark of educated speech." Students like

SA3 observe that "Those students who speak with a British accent, even if their grammar isn't perfect, are often seen as good speakers or competent people." Such perceptions demonstrate how the colonial past continues to influence contemporary attitudes, reinforcing accent-based hierarchies. Colonial psychology may continue to live on as an apparently innocent preference- "I like the British accent because it sounds aesthetic and sophisticated, kind of royal" (SA2). TB1 points to the long-lasting colonial influence on the socio-cultural fabric of Bangladesh. –

"Students who believe native accents are beneficial grow up with superficial, often incorrect notions imposed by parents. Another reason could be that native accents are seen as having a higher 'market value,' just like English-medium schools are considered superior. This notion is outdated and stems from a colonial mindset."

TB1 also adds that "Unduly glorifying accents and intonations persist in our country, even at the university level. Some people cherish this in their hearts, a carryover from the colonial mindset." Additionally, as mentioned in 4.4.1, by advertising and selling the image of superior status on the internet by teaching native accents, some continue to use these colonial aspirations for monetary gain. SB3 recognized this colonial influence, quoting one of his/her teachers- "We are more British than the British themselves. They don't care about accents, but why do we think their accent is better or proper?" “

Looking toward the future, the dominance of British English may face challenges due to shifting global dynamics and the increasing influence of American English through media and the internet. The rise of American cultural exports—movies, TV shows, and online content—has made the American accent more familiar to younger generations. TA1 noted that the growing popularity of American media content was contributing to a preference for American accents among students, despite the colonial legacy that associates British accents with formality and prestige.

This suggests that while British English has historically been associated with prestige due to colonial ties, American English may increasingly shape accent preferences because of its global cultural impact.

Moreover, there's a growing shift toward embracing linguistically diverse identities and challenging the remnants of colonial mindset and idea of “standard English” altogether, as TB2 remarks-

“Modern approaches toward language teaching tells that language is not anybody's monopoly. English, being the prime language of wider communication has taken diverse shapes and shades in terms of spoken and written forms. The reason is simple: English across the globe has undergone variation in terms of cultural, social, and ecological dimension. Thus, there is hardly anything called "standard English". "World Englishes" or "new Englishes" has removed the stereotypical notion of "correct accent" of English.”

Teachers like TB1 advocate for reducing the undue emphasis on native accents, stating, "This notion is outdated and stems from a colonial mindset... Teachers need to convince students that it is unnecessary." Students such as SB3 express a desire for a recognized Bangladeshi English accent, saying, "We have enough exposure to English to create our own version of it, and it would help if people respected our way of speaking as part of who we are." This reflects a shift toward valuing linguistic diversity and promoting a post-colonial identity that integrates local culture with global communication.

The colonial legacy has historically elevated British English as the prestigious standard in Bangladesh, current trends indicate a potential shift. The continued influence of colonial-era perceptions coexists with increasing exposure to a global variety of Englishes and a growing appreciation for all accents. The future may see a more balanced linguistic landscape; this evolution will depend on how educational institutions, media, and societal attitudes adapt to these changing dynamics.

4.4.3 Socioeconomic, Regional, and Educational Backgrounds

The survey data collected on students' accent preferences in academic settings reveals significant insights into the relationship between socioeconomic class, regional background, educational medium, and the choice of preferred English accents. By considering these findings between University A (public) and University B (private), a nuanced understanding surfaces, of how contextual factors may influence preferences for native-like accents (British, American, or a combination) emerges.

Accent Preferences Across Socioeconomic and Educational Backgrounds

According to the survey, 39.6% of respondents across both universities preferred native accents (British, American, or both), while 20.7% favored a Bangladeshi accent, and 34.4% showed preference for a combination of Bangladeshi and native accents. When breaking this down by university, a noticeable difference is seen in the preference patterns:

- At University A (public), 53.1% of students preferred native accents (British, American, or both), while 12.5% favored the Bangladeshi accent, and 25% opted for a combination.
- At University B (private), fewer students preferred native accents overall (23.1%), while 30.8% favored the Bangladeshi accent, and 46.2% preferred a combination.

