

THE PREFERENCES OF ENGLISH ACCENTS BY STUDENTS IN LEARNING ENGLISH IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the preferences of English accents by students in Learning English in the Secondary Schools classroom of DRC, Most students have difficulties in speaking English in or outside the classroom. However, non-native English learners often state a desire to sound like native speakers. The study aims also at finding out the accent students prefer to involve with when they learn English at school. In the field of second language acquisition (SLA), accent has been recognized as one of the areas in language education for the past few decades (Jenkins, 2014). Although accent is not always directly connected to intelligibility, it is often blamed for miscommunication and can lead to discrimination (Derwing & Munro, 2009). The preference of American accent by students is due to the beauty of the American English, the music and movies where they watch and hear the American English.

The result showed from this study showed 23% representing 39 respondents hear the American accent when the teacher teaches or speaks English, 70% hear the British accent when the teacher teaches or speaks English. There are still a few 7% representing who are still not clear about the accent issue and who did not answer. 75% representing respondents still preferred the American accent, which 20% representing preferred the British accent whereas 5% representing 9 did not answer.

Keywords: Preference, student, classroom, learning.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette étude examine les préférences des élèves en matière d'accents anglais dans les classes d'apprentissage de l'anglais dans les écoles secondaires de la RDC. La plupart des élèves ont des difficultés à parler anglais en classe ou en dehors. Cependant, les apprenants d'anglais non natifs expriment souvent le désir de ressembler à des locuteurs natifs. L'étude vise également à déterminer l'accent que les élèves préfèrent utiliser lorsqu'ils apprennent l'anglais à l'école. Dans le domaine de l'acquisition d'une seconde langue (SLA), l'accent a été reconnu comme l'un des domaines de l'enseignement des langues au cours des dernières décennies (Jenkins, 2014). Bien que

l'accent ne soit pas toujours directement lié à l'intelligibilité, il est souvent accusé de mauvaise communication et peut conduire à la discrimination (Derwing et Munro, 2009). La préférence des étudiants pour l'accent américain est due à la beauté de l'anglais américain, à la musique et aux films qu'ils regardent et entendent en anglais américain.

Les résultats de cette étude montrent que 23% des 39 personnes interrogées entendent l'accent américain lorsque le professeur enseigne ou parle l'anglais, tandis que 70 % entendent l'accent britannique lorsque le professeur enseigne ou parle l'anglais. Quelques 7 % des personnes interrogées n'ont toujours pas compris la question de l'accent et n'ont pas répondu. 75 % des répondants préfèrent toujours l'accent américain, 20 % préfèrent l'accent britannique et 5 % n'ont pas répondu.

Mots-clés : *Préférence, étudiant, classe, apprentissage*

1. INTRODUCTION

Accent has an influence in learning English in the classroom. English is taught in the secondary schools of the Democratic Republic of Congo as a second language. Most of students are not familiar with English either at home or at school, so teachers ought to attract students through their accent and pronunciation to have the desire of learning English.

Teachers may find it useful to have a class discussion about accents at the beginning of a course, pointing out that students can make choices about accent and making students aware of the interrelationship of language, accent, and social factors (Derwing, 2003; LeVelle & Levis, 2014). In the class discussion, teachers should commit to help students develop the accent they desire.

Accent has different fields: phrase, sentence and sentence. Term accent is part of the characteristic way that a language is pronounced (also called word stress or lexical stress).

Researchers have shown that accent is tied to identity, not only for the first language (L1) – for example showing links between phonological variation and socio-economic class (Labov, 2006), religion (Levon, 2006), or sexual orientation (Podesva, Roberts, & Campbell-Kibler, 2001) – but also for the second language, reflecting shifts in sense of identity through second language (L2) learning (Cutler, 2014; Marx, 2002; Piller, 2002). There are numbers of accents, but two main accents which have been discussed here are the American accent and the British accent. The accents of English differ enough and can give misunderstanding in the classroom.

In certain varieties of Scottish English, for example, the pronunciation of pearl can sound like petal to an American ear. However if a student wants to sound like a native speaker, the teacher ought to help them to reach their goals.

2. DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1. Definition of key terms

Preference

Preference: noun is - a greater liking for one alternative over another or others. Concise Oxford English Dictionary (2002: 808)

- thing preferred Concise Oxford English Dictionary (2002 : 808);
- favour shown to one person over another or others Concise Oxford English Dictionary (2002 : 808).

Preferences refer to certain characteristics any consumer wants to have in a good or service to make it preferable to him. This could be the level of happiness, degree of satisfaction, utility from the product, etc. economic.indiatimes.com

The learners showed a tendency to prefer the American accent more than the British accent both the female and male students.

