
RESEARCH ARTICLE

English Varieties: A Case Study on the Exploration of Filipino Students' Perceptions

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ABSTRACT

English is the medium of instruction in the Philippines. Although Filipinos are focused on acquiring American English, they are undoubtedly exposed to other types. However, little research has investigated this distinctiveness within the Philippine context. Hence, this case study explored the perceptions of Filipino students toward the varieties of English. Five students in the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) department who took the Bachelor of Arts in the English Language course were chosen as participants. A semi-structured interview allowed the researchers to understand the topic necessary for relevant and meaningful data. To provide better analysis, the authors utilized thematic synthesis. Five (5) themes emerged, namely: (1) English varieties' perceptions and importance; (2) integration of English varieties in the curriculum; (3) English varieties in the teaching-learning process; (4) the edge of knowing and applying English varieties; and (5) challenges and realizations. The study concluded that Filipino students value their exposure to various English varieties. Moreover, the features (e.g., word usage, pronunciation, accents) attributed to each variety were the most significant challenge. This paper recommends that students have more exposure and supplementary materials to address such difficulties.

KEYWORDS

English Varieties, Social Science, Students' Perceptions, Case Study, Cebu, Philippines

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1. Introduction

English is one of the most popular languages to study and the most spoken language. Over time, it has caused many variations to appear and evolve differently in different parts of the world. Accents, dialects, local phrases, slang, and other variations all play this role. Although English is a popular language, that does not mean it is easy to master. People face numerous problems when learning English, and if you are aware of these challenges, you will have a much better chance of understanding the language.

Learning English as a second language is even more challenging, especially if you are learning English where English is not spoken. For example, English language learners in African countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia, Zambia, and Malawi encounter numerous obstacles because English is not their native tongue. There are difficulties in learning English as a second language, just like learning English as a foreign language (Tévar, 2020).

Even for those who learned English as a first language, it might be perplexing. There are numerous exceptions to what is an unending set of rules. It can be difficult for people who want to learn it as a second language because the variations in the different forms of English can often be challenging to understand. For example, the difference between formal and informal or spoken and written language. This leads to students writing words phonetically, how they would say them rather than how it is spelled, and using informal language, maybe even slang that they have picked up, in formal situations, which is viewed negatively.

In the Philippines, English is the medium of instruction and is widely used in communication. Despite the non-native varieties of English, English-language education in the Philippines focuses on mastering English variety from the inner circle, specifically American. This variety is widely used as a medium of instruction and even in most instructional materials. Students may be exposed to other varieties with the help of technology and social media. In higher education, specific courses were offered to expound and acquaint students with English varieties. Given its distinct features (e.g., word usage, pronunciation, accents, structure), it is essential to know students' understanding of these varieties and uncover different opportunities and challenges faced upon learning this subject. While there has been some research on the perceptions and attitudes of students towards the variation of the English language conducted in some countries, there needs to be more research in investigating perceptions among students within the Philippine context. To fill that void, this study aims to explore the perceptions of Filipino students' perceptions of English varieties and to know the perceived opportunities and challenges of learning the subject matter.

2. Objectives of the Study

This case study explored Filipino students' perceptions in the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) department towards learning English varieties. Specifically, this sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do participants perceive English varieties?
2. How are English varieties introduced in the CAS department? What are the perceived opportunities and challenges?
3. Implication of students' perceptions based on the findings.

3. Literature Review

The study utilized Kachru's concentric circle model as this will be the basis of the participant's perceptions of the varieties of English. Kachru's concentric circles were divided into three: the inner circle (IC), where English functions as the first language represented by the UK, USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, and the outer circle (OC), where English works as an additional institutionalized language, for instance, includes Philippines, India and Singapore, and the expanding circle (EC) where English is used as a foreign language involving Korea, China, Thailand, and Taiwan.

From the perspectives of Asian English, Kachru's Concentric Circle Model of the spread of English presents two significant shared characteristics. These are: (a) that all the varieties are transplanted varieties; and (b) that these varieties comprise the formal and functional distinctiveness of the diaspora varieties of English in various degrees. Given that the Philippines is included in the OC, an investigation is conducted to reveal Filipino students' perceptions of the varieties of English included in Kachru's circles: IC, OC, and EC.

English is employed in cross-border communication, transporting English varieties to speakers who speak a different first language. Primarily, this incorporates the transfer of features of a specific first language into the pronunciation of English (Jenkins, 2000). Thus, the Kachruvian model serves as an investigative tool in understanding the dual acceptance of new English varieties with distinct features on word usage, pronunciation, accents, and structures in the expansive view of World Englishes.

