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TEACHER EDUCATION & DEVELOPMENT | RESEARCH ARTICLE

English as a lingua franca in Iran: An attitudinal investigation into the in-service teachers

Mohammad Barzegar Rahatlou[1], Ali Mohammad Fazilatfar[1]* and Hamid Allami[1]

*Corresponding author: Ali Mohammad Fazilatfar, Faculty of Language & Literature, Yazd University, Safa-ieh, Yazd, Iran
E-mail: afazilatfar@yahoo.com

Abstract: The present research examined the Iranian in-service teachers' attitudes towards some principles of English as a lingua franca (henceforth ELF), particularly intelligibility and acceptability of their accent, the authority of non-native speakers to own the English language, and the legitimacy of English used by them. What makes the present research markedly different from the other language attitude studies is the context of research, namely Iran, an under-explored country in the literature concerning ELF. To amass the data, the researchers employed mixed-method design, using a questionnaire and follow-up semi-structured interviews. The results indicated that many a participant maintained contradictory and ambivalent attitudes towards ELF-related issues. Whilst the participants appeared to be inclined to agree with the principles pertaining to ELF, they did not display uniform attitudes about ELF-related issues in an in-depth analysis of the results. In fact, there appeared to be an underlying tendency towards the norms of native speakers of English among the participants. The results of the study may have implications for teacher trainers and ELF researchers.

Subjects: Teachers & Teacher Education; Bilingualism & Multilingualism; Applied Linguistics; English Language; Language Teaching & Learning

Keywords: ELF; in-service teachers; language attitude

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Mohammad Barzegar is a PhD candidate in TEFL at Yazd University, Yazd, Iran. He has published a few books and research papers and has presented in some international conferences. His areas of interest are English as a Lingua Franca, language attrition, teaching methodology, and teacher education.

Ali Mohammad Fazilatfar is an associate professor at Yazd University, Yazd, Iran. He received his PhD in applied linguistics from the University of Manchester in England in 1998. He has published many books and research papers and has presented in many international conferences. His areas of interest are teacher education, teaching methodology, form-focused instruction, and global Englishes.

Hamid Allami is an associate professor at Yazd University, Yazd, Iran. In addition to publishing several books and numerous research papers, he has presented in many international conferences. His areas of interest include sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, and research methodology in SLA.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

It has been proved that the sociolinguistic reality of today's world has undergone dramatic changes by reason of the rapid expansion of the English language along with the globalization. As such, it is also believed what learners learn in their classroom is not compatible with what they encounter in the real communication outside their classroom. To keep pace with these ongoing changes, English as a lingua franca (ELF) has been introduced and examined by a number of scholars, though in limited regions. In this new paradigm, the norms and values of native speakers of English are no longer appropriate for English language teaching and learning. The present study, thus, aimed to explore some EFL teachers' attitudes towards ELF-related issues in Iran. Given the fact that ELF has not been explored in geographically widespread areas, this research study may broaden our understanding of this new field of study and of how it works in such an under-explored region.

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1. Introduction

ELF, as it is used now, has gained more scholarly attention since its genesis, particularly after the seminal works by Jenkins (2000) and Seidlhofer (2001). Since then, many a researcher has examined the theoretical and pedagogical issues pertaining to ELF (e.g. Cogo & Dewey, 2012; Jenkins, 2007; Mauranen, 2012; Seidlhofer, 2011; to name a few), though empirical research into the practical applications of its pedagogical implications has been scanty (Sung, 2018). In fact, during the arduous journey from its infancy to its present status, the field of ELF has been scrutinized by its proponents and opponents. Despite all the encouraging results obtained by ELF-related studies, many questions and issues have been raised by "'anti-ELFers'" (Jenkins, 2018, p. 597, emphasis in original) since the early conceptualization of ELF. As an example of an anti-ELFer, Sowden (2012), in his argumentative paper entitled "*ELF on a mushroom: the overnight growth in English as a Lingua Franca*", argues against ELF and refers to some of its theoretical and practical problems which hinder practitioners from implementing ELF norms and practices. He ascertains that it is difficult to codify ELF and "there is the difficulty in any given situation of distinguishing between authentic non-standard alternatives and persistent error" (Sowden, p. 92). Of course, this criticism is no longer justifiable as ELF researchers clearly declare that ELF research does not aim at codifying a new variety of English (Seidlhofer, 2011). What is clear then is that there are some tensions and conflicts as regards ELF conceptualization and ELF-oriented studies; however, agreeing with Marlina (2014), we believe that these conflicts and tensions are not a hindrance to ELF progress. They are not regarded as "negative or signs of rebellion against the paradigm, but as natural reactions or responses to a different way of seeing the world, especially one that encourages its followers to 'swim against the current' that has been flowing in one direction for a very long time" (Marlina, 2014, p. 14–15, emphasis in original). Furthermore, Jenkins (2018) reasonably argues that the criticisms leveled against ELF by these "anti-ELFers" are not fair as ELF researchers have proved they are wrong and "the [ELF] concept is not so new that it needs to be questioned every time an author chooses to write about it or to adopt an ELF approach to their subject" (p. 597).

After all, there is a general consensus among scholars that ELF refers to "any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option" (Seidlhofer, 2011, p. 7). Although ELF interactions mostly happen among non-native speakers (Sung, 2015), some scholars also (e.g. Cogo & Dewey, 2012; Mauranen, 2012) espouse the notion of including native speakers (NSs) of English in Seidlhofer's (2011) definition of ELF. Furthermore, in its most recent conceptualization, the term "English as a Multilingua Franca" (Jenkins, 2015) has been used to manifest the utilization of multilingual resources in ELF interactions, which is antithetical to English-only ideology. According to Jenkins (2015, p. 73), this means that in ELF communication "English is available as a contact language of choice, but is not necessarily chosen". That is to say, NSs of English occupy a place in the ELF definition, but their language is not the only choice for communication. Therefore, it can be said that in ELF encounters speakers can creatively use their "plurilingual resources to flexibly co-construct their common repertoire in accordance with the needs of their community and the circumstances of the interaction" (Cogo, 2015, p. 3).

