

# Redefining Pedagogical Priorities: An Investigation of EFL Teachers' Perceptions towards Teaching English as a Lingua Franca in the Saudi Higher Education Context

AbdulRahman Al Asmari, PhD

Associate Professor, Faculty of Arts, Taif University, Saudi Arabia

\* E-mail of the corresponding author: [abdulasmari@gmail.com](mailto:abdulasmari@gmail.com)

## Abstract

The ever expanding influence of English language in the modern world has initiated an unusual era of English language teaching worldwide, and nowadays English as a foreign language (EFL) learners are nearly four times as compared to the native English speakers. This overwhelming use of English language in the expanding circle has developed more complex relationships between the communities using English in this capacity and the dialogue addressing its use as a lingua franca continues to expand. Lots of research has been produced related to English as a Lingua franca (ELF) during the last two decades highlighting the need to understand the potential change that necessitates international, mutual comprehensibility and the concept of accommodation for social and academic interactions in ELF settings. The present study intended to investigate the potential of embracing the concept of ELF in the Saudi Higher Education. This paper builds on recent research in this area and focuses on the language instructors' perceptions of ELF, while placing it up against the widely common EFL concept prominent in the expanding circle. To do this, the study investigated 218 native and non-native EFL instructors at a Saudi university to document the implications of using ELF for the purpose of learning English and the language policies related to English language teaching in the context of higher education in Saudi Arabia. The data reveal that a vast majority of the participants are familiar with the term ELF and they favour the use of ELF in ELT by suggesting exposing their students to non-native varieties of English. The results also reveal contradiction in their responses which indicated that as a matter of practice they stick to a native-speaker norm when they teach. Furthermore, they have recommended native varieties of English, i.e. British, American, Canadian and Australian respectively, for pedagogical purposes in Saudi EFL context whereas non-native varieties of English were not favoured especially in written communication. It seems that this issue should be debated and investigated at much larger scale before deciding the role of ELF in English language teaching domain in Saudi higher education.

**Keywords:** English as a lingua franca; EFL; pedagogical implications

## 1. Introduction

It has been reported that due to multiple factors, English language has got established globally and it is used to serve various purposes. This unprecedented growth of English in the different regions "..... has created positive interactions as well as tensions between global and local forces and has had serious linguistic, ideological, sociocultural, political and pedagogical implications" (Sharifian, 2009, p. 1). This factor has created scholarly discussion of great magnitude and lots of studies have been conducted on its various perspectives (Rubdy & Saraceni, 2006; Burns & Coffin, 2001; Canagarajah, 1999; Kachru, 1996). This phenomenon manifested itself with the advent of many regional varieties of English and the concept of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) does not mean to accept any one of these as lingua franca but it recognizes English with its various varieties as a means of international communication between non-native speakers (Sharifian, 2009). This concept is based on principles of "tolerance for diversity" (Seidlhofer, 2006, p. 44); therefore, it is an effort to exhaust the possibility of introducing international English which is 'negotiated and developed by ELF speakers themselves rather than imposed from "above" by native speakers' (Jenkins, 2006, p. 36). Cogo, Archibald and Jenkins (2011) choose an interesting metaphor of 'English-speaking global village' emphasizing unity on the face of diversity in which the villagers speak different Englishes to communicate with each other.

It has been reported that "English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) has been a thriving field of research especially for the last twenty years, ..... apart from a considerable amount of publications ..... the establishment of a number of small and larger scale ELF corpora" (Cogo, Archibald, & Jenkins, 2011, p. 1). Furthermore, solely dedicated journals, book series, doctoral dissertations and a growing trend of exclusive international conferences devoted to discussing issues related to ELF can be sufficient to suggest that this is an extremely significant area in the modern world of ELT and it has extremely important pedagogical implications as well. Much published research has indicated that the researchers have covered various aspects of ELF such as lexis, pronunciation, pragmatics and grammar ( Jenkins, Cogo, & Dewey 2011; Seidlhofer, Breiteneder, & Pitzl, 2006; Seidlhofer, 2004). Jenkins (2006) has highlighted another perspective and concluded that the awareness of the important role

of ELF “fits well with another area of broad agreement among WEs and ELF researchers: the need for a pluricentric rather than monocentric approach to the teaching and use of English” (p. 173); therefore, providing the non-native speakers of English language with the opportunity to reflect their sociolinguistic reality rather than labeling as how remote they are from native speakers.

