

Building Global Connections Without Losing National Identity: The Use of English as a Lingua Franca in Global Communication

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Abstract

Globalization and the digital revolution have propelled English to function as English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), namely a global means of communication that bridges speakers from different linguistic backgrounds. For Indonesia, this phenomenon presents a dilemma: proficiency in English is required to enhance global competitiveness; however, on the other hand, it raises concerns regarding the preservation of national identity, Pancasila values, and the Indonesian language. Previous studies have predominantly focused on linguistic and pedagogical aspects, while the citizenship perspective remains underexplored. This article aims to analyze the relationship between the use of ELF and efforts to maintain Indonesia's national identity by employing a literature review method based on a descriptive-analytical approach. The sources reviewed include journal articles, books, and academic publications related to ELF, global communication, and national identity. The findings indicate that ELF can generate both positive and negative impacts on national identity; nevertheless, English should not necessarily be perceived as a cultural threat. Two main strategies are proposed: (1) implementing the concept of glocalization, namely positioning English as an instrumental communication tool rather than a lifestyle, while the Indonesian language continues to be upheld as the home of the nation's cultural and emotional values; and (2) adopting the intelligibility paradigm in English language learning, enabling younger generations to communicate confidently without eliminating local characteristics, including Indonesian accents and distinctive norms of politeness. Therefore, when balanced with a strong foundation of national character, ELF can serve as a strategic instrument for expanding influence while simultaneously promoting the richness of Indonesia's national identity on the global stage.

Keywords: English as a Lingua Franca (ELF); National Identity; Glocalization; Intelligibility; Citizenship Education.

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INTRODUCTION

The currents of globalization and the digital revolution have erased the boundaries of interaction among nations across various sectors. Within this interconnected ecosystem, English has assumed a new role as English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)—a communicative bridge for global communities whose speakers

come from different first-language backgrounds (Seidlhofer, 2001; Jenkins, 2006). English is no longer viewed as the exclusive domain of native-speaker countries. Contemporary international communication practices place greater emphasis on successful negotiation of meaning and intercultural collaboration than on merely imitating rigid Western grammatical norms (Cogo & Dewey, 2012; Mauranen, 2018; Ergasheva, 2024).

For Indonesia, this phenomenon presents a dual reality. On the one hand, English language proficiency has become an essential requirement for enhancing the global competitiveness of younger generations. On the other hand, the increasing intensity of foreign language use frequently generates collective concern. There is a genuine apprehension that national values, Pancasila, and the Indonesian language may gradually be eroded by the hegemony of global culture (Zein, 2020).

In responding to this dilemma, Citizenship Education plays a vital role in affirming that participation in a global society does not require individuals to relinquish their national identity (Kalidjernih & Winarno, 2019). In fact, foreign language proficiency can be harmonized with nationalism. Several studies have demonstrated that historical values, character education, and local wisdom can be seamlessly integrated into English language teaching (Agustini et al., 2014; Setyono & Widodo, 2019; Masita et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, scholarly exploration of the utilization of ELF as a strategy for bridging global engagement without compromising national identity remains limited. The majority of previous studies have primarily focused on technical, linguistic, analytical, and pedagogical dimensions of language, thereby overlooking the citizenship perspective.

Addressing this gap in the literature, this article aims to analyze the relationship between the use of English as a global means of communication (ELF) and efforts to preserve Indonesia's national identity. This article argues that English should not be interpreted as a cultural threat. On the contrary, when supported by a strong foundation of national character, ELF can serve as the most strategic instrument for expanding influence and promoting the richness of Indonesia's national identity on the global stage.

RESEARCH METHOD

This article was prepared using a literature review method based on a descriptive-analytical approach. The writing process was conducted through the collection and examination of various literature sources relevant to the topic of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) in global communication and its relationship with national identity. The sources utilized included scholarly journal articles, books, conference proceedings, and other academic publications discussing the concept of ELF, global communication, national identity, the impacts of English language use, and strategies for preserving national identity in the era of globalization.

The writing process began with a literature search using appropriate keywords, followed by the selection of sources based on their relevance and credibility. Subsequently, the information obtained was analyzed and synthesized to describe the role of ELF in global communication, identify its positive and

negative impacts on national identity, and elaborate on various strategies that can be implemented to preserve national identity without hindering participation in global communication.

The findings of the review were then organized systematically to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between the use of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and efforts to maintain national identity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. English as a Lingua Franca and Its Role in Global Communication

English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) plays a significant role in global communication or international communication. In this context, English is used by various speakers, not only native speakers but also non-native speakers. However, when English is chosen as a means of communication among individuals who possess different linguistic and first-language backgrounds across linguacultural boundaries, the preferred term is “English as a lingua franca” (House, 1999; Seidlhofer, 2001). Nevertheless, the terms “English as a medium of intercultural communication” (Meierkord, 1996) and, in a more specific and recent sense, “English as an international language” (Jenkins, 2000) are also frequently employed.

Therefore, English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) functions as a medium of communication that bridges the cultural differences possessed by its speakers. Accordingly, the use of ELF in the domain of global communication places greater emphasis on the effectiveness of message delivery in order to overcome differences in cultural backgrounds.