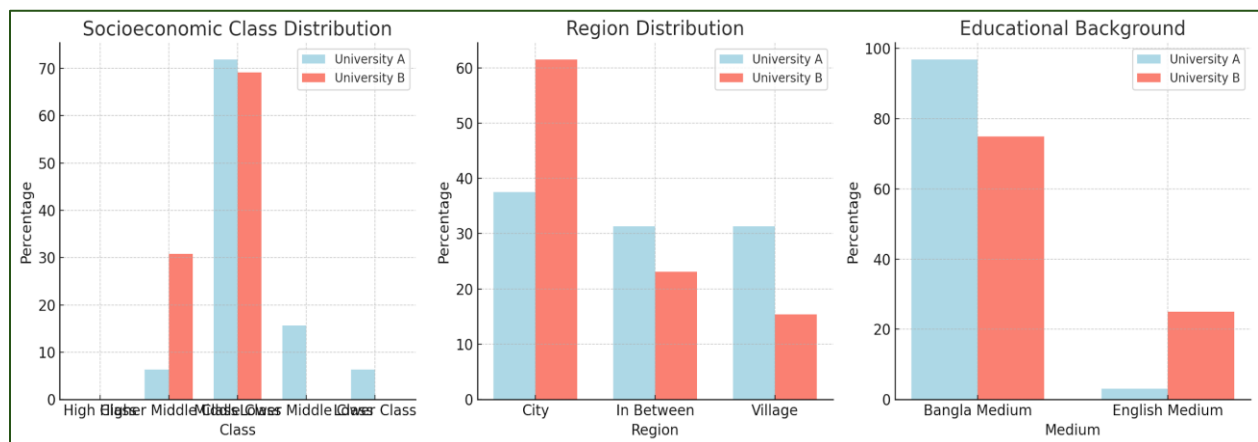


Figure 4.7: Students' Socioeconomic, Regional, and Educational Backgrounds

The preference for native-like accents in University A could be linked to the higher proportion of students from middle and lower-middle-class backgrounds, where mastery of a native-like accent might be seen as a path to upward mobility. For these students, particularly those from rural and semi-urban regions (62.6%), native accents may symbolize prestige and offer opportunities to bridge the perceived gap between their social class and the advantages afforded by a private education system. As seen in the interview data, students often associate native accents with better treatment from teachers and classmates, which could explain why more students from University A prefer native-like accents.

In contrast, students at University B are more inclined towards a combination of Bangladeshi and native accents. With 30.8% coming from the higher middle class and a larger percentage from urban areas (61.5%), these students may feel less pressure to adopt a purely native-like accent.

Their relatively privileged backgrounds might afford them greater confidence in maintaining elements of their Bangladeshi identity while still gaining access to the global advantages that come with proficiency in native English accents.

Educational Backgrounds and Accent Preferences

A clear divide also emerges in accent preferences based on students' educational backgrounds. At University A, 96.9% of students come from Bangla medium schools, while only 3.1% have an English-medium background. In contrast, at University B, 75% of students are from Bangla medium schools, and 25% have an English-medium background. This distinction is significant when analyzing their accent preferences.

Students from University A, largely educated in Bangla medium, may see native accents as a marker of academic achievement and professional success, something they aspire to acquire, especially as they perceive speaking with native-like pronunciation as a sign of intelligence or competence. The interviews reflect this, with students from University A reporting that native accents often lead to higher social status and better academic evaluations.

Meanwhile, University B students, with more exposure to English-medium education, may feel less pressure to conform to a singular native accent. Their preference for a combination of Bangladeshi and native accents suggests a more fluid approach, where they can blend their national identity with global linguistic standards, allowing for greater flexibility in both academic and professional settings.

The survey data suggests that accent preferences in academic settings are deeply influenced by the students' backgrounds. The higher preference for native-like accents among students at University A reflects the idea that for those from middle or lower socioeconomic classes, mastering these accents may provide them with a sense of legitimacy and an edge in both academic and social environments. In contrast, students at University B, with more diverse educational backgrounds and higher socioeconomic standing, exhibit a more blended approach, valuing both their Bangladeshi identity and the global advantages that native-like accents can offer.

This pattern points to a broader issue of social mobility and linguistic hierarchy in Bangladesh, where native-like English accents are often equated with power, prestige, and intelligence. However, the data also shows that students are aware of the limitations and biases this presents,

with many expressing a desire for a more inclusive academic environment where a variety of accents are valued equally. This calls for educational institutions to reconsider their approach to English language teaching, moving towards a more communicative and inclusive framework that recognizes the legitimacy of Bangladeshi English alongside global English varieties.

In summary, the data from both universities demonstrates how social and educational backgrounds play a pivotal role in shaping students' accent preferences. These preferences are not only a reflection of personal choices but are deeply embedded in larger socio-political structures, signaling the need for critical engagement with how accents are perceived and valued in academic settings.