3.1 Varieties of English

The variety most widely accepted, understood, and possibly valued within an English-speaking country is Standard English (Farrel & Martin, 2009). According to them, Standard English has three identifying characteristics: (1) It is easiest to recognize in print because written conventions are similar worldwide; (2) It is usually used in mass media of world news exposing English in delivering information; (3) Its usage relates to the speaker's social class and education. Foretelling a people's social class is possible by using English in communication.

In addition, learners who study the British and American English differences may acquire a broad understanding of the social and cultural experiences of life and institutions in these English-speaking countries. Exposure to the language itself allows them to have a deeper understanding of the varieties of English. Vocabulary might cause misunderstanding; hence this should teach them (Stelzerová 2014).

According to Crystal (2003), the global status of English has little to do with the number of English people but rather with those who speak it since English is the first language of about 25% of the world's speakers. In this way, it is necessary to recognize the role and functions of English variants. Regarding English's "ownership," Kachru (1998) argues that it should be viewed as a denationalized language because it belongs globally. According to Widdowson (2012), English no longer belongs to native English speakers but instead to everybody who uses it.

3.2 English Varieties in the Outer Circle

Fuchs (2016) evaluated the available evidence on whether the Outer Circle varieties of English tend to be more syllable-timed than the Inner Circle variety. Rhythm metrics were proposed, and the results suggest that Outer Circle varieties are overall syllable-timed than Inner Circle varieties. Following a multidimensional model of speech rhythm, Indian English is more syllable-timed than British English on different levels.

In a study investigating the attitudes towards native and non-native varieties of English in relation to the perspective of EIL (English as an international language) of Korean adults, Kim (2007) reveals that 1) the respondents preferred American English as a model for guidance and did not discriminate native and non-native varieties of English, 2) they regarded English as an international language to communicate not only with native speakers but also with non-native speakers of English and showed positive attitudes to non-native varieties of English, and 3) they are not well aware of varieties of English. Thus, English language teaching in Korea should emphasize learners' awareness of varieties of English to command EIL without difficulty.

According to Karami and Zamanian (2016), it may not be realistic and appropriate to use the Philippine English variety as the norm for ELT in the Philippines because of the absence of a comprehensive codification, grammar books, and other instructional materials, which makes it difficult to choose as a model in the English language classroom.

Moreover, Bautista (2003) emphasizes World Englishes and how we-Filipinos are using this paradigm in English language education in the Philippines since Philippine English is the English spoken in the country. English in the Philippines is studied within the framework of interference as inadequate attempts to hit the target of Standard American English. Studies conducted on phonology reveal the absence of the schwa; substitution of [a] for [æ], [] for [o], [l] for [i], for [e]; substitution of [s] for [z], [s] for [z], [t] for [θ], [d] for [ð], [p] for [f], [b] for [v]; simplification of consonant clusters in a final position; and syllable-timed, rather than stress-timed, rhythm.

3.3 Perceptions of English Varieties

Preference means a greater liking for one alternative over another or the other. Hurtig (2007) found that Swedish teachers considered British English more formal, intelligent, strict, and correct than American English. They prefer British English for educational purposes, allowing teachers to use this variety in teaching. Furthermore, perceptions of English accents have been given supreme importance in understanding how the language is used in communication. Asian English accents have become a trend in natural communicative environments as Thai learners have become more acquainted with work and socialization. Students' perceptions toward the three Asian English accents on listening comprehension, namely Filipino, Singaporean, and Indian, had been identified, revealing a more positive perception toward the Indian accent on its clarity and understanding than the other two accents. However, regardless of familiarity, the test scores of better comprehension belonged to the Filipino and Singaporean accents, respectively. A contradiction between students' perceptions and listening comprehension has been illustrated, raising teachers' awareness in highlighting the importance of accent variations among learners of English and preparing for a new instructional paradigm (Sangnok & Jaturapitakkul, 2019).

In addition, Arrieta (2017) investigated the perceptions and attitudes of two groups of ESL teachers and students in the United States regarding World Englishes (WE) pronunciations before and after watching a video on WE accent. The results show that the teachers' perceptions in the study ranged from somewhat negative to mildly positive, both pre-and post-video, which is consistent with Brown's (1993) findings that teachers' perceptions changed little, if at all, after being briefly exposed to WE stimuli. The teacher responses were consistent with the literature in that the advantages of WE implementation are often appreciated only after extensive training on the matter. Student results were slightly more encouraging than their teachers, as students were generally more enthusiastic about WE before and after stimuli.