2. National Identity

Indonesia is a multicultural country characterized by cultural diversity, which constitutes the national identity of the Indonesian nation. The elements that shape this national identity consist of historical, ideological, constitutional, linguistic, symbolic, and state-related aspects. From a historical perspective, Indonesia shares a common experience of suffering due to colonial domination by foreign powers such as the Netherlands. This historical experience was subsequently synthesized by the nation’s founding figures, such as Sukarno and Mohammad Hatta, into the foundation of the state, enabling Indonesian society to live harmoniously and pursue common aspirations.

This state foundation has become a set of values embraced and practiced by Indonesian society in national and civic life. According to Sumaludin (2018), the factors that shape a person’s identity—both individually and collectively—are a combination of uniqueness and the realization of one’s presence through the values one embraces. Therefore, the values upheld by society become a personality as well as an identity that underlies individual and collective behavior. In line with this view, Astawa (2017) states that personality as an identity is the manifestation or totality of biological, psychological, and sociological factors that underlie individual behavior.

3. The Influence of ELF on National Identity

The emergence of English as an international language or English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) in Indonesia has been influenced by globalization. This phenomenon can serve as a highly useful instrument for building relationships among nations worldwide, yet at the same time it may pose a challenge to national identity. Indirectly, this development influences cultural values that function as components of national identity. The challenges and threats arising from this phenomenon generate both negative and positive impacts.

On the one hand, globalization and ELF, which facilitate connections among nations, provide Indonesia with opportunities to become more open and introduce its culture to the international community. On the other hand, contemporary society is confronted with the increasing tendency to take pride in using foreign languages, particularly English, in everyday life. This tendency may shift the position of the Indonesian language as a symbol of national identity (Antari, 2019), especially among younger generations.

Nevertheless, another perspective suggests that such concerns merely represent “language schizophrenia” or “language exolingua-phobia” (Kartono, 1976, p. 124). In reality, it is difficult to observe English genuinely replacing Indonesia’s local values and cultures. As a non-native-speaker country, Indonesia can instead benefit from the presence of English as ELF, particularly in establishing a significant role in the professional world, both in the context of individual careers and global organizational dynamics. According to Sahnan (2024), English proficiency is a crucial aspect that provides competitive advantages for both individuals and organizations in the global market.

Therefore, alongside the challenges and benefits that arise, Indonesia, as a country rich in cultural heritage, requires appropriate strategies to build global relationships without losing its national identity. Several strategies that may be implemented are presented below.

4. Implementing the Concept of Glocalization in Language Use

As a country endowed with abundant cultural wealth, Indonesia requires adaptive strategies in responding to globalization, one of which is the implementation of the concept of glocalization. In this context, glocalization requires society, particularly younger generations, to think globally while acting locally. In order to establish international relationships without diminishing national identity, English must be positioned purely as a mechanical or functional means of communication. In other words, English should be adopted as a practical instrument for achieving competitive advantages in professional and global organizational settings (Sahnan, 2024), rather than as a lifestyle that is excessively glorified.

The phenomenon of treating foreign languages as symbols of social status or prestige in daily life is precisely what has the potential to shift the position of the Indonesian language as a symbol of national identity (Antari, 2019). Through glocalization, English is utilized proportionally according to global needs, while the Indonesian language continues to be upheld as the home of the nation’s cultural and emotional values.

5. Adopting the Concept of Intelligibility

The second strategy, which is equally important, is to transform public perceptions regarding standards of English language proficiency by adopting the concept of intelligibility. In the era of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), the status of English has changed significantly. Communicative success is no longer measured by how closely a speaker resembles a native speaker; rather, it is determined by the effectiveness and mutual intelligibility achieved among language users from different parts of the world.

The traditional view that idealizes Western accents often generates unnecessary language anxiety or language exolingua-phobia (Kartono, 1976). By focusing on intelligibility, Indonesian younger generations can free themselves from such psychological burdens. They can use English confidently without abandoning their local identity. When a professional speaks English while maintaining the characteristics of Eastern politeness and the distinctiveness of a clear Indonesian accent, that individual is not losing his or her identity; rather, he or she is introducing national identity onto the stage of global communication.

CONCLUSION

Based on the review presented, it can be concluded that English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and Indonesia's national identity are not two contradictory entities; rather, they can coexist harmoniously when managed through appropriate strategies. The use of English as a means of global communication undoubtedly brings both opportunities and challenges for the preservation of national values, Pancasila, and the Indonesian language, particularly among younger generations who are vulnerable to perceiving foreign languages as symbols of lifestyle and social prestige. Nevertheless, these challenges can be minimized through two principal strategies. First, the implementation of the concept of glocalization, namely positioning English proportionally as an instrumental communication tool for professional and global purposes, while maintaining the Indonesian language as the home of the nation's cultural and emotional values. Second, the adoption of the intelligibility paradigm, which shifts the standard of successful English language use from resemblance to native speakers toward communicative effectiveness, thereby enabling younger generations to speak English confidently without abandoning distinctive Indonesian accents and norms of politeness.

Accordingly, Citizenship Education plays a strategic role in fostering the understanding that participation in global communication does not require the loss of national identity. When supported by a strong foundation of national character, ELF can instead serve as an instrument for expanding Indonesia's influence in the international arena while simultaneously functioning as a means of introducing and promoting the richness of Indonesia's culture and national identity to the global community.

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