Students' educational experiences and their aspirations for upward social mobility are also major factors influencing their attitudes toward accents. For some students, adopting a native-like accent is seen as a pathway to greater academic success and better job opportunities. SB3, for instance, emphasized the role of accent in professional advancement: "Having a good accent will help in getting better opportunities, especially in international job markets."

In contrast, other students like SA1, who study in public universities, tend to place less emphasis on accent, focusing instead on clarity and comprehension. SA1 remarked, "In my experience, teachers care more about what you know than how you sound, so the accent is not such a big issue."

Teachers have noticed this divide as well. TA1 observed that students from private universities, where there is greater exposure to international schooling, are more likely to adopt American or British accents, whereas students from public universities show more acceptance toward local or mixed accents. This difference in attitudes reflects the role of social class and access to global networks in shaping students' preferences for native-like accents. TB1 identified an embedded flaw in this country's general English language teaching tradition-, "In our country, the way grammar was taught was flawed. We learned neither grammar nor language. If we had focused on vocabulary instead, it would have been more beneficial. If a student can articulate themselves well without obsessing over native accents, it will strengthen their own identity. "

There is a correlation between students' socioeconomic, regional, and educational backgrounds and their preferences for English accents. While there is significant overlap between the backgrounds of students from the two universities, the data suggests that students from less

privileged backgrounds are more likely to view native-like accents as symbols of prestige and a means of achieving upward mobility, both socially and academically, as TA2 informs-

“In peripheral areas, where opportunities might be limited, students may view acquiring a native-like accent as a tool for social mobility. Speaking English fluently and with a native-like accent can be seen as a pathway to better education, employment, and social standing within academic settings, peer pressure and the desire to fit in with what is perceived as the ‘standard’ can drive students to prefer and strive for native-like accents.”

On the other hand, students from more affluent backgrounds with exposure to English-medium/international education, are more inclined to embrace a mix of native and Bangladeshi accents, reflecting confidence in their own linguistic identity while still valuing global English standards. At the same time, there is an increasing recognition of the need for a more inclusive academic environment that appreciates diverse accents, highlighting the importance of balancing global linguistic norms with local identities in education.

4.4.4 Academic Environment

In academic environment, the pressure to adopt native-like English accents stems from both influence of teachers and peer dynamics.

