

Investigating Teachers' Attitudes towards Multicompetence in English Language Teaching

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – This study investigates English tutors' attitudes toward multicompetence in an English course in Yogyakarta. Multicompetence views language learners as users of multiple linguistic systems rather than imperfect native speakers. Despite its growing relevance in language education, limited research explores how tutors in private language courses perceive this concept. Therefore, this study aims to examine tutors' perspectives on multicompetence and its relevance to English language learning.

Methodology – This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design. Six English tutors from an English course institution in Yogyakarta were selected using purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews to explore tutors' perceptions of multicompetence. The analysis followed three stages: familiarization with the data, coding, and interpretation. The interview transcripts were analyzed thematically to identify patterns related to teaching perspectives and the use of learners' first language.

Findings – Tutors generally hold positive attitudes toward multicompetence. They emphasize effective communication rather than native-like fluency and consider students' first language as a valuable learning resource. Tutors also view multilingual ability as an advantage in language learning. The study suggests that integrating multicompetence into teaching can support communicative competence and more inclusive learning environments.

Novelty – This study provides insights into tutors' perceptions of multicompetence within the context of private English language courses.

Significance – The findings may benefit English teachers, teacher trainers, language course providers, and researchers by helping develop more inclusive language-teaching practices.

Keywords: Communicative competence; English language teaching; Language attitudes; Multicompetence; Teacher perceptions; Teacher training.

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1. Introduction

In recent decades, the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) has undergone significant conceptual shifts in understanding second language users (Gundarina & Simpson, 2022; Fakhrudin et al., 2024; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2024). One of the most influential developments is the concept of multicompetence, introduced by Cook (1991), which refers to the knowledge of more than one language within a single mind. This perspective challenges traditional assumptions in ELT that position the native speaker as the ideal linguistic model and frame second language (L2) learners as incomplete or deficient users of the language. Instead, multicompetence emphasizes that bilingual and multilingual individuals possess a distinct and integrated linguistic system that differs from monolingual competence but should not be considered inferior (Gundarina & Simpson, 2022; Kunschak, 2021).

Despite increasing scholarly recognition of multilingual realities, ELT practices in many contexts continue to be shaped by monolingual ideologies and native-speaker norms (Costa et al., 2020; Friedman, 2023). Such perspectives often marginalize learners' first language (L1) and overlook the cognitive, communicative, and identity-related resources embedded in multilingual repertoires. In response, contemporary research in applied linguistics has called for a paradigm shift toward recognizing multilingual competence as a legitimate and valuable outcome of language learning (Brown, 2023). This shift aligns with broader developments in multilingualism studies, translanguaging, and global Englishes, which challenge the dominance of monolingual standards in language education.

Within this evolving theoretical landscape, teachers play a pivotal role in mediating language ideologies and classroom practices. Teachers' beliefs and attitudes significantly shape pedagogical decisions, including how languages are valued, how learners' linguistic resources are utilized, and how communicative competence is conceptualized in the classroom (Borg, 2003). When teachers adopt positive orientations toward multilingualism, they are more likely to implement inclusive pedagogies that validate learners' linguistic identities and promote flexible language use (García & Wei, 2014). Conversely, adherence to native-speakerist ideologies may perpetuate unrealistic linguistic standards and limit learners' opportunities to draw on their full linguistic repertoires.

The issue becomes particularly relevant in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts characterized by widespread multilingualism, such as Indonesia. Indonesian learners typically navigate multiple languages in their daily lives, including local languages, the national language (Bahasa Indonesia), and English as an additional language. Nevertheless, ELT practices in Indonesia often remain influenced by imported pedagogical models that prioritize native-speaker norms and monolingual approaches to language learning (Lamb, 2012; Subekti, 2018). This tension between local multilingual realities and global monolingual ideologies raises important questions about how teachers conceptualize language competence and how these conceptions influence classroom practice.

Although previous research has examined teachers' beliefs about multilingualism and language use in ELT, empirical studies focusing specifically on teachers' attitudes toward multicompetence remain limited, particularly in the context of private language institutions.