It is also believed that ELF is "functionally not formally defined; it is not a variety of English but a variable way of using it" (Seidlhofer, 2011, p. 167). In fact, people from different lingua-cultural backgrounds use ELF as their contact language in various contexts that are dynamic, variable, multilingual, and intercultural (Galloway & Rose, 2015; Jenkins, 2012, 2015). In this sense, it has been argued that it's not native speakers' place to "set the linguistic agenda" in ELF communication (Jenkins, 2009, p. 201) wherein diversity, hybridity, fluidity, and flexibility are increasingly prominent (Jenkins, 2012, 2015). In this regard, non-native English speakers (NNSs) who take part in ELF communication are considered as creative English users (Seidlhofer, 2011) whose divergence from native speaker norms is not deemed a deficiency.

Whilst there have been striking developments in ELF, it has not been a geographically wide-spread area of research conducted around the globe; that is to say, almost all research studies into ELF have been carried out in the European context (Sung, 2015). Furthermore, As Sung and Matthew (2015, p. 313) puts it, ELF research is in its infancy in the context of Asia and thus "there is an urgent need for more ELF research" in this region. In response to this call, there has been much research into ELF but restricted to East Asia and Southeast Asia (e.g. Ali, 2014; Curran & Chern, 2017; Ren, Chen, & Lin, 2016; Wang, 2015; Wang & Jenkins, 2016). Little research, to the best of our knowledge, has examined ELF in other parts of Asia such as the Middle East wherein Iran is located.

The studies conducted in Iran have been more concerned with teachers' attitude towards varieties of English within the paradigms of English as an international language (EIL) and world Englishes (WE) (see, for example, Khatib & Monfared, 2017; Monfared & Safarzadeh, 2014; Safari & Razmjoo, 2016). For instance, in an attempt to explore teachers' attitude towards accent-related issues and varieties of English within the EIL paradigm, Khatib and Monfared (2017) conducted a quantitative and qualitative research study with three groups of teachers who formed three circles of WE (112 native American and British, 120 Iranian and 120 Indian teachers). Their findings indicated that while Iranian teachers were more inclined to Native American English pronunciation, Indian teachers had a predilection for British English pronunciation and Native English teachers were willing to accept different varieties of English. The only study that puts the findings of ELF research into practice of teaching in the context of Iran is the study conducted by Rahimi and Ruzrokh (2016) who explored the effect of lingua franca core-based pronunciation teaching on Iranian learners' intelligibility and their attitudes about English pronunciation.

While researchers are becoming interested in the topic of ELF in Iran, there has been little research, if any, into the Iranian in-service teachers' attitude towards ELF-related issues. What is more, the Iran's city of Yazd that the present researchers are affiliated with has just been added to the list of world heritage sites by UNESCO ("Iran's Yazd city" 2017), having resulted in an increasing number of international tourists who come to visit the world largest inhabited adobe city. Therefore, exploring teachers' attitudes towards ELF-related principles is deemed necessary in such an under-explored country where ELF encounters are frequently occurring due to tourist attractions. Teachers' attitude is explored by reason of the impact the teachers' attitude exerts on students' attitude (Crismore, Yeok-Hwa Ngeow, & Keng-Soon, 1996). It has also been argued that making a revision to traditional linguistic concepts as opposed to ELF principles is particularly associated with English language teachers who shoulder the task of helping students learn how to communicate successfully in today's globalized world (Litzenberg, 2016).

Furthermore, Lewis (1981, cited in Baker 1992) highlights the significance of investigation into attitudes by this assertion that "any policy for language should take into account the attitudes of those who may be affected" (p. 262), and hence without being aware of the current attitude of teachers towards issues pertinent to ELF, it can be a difficult task for ELF researchers to bring about changes in teachers' mind-set. In that regard, a number of studies have examined the in-service teachers' attitude towards the global function of English today, particularly towards ELF (e.g. Ali, 2014; Jenkins, 2007; Pan & Block, 2011; Sifakis & Sougari, 2005; Timmis, 2002). Timmis's (2002) study has been frequently cited in academic journals as a study which takes both teachers and students into account. By administering a student questionnaire for 400 students from 14 different countries and a teacher questionnaire for 180 teachers from 45 countries and conducting 15 interviews to support the data from the questionnaires, Timmis (2002) discovered that regarding pronunciation, more than 80% of students were inclined to NS norms. There were some exceptions, however. Learners from South Africa, Pakistan, and India pointed out they would like to retain their local accents. As a result, he stated that students' inclination to L1 accent might be context-sensitive. As for teachers, they were less inclined to native speakers' norms and more willing to non-native speakers' pronunciation. Timmis (2002) came to conclusion that "teachers seem to be moving away from native-speaker norms faster than students are" (p. 248).

Likewise, in an exploratory study into English language teachers' and students' beliefs in China, Pan and Block (2011) amassed the research data via both questionnaire and interview. Their research findings revealed that participants believed in EIL because of its instrumental value. However, it was identified that the purpose of English language learning and teaching was oriented to examination in China, hindering learners from development in English communicative skills. Sifakis and Sougari (2005) also sought for teachers' opinion as to the impact of the socio-cultural status of standardized norms on their teaching. The researchers aimed to discover the correlation between teachers' teaching practice and personal beliefs about pronunciation norms. As they mentioned, the results of their research were contradictory. That is to say, on the one hand, teachers believed that discourse was more significant than rules or standards, but on the other, they maintained norm-based perspectives with regard to pronunciation. The authors concluded that "in all probability, the situation described in this article is repeated in many other expanding-circle countries" (p. 483).

