



Role of Learner Autonomy and Students' Perception in Legitimizing China English as A Variety of English

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Abstract

Background/Objectives: China English, distinct from Chinese English or Chinglish, is struggling to get legitimized as a variety of the English language, despite many its users globally. The current study investigated the moderating effect of learner autonomy on the relationship between learner's attitude and learner's perception and China English (CE) as a variety of the English language. **Methods/Statistical analysis:** A questionnaire-based research design and utilized Pearson correlation analysis to test the hypotheses and SPSS-20 to analyze the data. The sample size was 120 Chinese EFL students who had studied at least one English course. **Findings:** The findings revealed that learner autonomy is enhanced due to the use of CE in classroom. This positive phenomenon was also noticed in the correlation between learner's attitude and learner's perception resulting in a high acceptance of CE as a variety of the English language. **Improvements/Applications:** This finding will give a positive thrust to the legitimizing issue of China English as a member of World Englishers. It may also contribute to the critical debate that is ongoing to change CE's status from a foreign language to China's own language and its users as Native speakers. Future studies can explore teachers' attitude towards CE and its influence on L2 teaching in China.

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1. Introduction

China English (CE) is recognized as the "fastest growing variety of English" with almost 650 million learners of it in China with a high or low proficiency (Bolton and Graddol, 2012, He and Zhang, 2010). Since this number is far higher than the population of the United States, Kirkpatrick (2007) observes that CE could become the "most commonly spoken variety of English." China English is distinct from "Chinese English" or "Chinglish," evolved historically from the Chinese Pidgin English and acquired its nativized form despite legitimization issues (Bolton, 2002, Bolton, 2006, Bolton, 2008). Fang (2017) categorically documented the China English debate, called it the identity debate of the impact made by the English language on the Chinese language, Chinese culture and choosing English as a medium of instruction in most Chinese educational institutions. English has been a compulsory subject in schools and universities in China since 2001; so English classrooms are often termed as "incubators" for CE. Eventually, due to its academic value, CE came to be differentiated from Chinglish and Chinese English

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(Standards, 2018).

CE has developed as an English variety in China and a “possible pedagogical choice” for Chinese practitioners of ELT (Deterding, 2006, Qiong, 2004). (Liu and Fang, 2017) argued that ELT should be seen with multilingual perspectives, accepting English as a global language and any local or regional language, such as CE, should be only of sociocultural and sociopolitical significance (You, 2008). Several writers have attempted to highlight the linguistic characteristics of CE in terms of syntax (Kirkpatrick and Zhichang, 2002) suggesting a ‘frame-main’ syntax in CE where syntactic sequences proceed from subordinate to main or from modifier to modified; in terms of lexicology e.g. loanwords (Pei and Chi, 1987) and lexical innovations (Yang, 2005) in China English; and finally, in phonology where there is a frequent usage of word-final epenthetic vowels, and substitution of [s] for /θ/ and [z] or [d] for /ð/ (Deterding, 2006). These examples might suggest that CE is creating a translingual space (Du et al., 2020) or what was earlier described as ‘interlanguage’ (Schneider, 2007). All these issues are later discussed in the Literature Review section.

China English (CE) thus evolved as a variety of the English language however a few linguists still dispute its legitimacy (Qiong, 2004). The reason for this is not only the prevalence of ‘Chinglish,’ a hybrid variety of English (Heng Hartse, 2014) but due to the interlanguage characteristics in Chinglish which are common to other varieties of English, such as Czenglish (with Czech), Dungleish (with French), Greeklis (with Greek) and Spanglish (with Spanish) and a few others. Such interlingual varieties are also often termed as jocular. Chinglish, particularly, was rejected as “incorrect usage of English by several Chinese linguists (Qiong, 2004, Seargeant, 2010, Henry, 2010) or grounds of Chinglish’ being inappropriate and ineffective in articulating the authoritative perspective of a speaker (Meilin and Xiaoqiong, 2006, Eaves, 2011, HE and LI, 2009, Yajun, 1995, Yajun, 2002, Yajun, 2003) as well as a derogatory (Heng Hartse, 2014, Wei, 2016)

This study has however refrained from this debate nor has attempted to legitimize China English or derogate Chinglish or Chinese English. In this study, we focused largely on the attitude and perception of the speakers from China who speak ‘China English.’ Since China English, has been accepted as a homogeneous national variety of English in a sociolinguistic context (Bolton, 2002, Bolton, 2006), it is necessary to investigate whether the learner autonomy is correlated with the legitimizing issues of recognizing China English as a variety of English. Such a study will have the implications in teaching and learning of CE. It will help to understand the students’ and teachers’ attitudes towards China English and the L2 teaching in China, since so far it is uncertain whether their attitudes affect English teaching in China.