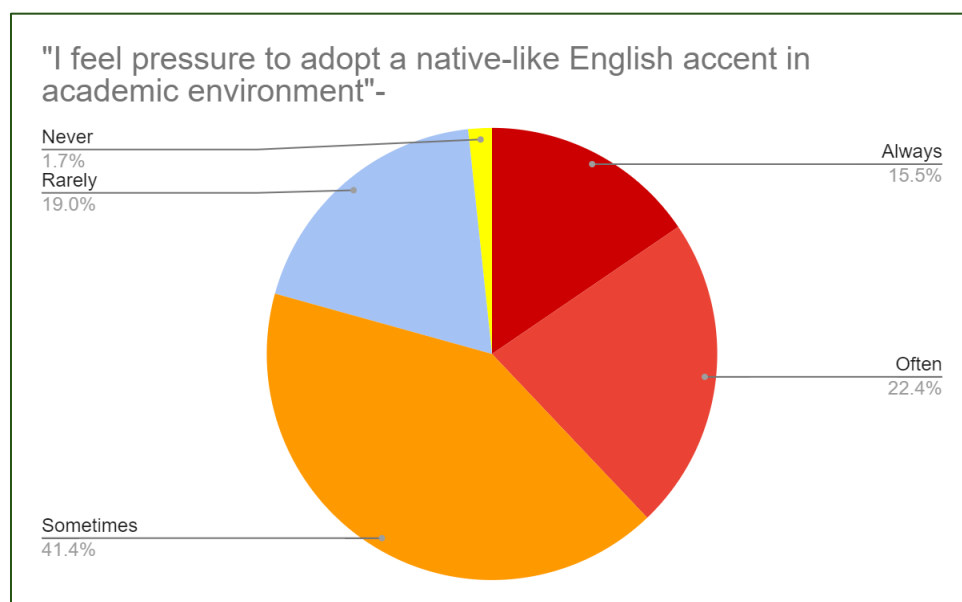


Figure 4.8: Pressure on Students in Academic Environment

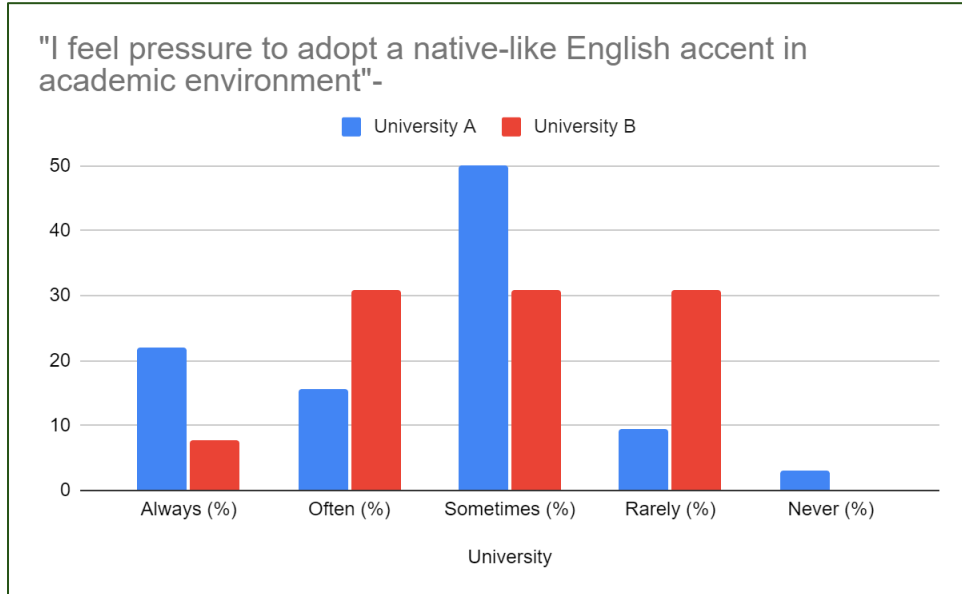


Figure 4.9: Pressure on Students at University A and University B

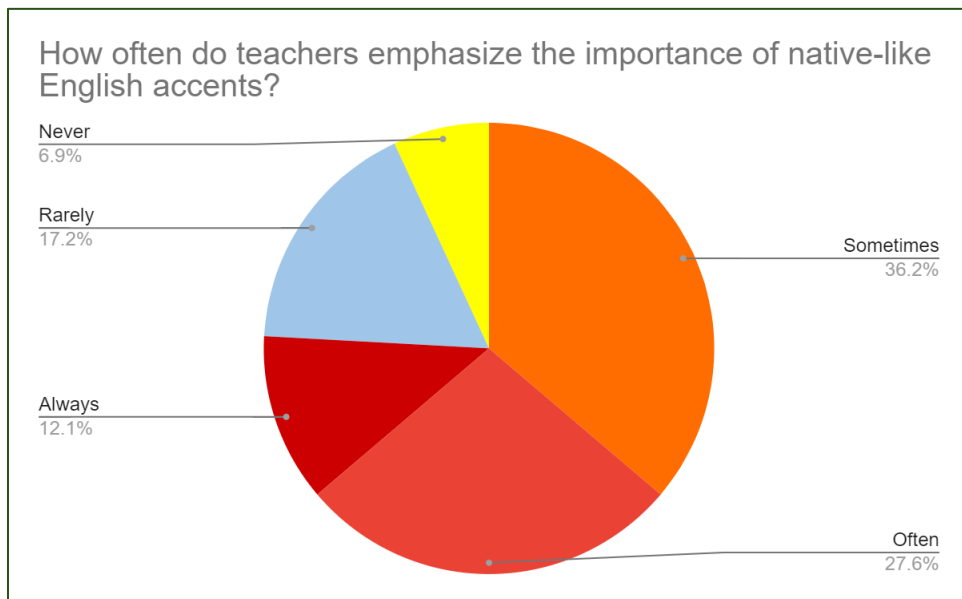


Figure 4.10: Teachers' Emphasis on NLEAs

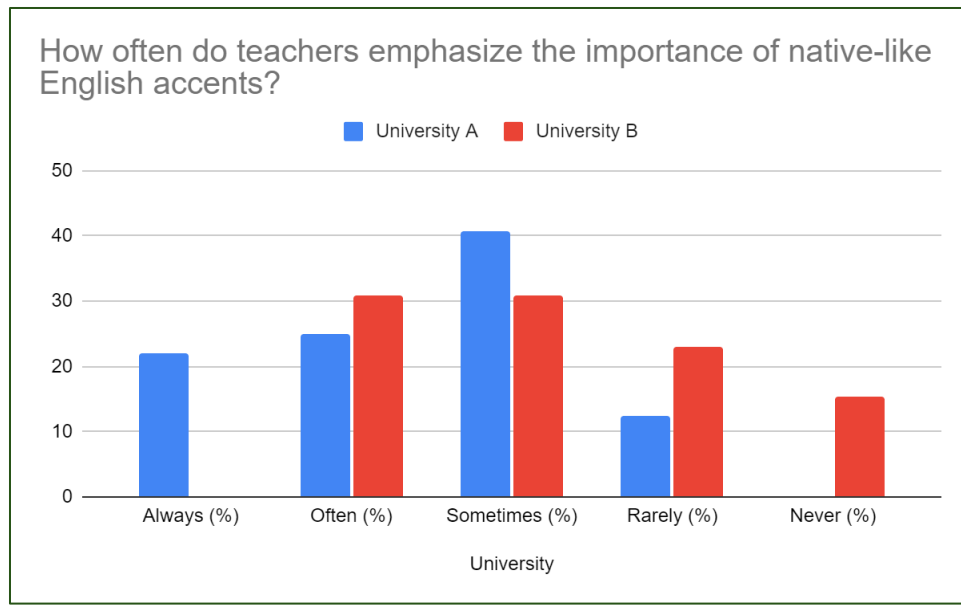


Figure 4.11: Teachers' Emphasis on NLEAs at University A and University B

The academic environment plays a significant role in shaping students' perceptions of native-like English accents (NLEAs) and the pressure they experience in adopting them. From the survey data, it is evident that a considerable number of students feel compelled to conform to certain linguistic standards set within their academic institutions. For example, 15.5% of students reported always feeling pressure to adopt a native-like English accent, while 22.4% felt this pressure often, and 41.4% sometimes. A comparison between universities reveals differences, with University A students feeling more pressure than those at University B. Specifically, 21.9% of students at University A said they always feel pressure, compared to 7.7% of students at University B. This indicates that the academic environment at public universities may place a stronger emphasis on linguistic conformity than private universities.

The expectation for students to conform to native-like English accents also extends to how teachers emphasize these standards. According to the survey, 12.1% of students reported that their teachers always emphasize the importance of native-like English accents, with an additional 27.6% saying that this emphasis occurs often. Interestingly, 36.2% reported that teachers sometimes emphasize it, and 17.2% said it was rarely a focus. In comparing universities, University A students indicated a stronger emphasis from teachers (21.9% said always, and 25% said often), while at University B, no students reported that teachers always emphasized native-like accents, and only 30.8% said

it was often mentioned. This reflects a potential institutional difference in how language proficiency is perceived and valued across educational settings.

Students from university A appear to face more pressure to adopt native-like English accents, likely reflecting broader institutional values that prioritize traditional language standards. This contrasts with the more flexible approach observed at university B, where there is somewhat less pressure and a greater acceptance of diverse English pronunciations.

