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EFL teachers' attitudes toward accent and culture in light of EIL: The case of Iranian public schools and private institutes

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Abstract: The aim of the current study was twofold: examining the influence of contextual variations on EFL teachers' attitudes toward accent and culture in the English as an international language (EIL) context and exploring reasons that shape teachers' viewpoints toward them. Data were collected from 43 public-school English language teachers and 63 private language institute instructors in Iran using a newly designed questionnaire and follow-up interviews. The results of *t*-test revealed that there was no significant difference between the two groups' attitudes toward the two elements of EIL. Participants in both settings considered the accents spoken in Inner Circle countries as an ideal pedagogical model. On the other hand, they believed both target and local cultures should be included in language classroom. They attributed their views toward EIL accent to the washback effect of standardized test, comprehensibility issue, and their own language learning experience. Teachers also referred to the link between language and culture and the significance of being aware of different cultures as the reasons behind their attitudes toward EIL cultural norms. The findings demonstrate the necessity of building a dialogic relationship between theoreticians/policymakers and practitioners to make EIL amenable for classroom settings.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

English has gradually turned into the most widely used language by people all over the world and linguistic and cultural norms of native English speakers have been challenged by many theoreticians in the field. In the current study, attempts were made to examine the influence of contextual variations on EFL teachers' attitudes toward English accents and cultures in today's world and to explore reasons that shape teachers' viewpoints toward them. The findings demonstrated that the participants were in favor of linguistic and cultural norms of native English speakers and contextual variations did not have any influence on public school and private language institute teachers' ideas about English accents and cultures, something which was more or less at odds with the criticism proposed by the theoreticians. The findings demonstrate the necessity of raising teachers' awareness of real English speakers in today's world.

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1. Introduction

English has gradually turned into the most widely used language by people all over the world since the second half of the twentieth century (Yano, 2009). Owing to this international status, Kachru (1985) proposed a model demonstrating the use of English in three different circles, namely Inner Circle (e.g. the USA, the UK, Canada, etc.), in which people use English as their first language, Outer Circle (i.e. India, Singapore, Nigeria, etc.), where English plays a key role in peoples' daily lives and is typically viewed as an official language, and Expanding Circle (i.e. Iran, Korea, China, etc.), in which English is not regarded as an official language of the involved countries.

The dominance of linguistic norms of first language speakers of English (i.e. people in Inner Circle countries) in the Outer and Expanding Circles has been criticized in several argumentative papers (e.g. Canagarajah, 2006; Jenkins, 2002; Kachru, 1983; Seidlhofer, 2001). Some empirical studies have also examined teachers' and students' attitudes toward linguistic norms common in Inner Circle countries (e.g. Coskun, 2011; He & Zhang, 2010; Ren, Chen, & Lin, 2016; Wang, 2015), with the findings being more or less at odds with the aforementioned criticism. The available literature also demonstrates EFL teachers' attitudes toward the notion of culture in English as an international language (EIL) context has not been investigated sufficiently in the Expanding Circle. Moreover, while the majority of the studies were conducted in Chinese contexts (e.g. He & Zhang, 2010; Pan & Block, 2011; Wang, 2015), few published papers (e.g. Khatib & Monfared, 2017; Tajeddin, Alemi, & Pashmforoosh, 2017) have been carried out in the context of Iran to investigate Iranian English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers' attitudes toward the role of the two key notions of EIL, namely accent and culture. The current study was thus partially inspired by this gap in the literature. In addition, English education in the Iranian public schools has recently undergone a significant reform with the aim of accommodating local culture in language classrooms, which can be considered as a step toward adopting EIL principles. The role of western cultures, especially American and British cultures, in Iran education system has always been a heated debate after the Islamic revolution in 1979 and, ever since, Iranian authorities have always strived for the elimination of western cultural elements from the education system of the country (see the following subsection) (Borjian, 2013). This issue has added to the significance of Iranian EFL teachers' attitudes toward culture in light of EIL. To the best of our knowledge, nonetheless, no attempt has been made to investigate the opinion of EFL teachers in public schools with regard to the popularity and practicality of this new approach, hence the second incentive for conducting the present study.

1.1. The status of English language teaching in Iran

English education in Iran is presented by public schools and private language institutes. The former involves state-run institutions that offer free education to all citizens and follow a nationwide curriculum designed by the Ministry of Education, with only one and a half hour each week being allocated to English education. The coursebooks are designed by a panel of language-teaching experts under the strict supervision of the ministry to ensure that all the included materials are in line with cultural and religious norms of the country. Furthermore, the requirements for recruiting public-school teachers are their successful performance on a paper-and-pencil test held all across the country and completion of a 2- to 4-year teacher training program held by the Ministry of Education (Moradkhani & Shirazizadeh, 2017). Following the normal procedure in recruiting staff for government-owned organizations, the applicants who succeed in passing the written exam undergo a clearance process to ensure that prospective teachers do not have any criminal background or political/religious orientation that is not officially recognized in the country's constitution.