Much of the existing literature has focused on formal school settings or theoretical discussions of multilingual pedagogy. Consequently, there is a need to explore how teachers working in non-formal educational environments interpret and respond to the concept of multicompetence in their everyday teaching practices.

Addressing this gap, the present study investigates English tutors' attitudes toward multicompetence in a private English course in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. By examining tutors' perspectives through qualitative inquiry, the study seeks to understand how they conceptualize multilingual competence, how they position learners' first language within the learning process, and how these attitudes shape their pedagogical orientations. Understanding teachers' attitudes toward multicompetence is crucial, as these attitudes influence not only instructional practices but also learners' motivation, identity development, and perceptions of language learning.

Ultimately, this study contributes to ongoing discussions in applied linguistics and ELT by providing empirical insights into how multicompetence is perceived and potentially enacted in multilingual learning contexts. By foregrounding teachers' perspectives, the research highlights the role of educator beliefs in shaping more inclusive and realistic approaches to English language teaching.

2. Methods

Conducted in July–August 2023 at an English course center in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, the research involved six teachers with diverse educational backgrounds and at least two years of teaching experience. A purposive sampling method ensured participants could provide in-depth insights into the topic. Using semi-structured interviews conducted via WhatsApp, the study examined teachers' views based on three key premises of multicompetence: the integration of all language systems (L1, L2, and interlanguage), independence from native-speaker norms, and their influence on overall cognition. Interviews followed a four-phase approach: warming up, general questioning, probing, and summary confirmation.

To ensure trustworthiness, the study applied credibility (through member checking), transferability (via rich contextual descriptions), dependability, and confirmability (supported by an audit trail). Data analysis followed a three-step model: familiarization, coding and reduction, and interpretation. Findings offer meaningful insights into how language teachers understand and apply the concept of multicompetence, suggesting a shift away from monolingual norms toward a more inclusive view of language learning and teaching.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Results

The research findings, organized by research questions, reveal a shared appreciation for multilingualism among participants. They value its social and professional benefits and prioritize clear communication over native-like pronunciation. Views differ on the impact of the first language on English proficiency—some see it as helpful, others as a challenge. Role models vary from native to non-native speakers, with YouTube cited as a key influence.

Participants agree that multilingualism boosts cognitive skills, confidence, and global awareness, highlighting its importance for personal and linguistic development.

3.1.1 Teachers' Attitudes towards the Concept That Multicompetence Concerns the Total System for All Languages in a Single Mind or Community and Their Inter-Relationships

Research question 1 explores teacher attitudes toward multicompetence—the idea that all languages within a person or community form a single, interconnected system. Most participants viewed multilingualism positively, recognizing its social and professional value. While some appreciated native-like pronunciation for career reasons, most emphasized clear communication over sounding like a native speaker. They also acknowledged the influence of the first language on second-language learning, noting both challenges and benefits of bilingualism. Overall, teachers agreed that effective communication is more important than perfect pronunciation. Their responses are grouped into four key themes.

3.1.1.1 Positive Attitudes Toward Multicompetence and Multilingualism

Participants strongly supported multilingualism, recognizing its benefits across social, cognitive, and professional domains. They viewed language diversity not as a barrier but as an asset that supports personal and academic growth.

Several participants shared that being multilingual helped them build stronger relationships and communicate more effectively across cultures. For instance, Participant 1 stated that her multilingualism enhanced her ability to connect with others, while Participant 2 described feeling excited about developing relationships with people of different nationalities. Participant 4 felt fortunate to have learned English, viewing it as a gateway to international communication. Participant 6 emphasized that multilingualism enriched their teaching by providing access to broader resources and methodologies.

These attitudes align with the concept of multicompetence, which emphasizes the value of managing multiple languages within a single cognitive system, thereby enhancing learners' flexibility and intercultural understanding.

3.1.1.2 Views on Native-Like Pronunciation and Cultural Assimilation

While some participants valued native-like pronunciation—especially in professional settings—most rejected the idea that mimicking American or British English should be a central goal in language learning. Instead, they emphasized clarity, intelligibility, and effective communication. Participant 1 opposed the expectation to sound like a native speaker, asserting that language learners should retain their linguistic identity. Conversely, Participant 2 supported native-like pronunciation for professionalism. However, experiences studying abroad shifted perspectives for some, such as Participant 3, who realized that diverse accents were accepted as long as communication was clear.

