

## Iranian Teacher Trainees' Attitudes towards English as a Lingua Franca

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### Abstract

The present research was an attempt to shed more enlightening light on the current wave of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), which is gradually sweeping the traditional ideologies in the field of ELT. To that end, this study examined the Iranian teacher trainees' attitude towards ELF. What makes the present research markedly different from the other language attitude studies is in the context of research, namely Iran, an underrepresented country in the literature concerning ELF. To collect the data, the researchers employed mixed methods design, using questionnaires and follow-up semi-structured interviews. The results indicated that many a participant maintained contradictory and ambivalent attitudes towards ELF-related issues. Whilst they appeared to be favorably inclined to agree with the statements pertaining to ELF, they did not display uniform attitudes about ELF-related issues in an in-depth analysis of the results. In fact, the results revealed an underlying tendency towards NS norms among the participants. Results of the study may have implications for teacher trainers and ELF researchers.

**Keywords:** ELF, Language Attitude, Teacher Trainees, Globalized World

## **1. Introduction**

The globalization of the world which is deemed the main factor in contributing to the global status of English (Graddol, 2006; Cogo & Dewey, 2012) is bound to have profound ramifications. Ke and Cahyani (2014, p. 28) argue that one of the ramifications of globalization is the advent of English as a Lingua Franca (henceforth ELF), World Englishes (henceforth WE), and English as an International Language (henceforth EIL) “as new fields of study in English Language Teaching (ELT)”. The shared ideology espoused by all of them is their “anti-normative paradigm” (Kubota, 2012) highlighting the point that English is pluralistic and moving away from the monolith and monopoly of native English norms in ELT (Galloway & Rose, 2017). In addition to a pluralistic versus monolithic view on the globalized English, such issues as ownership, standardness, legitimacy, acceptance, and identity have also been points of departure for research about ELF, WE, and EIL (Seidlhofer, 2011). In a nutshell, these frameworks and ‘paradigms’ (Sharifian, 2009) were developed to keep abreast of the ongoing change in the sociolinguistic structure of English in today’s world. In light of its definition, ELF is much closer to the context of Iran wherein English does not have an official standing but is a language for global communication (Kubota & McKay, 2009). Furthermore, unlike the other paradigms, ELF, as Ishikawa (2016, p. 1) states, is beyond the boundaries and is not nation-bounded variety and “ELF theories may well be the only way to conceptualize the legitimacy of many Asian people’s English”. Therefore, the present paper adopts ELF as its research paradigm, focusing on its commonalities with WE and EIL research paradigms.

ELF, as it is used now, has gained more scholarly attention since its genesis, particularly after the seminal works by Jenkins (2000) and Seidlhofer (2001). Since then, many a researcher has examined the theoretical and

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pedagogical issues pertaining to ELF (for the recent examples see, Bowles & Cogo, 2015; Jenkins, 2015; Seidlhofer, 2011, to name a few), though empirical research into the practical applications of its pedagogical implications has been scanty (Sung, 2017). Thus, during the arduous journey from its infancy to its present status, the field of ELF has been scrutinized by its proponents and opponents, leading to point and counterpoint exchanges between them (for the recent examples see, Dewey, 2013 versus Sewell, 2013; Ren, 2014 versus Yoo, 2014; Baker, Jenkins, & Baird, 2014 versus O'Regan, 2014). What is clear then is that there are some tensions and conflicts as regards ELF conceptualization and ELF-oriented studies; however, agreeing with Marlina (2014), we believe that these conflicts and tensions are not a hindrance to ELF progress. They are not regarded as “negative or signs of rebellion against the paradigm, but as natural reactions or responses to a different way of seeing the world, especially one that encourages its followers to ‘swim against the current’ that has been flowing in one direction for a very long time” (Marlina, 2014, pp. 14-15).

Notwithstanding these tensions, there is a general consensus among scholars about its current conceptualization that ELF refers to “any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option” (Seidlhofer, 2011, p.7). Today, many a scholar (e.g., Mauranen, 2012; Cogo & Dewey, 2012) espouses the notion of including native English speakers (NSs) in Seidlhofer's (2011) definition of ELF. This current understanding is in contrast to its former definition (Firth, 1996), which only encompassed English speakers from expanding-circle (Kachru, 1990) countries, though “most [ELF] interactions nowadays take place among second language (L2) speakers themselves, often without the presence of any L1 speakers” (Sung, 2015, p. 311). Furthermore, in its most recent conceptualization, the term ‘English as a Multilingua Franca’ is

used by Jenkins (2015) to manifest the utilization of multilingual resources in ELF interactions, which is antithetical to English-only ideology. According to Jenkins (2015, p. 73), this means that in ELF communication “English is available as a contact language of choice, but is not necessarily chosen”. That is to say, NSs occupy a place in the ELF definition, but their language is not the only choice for communication. Therefore, it can be said that in ELF encounters speakers can creatively use their “plurilingual resources to flexibly co-construct their common repertoire in accordance with the needs of their community and the circumstances of the interaction” (Cogo, 2015, p. 3).