In 2012, a two-dimensional education reform was implemented in public schools. The first dimension entailed considerable changes in coursebooks (i.e. Prospect and Vision series) with the objective of maximizing the inclusion of Iranian culture so that English teaching could serve as a means to assist Iranian students in understanding national cultural elements and communicating them internationally. The second dimension of this reform involved introducing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as the ideal methodology for teaching English to replace Grammar Translation Method, which was the dominant approach in public schools at that time (Rahimi, 2009).

In-service training programs were held across the country to make EFL instructors familiar with the new coursebook series and teaching method, encouraging teachers to implement these changes in their classrooms. Despite all these attempts, the odds of developing a good command of spoken English in public-school system are narrow due to various factors such as lack of time, inappropriate classroom settings, and the pressure of final exams. All these reasons stimulate many students to resort to classes in private language institutes, which provide proprietary education (Sadeghi & Richards, 2015a) and follow a decentralized approach in selecting coursebooks and recruiting teachers. Decision makers in language institutes often employ EFL textbooks designed by well-known publishers in English-speaking countries (e.g. Cambridge University, Oxford University Press, and Longman) based on their particular educational and financial policies. Decision on employing teachers in private institutes is primarily made based on applicants' command of English, with native-like proficiency being regarded as the yardstick (Rahimi & Zhang, 2015). Unlike public schools, however, applicants' political/religious orientation plays an insignificant role (if any) in recruiting EFL teachers in private institutes. Upon successful performance in the initial entrance exam (which may include oral and/or written modules depending on the particular policies of language institutes), teacher applicants will participate in an intensive teacher training program, which typically lasts no more than a month. They should subsequently demonstrate their practical ability in teaching in order to be admitted as official teachers.

Against this backdrop, in public-school English teachers have limited autonomy and it is mandatory for them to teach locally designed textbooks which are heavily culture-bound. Furthermore, policymakers attempt to exert further emphasis on students' local culture and identity in nationally designed public-school curriculum, while in private language institutes English teachers adopt internationally designed ELT textbooks in which mainly cultural and linguistic norms of native speakers are emphasized and EFL teachers have further autonomy in adopting educational and complementary materials. It would be illuminating to explore how such different educational policies can impact upon the participating teachers' attitudes. It can thus be hypothesized that public-school English teachers may demonstrate further leniency for non-native English accent and culture as they have already been exposed to materials and context in which normative cultural and linguistic elements are not viewed as significant and important as they are in private language institute context.

2. Theoretical framework and literature review

2.1. The history of EIL

Kachru (1983) and Kubota (2001) believe that colonization has contributed to the worldwide spread of dominant varieties of English, namely British and American English. Philipson (1992) also asserts that when English and its social values take key roles in developing countries, linguistic imperialism can act as a catalyst for cultural and social imperialism. English language imperialism refers to the unequal and dominant role of English in language teaching. This can occur when an educational system ignores or stigmatizes students' local dialects and cultural norms. On the other hand, Crystal (2003) proposes linguistic liberalism through which English is used by marginalized and empowered people. This can help marginalized people to present their local identities on international scale. This conception has been dismissed by the proponents of linguistic imperialism who call it "naïve liberalism" (Crystal, 2003, p. 24), while Crystal claims that the linguistic imperialism position is raw because

he believes that the empowering role of English as a global language is neglected by the proponents of linguistic imperialism. It seems the two notions of linguistic imperialism and linguistic liberalism have paved the way for the emergence of EIL as they raised language-teaching experts' and practitioners' awareness of the dominance of English in international communication.

It was traditionally assumed that the goal of learning and teaching English was primarily preparing language learners to communicate with native speakers of English. Accordingly, attempts were made to equip language learners with sufficient knowledge of linguistic and cultural norms exercised by native speakers of English, especially American and British English. However, with the rise of EIL, the objective of learning English has shifted from communication with native speakers of English to communication with native as well as non-native speakers (Suzuki, 2010). Sharifian (2009) holds that EIL does not refer to a specific variety of English and is against the idea of selecting a specific variety for international communication. That is, EIL does not approve of any varieties to be used as a lingua franca for international communication. Although the EIL paradigm rejects the native/non-native dichotomy, it does not exclude native speakers of English from international communication. Moreover, EIL exerts emphasis on the idea that English is a language used for international and intercultural communication. In the EIL context, communication takes place between speakers with different cultural and national backgrounds. Seidlhofer (2005), among the household names in English as lingua franca (ELF) paradigm, also defines EIL as "uses of English within and across Kachru's 'Circles', for intranational as well as international communication" (p. 339). Furthermore, Llurda (2004) indicates that in the EIL context, native speakers of English are only one piece of the puzzle. As English language learners communicate mainly with non-native speakers of English, they no longer need to conform to the norms of native English speakers (Kuo, 2006); therefore, it is not acceptable to consider native-like accuracy as a yardstick (Li, 2009). McKay (2018) states the main principles of EIL pedagogy as following:

(1) Considering language learners' needs in curriculum development
(2) Adopting students' L1 judiciously to develop their proficiency for international communication
(3) Developing language learners' strategic intercultural competence
(4) Avoiding associating EIL with any particular culture (i.e. culturally neutral)

