

Language Teacher Perspectives on English as Lingua Franca

Ceylan YANGIN ERSANLI

Ondokuz Mayıs University, Faculty of Education, Department of ELT

Samsun, Türkiye

ceylany@omu.edu.tr



Abstract- English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) refers to the use of English as a common means of communication among speakers of different native languages. Educators play a crucial role as they manage the complexities of teaching English and acknowledging the distinct difficulties and viewpoints of non-native speakers. This qualitative study seeks to investigate the perceptions of practicing English language teachers regarding the implications of ELF in language education. Twelve English language teachers in Türkiye, where English is a foreign language as an expanding circle country, participated in the study.

Keywords- English as Lingua Franca, Varieties of English, Teacher Perceptions.

Introduction

English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) has emerged as a global language of communication. This phenomena has become more evident in a world that is becoming more interconnected, where English is seen as a bridge that connects people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds rather than just as a native language of some people. Since teacher cognition informs pedagogical techniques that stress inclusivity and successful communication in the classroom, it is crucial to understand teachers' opinions on ELF. Historical factors including colonization, globalization, and technological advancements have all had a significant role in the development of ELF and have resulted in English as a global contact language. However, this dominance has also raised significant concerns regarding linguistic variety.

Furthermore, traditional views of language competence, often dominated by native speakerism, have come under scrutiny. Teachers are increasingly advocating for an inclusive approach that values diverse Englishes and emphasizes communicative effectiveness over strict adherence to native norms, reflecting a shift towards prioritizing interaction over grammatical perfection. However, some teachers maintain that a standardized model, rooted in native-speaker norms, is essential for ensuring a consistent foundation in English proficiency.

Teaching English for effective global communication involves various challenges including language barriers, cultural misunderstandings, and differing educational backgrounds among students. Addressing these issues requires a nuanced understanding of each student's context and the adoption of flexible, student-centered teaching practices. Teachers are also encouraged to integrate cultural studies into their curricula, enhancing students' understanding of English within various contexts and promoting intercultural competence. Teachers can have a significant impact on how English language instruction develops in the future by creating a classroom culture that emphasizes communication and cultural awareness, making it applicable to and accessible to all students.

Historically, languages such as Latin, French, Russian and Arabic served as prominent lingua francas in certain geographical regions facilitating communication across diverse areas and cultures. Today, however, English has emerged as the most widespread lingua franca, used globally in fields such as international business, science, technology, and education. This phenomenon can be attributed

to historical factors like British colonial expansion and, more recently, the influence of American economic, military, cultural, and technological power. Consequently, English functions as a bridge language across diverse linguistic and cultural landscapes, making it a key tool for global communication and exchange. As English expanded around the world, it became a symbol of power, access to education, and economic opportunity in addition to being a language for communication [1]. The dominance of English, however, has brought some consequences, in that the emphasis on learning English has frequently marginalized local languages, causing a decline in linguistic diversity and resulting in challenges for non-native speakers who may find it difficult to compete on equal terms [2] [3]. Within the field of education, there is an increasing acknowledgment of the need to integrate English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) into teaching methodologies. Traditionally, English language teaching (ELT) has been dominated by native-speaker standards, which may subordinate the experiences of non-native speakers. This native-speakerism perspective—where native speakers are perceived as ideal language models—has endured, shaping instructional methods and affecting learners' views on language proficiency [4] [5]. Studies about the Lingua Franca Core have indicated that interactions among speakers from varied linguistic backgrounds frequently diverge from the traditional grammatical norms and pronunciation patterns typically associated with native speakers [6]. This observation has led educators and researchers to reconsider English language instruction, advocating for a more inclusive approach that acknowledges the validity of diverse Englishes and the communication strategies employed by non-native speakers [7] [8].

A communicative dimension of learning English emphasizes the significance of effectively conveying messages rather than solely pursuing grammatical accuracy. The understanding that English is a global language accessible to all, not just native speakers, has led teachers to prioritize communication skills over rigid adherence to pronunciation standards [9]. Assessment in English language teaching is progressively focused on communication and peer interaction and more importantly, corrections are limited to instances that impede comprehension, fostering a more comfortable environment for students in their language use [9].

Teachers are encouraged to integrate cultural elements into their teaching practices and materials with the aim of making learning more relevant and engaging, as an awareness of cultural nuances can substantially enhance communication effectiveness [10]. Cultural misunderstandings can pose challenges in teaching English as a lingua franca, as diverse cultural norms and expectations may lead to misinterpretations in the classroom. To alleviate these issues, it is essential for teachers to adopt an empathetic and adaptable teaching approach, considering each student's cultural background and unique needs. This cultural awareness can create a more inclusive environment and enrich students' learning experiences [11].