Jindapitak and Teo (2013) reveal that participants' perceptions of non-native varieties of English were consistent with the notion of English as a Lingua Franca calling for World Englishes to have a place in the language classroom by raising awareness of the existence of English varieties in the promotion of effective communication between non-native speakers as exposure to Englishes in the pronunciation classroom is necessary.

3.4 Language Implications Concerning Culture

The English language is deemed to be the foundation of intercultural communication since this has been used by people of different cultural and dialectal backgrounds. There is a need to highlight the importance of cultural awareness in teaching the English language, as this promotes cultural behavior and learners' attitude in the communication of English as a foreign language (Soomro et al., 2015).

According to Koester and Lustig (2010, as cited in Soomro et al., 2015), individuals coming from diverse cultures with distinct orientations and interpretations of life's values are what encompasses intercultural communication. Here, there is an interconnectedness between communication and culture as they attach the same meanings and values. Determining the role of competence in the ability of an individual to understand language in culturally different contexts is a matter of contention in intercultural communication.

The pedagogical process in improving one's communication skills of foreign language learners in a non-native cultural setting must be considered since developing intercultural competence depends on the practical application of communicative strategies in learning programs. The use of authentic texts and instructional materials focusing on language functions may help enhance an individual's communication skills (Kelly, 1969).

Issues and challenges of English as an international and intercultural communication source have investigated individuals' incompatibility, language unfamiliarity, and cultural differences. The acquisition of linguistic knowledge is mandatory for effective communication. However, more attention needs to be paid to the cultural context of the target language, as intercultural communicative competence cannot be achieved without developing communicative competence (Kim, 1991).

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study utilized a case study design. According to Yin (2009), a case study is an in-depth and empirical investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context. The boundaries between phenomenon and context need to be more evident. Given the situation, it is then essential for this qualitative study to rely on multiple sources of evidence, with data connected in a triangulation fashion (Yin, 2018). How and why questions are integrated into case studies are more explanatory. The such questions deal with operational links needing to be traced over time rather than frequencies or incidence. In this paper, the study explored students' perceptions of English varieties under the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS). This study is to shed light on how students perceive English varieties. Learning different English is a contemporary phenomenon within the context of students under CAS. The research questions elicit exploratory questions to address the study's goal; hence, the case is an appropriate research design.

4.2 Research Participants

The participants in this study were Filipino college students selected from Carcar City College. Their ages ranged from 21 to 25 years old, and all of them were native speakers of the Filipino language. They were currently enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts in English Language program and were informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and confidentiality before giving their informed consent to participate. They were selected using a purposive sampling technique, which is a non-probability sampling method based on the population's characteristics and study objectives (Crossman, 2019). In other words, participants were selected based on the researcher's judgment and their knowledge or experience.

Specifically for this study, five (5) students were selected to participate based on four inclusion criteria:

1. They must belong to the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) Department.
2. They must be bonafide students of Carcar City College, Cebu City.
3. They must be enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts in English Language program.
4. They must be graduating seniors (the number of years of study will validate participants' exposure to English varieties).

4.3 Data Gathering Procedures

Before conducting the study, the researchers briefed the participants on the study's aim and procedures and their expected roles. They were asked to fill out an information sheet and consent, which stipulates the provisions of voluntary participation. Different research instruments were used to gather the data to accumulate an in-depth understanding of the participant's accounts. A semi-structured interview is employed in the study to allow the researchers to develop a keen knowledge of the topic of interest. The probing questions that evolved as the interview proceeded provided opportunities for the researchers to understand the true meaning of their experiences (Schmidt, 2004). The interviewer reads the questions and records the participants' answers through a video recorder. This helps secure a transcript of responses from the participants, which aids the researchers' data analysis. Moreover, during the interview, researchers gave the participants the freedom to use the language they were most comfortable with in answering the interview questions. This would help the participants freely express, share, and elaborate on their accounts.