From the interview data, both students and teachers acknowledged this pressure in diverse ways. Peer pressure within the academic environment also plays a significant role in shaping students' accent preferences. Several students mentioned experiencing mockery or embarrassment for not remaining close to native-like accent, which reinforces the perception that native accents are superior. SA3 noted,

"During a presentation I felt that a few classmates, and even a couple of teachers, were slightly making fun of how I was speaking. I felt embarrassed. Friends making fun of me doesn't bother me, but I did not expect it from teachers. However, most teachers are not like that."

SA2 and SB2 both confessed that they themselves make fun of their classmates when their regional accents manifest in their English language, although they claimed that their intentions were innocent.

SB2 also shared an observation that captures an unsettling feeling among the students-

"I think teachers don't emphasize native accents, but I've noticed they do have an unconscious preference for native-like accents or good pronunciation. For example, students from English medium backgrounds tend to receive extra appreciation from teachers—a noticeable trend. In big programs or seminars, most of the selected speakers tend to have a native-like accent. This is just my observation, and I'm not sure if I'd get in trouble for saying it, ha-ha(laughing), but it does seem like people prefer 'posh' English."

This pressure to conform to native-like standards often leads to students feeling self-conscious about their natural accents, particularly in formal settings. SA2 spoke about the discomfort of presenting in their natural accent, even though they feel more comfortable using it in informal conversations. Teachers like TB2 also commented on how social dynamics can impact students'

confidence, with some students feeling that their academic performance is judged based on their accent rather than the content of their speech. TA1 stated,

“Occasionally, I have found some students feel shy or even afraid to voice their opinions during class in English. Most of these cases turn out to be accent related. People often feel “their English” (accent) is not good enough and therefore would be ridiculed.”

TB1 suggested that teachers have highly prominent role –

“Choosing or adapting teaching materials thoughtfully is the teacher’s responsibility. A language teacher today is pedagogically informed, academically sound, and globally aware. Through a teacher's actions and choices, students will absorb these values more effectively.”