Thus one of the most important functions of English today is that it plays the role of a lingua franca between Non-Native Speakers (NNS). Recent research in this area assumes a perceptually changing status of ELF rather than EFL within the expanding-circle contexts, and there is a need to deal with the potential change from a norm-bound approach to one that emphasises international mutual comprehensibility. Such a change has implications for the purpose of learning English and the language policies related to ELT.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Overview of World Englishes (WEs)

Before embarking on the discussion of ELF in educational contexts, it might be more applicable here to discuss multifaceted views of WEs to identify sources of conceptual controversies related to the English language. Burt (2005) points out that the widespread inconsistency in terms of English models, the confusion and the differences in terminology can cause challenging obstacles in fully accepting any conceptual model in the spread and use of English. To name few of the so called English language models, Seidlhofer (2004) mentions the pluralisation of English to Englishes (Kachru, 1992) and the term World Englishes (Crystal, 1997). In addition, we often come across English as an international language (e.g., Modiano, 1999a, 1999b; Jenkins, 2002, 2000), English as a lingua franca (e.g., Gnutzmann, 2000; Seidlhofer, 2001), English as a global language (e.g., Crystal, 1997; Gnutzmann, 1999), English as a world language (e.g., Mair, 2003) and English as a medium for intercultural communication (e.g., Meierkord, 1996). These terms associated with the English language reflect the complexity in understanding the use of English language and call for the need to identify a feasible representative model that could be embraced in various educational contexts.

Within the world Englishes literature, the notion of teaching English as an Inner-circle language versus English as an international language (EIL) has become a critical issue to some learning contexts. Kachru’s (1989) concentric model of English speaking countries serves as a representative of “the types of spread, the patterns of acquisition, and the functional allocation of English in diverse cultural contexts” (p. 356). The centre or the origin which he calls Inner-Circle countries are those wherein English is a native language, i.e., the U.S.A, the U.K, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. Those countries are deemed as the traditional bases of English dominated by the “mother tongue” varieties of the language. The next circle is the Outer-Circle countries which are post-colonial countries where English is institutionalised as an additional language or may be as an official language such as Bangladesh, Ghana, India, Kenya, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Tanzania and Zambia. The third category includes Expanding-Circle countries in which English is the primary foreign language with no official status and with restricted use, such as Japan, Saudi Arabia, and China, to name few. Crystal (1997 cited in Javid, Farooq, & Gulzar, 2012) estimates that there are 570 million Inner and Outer Circle English users and anywhere from 100 million to one billion Expanding Circle English users; this figure is regardless of the varying definitions of competent English use. According to Burt (2005), Kachru’s concentric circles seem to acknowledge diversity but little commonality across Englishes, describing these varieties as separate and with the Inner Circle clearly established at the top of the hierarchy.

While Crystal (1995) agrees with Kachru (1992) that there is not yet a common, standard worldwide variety of English, he claims that Kachru’s (1992) model does not fully describe the reality of international English use. He further suggests that the concentric model can be interpreted as the Inner Circle being norm-producing, the Outer Circle being norm-developing and the Expanding Circle being norm-dependent. Crystal (1997) also proposes a more integrated view of international English using the term Englishes, defining these new varieties of L1 English as international dialects on an international scale involving entire countries and regions. In this model he states, “international varieties ... express national identities... and are a way of reducing the conflict between intelligibility and identity” (p. 134). Although legitimising new English varieties, Crystal’s (1999) model is still oriented towards the Inner Circle (Burt, 2005). However, all of these models seems insufficient because reality is often not so clear-cut.

Drawing on Kachru’s (1992), Modiano (1999a) suggests a model which he refers to as centripetal circles of international English. The Innermost Circle, which comprises proficient speakers of English as an International Language (EIL) is a general term including all varieties of English. These varieties are assumed to function well in cross-cultural communication and do not necessarily include L1 English. The emphasis here is placed on functionality and there is no inherent need for consistency; varieties can be mixed and elements interchanged.

The next circle includes speakers with native or foreign language proficiency whose variety of English is far enough removed from standard EIL to require code switching when speaking internationally. The third circle is comprised of learners of English and the Outermost Circle includes people who do not know English. In Modiano's (1999a) model, L1 English speakers are not necessarily in charge of defining the language: "Proficient non-native speakers of EIL, rather than the native speakers who are not proficient in EIL, are better equipped to define and develop English as a tool in cross-cultural communication" (p. 25). This legitimization of non-L1 speakers directly opposes Kachru's (1992) model where it is assumed that L1 speakers are proficient, and norm production is restricted by geographical location. Modiano (1999a) further argues that English by definition as a globally functioning language can no longer be conceptualised as restricted to any particular place. Hence, that is an emphasis on the democratic nature of the use of English worldwide and with the increasing majority of non-L1 speakers. Also, Modiano (1999b) claims that a linguistic feature is correct only if it is used and understood by the majority of proficient speakers of EIL. Accordingly, L1 speakers with strong regional accents are not deemed as speaking standard English and idiosyncratic features negotiated into existence by two parties do not qualify as EIL. In a way to preclude the possibility of distinct varieties of EIL, Modiano does not specify precisely what is meant by "a particular place" therefore leaving open the possibility of large-scale regional varieties of lingua franca English. Moreover, there was a shift in motivation to learn English from integrational to instrumental or utilitarian which is also highlighted alongside the importance of functionality and the democratization of English language use. Similarly, Larsen-Freeman (2011, p. 167) confirms that "no one outside of the local educational context can really answer the question of which English should be taught in a particular place at a particular time". This wide range of views raises questions about the importance of adopting a world English model that can serve as a target for ELT.

