

## Teachers' Attitudes Toward ELF (English as Lingua Franca) in the UAE and Georgia

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### Abstract

The paper introduces a preliminary study of teachers' awareness and attitudes toward ELF in two different language contexts, where English has the status of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The exploratory study was based on the survey method and an online questionnaire was completed by 20 teachers from each region in July-August, 2016. Participants reported on their attitudes toward ELF, beliefs on Standard English, opinions on widespread of English, etc. The data obtained on Standard English within this research are broadly consistent with the trend of the inner circle. The results have indicated that ELF is a crucial topic for both regions and it is noteworthy to provide future English language teachers with expertise on ELF and the ways of its incorporation in language courses.

**Keywords:** English as a lingua France, Standard English, Outer circle, Expanding circle, Attitudes to ELF

### 1. Introduction

In the last few decades there has been a growing interest in English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) throughout the world. The general cover terms for uses of English spanning Inner Circle, Outer Circle, and Expanding Circle contexts (Kachru, 1992) have been ELF, English as an International Language (EIL), World Englishes (WE), English as a Global Language (EGL), and English as a world language. The inner circle (UK, US...etc.) is supposed to be 'norm-providing', while the outer circle, mainly New Commonwealth countries, is 'norm-developing'; the expanding circle, which includes much of the rest of the world, is 'norm-dependent', because it relies on the standards set by native speakers in the inner circle. However, Nonnative speakers, as much as native speakers are shaping English(es). Due to this fact, systematic studies are encouraged to look into the nature of ELF, what it looks and sounds like, how people actually use it and make it work, a consideration of the implications for the teaching and learning of the language, and a prerequisite for taking informed decisions, especially in language policy and language teaching.

There are myths surrounding ELF, many of which are tied to the existence of a 'Standard English'. Standard English is typically defined as the English of a native speaker, usually containing American or British pronunciation

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and idioms, and it is supposed to be consistent with a native speaker's fluency. The issue of whether to teach British or American English restricted the English language education industry to two main standards of English, ignoring the fact that preparing students for the real world requires them to be exposed to more varieties. Distance used to be a key to which variety students were exposed. EFL students in the Americas were taught North American English whereas European students were taught British English only because of the distance factor (Trudgill & Hannah, 2008). However, as technology interfered to make the world a small village, many linguists (see: Crystal, 2003; Widdowson, 1994; Davies, 2003) started to question native speaker-ism and the ownership of the English language. By the end of the last century, the trend toward integrating ELF in the English language classrooms became more persistent.

Interestingly, when a number of Non Native English Speaking Teachers' (NNEST) attitudes were surveyed by Kaur (2013) in Malaysia, they showed a preference to using the native speaker model in their teaching over non-native models. In another study of Taiwanese English language teachers, Luo (2016) finds that teachers emphasize teaching the NS model although they show an appropriate understanding of ELF. On the other hand, Chiorean (2016) examines upper secondary school and International Baccalaureate teachers in Sweden; both of whom believe the curriculum should adapt to ELF patterns. Teachers in Norway asserted that being near-native English speakers makes them more confident in class and this would be reflected on students (Dykeman, 2016) which contradicts Jenkins (2009) when she concludes that "the freedom to express [teachers'] own local and ELF identities in their English would give them greater confidence as both English speakers and English teachers" (p.204).

A deconstructive reading of English language teaching would inquire the validity of teaching Standard English and look at the other side of the binary opposition of standard/nonstandard. Norton (1997) investigates whether English is the language of only those who are born to speak it or to anyone who uses it to communicate with others and then suggests "that if English belongs to the people who speak it, whether native or nonnative, whether ESL or EFL, whether standard or nonstandard, then the expansion of English in this era of rapid globalization may possibly be for the better" (p. 427).

Even though numerous studies have been conducted on NNEST's attitude toward ELF in recent years, several practical questions arise when dealing with ELF. In this paper while we refer to Kachru's (1992) three Circles of English, it would be of interest to learn differences and similarities in the attitudes and awareness of NNEST's toward ELF in outer and expanding circles. For this purpose two countries are chosen: Georgia from the expanding circle and the UAE - the outer circle.