Despite the differing institutional cultures, both public and private university students face a common underlying pressure to conform to native-like English accents. This shared experience indicates that while the emphasis may be more pronounced in public universities, the broader societal and academic expectations surrounding English proficiency and accents persist across the board. It highlights that even in settings where the focus on native-like pronunciation is less explicit, students still feel its influence, reflecting deep-rooted perceptions of linguistic standards and the broader impact of globalized norms of communication.

4.4.5 Cultural Identity and Push for Authenticity

The relationship between accent and cultural identity is multidimensional. Participants highlighted that accents serve not only as markers of linguistic ability but also as reflections of personal and cultural backgrounds. TA1 emphasized this by comparing the experience of Indian speakers who abandon their native accents for British ones, noting that such efforts often lead to a subconscious loss of identity. This observation reflects a broader societal issue: the pressure to conform to perceived standards of "superiority" associated with British culture persists, indicating a failure to challenge colonial legacies that uphold such biases.

Students articulated the internal struggles they face when trying to navigate these expectations. SA2 shared, “When I try to speak with a native accent, I sometimes feel a bit of an identity crisis, as if I’m not being myself. Speaking in a Bangladeshi accent feels more honest.” This sentiment

was echoed by SB2, who stated, “There’s a constant conflict between my English accent and my cultural identity.” These reflections illustrate that the pursuit of native-like accents often leads to identity-related conflicts, where students grapple with maintaining their authenticity while seeking acceptance in academic and professional settings.

The importance of cultural identity was further emphasized by TB2, who posited that Bangla is essential for expressing one's cultural heritage. He asserted that while being bilingual may enhance communication skills, it does not foster the same sense of national pride as one's mother tongue does. This perspective resonates with many Bangladeshi students, who might not fully grasp the implications of these dynamics but still display an inclination towards their native language in everyday communication.

Despite these tensions, there exists a strong drive among students to articulate themselves effectively in English. TB1 noted that students should focus on clarity and effective communication rather than striving for native accents. He argued that such an approach can enhance their identity rather than detract from it. The notion that students can present themselves authentically while mastering a global language emphasizes the potential for a harmonious balance between cultural identity and linguistic proficiency.

TA2 shared a personal anecdote about his experiences in the USA, where his Bangladeshi accent was recognized, affirming the idea that accents are significant markers of cultural identity. This reflects a broader truth for Bangladeshi students, who may find themselves caught between the desire to meet global standards of English and the need to retain their cultural roots. The challenge lies in reconciling these dual identities, ensuring that students can communicate effectively without losing sight of their heritage.

While academic and societal biases may favor aspiring for native-like accents, students express a desire for authenticity that can lead to internal conflicts. The acknowledgment of Bangladeshi English as a valid form of expression is crucial for retaining a sense of belonging and confidence. A shift in both educational practices and societal attitudes is necessary to create an environment where students can embrace their cultural identities through their natural accents while still achieving proficiency in English. Promoting clarity, communication, comprehension, and cultural authenticity will enable students to navigate global contexts without compromising their sense of self.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The prominence of native accents reflects deeply rooted historical, cultural, and media influences, as well as the continuing perception that native-like accents convey greater social status, competence, social mobility and employability. There is a growing awareness among students of the shifting global linguistic landscape. While a significant portion of students in Bangladeshi universities possess certain reverence towards native and native-like English accents, some students, particularly those exposed to diverse forms of English through media and international communication, express a desire to move away from the overemphasis on native-like accents, finding comfort in being true and honest their cultural and linguistic identity, aspiring for the recognition of Bangladeshi English as an authentic variety of English. This is a long slow walk journey- a subtle, continuous, significant shift in perceptions, where fluency, comprehension, communication effectiveness is beginning to be preferred over adherence to native accent norms.

While native-like accents traditionally served multidimensional purposes, both positive and negative, there is recognition in teachers of the practical challenges students face trying to achieve these unrealistic and unnecessary standards. Teachers highlighted the need for a balanced, holistic, inclusive approach, where clarity and communication skills are prioritized without imposing unrealistic expectations of native-like proficiency. This aligns with the growing acceptance of World Englishes, which value linguistic diversity over a singular 'correct' form of English.

5.1 Limitations of the Study

Despite careful planning and execution, this research may encounter certain limitations. Firstly, the sample size may be relatively small due to time and resource constraints, potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings. However, it is important to note that this research does not intend to make generalized inferences. Due to its focus on qualitative dimension and the limited sample size, conclusions will be more interpretive rather than generalizable, aiming to provide in-depth insights rather than broad generalizations. Secondly, the research's focus on a limited number of universities, students and teachers in Bangladesh may limit the applicability of the findings to other contexts or populations. Efforts will be made to mitigate any biases through reflexivity and

transparency in reporting. Lastly, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce social desirability bias, where participants may provide responses that they perceive as socially acceptable rather than their true opinions or experiences.