China English evolved due to various purposes and goals, from teaching curriculum in primary schools to university education, in job sectors and business communication, where mostly CE was autonomously accepted as a variety of English. Despite the rapid growth of CE, only a few studies have examined attitudes towards CE, particularly in terms of whether CE is perceived as a legitimate variety of English by speakers of English in China and whether an individual can be a native speaker of CE. A need was therefore felt to investigate the extent to which learner autonomy affected learners’ attitude and perception towards CE as a variety of English and whether this correlation helped in legitimizing CE as a variety of English. The current study addressed these issues through a research survey conducted with 120 tertiary students in Chinese universities, followed by a FGD with a handful of participants to validate the findings of the survey.

2. Problem statement

There are several issues that prevent legitimization and recognition of China English as a variety of English language. First and foremost is the non-availability of native English speakers in translation and editing tasks. As a result, teachers and learners must depend on dictionaries to translate or substitute Chinese words with English ones without considering the polysemic conditions of the two languages. The problem gets worsened as the Chinese-English dictionaries are outdated. Besides there are issues related to attitude, perception, different thinking patterns, linguistic differences and mother tongue interferences, resulting in a very mediocre style of English-language teaching (Zheng, 2014). Hence, due to all these challenges, educational

institutions have not been able to develop an English-language environment and allowed to develop hybridity in the form of Chinglish or Chinese English (Yiyang, 2019). Besides, more westernized Chinese still lack characteristics of traditional English writing styles, and thus face comprehension issues. It is probable that these westernized-Chinese fail to adopt the characteristics of native English-speakers to express themselves orally and in written form.

All these issues have culminated into the current research that revolved around examining learner's attitude and learner's perception towards CE as a variety of English and the moderating role of learner autonomy to legitimize CE as a variety of English. To validate the findings of the survey, the study also collected opinions of a group of participants about accepting CE as a legitimate variety of English and whether an individual can be a native speaker of CE.

3. Literature Review

i. Attitude and perception

Attitude as a psychological concept is linked to social psychology (Baker, 1992, Garrett, 2010), as well as ideologies and functions in sociolinguistics context (Garrett et al., 2003). Attitude may be favorable or unfavorable perception for a language or its varieties (Baker, 1992, Galloway, 2017, McKenzie, 2010, He, 2015). Moreover, learners' attitudes towards a specific language or its variety speak of the social status of that language and its speakers. A lot of emphasis is given for people's attitudes towards a particular language as it defines the learning outcomes (Baker, 1992, Garrett, 2010, Lippi-Green, 2012, Galloway, 2017). If language learners develop a positive attitude during the learning process for a language and its varieties, it helps them develop a broader perspective for that language, thus facilitating their language acquisition and sustainable development. This is consistent with a recent study (Fang and Liu, 2020) which, in the EFL context, suggests to compromise with the complexity of the EFL paradigm and do not insist to acquire a near-native English accent. This perception is contrary to the traditional EFL paradigm, which emphasize on the use of English to communicate with non-native speakers (He and Miller, 2011, Matsuda, 2019).

A recent study, Getie (2020), investigated social factors (English native speakers, peer groups and learners' parents) and educational factors (English text book, English language curriculum) affecting the attitudes of grade 10 students towards learning EFL. The findings revealed that both social and educational factors affected the learners' attitudes positively. However, the educational context like ELT teachers, classrooms, and the physical environment for English language learning made the negative effect on learners' attitude. The study recommended to improve the physical learning environment and to make the government work in close conjunction with the school management.

Jaliyya and Idrus (2017) examined the attitudes and perceptions of Indonesian English language learners and found that learners who gained proficiency in English classes held a positive attitude towards the use of L1 as it motivated them to learn the language, otherwise they would not show any willingness to learn. A similar study (S Almohaimed and M Almurshed, 2018) investigated Saudi university learners' attitudes and perceptions towards using L1 (Arabic) in ELT, in order to examine the effectiveness of the monolingual approach to foreign language learning and the learners' attitude towards the use of L1 in English classes. By using the Gaebler's questionnaire on 60 female EFL learners, this study found that advanced learners held a negative attitude towards the use of L1 in English classes while elementary and intermediate learners perceived a judicious use of L1 in ELT classes.

