

ELF in the Context of Iran: Examining Iranian In-service Teachers' Attitudes

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Abstract: There is a change in the status of English from a foreign language to a common language of communication among people with different mother languages. While the new profile of English as a lingua franca (ELF) has important implications for language teaching, it is not yet clear how far language teachers in different learning contexts have embraced them. The present study aims to address this issue by exploring the attitudes of in-service English language teachers towards different aspects of ELF in the underexplored context of Iran. Fifty-four Iranian teachers of English from three English language institutes participated in the study. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected through a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The participants expressed their attitudes towards different ELF-related pedagogical issues. Findings showed that teachers' attitudes were multifarious ranging considerably in each domain. While the majority of the teachers favored native speakers' norms in terms of teaching pronunciation, grammatical accuracy and the exclusive use of materials produced by native speakers, they displayed ELF-informed attitudes towards teaching multicultural awareness. Findings also showed divisions between participants' attitudes towards the status of native speaker teachers and the use of nonnative materials in listening exams. The diverse attitudes of teachers towards ELF-related issues underscores the need for more fine-grained teaching training programs that are adjusted to instructors' needs in different learning contexts.

Anahtar Sözcükler:

Ortak iletişim dili olarak İngilizce, İngilizce öğretmenlerinin eğitimi, öğretmenlerin tutumlar, standard İngilizce öğretimi

İran Bağlamında İngilizce Ortak İletişim Dili (ELF): Görev yapan İngilizce Öğretmenlerin Tutumlarının İncelemesi

Öz: İngilizce, yabancı bir dil statüsünden ortak iletişim dili (ELF) statüsüne evrilmektedir. İngilizcenin yeni profilinin dil öğretimi için önemli önerileri olsa da, farklı öğrenme bağlamlarındaki İngilizce öğretmenlerince bu önerilerini ne kadar kabul gördüğü henüz belli değildir. Bu çalışma İran gibi konunun az araştırıldığı bir bağlamda eğitim veren İngilizce öğretmenlerinin ELF' in farklı boyutlarına yönelik tutumlarını araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Çalışmaya İngilizce eğitim veren üç özel kurumdan elli dört İranlı İngilizce öğretmeni katılmıştır. Nitel ve nicel veriler bir anket ve yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yoluyla toplanmıştır. Bulgular, öğretmenlerin ELF ilkelerine yönelik tutumlarının oldukça değişken olduğunu göstermiştir. Öğretmenlerin çoğunluğu telaffuz ve dil yapılarının öğretiminde anadili İngilizce olanların normlarının kullanılması gerektiğini ve anadili İngilizce olan kişiler tarafından üretilen materyallerin kullanımını tercih ettiklerini belirtmişlerdir. Fakat aynı zamanda, ELF tarafından önerilen çok kültürlü farkındalık öğretimini tercih ettiklerini de ortaya koymuşlardır. Ayrıca bulgular katılımcıların anadili İngilizce olan öğretmenlerin tercih edilmesine dair tutumları ile dinleme sınavlarında anadili İngilizce olmayanlarca hazırlanan materyallerin kullanılması arasında keskin ayrımlar olduğunu göstermiştir. Öğretmenlerin ELF ile ilgili konulara yönelik değişken tutumları, eğitim ve öğretim programlarının farklı öğrenme bağlamlarındaki ihtiyaçlara göre ayarlanması gerektiğinin altını çizmektedir.

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1. Introduction

English has become a truly global language. It is used more than any other foreign languages in the world. More than two billion people in the world speak English as either their first or an additional language (Graddol, 2006). It is the language of trade, economy, politics, education and science. Historically, the spread of English is triggered by colonization where people who spoke English were given privileges over those who did not (Pennycook, 1998). The command over this language gave higher social status to its speakers and opened gates to their future prosperity. English became the language of power with native speakers at the pinnacle of power hierarchy, and nonnative struggling to get closer to them even though they knew they could never make it to the summit. ELT established itself as a profession that transmitted the values and cultures of native countries and promoted their supremacy over those of learners (Richards & Schmitt, 2002).

There were some voices of concern raised against the dominance of English and what Philipson (1992) termed as linguistic imperialism, but English managed to keep its revered position and even disseminated more. This is because British colonization was taken over by the US superpower throughout the 20th Century (Crystal, 1997). The increase in the number of people who left their home countries to receive better education and the immigrants who embarked on the west to survive or improve their life standard gave extra impetus for learning a common language for communication. Another reason for the widespread use of English was the advancement made in the field of technology, more specifically the introduction of the internet and Worldwide Web, which brought people even closer to each other (Brumfit, 2002). The interplay between English and globalization was bilateral. On one hand, globalization precipitated the use of English as a common instrument for communication; on the other hand, English became the instrument that speeded up the globalization. English hence became both a globalized and globalizing language (Jenkins et al., 2011)