5.2 Educational Implications and Recommendations

This section provides a zest of the educational implications drawn from the perspectives of the students and teachers who participated in this study.

Rethinking Language Pedagogy

- Emphasize clarity and effective communication over the pursuit of native-like accents.
- Encourage students to explore language without pressure to conform to accent standards.
- Use initiatives, such as a project to teach pronunciation in a Bangladeshi style, to promote fluency and linguistic identity.
- Focus on vocabulary development rather than traditional grammar-focused methods, as this approach may better help students articulate themselves.

Addressing Implicit Biases

- Acknowledge the bias toward native accents and openly discuss this in classes, seminars, and public forums, allowing teachers and stakeholders to overcome their subconscious bias.
- Educate society about accent bias starting from primary, secondary, and higher secondary educational levels.
- Integrate local stakeholders' opinions (e.g., students, businesspeople, freelancers) to gain a wider perspective on addressing and challenging bias.

Identity and Linguistic Confidence

- Teachers should focus on helping students see their unique linguistic identity as an asset, emphasizing that mastering English is not about mimicking native speakers but becoming confident communicators in their own right.

- Teachers should encourage students to focus on clear communication and embrace their linguistic diversity, rather than striving for native-like accents.
- Encourage students to develop their own identity through their communication skills without obsessing over achieving a native-like accent. Examples like Dr. Yunus show that one can be a world citizen without speaking with a native accent.

Teacher Training and Curriculum Development

- Teachers need to be more competent in designing materials, selecting diverse sources, and being pedagogically informed to ensure the curriculum does not reinforce bias toward native accents.
- Focus on developing self-sufficient local institutions, including teacher training, which reduces reliance on Western educational models.
- Teachers must be aware of accent bias, refrain from constant corrections, and promote student autonomy, allowing students to learn on their own terms rather than focusing on mimicking native accents.

Integration of World Englishes, Post-colonial Pedagogy, Critical Pedagogy

- Systematically integrate concepts like World Englishes, Post-colonial Pedagogy, and Critical Pedagogy into the curriculum for a deeper understanding.
- Instead of creating awareness for the sake of awareness, demonstrate respect and inclusion of linguistic diversity in English-speaking classes by selecting diverse materials (e.g., Chinese English, Indian English, Arabic English) to demonstrate the legitimacy of multiple English varieties.
- Through exposure to diverse English accents and fostering critical thinking, educators can help students engage with global discussions on language diversity and the legacies of colonialism in education.
- Incorporating critical pedagogy and emphasizing mutual intelligibility among different English accents can help enhance students' communication skills across cultural and linguistic boundaries.

5.3 Suggestions for Future Research

This research contributes to the growing body of literature on language attitudes in post-colonial settings by providing an in-depth analysis of the preferences and perceptions of native-like English accents among Bangladeshi university students. It also adds to the understanding of how global media, historical legacies, and academic environments influence language perceptions in educational settings.

Further research can do the following.

- a) Investigation of how perceptions of native-like English accents differ across other regions or countries, particularly in South Asia, to compare the influence of colonial history, media exposure, and educational systems.
- b) Conducting longitudinal research to track how student perceptions and preferences regarding native-like accents evolve over time, particularly after graduation and entering the workforce.
- c) Exploring how increasing recognition of World Englishes influences students' attitudes toward native-like accents and whether this leads to a more inclusive view of accents in professional and academic settings.
- d) Extend the research to examine how perceptions of native-like accents impact job prospects, workplace communication, and social mobility among graduates in Bangladesh.
- e) Analyzing the direct relationship between teachers' accents and students' learning outcomes, including confidence, comprehension, and participation in the classroom.
- f) Investigate the role of cultural identity and linguistic authenticity in shaping students' views on native-like accents, particularly in relation to preserving their own accents while navigating global English standards.
- g) Studying the specific impact of global media (e.g., movies, TV shows, YouTube) on students' accent preferences and whether it leads to a stronger inclination toward certain native-like accents over others.
- h) Exploring potential bias in academic evaluations where students with native-like accents may be perceived as more competent, leading to unequal grading or opportunities.

