

Future Saudi female teachers' perceptions of native-like English pronunciation and English as a Lingua Franca

Future Saudi
female
teachers'
perceptions

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Abstract

Purpose – The present study aims to examine the attitudes of future Saudi female English as a Foreign Language (EFL) student-teachers toward English native-like pronunciation to investigate their misconceptions about English as a Lingua Franca (ELF).

Design/methodology/approach – The researcher used a questionnaire to collect the data for the study.

Findings – The results indicate that students and teachers have positive attitudes toward native-like pronunciation. However, the results also show a realization on the participants' part about the status of ELF. The study concludes that although they have positive attitudes toward native-like English pronunciation, students use ELF and recognize that such pronunciation is not essential for global communication. The study results show that the participants are aware of ELF, filling a vacuum in the literature about how Saudi students perceive ELF. It encourages EFL teachers, syllabus designers, developers and researchers to provide more information on this topic and stresses international communicative ability, as ELF speakers require.

Research limitations/implications – As the study has some limitations that could be addressed in future research, other researchers should address these deficiencies in future studies. One limitation is that the study only involved Saudi female future teachers. Further researchers can investigate male Saudi future EFL teachers. Another limitation is that the study focused on future teachers of English in Saudi Arabia in only one institution. Other Saudi EFL teachers and other Arab future teachers could be further investigated to reject or support the study's findings. Additionally, a more detailed demographic background could be specified in further research for more comprehensive results. In addition, similar studies could be conducted with participants from different EFL-speaking countries. Another limitation of this study is that it covers the attitudes of EFL future teachers toward native-like pronunciation and indirectly investigates their views on ELF. More research is needed to determine how EFL learners and teachers perceive ELF. The actual use of English globally could become more enlightened with further study.

Practical implications – This study's findings have implications for instructors, syllabus designers and researchers. The results suggest that EFL instructors, syllabus designers and researchers should focus more on international communicative competence than native-like competence. While designing course materials or teaching, teachers and syllabus developers should be fully aware of the status of ELF. Designers of syllabi should include conversations among speakers from different linguistic backgrounds. Effective communication is a priority. Students should become more familiar with global communication outside the classroom and be prepared to engage in it.

Social implications – Students should become more familiar with global communication outside the classroom and be prepared to engage in it.

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Originality/value – Native varieties of English have gained popularity over the years among EFL teachers and learners. However, researchers have debated the importance of EFL students achieving native-like English proficiency.

Keywords Native-like English pronunciation, Attitudes, English as a foreign language, English as a Lingua Franca

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

With the world becoming a small village, the English language has become a Lingua Franca (LF), used for communication among speakers of diverse languages (Seidlhofer, 2005). Both English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) speakers use it for communication with native English speakers. Crystal (2018), in The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language, depicts the family tree representing the spread of English worldwide, as shown in Figure 1.

The actual use of the English language in the world has attracted the attention of many researchers. Kachru *et al.* (2009) present a “Three Circles of English” model. English speakers represent three circles in this model: inner, outer and expanding. The inner circle refers to speakers of English as a native language, such as in the UK, the USA, Canada and Australia. In contrast, the outer one refers to speakers of English as a second language, such as in Malawi, India, and Singapore. Finally, the expanding circle refers to speakers of EFL, such as in Saudi Arabia, Japan, China, Poland, Greece and other nations. Crystal (2012) elaborates that the “expanding” or “extending” circle consists of those countries that are neither from the inner circle nor are they the colonies of the inner circle members. For example, Saudi Arabia belongs to the expanding circle of Kachru *et al.’s* (2009) model. Crystal (2012) and Kachru *et al.* (2009) acknowledge that the users of the expanding circle further strengthen the claims of English as a universal or an international language.