Despite these developments in the field of ELF, it has not been a geographically widespread area of research conducted around the globe; that is to say, almost all research studies into ELF have been carried out in the European context (sung, 2015). Furthermore, As Sung (2015, p. 313) puts it, ELF research is in its infancy in the context of Asia and thus “there is an urgent need for more ELF research” in this region. In response to this call, there has been much research into ELF but restricted to East Asia and Southeast Asia. Little research, to the best of our knowledge, has examined ELF in other parts of Asia such as the Middle East wherein Iran is located. Moreover, the significance of an investigation into attitudes has been highlighted by this assertion that “any policy for language should take into account the attitudes of those who may be affected” (Lewis, 1981, p. 262 cited in Baker, 1992). Hence, it can be a difficult task for ELF researchers to bring about changes in teachers’ mindset without being aware of the current attitude of teachers toward issues related to ELF. In this regard, a growing number of studies have examined teacher trainees’ attitude towards the global function of English today, particularly toward ELF (e.g., Curran & Chern, 2017; Dewey, 2012; Grau, 2005; Litzenberg, 2014, to name a few).

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However, it has been argued that language attitudes are dynamic and fluid, oscillating in various social situations (Garret, 2010), and “sensitive to the context in which those attitudes are evaluated” (Jenkins, 2007, p. 71). Thus, as was mentioned above, what makes the present research different from the other studies is the context of research, i.e., Iran. The Islamic Republic of Iran is located in a region that is underrepresented in the literature (Berns, 2005). In addition, its special position in the region deserves more attention vis-à-vis ELT and the purpose of the present research. This special position is clearly evident in the words of Mokhtarnia and Ghafar-Samar (2015, p. 3), enunciating that “Among EFL communities, the Islamic Republic of Iran takes up a special position due to its particular socio-political and historical status in the world”. As they argued, “Iran is a fundamentally religious and conservative country” where in a very strong anti-imperialistic perspective has been adopted since the Islamic revolution of 1978, and accordingly, “it essentially regards western countries as having colonial and imperialistic purposes which aim at despoiling the cultural and natural resources of the country” (Mokhtarnia & Ghafar-Samar, 2015, p. 3).

What is necessary to mention here is that it is paradoxical that in spite of the country's ‘anti-imperialistic perspective’, adopted and presented in ELT materials at schools and universities, “the [Iranian] young generation is greatly interested in enhancing their English proficiency by enrolling in private English institutes” (Mokhtarnia & Ghafar-Samar, 2015, p. 3), where educational materials mostly contain western cultures, particularly British and American.

Moreover, the Iran's city of Yazd that the present researchers are affiliated with has just been added to the list of world heritage sites by UNESCO (“Iran's Yazd city”, 2017), having resulted in an increasing number of international tourists who come to visit the world largest inhabited adobe

city. Therefore, exploring teacher trainees' attitude towards ELF-related principles is deemed necessary in such an underrepresented country where ELF encounters are frequently occurring due to tourist attractions. The reason why the teacher trainees are included in our research is that they "represent the future of the profession, and their attitudes toward different Englishes can lend insight into the direction of linguistic and pedagogical ideologies" (Litzenberg, 2014, p. 19). Thus, prior to apprising teachers and students of the present status of English and taking any practical measures, it is of much importance to explore teacher trainees' attitude to ELF in such a less-documented region in the literature concerning ELF.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Previous Studies on Teacher Trainees' Attitude towards ELF**

There have been abundant studies into teacher trainees' attitude towards ELF-related issues. Due to space limitation, a number of previously-conducted studies on teacher trainees' attitude to ELF which are highly pertinent to the present research are addressed in this section.

