

Students' Perceptions of Using English for Real-Time Communication in International Video Conferences

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Abstract

Purpose: The goal of this study is to investigate the students' life experience, the challenges and opportunities they undergo in English as Lingua Franca (ELF) communication, as well as the influence of these experiences on their confidence, motivation, and identity as English users.

Methodology: This qualitative study explores EFL students' perception of practicing English in real-time communication with international interlocutors during the video conference dialogues on global issues. Data were collected and triangulated from semi-structured interviews with eight students as interviewees, observation notes compiled during the international video conference sessions, and students' reflective writings. In analysing the data, thematic analysis was employed to identify the recurring patterns across the data sources.

Results: The findings present that students viewed English as a primary tool for international communication rather than as an academic subject, prioritizing intelligibility and meaning-making over native-like norms and grammatical accuracy. The data also reveal that participants discover linguistic and intercultural difficulties, such as diverse accent variation, lack of academic vocabulary, speed of communication, and spontaneous responses. However, these existing challenges boosted the development of communicative strategies and willingness to communicate. Moreover, repeated participation in real-time international video conference contribute to gradual improvements in confidence, motivation, and sense of legitimacy as English users.

Applications/Originality/Value: This study emphasizes the pedagogical meaning of learners' participation in authentic international video conferences and highlights the urgency of integrating ELF-oriented practice toward English language education. By centralizing students' voices, this research provides a deeper comprehension of English in real-life communicative practice, especially in global education settings.

Introduction

In the globalized world, the existence of the English language primarily alters as a lingua franca, facilitating individuals to communicate with people across the globe from diverse linguistic, cultural, social, and national identity backgrounds. This idea is highly supported by the advancement of technology and the emergence of online communication platforms. With the acceleration of technology, English has reinforced its function as the primary lingua franca in online communication (Surenthiran et al., 2026). The availability of online communication platforms has become the bridge for English language communicators to practice with others worldwide (Handayani, 2024). Instead of being oriented with the perfect grammar and native-speaker norms (Ikhsan & Panjaitan, 2025), English is progressively understood as a tool for communication for constructing meaning or ideas internationally in academic, professional, and socio-political conversations. This transformation has been widely interpreted in contemporary applied linguistic research, which focuses on its flexibility, intelligibility, adaptability, and communicative effectiveness as defining features of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) communication (Tsai, 2025). As a consequence, engaging learners in authentic, real-time global communication needs to be a fundamental focus in English language education for international communication purposes.

This global transition creates huge consequences in English education, especially for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The implementation of traditional classroom teaching, which merely still emphasizes linguistic accuracy and standardized patterns rather than using English as a worldwide communication which more on understanding may inadequately prepare learners for the communicative demands of global discourse, where intelligibility, adaptability, flexibility, and intercultural negotiation are more important than native-like accuracy (Geçkinli, 2025). Moreover, the implementation of a traditional classroom setting, disregarding the use of technology and social media, still become the issues in certain areas that limit the students' opportunity to practice their language skills with people outside of their class, which is significant to accommodate a wide range of diverse accents and discourse styles, and formulate ideas and opinions on complex global issues. Therefore, comprehending the way learners experience and interpret real-life English communication has become a crucial aspect of inquiry in today's educational research.

One of the most noticeable sites for authentic EFL use is the students' involvement and participation in international conferences and global discussion forums where English becomes a crucial tool of communication and is employed in real time interaction to engage with other participants from various national, cultural, and socio-political backgrounds, discussing global issues such as climate change, education, human right and so on. This activity goes beyond a simulated classroom assignment, positioning learners as legitimate participants who have the right to deliver the idea within global discourse communities. Some researchers have displayed that active participation in this context increases intercultural awareness, improves self-confidence, fosters global citizenship, and problematizes the traditional conception of linguistic authority and native-speaker norms (Baker & Fang, 2023). In addition, Kribes (2025) assumed that increasing cultural awareness in EFL learning not only enhances students' language competence but also serves to develop global citizenship skills such as tolerance, empathy, and intercultural understanding.