The politics, cultures, histories, religions, and economies of these two countries are radically different. For a number of decades in Georgia the second language was Russian and English was mostly taught in the grammar-translation method with British textbooks. In the late 1980s, after the collapse of Soviet Union, Georgian teachers and students were able to hear live English speech and for the first time talk freely to native-English speakers. It took years to modernize English teaching and learning approaches. The current focus of the educational institutions is on teaching English, and not Englishes, which is a natural outcome. In contrast to Georgia, the UAE has diverse

ethnicities, and English is extensively used in business and industry for a wide range of functions. While in the UAE English is a prominent language in both - the country's economy and interpersonal communication, in Georgia all business is done in the Georgian language, as it is a mostly monolingual and mono-cultural country, with minorities living near the border regions.

The purpose of the present paper is to investigate non-NESTs' attitudes and beliefs toward ELF in two different contexts from the perspective of English teaching, more precisely in countries where English has the status of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL). We decided to research the instructors' opinions and beliefs in Georgia (the expanding circle) and the UAE (The outer circle). The findings suggest that the implications in teaching and learning language will vary in different language contexts.

The following themes are distinguished:

1. Formal education/course on ELF and knowledge of ELF; beliefs on Standard English
2. Attitudes towards the widespread of English
3. Integration of ELF in classroom practices

These themes are combined in the research questions given below:

- Do non-native English speaking teachers have a clear understanding of ELF?
- Do non-NESTs favor proper English rather than ELF features?
- How do non-NESTs integrate ELF in their classes?

The research findings would help us to identify the drawbacks of the policies in ELF education in different countries and gaps between theory and praxis.

## 2. Methods

The exploratory study was based on the survey method. An online questionnaire was designed for this purpose. Some items were adapted from Jenkins (2009). The questionnaire had 4 sections: there were factual (to cover demographic characteristics), behavioral (how they acted), attitudinal (opinions, beliefs, values), and questions that aimed at researching teachers' practice, opinions and awareness of ELF. There were multi-item, close-ended, specific open-ended, and clarification questions in the questionnaire. The focus of this paper is only the set of questions related to teachers' awareness and beliefs on ELF.

Google platform, which is a convenient tool to access sample, was utilized to survey teachers in Georgia for Georgian Teachers (GT) and the UAE for UAE Teachers (UAET) and the link to the questionnaire was shared on social network and by email. Some of the participants were personally known to the authors, and they were contacted and asked to complete the e-questionnaire. The survey data were collected in July-August, 2016. The confidentiality

and anonymity was secured as respondents did not have to register or leave their contact details. It was decided to have the equal number of sample from both regions.

## 2.1 Participants

Altogether 20 teachers from Georgia and 20 teachers from the UAE responded to the questionnaire. The demographic profile of the NNESTs in the study is the following:

The participants from Georgia were 20 females (100%) of Georgian Nationality. The participants from the UAE were 9 males (45%), 11 females (55%) – among them four teachers were Syrian, three- Tunisian, two- Indian, one – Mexican, Serbian, Lebanese, Jordanian, Maurice, Sudanese, Egyptian, Zimbabwean, and Iraqi. Table 1 illustrates the nationality of the participants and the first language they spoke. Most of the participants in both groups belonged to the age group between 26 - 45(82%).Only 13% were above 45 years old. The teaching experience was almost similar in both groups with the means for GT group- 2.5 and UAET group -2.45. About 60% in both groups had the teaching experience of 6-15 years. In UAET group most of the participants, 18 respondents (90%), were instructors, thus this group was more homogenous than the GT group, where participants at all level were presented with the biggest numbers of teaching assistants 6 (30%), and instructors- 6 (30%).

**Table 1:** The sample of the study

	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>First Language</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
<b>Sample from GE</b>	Georgian	20	Georgian	20
<b>Sample from the UAE</b>	Syrian	4	Arabic	13
	Pakistani	1	Hindi	1
	Jordanian	2	Urdu	1
	Maurice	1	French	1
	Sudan	1	Malayalam	1
	Egyptian	1	Shona	1
	Indian	2	Serbian	1
	Zimbabwean	1	Spanish	1
	Tunisian	3		
	Iraqi	1		
	Serbian	1		
	Mexican	1		
	Lebanese	1		
	Total	40	Total	40

## 2.2 Results

The analysis is based on descriptive statistics, with the results displayed in both tables and figures showing the percentage for the response distribution in each category. The respondents reported whether they had formal education in ELF during their study program. More than half of the Georgian teachers did not take ELF course or any related training within the program they graduated from. Less than half of the teachers in the UAE answered the same question negatively (table 2).