To explore German pre-service teacher attitudes to ELF, Grau (2005), in a research study, administered questionnaires to the participants at the outset of an ELT course and then participants took part in discussions at the end of the semester. The research findings indicated that while many of them consented to "the priority of intelligibility as a pronunciation aim in the classroom" (Grau, 2005, p. 270), others mentioned their concern about difficulties created when there were not any norms to follow. The author argued that the results of the study can support a strong need for reflective pedagogical approaches in order to encourage teacher trainees to reflect critically upon their established linguistic convictions. In a similar vein, Dewey

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(2012) asserted that there is much to do and it takes time to adjust to a more ELF-oriented perspective vis-à-vis teacher training programs and pre-service teachers. Using a three-part questionnaire and carrying out interviews, Dewey gained the pre-service teachers' knowledge of ELF and examined their responses to it. It was revealed that the participants were aware of ELF and of the terms for different varieties of English. As regards ELF, however, there was not a complete agreement among the participants on its applicability for individual teaching contexts. Some participants expressed their concern about how ELF may bring problems to classrooms. On the judgment task, some teachers were more inclined to norms while others displayed a tendency for divergences. What is striking about them was that almost all participants judged the utterances intelligible. In conclusion, Dewey (2012) expressed his optimism for the future of ELF and encouraged the incorporation of ELF and ELF ideologies into pedagogy.

In order to differentiate his study from other studies, Litzenberg (2014) employed a distinctive method for examining American pre-service English language teachers' attitude towards aural samples of native and non-native Englishes in interaction. The findings of his study revealed that although there was some evidence of adhering to the NS model, American pre-service teachers had a tendency to incorporate models of non-native Englishes into their teaching practice. This ambivalent attitude towards ELF-related issues is also evident in a study conducted by Deniz, Özkan, and Bayyurt (2016). Collecting data through a questionnaire and interviews, Deniz et al. (2016) discovered that many of the pre-service teachers were more inclined to conform to the norms of native English speakers. However, many participants also reported their acceptance of realities of ELF. The researchers concluded that "the crucial inference of this study is that language teachers have to be well

educated to meet the requirements of this globalized and changing world during their pre-service language teacher education program in which their insights towards language teaching profession flourish” (Deniz et al., 2016: 158).

More recently, Curran and Chern (2017) examined the pre-service teachers’ attitude towards ELF in an expanding circle country, namely Taiwan. Four groups of pre-service teachers—English majors, students minoring in English, graduate students, and interns—participated in their study. In addition, the researchers aimed to identify any variances in the attitudes of the four groups of the pre-service teachers based on their academic background. It was revealed that the participants showed a willingness to accept ELF-related principles, but there were also some different perceptions of concepts related to ELF among the participants. For example, interns and English majors showed a stronger inclination for native-like proficiency. In line with the studies mentioned above, Curran and Chern (2017) also called for teacher education programs wherein teachers’ awareness of the sociolinguistic realities of today’s world increases.

As the studies above reveal, almost all researchers accord great importance to developing reflective teaching training programs where in teachers’ and teacher trainees’ awareness of sociolinguistic realities of today’s global English can be raised. However, as it was mentioned above, gaining knowledge of teachers’ attitude should be taken as the first step on the path of appraising teachers of today’s realities of English. Furthermore, little research has sought to examine the realities of today’s English in Iran, and the studies conducted in Iran have been more concerned with teachers’ attitude towards varieties of English within the EIL and WE paradigms (e.g., Khatib & Monfared, 2017; Marefat & Pakzadian, 2017; Monfared & Safarzadeh, 2014; Safari & Razmjoo,



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2016). The only study that takes findings of ELF research into the practice of teaching in the context of Iran is the study conducted by Rahimi and Ruzrokh (2016) who explored the effect of Lingua Franca core-based pronunciation teaching on Iranian learners' intelligibility and their attitudes about English pronunciation. While researchers are becoming interested in the topic of ELF in Iran, there has been little research, if any, into the Iranian teacher trainees' attitude toward ELF-related issues. To address these gaps, it is thus necessary to explore the issues associated with ELF in such an underrepresented country in the literature. Indeed, the present paper aimed to explore the Iranian teacher trainees' attitude towards ELF, particularly accent-related issues.

## **3. Methodology**

### **3.1. Participants**

The participants in this study were purposefully recruited on the basis of convenient sampling as it is the most common method for recruiting readily accessible participants in L2 research (Dörnyei, 2007). As a result, 205 teacher trainees (83 males and 122 females) took part in the quantitative part of the present research. They were senior students majoring in ELT at different universities and higher education institutes located in Tehran, Karaj, and Yazd, Iran, and their age ranged from 21 to 26. To detect whether they would be interested in teaching after graduation, an item was included in the questionnaire, through which we could select the intended participants. Almost all of them were willing to be English teachers at the time of data collection. In the qualitative part of our study, 11 of the participants (3 males and 8 females) consented to attend a follow-up interview arranged by the present researchers.