2.2. Two basic elements of EIL

In general, most of the EIL-related discussions revolve around interaction between culturally and linguistically diverse English speakers, at the heart of which two key elements, namely accent and culture exist. With respect to accent, Seidlhofer (2001) states that the orientation of teaching English has shifted from the norms of native speakers of English to global norms and from native-like English to appropriate English. Jenkins (1998) also posits that language learners' pronunciation needs have changed in EIL contexts. Native-like accent is no longer the ultimate goal of the majority of English language learners nor is contact with native speakers of English their main motivation for pursuing the English language. Jenkins (2002) further suggests that non-native speakers of English have the right to present their local identity by virtue of their accent as long as international intelligibility is not violated. As Setter and Jenkins (2005) put it, intelligibility of pronunciation concerns comprehensible interaction between non-native speakers of English. Non-native speakers should be, therefore, exposed to both native speakers' varieties as well as other varieties of English as EIL is used by speakers with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Regarding the role of culture in EIL, language teachers need to devote sufficient time to language learners' culture so that they enable students to share their culture with other speakers of English (McKay, 2004). Smith (1976) also proposes that in EIL contexts one does not need to adopt cultural norms of native speakers. In fact, the objective of learning an international language is to assist language learners in communicating their ideas and culture to people with different cultural

backgrounds; however, McKay (2004) believes that whether to include target cultural elements in teaching English hinges on what one perceives as the role of culture in language learning. Tarone (2005) also asserts that the objective of language learning should determine what cultural and linguistic elements of native speakers of English should be included in language learning and teaching. In essence, if the purpose of learning English is for international communication, EIL materials should not be confined to merely native cultures (McKay, 2003). McKay (2000) further adds that in EIL classes, interculturalism rather than biculturalism should be emphasized. In today's multilingual world, culture is no longer a fixed and monolithic phenomenon shared by a given community (Kramsch, 2014) specifically for a language like English which is viewed as a global lingua franca to which no national boundaries can be assigned. This postmodernist outlook on culture vehemently levels criticism against the traditional argument for the link between English language and supremacy of native English culture in ELT programs (Kramsch, 2013).

2.3. L2 teachers'/students' attitudes toward EIL

Discussions on EIL have mainly remained at an abstract level, with few empirical studies investigating its implementation in language classrooms (Matsuda & Friedrich, 2011). On the other hand, some studies have examined English language instructors' and students' views on EIL. A seminal paper by Timmis (2002), for example, compared 400 students' attitudes toward native speaker norms with those of 180 teachers. The participants came from 14 different countries. Part of the results of the study indicated that teachers' attitudes and expectations stood in contrast with those of students as the majority of teachers considered non-native pronunciation as the accepted norms while students regarded native-like pronunciation as the standard ones. However, with respect to grammar, both groups supported native-like grammar. Basically, the researcher examined the extent the teachers' attitudes toward native-like grammar and accent diverged from the students'. However, this study did not proceed any further to examine the participants' attitudes toward non-linguistic norms, namely cultural norms. Further studies conducted in Chinese context also focused mainly on English teachers' and students' attitudes toward linguistic norms of native English speakers, Wang (2015), for example, explored Chinese teachers' and students' attitudes toward China English. To this end, 1,589 students and 193 EFL instructors completed a questionnaire and 31 students and 33 teachers sat individual semi-structured interviews. The results of the study revealed that generally the participants were not willing to consider China English as a model for learning English. The interview showed that their negative evaluation of China English could be attributed to the stigma associated with China English and the widespread ideology of native speakerism. In the same vein, He and Zhang (2010) also investigated the attitudes of 984 Chinese students and their teachers from 4 universities in different parts of the country toward the linguistic norms of native English speakers. The results revealed that the native English speakers' norms were considered an acceptable model for English language classes in China. However, the participants believed some features of China English can supplement those classes as well. In the Turkish context, Coskun (2011) also investigated 47 pre-service Turkish English language teachers' attitudes toward pronunciation in EIL contexts. The findings showed that the participants considered the linguistic norms used by native English speakers as an appropriate pedagogical model. As already stated, focusing mainly on linguistic norms (i.e. accent) and overlooking the participants' attitudes toward cultural norms of native English speakers suggests further investigation in this area. The existing studies in the Iranian context also followed the same line except for a study by Tajeddin et al. (2017), examining EFL teachers' attitudes toward the linguistic and pragmatic norms in EIL. Sadeghi and Richards's (2015b) case study of Iranian university students, for example, indicated that the majority of the participants preferred American and British English to localized varieties. However, even though the findings of the study were more or less in line with those of the previous studies, caution should be exercised not to generalize the findings of this study to other parts of the country, as it was a case study conducted merely in one educational context in the country. Khatib and Monfared (2017) also investigated British, American, Iranian and Indian teachers' attitudes toward English pronunciation. The participants were representatives of Inner, Expanding and Outer Circles, respectively. The results of the study revealed that the Iranian English teachers demonstrated the greatest tendency toward native-like accent among other

participating teachers. However, Tajeddin et al.'s (2017) study deviated from the existing literature by focusing not only on the linguistic norms but also on non-linguistic norms (i.e. pragmatic norms). They thus explored the attitudes of Iranian EFL teachers, teaching in private language institutes, toward linguistic and pragmatic norms in EIL, the results of which indicated that the participants supported the linguistic norms practiced by native speakers of English while they were more flexible with respect to pragmatic norms. However, in this study the researchers presupposed that all the participants had been aware of EIL as the notion was repeatedly used in the items of the questionnaire [e.g. "In using EIL, it is appropriate for nonnative speakers of English to transfer their linguistic norms for communication" (p. 9)], something which needs to be approached cautiously. Furthermore, the existing literature tends to focus only on private language institute teachers' attitudes toward linguistic and non-linguistic norms of native English speakers while their public-school counterparts' attitudes seem to be neglected.