**Table 2.** ELF in the study programs

Questions	GT	UAET
<b>ELF was covered in the program you graduated from</b>	Yes -8 (40%); No -11 (55%) Missing -1 (5%)	Yes -11 (55%); No -9 (45%)

The participants in both groups had almost similar knowledge on ELF. Nevertheless, the GT group's mean (2.75) was slightly higher than UAET group's (2.60) claiming that the expertise of ELF was higher in GT group (table 3).

**Table 3.** Teachers' awareness of ELF

Questions	GT	UAET
<b>Knowledge of ELF</b>	I have no idea -1 (5%) Not much, I've just heard the concept -7 (35%) Moderate, I've read few books and/or articles -8 (40%) Advanced, I've written compositions, articles and projects on the subject -4 (20%) Mean – 2.75	I have no idea -2 (10%) Not much, I've just heard the concept -6 (30%) Moderate, I've read few books and/or articles -10 (50%) Advanced, I've written compositions, articles and projects on the subject -2 (10%) Mean- 2.6

The participants were asked to define English as a Lingua Franca. The following common features were noticed in the answers of the participants:

- Lingua Franca is like a "bridge language" used for communication
- Means of international communication between speakers of different languages (common language)
- It means that two different nationalities use English for communication
- It is a language for foreigners (not native speakers).
- English is the common language for nonnative and native speakers

Few differences were noticed among the answers of participants from the UAE:

- It's the language people use to communicate with each other and they 'don't care for the perfect English language'
- 'learning English while you are home', and your first language is not English
- The language that people speak when 'they are not in English speaking countries'

The participants were asked if they believed in the existence of Standard English. The majority of the Georgian teachers (17 teachers -85%) believed that there is a Standard English (table 1). More than half of the participants (11 participants - 55%) from the UAE were certain that Standard English exists.

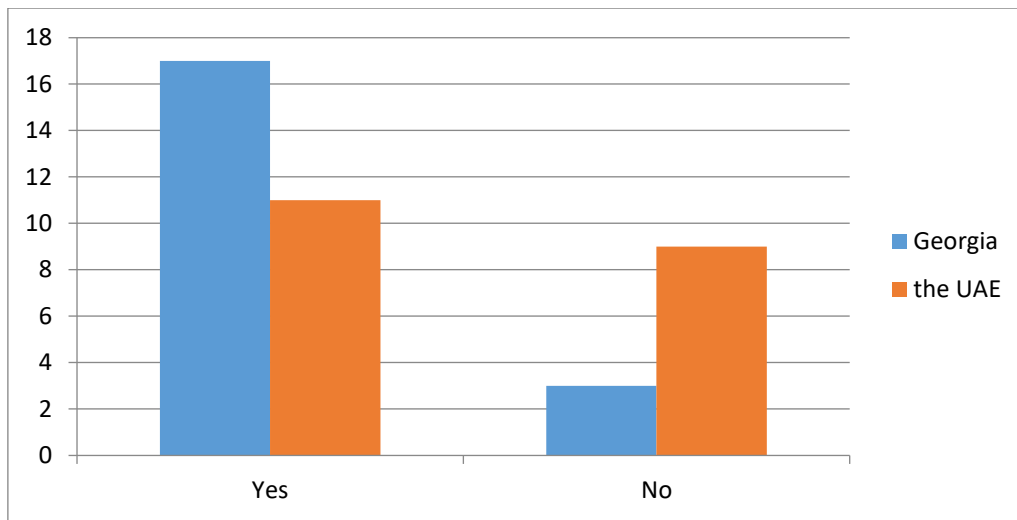


Figure 1. Beliefs on Standard English in the both groups

Most of the participants from Georgia and the UAE thought that Standard English is British and only one person in each group indicated that American English is the norm. Surprisingly, among the Georgian teachers' responses English as a lingua Franca was mentioned as Standard.