## 2.2 Standard English vs 'changing' English

"Although there are at least 360 million native speakers of English world-wide, Sir Randolph Quirk, writing in the Sunday Times on 17 April, 1994, estimates that on a global basis non-native speakers of English now outnumber native speakers" (Firth, 1996, p. 240). The fact that so many people are increasingly using English all over the world inevitably means that the language is changing, as individuals communicate with each other in the way that they find the easiest. Crystal (1996, p. 15) states that "the reason why linguistic change is so unpredictable is that it is in the hands of so many people". There is much controversy as to the changes that are happening in English. Furthermore, the grammarians with more traditional prescriptive inclination argue that there should be a standard in terms of grammar, lexis, orthography and pronunciation in English. On the other hand, defining exactly what Standard English (SE) is can be a challenging task. Crystal (1997) attempts to define the idea by summarising five essential characteristics:

"that SE is a variety of English, like a dialect; that the linguistic features of SE are chiefly matters of grammar, vocabulary and orthography, not a matter of pronunciation; that SE is the variety of English which carries most prestige within a country; that the prestige attached to SE is recognised by adult members of the community and it is the norm of leading institutions such as the government, law courts and the media; and that although SE is widely understood, it is not widely produced" (p. 110).

Crystal's lenient points about WE raised several controversial issues due to their flexibility, especially by radical prescriptive linguists and language academies. For example, while English speakers should aim for Received Pronunciation, the notion that pronunciation is not important can be too permissive. Medgyes (1994), however, thinks that Received Pronunciation is only spoken by a very limited number of the British population. With a flash back on several previous assumptions (e.g., Crystal, 2003; Görlach, 1990; McArthur, 1987, 1998), Jenkins (2006) argues that the so-called phenomenon of World Spoken English (WSE) can be problematic as it can be viewed as hypothetical, monolithic form of English developing in its own right.

## 2.3 Establishing ELF concepts

It has been long since communicative language teaching has been established to help learners to interact with other speakers of English, especially Native Speakers (NS). As such, it has traditionally focused on the linguistic and sociocultural knowledge needed for such interactions. However, the majority of learners increasingly use their English with other speakers for whom it is considered as EFL/ESL. In this regard, it has been widely acknowledged that NNS have outnumbered NS, and accordingly, most interactions in English take place amongst NNS (e.g., Graddol 1997, 2006). According to Richards et al. (1996, p. 214) "the term lingua franca originated in the Mediterranean region in the Middle Ages among crusaders and traders of different language backgrounds". Holmes (1997, p. 86) writes that "the term lingua franca describes a language serving as a regular means of communication between different linguistic groups in a multilingual speech community". The author also states that "when academics and experts meet at international conferences, ..... a world language such as

English, French or Spanish is often used” (p. 86).

In a communicative sense, Firth (1996) defines ELF as “a contact language between persons who neither share a common native tongue nor a common national culture and for who English is the chosen foreign language of communication” (p. 240). It has often been claimed that lack of shared knowledge and sociocultural framing between EFL speakers of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds is likely to lead to misunderstanding and communication breakdowns. One key reason for such miscommunication is that the norms of the participants' mother tongue and native culture may interfere with the target language (TL). Such assumptions have triggered research into the ELF field where speakers of other languages can maintain a shared level of comprehensibility in English. Simply put, English is defined by the purpose of communication, rather than the reference to NS norms.

According to Jenkins (2009, p. 201), a lingua franca is a language that is used among speakers of different linguacultural backgrounds. This means that ELF refers to a language used for communication between Non-Native Speakers of English. However, this does not necessarily mean that native speakers are excluded, but the language they speak does not have to be the decisive model for what is supposed to be correct or incorrect. House (1999) defines ELF interactions as “interactions between members of two or more different linguacultures in English” (p. 74). The majority of ELF researchers nevertheless do not define ELF communication this narrowly due to their agreement that speakers of English from inner, outer and expanding circles also participate in intercultural communication (albeit as a small minority in the case of inner circle speakers).

With this in mind, ELF speakers are likely to display varying levels of competence in English, which can raise issues of pragmatic fluency. House (2002) has elaborated the concept of pragmatic fluency as the following: ‘(1) appropriate use of discourse strategies; (2) ability to initiate and change topics; (3) ability to “carry weight” in substantive turns-at-talk; (4) ability to show appropriate uptaking, and responding behavior, via latching and overlapping; (5) appropriate rate of speech, types of filled and unfilled pauses, frequency and function of repairs’ (House, 2002, p. 262–263). A recent definition of ELF can be “the common language of choice, among speakers who come from different linguacultural backgrounds” (Jenkins 2009, p. 200).