Xu et al. (2010) investigated Chinese students' attitudes towards varieties of English before and during the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. A sample of 108 college students in mainland China examined six speeches by two American, two British and two Chinese English speakers. The focus was on social status, attractiveness, and language quality of the speakers and their attitudes towards the English language and its varieties. The study revealed that native varieties were preferred to non-native varieties. It was also revealed that students preferred teachers to use the native models in their teaching materials and learning environment. However, it was also evident that the participants were aware of the plurality of Englishes or English varieties and therefore China English contained all elements of the standard English (He and Zhang, 2010). The current ELT curricula in many universities however do not exactly reflect the attitude towards varieties

of the English language, though a need of attitudinal research has been greatly felt (He, 2015, Dornyei and Ryan, 2015, Jenkins, 2007, Jenkins, 2013, Norton, 2013, Rose and Galloway, 2019, Rose et al., 2021, Liu et al., 2021). Galloway (2017) recognizes ELT as Global English language teaching (GELT) platform, encompassing varieties of each location and providing a learner-centered curriculum “sensitive to students’ needs and context” (Galloway, 2017) This will lead to changing the ultimate goals of learning in ELT and also recognize the sociolinguistics nuances and complexities in a given context.

ii. China English

The term China English (CE) was first coined by Ge (1980) who defined it as “a developing variety of English, which is subject to ongoing codification and normalization processes. It is based largely on the two major varieties of English, namely British and American English. It is characterized by the transfer of Chinese linguistic and cultural norms at varying levels of language, and it is used primarily by Chinese for intra-and international communication.” (p.1) Li Wenzhong (Kirkpatrick and Zhichang, 2002), defined CE as “a standard English that expresses Chinese culture, has Chinese characteristics in lexis, sentence structure and discourse but does not show any L1 [Chinese] interference” (p. 269). Thus, it suggests that China English developed as a new variety with its own lexicon, structure, and discourse. Likewise, Xu (2010) identified four major features of CE viz., distinct pronunciation and accent, specific lexical items, a unique syntax, and distinct discourse varieties (p. 24). Due to these academic features, CE came to be recognized distinct from Chinglish or Chinese English, an example of Pidgin English. Pinkham (2000) explained the difference by describing Chinglish as a “hybrid language” that is neither English nor Chinese but that might be described as English with Chinese characteristics. Qiong (2004) and Xiaoqiong (2005) explained this difference on a continuum where CE is at the highest level (acrolect) and Chinglish at the bottom level (basilect). Learners of English are seen progressing from the bottom to the top level.

At the turn of the century, a fresh debate arose which inquired whether CE should be accepted as a member of the World English (WE) family. Kirkpatrick and Zhichang (2002) strongly supported this argument pointing out that CE is a product of a “natural process of language change.” Qiong (2004), too, supported that CE should be included in WE languages as there are “massive” number of English users in China around the world (Wei and Su, 2015). However, a few scholars rejected its inclusion in WE family on grounds that CE is only a “performance variety” of English developed for intercultural communication (HE and LI, 2009, Yang, 2016, Fang, 2017) or intra-ethnic communication and translanguaging (Li, 2011, Fang, 2017, Fang and Liu, 2020).

As a result of the debate over the legitimacy of CE as a variety of English language, a few students and teachers in ELT scenarios hold negative attitudes towards CE (Chen, 2021), mainly because of its structural complexities. Liu et al. (2021) though accepted the complexity of the English language use but emphasized upon negotiating and constructing a cultural identity through the English-language, which would be possible only through an eco-linguistic perspective and intercultural communication for the sustainable development of a language variety like CE as a lingua franca (Ai, 2016, Baker, 2015, Si, 2019). Another study by Du et al. (2020) analyzed how speakers of a variety of English use linguistic corpora to build an academic environment in which different varieties of English can effectively flourish. The study illustrated how the speakers of CE were first condemned as ‘accented,’ ‘substandard’ or ‘unintelligible,’ due to making use of structural terms in isolation; but later they succeeded in creating a pluralistic academic environment of communication.