According to Fussell (2011), most foreigners and locals in Gulf countries communicate and interact in English. They use it for education, science, the Internet, technology, computers,

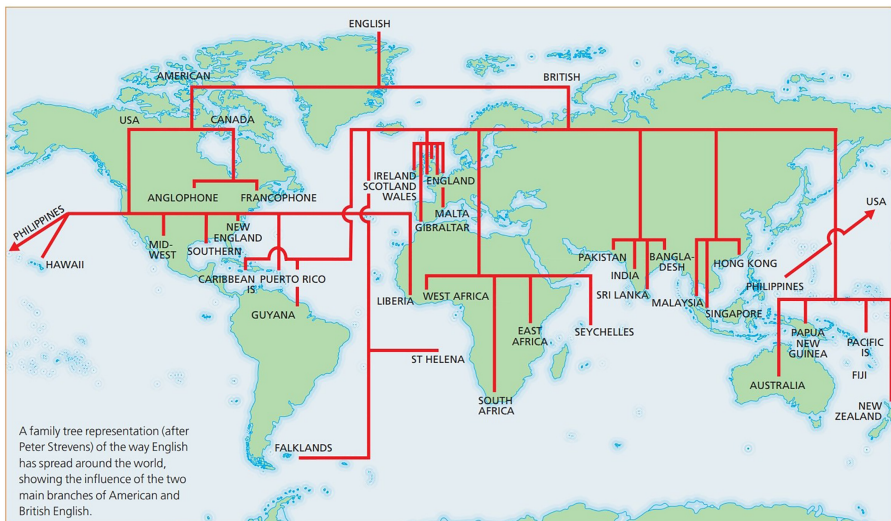


Figure 1.
The spread of English worldwide

Source(s): Crystal (2018)

advertising, tourism and finance. Also, many people come to Saudi Arabia for jobs, Hajj, Umrah or tourism. Saudi people use English to communicate with people from different linguistic backgrounds, and those people also use it to communicate with one another. According to [Al-Tamimi \(2019\)](#), Saudi universities invite scholars from all over the world to inspire and educate young Saudis, marking a significant shift in the emphasis on English education. In Saudi Universities, English language proficiency has become an essential requirement for admission into disciplines such as medicine, pharmacy, engineering, media, computer science and business. Master's and doctorate programs at universities require English proficiency for all specializations. According to [Shah and Elyas \(2019\)](#), the number of English language learners in the Saudi Kingdom has increased dramatically during the past decade. The country has also introduced English teaching at elementary school levels. Following the new education plan to increase achievement, prepare students for the future and meet Vision 2030, the Ministry of Education has introduced English as a subject for elementary school students in the 2021–2022 ([KSA.gov, 2020](#)) goals for the current academic year.

Scholars have proposed a difference between ELF and EFL. [Jenkins \(2004\)](#) indicates that EFL speakers who use English mainly in native-speaker environments to communicate with native English speakers aim to speak like native speakers. He adds that, on the other hand, ELF speakers who use it in non-native situations do not need to attain native-like proficiency. Jenkins' distinction attracts the attention of EFL learners to the core purpose of their learning such as international global language. [Kaur \(2014\)](#) states that the "emergence of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and English as an International Language (EIL), has implored us to re-examine the relevance and necessity of the ideology of the native speaker as a model in English language teaching" (p. 3).

With English becoming the language of global communication and the number of non-native speakers exceeding native speakers, a "World Englishes" phenomenon has emerged. Students who study EFL in Saudi Arabia have accents that reflect their first language. Some researchers have referred to this variety as "Saudi English" ([Almaqarn and Alshabeb, 2017](#)). [Elyas et al. \(2021\)](#) also indicate that Saudis use a unique form of English, called Saudi English, in combination with their local dialect, as part of their mixing English with Arabic linguistic repertoire. However, following [Jenkins \(2000, 2003, 2006\)](#) and [Seidlhofer \(2001, 2004\)](#), who proposed the term ELF to describe Englishes used in the expanding circle, [Bukhari \(2019, 2022\)](#) rejected the term Saudi English to describe the varieties used by Saudis and called for replacing it with the term "Saudi English as a Lingua Franca."