The term preference is used in multiple ways. Economists and behavioral decision theorists often equate preference with choice or willingness to pay. wires.wiley.com/cogsci. Psychologists, however, typically use the term preference to denote a latent tendency to consider something desirable or undesirable. Utility theory acknowledges that preferences vary between individuals. For example, when deciding whether to learn English in the classroom with the American accent or the British accent a bowl of soup or a bowl of ice cream, most of students preferred the American accent and some preferred the British accent. Thus, utility theory assumes that preferences are stable and complete Stability implies that learners who prefer the American accent over the British accent should exhibit the same preference in a different context.

Therefore, when talking about preferences that is the accent that learners in the classroom like. In this research students preferred the American accent that they often hear in movies, videos, music, the internet...

Student:

Student is defined as a person studying at university or other place of higher education. AmE a school pupil Concise Oxford English Dictionary (2002: 1424)

The definition of "student" once was "one who studies academic subjects". Today it can mean merely "one who attends a school, college or university".

This modern definition doesn't even suggest that the person does more than "attend". College and university professors still use the first definition, and schools have ways (such as requirements, exams and grades) to attempt to ensure that those who attend will also study and learn. monfortonschool.com

In this study, students of four different schools Institut 1 Bambou, Institut CBCO 2 Masina, Institut Scientifique et Commercial de Masina and Lycée Sainte Germaine went under research. Today, English is a world language and more English accents have appeared. Today it is difficult to teach English in the Democratic Republic of Congo due to the fact that we do not know when, where or how we are going to use English in the future.

This study therefore focuses on the students' preferences of English accents in the classroom. English teachers in the Democratic Republic of Congo secondary schools should teach and assess students' accents, in order to enable them to talk and work with the multitude of accents of the English-speaking world in the real life situations.

Therefore, most of English teachers in the Democratic Republic of Congo secondary schools do not teach different English accents in class. Teachers of English do not let the students make choice of the accent they want to learn in the classroom either. However, students' grades are not affected by the accent they speak. According to Skolverket (2011b), English teachers are supposed to teach students "spoken language, also with different social and dialect features", and "social, political and cultural conditions in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used" (p.55). According to Matsuda (2012, p.24), it is essential that students learn to understand that an English accent or the numerous accents they learn are just a few of many, and that the accents of their future conversation partners could, in fact, be different. It is therefore crucial that students learn different English accents so their speech can be understood by whomever they want to speak with, since people today acquire different English accents of the English language.

Classroom

Classroom noun: is a room in which a class of pupils or students is taught. Concise Oxford English Dictionary (2002: 264).

The research was done in the four different schools in which the classrooms are clean and students can learn without any problem. The environment learning is a challenge in numbers schools in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Many schools do not have nice buildings, its classrooms are not large enough to contain students. The overcrowded classrooms in government schools is an issue that the government should relieve in order to make students learn in good conditions and in adequate environment. Lots of private schools have one or two buildings with fewer classrooms but they organize

many streams. In such schools, classrooms are not so large enough to receive students. Students and teachers sweat during the lesson, and in other places students sit on the floor or the ground.

However, regardless the students level of English to understand authentic English, the kind of English they are going to encounter in their daily lives, in a radio, Tv in a movie for instance they ought to learn English accents in order to figure out. Students during the English class often struggle with the listening comprehensions in the classroom even though they understand their teachers' accents.

Learning

Learning is defined as knowledge or skills acquired through experience or study or being taught Concise Oxford English Dictionary (2002: 808).

The term *learning* is one of those concepts whose meaning is crystal clear until one has to put it in actual words. "Learning is when you learn something." "Learning is learning how to do something." A more useful definition is as follows: *Learning* is any relatively permanent change in behavior brought about by experience or practice gcwgandhinagar.com/econtent/document.

If we had not been able to learn, we would have died out as a species long ago. Learning is the process that allows us to adapt to the changing conditions of the world around us. We can alter our actions until we find the behavior that leads us to survival and rewards, and we can eliminate actions that have been unsuccessful in the past. Without learning, there would be no buildings, no agriculture, no lifesaving medicines, and no human civilization.

Most of students do not like learning English in the class room they find it difficult.

English is a difficult subject for many students in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Teachers of English should attract students to learn English and become familiar with the English language. Numbers of students do not learn English accents because they are taught in the classroom.