The widespread diffusion of English at a global level gave it a unique lingua franca status. Seidlhofer (2011, p. 7) defines ELF as “any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice and often the only option.” Even though the ELF definition does not exclude the interaction between native and nonnative speakers, it is mainly used to refer to interaction between nonnative speakers. This is also statistically more probable since nonnative English language users outnumber native English language users, so they stand a higher chance of interacting with themselves rather than with native speakers (Jenkins, 2009). The increase in the population of nonnative English speakers and the likelihood of interaction between them also brought forth several important questions regarding the ownership of English and the status of native speakers and their conventions of language use as the objectives of language programs (Widdowson, 2003). According to ELF supporters, English does not just belong to the relatively short number of native speakers’ in Kachru’s inner circle, and that nonnative speakers also have a say in how English is/should be used for communication. This is a loud outcry against native speakers’ dominance as the sole decision makers of correct and legitimate use of English. Graddol (1997) takes the matter forward by claiming that it will not be native speakers but “those who speak English as second or foreign language who will determine its world future” (p. 10).

Sharing the ownership of English with nonnative speakers legitimized their creative use of language whereby they may depart from the native speakers’ model and create their own

discourse as they attempt to communicate effectively among themselves. Learners may fail to use third person '-s' and articles, mispronounce some vowels and consonants, or employ incorrect yet innovative collocations which are not observed in native speakers' discourse. In fact, the earlier-ELF related studies were marked by attempts made to codify such common linguistic features of ELF communication (see Jenkins, 2000 for phonology; Seidlhofer, 2001 for lexical and grammar features). The quest for recording the existing regularities in ELF, however, soon lost its vigor since it turned out that ELF is too fluid and context-dependent to be pinned down and reduced into a set of predictable features. The purposes and needs of ELF users are constantly changing and ELF speakers' need to come up with new inventiveness as they respond to these needs and requirements (Jenkins, Cogo & Dewey, 2011). The focus has shifted from codifying linguistic features of ELF to the processes and functions that trigger the use of these features. The question has changed from what linguistic forms nonnatives use during their interaction to why these forms are chosen and what roles they play in fulfilling communication objectives (Jenkins, 2011).

The new ELF theory, what Jenkins (2015) labeled as the third phase of ELF, envisages English in broader context of multilingual practice where people have a repertoire of different languages at their disposal. English is available as one of the common contact languages, and it may or may not be used. The concept of "English as a Multilingual Franca (Jenkins, 2015) ensues the possibility of interaction between English and the other linguistic resources available for language users. The fluid borderline between these languages allow them to permeate into learners' multilingual competence and enrich their linguistic resources.

The new status of English and the role that nonnative speakers play in this regard introduced a new approach to ELT with important implications for different aspects of language teaching including setting learning objectives, the role of native and nonnative language teachers, materials development, teaching culture, language assessment. These implications are briefly discussed below.

In terms of learning objectives, ELF pedagogy differs considerably from its rival counterpart EFL pedagogy (English as a foreign language) with regard to the importance it attaches to correctness and communicative effectiveness. While EFL paradigm envisages Standard English as the ultimate objective of language learning and advocates the correct and native-like language use, ELF paradigm contends that diversion from native speakers' conventions is inevitable parts of nonnative speakers' communication, and therefore, should not be frowned upon. A good language learner is not the one who has learned a fixed set of native-like pronunciation, grammar or vocabulary, but the one who can communicate effectively using a range of communication strategies such as accommodation, collaboration, approximation and negotiation for meaning (Mauranen, 2012, 2018; Kohn, 2015).

This is not, however, to say that ELF objective is to teach erroneous and incorrect forms. The objective is to create awareness that such language use exists in the real world and serves the purposes of its users well despite its deviation from native speakers' norms. Correctness and accuracy are hence contextually driven values whose importance may vary depending on the situation and purposes for which language is used (Seidlhofer et al., 2006). They may come to language users' focus; for example, when the objective is to fulfil formal academic tasks such as writing scientific reports or papers, but become of lesser importance during casual communication among nonnative speakers. ELF hence exists side by side with other possibilities of language use (Jenkins, 2015), and it is exploited when the condition for its use arises.

The paradigm shift had important implications regarding the type of teachers who represent best models for language teaching. As the number of nonnative language teachers increased, ELF proponents have questioned the status of monolingual native speakers as ideal language teachers. Jenkins (2011), for example, asserts that native speaker teachers “are less likely to be able to code-switch, less good at making use of accommodation strategies, and less free and flexible in their use of English than nonnative speakers” (p. 934). Instead, the focus has now turned to multilingual and multicompetence teachers who are capable of switching between different languages and using them as extra resources to facilitate communication. These teachers set more realist examples of successful language learner and a better role model for their multilingual students (House, 2003). Medgyes (1994) asserts that nonnative teachers are more privileged because they can use learners’ mother tongue and add to the efficiency of their teaching, they can teach learning strategies better and they can give more information about English language itself. Jenkins, Cogo and Dewey (2011) went so far as to claim that people who run the risk of losing their jobs are in fact not the nonnative teachers but the native speakers who fail to adapt themselves to ELF-oriented context of language use.