Based on [Bukhari's \(2019, 2022\)](#) argument, as EFL Saudi graduates use ELF, they do not have to attain native-like pronunciation. When people learn a particular language other than their own, they do so to communicate with native speakers of that language and to be able to communicate with other non-native speakers who speak it. When that language is an international language, the aim is to communicate with people globally. English is a global language, and the number of people speaking it is increasing. Moreover, EFL classrooms, especially in English-speaking countries, are not for speakers of a particular language but for those of various languages. There are EFL students from different countries, cultures and native languages. Accordingly, EFL and ELF learners do not need native-like pronunciation proficiency.

Thus, it is evident that native-like pronunciation is no longer a reasonable, applicable or convenient aim for non-native English speakers. This lack of applicability is due to their increasing number, the different varieties of their native languages, and their need for interaction and communication among themselves ([Modiano, 2008](#); [Mollin, 2006](#); [Schell, 2008](#)). Moreover, they need international communicative competence in such global communication, enabling speakers of different languages to communicate effectively without misunderstanding. In addition, the increasing number of non-native speakers at Saudi universities who teach EFL has allowed students to listen to diverse pronunciations of English (of which native-like pronunciations are very few). Thus, the problematic demand to

attain that pronunciation has become a source of frustration, as most students did not have the chance to spend their early childhood in native English-speaking countries.

However, a native-like pronunciation is still charming and attractive for non-native speakers. Although it has been proven by linguistics (and subsequently taught in colleges) that native-like English pronunciation can be attained only by those who learn the foreign language at an early age, it is still held as an ideal for ESL/EFL learners. Students and faculty highly respect those with native-like English pronunciation. They consider non-native pronunciation inferior and native pronunciation prestigious, affecting career opportunities. Moreover, even those who do not have native pronunciation are keen to criticize those who similarly do not have it. This study deals with future Saudi female EFL teachers' attitudes toward native-like English pronunciation and ELF.

Review of related literature

Several applied linguists have considered differing attitudes toward divergent varieties of English. Many studies have shown that EFL learners are unsatisfied with their pronunciation skills and wish to speak English fluently (Bernaisch and Koch, 2016; Derwing, 2003; Derwing and Rossiter, 2002). According to a study conducted by Derwing (2003) that investigated the perceptions of adult immigrants toward the pronunciation challenges they face while speaking with a foreign accent, more than half of the participants believed that they would receive more respect if their English pronunciation improved. Al-Dosari (2011) reported on Saudi students' ratings of two short spoken texts, one by a Standard South African Native English speaker (SSAE) and the other by a Standard Indian English (SIE) speaker, regarding the speaker's perceived accents, education and comprehensibility. The results revealed different perceptions generated by each speaker's accent. The participants rated the SIE speaker more highly than the SSAE speaker. The ratings of perceived accent, comprehensibility, and education were higher in the SIE group than in the SSAE native English group; however, the ratings regarding actual understanding were not significantly different. The researcher concluded that the students' perceptions of accent and comprehensibility did not affect actual comprehension. This study called for more research concerning the linguistic variety of English. It also challenged linguistic stereotypes and standard language ideologies.

Similarly, investigating future EFL teachers' perceptions of pronunciation teaching in an EIL context, Coşkun (2011) found that the participants regarded native English speakers as the sound model in English language teaching (ELT). Furthermore, examining Japanese, South Korean and Malaysian learners' attitudes toward their L1-accented English, Tokumoto and Shibata (2011) found that while Malaysian learners highly respected their L1-accented English, Japanese and Korean learners preferred native English pronunciation. The researchers attributed the difference in attitudes between the learners to variations in political and historical backgrounds that affected the L2 students' language identity, educational policy and social actions. Furthermore, Kang (2010) investigated adult ESL learners' attitudes toward their pronunciation lessons and instructors' accent varieties in New Zealand and North America. The study found that North Americans were more satisfied with the current curriculum for learning pronunciation due to the New Zealanders' misunderstandings of various pronunciation models and accents available to them.