Therefore, learning is the process by which an individual acquires knowledge, attitudes and skills that are necessary to meet the demands of life. While touching a burning candle, a child gets burnt and he withdraws the fingers. When he faces a similar situation again he withdraws his fingers faster. Gradually he learns to avoid not only the burning candle but also other burning things. The behaviour of an individual is thus changed through experiences. This change in behaviour brought about by experiences is commonly known as learning. However, according to Matsuda (2012, p.24), it is essential that students learn to understand that an English accent or the numerous accents

they learn are just a few of many, and that the accents of their future conversation partners could, in fact, be different.

2.2. Objective

The objective of this study is to find out the extent to which student can discriminate or he aware of accents in English. The second objective is to identify what accents they like by students in the classroom. What accents they like when they learn English? What accent they can easily understand in the classroom during the English lesson.

The research questions:

- Which English accents are the preferred accents by students?
- Which accent/accents are the students aware of in the classroom?

Hypothesis

1. They are not aware of current accents.
2. The paper is driven by the assumption that students do not prefer any English accents when they learn English in the classroom.

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Discrimination due to foreign accent is a problem in North America (Lippi-Green, 1997) explored how children are taught to discriminate, offering one example of a cartoon, such as Disney's Aladdin, which shows the bad guys as others (different from the good guys and different from us, the viewers) who have noticeably strong accents. The preference of English accent is crucial in the way that students make choice to one accent while learning English in the classroom.

Today the English language is one of the accepted Lingua Franca, which means it is "a common language between speakers whose native languages are different" (Oxford dictionary, n.d.). As a result of English being a mutual language by many people, there are many different spoken varieties of English today. As Marlina (2014, p.1) points out English is used, not only among native speakers, but also among and between non-native speakers, and because of that the English language may go through adaptations and changes in the future. It has also been discovered that "The recognition of numerous 'new' varieties of English leads to a realization that any of these Englishes could be potentially used for international communication" (Matsuda, 2012, p.4).

The aim in school today is to teach and prepare students for the English language as a world language. This also includes in which direction English, as a language, will develop. English is the native or official language in a large number of countries, connects many different cultures and is the dominant language of communication in the world. The ability to use English is necessary

for studies, traveling in other countries and for social contacts of different kinds (Skolverket, 2011a, p. 1). Preparing students for English as an international language is the most complex and hardest part of being a language teacher today. Since the English language is an important part of the student's future, both when it comes to the international labour market, but also by making the student feel comfortable using the language in everyday situations (Malmberg, 1985).

3.1. Helping Learners to Understand Variety of Accents

Speakers from a wide variety of linguistic backgrounds use English together as a lingua franca in any number of contexts but understanding speakers with an unfamiliar accent can be a significant challenge for listeners.

Teachers of English in the Democratic Republic of the Congo ought to recognize the need for the learners to understand a variety of accents in English. However, it is common to feel almost paralyzed by the enormity of the task at hand, given the huge number of different accents that are found in the wide range of different situations in which English is used as a language of communication. There are resources available for teachers who wish to help their students expand the range of accents that they can understand.

The results of a study carried out by Gass & Varonis (1984), in which two groups of L1 English listeners - one group of students and one group of ESL instructors were asked to transcribe English sentences read aloud by English language learners whose L1 was either Arabic or Japanese. In both cases, the English teachers made fewer mistakes than the students (i.e. they understood the speakers better). According to the authors, this is because the English instructors were accustomed to listening to speakers with these accents, but it is also possible that they had learned compensation techniques to allow them to better understand any unfamiliar accent.

3.2. Causes of Failure in the Teaching/ Learning Variety of Accents in DRC

The major cause of failure is ignorance, teachers' ignorance of different accents is the main cause. Lack of deep knowledge and particularities of English different accents keeps the situation of failure in the teaching/learning of accents. Ignorance of basic principles and details on how things have to be done is harmful to life and kills as the Bible says. In the case under investigation, there exist a certain level of acknowledgement about the role of the English language nowadays, but no actions are taken. It is a kind of theoretical acknowledgement which is not enough when skills cannot be seen through practice as Ngwaba (2014) argues: "A paradox about theory is that knowing is NOT doing necessarily. Knowing is doing. People who know are people who do things with the knowledge they have. It is useless to say that

you know if you cannot do it in practice". (Ngwaba; Reading, 53). In other words, knowledge without action is nothing and is not knowledge.

Other causes of failure in teaching and learning English accents are related to the context or setting in which the English course is given. There are poor students' conditions of life, students' lack of exposure to the language, lack of books and poor teaching load. With the free education system today, teachers and students are between the devil and the deep blue sea. Classes are overcrowded, teachers seldom give enough tests and assignments due the high number of students in the classroom to evaluate them. Poor teaching/learning conditions have impacted on the outcome of the teaching/learning of accents. Poor teachers command of the language and numbers of teachers are not familiar with English accents. Some students come to class without exercise-books or text-books. Almost all students do not have dictionaries either.