4.4 Data Analysis

To better understand analyzing the data, the researchers utilized thematic synthesis. It is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Cruzes, Dybå, Runeson, & Höst, 2015). It "minimally organizes and describes the data set in rich detail and frequently interprets various aspects of the research topic" (p. 3):

1. The researchers organized and prepared the raw data for analysis. In this step, data were transcribed verbatim with the help of video recording.
2. The researchers read through all the data to arrive at the general sense of information and overall meaning.
3. The data were all coded. In doing the step, the researchers chunked or wrote words and turned them into categories.
4. The coding process was used to generate themes.
5. Themes were represented through narrative passages to convey the findings of the analysis. This step was done through a detailed discussion of the emerging themes.
6. Themes were then interpreted.

4.5 Ethical Consideration

Since qualitative research is more intrusive to the participants' experiences of a phenomenon, this study will strictly follow ethical principles. When researchers met the participants, various ethical considerations were given high regard. First, consent forms were given to provide sufficient information to a potential participant so that he/she could decide whether to participate in the research study. Second, the researchers protected participants' identities using symbols and numbers labeled as (P1, P2). Lastly, the information that was collected from this study will be kept confidential.

4.6 Rigors of the Study

Trustworthiness is used as a central concept to assess the rigor of a qualitative study. According to Yin (as cited in Cypress, 2017), it relates to the suitability of the procedures used to ensure the findings' correctness. In this presented study, researchers regularly consider their thoughts and actions in light of different contexts. Objectivity was ensured to keep the study from personal biases and make the conclusions aligned with the proposed problems. To ensure trustworthiness, the researchers engaged in data triangulation and member checking. In application to the presented study, the accumulated data were cross-examined and returned to participants to check for accuracy and resonance with their experiences.

5. Results and Discussion

In this chapter, the researchers described the qualitative analysis of the data. The researchers analyzed the data into generative themes, which were described individually. They then evaluated how the themes overlapped and assessed based on how the data were presented. Upon analyzing the data, the following themes emerged in this study. These came from the raw data, encoded according to the steps in data analysis. The following themes are:

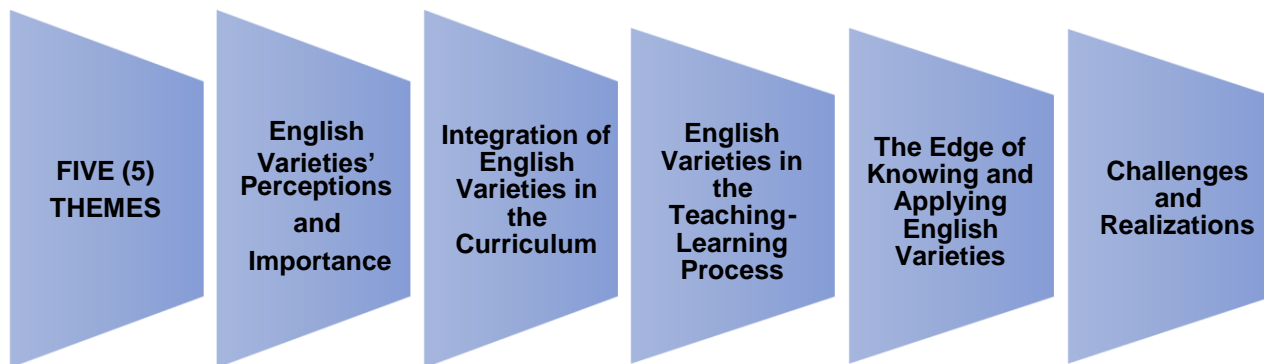


Figure 1. Emerging Themes of a Case Study on Students' Perceptions Towards English Varieties

5.1 English Varieties' Perceptions and Importance

The Bachelor of Arts in the English Language provides a strong background in studying English. The participants in this study shared their perceptions based on their experiences with these English varieties. The researchers would like to know their participants' perceptions of World Englishes and how they were exposed to using some of these English varieties.

"World English is very broad. It means that there are many varieties of English in the World like British English, Philippine English and many more." (P1)

"For me, World Englishes is the English variety in which we Filipinos are studying. As we all know, we have different varieties of English, and we have the two major varieties, which include American and British." (P2)

The participants perceived World Englishes as extensive, for it includes wide varieties of English like British, American, and Philippine English. They explained that it is used in various contexts worldwide and even shared their exposure and confidence in using some of these English varieties. They added that:

"Our teachers keep on using American English in delivering the lesson and in giving instructions. That's why we are more exposed to using American English as our standard English." (P4)

"Miss, our standard English is American English, but sometimes our teachers use Philippine English...that's why when we communicate, it is a mix of Philippine and American English." (P5)

The participants keep practicing or using American English and Philippine English ever since elementary and until now. They have been exposed to these English varieties, which is why they are comfortable and confident using them in daily communication. Through this, they have appreciated the importance of using these English varieties.