#### **2.4 Status of English in the Saudi context**

Due to internationalisation in higher education, English has become the dominant language for programs in academia in general (Graddol, 1997, 2006). The scale to which English has spread to degree programs in non-native speaking (NNS) countries is unprecedented (Mauranen, 2007). Internationalisation as a process has resulted in English becoming the most widely used lingua franca globally. This shift to English has also led to a trend where a good proportion of the world's technical and scientific knowledge is available in English only.

Saudi Arabia is no exception to this global trend as many Saudis in various fields of work use English to correspond with other nationalities. In the Saudi higher education context; therefore, the support of internationalisation manifested itself in increased teaching in English where the speakers/learners are non-native speakers (NNSs) of English. The pressure to compete among students aspiring to go for scholarships abroad and to hunt for good job opportunities has led to a considerably increased English-medium instruction at Saudi Universities. A good example of this scenario is Taif University, which has initiated a Preparatory Year Program offering increased numbers of English language instruction hours.

As “no one outside of the local educational context can really answer the question of which English should be taught in a particular place at a particular time” (Larsen-Freeman 2011, p. 167), this study seeks answers on what the language instructors themselves think about this situation? What are their inclinations of their own English, and particularly from the point of view of lecturing? What perceptions do they have towards teaching through ELF?

### **3 Research Design**

The underpinnings of the present study step out of a critical post-modern view which sheds light on the realistic situation of ELT in the expanding circle where there are enormous challenges to the process of language teaching and learning. This is a descriptive research study that intends to investigate the perceptions of EFL instructors working at Taif University English Language Centre (TUELC) regarding the use of ELF in general and its pedagogical implications in the context of higher education in particular. A semi structured questionnaire was exploited to generate data related to the research questions of this survey. The data generated through this questionnaire were statistically analysed for discussion, and recommendations were forwarded for identifying the suitability of using ELF in the context of Saudi higher educational institutions.

### 3.1 Research Objectives

This research is an attempt to avoid being limited to the vision of achieving native speakers' competences. Hence, it looks into ELF from a micro (individual) perspective as a way of reaching out for a new approach to ELT that will enable learners to communicate effectively at an international level. Based on that, the present study has the following objectives:

- 1) to identify language instructors' perceptions of ELF,
- 2) to identify attitudes that are linked to teaching English,
- 3) to acquire knowledge needed for decisions about future language teaching in Saudi universities, and subsequently in an expanding-circle context.

Findings provide insight into language instructors' perceptions of ELF. This may contribute in assessing the instructors' capability of performing their teaching duties without being apprehended by native-speakerness norms. Implications may call attention to the potential benefits of shifting the focus from EFL to ELF to trigger a larger capacity of dealing with international contexts.

### 3.2 Participants

In this study, the term "language instructor" is used neutrally to refer to academic staff at the university level. Those instructors are usually involved in the process of English language instruction to university students, and they are expected to hold different academic titles such as, instructor, teaching assistant, lecturer, assistant or associate professor.

### 3.3 Instrumentation

To collect the perceptions of the participants of this survey report a multi-item semi structured questionnaire was used and the participants were requested to fill in this online. The number of participants who responded to this online questionnaire was 218 (164 male EFL teachers and 54 female EFL teachers). All participants were language instructors who come from different backgrounds. The questionnaire was adapted from a previously developed survey (Pilkinton-Pihko, 2011), and it was further adjusted to the context-specific circumstances. The questionnaire was divided into four parts, where the first part was designed to obtain information about the teachers' background (i.e., gender, number of years of teaching experience), and the second part focused on information about their English language inclinations. The third part posed questions on instructors' perceptions of ELF. The fourth part asked questions on instructors' views about their teaching practice and what English is used in their curriculum. Data analysis was carried out in the format of descriptive analysis.

### 3.4 Research Questions

The present study is directed to find out the answers of the following research questions:

- a. What are the perceptions of EFL instructors at TUELC towards ELF?
- b. What are the perceptions of EFL instructors at TUELC towards standard English norms?
- c. What are the perceptions of EFL instructors at TUELC towards the pedagogical implications of using ELF?

## 4 Results and Discussion

The researcher administered a semi-structured questionnaire to identify the perceptions of EFL instructors at ELC TU towards ELF, standard English norms and the pedagogical implications of using ELF. The questionnaire was available online and EFL instructors were requested to enter their responses. The first 6 questionnaire items elicited the demographic data of the participants of the study. Majority of the participants, i.e., 150 did not enter their names out of the total 208 participants. The second question was related to their gender and it has been reported that 75.23% (164) male and 24.77% (54) female participants responded to this online survey. The results of the next item have revealed that it was a mixed group as far as their teaching experience was concerned. Majority of the participants 30.73% (67) reported to have more than 15 year of teaching experience followed by the ones who have 5-10 year experience: 25.69% (56 participants). Fifty-five (25.23%) stated that they have 10-15 years of teaching experience whereas the remaining 18.35% (40) reported to have less than five years experience.