Teacher training deficiency needs to be mentioned as one of the causes of failure in the teaching/learning English, especially accents in DRC. Teachers should be well trained and have the command of the language and exposed to the different English accents. Teacher with a poor training will never enable students to communicate in the real life situations.

3.3. How to Understand Accents

It is easy to see how understanding different accents can be very difficult as there are so many English accents, not only from the UK, America and Australia, but from all over the world. Most native English speakers speak very quickly and use expressions and slang so one's may have problems understanding them. Here are some tips which may help:

1) Ask people to slow down

Many people might not realize that you don't understand and will continue to speak at their usual fast speed. Most people won't mind at all if you ask them to speak slower and it will be much easier to understand them.

2) Expose yourself to many different accents

If you listen to more "real" English, your ears will soon adapt to hearing different accents.

3) Watch English TV and films

If you do not understand everything to begin with, put on English subtitles. Just remember to switch them off occasionally and see if you understand without them.

4) Listen to the radio

You may not understand everything in the beginning but you will improve quickly if you listen regularly.

5) Listen to at least an hour of English a day

The more you listen, the easier it will be.

6) Do some travelling

Travel to different areas in the UK, USA, Australia, and Nigeria... (and around the world) where people have different English accents and try to listen and speak to them. academia.edu/22663065/understanding-english-accents.

3.4. The Accent Preferred by Students in EFL Teaching.

As it is well known, the English language has acquired a greater importance around the world. For that reason, "an increasing number of L2 learners have begun to study English as a chosen foreign and/or as a second language because of the spread of English as a global language. This spread increased the variety of English accents over the world" (Kim, 2012, p.127).

English accent may be a possible factor that most learners care about when they learn the language. According to McGee (2009) there are still students or learners who think that the predominant and official accents are British and American because they take for granted that native speakers control better tools and methods that will improve their learning. In that sense, it is understandable if learners feel inclined to study and learn one of those English accents.

A study made in China reflects that "when speaking English, the majority of participants, 82 percent, preferred trying to sound like a Native Speaker (NS) whereas 25.3 percent wanted to be clearly identified as Chinese" (He & Miller, 2011, p.435). One possible reason why they prefer native accented English is the same that McGee (2009) explains: better tools and methods to learn the language.

Moreover, Kim (2012) mentions that English accents of language learners are closely related to their social, cultural and regional identity and the choice of an accent depends on the socio-cultural context.

4. METHODOLOGY

In this study data were selected with a questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed for the learners, it aimed at getting learners' preference of accents. A questionnaire has been handed to a sample of 169 students of four different schools. The sample was about second forms, third forms and fourth forms.