Pan (2019) studied the attitudes of a Chinese university students towards CE and attempted to find out how cultural features, lexical influences and the communicative functions affected their attitudes. The findings showed that most participants held ambivalent attitudes towards CE. The positive ones considered CE as an acceptable target language for the Chinese nation while others expressed unfavorable attitudes and felt that the use of CE as “linguistically inferior” and “embarrassing”. The dilemma was between either holding the national pride and Chinese cultural identity or achieve the personal desire to avail socio-economic opportunities by acquiring American or British English competence. Their attitudes constantly switched between keeping high the national and cultural pride and adopt the CE to fulfill all their communication needs or

seeking personal empowerment and career growth through the American or British English itself. A similar ambivalence was seen in a qualitative case study research (Nuske, 2018), which presents how a group of Chinese TESOL graduates first repudiated CE for its structural complexities but later justified its use. This attitudinal change was mainly due to personal life experiences of students who felt alienated while studying TESOL along with US native speakers. They would defend China English outside the classroom and demanded the modifications in TESOL programs by accommodating linguistic differences of learners from other nationalities and avoiding the superficial use of Western discourses in the curriculum and pedagogy (Fang and Widodo, 2019).

Saito (2021) made a good discovery in a recent study in the context of English varieties. The research was carried out with Japanese and Chinese/Vietnamese college students, focusing on intercultural communication. The objective was to examine how the knowledge of EFL influenced the students' attitudes toward English varieties. The Japanese students showed a positive attitude toward "non-native" English varieties, which included 'Japanese English' but the Chinese and Vietnamese students showed a negative attitude towards accepting China- English or Vietnamese English as a non-native English variety. The study showed a great concern and recommended to investigate the causes that lead to such variation in the attitudes of learners of different nationalities, a phenomenon that also applies to native or non-native English-speaking teacher engaged in TEFL in China (Li and Jin, 2020).

iii. Learner Autonomy

Learner autonomy is often confused with 'self-regulation' or 'self-efficacy' (Nakata, 2016, Nakata, 2011, Koc and Koc, 2016) since most second language (L2) or foreign language (FL) learners are adventurous learners and tend to become autonomous. Jiménez Raya and Vieira (2015) argued learner autonomy is evidence of learners' maturity, self-motivation and flexibility of learning. Autonomy is defined as the ability of a learner to set his own pace of learning and to take responsibility for his own learning, what they learn and how they learn (Little, 1999, Little, 2004, Hardy-Gould, 2013). Agustina (2017) and Ahsanu (2017) studied the role of learner autonomy in learning the English language and found that it contributed to the success of students' language learning. Benson and Voller (2014) theory is reflected in these findings which had postulated that learner autonomy was the innate capacity of learners, which is developed and evolved by teachers by implementing a relevant curriculum.

Several studies have attempted to address the challenges faced by CE through learner autonomy or autonomous learning. These studies show a consensus among linguists and pedagogues that learner autonomy or promotion of autonomous learning can enhance teaching and learning of the varieties of English language, like CE. For instance, Ding and Shen (2019) investigated a group of Chinese EFL learners in an English language MOOC program. Their analysis was based on situational, behavioral, and psychological criteria of the learners who exercised autonomy. It was revealed that the language used in MOOC was conducive to autonomous learning which helped learners to regulate their learning. Similarly, Ding and Shen (2019) showed learner autonomy promoted overall levels of motivation in learners leading to language proficiency. Additionally, their self-perception improved that helped them to engage in self-assessment activities more strongly and positively. These results are consistent with Dafei (2007) who studied the relationship between learner autonomy and English proficiency among non-English majors in a teacher college in China. The study found a significant and positive relationship between learner autonomy and English proficiency.

Qingzhao (2011) characteristically affirms that learners need learner autonomy to learn a language, even if their teachers are skilled and trained. Thus, learner autonomy plays an important role in learning a language. Learner autonomy can be meaningful only when the EFL learners are intrinsically and extrinsically motivated. Al Khalidi (2019), too, felt the need for motivation in EFL classrooms to develop learner autonomy, provided learning takes place in a learner-centered environment. Students are autonomous to choose their own learning with their own potential and effort. Although most learning takes place as direct experience of learners, there is still the need of the teacher, albeit very limited. Chang et al. (2021) introduced innovation and creativity to stimulate autonomous language learning. The study suggested the use of a game-based writing environment (GWE) that would help learners create an autonomous learning

setting in which students self-engage in the writing activity with the help of peer response.