The next three questionnaire items related to the demographic data were meant to elicit the participants' ethnic background and their target language competence. The questionnaire item 4 meant to document the percentage of native and non-native speakers of English. Thirty-seven participants skipped this and the data of the remaining ones have revealed that 32 (17.86) are native speakers of English and 149 (82.32%) are non-native. Responding to the next questionnaire item, a majority of 118 participants (65.19%) has reported that Arabic is their mother tongue whereas 63 participants (34.81%) have stated that they are non-Arabic speakers. Thus it is evident that a

vast majority of the participants of this empirical study consist of non-native Arabic speaking teachers who have had teaching experience in EFL context. The next question was “What is your own target competence in the English language; you expect to have a native like”. They were supposed to choose from three options: ‘1) grammar, 2) pronunciation, & 3) I am already a native-speaker’. This questionnaire was responded by 181 and skipped by 37 participants. A dominant majority of 54.14% (98 participants) has reported to have native-like pronunciation, followed by 26.52% (48 participants) who have aspired to have native-like grammar whereas the remaining 19.34% (35 participants) have stated that they are native speakers of English. This finding offers significant insights into the fact that majority of the participants seemed to believe that native-like pronunciation is a significant mark of nativity that should be tried to be achieved by non-native speakers of English.

The participants were asked to “describe their accent when they speak English” in 2-4 words. A majority of 181 respondents recorded their responses whereas it was skipped by 37. Thirty-two respondents have stated that they are native speakers of English and a vast majority of 61 participants have claimed that their accent is near native. As far the responses of native speakers have been concerned, they have mentioned the various native accents they speak such as, “North American, South African English, standard, Midwestern, British accent, American British fluent, natural American, formal, South African British, North American, R.P, Neutral accent, Southern English, Northern (Mancunian/Cheshire) British etc. Several responses have been articulated in such a manner that it was difficult to put them under some category. The examples of these responses are “like any non-native speaker, with my broken voice it sounds rocky, correct in terms of pronunciation, very intelligible, clear mistake-free” etc. Sixteen participants of this study have stated that their accent is excellent and 55 claimed that they have very good accent in the target language. This finding seems to suggest that even experienced EFL teachers also consider it important to achieve native-like accent.

The next item on the questionnaire was to “describe how would you like to describe your accent in English in 5 years” in 2-4 words. The frequency of response was the same for this item as well, i.e., 181 responded and 37 skipped. Sixteen respondents have stated that there would not be any changes and 19 have claimed it would be outstanding. This seems to indicate that it should be the response of the native speakers who have outstanding accent and don’t see any change in their accent in five years. A vast majority has posited that their accent would be near-native supporting the findings of the previous question that the majority of EFL teachers believe that efforts should be made to achieve native-like accent. Among the remaining responses, 22 have revealed it would be very good, 17 have stated that they would improve and 3 claimed that it would be satisfactory. This finding exhibiting high status to native English accent is in line with the study of Siek-Piskozub, Wach & Raulinajtys (2008) who have reported that Polish EFL speakers of English also bear strong preference for native-like pronunciation and accent.

The next question was central to the main focus of this empirical study and the participants were supposed to respond to the questions “Are you familiar with the term ‘ELF?’”. This question was skipped by 60 participants. A dominant majority of 132 (83.54%) has replied in affirmation and 26 (16.46%) have stated that they are not familiar with this term. The next question was related to the practical implications of the concept of ELF and the attitudes of the EFL faculty members. It has been responded by 158 and skipped by 60 participants. They have been asked to tell about their preferences of textbooks to teach English. They were supposed to choose from the options of American, British, Australian, Euro English and mixed native speaker standards. Majority (53.16% - 84 respondents) has favoured textbooks in British English followed by 36 participants (22.78%) who have opted for American textbooks. The third most favoured option opted by 34 participants (21.52%) is the textbooks with mixed native speaker standards whereas only one response favoured the textbooks in Euro English. This trend strongly suggests that a vast majority of native as well as non-native teachers of English language believes that the textbooks should follow a standard norm and it is not suitable to use a mixture of various native accents for teaching/learning a target language. The result also suggests that British English is favoured by the majority of EFL teachers represented by the participants of this study. The next question was an attempt to understand the attitude of the employers and the participants were asked to reply this closed-ended question: “Have you ever had employers who have insisted on a specific English standard in your teaching?” The response ratio was same like the previous two questions, i.e., 158 replied and 60 skipped. A majority of 56.96% (90 participants) has reported that they have had employers who insisted on following a specific standard and 43.04% (68) have responded in negative. This finding also suggests that like English teachers, employers also feel comfortable when their employees follow some standard English while teaching English language as second/foreign language.