ELF paradigm has also made its way to curriculum and materials development. Criticisms are leveled against the materials produced with exclusive focus on American and British accent and culture. It is stated that the scope of materials needs to be broadened to incorporate texts, both written and oral, from other English-speaking countries (such as Ireland, New Zealand, Canada), as well as those that exemplify nonnative speakers’ interactions. It is suggested that examples of successful communication between nonnative speakers be pulled out of ELF corpus and integrated into teaching materials (Sifakis, 2017). Also, topics need to be extended to cover more global and social subjects than simply those related to the target countries (Gimenez et al., 2015). This calls for a major revision in the content of current texts books and incorporation of ELF-sensitive materials, an enterprise that stakeholders are not willing to take at the moment (Seidlhofer, 2011).

In terms of culture, instead of focusing on American and British culture, ELF-supported pedagogy emphasizes the development of multicultural competence and intercultural awareness as well the appreciation of the native culture. Weber (2015) maintains that it would be useful if the awareness of students’ is raised towards the assets of their own culture and create sensitivity towards international culture. By raising their intercultural awareness, learners can move “across and between local, national and global cultures in a more dynamic fashion” (Baker 2018). Similarly, Cortazzi and Jin (1999) concur that ELT materials should represent three types of cultural information: the source culture (e.g., Turkish), the target culture (native English speakers’ countries) and the international culture (e.g., Japanese, German). In order to promote learners’ intercultural competence, McKay (2002, p. 100) proposed that the introduction of cultural elements in language classes may take three different forms: first students can be encouraged to “reflect on their own culture in relation to the others.” Second, their attention can be drawn to “the diversity that exists within all cultures.” And third, texts can be critically analyzed so that their underlying cultural assumptions and the alternative ways to present them are explored.

Parallel proposals are also made in the field of language assessment both at the level of language comprehension and production. Instead of using listening tests produced exclusively with a British or an American accent, ELF-informed assessment calls for the inclusion a wide range of English varieties as well as texts that feature nonnative language use. At the level of language production, ELF paradigm questions the current focus of

international language tests on native speakers' correctness, suggesting that it should give way to comprehensibility, predicting communication problems and ability to deal with these problems through employing communication strategies and cooperation in negotiation for meaning. This demands the application of performance-based tasks that reflect how learners use language in actual interaction (Fang, 2017). It may also require educating evaluators to give more weight to communicative effectiveness when they score learners' performance on language tests (Cenoz, 2019).

1.1. Studies on ELF Awareness

The bulk of studies that have examined the attitude of language teachers towards ELF usually produced ambivalent results. Some studies with Greek language teachers, for example, showed that these teachers, despite their awareness of status of English as lingua franca, still followed American and British conventions and system of language use (Sifakis & Sougari, 2005; Sougari & Sifakis, 2007). Sougari and Faltzi (2015) reported that while the majority of Greek pre-service language teachers expressed their awareness of the importance of communication in actual teaching practice, they still reverted to pronunciation and grammatical accuracy.

A similar inclination towards norms of Standard English was also reported by Biricik-Deniz et al. (2017) with regard to Turkish in-service teachers. More than half of pre-service language teachers in their study expressed their unwillingness to incorporate ELF principles to their language teaching practice. Coşkun (2011) conducted a study with Turkish ELT university students and found that, despite their relative ELF-awareness, these learners displayed a strong preference for native or near-native accents. İnceçay and Akyel (2014) studied Turkish language teachers' and educators' perceptions on ELF and found that more than half of the participants disfavored ELF and supported Standard English. They also expressed their inclination to acquire a British or an American accent. Geçkinli (forthcoming) compared novice and experienced prep school teachers' attitudes towards ELF and found that novice teachers were comparatively more aware of ELF principles. However, he also found that both novice and experienced teacher were indecisive about how this knowledge can be translated to language classes and help them with their actual teaching practice.

Bayyurt et al. (2019) studied the Turkish, Polish and Portuguese in-service language teachers' attitudes towards different aspects of ELF. They reported that the teachers were largely aware of the importance of teaching cultural diversities and comparing native and nonnative cultures in language classes. However, in terms of using native speakers' model (native speakers' accents and teaching materials) and assigning importance to accuracy, their opinions were almost equally divided. The number of the teachers who agreed that they followed native speakers' accents, preferred to use only the materials written by native speakers and believed that accuracy is necessary for successful communication was almost equal to those who disagreed with these statements.

