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Contextual Differences regarding Students' Perceptions of English as a Lingua Franca according to Subject Major and Nationality

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ABSTRACT

The importance of English as a lingua franca (ELF) has grown exponentially, and a great deal of controversy has emerged over a number of years. Gathering data from a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire with a comments section, the study reported in this article aimed to explore perceptions of ELF among non-English major students from a wide variety of national origins. The students were studying in two distinct contexts (one a foreign language environment, where English is not spoken beyond the classroom; the other a target language situation, where English is spoken as the native language). The results showed that students' perceptions were ambivalent, with students expressing both a personal desire to attain native-like competence but also considerable tolerance of ELF. These perceptions showed very little difference according to nationality or subject major, though, interestingly, students in the target language environment were significantly more tolerant of ELF than their peers learning English in a foreign language environment, as well as being significantly less positive about the desire to attain native-like competence. These findings lead the researchers to conclude that study-abroad programmes may be an effective way of promoting ELF, and to stress the importance of giving learners choice regarding the degree to which they personally wish to work for native-like competence versus communicative ability. The findings were also examined for implications they might have for classroom practice.

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In a globalizing world, a common language used for the purposes of communication by speakers who do not share a first language (L1) has become a practical necessity. In the early 21st century, the most widely accepted global common language is undoubtedly English (e.g. Seidlhofer, 2009). When used as a medium of communication by speakers from different lingua cultures and language origins, English is often known as English as a lingua franca or ELF. The rapid expansion of ELF began towards the end of the twentieth century, but since the beginning of the current century, it has been spreading like 'wildfire'

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(Rajagopalan, 2008, p. 209), and growing like a ‘mushroom’ (Snowden, 2012, p. 89). Nevertheless, although it has spread rapidly and widely, as we approach the third decade of the new millennium it remains ‘uncharted territory’ as Mauranen (2012, p. 1) neatly puts it, meaning that we still have much to discover. The reason for this lingering uncertainty may lie in the fact that ‘the global extent to which English has become a contact language is entirely unprecedented’ (Dewey, 2014, p. 14). In other words, although there have been other lingua francas in the past (indeed English itself has been used as a lingua franca in various localities around the world for many years), the current ELF phenomenon is something entirely new in terms of its global scope and widespread adoption by people for all manner of different purposes and of all nationalities, ages and professions. From an ontological point of view, therefore, we can see that our understanding is lagging well behind the already existing reality, which few languages have experienced so far.

The lack of precedent may well be at least partly the reason that the question of ELF generates a great deal of controversy. This epistemological debate has frequently manifested itself in exchanges such as those between Snowden (2012) who claims that ‘it is clear that the native-speaker model still has an important role to play’ (p. 89) and Cogo (2012) who counter-argues that Snowden’s views are ‘rather dated’ (p. 104). More recently, O’Regan (2014) accused the ELF movement of being ‘inconsistent...and...lacking in theorization’ (p. 534), prompting Baker, Jenkins and Baird (2015) to respond that the ELF movement ‘mediates between theory and practice’ (p.122).

This article aims to explore perceptions of students regarding ELF, sampling a previously under-researched population (students of non-English major subjects, N = 36) from a wide variety of nationalities (N = 72) in both a foreign language context (EFL, that is where English is not spoken outside the classroom, such as China or Turkey) and a target language context (TL, that is where English is spoken in the wider community, such as the UK or USA, often also called ESL).

2. Previous Research

Over the years, the English as a lingua franca (ELF) phenomenon has been investigated in a number of studies in many different places. In a study of German teachers of English in two different types of schools, Decke-Cornill (2003) found that teachers generally favoured teaching ‘proper’ (p. 68) English, rather than ELF features, while according to Friedrich (2003), the Argentinean learners in her study also aspired to ‘native like command of the language’ (p. 180). In Japan, Matsuda (2003) investigated the perceptions of 33 high school students regarding the use of standard English and concluded that they believed that ‘the closer they follow the native speakers’ usage the better’ (p. 493). A decade later, when Galloway (2013) investigated the perceptions of 52 Japanese university ELT students, the results indicated that, while they were aware of ELF, the majority still wanted to sound like a native speaker, suggesting that ‘the NES is still placed firmly on a pedestal’, since native English is seen as ‘correct’ and ‘standard’ and non-native English as ‘imperfect’, ‘wrong’ and ‘untrustful’ (p. 801). Greek teachers’ beliefs and practices regarding the teaching of English were investigated by Sifakis and Sougari (2005) who found that teachers favoured teaching native speaker norms and standard pronunciation, and in Finland, Ranta (2010) discovered that although both students and teachers were well aware of the role of ELF in the ‘real world’ (p. 156), they nevertheless preferred the native speaker model for teaching/learning purposes. Following a project designed to explore learners’ beliefs and perceptions towards native-speaker English, Ke and Cahyani (2014) discovered that their Taiwanese students still ‘wished to speak like an NS and be taught by NS teachers’ (p. 32). And when Ren, Chen and Lin (2016) examined the perceptions of 400 students at universities in mainland China and Taiwan, according to the results, the students showed ‘a strong desire to achieve an NS accent’ (p. 22).