The next question was what were those standards the employers insisted on following? Among 158 participants who responded to this question, a majority of 43.67 % (69 participants) has stated that they insisted on British English followed by 27.85% (44 participants) who have declared that they have been asked to follow multiple

standards. The third standard remained American English reported by 23.32% (40 participants) whereas the Australian English has been reported by only 5 participants. This also confirms the trend that was revealed in the previous questions exhibiting the favoured attitude of English language teachers towards British English. Related to this question was the next questionnaire item: “Did it bother you to be instructed to follow a specific English standard?” Out of the total 156 participants who responded to this question, a vast majority of 73.72% has answered in negative and the rest 26.28% replied in affirmation. “Please describe ELF from your own perspective in a few words” was the next question on the questionnaire that meant to investigate the participants’ understanding of the concept of ELF. The definitions provided by the participants have revealed that a dominant majority of them understand the concept except for 12% participants who have misunderstood it and reported it as English as a foreign language. The following are some of the definitions forwarded by the participants – “Using English as a common medium of communication; *Lingua Franca* means any language which works best for communication/ medium of instruction among different segments of society with different cultural, linguistics and academics backgrounds; English used among people who don’t share a mother tongue; It’s when English is used as the common language of communication by non-English speakers, esp. at conferences’ and workshops; When people with a different first language use English to communicate; English use as a medium of communication between speakers with different native languages; A common language that speakers of different languages can use to communicate; English is a language of the world. There are numerous varieties of English and they all acceptable and they should be; English as a *Lingua Franca* means the language people from different origins use to communicate; English as the language of the world/a global language” etc. All these definitions show that though various people used different definitions but they all have reasonably conveyed the main concept of ELF.

Table 1: Descriptive analyses for item 15-29

No	Questionnaire items	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Average
15	I consciously change my accent depending on to whom I am speaking.	16.46% 26	29.75% 47	20.89% 33	20.25% 32	12.66% 20	2.83
16	I think a standardized English (e.g. American, British, or Australian) is the best for teaching	5.06% 8	20.25% 32	6.96% 11	44.94% 71	22.78% 36	3.60
17	The teachers I have come across during my career in Saudi Arabia speak English well enough to teach it.	3.16% 5	18.99% 30	22.15% 35	46.84% 74	8.86% 14	3.39
18	When I am speaking to a native speaker of English, I try to speak in the way they do.	10.13% 16	25.95% 41	17.72% 28	34.18% 54	12.03% 19	3.12
19	I think Native-Speaker standard is the best for teaching.	6.33% 10	27.22% 43	24.68% 39	31.01% 49	10.76% 17	3.13
20	I think teachers should insist that learners should not mix, e.g. British and American English. I get irritated when I read or hear something in mixed American / British English.	16.46% 26	37.34% 59	22.78% 36	15.82% 25	7.59% 12	2.61
21	When I find someone who does not speak English as well as I do, I try to “talk down”.	15.82% 25	20.25% 32	23.42% 37	34.81% 55	5.70% 9	2.94
22	It doesn't bother me when I read /hear something in mixed British/American English.	6.33% 10	9.49% 15	20.25% 32	47.47% 75	16.46% 26	3.58
23	I will not correct my students' pronunciation as long as I can understand them.	19.62% 31	32.28% 51	15.82% 25	27.22% 43	5.06% 8	2.66
24	I would be happy if there was a standard non-native norm for English.	11.39% 18	24.05% 38	38.61% 61	19.62% 31	6.33% 10	2.85
25	English teachers should stick to native speaker models when they chose recordings to play in class.	5.06% 8	16.46% 26	15.82% 25	35.44% 56	27.22% 43	3.63
26	English teachers should make their learners comfortable with non-native speaker accents in English language teaching.	3.80% 6	7.59% 12	15.82% 25	53.80% 85	18.99% 30	3.77
27	When I teach English, I try my best to stick to a native-speaker norm.	3.16% 5	10.76% 17	14.56% 23	44.30% 70	27.22% 43	3.82
28	Native speakers of English should decide what is correct in the language or not.	8.86% 14	30.38% 48	18.99% 30	30.38% 48	11.39% 18	3.05
29	My experience abroad has positively influenced my English language skills (only answer if you have had a stay abroad).	4.43% 7	6.33% 10	22.15% 35	36.71% 58	30.38% 48	3.82

The table given above presents a detailed descriptive analyses for items 15 to 29 which meant to elicit the participants' responses towards the use of English as a lingua franca in their daily life as well for the process of teaching/learning English as a foreign language. The results have exhibited interesting psychological underpinning in the attitudes of the participants of this empirical study towards ELF. Items 27 and 29 have been assigned the highest mean value in which the participants reiterate that their overseas stay has positively influenced their English language skills and they prefer to stick to a native-speaker norm. The second highest mean has been calculated for the item which states that non-native speakers' accent should be used in English language teaching to make their learners comfortable. This finding is in line with much empirical studies that have been conducted and have revealed that when people from diverse linguacultural backgrounds use ELF for mutual communications, they exploit various strategies that help in making their communication a success without having any considerable problems (Cogo 2009; 2010; Kaur 2009; Mauranen 2006; Pitzl 2005). The study of Sherman & Sieglöva (2011 cited in Cogo, Archibald, & Jenkins, 2011) investigated Czech EFL students and suggested that native standard English is more suitable for formal education and economic success but ELF is reported to be more strongly associated with vocational and non-academic education.