In Iranian context, the number of ELF studies on teachers' perceptions is noticeably few. Barzegar Rahatlou et al. (2018) examined the attitudes of Iranian in-service teachers and found that while almost half of them expressed their authority over the ownership of English and their right to appropriate English to their own purposes, they disagreed to set nonnative speakers as appropriate models for their students. They also stated their dissatisfaction of being recognized as nonnative speakers by their accent. Asakereh et al. (2019) also

investigated the attitudes of pre-service and in-service Iranian language teachers on different aspects of ELF. Their findings showed that even though language teachers were open to accented use of English, they still aspired to sound like native speakers. Similar attitudes were also reported with regard to language structures. While these teachers claimed that they preferred not to correct students' erroneous but intelligible language use, they still strived to comply with native speakers' conventions of language structures. Overall, these studies show that even though language teachers appeared to be somewhat aware of ELF research and the advantages of exploiting their linguistic resources, they still committed themselves to native speakers' norms and used them as points of reference for teaching pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary.

The primary purpose of the present study is to address two ELF-related issues. First, Iran is an under-explored country in terms of English language profile. Berns (2019), for example, examined the number of articles that were published in *World Englishes* and *English Today* journals between 1998 and 2018 in different expanding circle countries (based on Kachru's model, 1985). She reported that there was only one article published about Iran compared to 98 articles published about China. She concluded that countries in the Middle East are not adequately examined in terms of sociolinguistic reality of English. The paper aims to bridge the existing gap. It aspires to broaden our understanding of the current position of ELF in the world and help us get the big picture of how English is used in different countries. Second, teacher training programs that aim to align teachers with the current status of English need to explore teachers' understanding and awareness of ELF and its pedagogical implementation in their language classes in order to identify the areas where further education is required (Dewey, 2012). The present study also aims to serve this purpose by specifying these areas.

Owing to the limited number of research with in-service language teachers in Iran, the present study focuses on these teachers. It is important to note that unlike pre-service teachers, in-service teachers usually have more first-hand experience of difficulties related to the teaching of Standard English and native-like accuracy and the limited contributions that these instructions have on promoting communication effectiveness. Of interest is to explore whether the teaching experience of these teachers has any impact on their attitudes towards ELF and English language teaching. In light of the discussion made above, the following research question is formulated: What are the attitudes of Iranian in-service language teachers towards ELF and its application in their language classes?

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The participants of the study were 54 volunteer English language teachers, 43 females and 11 males, working in three branches of a private English institute in Tabriz, Iran during the summer of 2019. Twenty-two of the teachers had a BA degree, and 32 were either MA students or MA graduates. The participants majors were ELT (29 teachers), English language and literature (17 teachers) and translation studies (8 teachers). A purposive sampling method (typical case sampling) was used to select the participants. Candidates with PhD degrees or graduates of nonlinguistic departments (e.g., engineering or medical schools) were excluded from the study. The native language of 52 participants was Azeri, and the other two were Persian. Their average language teaching experience was nine years. Forty-eight teachers had taught English for at least four years, so the majority of the teachers were quite experienced. Except for three teachers who had lived in Turkey and India, the other teachers had no

experience with living in foreign countries other than short touristic visits. Out of 54 teachers, six teachers agreed to take part in semi-structured interviews. The selected course book by the institute authorities for senior classes was *American Files* and for junior classes was *Friends and Family* at the time of the study

2.2. Data Collection

A mixed method, both quantitative and qualitative, was used for the present study. Quantitative data were collected using a questionnaire that aimed at measuring the participants' perceptions and attitudes of ELF-related issues including 1) Standard English 2) pronunciation and writing conventions 3) teaching culture 4) the authorship of ELT materials 4) native/nonnative language teachers' supremacy 5) the use of native/nonnative materials in language assessment.

The questionnaire consisted of three parts. The first part collected the demographic information of the participants. The second part consisted of five multiple choice questions. Of these, four questions were adapted from Azuaga and Cavalheiro (2015). The researcher consulted two colleagues who had expert knowledge in the field, and based on their opinions, some adjustments were made to the questions to make them serve the purpose of the study. In Azuaga and Cavalheiro (2015), two items asked about the English varieties that teacher trainers used while speaking and writing in their classes (British, American or a mixture of them). In the present study, however, these items were changed to focus on the students. The items hence asked about the English varieties that teachers encouraged their students to follow (see Table 1 and 2). For item 3, and 5 the options 'materials produced in English speaking countries' and 'no culture' were added to the choices (see Table 4 and 5). Also, item 4 was developed by the researcher himself to ask about teachers' attitudes towards different objectives of ELT programs (see Table 5).

The third part of the questionnaire consisted of five statements to which teachers were asked to indicate their preference by choosing among five options ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5), and then proceed by providing further explanations on the choices they made. The five statements were originally taken from Geçkinli (forthcoming) and İnal and Özdemir (2015). They were part of a 27-item Likert scale questionnaire that the researcher had developed to measure in-service and pre-service teachers' attitudes on different aspects of ELF. The questionnaire was already piloted with 74 senior pre-service language teachers in Istanbul, and the reliability was .78. The reliability for the five items with Iranian language teachers was .54.

Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Six questions related to the major topics of the questionnaire were chosen after consulting with a domain expert and conducting a pilot interview with one of the teachers. The semi-structure nature of the interviews allowed for the modification of the questions and the increased chance of eliciting more related responses. There were no time limits for the interviews, but they took roughly 20 to 30 minutes. The interviews were conducted through English as preferred by all six participants. Due to the hectic schedule of the teachers, the interviews were carried out through phone calls at their convenient time, and their voices were audio-recorded on a computer.

2.3. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed through descriptive statistics. To ease off the interpretation of the data, on the third part of the questionnaire, teachers' answers for strongly agree and agree were merged into as a single construct. The same process was also applied for the strongly disagree and disagree choices. Since the majority of the teachers only indicated whether they agreed or disagreed with the statements in the third part of the questionnaire and failed to provide further comments on them, the data analysis for this part was limited to the frequency distributions.

As for the qualitative data collected from the interviews, content analysis was applied to specify the recurring themes and patterns (Merriam, 2009). The teachers' recording was first transformed into transcriptions. Following Strauss and Corbin's (1998) suggestions, the data were divided into segments and were coded. The related segments were later combined into smaller categories, and their recurring themes and patterns were extracted. The identified themes were examined by two experts from the field, and the agreement regarding their consistency was reached. The identified themes were combined with the quantitative data to create a more holistic understanding of the findings.

3. Results and Discussion

The first two multiple choice questions asked about the accents and writing conventions that teachers promoted in their language classes. The results showed a strong preference for native speakers' norms both in terms of pronunciation and writing conventions as opposed to communication effectiveness (Table 1 and 2). In terms of accent, the teachers who chose the first three items (American, British and American or British accents) accounted for 78% of the participants in contrast to 22% for the teachers who chose their ELF counterpart, that is, communication effectiveness. Similar data were also collected for the writing convention where the teachers who chose the first three items (American, British, American or British writing Standard) combined accounted for 63% and the teachers who favored effective communication comprised 37% of the participants. It is also noteworthy that the tendency for following native speaker norms was stronger for pronunciation than writing conventions, and this was mostly reflected by following American accent rather than British one.

Table 1.

The accent that teachers promote in language classes

	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
American accent	21	38.88
British accent	4	7.40
Either American or British accent	17	31.48
As long as there is no problem in communication, I ignore their departure from standard accent	12	22.22

Table 2.

The writing conventions that teacher promotes in language classes

	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
American Standard	18	33.33
British Standard	2	3.27
Either American or British Standard	14	25.92
My main focus is just on effective communication, so I don't mind which variety they use.	20	37.03

These findings are in line with those of Khatib and Monfared (2017) where it was found that Iranian teachers had more preference towards American pronunciation. In the follow-up interview, the teachers gave the following reasons for their tendency for American accent: 1) It was easy to learn and to teach compared to a British accent. 2) It was the variety they chose when they started their own language learning. 3) It was compatible with the accent promoted by the books they were teaching.

However, almost all of the six teachers who were interviewed stated that, despite their preference for American English, they usually introduce both accents to their students, and then encourage them to choose between them. Also, they insisted that students need to be consistent with the choices that they make. A similar approach was taken with regard to teaching writing skills. The teachers claimed that it was their responsibility to introduce both American and British writing conventions to their students and then ask them to choose one and use it in a consistent manner.

There were also some teachers who claimed that their main focus was on communication, but these teachers also expressed that their meaning-focused activities usually proceeded by follow-up accuracy-based ones to ensure that learners did not depart from native-like norms. One of the teachers in this regard said:

I think the most important thing is to communicate, and if you communicate, you have done your job. We can have differences, but we can understand each other... However, when they make a mistake, I tell them at the end of the class that this is the right pronunciation... because I want them to have the correct pronunciation, either British or American, and not to have completely wrong pronunciation.

The third question asked which native speakers' conventions should be introduced at the level of policy making. Table 3 below shows that the teachers considered the norms and conventions of native speakers, especially those coming from America or England, as the ultimate goal for learning English. The two countries overall comprised 78% of the answers. Only 22% of participants conceived merits in introducing English varieties other than American and British Standard.

Table 3.

The objectives of ELT programs

	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Introduce American Standard	12	38.88
Introduce British Standard	2	7.40
Introduce both American and British Standard	23	31.48
Introduce American and British Standard English as well as some other English varieties (e.g. Canadian, New Zealand, Australian English...etc.).	17	22.22

During the interview, half of the teachers claimed they were not in favor of introducing the other English varieties for the following reasons: 1) They did not have any knowledge about these varieties, so they didn't feel comfortable teaching something that they did not know. 2) There were not enough resources to use in language classes. 3) These varieties are less prestigious and less known to the people who want to learn English compared to American or British. 4) They did not like the accents affiliated with these varieties; for example, Australian, Irish or Scottish accents, as pointed out by one of the teachers below:

It is hard to keep track of the distinction between Canadian and American accent, so I would go for what is more trustworthy which is American because I haven't seen a dictionary written based on a Canadian Standard in my country, so American and British have more credits in terms of having enough sources, and enough examples which clearly give you some ideas about their rules.