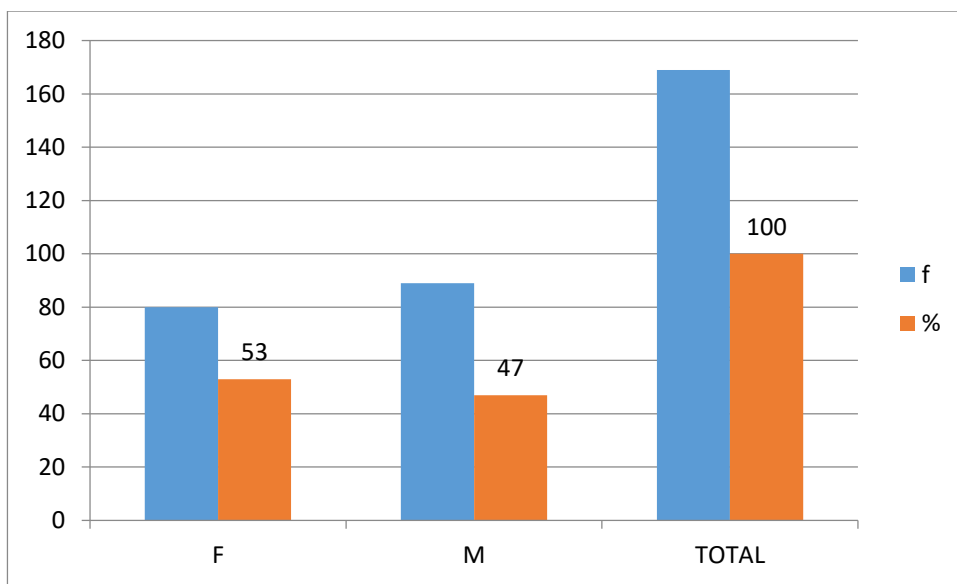
5. RESULTS

5.1. Sample characteristics

5.1.1. Gender

Table 1

GENDER	f	%
F	80	47
M	89	53
TOTAL	169	100

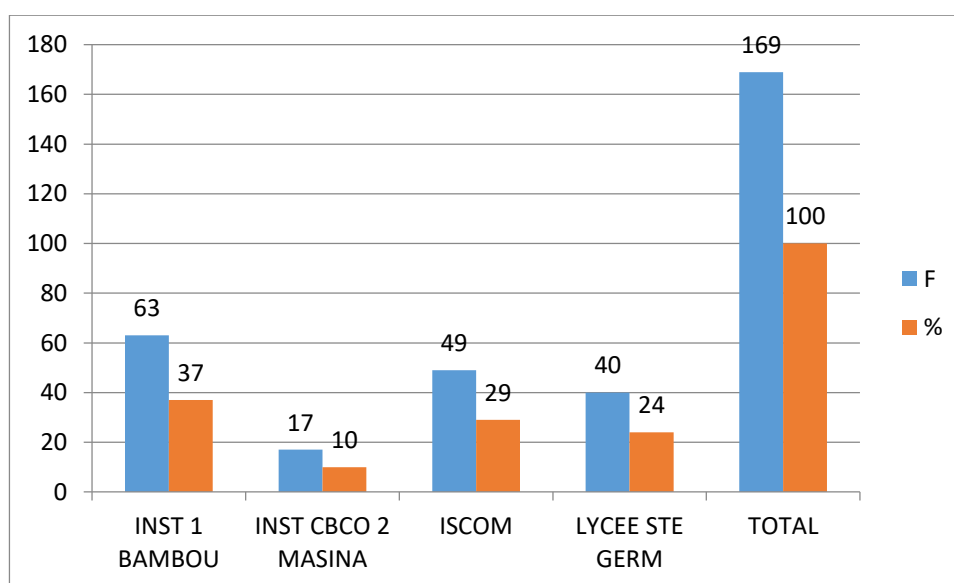


It was observed that 47% representing 80 respondents were female students whereas 53% representing 89 respondents were male students.

5.1.2. School

Table 2

SCHOOLS	F	%
INST 1 BAMBOU	63	37
INST CBCO 2 MASINA	17	10
ISCOM	49	29
LYCEE STE GERM	40	24
TOTAL	169	100

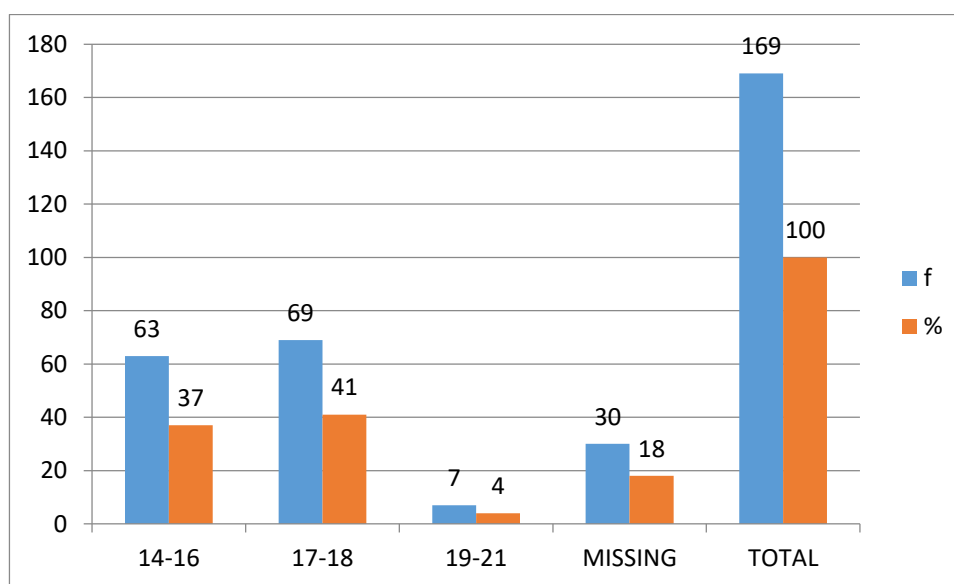


It was noticed that 37% representing 63 respondents were from Institut 1 Bambou, 10% representing 17 respondents were from Institut CBCO 2 Masina, 24% representing 49 respondents were from Institut Scientifique et Commercial de Masina and 29% representing 40 respondents were from Lycée Sainte Germaine.