Based on the above discussion, it can be safely concluded that there exists a debate around the suitability of CE as a variety of the English language. CE is also distinct from 'Chinese English' or 'Chinglish' as these two terms lack broader implications and do not withstand the pragmatism and rhetoric of the English language. The current study therefore is based on the premise that CE is the more appropriate term for the Chinese variety of English due to its consistency with the sociolinguistic norms. Besides, CE has very little functional allocation which is due to the 'Chineseness' or the nativization of English in the Chinese sociocultural context. Last, but not the least, CE has been decomposed into sub-varieties for different user groups across China which vouches for its depth of nativization.

4. Methodology

4.1 Hypothesis Development

Based on the arguments in previous studies, the following research hypotheses were stated and tested in the current study:

- a. H1: learners' attitude has a significant direct impact on China English as a variety of English language.
- b. H2: Learners' perception has a significant direct impact on China English as a variety of English language.
- c. H3 Learner autonomy has a significant direct impact on China English as a variety of English language.
- d. H4: Learner autonomy moderates the relationship between learners' attitude and China English as a variety of English language.
- e. H5: Learner autonomy moderates the relationship between Learners' perception and China English as a variety of English language.

4.2 Research Design

The research framework of the current study comprised a research design that included a framework, hypotheses and research tools for data analyses (Flick, 2014). Out of the two research approaches: deductive and inductive (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016), this study adopted the deductive approach as it enabled testing of existing theory with the help of hypotheses (Wiles et al., 2011).

Figure 1 below explains the theoretical relationship between independent and dependent variables (Learners' attitude, Learners' perception, and China English as a variety) and the moderator (Learner autonomy).

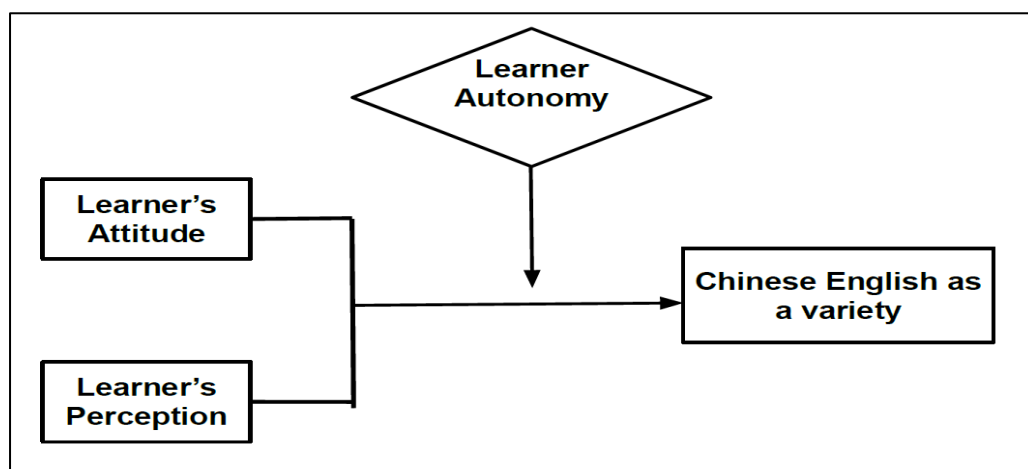


Figure-1. Theoretical Framework.

Source: the current research

4.3 Sampling

A sample of 120 Chinese students was selected using the purposive sampling method from three different universities. All these students were pursuing intermediate to advanced English language programs in the ELT centers of these universities. It was ensured that the participants of the research possessed a certain level of English proficiency, in both oral and written form. Their previous academic record was also checked to ensure that they had completed at least one English language program in the past.