Bayyurt's (2006) research is among one of the retrieved studies in the literature in which EIL-related cultural norms were taken into account. The researcher examined a small group of Turkish English language teachers' attitudes toward the inclusion of cultural norms in language teaching through a semi-structured interview. The participants believed international culture, which emphasizes the importance of exposure to both native English speakers' and students' local culture, should be capitalized in the classroom. As the study was a qualitative study conducted on a small number of participants, caution should be exercised not to generalize the findings of the study. In part of their studies in the same context, İnceçay and Akyel's (2014) examined the attitudes of Turkish English teachers and teacher educators toward the implementation of culture in the classroom. The participants believed both target culture and Turkish culture should be included in the English classes as the local culture can motivate language learners and make learning more interesting for them.

The review of the literature suggests that generally English language teachers and students seem to consider native English speakers as the best pedagogical model for teaching and learning English. The literature, nevertheless, is in need of further studies to explore L2 teachers' viewpoints about the implementation of EIL in various educational settings because of a number of reasons. First, according to Coskun (2011), teachers are the professionals who put EIL-based theoretical argumentations into practice in language classes, meaning that their personal interpretations impinge upon EIL implementation. The importance of taking instructors' viewpoint into account is also supported by postmethod debates, which consider a crucial role for teachers as both theory generators and consumers (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). Furthermore, it appears that the majority of studies were conducted in China. Since variations in educational settings may have a measurable impact on teachers' attitudes toward EIL, more studies need to be carried out in other Expanding Circle countries like Iran. On the other hand, the notion of culture, which is an essential element in EIL discussions, requires further exploration in the Expanding Circle countries in general and in Iran in particular. Additionally, as the available studies have mainly shed light on what teachers and/or students think about EIL in a particular context, in the current study attempts were made to make comparisons between two educational settings (i.e. public schools versus private language institutes) to ascertain if policymakers' viewpoints about EIL can change teachers' perspectives. Finally, to the best of researchers' knowledge, the majority of the published studies in this area have focused on investigating EFL teachers' attitudes toward EIL without considering the reasons behind these viewpoints, a lacuna in the literature which we partially addressed in the current study. Therefore, the following research questions were formulated:

(1) Is there any significant difference between Iranian public-school and private language institute EFL teachers' attitudes toward EIL-oriented norms of accent and culture?

(2) To what factors do Iranian public-school and private language institute EFL teachers attribute their attitudes toward EIL-oriented norms of accent and culture?

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

A total of 106 EFL teachers (73 females and 33 males) were selected from across the country based on a convenience sampling. Their age and teaching experience ranged from 20 to 40 and 1 to 28 years, respectively. Considering the educational setting, 63 teachers were teaching English in private institutes (henceforth, private teachers) and 43 were teachers in public schools (hereafter, public teachers). Regarding their field of study, 83 majored in English Language Teaching, 6 in Linguistics, 10 in English Translation, and 7 in English Literature. Considering participants' academic degree, 70 were holders of master degrees, 27 had bachelor degrees, and 9 were Ph.D. candidates. Furthermore, none of the participating teachers had studied abroad and they all had graduated from the Iranian universities, the curriculum of which is designed by the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology. More specifically, although each branch of the English language (i.e. English translation, English literature, English teaching and Linguistics) has fairly different specialized courses, some teaching-related courses such as teaching methodology and testing are commonly shared between all branches of this field of study in the BA program. Furthermore, although the participants majored in different branches of the English language, they all were engaged in teaching general English at the time of the study. Against this backdrop, the researchers decided to pay marginal attention to their educational backgrounds and put the spotlight on contextual variations.

3.2. Instruments

A sequential complementarity mixed-methods design (Riazi & Candlin, 2014) was employed in the present study, using a questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) and a follow-up semi-structured interview. The questionnaire aimed at examining the participating instructors' attitudes toward EIL-oriented norms of accent and culture. To further inspect their attitudes toward EIL-oriented norms of accent and culture, factors contributing to the development of such attitudes were explored through the semi-structured interview. To this end, quantitative data were merged with quantitative data at the level of data analysis to provide convincing explanation for the participants' attitudes toward EIL-oriented norms of accent and culture.

We perused around 40 EIL-related papers (e.g. Canagarajah, 2006; Jenkins, 2002; Kachru, 1983; Sharifian, 2009) to come up with the items of the questionnaires. This led to the construction of an initial pool of 32 items. Two experts who were well versed in the realm of EIL were asked to provide feedback on the content of the questionnaire. Based on their feedback, the questionnaire was reduced to 17 items as a result of removing repetitive and irrelevant items. Subsequently, the final draft of the questionnaire was piloted with 58 participants from the same population. The participants were asked to fill out the questionnaire and present their feedback on the clarity and comprehensibility of the items. Slight changes were made based on the participants' feedback afterwards. To estimate the reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach's Alpha was run, with the results showing that the instrument possessed high reliability ($r = .98$).