On the other hand, despite the growing acknowledgement of the pedagogical values of international interaction, empirical study which concerns of students' perception regarding these experiences, especially in simultaneous and highly intensive communicative events remains limited, particularly when the participants are junior high school students. Nevertheless, real-time EFL communication in international settings produces various challenges for learners. Learners mostly encounter difficulties in negotiating with real-world communication problems with diverse forms of English (Kurniawan, 2024), pragmatic differences, turn-taking norms, and the pressure to express complicated ideas in fluent English. Moreover, as EFL learners, a lack of academic vocabulary creates huge barriers to fully translating the ideas into English. At the same time, such activity may also create educational prospects for linguistic growth, strategic competence, communicative skills, and also confidence as English users. The existing qualitative research indicates that learners' participation in EFL conversation is strongly linked with affective variables like anxiety, motivation, willingness to communicate, and the ongoing construction of learning identities, which significantly affect their readiness to communicate (Syukri et al., 2024). This affective and identity-related dimension becomes a mostly significant aspect when it deals with global participation to discuss the rising and popular issues with international interlocutors globally.

Despite the increasing scholarly focus on EFL and authentic communicative practices, there is still a fundamental gap in this area of research related to students' perception of utilizing English for real-time communication in international conferences that address complex global issues, particularly from a qualitative framework that emphasizes learners' voices. A large body of literature has explored ELF-related attitudes at the theoretical dimension or on the structured educational exchanges, ignoring the life and contextual experience undergone by students who actively employ English as a language of communication to engage in global dialogues. Thus, responding to this gap is somehow essential to distribute pedagogical approach information that strives to empower learners with communicative competencies and orientation needed for meaningful active involvement in global discourse communities.

In response to this research gap, this qualitative research exists to explore EFL students' perceptions and experiences of employing English as Lingua Franca (ELF) in real-life communication within international conferences and discussions on global issues. By exploring the students' perspectives on their communicative experiences, the obstacles and opportunities they undergo, and the ways such experiences build their confidence, motivation, and shifting identities as English users. Therefore, this study seeks to provide a more nuanced understanding of EFL communication as situated and experienced by junior high school students when participating in the international video conference. In more specific terms, this study is guided by three fundamental research questions as follows:

1. How do students perceive their experience of using English for real-time communication with international participants during international conferences?
2. What challenges and opportunities do students experience when using English as a lingua franca in real-time international conference dialogues on global issues?
3. How do these real-time international communication experiences influence students' confidence, motivation, and sense of themselves as English users?

Thus, by exploring these research questions, the study aims to produce additional theoretical discussions on ELF, authentic communicative practices, and learners' identity, while also furnishing pedagogical perspectives for English language education within the growing frequency of transnational and globalized learning environments.

Research Methods

Research Design

This research implements a qualitative research design to investigate the students' perception towards EFL real-time communication with international participants in a global video conference. A qualitative approach was determined appropriate as the study intends to obtain an in-depth understanding of students' perspectives and subjective experiences related to the use of authentic English communication in a global context. Daruhadi (2024) stated that qualitative research is employed to describe a particular phenomenon in detail to obtain the fundamental meaning. This is in line with Flick's (2007) statement, who argued that qualitative study emphasized the analysis of subjective meanings and the social construction of particular events by compiling non-standardized data like texts and images rather than numerical data. In line with qualitative research in applied linguistics, this design enables the researchers to explore the affective, experiential, and identity-related aspects of ELF communication, which are not readily accessible through a quantitative design.

This study adopted an interpretive perspective, placing English communication as a situated practice shaped by interaction, context, and interlocutors' diversity. By highlighting the students' perspective on the use of English in this context, the researcher intended to grasp what is actually experienced and felt by learners when having real-time communication, the challenges they encountered, and the opportunities they had, as well as the impact on their confidence, motivation, and English speaking performance.

Participants

The participant of this study was eight junior high school EFL students from SMP Al Hikmah International Islamic Boarding School (IIBS) Batu who had actively engaged in international video conferences, including real-time dialogues with participants from various countries, where English served as the main tool of communication. This video conference concerns Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), contemporary global issues like Artificial Intelligence (AI), Climate Change, Human Rights, Education, etc. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling, as they possessed the targeted experiences that became the concern of this study.

All participants received formal instruction in English and voluntarily participated in international dialogues beyond their regular classroom activities. Moreover, ethical considerations were strictly addressed, including informed consent was taken from all participants, they were purely voluntary, and anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed by the use of pseudonyms.