Notwithstanding the above-mentioned studies into the teachers' attitude towards different aspects of ELF, it has been argued that language attitudes are dynamic and fluid, oscilating in various social situations (Garret, 2010), and "sensitive to the context in which those attitudes are evaluated" (Jenkins, 2007, p. 71). In this regard, Timmis (2002) also refers to context sensitivity when he discusses the results of his research. Thus, as was mentioned above, what makes the present research different from the other studies is the context of research, i.e. Iran. The Islamic Republic of Iran is located in a region that is underrepresented in the literature (Berns, 2005). It is also paradoxical that in spite of the country's "anti-imperialistic perspective", adopted and presented in ELT materials at schools and universities, "the [Iranian] young generation is greatly interested in enhancing their English proficiency by enrolling in private English institutes" (Mokhtarnia & Ghafar-Samar, 2016, p. 3), where educational materials mostly contain western cultures, particularly British and American. Given that little research has sought to examine the realities of today's English in Iran (e.g. Khatib & Monfared, 2017; Monfared & Safarzadeh, 2014; Safari & Razmjoo, 2016), it is thus necessary to first explore the Iranian teachers' attitude towards ELF prior to taking any practical measure. To do so, the present paper aimed to address the following questions:

(1) What are the attitudes of the Iranian in-service teachers towards their own accent?
(2) What are the attitudes of the Iranian in-service teachers towards L1-accented English and its relationship with identity?
(3) What are the attitudes of the Iranian in-service teachers towards their authority to own the English language?
(4) What are the attitudes of the Iranian in-service teachers towards the legitimacy of English used by them?

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants
To address the research questions, two groups of participants took part in the present research. In the quantitative part of the study, 183 in-service teachers (71 male and 112 females) participated. They had been teaching English courses at different levels in different private language institutes located in Tehran, Yazd, and Karaj. Their age ranged from 25 to 41 and had English language teaching experience from 2 to 16 years. Of the participants, 10 in-service teachers (2 males and 8 females) consented to participate in the qualitative part of the study.

2.2. Data collection
To amass the data underpinning the present study, a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire consisting of two major sections was initially developed: a section about demographic information and a section asking the participants to express their level of agreement with ELF-related matters, from 1

(strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). To do so, the related literature for extracting the principles pertinent to ELF and the existing questionnaires aimed at exploring students' and teachers' attitudes to ELF were intensely scrutinized. Some of the statements were extracted and adapted from a few of the questionnaires (Curran & Chern, 2017; Ren et al., 2016) and a number of them were based on the principles associated with ELF. As a result, 18 statements were made and divided into four categories to examine the participants' attitude towards (1) their own English accent (statements 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5), (2) identity and L1 accent (statements 7, 8, and 9), (3) the authority of non-native speakers to own the English language (statements 6, 13, 14, and 15), and (4) the legitimacy of English used by NNSs (statements 10, 11, 12, 16, 17, and 18). The statements 6 and 7 were negatively worded and thus their scores were reversed prior to conducting any statistical analyses and reporting the results. To measure the reliability of the questionnaire, it was piloted with 50 pre-service teachers and 50 in-service teachers and the result of Cronbach's alpha reliability indicated that the questionnaire had relatively strong internal consistency ($\alpha = .78$ for the pre-service teachers and $\alpha = .71$ for the in-service teachers).

Then, the interviews were scheduled with those volunteer teachers who accepted our invitation to further research. The interviews were carried out to delve into the participants' attitudes more deeply and to create an opportunity for the participants to express their ideas and attitudes about ELF and its related issues more freely than those expressed in the questionnaire. The questions raised in the interviews reflected the main themes addressed in the developed questionnaire and prior to conducting the interviews, each interview question was carefully examined in terms of clarity and simplicity. For polishing the interview questions, the present researchers also consulted three domain experts and slightly modified the research questions based on their feedback. Then a pilot interview was conducted with one English teacher to identify any problems in the whole interview process. This pilot interview also helped the researchers make final revisions to the interview questions and prepare for conducting the main study (Maxwell, 2013). As a result, 12 questions were picked to be addressed in the interviews (see Appendix B). The interviews were audio-recorded and conducted face-to-face, and they lasted about 40 min each.

2.3. Data analysis

The quantitatively collected data about the participants' attitudes toward ELF-related issues were summarized via descriptive statistics. Then, qualitative content analysis was adopted to analyze the recorded data. Initially, the data were transcribed because "the first step in data analysis is to transform the recordings into a textual form" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 246). Next, Lichtman's (2010, p. 197) procedure, namely "the three Cs of analysis" was followed. Lichtman (2010) asserts that in a qualitative research, the collected data are analyzed with the aim of arriving at common themes or concepts. Thus, to achieve this goal we started "from Coding to Categorization to Concepts" (Lichtman, 2010, p. 197). Garnering insights from Lichtman's (2010) procedure and Creswell's (2002) interpretive qualitative data analysis, the present researchers initially divided the data into different segments which were labeled with codes. Then it was continued until similar codes were placed into a number of categories. Next, the recognized categories from the participants' responses were compared and contrasted in order to find a connection between the emerged categories and the theoretical concepts from the research literature. This helped the present researchers organize the categories into a smaller number of concepts developed based on the relevant literature. The concepts were explained in the categories associated with the quantitative phase of the study. Finally, in order to generate a holistic understanding of the raised questions, qualitative findings, and quantitative results were compared and combined. As regards ensuring the credibility of the interview data, a member checking procedure was employed (Creswell, 2002).

3. Results

In this section, the findings of the present research are presented based on the categories defined in the methodology section. Both quantitative and qualitative findings were examined and compared in each category so that a general picture could be obtained from them. In reporting the results, the most representative and insightful examples of the participants' responses to the

interview questions are illustrated in order for the present researchers to fully clarify the points at issue. For reasons of anonymity, the in-service teachers are referred to by their invented codes (see Appendix A).

3.1. Participants' attitudes toward their own English accent

The first category consisting of five statements intended to explore the participants' attitude towards their own English accent. In general, the in-service teachers maintained a favorable attitude towards their own accent, as indicated by the high mean score of their overall ratings (*M* = 3.47). Table 1 presents the results of descriptive statistics for each statement in this category. As it is shown, the in-service teachers felt proud of their English accent. Only one (0.5%) in-service teacher strongly disagreed with the statement, and a fairly positive view was expressed by more than half of all the participants, out of whom 53 (29%) and 20 (10.9%) participants agreed and strongly agreed with the statement, respectively.