Although most studies have been carried out in EFL environments, there are a few which have been carried out in target language (TL) situations. Kuo (2006), for instance, working with international

students in the UK, discovered that, although her participants accepted a degree of ‘inaccurate pronunciation and incorrect use of vocabulary or grammar’ (p. 217) in their own and others’ communication, they did not want to approximate their speech to ELF interactions, preferring a native-speaker model as a learning goal. Other studies have included a number of different locations. Jenkins (2007), for instance, surveyed 326 respondents in 12 countries and concluded that native speaker accents are preferred ‘in all respects’ (p. 186); such accents were particularly valued for their perceived correctness and intelligibility. More recently, when Jenkins (2014) administered an open-ended questionnaire to 166 students from 24 countries and interviewed 34 students, she still found ‘a widespread and entrenched preference’ (p. 5) for native-speaker varieties, because of the perception that English provides advantages for its speakers (e.g. mobility, global careers, access to educational opportunities, etc.). Somewhat similar responses were received by Soruç (2015) when he investigated the perceptions of 45 non-native teachers of English from 5 different countries. According to a majority of these teachers, they never or only occasionally used ELF features in their own language. They gave as reasons that native-speaker English promotes communicative ability, earns respect, and leads to better opportunities, whereas using ELF tends to create doubts about the level of proficiency and may lead to problems with acquiring and maintaining employment.

From the studies summarized above, although there is some acceptance of ELF in the ‘real world’ (Ranta, 2010, p.156), and some toleration of ‘inaccurate pronunciation and incorrect use of vocabulary or grammar’ (Kuo, 2006, p. 217), it is impossible to ignore the strong overall tendency to prefer standard native-speaker English. However, almost all of these studies involved either teachers and/or students of English, who might be expected to have a vested interest in the native-speaker model. But what about business people, those involved in tourism or computer studies, mathematicians, scientists, engineers, politicians, lawyers and a host of others who may need a common language in order to be able to conduct their commercial or professional interests beyond their own language environments, but who may neither need nor want to develop native-speaker proficiency? For some reason, the views of this conceivably very large population, which needs to find ways of communicating with each other, or ‘establishing common understanding’ (Widdowson, 2015, p. 367), have been largely unexplored. Furthermore, although there are some studies which investigate multiple contexts (e.g. Soruç, 2015; Jenkins, 2007, 2014), most of the existing research is limited in terms of participant origin. Studies which compare different contexts (e.g. EFL, TL) are also rare. There are, however, numerous calls for broader-based research, including Ren, Chen and Lin (2016) who suggest the need for further research including ‘ELF users from more diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds’ (p. 23). Deterding (2013) also argues that, in order to reach more generalizable outcomes and to give a broader picture of ELF all around the world, more studies involving more contexts are needed.

In order to address these issues, this paper addresses perceptions regarding the ELF phenomenon of students studying a range of non-English majors (N = 36), from a wide range of national backgrounds (N = 72), who were studying in both foreign and target language environments.

The research questions for the current study therefore were:

- (1) Are there any differences in perception of ELF according to
 - subject major
 - national origin
 - learning context?
- (2) What are the implications for teaching and learning?

3. The Study

3.1. Participants and Setting

Altogether, there were 425 participants, of whom 210 students were male, while 215 were female. Their ages ranged from 18 to 20. Students were studying for a wide variety of different subjects (N = 36), as set out in Table 1:

Table 1.
Subject Majors of Participants with Number of Participants from Each in Brackets

Major	Major	Major
Arabic (2)	Health Management (7)	Medicine (4)
Banking (5)	History (2)	Middle East Studies (1)
Business (29)	Human Resource Management (1)	Philosophy (24)
Chemistry (33)	Information Technology (52)	Physics (25)
Civil Engineering (4)	International Relations (36)	Political Science (3)
Computer Engineering (7)	International Trade (4)	Public Finance (3)
Economics (5)	Law (2)	Science (5)
Electrical Engineering (2)	Management (4)	Social Service (7)
Electronic Engineering (7)	Material Science (3)	Sociology (5)
Engineering (30)	Maths (29)	Theology (8)
Geographical Engineering (2)	Mechatronics (4)	Tourism (61)
Governance (2)	Mechanical Engineering (4)	Translation (3)

Participants came from a large number (N = 72) of different national backgrounds (see Table 2).