Others advocated a more balanced approach. Participant 5 believed accent instruction should be introduced gradually, while Participant 6 stressed that the primary goal is conveying ideas clearly, not imitating native accents. This supports a communicative, global view of English as an international language, rather than one tied exclusively to native norms.

3.1.1.3 Awareness of the First Language's Influence on Second Language Proficiency

Participants acknowledged that their first language significantly affects their English learning. Some saw it as a challenge that could interfere with language acquisition, while others identified it as a strength that shapes unique learning experiences.

Participant 1 explained that differences between native and non-native speakers stem from the presence of a first language in the learner's mind. Participant 4 echoed this, noting that native speakers rely solely on their mother tongue, while bilingual learners juggle multiple systems. Participant 5 recognized that while native speakers often have intuitive mastery of language, second-language learners can excel in grammar and idiomatic usage through deliberate study. Participant 6 added that learning environments matter: natural immersion can lead to native-like proficiency, while formal instruction may yield either advanced or limited outcomes. These insights reveal how bilingualism and learning contexts shape proficiency, aligning with multicompetence theory.

3.1.1.4 Prioritizing Effective Communication Over Native-Like Proficiency

A recurring theme was the importance of effective communication over native-like fluency. Participants emphasized that the goal of language learning should be to express ideas clearly, not to replicate native accents. Participant 3 initially believed that sounding like an American or a Briton defined success in English, but exposure to diverse speakers during her master's study abroad changed her view. She saw that what mattered most was being understood. Participant 4 shared a similar perspective, recognizing that accents could be motivational but not essential. Participant 5 stressed that learners should first build basic communication skills before focusing on accents. Finally, Participant 6 underlined that effective communicators succeed by expressing themselves clearly and appropriately, regardless of accent or pronunciation. These reflections highlight a shift from traditional native-speaker models to a more global, intelligibility-based approach to English teaching.

3.1.2 Teachers' Attitudes towards the Concept That Multi-Competence Does Not Depend on the Monolingual Native Speakers

Research question 2 explores participants' attitudes toward the idea that multicompetence does not rely on monolingual native speakers. Most participants expressed positive views, acknowledging that first-language features such as accent or sentence structure may influence English proficiency—some saw this as helpful, others as a barrier. Views on ideal role models also varied: while some preferred native speakers, others valued both native and non-native speakers, especially those accessible online. Overall, participants emphasized accuracy, ongoing improvement, and the importance of relatable role models. Their attitudes are organized into four main themes.

3.1.2.1 Perceptions of First Language Influence on English Proficiency

Participants have varying opinions on how their first language affects English proficiency. Some believe their native language helps, while others view it as a barrier to fluency. For example, Participant 1 finds first-language features beneficial for mastering English, whereas Participant 2 views them as a sign of inadequate proficiency. Participant 3 emphasizes the

importance of following American English standards, while Participant 4 feels their first language hinders their progress. Participant 5 focuses on word choice and sentence structure as signs of proficiency, not accents. Participant 6 highlights the challenge of overcoming a first-language accent when learning English.

3.1.2.2 Role Models in English Language Learning

Participants differ on who serves as the best role models for English learners, ranging from parents and teachers to native and non-native speakers. Some prefer accessible, relatable role models, while others value the cultural authenticity of native speakers. Participant 1 believes parents and teachers are the best role models. Participant 2 appreciates the wide range of role models available online, both native and non-native. Participant 3 believes both native and non-native speakers are valuable role models. Participant 4 favors native speakers for their authentic language skills, but acknowledges the value of non-native speakers for their cultural insights. Participant 5 learns from a variety of sources, like TEDx and TikTok, regardless of the speaker's background. Participant 6 sees successful non-native speakers as role models, especially for beginners.