The interview results also revealed that almost all of the in-service teachers took pride in their own accent. They believed that the effort they had made to achieve their goal was worth feeling proud of:

1. *Yes, I'm proud of it because of what I have become. I haven't been like this before. The effort and the process that has taken me to (…) have this accent are the things that make me proud of now. (IT6)*

Whilst the majority of them prided themselves on their accent, three of them also mentioned that their accent was not perfect and they had to work on it more. It can be derived that the belief that they should achieve a perfect native-like accent is deeply ingrained in them.

2. *I'm proud of the attempt I've put in learning English. I know my accent is acceptable and also it is understandable. But I think I still have a long way to go. I mean I still have to work harder. (IT3)*

Table 1. Attitudes towards their own accent							
Statements	In-service teachers (*N* = 183)						
	Distribution of answers to each statement						
	Mean (SD)		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1. I am proud of my English accent	3.24 (.97)	Frequency	1	47	62	53	20
		Percent	0.5	25.7	33.9	29	10.9
2. I think my accent is intelligible to native speakers when I speak English	3.47 (1.05)	Frequency	0	47	33	72	31
		Percent	0	25.7	18	39.3	16.9
3. I think my accent is intelligible to non-native speakers when I speak English	3.85 (.97)	Frequency	2	18	36	75	52
		Percent	1.1	9.8	19.7	41	28.4
4. I think my accent is acceptable to native speakers when I speak English	3.43 (.81)	Frequency	1	18	81	66	17
		Percent	.5	9.8	44.3	36.1	9.3
5. I think my accent is acceptable to non-native speakers when I speak English	3.95 (.90)	Frequency	0	18	25	88	52
		Percent	0	9.8	13.7	48.1	28.4

The remaining four statements explored the participants' attitude towards their accent intelligibility and acceptability to both NSs and NNSs. On the whole, they had a strong view on the intelligibility and acceptability of their English accent, as revealed by the high mean score of their ratings. Among the last four statements in the first category, statement 4 was ranked the lowest by the in-service teachers, indicating that they rated their English accent as more acceptable to NSs. Whilst 19 participants (10.3%) took a dim view of their accent acceptability to NSs, about half of the participants agreed (36.1%) and strongly agreed (9.3%) with this statement. The rest of them (44.3%) had a moderate view on it.

Statement 5 received the highest mean score in this category ($M = 3.95$, SD = .90). In fact, none of the participants strongly disagreed with their accent acceptability to NNSs. 48.1% of them agreed with the statement and 28.4% of them strongly concurred with it. Moreover, statements 2 and 3 which aimed to seek the participants' opinion about their accent intelligibility to NSs and NNSs were rated more highly. Over half of all the participants agreed with these two statements and none of them strongly disagreed that their accent is intelligible to NSs.

The above-made points were also corroborated by the interview data. Citing a few reasons, almost all of the in-service teachers believed their accent was intelligible and acceptable to both NSs and NNSs. The most frequently cited reason was their effective communication with their interlocutors. They justified their assertion on the ground of receiving positive feedback from them:

3. *According to my experiences in communicating with others, both native and non-native speakers, I have to say I could communicate with them easily and without difficulty. So I think my accent is both intelligible and acceptable for them. (IT1)*

4. *Definitely, it is. I had the experience of talking to some NATIVES and NON-NATIVES and it was good. I could communicate. (IT6)*

Finally, two of the in-service teachers alluded to accommodation and non-verbal communication strategies used by them to make their speech intelligible to others. They appeared not to be oblivious of some strategies adopted by interlocutors in ELF encounters:

5. *I think yeah my accent is intelligible for everyone because I think everyone who I communicate with, my accent changes too. (IT5)*

6. *I think 70% of our communication is through visual aspects of understanding from features, body language. So a lot of these things can help in order to be intelligible totally. (IT2)*

3.2. Participants' attitudes toward L1 accent and identity

The present researchers also aimed at exploring the extent to which the participants desired to have their local accent when speaking English. In this regard, three statements were included in the second category of the research questionnaire. On the whole, the in-service teachers did not tend to be identified as a Persian through their English accent, as it was indicated by a low mean score of their overall ratings ($M = 2.10$, SD = .62).

Further examination of the statements in this category revealed that the lowest mean score of the participants' ratings was related to statement 8 (see Table 2). It appeared that the participants did not accord with this statement that they should speak English with a Persian accent just because they are Persian. This disinclination to the statement is also manifest in the distribution of their answers. Indeed, as it is shown in Table 2, none of the in-service teachers in our sample agreed with the statement and about 95% of them indicated disagreement with it. It was also revealed that statement 9 received the highest rating from the in-service teachers. By this statement, it was aimed to find out how the participants feel when they are identified as a Persian through their accent. In general, about 34% of them disagreed with statement 9 and the rest did not show disapproval of it. Finally, the mean score for statement 7 indicated that the in-service teachers were willing to be identified as an NS. To be

Table 2. Attitudes towards L1 accent and identity							
Statements	In-service teachers (*N* = 183)						
	Distribution of answers to each statement						
	Mean (SD)		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
7. I would like to be identified as a native speaker of English through my English accent[a]	2.11 (.70)	Frequency	29	82	62	10	0
		Percent	15.8	44.8	33.9	5.5	0
8. I would like to speak English with a Persian accent because I am a Persian	1.40 (.59)	Frequency	119	54	10	0	0
		Percent	65	29.5	5.5	0	0
9. I feel ok if someone recognizes my nationality through my English accent	2.78 (.97)	Frequency	24	38	76	44	1
		Percent	13.1	20.8	41.5	24	0.5

[a]The mean scores for item 7 were reversed.

exact, over half of all the participants (about 60% of them) had a negative attitude towards being identified as an NNS.

The questionnaire results were also confirmed by the participants' responses to the interview questions related to this category. Two of the participants mentioned that an inner drive has motivated them to sound like a native speaker (see example 7). Furthermore, the advantages of being identified as an NS through their accent were among the most frequent reasons stated by most of the in-service teachers. Once again the statements allude to the strong orientation of the participants toward the NS model:

7. *It depends on the characteristics that I have. I'm a PERFECTIONIST by nature. That's who I am. It makes me want to be on top, whatever I do, even if I'm learning another language I need to be on top. This is the reason. This is the building block of what makes me want to be like a native speaker. (IT2)*

8. *I would like to be identified as a native speaker because my English speaking character is more logical, more to the point, more analytical, (and) more understandable than my Persian accent, than my Farsi mentality even. (IT1)*

9. *I want to be in higher places and be admired by higher people. Sounding like and being identified (…) like native speakers bring that place to me and you look more prestigious. (IT10)*

On the contrary, one participant stated that she deliberately puts on her local accent to be identified as a Persian when communicating in English. Moreover, she accorded priority to communicating effectively rather than being identified as an NS or NNS.