Table 2.
National Origins of Participants with the Numbers of Participants from Each Country in Brackets

Country	Country	Country	Country
Abkhazia (2)	France (2)	Malagasy (2)	Somalia (2)
Afghanistan (9)	Gabon (1)	Malawi (2)	South Sudan (3)
Albania (5)	Germany (3)	Malesia (4)	Sri Lanka (2)
Algeria (1)	Ghana (4)	Mali (4)	Syria (16)
Azerbaijan (4)	Haiti (1)	Mongolia (2)	Tajikistan (2)
Bangladesh (4)	India (34)	Morocco (4)	Tanzania (1)
Benin (5)	Indonesia (10)	Nepal (6)	Thailand (4)
Bosnia (2)	Iran (2)	Nigeria (1)	Togo (2)
Burkina Faso (1)	Iraq (10)	Pakistan (5)	Tonga (6)
Burundi (1)	Ivory Coast (2)	Palestine (1)	Tunisia (1)
Cameroon (1)	Japan (5)	Philippines (9)	Turkey (149)
Central African Republic (2)	Jordan (1)	Russia (1)	Turkmenistan (1)
Chad (2)	Kazakhstan (1)	Rwanda (1)	Uganda (2)
China (31)	Korea (6)	Saudi Arabia (6)	Ukraine (2)
Colombia (1)	Kosovo (3)	Senegal (1)	Uzbekistan (5)
Djibouti (1)	Kyrgyzstan (2)	Serbia (2)	Vietnam (4)
Ethiopia (1)	Lebanon (1)	Sierra Leone (2)	Yemen (5)
Fiji (1)	Liberia (1)	Somalia (1)	Zimbabwe (1)

Data for the study were collected from two different settings. One was a university in Sakarya, Turkey, where the students (N = 325) were studying their majors in English but in a non-English-speaking (EFL) environment. The other was a private tertiary institution for international students in Auckland, New Zealand which provides various courses (e.g. business, information technology) in a target language (English speaking) environment (100 students were surveyed here).

3.2. Instrument

Since the aim of this study was to collect perceptions towards English as a lingua franca, an initial prompt was used, consisting of just 4 statements of common opinions expressed about ELF to which students were asked to respond. Respondents were asked to rate the statements from strong agreement (5) to strong disagreement (1). In addition to the ratings, students were asked to add comments, reasons or examples in the column provided. At the end of the questionnaire, they were asked to add any other comments about English as a lingua franca (ELF) they might have.

Following the procedure outlined by Dörnyei (2007), a pilot survey was conducted first of all by means of consultation with colleagues in order to get feedback about potential problems, and according to this feedback several adjustments were made to the wording of items. The pilot was then conducted with a class of ELT (English language teaching) students (not included in the final survey) in order to identify any further problems. Following this, further minor adjustments were made to item wording, formatting or instructions before surveying the target group of non-English major students.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

After obtaining the necessary permissions from both the Turkish and the New Zealand institutions from which the data were collected, students from the EFL environment were surveyed by a lecturer at Sakarya University in Turkey (the second author of this article). Surveys for the target language environment were sent by email to a lecturer at the tertiary institution in Auckland, New Zealand who arranged for them to be administered and returned them by email. In the case of both contexts, students were informed of the purpose of the study, assured that their participation was voluntary and would have no effect on their grades for the course, and asked to give anonymous consent for the data to be used for research and/or publication purposes.

In order to analyse the quantitative data, the ratings from the surveys were entered into SPSS, and first of all a factor analysis was conducted using the Principal Component Analysis (PCA). During this procedure, first, the suitability of the data for factor analysis was checked; according to the correlation matrix, coefficients were found at .3 and above level. The Kaiser-Meyer-Okin value was .92, which was more than the acceptable value of .6 and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was statistically significant ($p < .000$), confirming the factorability of the correlation matrix. Second, as a result of PCA, a rotated component matrix was extracted using Equamax with Kaiser Normalization (see Appendix 2), which found a cohesive group with eigenvalues exceeding 1, of which two items pertain to the use of standard English (items 1 and 4) and another two pertain to using English as a lingua franca (items 2 and 4). After running factor analysis, therefore, no items were removed; a test for Cronbach's Alpha for internal reliability returned an acceptable value ($r = .760$) (Dörnyei, 2007). As to the normality of the data, a Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality was conducted, and it was found that none of the items of the questionnaire was normally distributed (in all cases, $p=0.000$). Given also that Likert-type scales such as this one produce ordinal data, for which non-parametric analyses are most appropriate (e.g. Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018; Dörnyei, 2007) the data were analysed for medians and nonparametric differences (Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis H). Effect sizes were also calculated.