Ahn (2014) used a mixed-methods research design to examine the attitudes of both Korean and non-Korean English teachers in South Korea toward Korean English. The results showed that most participants had a cognitively positive attitude toward Korean English. The results also showed that Korean English's intelligibility, demographic and widespread use were the dominant factors shaping their cognitive attitudes toward the language. Kaur (2014) examined how non-native speakers of English perceive non-native accents compared to native accents. Researchers found that the respondents viewed native accents better and described them more

positively than non-native accents. Kaur concluded that native accents are considered better and more native-like than non-native accents and that, despite recent shifts in English usage, many teachers still think that “proper” English belongs only to inner-circle countries.

In India, [Bernaisch and Koch \(2016\)](#) examined Indian English speakers’ attitudes toward Indian English in contrast with American English, British English and Sri Lankan English. The results showed that, although young female Indian English speakers had a positive attitude toward Indian English, they preferred British English. Moreover, they expressed a low acceptance of Sri Lankan English, which indicates a similar attitude difference between the two neighboring varieties. In Sudan, [Alhassan \(2017\)](#) investigated what kind of English(es) Sudanese EFL learners and teachers want to learn, teach and identify with, how they perceive ELF and EIL language and to what extent they are ready to learn and teach this variety in the classroom. He concluded that EFL students and teachers prefer to teach, learn and identify with native-like English, showing unfamiliarity with EIL/ELF.

[Almaqrm and Alshabeb \(2017\)](#) examined Saudi EFL learners’ attitudes toward native-like pronunciation and using podcasts to facilitate native-like pronunciation. They concluded that attitudes toward native-like pronunciation among Saudi students are positive. [Chien \(2018\)](#) compared the attitudes of 317 Taiwanese nationals living in Taiwan and 147 British nationals living in the UK toward different English accents. The results indicated that Taiwanese and British respondents largely favor English varieties of the English Inner Circle and the Outer Circle over those of the Expanding Circle. The results also indicated that both groups prefer the variety of General American English in terms of status and solidarity. Moreover, some social variables (e.g. gender and occupation) significantly affected speaker evaluations. Furthermore, while Taiwanese and British participants could tell whether a speaker was native or non-native, there were no significant associations between their ability to identify distinct English varieties and their positive view toward them.

[Dragojevic and Goatley-Soan \(2020\)](#) studied nine non-native and American native English speakers, including a native Arabic speaker, and their attitudes toward standardized American English. Non-native accents received a lower score than the American accent for status and solidarity, although there was some variation in the ratings between non-native accents; Western European accents received higher ratings than Arabic, Farsi and Vietnamese accents. The researchers attributed these ratings to the English and Western European countries’ social power and the comprehensibility of a speaker’s speech. The more comprehensible the speakers, the higher they were rated.

Investigating the comprehensibility of Thai English among foreign tourists, [Phuengpitornchai and Teo \(2021\)](#) also showed that most tourists understood Thai English owing to its syntactic and morphological features. However, they found its phonological features quite challenging. Therefore, their study suggested that Thai speakers could be more confident in communicating in English by focusing on the linguistic features that primarily inhibit the comprehensibility of Thai English. [Abu Guba et al. \(2021\)](#) explored native and non-native English speakers’ attitudes toward Jordanian Arabic-accented English. The results revealed that Jordanian Arabic speakers, particularly those with low English proficiency, were perceived less favorably than native speakers. The results also showed that native English speakers tend to view non-native speakers more favorably than their non-native counterparts. Furthermore, there was a strong correlation between the degree of foreign accentuation and attitudes toward non-native speakers, especially among non-native speakers. The researchers concluded that native English accents are preferred over non-native accents.