10. *I wouldn't like to identify myself as a native English speaker. I never want to HIDE my identity because I'd like to show my talent that I'm a non-native English speaker and I learned how to speak English very well like native speakers. And the goal of learning a language is that we COMMUNICATE effectively. (IT9)*

3.3. Attitudes towards the authority of nnss to own the English language
The present research also aimed at investigating the participants' attitudes towards the authority of NSSs to own the English language. Four statements fell into the third category in our research

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questionnaire. Overall, the Iranian in-service teachers in our sample displayed a very favorable attitude towards the authority of NSSs by rating this category as the highest one (*M* = 3.62).

It is necessary to mention that in reporting the results the mean scores of statements 6 and 13 were averaged because both of them aimed at asking the participants for expressing their opinion about the authority of NNSs to own the English language, with the first statement negatively worded. On average, they received the highest mean score of the participants' ratings (*M* = 3.69, SD = .92). In general, about 55% of them agreed that NNSs have the authority to own the English language. As it is shown in Table 3, a high percentage of the participants were also in accord with the other statements (*M* = 3.61, SD = .93 for statement 14; *M* = 3.48, SD = .97 for statement 15). On a percentage basis, only 14.8% of them disagreed that NNSs have the authority to modify English based on their needs. As for statement 15, it also received a substantial level of agreement from the participants although it was ranked the lowest in this category. Indeed, more than 50% of the in-service teachers in our sample concurred that NNSs can use different languages they know to avoid misunderstanding when communicating in English. 18.6% of the participants disagreed with this statement and only one participant strongly disagreed with it.

An analysis of the responses to the interview questions pertaining to the third category also seemed to confirm the results reported above. There were a number of different points of view adopted by the participants. Seven of the in-service teachers believed that because English is an international language, it is not correct to say that it belongs to specific speakers of English. From their perspective, English is a "*device or tool*" by which they can communicate internationally and inter-culturally:

11. *English is not limited to a particular geographical region and is a worldwide international communication tool and no one can claim this language as a property. (IT3)*

12. *I think it has been long since English has lost its essence of being a language. It's a DEVICE now and when something becomes a device and everybody needs in order to use (it) to do something with that, then it belongs to everybody. (IT2)*

In sharp contrast to the above-mentioned participants who made affirmative responses, three in-service teachers categorically rejected the NNSs' authority to own English. The latter argued that

Table 3. Attitudes toward the authority of NNSs							
Statements	In-service teachers (*N* = 183)						
	Distribution of answers to each statement						
	Mean (SD)		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
6. I think English belongs to native speakers[a]	3.87 (1.07)	Frequency	7	17	25	76	58
		Percent	3.8	9.3	13.7	41.5	31.7
13. I think non-native speakers of English have the authority to own the English language	3.51 (.99)	Frequency	7	19	57	72	28
		Percent	3.8	10.4	31.1	39.3	15.3
14. I think non-native speakers of English have the authority to modify English based on their needs	3.61 (.93)	Frequency	0	27	47	78	31
		Percent	0	14.8	25.7	42.6	16.9
15. I think non-native speakers of English can use the languages they know to avoid misunderstanding when communicating in English	3.48 (.97)	Frequency	1	34	50	71	27
		Percent	0.5	18.6	27.3	38.8	14.8

[a]The mean scores for item 6 were reversed.

NNSs do not have the right to own English because it is not their mother tongue and they use English only for meeting their needs:

13. *I think English belongs to native speakers because it's their mother tongue and English comes from them. It's not coming from me as a non-native speaker and I'm not adding something to it. Persian belongs to us even if it becomes an international language and it shows our identity. (IT7)*

Furthermore, almost every participant exhibited an affirmative response to the question asking them to express their opinions on the authority of NNSs to modify English based on their needs (see example 14). Likewise, many a participant consented to non-native speakers' use of their multilingual resources when communicating with foreigners (see example 15). To reinforce their attitude, two of them also provided some examples vis-à-vis their using other languages when speaking English with other non-native speakers. They asserted that they did use their multilingual resources intentionally to avoid misunderstanding and to get their ideas across.

14. *Yes, they do. According to the huge cultural gap between countries, I think we have to modify English to clarify what we say and make it more comprehensible. (IT10)*

15. *Last year my friends and I ran into some Italian tourists in the street and they asked (us) about the Iranian foods. We explained but they couldn't understand some English words. So we shifted into Spanish and we said some words in Spanish and they easily understood what we were saying. (IT6)*

3.4. Participants' attitudes towards the legitimacy of English used by nnss

The last category sought to examine if the participants accorded with the legitimacy of English used by NNSs. Generally, the participants held a moderate view about considering non-native English as a legitimate model compared to the NS model (M = 2.63, SD = .66). As it is shown in Table 4, of the six statements included in this category, statement 10 asking the participants to determine their level of agreement on whether teachers should help students communicate successfully obtained the highest mean score from the teachers (M = 3.27, SD = 1.14). Whilst 30.1% of the participants agreed with this statement, 18.6% and 7.1% of them disagreed and strongly disagreed with it respectively. 15.3% of them also strongly concurred with the statement and the rest (29%) had a moderate view on it. The second highest mean score was related to statement 18 asking the respondents to what extent they were in accord with introducing students to different native and non-native English accents in class (M = 2.93, SD = 1.08). As it is shown, the participants' responses to this statement were distributed among the choices rather identically. However, a greater percentage of the participants (36.6%) agreed with the statement to some degree.