5.1.3. Age

Table 3 Students 'age

AGE	f	%
14-16	63	37
17-18	69	41
19-21	7	4
MISSING	30	18
TOTAL	169	100



It was observed that 37% representing 63 informants 'age vary from 14 to 16 years, 41% representing 69 informants 'age vary from 17 to 18 years, 4% representing 7 informants 'age vary from 19 to 21 years whereas 18% representing 30 informants left the blank space.

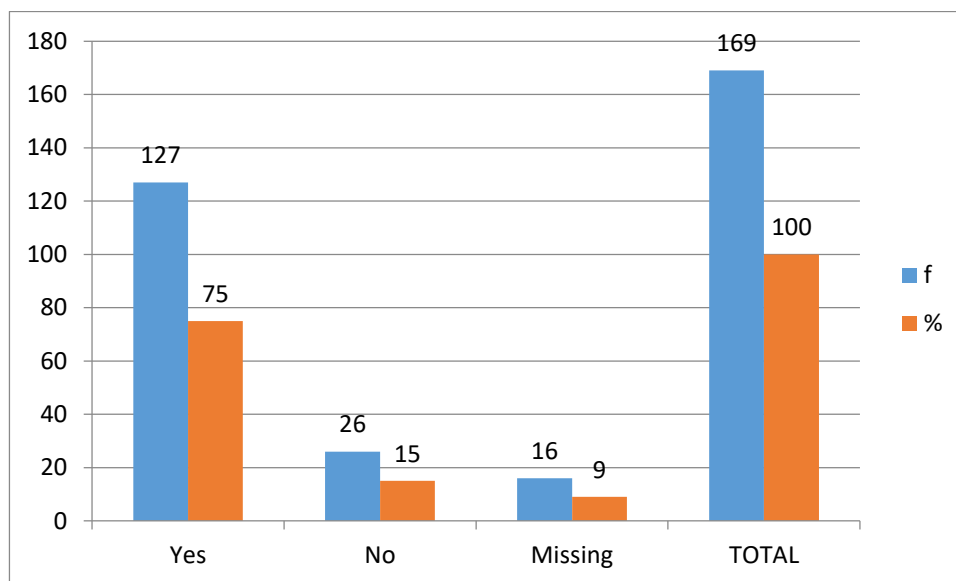
5.2. Interest variables

Accent Awareness and Discrimination.

Item 1: In question 1 students were required to say whether they study accents in English course.

Table 4

English accents in English course	f	%
Yes	127	75
No	26	15
Missing	16	9
TOTAL	169	100

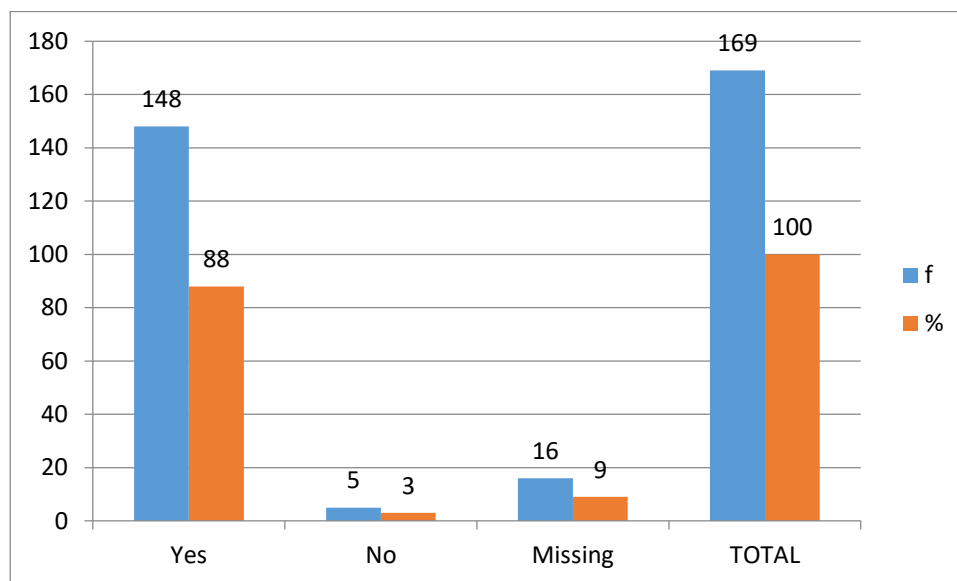


The result showed that 75% representing 127 informants study English accents in the English course, 15% representing 26 informants said no whereas 9% representing 16 informants left the blank space.