4.4 Research Procedure and Instrument

A questionnaire on five-point Likert scale with 40 items was distributed to all 120 participants. The questionnaire focused on students' views about learner autonomy, learner's attitude, learner's perception, and China English as a variety of English language. All the 120 students participated in the questionnaire. The results of the questionnaire were quantified, and statistical results were obtained with the use of SPSS software. A FGD was also conducted with 12 randomly selected participants after completing the questionnaire findings. This provided an opportunity to triangulate the findings of the questionnaire (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

4.5 Convergent and Discriminate Validity

Convergent validity is the measure to determine the correlation between any two variables—and whether this relationship is high enough to perform the test for discriminant validity. Convergent validity is scaled by assessing each item loading, whose recommended level should be greater than 0.70 (Clark and Watson, 1995). Table 1 presents the values for composite reliability and Cronbach alpha to determine the convergent validity. The range of Cronbach alpha came out as 0.860 to 0.965, whereas the range of composite reliability was 0.800 to 0.960. The composite reliability scale exceeded the recommended value i.e. 0.70, which confirms its convergent validity. AVE test results were also satisfactory, and they confirmed the convergent validity of the items.

Table-1. Convergent validity.

Item	Cronbach's Alpha	RHO_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
LATT	0.920	0.900	0.960	0.650
LPER	0.965	0.900	0.800	0.750
LNAU	0.880	0.990	0.820	0.820
CEV	0.860	0.970	0.870	0.660

(LNAU= Learners' autonomy; LPER= Learner's Perception; LATT= Learner's Attitude; and China English as a variety = CEV.)

Likewise, discriminant validity tests whether the variables which seem to be unrelated are in fact related. It is often used in concordance with convergent validity to determine the extent of correlation among variables and distinguish one variable from the other (Byrne, 2010, Duarte and Raposo, 2010). A higher discriminant validity is a sign of some distinctive features common among variables. Table 2 presents the discriminant validity among the variables of this study.

Table-2. Discriminant validity.

Item	LATT	LPER	LNAU	CEV
LATT	0.825			
LPER	0.827	0.894		
LNAU	0.815	0.892	0.911	
CEV	0.885	0.723	0.730	0.817

(LNAU= Learners' autonomy; LPER= Learner's Perception; LATT= Learner's Attitude)

4.6 Data Analysis Methods

Both descriptive and inferential statistics methods were applied to analyze the data. The regression diagnostics showed the normality and reliability of the data while the descriptive statistics explained the nature of data set in the form of mean, median, mode, standard deviation, and other normality measures (Merchant et al., 2012). All these measures are required if a study has hypotheses containing predictors and outcomes, moderators, and control variables.

5. Results And Analysis

Pearson correlation methods were utilized to the relationship of Learner autonomy with other variables. Correlation was tested between (i) learner autonomy and China English as a variety of the English language, (ii) learner's attitude and China English as a variety of the English language, and (iii) learner's perception and learner's attitude.

Table 3 presents the first Pearson correlation measurements between learner autonomy and China English as a variety of the English language with a few of sub variables to highlight their correlation. Each sub variable was measured with the significant values of 0.618, 0.600, 0.690, and 0.570 respectively having $p < 0.01$ significance level. These findings indicate that learner autonomy had an influence on China English as a variety of the English language in all its aspects represented in sub-variables. The results also indicate a correlation between learner autonomy on China English as a variety of the English language.

Table-3. Pearson's correlation coefficients.

Influence of learner autonomy on China English as a variety of the English language Sub Variables	Pearson correlation	Sig. (two-tailed)	n
Learner autonomy is a by-product of learner centered teaching with CE perspective.	0.618*	0.000	120
Learner autonomy is enhanced by teachers who used CE in classrooms	0.600*	0.000	120
Learner autonomy helped in adopting CE as a medium of instruction.	0.690*	0.000	120
Learner autonomy improved the understanding of CE structures	0.570*	0.000	120

Note: the significance of correlation measured at 0.01 level (two-tailed).

Table 4 presents the second Pearson correlation measurements between learner's attitude and China English as a variety of the English language with a few of sub variables to highlight their correlation. Each sub variable was measured with the significant values of 0.648, 0.468, 0.068 respectively having $p < 0.01$ significance level. These findings indicate that learner attitude had an influence on China English as a variety of the English language in all its aspects represented in sub-variables. The results also indicate a correlation between learner attitude and China English as a variety of the English language.

Table-4. Pearson's correlation coefficients.