### **3.2. Data Collection**

To amass the data underpinning the present study, a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview were utilized. Initially, a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire consisting of two major sections was developed: a section about demographic information and a section asking the participants to express their level of agreement with ELF-related matters, particularly ELF phonology, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). To do so, the related literature for extracting the principles pertinent to ELF was intensely scrutinized. In addition, some of the statements were extracted and adapted from a few existing questionnaires exploring teachers' and students' attitude towards ELF (Curren & Chern, 2017; Ren, Chen, & Lin, 2016). As a result, 18 statements were designed and divided into four categories to examine the participants' attitude towards 1) their own English accent (statements 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 ), 2) identity and L1 accent (statements 7, 8, and 9), 3) the authority of non-native speakers to own the English language (statements 6, 13, 14, and 15), and 4) the legitimacy of English used by NNSs (statements 10, 11, 12, 16, 17, and 18). To measure the reliability of the questionnaire, it was piloted with 50 teacher trainees, and the result of Cronbach's Alpha reliability indicated that the questionnaire had relatively strong internal consistency ( $\alpha=.78$ ).

Then, interviews were scheduled with those volunteer participants who accepted our invitation to further research. The interviews were carried out to delve into participants' attitudes more deeply and to create an opportunity for participants to express their ideas and attitudes to ELF more freely than those expressed in the questionnaire. The questions raised in the interviews were derived from related literature and likewise reflected the main themes addressed in the questionnaire. The interviews were audio-recorded and lasted about 40 minutes each.

### **3.3. Data Analysis**

In order to generate a holistic understanding about the raised questions, qualitative findings and quantitative results were compared and combined, using relevant statistical procedures. The quantitative data about participants' attitudes towards ELF-related issues were summarized via descriptive statistics. The qualitative content analysis was adopted to analyze the recorded data. Initially, the data were transcribed because "the first step in data analysis is to transform the recordings into a textual form" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 246). Next, garnering insights from Cresswell's (2002) interpretive qualitative data analysis, the present researchers divided the data into different segments which were labeled with codes. Then it was continued until similar codes were placed into a number of categories. Next, the recognized categories from the participants' responses were compared and contrasted in order to find a connection between the emerged categories and the theoretical concepts from the research literature and the themes developed in the questionnaire. As regards ensuring the credibility of the interview data, a member checking procedure was employed (Cresswell, 2002).

## **4. Result**

### **4.1. Participants' Attitude toward their Own English Accent**

The first category consisting of five statements intended to explore the participants' attitude toward their English accent. In general, the pre-service teachers maintained a favorable attitude toward their own accent, as indicated by the higher mean score of the sum of their ratings ( $M=3.25$ ). Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for each statement in this category.

**Table 1. Attitudes towards their Own Accent**

Statements	Pre-service Teachers (N= 205)	
	Mean	SD
1. I am proud of my English accent.	2.87	.89
2. I think my accent is intelligible to native speakers when I speak English.	3.47	.87
3. I think my accent is intelligible to non-native speakers when I speak English.	3.32	.95
4. I think my accent is acceptable to native speakers when I speak English.	3.18	.84
5. I think my accent is acceptable to non-native speakers when I speak English.	3.60	.70

The interview results also revealed that out of 11 pre-service teachers attending the interview, half provided an affirmative answer to the question. Some of them stated that they were proud of their accent by reason of not having difficulty in communication and of receiving positive feedback from the others (examples 1 and 2). Whilst they prided themselves on their accent, some of them also mentioned that their accent was not perfect and they had to work on it more (example 3). This point was also supported by their lowest rating given to statement 1. It can be derived that the belief that they should achieve a perfect native-like accent is deeply ingrained in them.

- 1. Yes, since I can communicate very well and most of the people admire my accent. (T10)*
- 2. Yeah, I feel quite well about it. Because most of the people I communicate with say that I'm talented in accent. (T11)*
- 3. I'm satisfied with my accent but I think it's good If I improve my accent to speak like a native speaker because it shows I'm professional. (T6)*

On the other hand, a number of the participants also voiced their dissatisfaction with their accent. The most frequently stated reason was their

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having a Persian accent when speaking English (examples 4). They related this problem to the lack of enough practice on their accent (example 5):

*4. I don't like my accent because I think I have a little Persian accent when I speak English. I will try to change it. (T1)*

*5. Unfortunately I have not practiced on my accent very much, I try to pronounce the words correctly, but usually, I have Persian accent that is not good at all. (T4)*