Item 2: In question two students were requested to state whether they want to improve their accent.

Table 5

Improve accent	f	%
Yes	148	88
No	5	3
Missing	16	9
TOTAL	169	100

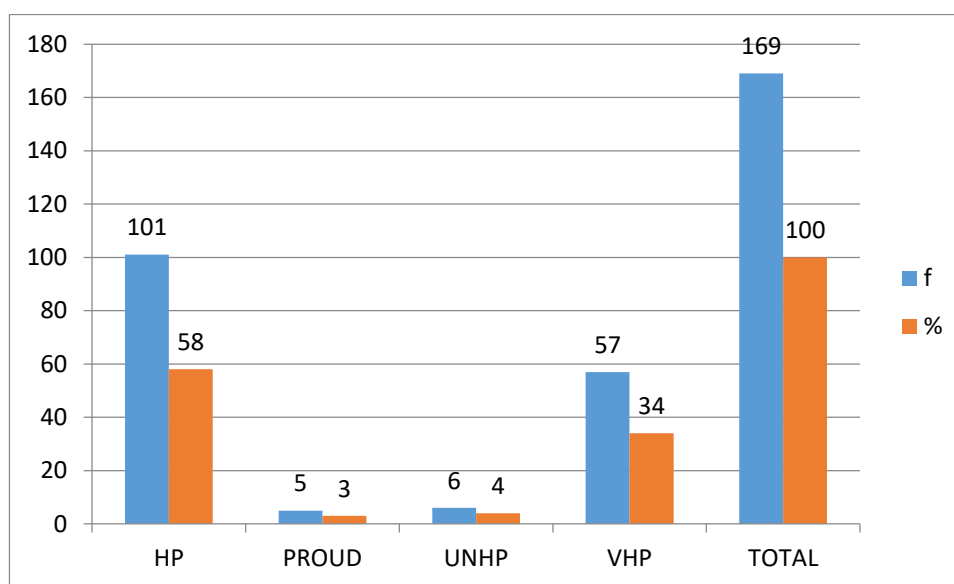


It was observed that 88% representing 148 respondents wanted to improve their accent, 3% representing 5 respondents did not want to improve their accent whereas 9% representing 16 respondents left the blank space.

Item 3: In the third question students were asked to say how they feel when they hear themselves speaking English with good accent.

Table 6

Speaking with a good accent	f	%
HP	101	58
PROUD	5	3
UNHP	6	4
VHP	57	34
TOTAL	169	100



It was noticed that 58% representing 101 respondents are happy when they speak English with a good accent, 3% representing 5 respondents are proud when they speak English with a good accent, 4% representing 6 respondents are unhappy whereas 34% representing 57 respondents are very happy when they speak English with a good accent.

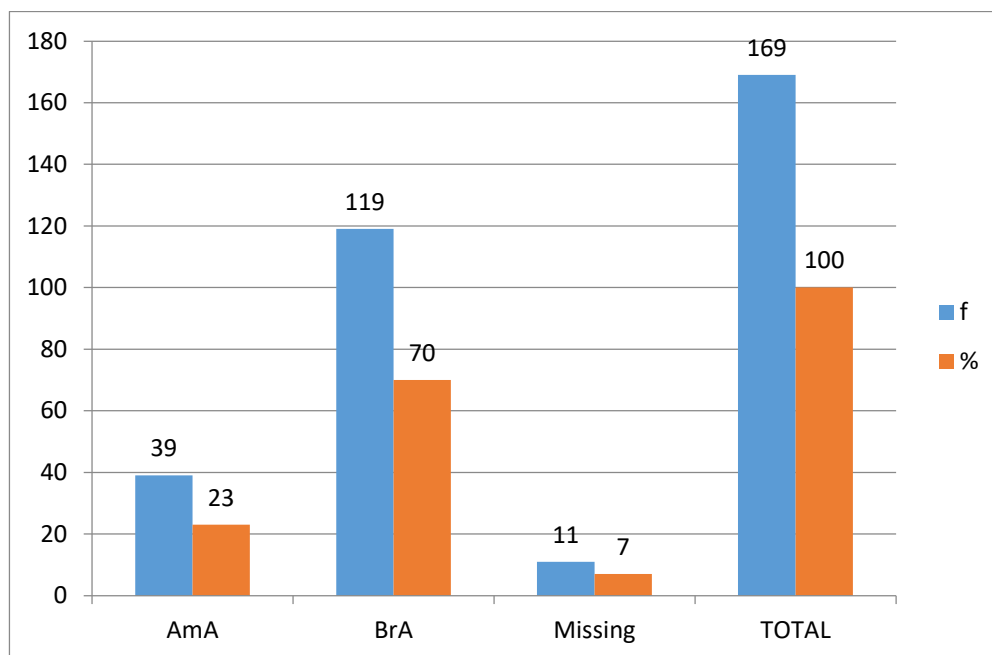
6. ANALYSIS

As far as the teaching of accents is concerned, most of students prefer the American accent in the EFL context, the study indicated that 75% of participants prefer the American accent. They said that they like the American accent because when they watch movies, wrestling, videos, and listen the music, they hear the American accent. Whereas 25% of participants like the British accent because they find it easier and understandable.