The results also show some contradiction in their responses towards ELF as the participants suggest exposing their students to non-native varieties of English but also state that as a matter of practice they actually stick to a native-speaker norm when they teach. This finding seems to suggest that they are convinced that ELF should be given due importance in the teaching/learning process of English language by exposing the learners to non-native speakers' accents but they don't practice them in their practical teaching for various reasons. It seems that there are some pressures from various corners that hinder English language teachers from using ELF in their teaching and they find it safe to follow a native-speaker norm. This seems to confirm the findings of a growing mass of research reporting that the use of ELF is growing fast for various academic and non-academic contexts but it is least recognized one among various functions of English language globally (Jenkins, 2000 & 2007; Widdowson, 1994; Seidlhofer, 2001). The item that received third highest mean value states that "English teachers should stick to native-speaker models when they choose recordings to play in class", confirming the argument presented above that they don't feel comfortable using non-native varieties of English in their teaching sessions though they acknowledge that English learners should be exposed to other varieties of English as well. The participants have assigned the lowest mean values to items 20, 23 and 15 which clearly posits that English language teachers teaching English as a foreign language represented by the participants of this study acknowledge the significance of ELF and favour its use inside as well as outside the academic setting. The descriptive analyses of all other items except 24 in this section strongly support the trend exhibited in the highest ranking and lowest ranking items that ELF is a positive development and it should be properly practiced and exploited not only in daily life but also for pedagogical purposes.

The question related to their preferences for teaching materials was answered by 139 participants and skipped by 79. A majority of 51.08% (i.e. 71 participants) has favoured the use of 'one variety of standard English (e.g., American, British, or Australian English)' followed by 40.29% (i.e. 56 participants) who have showed liking for 'a mix of many standard Englishes (e.g., British, American, Australian English etc.)'. Only 7.91% (11 participants) have voted for 'a mix of standard and non-standard Englishes (e.g., American and Afro American Vernacular English - AAVE etc)'. One participant has stated that he favours 'a mix of non-standard Englishes (e.g., Indian, AAVE, Hong Kong English etc.)' whereas the last option that 'one variety of non-standard English (e.g., Indian, AAVE, Hong Kong English etc.)' should be used as teaching materials has been opted by none. This finding strongly suggests that though the concept of ELF has been presented enthusiastically from various corners but the native as well as non-native English language teachers represented by the participants of this study do not prefer a non-standard variety of English to be used in teaching materials for teaching EFL learners.

Table 2: Data analyses of students' exposure to various English varieties

No	Variety of English	No of participants	Never	Sometimes	Often	Regularly
1	American English	134	2.24% 3	52.24% 70	15.67% 21	29.85% 40
2	British English	136	1.47% 2	28.68% 39	26.47% 36	43.38% 59
3	Australian English	132	34.09% 45	30.30% 40	18.94% 25	16.67% 22
4	Canadian English	130	58.46% 76	33.85% 44	3.85% 5	3.85% 5
5	African American Vernacular English	132	72.73% 96	20.45% 27	3.03% 4	3.79% 5
6	Indian English	133	66.17% 88	28.57% 38	1.50% 2	3.76% 5
7	Jamaican English	132	94.70% 125	5.30% 7	0.00% 0	0.00% 0
8	New Zealand English	131	82.44% 108	16.79% 22	0.76% 1	0.00% 0
9	Nigerian Standard English	130	94.62% 123	4.62% 6	0.00% 0	0.77% 1
10	Spanish English	130	89.23% 116	9.23% 12	0.77% 1	0.77% 1

Table 2 contains the data analyses for the items that meant to elicit the participants' responses towards the questions, 'How often are your students exposed to the following English varieties during English lessons (oral or written sources)?' which was answered by 139 and skipped by 79 participants. This section contains five standard native varieties of English (American, British, Australian, Canadian & New Zealand English) and five non-native varieties (African American Vernacular English, Indian English, Jamaican English, Nigerian Standard English & Spanish English). The data generated reveal that the students are exposed to British English, American English and Australian English on regular basis respectively. It has also been posited that presently EFL students are not exposed much to other varieties of native as well as non-native varieties of English. The same trend is evident in the rest of the data analyses of this category partially supporting the finding of items 15-29 that the EFL teachers like to follow native norms and preferably British, American and Australian English. These findings contradict the recommendations of Kachru (2005 & 1992) that new varieties of English which emerged in the ex-colonies of Britain and North America should be the target and main focus of EFL curriculum, teaching materials and classroom teaching practices for their respective countries. He forwards the examples of Indian English, Nigerian English, Singaporean English and Philippino English in this regard.