The remaining four statements explored the participants' attitude toward their accent intelligibility and acceptability to both native and non-native English speakers. On the whole, they had a strong view on the intelligibility and acceptability of their English accent, as revealed by the high mean score of their ratings. Likewise, in response to the interview questions, the pre-service teachers believed their accent was intelligible and acceptable to both NSs and NNSs. The most frequently cited reason was their effective communication with their interlocutors. They justified their assertion on the ground of receiving positive feedback from them. In addition, they deemed their accent intelligible and acceptable by reason of their speaking simply and slowly and using grammatically simple and accurate sentences (see examples below):

*6. According to my experiences of communication with foreigners in some journeys, I was able to send my messages to other people without difficulty, so I think my accent is intelligible for them. (T9)*

*7. I think my accent is comprehensible and acceptable for others because when I speak with them they can answer my question or can speak with me. And I try to use appropriate vocabulary and try not to have grammatical mistakes. (T6)*

On the other hand, some of them believed that their accent was acceptable to NNSs but unacceptable to NSs. Although they did not provide any adequate

reason for their opinion, it could be presumed that their lack of experience in communicating with NSs was a big obstacle for them to consider their accent acceptable to NSs, as one of the pre-service teachers (example 9) supported our presumption:

*8. I think it depends on people with whom we speak. I think mine is acceptable to non-native speakers but probably non-acceptable to natives. I don't know. I feel this way. (T2)*

*9. I don't know as I haven't spoken with native speakers. (T10)*

#### **4.2. L1 Accent and Identity**

The present researchers also aimed at exploring the extent to which the participants desired to have their local accent when speaking English. In this regard, three statements were included in the second category of the research questionnaire (see Table 2). As regards Statement 7, its scores were reversed before conducting any statistical analyses because it was negatively worded. On the whole, the pre-service teachers did not tend to be identified as a Persian through their English accent, as it is indicated by a low mean score of the sum of their ratings ( $M=2.26$ ,  $SD=.86$ ). Further examination of the statements in this category revealed that the lowest mean score of the participants' ratings was related to statement 8. It appeared that the participants did not accord with this statement that they should speak English with a Persian accent just because they are Persian. It was also revealed that participants' mean score of statement 9 was ranked the highest.

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*Table 2. Attitudes towards L1 Accent and Identity*

Statements	Pre-service Teachers (N= 205)	
	Mean	SD
7. I would like to be identified as a native speaker of English through my English accent.	2.58	1.07
8. I would like to speak English with a Persian accent because I am a Persian.	1.61	.85
9. I feel ok if someone recognizes my nationality through my English accent.*	2.60	1.20

\*The mean score for item 7 is reversed.

The questionnaire results were also confirmed by the participants' responses to the interview questions related to this category. Some of the participants referred to the advantages of their being identified as an NS and to the demerits of being identified as a Persian through their accent. They considered Persian accent inferior compared to native English accents, by reason of which they asserted that they did not like to be identified as a Persian through their accent. These statements allude to the strong orientation of the participants toward the NS model:

*10. I want to be in higher places and be admired by higher people. Sounding like and being identified like native speakers bring that place to me and you look more prestigious. (T10)*

*11. Of course a native speaker; because I think that in this way I can do my best and sounding like a native speaker brings me more confidence. (T8)*

*12. I can't stand Persian accent because it makes my English ridiculous and I don't like its sound. (T4)*

In sharp contrast, a number of the participants stated that they deliberately put on their local accent to be identified as a Persian when communicating in

English. Moreover, they accorded priority to communicating effectively rather than being identified as an NS or NNS.

*13. I prefer to be identified as a non-native speaker because the other people become interested to get some information about my nationality and my accent is the first thing that shows my nationality. (T7)*

*14. I think it's not necessary. It's not a big deal for me being recognized as a Persian as long as I can communicate. I don't care. (T11)*

### **4.3. Attitudes towards the Authority of non-native Speakers to Own the English Language**

The present research also aimed at investigating the participants' attitude towards the authority of non-native English speakers to own the English language and to exploit it according to their needs. Four statements fell into the third category in our research questionnaire. The first statement was negatively worded, so its mean score was reversed prior to analyzing the data and reporting the result. Overall, the teacher trainees displayed a very favorable attitude toward the authority of non-native English speakers by rating this category as the highest one ( $M=3.76$ ).

It is necessary to mention that in reporting the results the mean scores of statements 6 and 13 were averaged because both of them aimed at asking the participants for expressing their opinion about the authority of NNSs to own the English language, with the first statement negatively worded. On average, they received the highest mean scores of the participants' ratings ( $M=3.84$ ,  $SD=.52$ ). The survey results of the four statements involved in the third category are presented in Table 3.