The fourth question asked about the types of materials that language teachers wish to use in their classes. Table 4 below represents the frequency of the answers given to the question. It is noteworthy that 63% of the participants expressed their inclination towards using materials produced in America, England or both countries. The high preference for using American or British texts reflects the teachers' tendency to ascribe the ownership of English to these countries. It is also interesting to note that only 11% of participants expressed their willingness to use materials produced in nonnative countries including Iran.

Table 4.

The type of materials teachers prefer to use in their language classes

	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Materials produced in America	14	25.92
Materials produced in England	4	7.40
Materials produced in American or England	16	29.62
Materials produced in English-speaking countries such as America, England, New Zealand, Canada, etc.	14	25.92
Materials produced in English speaking countries as well as non-English speaking countries such as Iran, Turkey, Japan, etc.	6	11.11

Only one of six interviewees stated that she was willing to use books written by nonnatives. The others expressed extreme reservations in this regard. The main reasons for teachers' mistrust in locally-written materials were 1) these materials are prone to carry grammatical mistakes, inaccurate vocabulary choice, and erroneous collocations, and as such they may expose learners to a wrong language; 2) they pay undue attention to formal language use as opposed to informal one; 3) they are inadequate in presenting the cultural elements of language; and 4) they are not needed since the current books by native speakers writers sufficiently serve the needs of students. One of the teachers in this regard said:

The books we have in market now, they are organized by experts like Oxford and Cambridge, and the local books cannot go parallel with these people because they are legendary. Plus, it is not necessary. Why should I develop a self-design book when we have these books in the market? Instead, I would focus on our weakness in terms of teaching and learning.

Another teacher said:

It is like a Persian book written by a Persian writer as opposed to a Persian book written by an American. Which one would you prefer to use?

Obviously, the majority of the teachers could not confide in the quality of the materials produced in outer circle countries. It should be born in mind that ELF-supported pedagogy in fact takes the opposite position. Safari and Razmjoo (2016), for example, contended that to offset English hegemony, locally produced materials with emphasis on native cultures, values and identities should be incorporated into teaching materials. The results of the

present study, however, show that great majority of these teachers undervalue the effectiveness and necessity of such materials.

The last multiple-choice questions asked for teachers' opinions about importance of teaching cultural elements from native and nonnative countries. The teachers were allowed to choose more than one option. Table 5 represents teachers' answers to this question with some modifications. A separate item was designated to present the teachers who chose both American and British cultures. Since all of the teachers who chose Iranian culture also chose world culture, the value related to these two items were combined and presented as a single item, that is, world culture. As Table 5 shows, teachers had more ELF-oriented approach to teaching and learning culture compared to other pedagogical issues. Almost all teachers believed that teaching culture should be part of ELT language programs and more than half of these teachers believed that this should include elements from different countries in the world and not just English-speaking countries. All the same, almost 30% of teachers still claimed that teaching culture should be limited to teaching American culture, British culture or the culture of both countries.

Table 5.

The culture that should be main focus of language classes

	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
America culture	6	11.11
British culture	1	1.81
Both American and British culture	10	18.51
Cultures from other English-speaking countries (e.g., Australia, Canada, etc.)	6	11.11
World culture	30	55.50
No culture	1	1.81

A similar picture emerged from the qualitative data. All six teachers claimed that culture was a sine qua non of language teaching. Four out of six teachers claimed that ELT programs should include examples of worldwide cultures in their language classes since they believed learners may encounter these speakers in the real life. As the following comment shows:

I believe that teaching only American culture is not fair, and we need to consider worldwide etiquette. The more we go for worldwide culture, the more sophisticated we become.

Two of the teachers, however, claimed that the cultural elements should be limited to American or British culture mainly because of time limits and lack of their knowledge about other cultures. One of the teachers said:

I prefer to teach American culture because the books are American. It is somehow impossible to teach African culture or all other cultures in English language classes because of the time limit.

Our findings are in line with Asakereh et al. (2019) where it was found that in general Iranian language teachers were in favor of raising students' awareness towards cultural differences. Apparently, a great majority of Iranian teachers favored the enrichment of ELT programs by inclusion of cultural elements from the world countries. Similar results were also reported by Bayyurt et al. (2019) where Turkish, Polish and Portuguese in-service language teachers

supported the introducing of the cultures of nonnative speakers alongside the culture of native speakers in their classes.

The third part of the survey collected teachers' opinions on five statements. Table 6 below presents the descriptive statistics of teachers' responses to these items. The items aimed to tap teachers' attitudes towards the application of ELF in different domains of English language teaching.