"Yes, learning English varieties are important. Because different varieties of English have its own unique cultural background; like our Philippine English it is distinct from any other Englishes as we have our own phonetic like we Filipinos, we have different accents, so the English varieties depend on how people pronounce the English so it is important to learn different kind of English varieties for us to be considered as competitive in the work arena." (P2)

As a whole, the participants have known the essence of these existing English varieties and their distinctions. They have appreciated how pronunciation, accents, and words in this English variety can create an impact when people use them in their daily conversations. They even highlighted the essence of global competitiveness regarding using English varieties at work. Farrel and Martin (2009) supported this notion that the kind of English variety most widely accepted, understood, and possibly valued within a country is based on three characteristics. In this study, at least two characteristics have been reflected. Filipino students acknowledge the varieties of English because of its exposure, and it is included in social class and education.

5.2 Integration of English Varieties in the Curriculum

Participants in this study are currently taking their Bachelor of Arts in the English Language under the College and Sciences Department. They have shared how the curriculum helped them be exposed to these English varieties.

"The curriculum today requires us to have an output to apply everything that we learn, so that's a very big help for us, students; for us, we can acquire, use and be able to use the language variety. Video and audio recordings like how we communicate with other people using that certain variety of Philippine English and others. It's a form of a dialogue." (P1)

"The curriculum that was introduced in school, specifically in a BA English language, is helpful for me because I was able to become exposed to different variety of English; we have Philippine English, Korean and Japanese English, which is I can say that in every English variety has its own unique pattern or has their own unique structure because of our own different cultural background. We have studied the Korean/Japanese script, and it is being translated into English (more on translation)." (P4)

Thus, students have appreciated how the curriculum helps them understand English differences and acknowledged that an English variety has its unique pattern and structure because of how cultural background reflects on it. The study's findings share a similar result with the study by Jindapitak and Teo (2013), which reveals that awareness of the existence of English varieties in promoting effective communication between non-native speakers as exposure to Englishes in the language classroom is necessary. Furthermore, Soomro et al. (2015) mentioned a need to highlight the importance of cultural awareness in teaching the English language in intercultural communication.

5.3 English Varieties in the Teaching-Learning Process

Exposure to different activities in the teaching-learning process would acquaint not only students with the varieties of English but also influence their attitude toward the subject matter. Hence, activities are necessary to achieve effective communication. In this study, the participants shared the activities they had experienced.

"Mostly, our instructors use a video presentation with a speaker in which a certain variety of English speakers from other countries are used, especially American English. "Mostly group performance—role plays and ... creative writing. But, mostly on these activities, teachers and students make use of American English." (P1)

"Mostly, it is a form of essay because it has more of a sentence pattern. For us, Standard American English is focused in terms of essays; we are not into the Korean and Japanese English structure because we will fail if we follow their structure in grammar." (P3)

We've tried to introduce ourselves in Japanese or Korean when it comes to speaking, but still, we are into American English." (P2)

Writing is the fundamental criterion by which one's intelligence and learning will be assessed. These BA English college students have experienced writing an essay using standard American English. They also have the chance to experience listening to various speakers from other countries while observing how they differ in terms of accents, pronunciation, grammatical structure, etc. The use of audio and video also makes it possible to present knowledge differently and enables different forms of interaction with learners. The findings share a similar result with the study of Hurtig (2007), in which the American English variety is preferred in the teaching-learning process. This preference is because Filipinos frequently use and are exposed to Americans.

5.4 The Edge of Knowing and Applying English Varieties

The way languages are produced and local languages, such as slang, can reveal much about the people who speak them. While learning a new language can increase your awareness of cultural differences, you will also better understand why such differences exist and the significance of respecting cultures other than yours. The participants emphasized that:

"The advantage is that we can connect to other countries through using that certain variety because the English language is very powerful in the world. In that way, we can communicate with others, learn their culture, their language, and we also prepare ourselves for a better future." (P1)

"There's a lot of advantages in taking the subject because you are able to understand the different culture and language of a specific country you are studying. It is also a great opportunity to communicate with native speakers." (P3)

Associating newly acquired knowledge with existing background information aids in the development of greater meaning and engagement. Engaged, self-directed students are better prepared to apply what they have learned in the real world.