Teachers are encouraged to adopt diverse assessment strategies that acknowledge individual student strengths and competencies, extending beyond the scope of standardized testing. This is especially crucial in multilingual settings, where traditional assessments, which often prioritize accuracy and standardized forms, may not capture students' communicative skills and creative problem-solving abilities as exhibited in authentic interactions. In the context of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), such an approach necessitates a shift in focus, valuing effective communication and adaptability over strict linguistic conformity [9] [12]. Non-native English teachers recognize the validity of diverse English varieties, however, they often continue to favor native-like standards in pronunciation and vocabulary [13].

Given the growing dominance of English, it becomes essential to understand teachers' perspectives on integrating English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) into classroom practices, particularly in expanding circle countries like Türkiye where English is spoken as a foreign language and therefore the teachers might have a tendency to show a norm-driven approach and attachment to native-speaker norms, accuracy, and traditional error correction despite positive attitudes towards ELF-sensitive teaching. Taking into account the evolving roles of non-native English teachers, this qualitative study aims to investigate teachers' attitudes toward ELF and seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on ELF. In light of the discussions above, the following research questions guided this research:

1. How do practicing English teachers perceive the role of English as a Lingua Franca in their teaching practices?
2. What are teachers' attitudes toward the use of diverse English varieties in the classroom, and how do these attitudes influence their teaching strategies?

3. In what ways do practicing teachers integrate or resist ELF principles in their assessments and feedback practices?
4. How do teachers perceive the role of cultural awareness in teaching English as a Lingua Franca, and how do they incorporate it into their lessons?

Methodology

Research Method

The study made use of qualitative research design to make an in-depth analysis of in-service English language teachers' perceptions about ELF. Qualitative method is defined as a method for investigation and comprehension of social or human issues [14]. In qualitative method, data is usually obtained in the participant's environment and data analysis is done inductively to reach general themes. The researcher's interpretations are all part of the research process. To this end, semi structured interviews were conducted with 14 in-service English language teachers to explore their perspectives regarding ELF. Interviews are viewed as one of the most effective data gathering tools in qualitative research [14] [15].

Research Sample

Fourteen English language teachers with varying years of teaching experience participated in the study. Their ages range from 24 to 45, and they are all female. The general profiles of the English language teachers taking part in the study are shown in Table 1 below. The data shows that the vast majority of participants are experienced teachers who work in elementary, secondary, and high schools. The participants hold BA degrees in English Language Teaching programmes, none of the participants hold an MA or PhD. Three of the participating teachers have participated in international projects such as e-twinning.

Table 1 Profiles of the English Language Teachers

		N
School Type	Primary Schools	2
	Secondary School	8
	High School	4
Graduate Degree	ELT	14
International project participation	Yes	3
	No	11
Teaching experience	0-5 years	1
	6-10 years	2
	11-15 years	3
	16- 20 years	3
	20+	5
TOTAL		14

Data Analysis

The qualitative data analysis is based on semi structured interviews. The data was analysed using Content Analysis approach. Prasad defines content analysis as “...the study of the content with reference to the meanings, contexts and intentions contained in messages. In a similar way [16]. Content analysis as a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts.

The researcher employed a top-down content analysis approach, using pre-determined research questions to guide the coding process. First, the interview data from each participant was transcribed, and two experts analyzed it separately to ensure high inter-coder reliability. Using the research questions as a framework, they identified initial codes aligned with the study's objectives. These codes were then applied to the data to identify specific themes. The experts reviewed and refined these themes, grouping related responses into final categories that reflected the key areas addressed by the research questions.

Results and Discussion

The findings will be presented and discussed in alignment with each research question, providing a structured interpretation of the data. Qualitative data has been quantified through frequency counts, indicating how often themes or responses appeared across participants. This approach highlights prevalent patterns within the data and enhances the clarity and reliability of the analysis.

Research Question 1: How do practicing English teachers perceive the role of English as a Lingua Franca in their teaching practices?

Table 2. Role of ELF in teaching practices

Main Themes	Categories	Codes
role of ELF	limited knowledge	concept not clear (12)
	motivation	students' motivation to learn
incorporating ELF	not included in teaching practice	acknowledging importance but limited trace in practice

The main theme, **role of ELF**, shows that many teachers possess a **limited knowledge** of ELF concepts, with twelve participating teachers indicating that the idea of ELF remains unclear. This lack of clarity may impact teachers' motivation and understanding of how ELF could be integrated into their lessons. However, despite limited knowledge, some teachers recognize the potential of ELF to positively influence **student motivation**. They perceive that an ELF-oriented approach could align with students' interests and encourage them to learn English as a tool for global communication, rather than simply adhering to native-speaker norms.