Table 6
Teachers' attitudes toward five ELF-related issues

Items	Strongly agree/agree		Neutral		Strongly disagree/disagree		M	St. D.
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%		
1. Teachers of English should have, at least, native-like accent in English.	47	87	3	5.6	4	7.4	4.16	0.84
2. In order to learn English well, we need to learn American and British culture well too.	43	79.6	7	13.3	3	5.6	3.94	0.74
3. One can learn English best from native speaker teachers.	22	40.7	5	9.3	27	50	2.85	1.13
4. I think texts with nonnative English accent should also be used in listening exams.	26	48.2	4	7.4	23	42.6	2.96	1.25
5. Any language use that does not conform to Standard English, even though understandable (e.g., 'less people' instead of 'fewer people') is not acceptable.	33	61.2	8	14.8	13	23.1	3.37	1.03

The first item shows that a great majority of language teachers (87%) believed that they should have native-like accent in English. The findings are similar to those reported by Coskun (2011) where the majority of Turkish pre-service language teachers placed importance on native-like pronunciation. They are also in line with Barzegar Rahatlou et al. (2018) who found that even though a great majority of Iranian teachers were content with their own pronunciation, more than half of them still aspired to reach native-like accent. These findings beg the questions of whether these teachers were familiar with the concept of near-nativeness and the difficulties of achieving it, and whether by raising their objectives so high, they created a perpetual dissatisfaction with their own teaching practice.

The second item shows that the majority of teachers (79.6%) claimed that they needed to know American and British culture in order to learn English language well. From ELF perspective, this is a controversial issue though. Weber (2015), for example, holds that for English as a lingua franca, "There is no such immanent connection between the English language and British and/or American culture" (p.183). She maintains that it would be more useful if the awareness of students' is raised towards the assets of their own culture and create sensitivity towards international culture. Similarly, Gimenez (2006) argued that nonnative

speakers do not need to know information about native speakers' habits so that they can communicate with each other.

Item 3 shows that there was a disagreement among teachers regarding whether native speakers are better language teachers. The teachers who opposed this proposition were slightly more than the teachers who agreed with it (50% vs. 40.7%). The qualitative data also produced similar results. Of the six teachers who took the interview, two expressed that nonnatives might be better teachers especially because they can predict learners' problems and their sources, and therefore, come up with better solutions to solve them. Two of them, however, expressed that native teachers might be better because they are less likely to make mistakes, and that they are favored by language learners. And two teachers expressed it is not possible to choose one over the other because teaching requires a set of complicated skills, and both native and nonnatives may or may not have them.

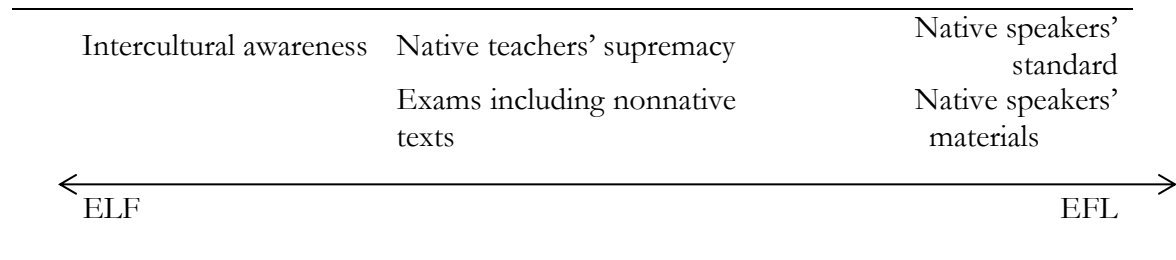
Item 4 asked whether texts written by nonnatives should be used in listening exams. Teachers' responses again were divided in this regard. While 48% agreed that such texts needed to be included in the exams, 42% claimed that exams should only use native speakers' speech and interaction. As for the interviewees, three teachers rejected the inclusion of nonnative texts in the listening for two main reasons: 1) They are nonstandard English and may contain incorrect pronunciation, vocabulary choice or grammar use. 2) Students are usually under stress during exams, and they may easily get confused. The other teachers agreed with the inclusion of texts written by nonnatives but under some conditions. One asserted that they should only be included in the advanced levels. The other two concurred that they should be included if students are already exposed to them and have carried some practice during their regular classroom hours. And one teacher stated that texts written by nonnatives need to be checked beforehand to ensure they are free of grammatical mistakes.

The last items aimed to measure the attitude of teachers toward the use of Standard English with regard to grammar. As the findings show, the number of teachers who favored grammatical accuracy was considerable higher than teachers who disfavor it (61% vs. 23%). Once more our data shows that there is a tendency towards accuracy and native speakers' norms of correct language use. Our findings are similar to those of Deniz et al. (2016) where more than half of Turkish language teachers claimed that they favored Standard English as opposed to World Englishes and intelligibility. The overemphasis on accuracy may be connected to teachers' earlier education. They invested a lot during their own language learning experience and envisaged their success as their ability to approximate to the norms of native speakers (Jenkins et al., 2011). They were taught that accuracy and communicative effectiveness complete each other, and that accuracy contributes to communication effectiveness, and therefore, is an objective that should not be compromised. What they overlook, however, is that, total accuracy does not always guarantee successful communication, and the lack of accuracy, does not necessarily lead to communication failure.