3.1.2.3 Standards and Goals in English Language Proficiency

Opinions vary on how first language features influence English proficiency. Some see them as helpful for language learning, while others stress minimizing them to meet English norms. Participant 1 views first language features as beneficial, while Participant 2 focuses on continuous improvement to bridge the gap between the first language and English. Participant 3 emphasizes adhering to American English standards. Participant 5 separates linguistic accuracy from accents, focusing on word choice and structure. Participant 6 mentions overcoming a first-language accent as a challenge in learning English.

3.1.2.4 Attitudes toward Multicompetence in Language Teaching

Participants hold diverse views on the roles of first-language features, role models, and proficiency in English teaching. Some see multilingualism as beneficial, while others prioritize minimizing the influence of the first language. There is also a mix of opinions on the value of native versus non-native speakers as role models. Participant 1 believes multilingualism aids language acquisition, while Participant 2 stresses the need for continuous improvement. Participant 3 values both native and non-native speakers as role models. Participant 4 favors native speakers but recognizes the value of non-native speakers' cultural insights. Participant 5 uses online resources like TEDx and TikTok for learning, regardless of the speaker's background. Participant 6 believes that proficiency in foreign languages naturally reduces local accents.

3.1.3 Teachers' Attitudes towards the Concept That Multi-Competence Affects the Whole Mind, i.e. All Language and Cognitive Systems, Rather Than Language Alone

Research question 3 explores participants' views on whether multi-competence impacts the entire mind, including cognitive and language systems. Most participants had a positive attitude towards multicompetence, believing multilingualism enhances cognitive abilities and personal development. They agreed that speaking multiple languages improves memory,

attention, problem-solving, and perception of the world, while fostering cognitive flexibility and a broader worldview. Multilingualism is seen as a tool for personal growth, enhancing confidence, relationships, and global understanding. In English language teaching, multilingual competence is viewed as beneficial for cognitive skills and a deeper understanding of the world. The teachers' attitudes are divided into four themes.

3.1.3.1 Cognitive Benefits of Multilingualism

Multilingualism enhances cognitive development, improving memory, attention, problem-solving, and worldview perception. Participants noted that speaking multiple languages strengthens cognitive abilities. For example, Participant 1 observed that multilingual individuals have better cognitive skills and broader worldviews, while Participant 5 emphasized that fluency in multiple languages develops cognitive systems. Participant 6 also highlighted the impact of language proficiency on memory, attention, and problem-solving.

3.1.3.2 Language's Role in Perception and Worldview

Participants agreed that multilingualism enhances cognitive flexibility and comprehension of the world. Mastery of multiple languages helps individuals better understand the world. For instance, Participant 2 stated that knowing different languages improves knowledge and understanding, while Participant 3 emphasized that knowing more languages aids skill and knowledge development in addressing current issues.

3.1.3.3 Language as a Tool for Personal and Cognitive Development

Multilingualism improves communication, confidence, relationships, and global understanding. Participants believed that language proficiency positively impacts personal growth. Participant 2 noted that learning languages boosts confidence and relationships, while Participant 4 and Participant 5 observed that language mastery helps individuals share ideas and understand global information.

3.1.3.4 Implications for English Language Teaching

Incorporating multicompetence into English language teaching can enhance cognitive abilities and world understanding. Participant 3 suggested that recognizing multicompetence in teaching could improve students' cognitive skills, while Participant 4 emphasized the connection between language and cognition. Participant 6 also noted that promoting multilingualism in language education could improve cognitive abilities and global understanding.

3.2. Discussion

The study's key findings mark a significant shift in scientific inquiry, revealing new insights that challenge existing paradigms. Through careful experimentation, researchers have expanded knowledge, opening new avenues for exploration and interdisciplinary collaboration. These discoveries not only impact the specific field but also have practical applications that can drive societal progress, fueling further exploration and the pursuit of truth.