Research Instruments

The primary research instrument was a semi-structured interview, developed based on previous studies on English as Lingua Franca (ELF), authentic language use, and intercultural communication. The questions were conceptually structured based on the research on learners' experiences of real-world English use, ELF conversation and meaning negotiation, and studies examining the learners' affective factors, learners' motivation, confidence, identity, and participation in an international communicative context. A semi-structured interview was selected to provide flexibility for participants to convey and elaborate on their experiences while keeping the concern with the research questions. The interview guidelines stick to three main points:

- students' overall experiences of using English with international participants,
- perceived challenges and opportunities in ELF communication,
- the influence of these experiences on learners' confidence, motivation, and identity as English users.

To ensure the richness and validity of the data, the interview results were supported by observation notes during the video conference session, which mainly attempted to capture immediate physical expression, participation patterns, and interaction behaviour that happened when the video conference was conducted. These observation notes were a

complementary data source that strengthened the findings, allowing for data triangulation and enabling more precise data reports regarding the students' perception and experience after joining international video conferences.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted within a particular period when students participated in an international conference session. Semi-structured interviews were carried out individually and were organized in an understandable and comfortable language for participants to gain depth and clear responses. Each interview takes about 20-30 minutes to ensure the completeness of the data needed. Moreover, participants were also provided a reflection note to write down some important highlights about their experience of using English in authentic global dialogues. All collected data were transcribed verbatim and securely stored to facilitate systematic analysis.

Data Analysis

In analysing the data, the researcher applies thematic analysis, following a systematic and iterative process. By following the procedures outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), the analysis is started by reading all interview transcripts and reflection notes as well as observation notes, and is selected carefully and repeatedly to gain familiarity with the data, filtering the important parts which were relevant to answer the research questions. Preliminary codes were generated to capture the recurring ideas, experiences, and students' perspectives related to the use of English in real-time international communication.

Then, the existing codes were examined, compared, and arranged into wider themes that represent the thematic patterns of the data. These themes were selectively reviewed through constant comparison among the sources of the data and were mapped to answer the research questions. Considerable attention was given, during the analysis of the data, to ensure the credibility, validity, and trustworthiness of the data by upholding an audit trail, carefully conducting data triangulation between interviews, observation notes, and reflections, and guaranteeing the grounded interpretations based on participants' statements.

Finally, the ending of the data analysis should represent the comprehensive answer to explain the research question, which mainly focuses on the perception of ELF communication, the challenges and opportunities encountered in international dialogues, and identity as the users of English.

Findings

This finding section presented the data derived from the triangulation analysis of semi-structured interviews, observation notes taken during the international conference session, and students' reflections written when the interview session had ended. By employing thematic analysis, some fundamental themes emerged that highlight the students' perceptions, challenges, opportunities, and the development of personal identity as the users of English as Lingua Franca (ELF) in real-time international communication.

English as a Functional Communicative Resource

The result of triangulating the data has revealed a consistent statement from the participants that English is perceived as a practical and functional means of communication rather than as an academic subject regulated by rigid and systematic grammatical norms. Interview data also highlight some statements that students prioritized communicative clarity and meaning-making over linguistic accuracy when taking part in an international conference. One particular note, from student's reflection, demonstrated that the students finally comprehended the urgency of learning English not just to gain an academic score but as a tool for building international relationships with people all over the world. In her direct speech, she said:

“When I first started learning English, I thought it was only for getting good grades. However, as I learned more deeply, I realized that English is not just about written scores, but a language that is widely used by many people and helps us connect with and understand others through communication in English.”

This expression clearly described a shift of learners' perception about English from an instrumental and academic assessment-oriented point of view to communicative and social relationship understanding. Initially, the learner perceived English simply as an academic subject correlated with the level of academic achievement and passing grades, denying the core function as a tool of global communication. This argumentation existed due to the fact that mostly English teaching is conducted in the traditional classroom concept, where such intensive communication rarely happened particularly with learners from an international background.

However, as learners got more chances and experience to collaborate with international students through video conference, this perception has transformed into recognizing English as Lingua Franca that is employed by a wide range of people in the world for communication. This indicated that English becomes more meaningful when learners use it as a tool of global communication rather than merely an academic requirement. One interviewee said "*Previously I don't understand why we need to learn English, but now, I finally know that English language is a life skill which must be mastered by all people*", this assumption indicated that the student firstly had not fully understood the goals of learning English, but finally realized after taking part in the video conferences for English was the only communicative device that understood by other across the nations. In addition, another participant strengthened by stating, "*I felt like I was part of the international community.*" This statement emphasized that by utilizing English as a tool of international communication, people would feel that they are part of a global social community.