Influence of learner's attitude on China English as a variety of the English language Sub Variables	Pearson correlation	Sig. (two-tailed)	n
Learners felt less stressful in learning CE	0.648	0.000	120
Learners' academic freedom helped n better understanding of CE	0.468	0.000	120
Learners felt more confident and mature in understanding the CE curriculum	0.068	0.000	120

Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed); **correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

Table 5 presents the third Pearson correlation measurements between learner's perception and Learner's attitude with a few of sub variables to highlight their correlation. Each sub variable was measured with the significant values of 0.678, 0.780, 0.420 respectively having $p < 0.01$ significance level. There is a weak association between the item "Learners felt stronger and empowered by their autonomy to develop a positive attitude" because the value of p is greater than 0.01. These findings indicate that learner's perception had an influence on learner's attitude in all its aspects represented in sub-variables. The results also indicate a correlation between learner's perception and learner's attitude.

Table-5. Pearson's correlation coefficients.

Influence of learner's perception on Learner's attitude Sub Variables	Pearson correlation	Sig. (two-tailed)	n
Learner's perception was positive and developed feeling of self-regulation to learn CE	0.678	0.000	120
Learners felt stronger and empowered by their autonomy to develop a positive attitude	0.780	0.012	120
The learners perceived CE as a medium of instruction	0.420	0.000	120

Source: Based on Researcher's findings

Table 6 presents the conclusion drawn for the hypotheses of the study. To make an effective testing of the hypotheses, a structural model was established with path coefficients defined to determine the relationship between each item. After assessing the structural relationship among variables of the measurement model, the goodness of fit was also checked. The goodness of fit determines whether the model is suitable for testing of hypothesis. The Mean, standard deviation, and p-values of all hypotheses and the effect of the moderator variable is presented in Table 6.

Table-6. Direct Relations among hypotheses

	Original Sample	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation	t- Statistics	p- values
H1	0.656	0.310	0.080	3.245	0.002
H2	0.600	0.380	0.041	3.210	0.001
H3	0.690	0.800	0.070	3.340	0.000
H4	0.300	0.260	0.068	3.100	0.001
H5	0.823	0.900	0.056	3.500	0.000

Source: Based on Researcher's findings

The measurement model was converted to a structural model to examine the relationship between the study variables. The test results for each of the hypotheses shown in Table 6 reveal that they are significantly accepted. All hypotheses are seen significant at 5% showing p-values of less than 0.05, thus indicating the acceptance of all hypotheses. The moderating role of learner autonomy is shown in Table 7 whose outcome is also shown significant for p and t values above the threshold level, i.e., less than 0.05 as acceptable. These results of moderation show that the values for p and t are significant for the hypotheses.

Table-7. Indirect results (Moderation).

	Original Sample	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation	t- Statistics	p- values
Moderating Effect	0.078	0.056	0.060	0.875	0.000

Source: Based on Researcher's findings

The participants' observation in the FGD validated most of the findings of the quantitative phase of the research. A few scenarios were placed before the participants. Given below are their remarks, opinions, and arguments:

- *Are you familiar with any variety of the English Language? Which variety? Do you prefer any of these varieties? Do you think China English can also be legitimized as a variety of the English language?*

Many of the participants thought that CE was the product of the combination of national language and Chinese unique social culture. To the question whether CE should be legitimized as a variety of the English language, participants had mixed reaction. One set of participants, who were a little familiar with the meaning of variety, believed that CE facilitated communication and it also enriched English as a global language, so it must be legitimized as a variety of English. They also believed that the progress of CE is linked with the rise of China as a superpower. So, it has already gained an international status and recognition. Secondly, with the spread of Chinese

culture, more people now use CE for various purposes. This also is a strong reason to accept CE as a variety.

This is contrary to the findings of a few previous studies which claimed that students and teachers were not even aware of the existence of China English (HE and LI, 2009, Yang, 2016, Qiong, 2004, Xiaoqiong, 2005, Fang and Ren, 2018). However, other studies (Xu, 2008, Xu, 2010, Xu and Fan, 2017, Xu et al., 2017, Edwards, 2017) had admitted that students and teachers were familiar with 'Chinese English' and not China English. The reason was that most teachers and students used 'Chinese English' and 'Chinglish' to refer to the English spoken in China. This suggests that they did not recognize English with Chinese characteristics as a variety of the English language or to call it China English. The participants suggested that teachers should raise students' awareness of China English and other English varieties.