Overall, our findings showed that Iranian language teachers' attitudes varied a lot with regard to different ELF-related pedagogical issues. As figure 1 shows the diverse attitudes of Iranian teachers towards ELF issues put them in different places of ELF-EFL dichotomy. These teachers displayed more resistance towards ELF-informed language practice with regard to setting Standard English as the objective of language learning (mainly reflected through following native speakers' norms of pronunciation and the accurate use of grammar) and the application of locally produced materials in language classes. They, however, displayed more ELF-informed attitude with regard to teaching multicultural awareness. As for the other

pedagogical issues, such as setting native speaker as language teachers' models and the inclusion of nonnative texts in exams, the teachers occupied a middle ground in the spectrum with almost half supporting ELF principles and the other half opposing them.

Figure 1 *The attitudes of Iranian teachers towards ELF principles*



The multifarious attitudes of Iranian teachers towards ELF issues put extra onus on teacher training programs. These programs need to consider the diversity of teachers' needs in different domains and come up with context-specific plans to meet them. As for the present study, for example, language teachers need to know there is a difference between aspiring to achieve native-like accuracy and considering such accuracy as an indispensable pre-requisite for any instances of language use. One way to handle this is by creating opportunities for interaction between these teachers and other nonnative speakers. Research shows that the communication between nonnative speakers promotes diversity and tolerance for discrepancy, which naturally serve the elf-oriented pedagogy (Sougai & Faltzi, 2015). For sociopolitical reasons, the likelihood of face-to-face interaction between Iranian teachers and other nonnative speakers is limited. The existing gap can, however, be filled through the application of online programs where teachers experience the possibilities of successful communication despite their occasional departure from native speakers' conventions. Also, teacher education programs need to raise teachers' awareness of their assets as nonnative speakers and prepare them to employ these assets to improve their language teaching practice (Seidlhofer, 1999). They need to know that native language teachers are not necessarily better language teachers, and in fact, nonnative teachers might have a better quality and be superior to them.

Of importance is also some of the issues that nonnative teachers raised to explain their reasons for not supporting an ELF-informed pedagogy and its application in their language classes, some of them appear to be quite legitimate and deserve serious considerations. Some teachers, for example, contended that the application of language tests with examples of nonnative interactions should only follow the introduction of ELF-oriented materials in language classes. Others raised concerns regarding the major accuracy problems and inappropriate presentation of cultural elements, and informal language of the texts prepared by nonnative experts. These concerns reveal some weak areas that ELF-supported language teaching needs to address before they could expect changes in the perception and application of ELF in language classes (see Sifakis, 2019).

Like all studies, the present research also suffers from some limitations. The fact that the data were collected from private institutions and excluded the state schools restricts the generalizability of the findings to these education settings only. The second limitation is related to the short number of the items used in the questionnaire, that is, 10 items total. Only five items were used for the third part of the questionnaire (Linkert scale type). A questionnaire with more test items could have yielded more reliable results. Finally, a more

realistic picture of teachers' attitudes towards ELF could have been obtained if some classroom observations of the teachers had also been carried out. Future studies can, hence, show whether there is a mismatch between teachers' claim in following ELF principles and their actual application in language classes.

4. Conclusion

ELF is a better reflection of an ongoing reality on how English language is used outside the context of language classes (Muranen, 2012). And ELF-aware teachers who have adapted their perspective to this reality are more capable to prepare language students to successfully interact in such context. However, as Dewey (2015) contends, ELF has so far faced a limited acceptance in pedagogy. Most language teachers are either not aware of these changes, or not well-equipped to take necessary measures to prepare their learners for the real-life language use. The results of the present study show that this is also the case with Iranian in-service teachers. Except for the cultural issues, a large number of the participants disfavored ELF principles and their applications in their classrooms. The majority of the teachers who took part in the present study were experienced. Future studies can examine whether there is any gap between the perceptions of in-service English language teachers with different amount of teaching experience. Further studies are also required to examine how far academia in different learning contexts embraces ELF-aware perspectives and integrate them into their teaching practice.

It is of course the responsibilities of teacher training programs to come up with detailed plans to improve teachers' critical reflection on ELF-related issues. And the first step in this regard is to decide on the areas where these programs need to be directed at. That is why descriptive and observation studies, like the current research, are going to thrive. They both specify the areas that need changing and keep track of the changes. But we should bear in mind that changes in ELF awareness is a matter of degree and happens gradually (Sifakis, 2019). The history of language learning shows that all paradigm changes initially faced with some fierce resistance by language teachers whose beliefs were deeply entrenched in their earlier education. In case of ELF, teachers' beliefs are fueled by long-running ELT programs that dogmatically endorsed native speakerism and their linguistic and cultural representations. The upside of the story, however, is that the belated changes have started in the field, and as they promulgate, they alleviate the burden from teachers and students' shoulders who no longer feel the need to climb the impossible walls of native speakers.

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