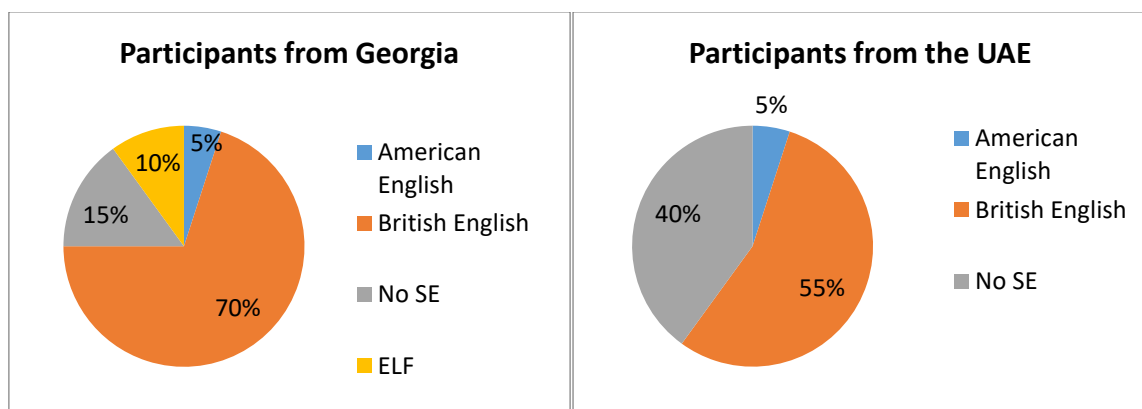


Figure 2. Kinds of Standard English according to the groups

It has been found that the widespread of English was acknowledged as a negative phenomenon among 15% of respondents in GT group (3 respondents) and twice as many in UAET group 30%, (6 respondents) believed that this process should be restrained. The restriction of English among UAETs was explained that English is a threat to mother tongue; some fields should only be studied using the first language or that one can use native language in most studies, etc. Another reason was that some people may not know how to speak English and this point is related to the heritage, tradition and religion of a country.

Those who thought that English should not be impeded had the following explanations; English is important for various reasons e.g. international communication. English also makes it easy to connect to other people as it is a dominant language and the restriction of this language is impossible or may result in serious problems. It impacts different fields: economy, science, intellectual property, medicine, culture, and everyday life. With the help of this language, technological advances may reach different parts of the world. Already a lot of resources are spent on learning this language and allowing people to speak it. No other language can take its role as they are restricted to the single countries.

Nevertheless, more the UAE teachers claimed to integrate ELF in their classroom. The missing answers (3) of the Georgian teachers to this point were quite high, and the UAE teachers gave more practical recommendations on how to incorporate ELF in studies.

**Table 4.** Integration of ELF in classes

Questions	GT	UAET
<b>If 'No' do you think it should be covered</b>	Yes -10 (50%); No -2(10%) Missing - 8 (40%)	Yes 9 (45%); No 4 (20%) Missing 7 (35%)
<b>Do you integrate ELF in your classroom?</b>	Yes-13 (65%); No -4 (20%) Missing 3 (15%)	Yes - 15 (75%); No - 5 (25%)

The respondents from Georgia explained their preference on inclusion of ELF in study programs which is summarized below:

- It should be helpful for learners now. However, in the past, in the 1980s, when some of the teachers graduated it wasn't so essential. Nowadays most of the world information flow happens in English. So it is rather a necessary skill for all professionals and more than just a language. Also, tourism has become very popular; people travel to many European countries, not to America; many people, who visit Georgia, are not from the USA or the UK. Thus, students have to be aware of Englishes.

The summary of the teachers' answers from the UAE to support the inclusion of ELF:

- Graduates should have an idea about it. Most of the teachers were exposed to English as a first language hence there was the absence of ELF course at university level. Education on ELF will enable students to excel in language knowledge because its focus on many language aspects, such as how to pronounce the

words. Another reason is the globalization that demands interaction with foreigners which is tightly connected to the career; your growth opportunities can be hampered if you do not speak English. It is a well-known fact that English has more importance than just communication with certain nationalities.