More recently, [Bukhari \(2022\)](#) studied Saudi teachers’ views of Saudi English and its variants and how the realization of the difference between errors and variants affects such views. The results reveal that the informants had opposing views on the term “Saudi English” and used notions of correctness to judge language quality. However, after learning how the studies on World Englishes and ELF distinguished between errors and variants, the

informants began to accept the variants. Furthermore, they agreed that language judgments could depend on register and context. Results also indicate that the informants welcomed the inclusion of a Global Englishes perspective in ELT. Nevertheless, they could not incorporate Global English perspectives into their teaching practice. The study thus recommended replacing the label Saudi English with Saudi English as an LF and including a field of study called Global Englishes in teacher education courses.

As seen in the literature review above, although several studies have studied the EFL/ESL learners' attitudes toward English pronunciation, none of them have covered the attitudes of Saudi EFL learners toward native-like English-accented pronunciation and ELF. Therefore, this study bridges a gap in existing literature regarding how EFL learners perceive native-like English pronunciation and ELF.

Research questions

Based on the researcher's experience teaching English to Saudi female EFL students and on the related literature, the researcher attempted to answer the following questions:

- (1) How do future Saudi female EFL teachers at King Khalid University feel about native-like English pronunciation?
- (2) What do future Saudi female EFL teachers at King Khalid University think about the importance of native-like pronunciation for global communication with non-native English speakers?

Methodology

Participants

This study used data from 280 future Saudi female EFL teachers at King Khalid University during the second academic semester of 2018. The participants were drawn from Level 7 of the English Language course, which forms part of a bachelor's degree in education. The participants were aged 20 to 23 years old. This criterion was selected as this demographic constitutes a generation of future teachers whose attitudes affect how they teach their EFL students in the future. In addition, the participants studied English language skills, phonetics, phonology and other English language subjects for seven academic semesters.

Materials

The researcher used a three-part questionnaire to collect the data that was partly based on and modified from the study by Kang (2010). A section for informed consent was added at the beginning of the questionnaire, informing the participants about its aim and confidentiality, stating that participation was optional and eliciting the participation agreement before completion (see Appendix A). The questionnaire contained three parts: the first elicited biographical information (age, GPA and years spent in the English department). The second consisted of 10 multiple-choice questions designed to elicit the participants' attitudes toward the pronunciation of English. This part employed a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), designed to understand the students' attitudes toward native-like English pronunciation. The researcher modified most of the items in this section from Kang's (2010) questions about general pronunciation to elicit attitudes about English native-like pronunciation. Finally, the third part is qualitative. It consisted of two open-ended questions. The first question asked whether they thought their teachers should have native-like English pronunciation and why. The second one asked whether they expected to speak with native-like pronunciation, after graduation, with EFL/ESL speakers (i.e. speakers who do not speak English as a native language/mother tongue) and why (see Appendix). The researcher gave the questionnaire to two assistant professors specialized

in the field for review. Thus, as the tool was based on Kang's (2010) questionnaire and reviewed by field specialists for its appropriateness for the research questions, it is thought to be valid and reliable.

Procedures

The researcher distributed the questionnaire online. She gave the participants enough time and instructions to fill it in. Phrases and open-ended questions were translated into the participants' native language to ensure they understood them. Participants were allowed to use their native language if they wanted to while answering the open-ended questions. In Microsoft Excel, the researcher computed the means of the participants' answers to determine their attitudes toward native-like accented pronunciation. The answers to the open-ended questions were also gathered for thematic content analysis to understand the participants' awareness of the use of ELF.