Table 3: Data analyses of acceptable varieties of English in written communication

No	Variety of English	Respondents	Percentage
1	American English	117	84.17%
2	British English	128	92.09%
3	Australian English	94	67.63%
4	Canadian English	73	52.52%
5	African American Vernacular English	24	17.27%
6	Hong Kong English	20	14.39%
7	Jamaican English	17	12.23%
8	Mix of American and British English	62	44.60%
9	Nigerian Standard English	19	13.67%

Table 3 details the analyses for the question 'In written production, would you consider the use of the following varieties of English acceptable as long as it did not impede communication?' The respondents were supposed to check the option of yes for any numbers of options they thought appropriate. Maximum participants have considered it British English followed by American English. Australian English and Canadian English have been ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> respectively. A "mix of British and American English" has also been assigned a moderate preference as evident by 44.6% whereas the rest options, non-native norms, have not been considered appropriate in this regard. This result also reveals that the participants are hesitant to accept non-native norms in

the formal writings.

Table 4: Data analyses of acceptable varieties of English in oral communication

	Variety of English	Respondents	Percentage
1	American English	121	87.05%
2	British English	127	91.37%
3	Australian English	101	72.66%
4	Canadian English	84	60.43%
5	African American Vernacular English	48	34.53%
6	Hong Kong English	45	32.37%
7	Jamaican English	42	30.22%
8	Mix of American and British English	78	56.12%
9	Nigerian Standard English	44	31.65%

Table 4 presents the data analyses for the question ‘In oral production, would you consider the use of the following varieties of English acceptable as long as it did not impede communication?’ One hundred thirty-nine responded to this item by checking the option of yes for any numbers of options they thought appropriate. Like the results of the previous item, a majority of the participants has assigned the highest value to British English followed by American English. Australian English and Canadian English have been given the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> positions respectively though slightly lower values have been assigned as compared to these for written communication. A ‘mix of British and American English’ has been given slightly higher mean of 56.12.6%. As compared to the written communication, relatively higher preferences are reported for non-native varieties of English. This offers valuable insights into the psychological underpinnings of English language teachers represented by the participants of this survey that though they favour the use of varieties of English other than native, they are hesitant to accept non-native norms for more formal academic activity of written communication. The responses of the participants related to the use of non-native varieties of English for written and oral communication confirm the findings of much research done in ELF. For example, the findings match the results of Kuo (2006) and Mollin (2006) who investigated the attitudes of EFL speakers who have shown strong inclination towards native English norms. Likewise, the empirical study of Sifakis & Sougari (2005) has also revealed that EFL teachers in Greece are reported to have strong inclination towards native English norms for teaching English in the EFL context of Greece.

## 5. Findings and Conclusions

This empirical survey is an attempt and a starting point to engage in a discussion related to the role of ELF in the EFL higher education context of Saudi universities. Considering an ever-increasing role of ELF in the outer and expanding circle, it seems important to thoroughly investigate its potential use in ELT so that EFL learners should have the confidence to effectively communicate with not only native speakers of English, but also with much larger communities of non-native speakers. This study adopted a user-center approach and aimed at recording the perceptions of native as well as non-native English language teachers teaching in the EFL context of Saudi Arabia to shed light on various aspects that are important to determine the role of ELF in English language pedagogy.

Generally speaking the data strongly suggest that the participants understand the significance and increasing role of ELF in the present world. It is also evident that in Saudi Arabia English has transcended its role as EFL and is now closely associated with the growing global trend of English as a lingua franca. Furthermore, an interesting finding is that the results have exhibited somewhat contradictory trends highlighting the tension that exists in the role of ELF in the real world and the emphasis on native speakerism norms prevalent in the domain of ELT in the outer as well as the expanding circle. The results reveal that the English language teachers working in the Saudi EFL context have evident signs of acceptance of ELF, but for pedagogical purposes they insist on native standard English accuracy. Their responses also exhibit their own preference of achieving native-like accent which does not confirm the norms of accepting English as a lingua franca.

An ambitious pursuit of achieving native speaker standards by neglecting the due role of ELF in English language pedagogy will not only be deemed as high expectations which learner may never be capable of meeting, but also depriving the learners from making their own meaning and having access to their full potential to make their impression on the language. It is highly recommended that the local educators should explore important issues related to ELF in their own contexts through surveys, case studies, observations, ethnography, action research etc. to ensure a balance between native standards and the flexibility of ELF. Having established a clear

understanding of instructors' perceptions of ELF, it becomes essential as a subsequent step to make ELF processes and features more tangible for language teaching and practical daily uses. Furthermore, it is extremely important to take the decision makers on board as well so that a smooth transition may be ensured because the idea of such integration calls for serious consideration in terms of plausible options for syllabus design, material development, adopting suitable teaching procedures and implementing the required assessment techniques.

Considering the significance and scope of ELF in the expanding circle, the present study can be extended to investigate other related areas and implications of ELF. It is highly recommended to explore the learners' and policy makers' perceptions to investigate the feasibility of such instruction in order to improve their awareness of the other varieties of English used around the world. For in-depth exploration, it is also recommended that a more thorough understanding of the stakeholders' conceptualisation should be recorded through the inclusion of a 'thick description' based on the basis of other qualitative methods.

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