Moreover, the explanation above was strongly supported by the findings from observation notes, which demonstrated that students still enthusiastically continued to engage in the conferences despite lots of grammatical errors, lack of academic vocabularies, and low English skill proficiency compared to students from native English and English as Second Language (ESL) countries, as long as their ideas were comprehensible by the others. Reflective notes even added that students optimize the opportunity to practice their English on global issues dialogues as a valuably authentic experience for them.

Negotiating Linguistic and Intercultural Challenges

Participants noted some important challenges when participating in real-time international conferences. Mostly argued that linguistic challenges, such as the variety of diverse accents, formulating spontaneous responses, and interpreting complex ideas into scientific words in grammatically correct that related to the topic of global issues. Moreover, the variety of divergent accents is one of the most challenging factors that often creates misinterpretation. One student delivered a statement in the interview session:

"I need to be able to understand the accents they use—whether British, American, or from their own regions—and I also need to be able to organize my words well and use correct grammar."

This statement clarified the above explanation that the crucial challenges were the diversity of accents and the ability of constructing English words based on the correct grammatical patterns. In addition, some others responded that the speed of English speech from international participants exacerbated difficulties in comprehending the meaning of the utterance. Then, one interviewee said, "*My biggest challenge is understanding their accents, especially those who speak quickly.*" The different accents, as well as the speed of the speech, created barriers in understanding the utterance.

For some students, self-confidence and being afraid of making mistakes also become critical challenges that hinder them from actively engaging in the conversation. Some of their statements were "*I was afraid of making pronunciation and grammatical errors*" and "*I didn't feel very confident because my English was still bad.*" Therefore, all these challenges are supposed to become essential concerns for achieving better performance.

However, rather than seeing these challenges as purely negative, students portrayed them as learning opportunities. These challenges lead them to grow and develop their English skills, speech competencies, self-confidence, learning motivation, and identity as English users. The data of the interviews and observation notes revealed that students developed a range of communicative strategies, such as adjusting vocabulary to gain mutual understanding, constructing note-taking strategies to highlight important points, slowing down the speech, and developing critical thinking by forming complicated questions. One student, in an interview session, argued, "*I felt that my vocabulary, grammar, listening, and speaking skills also improved well. I learned many new words, which had a positive impact,*" which described that the international conferences assisted them in improving their English linguistic competencies. Observational data further supported the findings, capturing the improvement in speaking quality after students had participated in the conference for several sessions.

Increased Confidence and Willingness to Communicate

A notable finding across interviews and students' reflections was a parallel increase in students' confidence and willingness to employ English as a daily communicative language among them. The rising frequency of the use of English in the students' daily life boosted their communication skill performance and improved their English frequency when joining the international conference. Most of the students reported that they were psychologically pressured at the beginning of engaging in the international conference. They felt nervous, anxious, and fearful of making mistakes or being judged by other interlocutors when delivering the ideas. However, they gradually improved their self-confidence and reduced their anxiety after participating in the conference repeatedly. When the interview session began, one student stated:

"At a climate change conference, I was a little shy at first. However, as time went on and I listened to other speakers share their opinions, I started to express my own views as well, which made me feel more comfortable and less shy."

Looking at the answer from the students, it concludes that anxiety and feeling unconfident influenced the student to keep quiet and stay silent listening to the ongoing conversation in the conference, but she was confidently starting to speak after the other participants' opinion stimulate her to deliver ideas as well. Some interviewees also stated similar arguments like *"I am more motivated to learn English after joining the conference"*, *"I am not really afraid to speak after joining this conference more than two times"*. Therefore, such an experience is significant for the advancement of students' English-speaking skills.

Moreover, observation notes also supported the findings from interviews and students' reflections, demonstrating that students gradually and actively engaged in international video conference interaction by increasing the frequency of delivering the ideas, asking questions, and answering other participants' questions, and displayed less visible hesitation. The dialogues were more alive, indicating that successful communication experiences boosted students' personal confidence towards their communicational abilities and English skills, even though with the absence of native-like proficiency.