The questionnaire comprised two sections: the first section explored the participants' background information such as age, academic degree, teaching experience, gender, etc. The second section examined the respondents' attitudes toward accent (items 1 through 9) and culture (items 10 through 17) as two main aspects of EIL. The majority of questionnaire statements were designed in a way that disagreement with the items of the questionnaire indicated the participants' disinclination to consider accent and culture common in English-speaking communities as a pedagogical model. More specifically, teachers who scored lower in the two sections of the instrument had a more positive attitude toward culture- and accent-based norms proposed by EIL. However, in order to avoid haphazard answers, reverse scoring was used for items 1, 7, and 14.

To answer the second research question, six individual semi-structured interviews were conducted. To this end, an interview guide was first developed and then reviewed by an expert in the field. Necessary modifications were made, with the finalized version of the interview guide comprising six questions (3 dealing with accent and 3 with culture) (see Appendix B). The purpose of the interviews was exploring the reasons for teachers' specific attitudes toward the role of accent and culture as two main aspects of EIL.

3.3. Procedure
The finalized questionnaire was sent to around 800 English language teachers across the country online and they were requested to respond to the items of the questionnaire. Although the purpose of the study was explained clearly in the questionnaire, the participants were asked to feel free to email one of the researchers in case they had any questions about the study. Participants were assured that their answers would remain strictly confidential. They were also informed that their participation in the study would be completely voluntary and they could withdraw from the study whenever they wanted. In total, 140 appropriately filled-out questionnaires were received (hence, a return rate of 17.5%). Given that quantitative data collection proceeded through an online procedure, such a low return rate was not surprising. Upon an initial inspection of the collected data, 34 questionnaires were excluded from further analysis as the corresponding participants reported teaching in both public schools and private institutes.

Subsequently, six participants (three public teachers and three private teachers) were randomly selected for individual semi-structured interviews from among respondents who had expressed their willingness to take part in the qualitative phase. Five interviews were conducted on the phone and one was carried out face to face. As the participants came from different parts of the country, we did not have direct access to them, hence conducting five interviews through telephone. Informed consent was obtained from the interviewees prior to recording their voices. Each interview took around 15 min on average. To ensure that the participants could express their views without any problem, the interviews were conducted in Persian, which is the official language of Iran. The recorded interviews were then transcribed *verbatim* for further analysis.

3.4. Data analysis
The data obtained through the questionnaires were fed into SPSS 16. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the reliability of answers, while the Kolmogorov–Smirnov (KS) test was conducted to ensure that the data were normally distributed. To answer the first research question, the two groups' (public and private teachers) mean scores were initially scrutinized to see to what extent their ideas were in line with EIL discussions. Based on the scoring procedure used in the questionnaire, higher scores were indicative of further tendency toward linguistic and cultural norms of Inner Circle countries. Moreover, after making sure that the data met the pre-assumptions for conducting a parametric test, two sets of *t*-test were run to ascertain the possible differences between the two groups in terms of their perception of the role of accent and culture as two main aspects of EIL in teaching English.

To answer the second research question, the transcripts were first translated into English and then backtranslated into Persian by an assistant who was well-versed in both Persian and English and had enough experience in translating various texts from English into Persian and vice versa to ensure the English translation reflected what the participants' reported in the interview. Subsequently, the interview transcripts were analyzed following a three-stage process of open coding, axial coding, and labeling (Merriam, 2009). More specifically, the interviews were carefully examined to extract themes that had to do with the reasons that teachers mentioned for their specific views toward EIL. The extracted themes were clustered on the basis of their similarity afterwards, with each cluster receiving a particular designation. Finally, the extracted themes were checked by the interviewees for any possible discrepancies between their intended explanations and the extracted themes, hence the concept of member checking. Furthermore, to safeguard the participants' identity, pseudonyms are used in the Results and Discussion sections of the present study.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Quantitative analysis

Table 1 shows Cronbach's alpha and KS indices for the two elements of the EIL questionnaire. It is observed that the values of Cronbach's alpha for accent and culture are 0.77 and 0.81, respectively, meaning that participants' responses to the constituent items of the two questionnaires enjoy a fairly high internal consistency. On the other hand, the p-values of the KS test for EIL-based accent and culture are 0.65 and 0.53, indicating the collected data are normally distributed.

Table 2 demonstrates the mean and standard deviation for the two groups' ratings of EIL-based accent and culture. It is observed that, regarding accent, the mean scores of both private teachers' attitudes (M = 3.21) and their public counterparts' (M = 3.13) are above the questionnaire's Likert-scale midpoint (2.5), indicating their tendency to consider accent spoken by native people in English-speaking counties as a pedagogical model. In addition, with respect to culture, the mean score of private teachers' attitudes (M = 3.25) and that of public teachers' (M = 3.25) demonstrate that both groups believed the cultural elements of Inner Circle countries should be included in teaching English to Iranian students. However, one's judgment should not be solely based on these high mean scores in the cultural dimension. A closer inspection of the constituent items in this subscale showed that 58.72% of private teachers and 55.8% of their public counterparts agreed with item 14, which highlighted the importance of including Iranian culture and customs in teaching English to Iranian students. Thus, the majority of participating instructors believed that while the cultural elements of English-speaking countries ought to be taught in classes, the students' native culture should not be neglected.