- *Based on your understanding and evaluation, describe your views on CE, its characteristic features of pronunciation, syntax, lexis, and pragmatics, your positive or negative attitude and your perception about CE.*

The participants showed different attitudes towards the acceptability of CE as a variety of English. For instance, most participants admitted that they consider CE accent as acceptable as its phonological feature. Even those who hold negative attitudes toward China English think that they can accept China English accent if it is understandable. A few others said that they would prefer native norms of speaking English, rather than adopting the Chinese accent. As for lexical features, students accepted that they accepted CE expressions if they referred to the Chinese culture or when no equivalent in English was available. In terms of syntactic features of CE, students admitted that their teachers showed resistance to syntactic features pertinent to CE as they related those syntactic features with Chinglish, and therefore unacceptable. Finally, for discourse pragmatics, too, participants informed of the same attitudes as it was shown for syntactic features, i.e., less willing to accept pragmatic features in oral and well as written discourses. This is consistent with the findings of Wang and Gao (2015), Yang (2016) and Edwards (2017) who closely observed the learner's attitude toward CE.

- *In your everyday use of the English language, did you feel any autonomy to use China English as a variety of English?*

Over the question of learner autonomy, participants believed that teachers should not impose the native norms of the English language as students are willing to accept CE features like pronunciation, accent, lexis, and syntax. They should have the autonomy to learn a second language rather than being forced to pursue blindly a native-like accent. They also wanted learner autonomy to use English expressions that are unique to Chinese culture, or which do not have English equivalents. Participants also believed that learner autonomy would increase if CE were used to express the cultural content. Participants should also feel the autonomy to reject some of the CE features such as embedded in its syntactic and lexical content as it contradicted with the ideology of Chinese English rooted in their minds. Likewise, students would prefer to accept discourse pragmatics feature of CE as it the Chinese discourse pragmatics enabled them to understand the differences between Chinese and English cultures. These findings are consistent with (Wang, 2015, Wang and Gao, 2015) which advocated to grant learner autonomy in acquiring CE features but contradicted with Wei (2016) which considered rejection of CE syntactic and lexical features due to the violation of grammar rules rather than the Chinese ideology.

- *Do you identify yourself or other Chinese speakers as users of CE? Do you relate your identity with the CE?*

Most participants agreed that CE grants them an identity as it highlights the Chinese culture globally. They wished that China English should be introduced in classrooms to help students protect their own identity. However, they also accepted the fact that many Chinese students are more familiar about the English culture and very little about their own culture. This is consistent with the findings of Yang (2016) who pointed out a blind adherence to the standard English. A few participants were of the view that while communicating with non-native speakers, the adherence to CE features made cross-cultural communication much easier. It would also influence learners' perception about CE as a medium of instruction and increase their confidence levels as English speakers. Galloway (2017), Kachru (1992a), and (Kachru, 1992b) also believed that

students should not be restricted to one kind of English in classrooms and global English instructional methods should be adopted. This will increase students' awareness about China English, which they would look as a good substitute medium of instruction as it would help them to protect their culture and identity. Gao (2012) called it "identity anxiety" among the Chinese students who considered learning English in China as a means to enhance their country's image and establish it as a "modernized" nation. Others like Qiang and Wolff (2003) held contrary views and considered English as a "Trojan horse" that would destroy the Chinese culture and its values.

6. Conclusion

The current study was designed to examine the moderating effect of learner autonomy on the relationship between learner's attitude and learner's perception and China English (CE) as a variety of the English language. The study employed a questionnaire-based research design and utilized Pearson correlation analysis to test the hypotheses and SPSS-20 to analyze the data. The findings revealed that learner autonomy is enhanced due to the use of CE in classroom. This positive phenomenon was also noticed in the correlation between learner's attitude and learner's perception resulting in a high acceptance of CE as a variety of the English language. This finding will also give a positive thrust to the legitimizing issue of China English as a member of World Englishes.

Future studies can explore teachers' attitude towards CE and its influence on L2 teaching in China. It would be an interesting to examine how ELT teachers perceive CE teaching in China. Jenkins (2007) and Pan (2019) have attempted investigation of ELT in China but their focus was more on teachers' and students' attitudes towards English rather than CE. There is no doubt that CE is gaining recognition and acceptance as number of CE speakers is rising and therefore it changed its status of from a foreign language to China's own language. A study can be conducted to examine the state of native speaker construct in relation to CE, particularly sampling those who speak a new English such as CE.

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