The results from analyzing the quantitative data were also verified by the qualitative data obtained via the interviews. In general, the participants assigned a high priority to effective communication because they believed English is a communication tool for many people all around the world:

16. *The English language has turned into a device smoothing the way for the learner to achieve so many other goals in his working or studying position. That's why English is no more learned for the sake of itself but for the learners' needs to communicate with people of different countries. (IT3)*

In contrast, inferred from their responses, there was a vestige of orientation towards NS norms. Two of the participants pointed out that there is a direct correlation between a native-like proficiency and effective communication, as illustrated by the examples below. They also believed that helping students communicate effectively should be accompanied by helping them attain high levels of proficiency in English:

Table 4. Attitudes toward the legitimacy of English used by NNSs							
Statements	In-service teachers (*N* = 183)						
	Distribution of answers to each statement						
	Mean (SD)		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
10. I think teachers should help students communicate effectively rather than achieve a native-like proficiency	3.27 (1.14)	Frequency	13	34	53	55	28
		Percent	7.1	18.6	29	30.1	15.3
11. I think it is unnecessary for many students to learn English according to the native English speakers' model	2.34 (1.12)	Frequency	47	63	43	22	8
		Percent	25.7	34.4	23.5	12	4.4
12. I think it is unnecessary for many students to become familiar with the culture and traditions of native English speakers	2.31 (1.11)	Frequency	48	64	46	15	10
		Percent	26.2	35	25.1	8.2	5.5
16. I don't think it is necessary for non-native English speakers to sound like a native speaker of English to communicate successfully in English	2.33 (1.04)	Frequency	50	49	56	28	0
		Percent	27.3	26.8	30.6	15.3	0
17. I think non-native speakers of English can be a role model for Persian students	2.59 (1.01)	Frequency	21	77	47	32	6
		Percent	11.5	42.1	25.7	17.5	3.3
18. I think it is important to introduce students to many different English accents (both native and non-native accents)	2.93 (1.08)	Frequency	19	42	67	41	14
		Percent	10.4	23	36.6	22.4	7.7

> 17. *I think teachers should aim at helping learners achieve sophisticated levels of competence since each learner has a different need, but be flexible when learners use the English language intelligibly and effectively for the means of communication. (IT2)*

> 18. *Communication and competence both are important for English learners. Competence makes motivation and communicating develops English knowledge, so teachers should aim at both of them. (IT5)*

Concerning the importance of introducing students to different accents, six of the participants did not have a positive attitude. For their refutation of the statement, some of them pointed out exposing students to different English accents may cause chaos, leading to students' confusion:

> 19. *I think in teaching the language you must pick a specific accent from the very beginning. Exposing students to different accents or varieties is not a correct way. They do not learn. I think it can be confusing. (IT3)*

On the contrary, it appeared that two in-service teachers had a predilection for introducing students to different English accents. From their perspectives, this can help students communicate successfully and effectively with people from different linguistic backgrounds:

20. *Yes, because I think in natural life you have to deal with different people having different accents. So this would bring the defense mechanism a little bit lower in order to deal with people outside of the classroom. (IT2)*

Furthermore, two participants referred to some external obstacles created by language schools they were working for and the requirements of the course books they had to comply with. Although interested, they believed they were thwarted by these hindrances in exposing students to different English accents in the classroom:

21. *I prefer to teach my learners the accent that it is supposed to be correct as it is used outside of the class. This is what I want to teach them. But based on the requirements of the course book and the INSTITUTE, I have to follow British English and I deal mainly with books covering British English accent. (IT5)*

In the above example, the participant stated that what is used outside of the class is the correct accent. When asked what she (*IT5*) meant by that point, she clearly explained that the accent which is used by English users in a real context is deemed correct, be it a native or non-native accent. Recalling her earlier statement about the intelligibility of her accent, she added that a good correlation exists between a correct accent and comprehensibility. To her, English users' accent must be comprehensible if they want to have effective communication. This point was also high-lighted by her when she was asked to express her opinion about the importance of having a native-like accent in successful communication (see example 25).

One in-service teacher also pointed out another obstacle posed by students. She argued that students are more inclined to a specific type of accent, particularly American and British accents, and if they do otherwise, the students cannot accept it willingly:

22. *If teachers expose learners to a non-native speaker, they would not get a positive reaction because their preferences mostly, through my experience I'm talking, are toward native ones. (IT8)*

Statement 11 which was among the lowest-rated statements in this category intended to examine the extent to which the respondents agreed with whether it is unnecessary to learn English according to the NS model. Most of the participants were not in accord with this statement (25.7% of them strongly disagreed and 34.4% of them disagreed). Only 8 in-service teachers (4.4%) strongly concurred with the statement and 22 of them (12%) agreed with it. The rest of the participants (23.5%) somewhat agreed with the statement. Also, the in-service teachers had a moderate view as regards statement 17 asking the participants' opinion about whether NNSs can be a role model for Persian students. In general, more than half of all the participants (about 53%) took a pretty dim view of accepting NNSs as a role model for Persian learners of English. About 21% of them agreed with this statement and the rest (25.7% of the in-service teachers) had moderate views about it.

In the qualitative part of the present study, quite a few in-service teachers took a conservative stance, emphasizing the point that students' needs and purposes should be taken into account in adopting a specific model of English. Furthermore, some of them believed that the real use of English in the world makes it unnecessary for many students to stick to the NS model. Yet the very same teachers stated that personally they would like their students to learn English according to the NS model. Thus although they were aware of the realities of English use outside the classroom, they insisted on adhering to the NS norms (see examples below). This result shows that traditional view of ELT is still ingrained in the participants:

23. *It depends on what you need. Why do you learn English? What is your purpose? And if you're just a businessman who wants to do business things, it's not necessary to learn English based on the native models. (IT2)*

24. *HOW ENGLISH is USED NOWADAYS? No, it's not important because as I said it has become a DEVICE. But personally, I think when you learn something you have to learn it precisely. So personally I think yes it is very important. But what it happens actually in the world, no, people don't pay much attention to the models of NSs very much. They just want to communicate. (IT2)*