The results of two sets of independent-samples t-test also revealed no statistically significant differences between private and public EFL teachers regarding their perception of the role of accent (t (104) = 0.34, p = 0.73) and culture (t (104) = −0.02, p = 0.98). Therefore, contextual differences played no measurable role in affecting teachers' attitudes toward the implementation of EIL-based accent and culture in language classrooms. Generally, both groups of participants were more or less in agreement about how accent and culture should be dealt with in English language teaching and learning. As the results of the questionnaire demonstrated, both groups considered native speakers as a model for correct pronunciation. This finding is in line with those of previous studies (e.g. Coskun, 2011; He & Zhang, 2010; Tajeddin et al., 2017; Wang, 2015). Although in EIL context the accents spoken by native speakers of English are no longer considered as a benchmark (Jenkins, 1998; Li, 2009; Seidlhofer, 2001), the findings of the present study verified Sifakis's (2007) claim that the majority of EFL practitioners still consider English used by

Table 1. The reliability and normal distribution of questionnaire data		
	Accent	**Culture**
Cronbach's alpha	0.77	0.81
KS sig.	0.65	0.53

Table 2. Attitudes toward EIL-related accent and culture: public versus private teachers								
	Public teachers		**Private teachers**					
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*df*	*Sig. (two-tailed)*	*d*
Accent	3.13	0.53	3.21	0.50	0.34	104	0.73	0.15
Culture	3.25	0.70	3.25	0.54	0.02	104	0.98	0.00

Note: *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation.

native speakers, especially British and American English, as standard varieties. With regard to culture, both public and private teachers believed cultural elements of English-speaking and Iranian communities should be simultaneously included in English language teaching. Similar findings have been echoed by Bayyurt's (2006) and İnceçay and Akyel's (2014). Thus, the participants seemed to assign equal learning value to cultural elements of both Inner and Expanding Circles.

4.2. Qualitative analysis

The findings of the interviews, substantiating those of the questionnaire, revealed further insights into the participants' attitudes toward accent- and culture-based EIL. Regarding accent, both public and private teachers considered native English speakers as a pedagogical model for teaching and learning English for several external factors such as the standardized tests, comprehensibility issue, and their experience as language learners.

Both public and private instructors believed that the washback effect of standardized tests such as TOEFL and IELTS has a driving force for following the accents spoken by native speakers of English, as illustrated in the following excerpt of the interview with Maryam (private teacher):

> If they want to take part in international exams like TOEFL or IELTS, they have to follow native English speakers as a model. Accordingly, I put emphasis on native-like accents in the classroom and persuade them to follow native English speakers as a model for learning English.

According to the interviewed teachers, native-like accent in general is considered an important element for evaluating language learners' speaking skills in standardized tests. As a result, it has become crucial for EFL teachers to prepare language learners for the tests. This can be considered as the washback effect of the standardized tests on the teaching of speaking skills. Canagarajah (2006) believes the washback effect of existing standardized tests based on Inner Circle norms will hamper the development of local pedagogical materials and local English varieties. That is, the conversation textbooks available in the market focus on the accents spoken in Inner Circle countries; therefore, EFL teachers are provided with limited options to give due attention to local accents. Hossein (one of the interviewed private teachers) vividly pointed out this issue:

> As all the ELT textbooks in the market follow one of the two dominant accents, we have no other alternative except following either as a pedagogical model.

The issue of comprehensibility was another reason which persuaded the teachers to stick at the pronunciation norms of Inner Circle speakers. More specifically, they believed that incorrect and accented English can block communication. This pattern is clearly presented in the excerpt of the interview with Reza (public teacher):

> They should follow the pronunciation provided in dictionaries because incorrect pronunciation breaks down communication so they have to follow native speakers as a model.

On the other hand, Jenkins (2000) holds that intelligibility should not be defined in terms of non-native/native interaction as English speakers speaking English as an additional language interact mainly with people whose first language is not English. She further maintains that successful bilingual English speakers should be considered as a model as this scenario is more realistic with respect to sociolinguistic reality of English language in today's world. Canagarajah (2006) also argues that it is not enough for Outer and Expanding Circle speakers to follow the Inner Circle speakers' norms as they communicate mainly with people from Outer and Expanding Circle. Jenkins (2002) believes that language learners can present their regional group identity through their accent as long as it does not affect the intelligibility. Therefore, students, their parents, and

English language instructors should be educated in order to rectify their conception of attachment to the linguistic norms of native speakers of English (Kuo, 2006).

Teacher' experience as a student or what Lortie (1975) refers to as "apprenticeship of observation" seems to be another factor which can be attributed to their inclination toward a native-like accent. According to Farrell (2016), teachers' past experiences can shape teachers' attitudes and beliefs.