Results

Survey results of ESL learner opinions on native-like accents

Regarding the first research question about how the participants feel about native-like English pronunciation, the survey results indicate that the participants had positive attitudes toward native-like accents. The results are shown in Table 1.

| Statement | Opinion scale | | | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|
| | Strongly agree No. (Percent) | Agree No. (Percent) | Neutral No. (Percent) | Disagree No. (Percent) | Strongly disagree No. (Percent) |
| 1 It is important to learn native-like English pronunciation | 103 (36.8%) | 73 (26.1%) | 51 (18.2%) | 34 (12.1%) | 19 (6.8%) |
| 2 I should have native-like English pronunciation | 96 (34.3%) | 84 (30%) | 63 (22.5%) | 25 (8.9%) | 12 (4.3%) |
| 3 I am concerned about having native-like English pronunciation | 71 (25.3%) | 66 (23.6%) | 99 (35.3%) | 29 (10.4%) | 15 (5.4%) |
| 4 To improve my pronunciation, I should imitate native English speakers | 113 (40.3%) | 80 (28.6%) | 64 (22.8%) | 15 (5.3%) | 8 (2.8%) |
| 5 I think I should travel to America/Britain to develop my English | 83 (29.6%) | 53 (19.0%) | 73 (26.1%) | 44 (15.7%) | 27 (9.6%) |
| 6 I really want to sound like a native speaker | 199 (71%) | 36 (12.9%) | 21 (7.5%) | 17 (6.1%) | 7 (2.5%) |
| 7 I want to improve the way I pronounce English | 193 (68.9%) | 45 (16.1%) | 24 (8.6%) | 12 (4.3%) | 6 (2.1%) |
| 8 If I have native-like pronunciation, I will be more confident in English | 158 (56.4%) | 52 (18.6%) | 43 (15.4%) | 16 (5.7%) | 11 (3.9%) |
| 9 Native-like English pronunciation is important for communication | 83 (29.6%) | 65 (23.2%) | 91 (32.5%) | 28 (10.0%) | 13 (4.6%) |

Table 1.
Feelings about native-like English pronunciation

As shown in the above table, the results indicate that 62.9% of participants believed it is important to learn native-like English pronunciation, 18.9% did not and 18.2% were neutral. The results also showed that 64.3% of the participants thought they should have native-like pronunciation, but only 13.2% did not. The remaining 22.5% were neutral. Moreover, approximately half of the participants (49.0%) were concerned about having native-like pronunciation, whereas 15.8% were not.

In addition, while 69.0% of the participants thought they should imitate native English speakers to improve their pronunciation, only 8.1% disagreed, with 22.8% being neutral. Moreover, while 84.6% of the participants thought they should travel to America or Britain to develop their English, only 25.3% did not think so, whereas 26.1% were neutral. Furthermore, the results show that while 84% of the students wanted to sound like native speakers, only 8.6% did not and 7.5% were neutral. While 85% of the students wanted to improve their English pronunciation, only 6.4% did not, with 8.6% being neutral. Furthermore, the study shows that 75% of the participants felt more confident with native-like English pronunciation, and 9.6% did not, with 15.4% being neutral. Finally, while 52.8% of the participants agreed that native-like pronunciation is essential for communication, only 14.6% did not concur and 32.5% were neutral.

The importance of having a native-like pronunciation of English

The researcher used the responses to the two open-ended questions to determine what the participants thought about the importance of native-like pronunciation for global communication with non-native English speakers. In response to the first open-ended question about whether teachers should have a native-like pronunciation of English, most participants (91%) said teachers do not have to attain native-like pronunciation. Their reasons were that they are Arabs, and it is difficult for them to adopt a native-like pronunciation. They added that the most important thing is that their teachers speak in a straightforward dialect that is easy to understand for their students and has a clear pronunciation. The participants noted that everyone has an accent and that fluency in English is sufficient for their purposes. Additionally, everyone has a different ability to attain a native-like accent. Finally, they said the most important aspect of their English use was that the pronunciation should not affect the meaning of the words.