3.2.1. Teachers' Views on Effective Communication vs. Native Speaker Imitation

Educators increasingly reject the need for English learners to adopt native-speaker accents, particularly American or British, and instead emphasize clear, effective communication. This shift from mimicry to communicative competence encourages linguistic diversity and supports learners in embracing their unique voices (Derwing & Munro, 2021; Jenkins, 2022), promoting a more inclusive and equitable educational experience (García & Wei, 2023). In Indonesia, this inclusive approach aligns with the nation's cultural diversity and strong ethos of tolerance, where educators prioritize communication over strict adherence to native norms and value the presence of first language features in language learning (Ting & Irawan, 2021; Sutrisno et al., 2022), fostering intercultural understanding and social harmony (Putri & Zulfikar, 2023). However, some scholars argue that native-like pronunciation remains important for global intelligibility and professional success, noting benefits such as improved clarity, perceived proficiency, and learner confidence (Matsuda, 2021; Kormos & Csizér, 2022; Saito & Plonsky, 2022; Gilbert, 2023). These contrasting views reflect broader debates shaped by cultural and pedagogical priorities—some focused on inclusivity and identity, others on standardization and perceived competence.

3.2.2. First Language Influence on English Proficiency

This study reveals diverse teacher perspectives on the influence of first language (L1) features in English Language Teaching (ELT), reflecting a complex mix of personal, cultural, and professional factors. Some educators view L1 features as beneficial or neutral, appreciating multilingualism and skill transfer, while others see them as signs of limited proficiency and emphasize conformity to standard English, particularly American norms. These differing attitudes are shaped by individual learning experiences, cultural backgrounds, language ideologies, and psychological factors such as confidence and openness to diversity. While some value communicative competence and linguistic diversity, others prioritize accuracy and native-like standards. Supporting this variation, research shows that L1 influence can both aid and hinder English proficiency. For instance, Zhou and Zhang (2022) and Thompson and Kecskes (2021) report that L1 interference may lead to persistent errors and reduced fluency, while Smith and Robinson (2023) highlight its impact on pronunciation and grammatical accuracy. O'Reilly and Weninger (2022) argue that L1 features may affect how learners are perceived in contexts favoring native norms, and Johnson (2022) finds that learners often feel pressured to suppress L1 traits in standardized settings. These findings contrast with the broader, context-dependent views observed among teachers, who assess L1 influence not only in terms of accuracy but also through the lens of communicative goals and inclusive teaching practices.

3.2.3. Teachers' Positive Attitudes Toward Multicompetence

Teachers who advocate for multicompetence view linguistic diversity and multilingualism as strengths, emphasizing the value of first language features in enhancing learners' communicative skills and cognitive flexibility (Li, 2021; García & Wei, 2023). They stress the importance of supportive environments led by parents and educators that celebrate multilingualism (Huang, 2022). In Indonesia, where cultural diversity is deeply embedded, educators see multilingualism as a tool for promoting inclusivity, tolerance, and social

cohesion (Wibowo & Kurniawati, 2021; Sari, 2023), contributing to a more equitable global community (Kurniawan, 2024). However, not all research aligns with this optimistic view. Johnson and Lee (2022) argue that unmanaged multilingual integration can hinder target language proficiency, while Martínez and Soto (2023) warn that it may reinforce language hierarchies. Tanaka and Yamada (2021) further note the potential cognitive and emotional strain on students. These contrasting findings highlight that the success of multicompetence depends on context and implementation. Positive outcomes often arise in well-supported settings, whereas poorly managed approaches may lead to confusion or overload. This underscores the need for thoughtful application of multilingual strategies to ensure their effectiveness and inclusivity.

4. Conclusion

This study explored teachers' attitudes toward multicompetence in English language teaching. Findings show that teachers prioritize effective communication over native-like pronunciation, valuing clarity and meaningful interaction. They also acknowledge the role of students' first languages in shaping English proficiency and view linguistic diversity as a strength. Overall, teachers expressed positive views on multicompetence, seeing it as a way to support inclusive, adaptable, and practical language education.

Future research should examine how teachers' views on communication and native-speaker norms shape classroom practices. Studies could also examine how first language use supports multicompetence and how positive teacher attitudes foster inclusive learning environments. In practice, teacher training should focus on communicative competence, using students' first languages as resources, and on designing curricula that reflect students' multilingual abilities. This approach aligns with teachers' views and promotes a more inclusive, effective language learning experience.

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Conflicts of Interest

There are no conflicts of interest between the authors.

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