The interviewed teachers also attributed their propensity for following the accents spoken by native speakers of English to their own language learning experience. They noted that, as students, they were exposed merely to the dominant English accents, namely American and/or British English, a phenomenon which evidently formed their ideology. Such a pattern is best illustrated in the following excerpt of the interview with Mohammad (public teacher):

> As I was taught one of the dominant native accents when I was an EFL student, now I use it and cannot think of any other accent.

Regarding the cultural aspect of EIL, the interviewees further corroborated the findings of the quantitative phase by maintaining that language learners need to get familiar with different cultures and customs including the ones dominating English-speaking countries. The interviewed teachers pointed out some reasons for their viewpoint toward EIL-based culture. First, they believed that knowing about different cultures can broaden language learners' perspective, a claim that is clearly demonstrated in the following excerpt of the interview with Zahra (private teacher):

> I believe language learners need to get familiar with different cultures including the ones practiced in English communities because learning about different cultures broadens their minds and provides them with a new window to the world.

As they stated in the interviews, there can be positive and negative cultural elements in every culture; therefore, EFL teachers can include positive ones in their language teaching and avoid the negative dimensions. In the same vein, Prodromou (1992) believes English can be used to learn not only about local and target cultures but also other cultures across the world as English is used on international scale. Cavalheiro (2016) also holds that there is no fixed culture which English users should acquire. In fact, they need to develop critical cultural awareness so that they can enhance their intercultural competence. As Alptekin (2002, p. 63) put it, "successful bilinguals with inter-cultural insights and knowledge should serve as pedagogical models in EIL rather than the monolingual native speaker."

There are two views with respect to the role of culture in language teaching: the first vantage point argues that language should be taught devoid of its culture (e.g. Kachru, 1986) and the other perspective is that language and culture are closely interwoven (e.g. Brown, 2007). The participants posited that language and culture are inseparable, believing that it is meaningless to talk about a particular language without considering its cultural dimension. The following excerpt of interview with Hamed (public teacher) presents this pattern clearly:

> I think as culture and language are interwoven and students need to get familiar with culture and customs of English-speaking countries.

On the other hand, the participating teachers argued that the culture of Iran should not be overlooked in teaching English to Iranian students. They attributed this view to the idea that ignoring students' native culture in teaching language can have a debilitative effect on language learners, leading to a sense of alienation. The following excerpt of the interview with Setareh (private teacher) serves as a sample:

> I think the culture of Iran should be included in teaching English to Iranian students. If we ignore their culture, it might be replaced by that of English-speaking communities. This will eventually lead to the westernization of the country and students' lack of knowledge about their own culture.

McKay (2018) also holds that EIL cannot be associated with any particular culture, especially American or British cultures. That is, EIL is culturally neutral, which does not mean EIL disregards the significance of culture in international communication. In essence, it exerts emphasis on language learners' local culture as a point of reference for a clear understanding of cultural schemas common among speakers with diverse cultural backgrounds.

5. Conclusion

There were no statistically significant differences between public and private teachers in terms of their perception of the role of accent and culture in language teaching. Although an educational reform has already commenced in public schools, which has capitalized the local culture in ELT textbooks for school students, EFL public-school teachers still consider the inclusion of Inner Circle cultural and linguistic norms necessary in the teaching and learning English. This understanding echoes Jenkins' (1998) contention which implies that, in spite of a bulk of research into linguistic imperialism and EIL, no major alterations in English teaching and teacher education policies can be observed. Sifakis (2007) also stated that although there is sufficient information on the wide-spread use of English on international scale, there appears to be little debate in terms of training teachers for teaching EIL. Therefore, it seems that if education policymakers desire to make some changes in this regard, EFL teachers' ideas need to be taken into account. That is, EFL instructors should be provided with sufficient information on EIL and should be trained well so that they exert more emphasis on local varieties of the English language. It seems designing an English-teaching program following EIL principles is a complicated task in which some key factors should be taken into account to pave the way for their implementation.

According to Bayyurt (2017), in today's world, English is used for international communication among people with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, which makes intercultural competence a prerequisite for communicating with people across the world. This necessities EIL-informed teacher training programs which can raise teachers' awareness of the status of English in today's world and challenge their misconception about the owner of English language. However, many teacher-training programs are informed by SLA findings which exert emphasis on native speakerism and do not allow teachers to perceive the reality of using English (Dewey, 2015). Dewey (2014) believes teacher training programs around the world are basically norm-orientated and provide little room for focusing on diversity common among English users across the world. He also adds teachers need to exert further emphasis on EIL-aware activities to prepare students for what they are likely to encounter in reality. Vettorel (2015) also holds that equipping teachers with sociolinguistic reality of English language and EIL can assist them to make informed decision about the common normative model for teaching English.