The few participants (9%) who argued that their teachers should have native-like English pronunciation were balanced and logical in their reasoning. They reported that it is good if the teachers have a similar pronunciation to the English language speakers themselves, but it is not a problem when they do not if students can understand what the teachers are saying. Participants reported that they needed teachers with native-like English as their teacher's pronunciation would affect their pronunciation, thus leading to the acquisition of that pronunciation. They contended they had the right to be taught by native English speakers to learn the language correctly. A few also reported that their teachers should try their best to have native-like English pronunciation to teach them the correct language pronunciation. One participant stated that they thought it was required for the teacher to speak like a native speaker to perform their task flawlessly. They added that they did not expect perfection in this regard, as it is not easy for non-native speakers to master native-like speaking, but there must be an effort to train new students. Thus, native-like accents must be attempted and practiced showing the new generation how to be proficient, understand native English speakers and communicate and start conversations quickly.

Use of native-like accented pronunciation with EFL/ESL speakers

The second open-ended question asked whether the participants expected to speak with native-like accented pronunciation, after graduation, with other EFL/ESL speakers. Most participants (94%) said it is unnecessary to speak with EFL/ESL speakers using native-like

accented pronunciation. They disclosed that the most crucial aspect of communication is to be clear and ensure that they understand what is said. They declared that they were not native English speakers; they had different accents. Therefore, they emphasized clarity and ease of communication. The few participants (6%) who answered that they would use native-like accented English pronunciation with EFL/ESL speakers were hesitant to answer why and then reported that they would because it is the way they should speak English.

Discussion

The results indicate that future Saudi female EFL future teachers at King Khalid University have positive attitudes toward the native-like pronunciation of English. More than half of them feel that it is important to learn the native-like pronunciation of English. Furthermore, most of them think that to improve their pronunciation, they should imitate native speakers of English and travel to North America or the UK to develop their English. In addition, they aspire to sound more native and want to improve their pronunciation. Finally, they feel confident with native-like English pronunciation. These responses are expected, as they study the language as an academic discipline and are taught British or American English phonetics and phonology. Another explanation is that they are studying the language as a foreign one and, as such, do not use it extensively outside the college to communicate with speakers of other languages.

The study results support [Derwing and Rossiter's \(2002\)](#) conclusion that most English language learners dream of speaking English fluently despite poor pronunciation. They also align with [Derwing's \(2003\)](#) conclusion that EFL learners would receive more respect if they could improve their pronunciation. In addition, these results are consistent with [Coşkun's \(2011\)](#) claim that future teachers regard native speakers of English as the best model for ELT. Moreover, they align with [Tokumoto and Shibata's \(2011\)](#) conclusion that Japanese and Korean learners prefer native English speakers' pronunciation over other varieties of English. They are also similar to [Bernaisch and Koch's \(2016\)](#) finding that young Indian English female speakers were positive about Indian English but preferred British English.

Furthermore, these results about the positive attitudes of EFL future teachers toward the native-like pronunciation of English align with [Alhassan's \(2017\)](#) finding that both Sudanese EFL teachers and learners prefer to learn, teach and identify with native-like English, demonstrating a lack of familiarity with EIL/ELF. They also support [Almaqarn and Alshabeb's \(2017\)](#) conclusion that Saudi English students have a positive attitude toward native-like pronunciation. They also support [Chien's \(2018\)](#) findings that the Taiwanese favor English varieties of the English Inner Circle over those of the Expanding Circle.

Finally, the results also support [Kaur's \(2014\)](#) conclusion that native accents are preferable and more appropriate than non-native accents despite recent shifts in English usage. They also support [Dragojevic and Goatley-Soan's \(2020\)](#) results that native English accents are perceived more positively by native American speakers than are non-native accents. Moreover, they are consistent with [Abu Guba et al.'s \(2021\)](#) conclusion that native English accents are perceived more favorably than non-native accents. It appears that native-like pronunciation is still considered a prestigious variety of English despite not being used for global communication.