Emerging Identity as Legitimate English Users

The data also described the shifting perception of students as English users. Students perceived a growing sense of legitimacy and ownership over the use of the English language, demonstrating themselves as competent English speakers in the context of global dialogues. Rather than orienting to the native-like norms, students put more concern on constructing the complex ideas to be delivered in the conference and trying to accept accent diversity among the participants. Some interviewees stated that:

S1: *"Because when there are differences in accents, my ears sometimes catch different words."*

S2: *"I realized that English does not have to be spoken like a native speaker."*

S3: *"I felt that everyone was trying to understand each other."*

These three statements were clearly evidence explaining the increase in students' identity as English users. The effort of tolerating diverse accents among them and working collaboratively to have mutual understanding has been a significant proof that they felt as 'part of a global community' and recognized English as a tool to share global sources, rather than foreign language owned by certain communities. Therefore, this statement indicated an evolving paradigm of learners' identity which aligned with ELF principles.

Discussion

The findings of the present study provide empirical evidence to support the contemporary perspective of English as Lingua Franca (ELF), particularly in relation to the use of authentic, real-time international communication. In line with the previous research, students regarded English as a tool of communication and meaning-making, concentrating on creating

communicative effectiveness over linguistic norms. These findings reinforced the previous research that EFL students hold firmly toward ELF and recognise its role as media for intercultural communication, constructing meaning-making with global conversation rather than strictly committed to native-linguistic norms (Tsai, 2025). Moreover, Shofiya and Basuni (2023) reinforced that EFL-focused interaction prioritizes creative communicative strategies to construct an understandable meaning that enhances engagement and confidence, stressing the interaction over the native norms. In a more specific Indonesian context, Santoso et al. (2023) argued that Indonesian learners view EFL as a communicative resource in a multilingual context that foreground on the language usage and meaning rather than focusing on the traditional linguistic context.

The challenges identified by the students, such as accent diversity, spontaneous response, speed of communication, lack of academic vocabulary, and psychological pressure (e.g., anxiety, nervousness, and fear of evaluation), significantly described the complexity of real-time international video conferences. Moreover, those challenges did not diminish the students' eagerness and motivation to participate in that conference, but rather facilitated them to gain strategic competence development as learners and improved their English language skills. This is linked with previous researches which stated that spontaneity and real-time interaction, which are created naturally, direct the participants to become highly engaged in learning (Yu & Wu, 2023). While the previous research also strengthen statement that an authentic interaction in English could affect the students' comfort level to employ their skills, improve their confidence, and be more inspired to participate in global, cross-cultural connections (Wu et al., 2011). A similar statement was also conveyed by O' Dowd (2021), who reported that virtual exchange enhanced students' confidence as communicators and helped them reformulate English as a tool for communication rather than an abstract academic material.

In addition, the shifting perception of English as a means of international communication contributed to the growth of a more inclusive English user identity among participants. Ershad (2025) in his study found that students perceived ELF as a practical, inclusive means of interaction, which described an identity shift from traditional linguistic norms toward English as international communication. Moreover, Situmorang et al. (2021) mentioned that students in ELF frequently reconstitute their language identities through daily use of English with diverse interlocutors, outlining communicative strategies that support mutual understanding and self-belonging among global communities. Therefore, by positioning themselves as a legitimate contributor in an international conference, students finally realised that English should be viewed as a means of global citizenship that connects people across the world.

Conclusion

This qualitative study examined junior high school EFL students' perception of employing English in real-time communication for international video conferences on global issues. The triangulation technique has been implemented to analyse data from semi-structured interviews, observation notes, and students' reflections. The data revealed that students assumed English as a functional communicative resource to navigate people's diversity in a global context, including linguistic diversity, intercultural diversity, and so on. Through strategic adaptation of learning, such as participating in video conferences, students have successfully increased confidence, boosted learning motivation, and evolved identity as English users.

The results of the study suggest that engagement in authentic international communication could be an alternative way of language learning experiences. Through participating in global dialogues discussing the recent issues with many participants from diverse countries, learners have relocated the learning session beyond a classroom-bound conception of English and gradually developed the confidence, motivation, and communicative competence that are necessary for significant global participation.

From a pedagogical point of view, the study also highlights the urgency of creating learning opportunities that expose students to more authentic ELF communication and foster critical reflection on real communicative experiences. Therefore, such a pedagogical highlight may become a solution to prepare learners for better linguistic and intercultural demands of contemporary global communication. However, despite the limitation of participants by its small number in this study, especially since it deals with junior high school students, and the context of specific settings, it essentially provides valuable insights into learners' life experience of employing ELF communication in an international video conference. Thus, future research needs to extend this line of inquiry by providing large groups of participants, longitudinal designs, or comparative contexts to further investigate the impact of real-time international communication on language development and learners' identity

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