- i) Investigate the effectiveness of integrating more diverse accents (including non-native Englishes) in language learning curricula to reduce bias and broaden students' exposure to global English varieties.
- j) Study the emotional and psychological consequences of accent-related discrimination or bias, particularly how it affects students' linguistic confidence and identity formation.

References

- Al-Quaderi, G. G., & Al Mahmud, A. (2010). English literature in English medium schools in Bangladesh: The question of post-colonial pedagogy. *Asiatic: IIUM Journal of English Language and Literature*, 4(2), 121-154.
- Bolton, K., & Jenks, C. (2022). World Englishes and English for specific purposes (ESP). *World Englishes*, 41(4), 495-511.
- Boonsuk, Y., & Fang, F. (2022). Perennial language learners or competent language users: An investigation of international Students' attitudes towards their own and native English accents. *RELC Journal*, 53(1), 40-55.
- Buckingham, L. (2014). Attitudes to English teachers' accents in the Gulf. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 24(1), 50-73.
- Buckingham, L. (2015). Recognizing English accents in the community: Omani students' accent preferences and perceptions of nativeness. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 36(2), 182-197.
- Chowdhury, M. M. H. (2023b). Grammar phobia as a hindrance to the fluency in oral communication of Bangladeshi tertiary level students: A study. *EnJourMe (English Journal of Merdeka)*, 7(2), 204–216. <https://doi.org/10.26905/enjourme.v7i2.8767>
- Chowdhury, Q. H. (2010). Revisiting English in Bangladesh: Oscillation of the colonized mind in the decolonized world. In *Applied linguistics, global and local: Proceedings of the 43rd annual meeting of the British Association for Applied Linguistics (49)* (pp. 49-59). London: Scitsiugnill Press.
- Derwing, T. M., & Munro, M. J. (2005). Second language accent and pronunciation teaching: A research-based approach. *TESOL quarterly*, 39(3), 379-397.
- Dhami, B. (2022). Global Englishes in ELT: Unpacking University English Teachers' Perceptions in Bangladesh. *THAITESOL Journal*, 35(1), 91-112.

- Hendriks, B., van Meurs, F., & Usmany, N. (2023). The effects of lecturers' non-native accent strength in English on intelligibility and attitudinal evaluations by native and non-native English students. *Language Teaching Research*, 27(6), 1378-1407.
- Hossain, M. M., Hasan, M., & Meraj, A. A. (2015). Redefining Bangladeshi variety of English: Print and electronic media perspective. *International Journal of Advanced Research*, 3(6), 1280-1286.
- Islam, M. N., & Hashim, A. (2019). Historical evolution of English in Bangladesh. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 10(2), 247-255.
- Jenkins, J. (2000). *The phonology of English as an international language*. Oxford university press.
- Kachru, B. B. (1985). Standards, codification and sociolinguistic realism: the English language in the outer circle. In R. Quirk and H.G. Widdowson (Eds), *English in the world: Teaching and learning the language and literatures*, 11-30, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Levis, J. M. (2005). Changing contexts and shifting paradigms in pronunciation teaching. *TESOL quarterly*, 39(3), 369-377.
- Patra, B. (2016). Emergence of English Language—The global spread of English & its images over world: A linguistic study. *Global English-Oriented Research Journal*, 2(1), 235-258.
- Pilus, Z. (2013). Exploring ESL learners' attitudes towards English accents. *World Applied Sciences Journal*, 21(21), 143-152.
- Rafi, A. S. M. (2023). *Language weaponization, missed opportunities, and transformational spaces in Bangladeshi English departments: A biographical perspective* (Vol. 28, p. 13). Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG.
- Rahman, A., & Chowdhury, R. (2018). Teaching “English for Life”: Beliefs and attitudes of secondary school English teachers in rural Bangladesh. *Bangladesh Education Journal*, 17(2), 35-54.

- Reagan, T., & Schreffler, S. (2005). Higher education language policy and the challenge of linguistic imperialism: A Turkish case study. *Decolonisation, globalisation: Language-in-education policy and practice*, 115-130.
- Sadeghpour, M., & Sharifian, F. (2019). World Englishes in English language teaching. *World Englishes*, 38(1–2), 245–258. <https://doi.org/10.1111/weng.12372>
- Yuwita, M. R., & Ambarwati, N. D. (2023). Exploring university students' attitudes towards their English accent and native English accents. *Linguistics and Literature Journal*, 4(1), 21-27.
- Wells, J. C. (1982). *Accents of English: Volume 1* (Vol. 1). Cambridge University Press.
- Zarin, I. (2013). The effect of accent (s) and pronunciations (s) of English on Bangladeshi English language learners' listening skill acquisition process.