Finally, statement 16 was based on the premise that sounding like a native speaker of English does not automatically guarantee English users a successful communication in ELF encounters. The participants appeared to maintain a fairly negative attitude towards this second lowest-rated statement (M = 2.33, SD = 1.04). As it is shown in Table 4, over 50% of the participants indicated their disagreement about statement 16. Only 15.3% of them agreed with the statement and the rest (30.6%) had a moderate view about it. In addition, they had the lowest level of agreement with statement 12 which aimed to seek their opinion about the relationship between being familiar with NS culture and communicating successfully in English (M = 2.31, SD = 1.11). According to the distribution of their responses, about 61% of the in-service teachers in our sample did not agree with this statement and 25.1% of them agreed with it to some degree. The rest (about 14%) either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

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

25. *I think being understood by people are much more important than having a native-like accent. There are also a lot of necessary things to observe in communicating with others such as the use of grammatical sentences and correct vocabulary. (IT5)*

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

26. *Of course, correct accent based on native speakers' accent has a high degree of importance to have a successful communication. (IT8)*

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

27. *Of course, it is necessary. I think learning about a culture is an indispensable part of learning that language. Culture and language are closely related. Language can be (...) the verbal realization of a culture. Learning some idioms in English is not possible unless we learn about the culture. (IT1)*

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

28. *sNot necessarily, I mean knowing the language would be sufficient in order to communicate, but given that some words or phrases may have come from a cultural background, then having a grasp of the culture could be helpful in some cases in communication. (IT9)*

4. Discussion

The present study was an attempt to investigate the attitudes of the Iranian in-service English teachers towards the issues related to ELF. The results indicated that the teachers appeared to be inclined to agree with many statements involved in the given categories pertaining to ELF-related issues. The interviews with the participants also reflected an inclination towards some issues associated with ELF. However, an in-depth analysis of the results revealed an underlying tendency towards NS norms among the participants. In addition, there were some participants whose points of view were at variance with those of many participants. Furthermore, the participants' views on the statements in the second category differed considerably from their positive views expressed in the other categories. Indeed, the in-service teachers were not in accord with being identified as a Persian through their English accent. Significant implications arise from these results, which are examined below.

There appeared to be contradictory and ambivalent attitudes towards ELF. The participants did not display uniform attitudes about the ELF-related issues addressed in the present study. These ambivalent attitudes were manifest in their responses to the interview questions in particular. This finding is in line with many studies mentioned in the literature concerning pre-service and in-service teachers' attitudes towards ELF-related issues (e.g. Deniz, Özkan, & Bayyurt, 2016; Jenkins, 2007; Litzenberg, 2016; Pan & Block, 2011; Sifakis & Sougari, 2005). For example, in consistent with the results of the present research, the results from a research study conducted by Deniz et al. (2016) indicated that although the participants seemed oriented to some principles associated with ELF, "their perspectives and teaching practices were largely shaped by inner circle native norms of English" (Deniz et al., 2016, p. 144). Sifakis and Sougari (2005) also reported that teachers had contradictory beliefs about pronunciation norms; although the participants in their study attached great significance to discourse rather than standards, they presented norm-based perspectives with regard to pronunciation. Overall, despite employing different methods for collecting data, these research studies support the present research findings in that the participants had ambivalent attitudes towards issues related to ELF. The following paragraphs explain these ambivalent attitudes towards the ELF-related issues addressed in this study in more detail.

When the participants in the present study referred to the realistic use of English in a context outside the classroom, they were not very inclined to the NS standard; that is, they consented to effective communication rather than native-like proficiency. However, conforming to the NS norms was deeply ingrained in most of them when they commenced talking about their practice of teaching and formal English learning in a classroom setting. This orientation to NS norms in an educational context may be because of their English language learning and teaching in the Iranian private language schools wherein educational materials mostly contain the norms of NSs, particularly British and American. This point is also argued by some scholars (e.g. Galloway & Rose, 2018; Sung, 2018) that there is a big difference between the English language taught in the classroom and what is used outside the classroom.

Furthermore, the findings indicated that many a participant had favorable attitudes towards their own English accent. Overall, the in-service teachers felt great pride in their accent and maintained a positive attitude towards the intelligibility and acceptability of their accent to both NSs and NNSs. Nevertheless, a closer analysis of the interviews revealed that among the very same participants, more than half of them desired to achieve a native-like accent. In other words, while they felt a sense of satisfaction with their accent, once again the belief that they should achieve a native-like accent was deeply ingrained in them. Moreover, the results suggest that almost all of them consented to be linguistically identified as an NS through their English accent, as they accorded the native-like accent considerable advantages. However, this does not mean that they had a negative attitude towards their cultural identity (see, for example, Ren et al., 2016; Sung, 2014). Some of them even evinced their interest in being identified as a Persian when

communicating internationally. Further, as the analysis of the data indicated, almost over half of all the participants did not feel embarrassed if they were identified as a Persian through their accent. This glaring discrepancy in their opinions accounts for "an intricate and complex relationship between ELF and identity" (Sung, 2015, p. 326).

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

Furthermore, it seemed that they were aware of the current realities vis-à-vis the ownership of English. As it was substantiated by the quantitative data, they maintained a very positive attitude towards the acceptance of the authority of NNSs to claim the ownership of the English language. However, on closer examination of the interview data, it was found that some of the participants did not accord with granting NNSs or NSs supreme authority to own English. According to them, English is not a language specific to a country because it has overstepped its original boundaries and is being used as a communication tool by all people all around the world. These findings support the current theories and principles pertaining to ELF. As it is argued by some scholars (e.g. Galloway & Rose, 2015; Ishikawa, 2016; Jenkins, 2015), today's English is used by a large number of people from different lingua-cultural backgrounds in various contexts that are dynamic, variable, multilingual, and intercultural and hence it is not peculiar to a group of English speakers. On the other hand, many a participant had mixed opinions. In fact, irrespective of their responses to the question concerning the ownership of English, they accorded with the right and power of NNSs to appropriate English based on their needs. In other words, although some of them believed that English belongs to NSs, the very same participants consented to the authority of NNS to modify English and use their multilingual resources to communicate effectively and avoid misunderstanding. It appears that the participants' attitudes are in line with the term "English as a Multilingua Franca" coined by Jenkins (2015) to refer to speakers' use of their multilingual resources in order to communicate effectively.