The theme of **incorporating ELF** highlights a disconnect between teachers' acknowledgement of ELF's importance and its actual implementation in classroom practices. While many teachers **acknowledge the importance of ELF**, there appears to be limited evidence of this perspective influencing their teaching strategies, as indicated by the category *not included in teaching practice*. This finding suggests that, although teachers may theoretically value ELF, practical constraints or a lack of resources and support may prevent its integration into their day-to-day instruction.

The data reveals both a recognition of ELF's relevance and a gap in its application, emphasizing the need for further professional development to bridge this gap and support teachers in effectively incorporating ELF principles into their teaching practices.

Research Question 2: What are teachers' attitudes toward the use of diverse English varieties in the classroom, and how do these attitudes influence their teaching strategies?

Table 3. Influence of varieties of English

Main Themes	Categories	Codes
influence of varieties of English	Standard English	Prestigious (11)
	Varieties of English	very limited and unfavoured (11)
		natural to use in class (3)
balancing Native, Nonnative speaker standards	native speaker standards	Prioritizing native speaker standards (11)
	intelligibility versus perfection	Good pronunciation prestigious (8)
		intelligibility (4)

The theme **influence of varieties of English** suggests that teachers often view **Standard English as prestigious**, with 11 teachers indicating this perception. At the same time, many teachers expressed a **limited and unfavorable attitude** toward incorporating varied English dialects, with an equal frequency of 11 for this view. Only a small number (3) felt that using diverse English varieties was natural or beneficial in the classroom. This reveals an overarching preference for Standard English, likely reflecting traditional language norms that emphasize native-like proficiency and possibly rooted in perceptions of Standard English as more "correct" or prestigious.

The second theme, **balancing native and non-native speaker standards**, underscores this preference for native speaker norms. Here, a significant number of teachers (11) prioritize **native speaker standards** in their teaching strategies, often associating native-like pronunciation and accuracy with prestige. However, a subset of teachers (4) shows an appreciation for **intelligibility over perfection**, reflecting an awareness of the communicative nature of English as a global language. This shift towards intelligibility suggests a growing, albeit limited, openness to viewing English as a flexible, intercultural tool, rather than as a language bound by native standards.

The findings appear to reveal a predominant favoring of Standard English and native norms in classroom practices and assessment. While some teachers recognize the importance of intelligibility and communicative effectiveness, this remains a secondary focus. These findings underscore the need for teacher training that encourages greater acceptance and application of diverse English varieties, fostering a teaching approach that aligns more closely with the realities of English as a Lingua Franca.

Research Question 3: In what ways do practicing teachers integrate or resist ELF principles in their assessments and feedback practices?

Table 4. Integrating ELF in assessment and feedback

Main Themes	Categories	Codes
integrating ELF	Lack of knowledge and skills	Do not know how to integrate into teaching practices
	Limited practices	Non-native speakers in listening texts (4)
resisting ELF	accuracy and standard use	Favouring the standard use Seeing other varieties as deviant (8)
integrating ELF in assessment and feedback	native speaker standards	Focusing on native speaker standards
	norm-providing versus norm dependent	Emphasis on accuracy in assessment Highlighting communicative effectiveness (4)

The first theme, **integrating ELF**, highlights a general **lack of knowledge and skills** among teachers, which limits their ability to incorporate ELF principles into teaching and assessment. Many teachers expressed that they **do not know how to integrate ELF**

concepts into their practices, suggesting a need for more targeted professional development on ELF-specific assessment strategies. The use of **non-native speakers in listening texts** (coded 4 times) was one example of ELF integration, albeit limited, indicating that some teachers attempt to expose students to diverse English accents and varieties. However, these practices appear sporadic and are not consistently applied, reflecting the overall uncertainty teachers feel in operationalizing ELF within their assessment frameworks.

The second theme, **resisting ELF**, reveals a strong preference for **accuracy and standard use**, with teachers often **favoring the standard use** of English in assessments and feedback. This resistance is further underscored by the perception of non-standard English varieties as **deviant** (with a frequency of 8). Teachers who hold this view may feel that emphasizing standard English maintains a sense of linguistic "correctness," aligning with traditional norms that prioritize native-like accuracy. This perception limits teachers' willingness to incorporate ELF principles that promote diverse English varieties and communicative flexibility.