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**Table 3. Attitudes towards the Authority of NNSs**

Statements	Pre-service Teachers (N= 205)	
	Mean	SD
6. I think English belongs to native speakers.*	4.13	.82
13. I think non-native speakers of English have the authority to own the English language.	3.56	.66
14. I think non-native speakers of English have the authority to modify English based on their needs.	3.70	.88
15. I think non-native speakers of English can use the languages they know to avoid misunderstanding when communicating in English.	3.63	1.03

\*The mean score for item 6 is reversed.

There were a number of different points of view adopted by the participants. Some of them believed that because English is an international language, it is not correct to say that it belongs to specific speakers of English. From their perspective, English is a 'device or tool' by which they can communicate internationally and inter-culturally:

*15. English is not limited to a particular geographical region and is a worldwide international communication tool, and no one can claim this language as a property. (T3)*

*16. I think English is an international tool, and everybody has to use this tool. And it's not just for one country. (T2)*

In contrast, a number of the participants rejected the non-native English speakers' authority to own English. They argued that NNSs do not have the right to own English because it is not their mother tongue and they use English only for meeting their needs.

*17. English is not native speakers' mother tongue and they have no right and authority to own it but they can speak it just to communicate. (T10)*

Furthermore, almost every participant exhibited an affirmative response to the question asking them to express their opinions on the authority of NNSs to modify English based on their needs (example 18). Likewise, many a participant consented to non-native speakers' use of their multilingual resources when communicating with foreigners. To reinforce their attitude, a small number of them also provided some examples vis-à-vis their using other languages when speaking English with other non-native speakers:

*18. When the goal is communication, something that is important is understanding. So anything that is used for this purpose is good, for example, modification of the language. (T3)* *19. Sometimes it happens to shift to other languages; for example, in Turkey, they don't know English very well, so I had to mix some English sentences with Turkish words in order to convey my ideas clearly. (T5)*

#### **4.4. Attitudes towards the Legitimacy of English Used by NNSs**

The last category sought to examine if the participants accorded with the legitimacy of English used by NNSs. Generally, the participants held a moderate view about considering non-native English as a legitimate model compared to the NS model ( $M=2.62$ ,  $SD=.60$ ). As it is shown in Table 4, of the six statements included in this category, Statement 10, asking the participants to determine their level of agreement on whether teachers should help students communicate successfully, obtained the highest mean score from them. The second highest mean score was related to statement 18 asking respondents to what extent they were in accord with introducing students to different native and non-native English accents in class.

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**Table 4. Attitudes toward the Legitimacy of English Used by NNSs**

Statements	Pre-service Teachers (N= 205)	
	Mean	SD
10. I think teachers should help students communicate effectively rather than achieve a native-like proficiency.	3.13	1.14
11. I think it is unnecessary for many students to learn English according to the native English speakers' model.	2.07	1.08
12. I think it is unnecessary for many students to become familiar with the culture and traditions of native English speakers.	2.58	1.27
16. I don't think it is necessary for non-native English speakers to sound like a native speaker of English to communicate successfully in English.	2.49	1.16
17. I think non-native speakers of English can be the role model for Persian students.	2.55	.84
18. I think it is important to introduce students to many different English accents (both native and non-native accents).	2.91	.93

The qualitative analysis showed that whilst the participants assigned a high priority to effective communication; there was a vestige of orientation towards NS norms. A few participants pointed out that there is a direct correlation between a native-like proficiency and effective communication:

*20. I think helping students to communicate effectively is one of the most important tasks for the teachers. When students communicate with foreigners well, they will be able to achieve the other skills of that language step by step, resulting in native-like proficiency. (T6)*

Concerning the importance of introducing students to different accents, over half of all the participants did not have a positive attitude. For their

refutation of the statement, some of them pointed out exposing students to different English accents may cause chaos, leading to students' confusion:

*21. I think following one model of accent in classroom activities can help students to avoid confusion and it can help teachers to avoid wishy-washiness in their teaching. (T9)*

On the contrary, it appeared that a number of them had a predilection for introducing students to different accents. From their perspectives, it can help students communicate successfully and effectively with people from different linguistic backgrounds:

*22. It would be very well if students get familiar with different accents because English is spoken all over the world with different accents. So if they know some of the accents, they could have better communication. (T7)*

As regards their attitude towards whether it is necessary to learn English according to the NS model, the qualitative part of the present study also corroborated that traditional view of ELT was ingrained in most of the participants, which is counter to ELF-related issues. The trainees believed that the English used by NNSs is replete with phonological and lexico-grammatical mistakes, which make it more difficult to understand and learn:

*23. I think for doing everything we should have a model and pattern and if someone tries to speak like a native speaker, it's so important because native speakers don't have any problems in the grammar, accent, speaking and other aspects of the language. (T11)*

In contrast, a small number of the participants were not as much oriented to the NS model as the above-mentioned teacher trainees. This group of participants maintained that students' needs and purposes should be taken into account in adopting a specific model of English:

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*24. It depends on what you need. Why do you learn English? What is your purpose? And if you're just a businessman who wants to do business things, it's not necessary to learn English based on native models. (T2)*

Analyzing the interviews also revealed that almost half of all the participants consented to this statement that it is not important to sound like a native speaker to communicate successfully. In their opinion, the intelligibility of the accent and correct use of grammar and lexical units are more influential and important in communicating successfully than sounding like an NS.

*25. I think being understood by people are much more important than having a native-like accent. Even the use of grammatical sentences and correct vocabulary is more important. (T3)*

On the contrary, there were some participants who accorded significance to sounding like a native speaker. They stated that it is of much importance for students to have a native-like accent because it can affect the intelligibility of their accent, resulting in having effective communication:

*26. In my perspective, if learners have a native-like accent, they can communicate successfully in English. It is more understandable and intelligible for listeners. (T1)*

As regards the importance of being familiar with the culture of NSs in communicating successfully, almost over half of the participants believed that it is a must for students to learn about NSs' Culture, particularly American and British culture. From their point of view, language and culture are intertwined. In that regard, some of them stated that students can gain more information and learn many words which have cultural meanings:

*27. There is always a word, a phrase and something like that, which you should know the origin and be familiar to its culture if you want to understand it better (T10)*

Furthermore, there were a small number of the participants who were aware of the function of today's English used as a medium for people from different linguacultural backgrounds. However, they believed that students have to know the culture of NSs if they want to communicate successfully with them:

*28. Not necessarily, I mean knowing the language would be sufficient in order to communicate, but given that some words or phrases may have come from a cultural background, then having a grasp of the culture could be helpful in some cases in communication. (T9)*

## **5. Discussion**

The present study aimed to explore the attitudes of the Iranian English teacher trainees towards ELF. The results indicated that the teacher trainees appeared to be favorably inclined to agree with many statements involved in the given categories pertaining to ELF-related issues. However, an in-depth analysis of the results revealed an underlying tendency towards NS norms among the participants. Some of them also presented viewpoints which were at variance with those of most of the participants. Furthermore, the participants' views on the statements in the second category differed considerably from their positive views expressed in the other categories. In general, the participants did not display uniform attitudes about the ELF-related issues. Significant implications arise from these results, which are examined below.

The results from the present study suggest that the teacher trainees were rather inclined to ELF-related principles. One possible reason may be related to their age. The younger generation of teachers has been raised in "an increasingly globalized world" in which they have more chance to communicate with other people from various linguacultural backgrounds (Seidlhofer, 2010,

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p. 357). This finding is also corroborated by other studies in which the younger generation of teachers are more oriented to the principles pertaining to ELF (e.g., Litzenberg, 2014; Ranta, 2010). Yet there appeared to be contradictory and ambivalent attitudes towards ELF, which were manifest in their responses to the interview questions in particular. This finding is in line with many of the previous ELF-related studies (e.g., Deniz et al., 2016; Jenkins, 2007; Litzenberg, 2014; Wang & Jenkins, 2016). When talking about the realistic use of English outside the classroom, the participants were not very inclined to the NS standard and consented to effective communication rather than native-like proficiency. However, it seemed that conforming to NS norms was ingrained in most of them when they referred to formal English learning in the classrooms and to their future teaching practice. In other words, they were very oriented to NS norms in a classroom setting. This orientation to NS norms in an educational context may be because of their English language learning in the Iranian private language schools wherein educational materials mostly contain the norms of NSs, particularly British and American. This reason is also pinpointed by some scholars (e.g., Galloway & Rose, 2017; Sung, 2017) that there is a big difference between the English language taught in the classroom and what is used outside the classroom.

Furthermore, the findings indicated that many a participant had favorable attitudes toward their own English accent. However, a closer analysis of the interviews revealed that among the very same participants, more than half of them desired to achieve a native-like accent. In other words, it can be inferred once again the belief that they should achieve a native-like accent was deeply ingrained in them although they felt a sense of satisfaction with their accent. In addition, the results suggest that almost all of them consented to be linguistically identified as an NS through their English accent, as they accorded

native-like accent considerable advantages. Yet this does not mean that they had a negative attitude toward their own cultural identity (see, for example, Sung, 2014; Ren, Chen & Lin, 2016). Some of them evinced their interest in being identified as a Persian when communicating internationally. Further, as the analysis of the data indicated, almost over half of all the participants did not feel embarrassed if they were identified as a Persian through their accent. This glaring discrepancy in their opinions accounts for “an intricate and complex relationship between ELF and identity” (Sung, 2015, p. 326).