In order to analyse the qualitative data drawn from the students' comments made to the items in the survey, a content analysis approach was adopted (Dörnyei, 2007). During content analysis, the data were first examined recursively in order to identify salient themes. The second author identified 44 distinct themes, and the first author added a further two themes, making a total of 46 themes. Inter-rater agreement was, therefore 95.65%. The themes were then grouped according to whether they agreed,

disagreed or were ambivalent towards the statements in the questionnaire. Comments were put into the ‘ambivalent’ category if they displayed elements of both perceptions.

4. Results

4.1. Quantitative Results

4.1.1. Opinions regarding statements related to ELF across all students

Two of the items received an overall median rating of 4 (agree), while the item regarding the importance of correctness versus communication (Item 3) was rated only 3 (neutral). The last statement, regarding the desire to achieve native-speaker competence, was rated 5 (strongly agree). These results are set out in Table 3:

Table 3.

Opinions of ELF across All Students

No	OPINION STATEMENT	OVERALL MEDIAN RATING
1	It is important to use English accurately and appropriately	4
2	English as a lingua franca is getting to be more acceptable	4
3	Correct usage is not important as long as you can communicate	3
4	I would like to be able to achieve a native-speaker level of English	5

(1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=no strong opinion; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree)

4.1.2. Differences by subject major

The Kruskal-Wallis H nonparametric test of difference for several independent samples was used to determine if there were any significant differences in perceptions towards English as a lingua franca according to subject major (N = 36). According to the results, there were no significant differences in perceptions of ELF according to the subjects the students were studying, suggesting that students have similar views irrespective of their learning goals.

4.1.3. Differences according to nationality

A Kruskal-Wallis H nonparametric test of difference for several independent samples was also used to determine if there were any significant differences in perceptions of ELF according to nationality. Although two of the items (Items 2 and 4) showed significant differences over all nationalities (N = 72), these results should be treated with some caution because of the relatively low numbers of many of the national groups involved, in some cases amounting to no more than a single individual (check Table 2 for these numbers). In fact, there were no significant differences among nationalities with 10 or more members, suggesting that any evident differences might be more a matter of individual variation rather than typical of national groups as a whole.

4.1.4. Contextual differences

The nonparametric two-independent-samples test of difference (Mann-Whitney U) was used to determine any differences in perceptions towards ELF according to foreign/target language (Turkey/New

Zealand) context. Of the four items in the survey, two (item 3 and 4) showed significant differences. These results are set out in Table 4.

Table 4.
Differences According to Context

No	QUESTIONNAIRE ITEM	DIFFERENCE	EFFECT SIZE
3	Correct usage is not important if you can communicate	p=.025	0.87%
4	I would like to achieve a native-speaker level of English	p=.011	1.51%

According to the mean ranks, students studying in New Zealand were more accepting of Item 3 (Correct usage is not important if you can communicate) than EFL students (studying in Turkey). However, Item 4 (I would like to be able to achieve a native-speaker level of English) was rated more highly by the EFL students in Turkey. Although effect sizes (calculated using Yanati's effect size calculator) were small, this is an interesting finding, the implications of which will be considered further in the Discussion section.

4.2. Qualitative Results

After the analysis of the comments which the students added to their questionnaire forms, the following results were found regarding students' perceptions of ELF. Since the complete list of coded comments is quite long, sample comments are reproduced here to exemplify the kinds of comments that were made (see Tables 5-8). The comments are reproduced here as they were written, including occasional ELF features.

Table 5.
Sample Comments Made by Students on Item 1 (It is important to use English accurately and appropriately)

Item	Agree	Ambivalent	Disagree
1	<p>"just like any other language, it is important to use English accurately and appropriately in order to deliver the message without causing any misunderstanding."</p> <p>"we have to respect the norms of the language if we use it in communication"</p>	<p>"widely usage of English led a lot of different accent and usage to new versions of English. You cannot make everyone follow the exact rules. As long as they can communicate which is the function."</p> <p>"it is important for academic speeches, but it is not important for casual"</p>	<p>"We are not native speakers, so it should be acceptable if we make mistakes"</p> <p>"not everyone use English as their first language and some people learn it later, so it is impossible to use it accurately"</p>

Table 6.
Sample Comments Made by Students on Item 2 (English as a lingua franca is getting to be more acceptable)

Item	Agree	Ambivalent	Disagree
2	<p>"it is becoming a lingua franca, because it is easy to learn and widely spoken."</p> <p>"people use and understand English in economy, politic, travel, education etc."</p>	NONE	<p>"Native varieties, British, American etc. which one."</p> <p>"Yes, it is good to talk in English good, but our national language must be at first place"</p>

Table 7.