The theme of **integrating ELF in assessment and feedback** further highlights teachers' reliance on native speaker norms, especially in assessment practices. Teachers frequently emphasize **accuracy** in assessments, aligning with traditional expectations, though a few (4) note the importance of **communicative effectiveness** as a goal. The data here suggests that while communicative competence is acknowledged, teachers often remain **norm-dependent**, viewing native-like accuracy as an ideal rather than adapting assessments to a more ELF-aligned, interaction-focused standard.

The findings suggest that while some teachers are open to incorporating ELF in limited ways, such as through varied listening materials, a prevailing adherence to accuracy and native standards often results in resistance to ELF principles in assessment. The data reveals a need for expanded training on ELF to help teachers understand and implement assessment practices that recognize diverse English varieties and prioritize communicative effectiveness over strict adherence to standard norms.

Research Question 4: How do teachers perceive the role of cultural awareness in teaching English as a Lingua Franca, and how do they incorporate it into their lessons?

Table 5. ELF and cultural awareness

Main Themes	Categories	Codes
creating cultural awareness	One of the lesson objectives Lack of knowledge about cultures Deep level versus surface level culture elements	Acknowledging importance Teachers as non-natives have limited cultural knowledge Generally focusing on surface level cultural elements (food, festivals etc) Lacking knowledge and skills to teach deep level cultural elements (attitudes, beliefs etc)
Native-speaker culture	important	Viewing target culture as important Surface level presentation in materials
Home culture	important	Used in comparing with native culture Used in comparing with world cultures
World cultures	Relatively less important	some factual information in textbooks is enough

The theme **creating cultural awareness** shows that many teachers consider cultural awareness as **one of the lesson objectives**, acknowledging its significance in ELF contexts. However, they commonly express a **lack of knowledge about diverse cultures**, which limits their ability to integrate deep cultural elements effectively. The data indicates that teachers often focus on **surface-level cultural elements**, such as food and festivals, while **deeper cultural aspects** like beliefs and attitudes are generally not

addressed, largely due to a lack of **knowledge and skills**. As non-native English speakers, teachers often feel limited in their own cultural understanding, which may lead them to present simplified cultural content.

The theme **native-speaker culture** reflects teachers' perception of **target culture as important**. Many rely on materials that present **surface-level aspects** of English-speaking countries, aligning with traditional ELT practices that prioritize native-speaker culture. This reliance indicates that while teachers understand the importance of culture in language teaching, they may still default to a limited, conventional view of English-speaking cultures, reinforcing native-speaker norms over a more global ELF approach.

Home culture also plays a role in teachers' lessons, especially as a **point of comparison** with both native-speaker and world cultures. Teachers often encourage students to contrast their own culture with those represented in materials, which can foster an understanding of cultural differences. This approach suggests a recognition of the value of integrating students' backgrounds; however, the data shows that **world cultures** are viewed as relatively **less important**, with only **factual information** from textbooks considered sufficient. This limited treatment may miss opportunities to deepen students' global cultural awareness.

The theme of **world cultures** suggests that while teachers do occasionally introduce information about non-native cultures, these representations are typically **limited to factual information** in textbooks and tend to be treated as supplementary rather than central. The focus on surface-level facts, rather than deeper engagement with values or practices, implies that world cultures are often **marginalized in comparison to native-speaker and home cultures**. This perspective may limit students' exposure to diverse perspectives within the ELF framework, which could otherwise enrich their understanding of English as a truly global language.

While teachers appreciate the role of cultural awareness in ELF, their focus tends to remain at a surface level, with an emphasis on native-speaker and home cultures over diverse global perspectives. These findings point to a need for resources and training that would support teachers in teaching deep cultural elements and incorporating a wider range of global cultural content, aligning with the communicative and inclusive goals of ELF.

Conclusion and Suggestions

The findings indicate that while practicing teachers recognize the importance of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and cultural awareness in language teaching, their limited knowledge, prevailing adherence to native-speaker norms, and surface-level approaches restrict effective integration. Teachers often view Standard English as prestigious, lack clarity on ELF concepts, and predominantly focus on accuracy and native-like standards in their teaching practices and assessments. Similarly, cultural elements in lessons are typically limited to surface-level aspects, with world cultures often underrepresented.

To bridge these gaps, targeted **professional development** is essential. Training programs should focus on deepening teachers' understanding of ELF principles, particularly in practical applications for teaching, assessment, and feedback. Emphasis on diverse English varieties and communicative effectiveness over strict accuracy can support teachers in adapting to a more global, communicative approach. Additionally, training should provide resources and techniques for incorporating deep cultural elements, enhancing teachers' ability to integrate rich, diverse cultural content, including underrepresented world cultures. This approach aligns more closely with ELF principles, preparing students for authentic, global interactions.

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