Moreover, the results revealed that the participants did not consider non-native English as a legitimate model for Persian students in English language learning. Although they ascribed great importance to effective communication, they had a marked tendency for NS norms. For instance, they showed disagreement with introducing students to different accents and considering NNSs as a role model for them. Further, they were in accord with this statement that English teachers should familiarize students with the culture and the traditions of NSs. On the other hand, there were also a small number of the participants who had a positive attitude towards ELF-related principles. Notwithstanding, these apparently ELF-oriented participants had a predilection for having their students learn English based on the NS model. One possible reason, as it was asserted by some of the in-service teachers interested in non-native norms, is the external obstacles created by the language schools, course books, and language learners. In this regard, Kumaravadivelu (2012, p. 24) asserts that there are some "external (marginalization) and internal (self-marginalization) challenges that impede any progress towards breaking the epistemic dependency". According to Kumaravadivelu (2012, p. 22), external challenges are related to "the ways in which the coloniality of the English language is exploited to maintain the authority of the center over the periphery". For example, as discussed in the introduction to this study, educational materials used in private language schools in Iran mostly contain British and American cultures and a considerable number of Persian students take the most leading international tests such as TOEFL and IELTS, which are highly dependent on NS norms. An internal challenge which pertains to "the ways in which the periphery surrenders its voice and vision to the center" (Kumaravadivelu, 2012, p. 22) is also deemed an important constraint, hindering teachers from accepting the ongoing sociolinguistic realities. In fact, non-native

English teachers "self-marginalize themselves in spite of the fact that they are highly skilled professionals holding prominent positions in their country" (Kumaravadivelu, 2012, p. 23). As a result, we believe that such external and internal challenges are the plausible reasons for the participants' ambivalent attitudes towards using non-native English as a model for Persian learners of English.

5. Conclusion

Taken together, the results of the current study are consistent with the existing literature in which ambivalent attitudes prevail among the pre-service and in-service teachers (e.g. Deniz et al., 2016; Jenkins, 2007; Litzenberg, 2016; Pan & Block, 2011; Sifakis & Sougari, 2005). Although the participants were seemingly reluctant to be oriented towards the NS ideology on the basis of a statistical analysis of the quantitative data in particular, the interview results appeared to suggest that NS norms are still the benchmark against which the Iranian English language teachers' and students' level of proficiency can be measured. These findings imply that the Iranian in-service teachers are not fully aware of the theories and principles pertaining to ELF, although their cognizance of the real use of English language outside the classroom can help the present researchers remain hopeful about the future. This possible implication is also realized by some scholars (e.g. Curran & Chern, 2017; Deniz et al., 2016; Sifakis & Sougari, 2005) who accord great importance to developing reflective teaching training programs wherein teachers' and teacher trainees' awareness of sociolinguistic realities of today's global English can be raised. Therefore, it is hoped that the present study can motivate the teacher trainers to develop teacher training programs in which they can raise the Iranian in-service teachers' aware-ness about the sociolinguistic realities of today's world and particularly issues related to ELF. Of course, further research is also needed to explore to what extent the Iranian teacher trainers, pre-service teachers, and students are cognizant of ELF. An investigation into their attitudes which have been under-investigated in the context of Iran can give the researchers valuable insights into the reasons concerning the in-service teachers' ambivalent attitudes.

In sum, in line with a growing body of literature on ELF, attempting to open up new horizons for researchers as well as teachers, the present research likewise aimed to shed more enlightening light on the current wave of ELF sweeping the traditional ideologies in the field of ELT. However, it is necessary to mention that the present research has some limitations. First, although the participants were from three cities located in Iran, it is not reasonable to generalize the findings to other in-service teachers from other parts of the country as it is argued context has a great effect on their attitudes towards ELF. Another limitation is that the teachers being employed in the Iranian public schools were not included in the study. Further research, therefore, is required to explore the attitudes of this group of teachers and compare them with the attitudes of the in-service teachers in our sample. By doing so, it can be identified to what extent the educational system, materials, and teacher trainers in private language institutes and public schools can impact upon their attitudes towards ELF-related issues. Despite these limitations, the present research was an attempt to take the first and important step towards apprising the Iranian teachers of the current realities of today's English and provide some light into the ELF in the context of Iran.

Author details
Mohammad Barzegar Rahatlou[1]
E-mail: barzegar_moh@yahoo.com
Ali Mohammad Fazilatfar[1]
E-mail: afazilatfar@yahoo.com
Hamid Allami[1]
E-mail: hamid_allami@yahoo.com
ORCID ID: http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7882-856X
[1] Faculty of Language & Literature, Yazd University, Safaieh, Yazd, Iran.

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Appendix A
Transcription conventions for interviews (adapted from Sung 2016)

IT1, IT2, IT3, etc. Codes given to in-service teachers

(xxx) Authors' uncertainty

(…) An unclear word

Full stop Completion of an utterance

CAPITAL emphasis

Appendix B
Interview questions

(1) Are you proud of your English accent? Why/Why not?

(2) A. Do you think your accent is intelligible to NSs and NNSs when you speak English? Why/Why not?
B. What about the acceptability of your accent to them? Please give your reasons.

(3) Would you like to be identified as a native speaker of English or non-native speaker of English (a Persian speaker of English) when you communicate in English? Please give your reasons.

(4) How do you feel when someone recognizes that you are Persian through your English accent?

(5) Do you think non-native spankers of English have the authority to own the English language? Why/Why not?

(6) Do you think non-native speakers of English have the authority to modify English based on their needs? Why/Why not?

(7) Do you think non-native speakers of English can use other languages to avoid misunderstanding when communicating in English? Why/Why not?

(8) Do you think teachers should help students communicate effectively or help them achieve a native-like proficiency? Please give your reasons.

(9) Which one can be a good role model for Persian learners of English—a native or a non-native speaker of English?

(10) Do you think students should get familiar with the cultures and traditions of native speakers of English? Why/Why not?

(11) Do you think it is necessary for students to have a native-like accent if they want to communicate successfully in English? Why/Why not?

(12) Do you think students should be exposed to both native and non-native English accents? Why/Why not?

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