Sample Comments Made by Students on Item 3 (Correct usage is not important as long as you can communicate)

Item	Agree	Ambivalent	Disagree
3	<p>“if people can understand each other there is no problem because they can deal with everything by listening each other. It does not matter whether usage is right or wrong”</p> <p>“we use language to communicate in English somehow, that is the point, not the correctness”</p>	<p>“In terms of academic I find it completely unacceptable but in speaking for me it is OK”</p> <p>“In class it is important because we are learning new language and we should be careful. However in daily life it is not important as long as you can communicate”</p>	<p>“Correct usage is important otherwise it may result in a big failure”</p> <p>“I cannot communicate with someone if he doesn’t speak in a way that I’ve learned.”</p>

Table 8.

Sample Comments Made by Students on Item 4 (I would like to be able to achieve a native-speaker level of English)

Item	Agree	Ambivalent	Disagree
4	<p>“I always believe in being perfect in what we learn. So we choose to speak English. We have to speak it well and work on that”</p> <p>“It is my passion to speak like a native speaker by heart”</p>	<p>“In academic way, yes it’s better. But I think it is not necessary to be native like speaker in communication. It depends on social area”</p> <p>“I would like to be able to speak like native but the important thing is communicate”</p>	<p>“We can’t speak as native. I really want it but...”</p> <p>“it is impossible for us. We can’t reach native like level”</p>

In addition to commenting on the items of the questionnaire, students were given the opportunity to add a free comment of their own. Although not all of them did this, some of the comments add an interesting and ‘human’ dimension to the responses. Most of the comments were positive (N = 11) about ELF, a few were ambivalent (N = 5), and a few others negative (N = 2).

4.2.1. Positive

- (1) ‘English is like a dollar; we have to use it, because of modern world political organizations’.
- (2) ‘I think English is widely used language all over the world. As far as communication is concerned one common language should be there for everyone. A society have common language like English would maybe life easier for everyone’
- (3) ‘It is a great idea to have English as a lingua franca all around the world so all people can speak a common language and understand each other’
- (4) ‘I think everybody should learn English for an international way of communicating’.
- (5) ‘It is very easy language, logical language. I support English language to be a lingua franca universal common factor. To be I married to Bulgarian man and there is a problem of understanding with people because they don’t talk English very well and I still learning their language ☺’
- (6) ‘I think we all should adopt one language. If we adapt English as a one global language then we can understand each other and can communicate very well with each other’.

- (7) 'ELF is the apple of my eye, I have many international friends in facebook. I don't need to learn their languages'.
- (8) 'It is the best language ever on earth'
- (9) 'Thank you ELF. It is an angel'.
- (10) 'I think people and learners shouldn't care about accuracy, because most of the people learn English to communicate'.
- (11) 'It is a common language for all people. You don't say that I need to learn Polish when you want to go to Poland. English is enough for all. That's way it is better for most people to communicate it'.

4.2.2. Ambivalent

- (12) 'If all English speakers follow or accept one rule it will be more acceptable language by non-English native speakers (British English, US eng., Australian eng...)
- (13) 'It is good to use English as a lingua franca but a lot of problem must be a grammar of how to accent and pronunciation. That's why couldn't understand each other'.
- (14) 'English language will be become international but asked you which English become international language UK or US, very confusion between UK and US listening understanding'
- (15) 'I think English could be used as a lingua franca. But using it all over the world may cause a change or different use of English'.
- (16) 'From my point of view language should be used according to rules. However, to me more important thing is to provide communications. Errors or mistakes can be tolerated if the communication is not locked.'

4.2.3. Negative

- (17) 'We should find something more than just Band-aid. ELF is not solution. There is still not one standard native language variety'.
- (18) 'To make English more common, the way of making it simpler sounds foolish and unnecessary'.