"Specifically, in translation, I can communicate if I would really focus on studying the different kinds of languages; I can use the English translation to communicate with other people using our language and also in the English language." (P5)

"I would like to be a teacher someday so that I can help my students focus on grammatical rules of these English varieties, and I would also like to encourage my students to explore these variations in English." (P2)

The statements above are supported by Kim (1991), who emphasized that acquiring linguistic knowledge is mandatory for effective communication. In addition, Koester & Lustig (2010, as cited in Soomro et al., 2015) stated that individuals from diverse cultures with distinct orientations and interpretations of life's values encompass intercultural communication. Here, there is an interconnectedness between communication and culture as they attach the same meanings and values.

5.5 Challenges and Realizations

Taking on difficulties allows us to test our limits and see what we can. Furthermore, when we reflect on difficult times, we can be proud of how we handled the situation and remind ourselves that things will improve and that difficulties are not necessarily dire. The participants mentioned that:

"Based on my experience, the most difficult part is when my instructor gives us some assignments/activities to apply what we have learned. We are able to speak to some foreigners' interview them, and that, for me, is the most difficult. If you are not in the situation, I think it's easier for us, but when you are in that situation talking to foreigners, talking to someone that is very knowledgeable about that variety. It is hard. I've talked to Filipinos living abroad, and they acquire those accents, the culture, etc., their experience." (P2)

"In speaking somehow, it is difficult for us to speak straight in English because we are multilingual. There is a quick shift of Cebuano accent to English and sometimes with Tagalog accent, so the shift or change in our accent is a hindrance for me to speak fluent English." (P3)

The participants have experienced vast challenges primarily concerning speaking because it is difficult to speak English straightly during conversation or an interview. They tend to shift from their native language and mix it with Standard English. That is why these research participants have come up with some ways of overcoming these challenges.

"In learning English varieties, I overcome it through practicing and learning on what is better and what's acceptable in using the English language, especially when we talk about pronunciation, enunciation, grammatical rules or how it should be properly used." (P2)

"By facing those challenges, I try my best and explore. I read a lot of books, articles and information's online that can help me face those challenges/ difficulties in learning that variety." (P4)

Through these challenges in learning English varieties, students' realizations come in. Accepting realization allows people to notice, confront, and master their emotions. The participants shared that:

"I have learned that only native speakers can speak fluent English since we are using the English language as our second language because our mother tongue is Filipino so, I have realized that even if we are studying more on grammar and structures still, we are just second learners of English so I am expecting that I cannot speak the way how native speaker speak the English language." (P2)

"Taking this course is really a big opportunity because we'll be able to understand the largest scope of languages and understand different cultures around the world. This serves as a stepping stone in achieving my dream/goal whenever I want to go to other countries." (P4)

Given the statements above, participants had difficulty learning English varieties. They are faced with challenges because of their distinct features. The difficulty the participants have encountered is reflected in the features of phonology that Filipinos have. Specifically, in attempting to hit the standard American English, the study of Bautista (2003) on Philippine English phonology reveals the absence of the schwa. Despite these challenges, students still positively perceived English variety as means to communicate with other non-native speakers. This notion shares one of the results conducted by Kim (2007), in which participants regarded English as an international language to communicate not only with native speakers but also with non-native speakers of English.

6. Conclusion

English language education in the Philippines places emphasis on achieving proficiency in American English, which is classified as an inner circle language variety. However, only certain courses are given the opportunity to extensively study English variations. Hence, this case study explored the perceptions of students toward the varieties of English within the Philippine setting.

Based on the findings, Filipino students perceive English varieties as necessary. Learning from these varieties provides a broader perspective on how English influences other languages worldwide. Each variety's distinct features were valued and seen as a window to other dimensions of languages. Its awareness is not only about languages but also about cultural differences. The participants are familiar with different English, which implies that the curriculum and teaching-learning process assisted with their exposure. However, despite this awareness, students still faced challenges concerning distinct features such as accents, pronunciation, tone, etc., of each variety. Hence, more exposure and supplementary materials that can aid with English differences must be considered in addressing such difficulties.

Based on the implications of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Topics for future research:

- 1.1. Cross-case analysis on the perceptions of Filipino students towards English varieties among different universities in Cebu City.
- 1.2. Mixed-method research design on the perceptions of students toward English varieties within the Philippine setting.

2. Seminars for an in-depth discussion and exposure to English varieties.

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