Item 4: In the fourth question the aim was to know what accent students hear when their teacher teaches or speaks English. The British or the American accent.

Table 7

Teacher accent	f	%
AmA	39	23
BrA	119	70
Missing	11	7
TOTAL	169	100



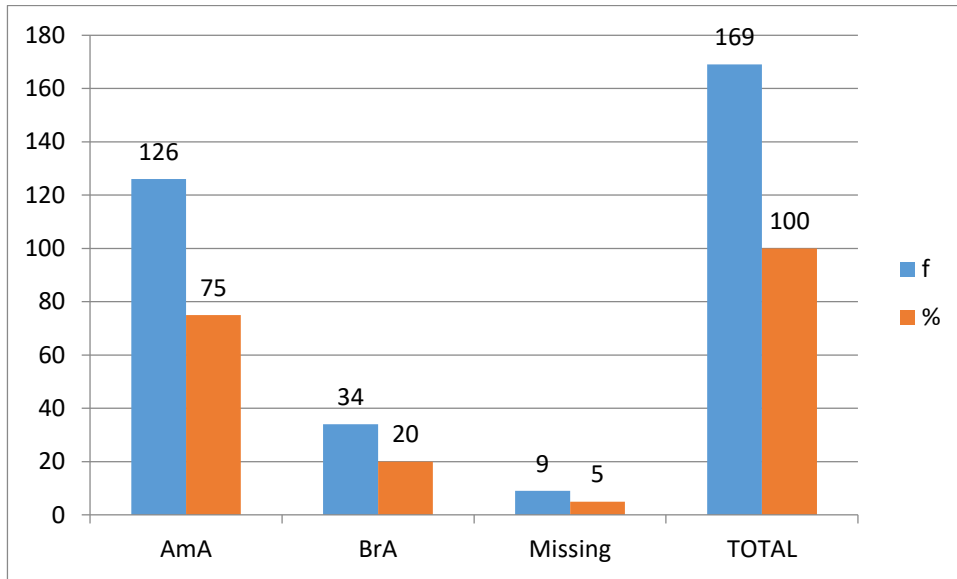
The result showed 23% representing 39 respondents hear the American accent when the teacher teaches or speaks English, 70% representing 119 hear the British accent when the teacher teaches or speaks English whereas 7% representing 11 did not answer.

Item 5: In the question five students were requested to say which accent they prefer, the British accent or the American accent.

*** Accent preference**

Table 8

Accent preference	f	%
AmA	126	75
BrA	34	20
Missing	9	5
TOTAL	169	100



The result showed 75% representing 126 respondents preferred the American accent, 20% representing 34 respondents preferred the British accent whereas 5% representing 9 did not answer.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, this small scale study has shown that the most preferred English accents in the classroom, is the American accent. 75% representing 126 respondents preferred the American accent, whereas 20% representing 34 respondents preferred the British accent. Their preference of the American accent was due to accent they watch in movies, videos, internet and they hear in songs.

The issue of English as an International Language (EIL) has been a long debate in contemporary English language teaching (Holliday, 2005). As an international language, a wide variety of accents or Englishes is developed in different parts of the world. Thus, based on the findings of this study, further research may be undertaken on how EFL learners can get wider exposure on different accents of English, particularly in a Listening, Pronunciation or Speaking class.

Accents in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class, particularly a Pronunciation class, may be a hard task raised by English teachers. Dauer (2005) addresses a significant issue within this matter. She states that English consists of many varieties and Standard English taught in schools is basically a written language, not an accent. Thus, "the first question any pronunciation teacher must address is, what accent should I teach?" (Dauer, 2005, p. 543).

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APPENDIX

1. Do you study English accents in English course?

2. Do you want to improve your accent?

3. How do you feel when you hear yourself speaking English with good accent?

4. What accent do you hear when your teacher teaches or speaks English? The British or the American accent.

5. Which accent do you prefer? The British accent or the American accent?