5. Discussion

Perhaps the most notable aspect of the results of this study is the ambivalence in the perceptions expressed. In fact, there was agreement or strong agreement with three of the four statements in the survey, in spite of the fact that the statements might be considered somewhat contradictory. On the one hand, students agreed that ELF is getting to be more acceptable, indicating, perhaps, 'a growing receptivity towards ELF' (Jenkins, 2012, p. 493). On the other hand, however, they also agreed that it is important to use English accurately and appropriately, while the strongest level of agreement (median rating=5) was for Item 4, which seemed to suggest that, in spite of the fact that they might accept ELF for the sake of communicative convenience, they nevertheless still aspired to achieve native-speaker competence.

Although nationality and subject major have been suggested as possible factors affecting perceptions towards ELF (e.g. Deterding, 2013; Ren, Chen & Lin, 2016), significant differences were not apparent according to either of these variables. Indeed, there were no significant differences according to subject major, suggesting that students have similar perceptions whether they are studying Arabic, mechanical engineering, translation or any of the other courses. And although some differences according to nationality were apparent across all 72 nationalities represented in the study, when it is considered that

many of the national groups consist of just one individual, we need to question whether such results might merely reflect individual differences rather than the characteristics of the whole group. This possibility is reinforced by the finding that there were no significant differences among national groups of 10 or more.

An interesting result, however, was in the area of contextual differences. Here the students studying in the target language environment were significantly more in agreement that correct usage is not important as long as you can communicate. However, the EFL students were significantly more in agreement that they wanted to achieve native-speaker level. Might this reflect the reality that it is the students in the target language environment who actually have to confront the difficulties of the task? The environment in which they study or use English as a medium of communication might pre-dispose them to be more tolerant of language which is less than perfectly 'correct' as long as they can convey the necessary message. Indeed, they may well also be aware that native-speakers themselves do not always speak or write 'correctly'. Those in the EFL environment, however, are removed from the day-to-day struggle to communicate, which might make it easier for them to be idealistic.

Responses from the qualitative data for Item 1 (It is important to use English accurately and appropriately), tended to emphasize the need to avoid misunderstanding; but others point to the difficulties presented by differing accents and usage, and yet others argue that since they are not native speakers it is natural for them to make mistakes. For Item 2 (English as a lingua franca is getting to be more acceptable), several students suggest that the reason English has become the lingua franca is that it is easy to learn; but others complain that the different varieties of English interfere with communication. According to some responses to Item 3 (Correct usage is not important if you can communicate), there is no problem if people can understand each other, although others point out that correct usage can avoid 'failure' (although this is not precisely defined); in the middle, there are some who argue that ELF is acceptable in speaking, but not for academic purposes. And for the final item, (Item 4: I would like to be able to achieve a native-speaker level of English), almost all the responses were in agreement, although one or two were more ambivalent and argued that, although native-speaker level is necessary for academic purposes, it is not absolutely necessary for social interaction. Just a few were negative, arguing that achieving native-speaker competence is difficult, however desirable an aim it might be.

The impromptu comments which some students added to the end of the questionnaire were interesting for their spontaneity and the personal element that they added to the study. Also interesting was the fact that by far the majority of these impromptu comments (11 out of the 18, or 61%) were positive. Some of the respondents even waxed metaphorical with one describing ELF as 'like an angel', another as the 'apple of my eye' because it means being able to communicate with friends on Facebook, and a third as 'like a dollar'. A number of respondents suggested that using English as a lingua franca would make 'life easier for everyone'. Examples of those who held this view are the lady married to a Bulgarian man who is struggling because she does not speak her husband's language, and the student who would not need to learn Polish when going to Poland. Others who are more ambivalent mention problems such as the grammar and variable pronunciation, the need for 'rules', and the effect that it will have on English itself. Just a couple are quite negative, such as the student who believes that it 'sounds foolish', and another who warns that ELF is not a 'Band-aid', that is, he sees it as a temporary rather than a permanent solution to the problem of international communication.

6. Implications for Teaching and Learning

Although, as noted in the literature review, conflicting points of view about English as a lingua franca are often quite strongly argued, a question which has been largely absent from the literature until recently is that of how teachers are supposed to manage this controversial phenomenon. After all, teachers have

traditionally been expected to educate students who can speak ‘correctly’ and write grammatically accurate texts. Many students still expect this, many parents and institutions still maintain such standards as a basic requirement, and many exams judge candidates by traditional standards of grammatical and lexical accuracy and appropriacy. What is the teacher supposed to do in the face of such conflicting demands?