The findings also revealed that almost every participant considered their accent more acceptable and intelligible to NNSs rather than NSs. Having personal experiences of communication with other NNSs and getting positive feedback from them were deemed the primary reason for the teacher trainees’ accent intelligibility and acceptability. Likewise, it can be derived that a lack of experience in communicating with NSs was a big obstacle for the participants to consider their accent intelligible and acceptable to NSs. The importance of experience is also underscored by many researchers (e.g., Garret, 2010; Wang, 2015; Wang & Jenkins, 2016). For example, examining the effect of intercultural experience on the participants’ language attitudes, Wang and Jenkins (2016) identified that the participants who had little ELF experience attributed the intelligibility of their accent to conforming to the NS model.

The Iranian teacher trainees in our sample also appeared to accord great significance to non-native English speakers as the authoritative agents having the power and right to appropriate English to fulfill their social and linguistic needs in today’s world. Moreover, it seemed that they were aware of the current realities vis-à-vis the ownership of English. However, on closer examination of interview data, it was found that some of the participants did not accord with granting NNSs or NSs supreme authority to own English.



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According to them, English is not a language specific to a country because it has overstepped its original boundaries and is being used as a communication tool by all people all around the world. These findings are consistent with the current theories and principles pertaining to ELF. As it is argued by some scholars (e.g., Galloway & Rose, 2015; Ishikawa, 2016; Jenkins, 2015), today's English is used by a large number of people from different lingua-cultural backgrounds in various contexts that are dynamic, variable, multilingual, and intercultural and hence is not peculiar to a group of English speakers. Furthermore, many a participant had mixed opinions. In fact, although some of them believed that English belongs to NSs, the very same participants consented to the authority of NNS to modify English and use their multilingual resources to communicate effectively and avoid misunderstandings. It appears that the participants' attitudes are in line with the term 'English as a Multilingua Franca' coined by Jenkins (2015) to refer to speakers' use of their multilingual resources in order to communicate effectively.

The results also revealed that the participants did not consider non-native English as a legitimate model for Persian students of English. Although they ascribed great importance to effective communication, they had a marked tendency for NS norms. For instance, they showed disagreement with introducing students to different accents and considering NNSs as the role model for them. Further, they were in accord with teachers' familiarizing students with the culture and the traditions of NSs. Unlike these participants, there were a small number of participants who had a positive attitude toward ELF-related principles. Notwithstanding, these apparently ELF-oriented participants had a predilection for having their students learn English based on the NS model. One reason might be the obstacles created by the language schools, course books, and language learners. In fact, there are some "external

(marginalization) and internal (self-marginalization) challenges that impede any progress towards breaking the epistemic dependency” (Kumaravadivelu, 2012, p. 24).

## **6. Conclusion**

In an attempt to shed more enlightening light on the use of ELF in an under-represented country, the present paper explored the Iranian teacher trainees’ attitude to ELF-related issues. The results of the current study were consistent with the existing literature in which ambivalent attitudes prevail among the teacher trainees. Although they were seemingly reluctant to be oriented towards the NS ideology on the basis of a statistical analysis of the quantitative data in particular, the interview results appeared to suggest that NS norms are still the benchmark against which the Iranian English language teachers’ and students’ level of proficiency can be measured. These findings imply that they are not fully aware of the theories and principles pertaining to ELF, although their cognizance of the real use of English language outside the classroom can help the present researchers remain hopeful about the future. Therefore, it is hoped that the present study can motivate the teacher trainers to develop teacher training programs in which they can raise the Iranian teachers’ awareness about the sociolinguistic realities of today’s world and particularly issues related to ELF. Further research is also needed to explore to what extent the Iranian teacher trainers, teachers, and students are cognizant of ELF. An investigation into their attitudes which have been under-investigated in the context of Iran can give the researchers valuable insights into the reasons concerning the ambivalent attitudes of teacher trainees. Finally, it is necessary to mention that although the participants were from three cities located in Iran, it is not reasonable to generalize the findings to other teacher trainees from

other parts of the country as it is argued that context has a great effect on their attitude toward ELF. Despite these limitations, the present research was an attempt to take the first and important step toward apprising the Iranian pre-service teachers of the current realities of today's English and provide some light into the ELF in the context of Iran.

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