Some of the teachers from the UAE rejected the idea of including ELF in language study programs. They argued that if someone wants to become a teacher, he/she must learn proper English and ELF might be needed only in other study fields. Therefore, learning about ELF should not be compulsory, but students should be given the chance to choose themselves.

Very few participants (6) in GT group gave ambiguous answers to the question of how ELF should be integrated in their studies: the most important is to teach speaking to pupils, i.e. develop communicative competence in them and also grammar but inductively, i.e. to form correct language; indicate additional resources that are available in English and make them mandatory for everyone; as a compulsory subject; by exposing students to different varieties of English through reading, listening, speaking, and writing.

**Table 5.** Popular areas for ELF integration

<b>The most popular area of ELF teachers focus on</b>	Grammar - 3 (20%) Discussions on the role of English in the world - 4 (26.7%)	Discussions on the role of English in the world - 4 (25%) Students' own ELF performance -7 (43.8%)
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Similarly, a few respondents from the UAE had a clear idea of how to integrate ELF in the current curricula: It should be included as a course that focuses on the varieties of English worldwide and how important they are to the current status of the language; discussion of the role of ELF; field training; the four skills and focus on accent; as a four skills model rather than just focusing on grammar or writing.

Nevertheless inconsistency is observed among the answers when the respondents were asked to report how they integrate ELF in their own classroom. In both groups the teachers preferred discussions on ELF. If students' own ELF performance served as a means of ELF integration in the classes of the teachers from the UAE, then grammar had the same role for the teachers from Georgia.

The analysis of the responses indicates that in both groups teachers were willing to demonstrate their knowledge on ELF; however there were considerable missing data especially with the open-ended questions.

### 3. Discussion

In this paper we examine the attitudes and awareness of NNESTs toward ELF in two countries and language contexts. Particular attention was paid to the role of ELF in the outer and expanding circles, specifically in Georgia and the UAE. To our knowledge, this is the first study to deal with comparison of these specific regions.



The data obtained on Standard English within research are broadly consistent with the trend of the inner circle, that it is 'norm-providing'. As research findings revealed, in other circles it is acknowledged that English language norms are developed in the USA and the UK.

The research findings suggest that in the expanding circle, teachers take an ELF course or it is somehow covered within their study programs, enabling them to define ELF in its classical way, but in real life few of them integrate ELF in their classes and identify the ways of doing it. While the majority of them still believe in the existence of Standard English, the widespread of English alarms few of them. On the other hand, in outer circle, few teachers have ELF covered during their studies; as a result, most of them come up with their own definitions of ELF, and are able to integrate ELF in their classes skillfully. Likewise, they believe in the existence of a Standard English and think that English should be restrained as it can be a threat to L1.

Based on these points we can conclude that:

In the countries of expanding circle, like Georgia, where English is regarded as a foreign language, the following trends emerge:

- More formal education of the topic of 'ELF'
- superficial understanding of ELF and its importance
- ambiguous understanding on its integration in studies
- less need of ELF

On the contrary, in the outer circle, in the UAE, where English serves a lingua Franca, the following peculiarities are noticed:

- Experience of ELF in its real sense
- Practicality in all aspects connected to ELF: definition, integration, recommendations
- ELF regarded as a threat to L1, which might be influenced by the cultural diversity

#### **4. Conclusion**

From the research that was undertaken, it is possible to conclude that comparing attitudes and awareness of NNESTs to ELF in countries from such circles is a complex and multifaceted task, which implies different roles of English and influencing factors such as other languages, cultures, religion, ethnicities, histories, etc.

An important implication of the research findings is that ELF is a crucial topic for both regions and it is noteworthy to provide future English language teachers with expertise on ELF and the ways of its incorporation in language courses; it is necessary to disperse the existing myths and fears around ELF and focus more on the benefits that can be accrued in both regions through the understanding of the ELF features by providing training and proper education on ELF.

The main limitations of the research results are the missing data to the open-ended questions and inconsistency in the UAE participants' representativeness. Clearly further research will be needed to reach a bigger sample in both regions and gather additional information with other research methods.

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