Until recently, this important question has been largely avoided by ELF advocates. Jenkins, (2012, p. 492), for instance, states: ‘ELF researchers have always been careful to point out that we do not believe it is our place to tell teachers what to do’. While this point of view may be to some extent understandable, it leaves a major quandary for the real-life teacher in the real-world classroom. What are they supposed to do in order to satisfy all sides of this sometimes heated debate? Although in more recent years, the pedagogical issue has been more widely considered (e.g. Bayyurt & Sifakis, 2015; Bowles & Cogo, 2016; Crowther & De Costa, 2017), the question of precisely how to deal with ELF in the classroom remains under-addressed.

The quandary for teachers remains: how to balance competing needs in order to satisfy both those who aspire to native speaker competence as well as those for whom communication is more important than ‘correctness’. If ELF is to be considered acceptable, what does this imply in terms of classroom practice? Should students be taught according to the long-accepted standards of The Oxford English Dictionary, The Oxford English grammar, and received pronunciation (RP) in spite of the fact that many native-speaking teachers themselves do not model these standards in their own speaking or writing; or is an ‘anything goes’ approach more appropriate and useful in a globalizing world; or should the approach be somewhere between these two extremes? If the best approach which is most likely to satisfy most people is to be considered somewhere between, where, exactly does the dividing line come? This can be an especially vexing question for novice teachers who are still trying to find their way forward in their chosen profession, and uncertain what to do to satisfy their own professional standards, the needs of their students, parental requirements, and the demands of their institutions. Indeed, this may be a question which continues to trouble teachers in spite of many years in the classroom, since it may run quite contrary to their own initial training, experience, and understanding of what is expected.

Maley (2009) suggests that ‘what we can do is to teach something as close to a ‘standard’ variety as possible, while at the same time raising learners’ awareness of and respect for the variability they will encounter the moment they leave the safe haven of the classroom’ (p. 198). Maley suggests that teachers should raise awareness of the diverse ways English is used beyond the classroom, and they should be given strategies (e.g. for repair, clarification, accommodation, etc.) for dealing with this diversity. Kohn (2011, p. 86) also suggests that ‘pupils should know about ELF’ (emphasis in original). And Sewell (2013) is another who suggests that ‘language teachers need to provide learners with critical awareness of language variation, at the appropriate stage, so that they are capable of entering into a variety of discourse communities’ (p. 7).

As well as raising students’ awareness of language diversity, students should be given a choice about whether they want to conform to native speaker use of English or not. Jenkins, Cogo and Dewey (2011) recommend an approach which aims at ‘promoting an ELF perspective not as an alternative approach intended to supplant existing pedagogy, but rather as an additional option about which teachers and learners can make informed choices’ (p. 307). The importance of choice is also stressed by Cogo (2012): ‘ELF is about awareness and choice – making students aware of different ways of speaking English, of language variability and change – and about offering choice to them’ (p. 104). Likewise, Galloway and Rose (2014) recommend providing choice so that students can see themselves as ‘multilingual English speakers not as inferior NNE speakers’ (p. 9).

If, however, this choice is to be made a practicable reality, it has implications beyond the teacher and the classroom. Publishers need to produce suitable material (e.g. Crowther & De Costa, 2017), and

this takes time and money. Testing systems need to be adjusted to accommodate the inevitable variability, which may be 'somewhat problematic in practice' (Elder & Davies 2006, p. 282). Institutional and parental expectations need to be re-aligned to accept a somewhat different educational philosophy, where the ability to communicate becomes more important than the traditional correct-incorrect dichotomy, which may, in turn, manifest itself in exam results. At a meta-level, ELF needs to be accepted as a valid option by language planners, policy makers and examination boards. Students themselves need to be educated to sanction ELF as an acceptable option, whether or not they personally choose to adopt it. And, perhaps most importantly, teachers need to be educated to be 'ELF-aware' (Bayyurt & Sifakis, 2015, p. 55), a process which needs to begin at the teacher-training stage, before teachers even get into the classroom.

Although somewhat contrary to expectations, neither nationality nor subject major seemed to produce major differences in perceptions towards ELF, the fact that there were differences (albeit small) according to learning context might suggest implications for ongoing practice. It would seem that those studying in a target language environment, where they must cope with the new language on a real-life basis, are more tolerant towards ELF than those who view it from a distance in a foreign language environment. This would seem to suggest that, if we are wanting to promote English as a lingua franca, it would be useful to facilitate study abroad experience, which other studies (e.g. Copland & Garton, 2011; Mora & Valls-Ferrer, 2012) have also shown to be beneficial. In this way, students may obtain authentic experience with the language to which they aspire, which may provide a somewhat different perspective from what may be available from the remote viewpoint of a foreign language classroom.

7. Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

Given gaps in previous research, which has tended to focus on students or teachers of English in a restricted number of situations and from a limited number of nationalities, this study aimed to include students from a broad range of disciplines, from multiple nationalities, studying in different contexts. However, this has meant that some of the nationalities and some majors have very low numbers, from which generalizations must clearly be made with caution. Further studies might care to explore some of the nationalities or majors with low numbers in this study, aiming at surveying larger samples which would be more representative, in order to determine whether similar results are obtained. Such results would be especially useful for informing policy decisions for particular national or subject groups.

The interesting finding regarding the differences according to context (foreign or target language), which seemed to indicate that those in a target language situation (that is, studying in an environment where the target language is spoken) are more tolerant towards ELF than those in a foreign language situation, also deserves further investigation. The study abroad experience has already been quite extensively researched (e.g. Mora & Valls-Ferrer, 2012), but a specific focus on the students' perceptions of ELF before, during and after such exposure could be a useful addition to existing research.

Perhaps most importantly, research which focuses on providing guidance for teachers is urgently needed. Such guidance as is currently available such as 'raising learners' awareness' (Maley, 2009, p. 198), 'promoting an ELF perspective' (Jenkins, Cogo & Dewey, 2011, p. 307) and educating 'ELF-aware' teachers (Bayyurt & Sifakis, 2015, p. 55), while undoubtedly well-meaning and correct, does little to provide the teacher with the precise details of what is required to achieve these desirable aims, especially in the face of often conflicting demands from students, parents and institutional authorities. In order to provide answers at this grassroots level, action research is required which takes research directly into the classroom, such as recommended by Burns (2010) and Dikilitaş and Griffiths (2017). Such research can help to promote teacher autonomy, empowering teachers to make their own decisions, and/or helping to inform others in the profession, giving them the confidence to make changes to their own perceptions and practices, and increasing job satisfaction (Prichard & Moore, 2016).

8. Conclusion

This study has investigated perceptions of ELF (English as a lingua franca) among non-English major students from a wide range of nationalities in both EFL (foreign language) and target language (TL) contexts. An interesting feature of the findings is the ambivalence displayed in the opinions expressed. Although native-speaker competence remains the ideal for many, there is general consensus that ELF has become more acceptable, and that it helps to achieve communication. Another very interesting finding is that students in the target language context proved to be more accepting of ELF than those in the foreign language situation, as well as less in agreement that they wanted to achieve native-speaker competence. Given that it is the students in the target language context who have actually been exposed to the lived experience of coping in a language environment which is different from their own L1, and who are therefore in a position to have first-hand experience of the difficulties, this finding might well reward further exploration.

Although much of the previous debate about ELF has revolved around issues of ontology and epistemology, this study has tried to remain grounded, accepting the fact that ELF (however it may be defined) clearly exists, and seeking to establish knowledge on which to build understanding using student perceptions as a base. From a pedagogical point of view, perhaps the most important conclusion to be drawn from this study is the need to give learners choice. Given that, over the years, ELF seems to have steadily become more acceptable, and the relative value of communicative ability compared with 'correctness' has been more widely recognized, it is important that learners should be allowed to choose the option which best suits their situations and their learning goals.

A major gap in current research, however, is the dearth of studies aimed at providing definite and detailed guidelines for teachers concerning how to manage competing demands regarding ELF in their classrooms. Since this can be a major source of anxiety and confusion, especially for novice teachers, but also for more experienced teachers for whom it creates uncertainty and confusion about how best to proceed in their chosen profession, it suggests an area in crucial need of further research.

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Appendix A
Questionnaire of perceptions of English as a lingua franca

Gender: M () F () Age: _____ Nationality: _

What course are you taking/planning to take? (e.g. business, science, etc):

Dear student: We are doing some research into perceptions of English as a lingua franca (ELF). Would you please give your opinion of the following statements according to this rating scale:

5=strongly agree 4=agree 3=no strong opinion 2=disagree 1=strongly disagree

Please also comment on your reasons for your opinion

No	STATEMENT	RATING	COMMENT
1	It is important to use English accurately and appropriately		
2	English as a lingua franca is getting to be more acceptable		
3	Correct usage is not important if you can communicate		
4	I would like to be able to achieve a native-speaker level of English		

Do you have any other comments about English as a lingua franca (ELF)

I agree to the use of these data for research or publication purposes. Yes ____ No ____

Appendix B

Rotated component matrix of factor analysis

Rotated Component Matrix^a

	Component	
	1	2
1	,786	
2		,353
3		,929
4	,728	

Extraction Method:
Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Equamax
with Kaiser Normalization.