A thorough analysis of EIL-related discussions reveals an apparent contradiction when theory and practice meet. Lying at the heart of theoretical considerations is the argumentation that the dominance of Inner Circle countries over English teaching has served the financial and cultural interests of so-called native speakers at the expense of marginalizing people from Outer and Expanding Circles. Ironically, however, this theoretical rhetoric is mainly pursued by the academics who are either positioned in English-speaking countries or have easy access to the very publishing centers they are fiercely criticizing. A more glaring inconsistency is observed in some cases when such theoretical polemics are put to the test in language-teaching settings, especially in Expanding Circle countries like Turkey, China, and Iran. The findings of field-based research in these contexts unanimously indicate that, opposed to what EIL proponents preach, EFL teachers and students still consider native speakers as the best model for their accent in classroom practices. Although the condition is more agreeable to EIL followers when it comes to teaching cultural issues, the situation is yet far from a

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utopia since EFL practitioners believe that, in addition to domestic and/or international cultural elements, they need to know about dominant customs of English-speaking countries.

This observed discrepancy between theoretical speculations and practical considerations implies that the top–down approach traditionally dominating EIL pedagogy should be replaced by a more dialogic procedure in which academics and practitioners share their concerns and constraints trying to see how EIL can be implemented in English language classrooms. In fact, without taking teachers' and students' ideas into account, EIL debates are likely to remain at the level of theory and journal publications, instead of being materialized in real settings.

The lack of significant difference observed between public and private teachers' ideas on EIL-related accent and culture in the current study also supports the necessity of building a constructive dialogue between top-rank policymakers and EFL practitioners. According to Cohen and Mehta (2017), no reform is likely come into effect unless it is in line with the values and expectations of educators, students, and parents. These negotiations should aim at shedding further light on the reasons that hinder teachers from adopting EIL-based pedagogy. Upon achieving a mutual understanding and detecting potential obstacles, EFL decision makers and instructors may conclude that it is not desirable and/or practical to implement a strong version of EIL in Iranian public schools. Instead, they need to adopt a weak version which will contain elements from domestic and international contexts as well as English-speaking countries.

Like any other research, this study was not devoid of limitations. First, we relied on self-report data (i.e. questionnaires and interviews) to collect participating teachers' ideas on EIL-based accent and culture. It is suggested that future researchers perform classroom observations (in addition to administering questionnaires and conducting interviews) to discover the extent to which teachers' classroom performances are in line with what they report in questionnaires and interviews. Moreover, our understanding of the reasons behind EFL educators' ideas on EIL was solely based on data obtained through interviewing a small number of participants. Since it is a qualitative method of data collection and analysis, care should be taken in generalizing the findings. Prospective researchers may design a survey to tap into a larger sample of EFL teachers' ideas on the reasons that help/hinder the implementation of EIL principles. Finally, it is crucial that a similar line of inquiry is sought in other Expanding Circle countries to find out to what extent EFL practitioners in those settings follow the principles of EIL. It is only through further empirical studies that potential theoretical shortcomings can be detected in EIL-related arguments and remedial measures can be taken to make EIL amenable for classroom settings.

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Appendix A. English as an international language questionnaire

Direction: Please indicate to what extent you agree with each of the following statements on the five-point scale below (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree).

Items Accent	1	2	3	4	5
Accent					
(1) It is OK if English language learners speak English with a Persian accent.					
(2) English language learners should follow closely one of the accents that is spoken by native people in English-speaking countries (e.g. the US, the UK, Australia, etc.).					
(3) English language learners' foreign accent should be acceptable to native English speakers from English-speaking countries.					
(4) I cannot tolerate my English learners' foreign accent which is different from the one spoken by native people in one of the English-speaking countries.					
(5) English language learners' accent should be evaluated based on that of people who speak English as their first language.					
(6) English language learners should eradicate all traces of their foreign accents.					
(7) As long as English language learners' language is comprehensible to people from other countries, they do not need to be corrected.					
(8) As an English language instructor, in the classroom I try to use an accent spoken in one of the English-speaking countries.					
(9) The only acceptable accents are the ones spoken by native people in one of the English-speaking countries.					
Culture					
(10) English language learners should gain information about customs of English-speaking countries such as Thanksgiving and Halloween.					
(11) English language learners should adopt the cultures of English-speaking countries.					

Items Accent	1	2	3	4	5
(12) English language learners should follow the way of greeting, requesting, inviting, refusing and so on used by native people in English-speaking countries.					
(13) English language cannot be separated from the dominant culture of English-speaking countries.					
(14) Iranian culture and customs should be included in teaching English to Iranian English language learners.					
(15) English language instructors should introduce English language learners to the cultural norms of communities in which English is used as the first language.					
(16) As an English instructor, in the classroom I put emphasis on the culture of people in English-speaking countries rather than the Iranian culture.					
(17) If English language learners want to learn English perfectly, they need to practice culture and customs of people in English-speaking countries.					

Appendix B. Interview questions

(1) Is it important for your students to follow one of the accents that are spoken by people who speak English as their first language? Why or why not?

(2) Do you try to encourage your students to speak one of the accents that are spoken by people who speak English as their first language? Why or why not?

(3) How do you feel when your students speak English with a strong accent? Why?

(4) Do you think students need to know about customs and cultural norms of English-speaking communities in which English is spoken as their first language? Why or why not?

(5) Is it necessary for students to acquire the culture of people whose first language is English? Why or why not?

(6) Is it important to include Iranian culture and customs in teaching English to Iranian English language learners? Why or why not?

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