However, the study results indicate that only around half of the participants are concerned about native pronunciation or think it is important for communication. They also show that most participants think their teachers do not have to attain native-like pronunciation because they are Arabs, and it is not easy for all of them to attain it. They reported that they might have their dialects and that it is sufficient for them to have a clear pronunciation that does not affect the meaning. Only a few participants argued that their teachers should have native-like English pronunciation because their teachers' pronunciation needs to be a good sample for them to imitate. While those participants emphasized that their teachers should do their best

to attain native-like pronunciation, they did not expect perfection, as it is not easy for everyone to sound like a native English speaker.

These views can be attributed to their real-life experiences communicating with other non-native speakers of English inside and outside their classrooms. They indicate an awareness of the participants' part of the use of ELF. Such usage is common in their communities, and they have realized it. These results align with Al-Dosari's (2011) conclusion that the EFL learners' perceptions of accent and comprehensibility were found not to affect actual comprehension. They also align with Dragojevic and Goatley-Soan's (2020) and Phuengpitipornchai and Teo's (2021) results, in which comprehensibility plays a crucial role in the attitudes toward English varieties. Furthermore, they are in line with Bukhari's (2022) indication that Saudi EFL teachers are ready to accept the concept of ELF.

Conclusion

Future Saudi female EFL teachers tend to have positive attitudes toward native-like pronunciation, are aware of its importance and are confident about attaining it. However, they do not see it as essential for global communication. Moreover, they do not think their teachers need to have it and do not believe it is necessary to use it with EFL/ESL speakers. Instead, they emphasize comprehensibility and clear communication. Thus, although future Saudi female EFL teachers have positive attitudes toward native-like pronunciation, they are aware of using it as an LF.

Implications and recommendations

This study's findings have implications for instructors, syllabus designers and researchers. The results suggest that EFL instructors, syllabus designers and researchers should focus more on international communicative competence than native-like competence. While designing course materials or teaching, teachers and syllabus developers should be fully aware of the status of ELF. Designers of syllabi should include conversations among speakers from different linguistic backgrounds. Effective communication is a priority. Students should become more familiar with global communication outside the classroom and be prepared to engage in it.

As the study has some limitations that could be addressed in future research, other researchers should address these deficiencies in future studies. One limitation is that the study only involved Saudi female future teachers. Further researchers can investigate male Saudi future EFL teachers. Another limitation is that the study focused on future teachers of English in Saudi Arabia in only one institution. Other Saudi EFL teachers and other Arab future teachers could be further investigated to reject or support the study's findings.

Additionally, a more detailed demographic background could be specified in further research for more comprehensive results. In addition, similar studies could be conducted with participants from different EFL-speaking countries. Another limitation of this study is that it covers the attitudes of EFL future teachers toward native-like pronunciation and indirectly investigates their views on ELF. More research is needed to determine how EFL learners and teachers perceive ELF. The actual use of English globally could become more enlightened with further study.

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Further reading

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Appendix

Dear learners,

This questionnaire is part of a paper conducted at King Khalid University. It aims to investigate your perceptions of native-like English pronunciation. Please respond to these questions according to your beliefs and context. There is no correct or wrong answer. Your answers will be highly confidential and only used for research purposes. Your participation in this questionnaire is optional.

I am fully aware of the aim of this survey, and I am willing to participate in it:

A. Yes

B. No.

Part 1: Demographic information

Age: _____ GPA: _____ Your name (optional): _____

Number of years studying the English language: _____

Part 2: Please note down a number from 1 to 5 that describes your feelings about the statement about native-like English pronunciation best, where: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree

| Item | Answer |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| 1. I am concerned about having native-like English pronunciation | |
| 2. I should have native-like pronunciation of English | |
| 3. I really want to sound like a native speaker | |
| 4. If I have native-like pronunciation, I will be more confident in English | |
| 5. I want to improve the way I pronounce English | |
| 6. It is important to learn native-like English pronunciation | |
| 7. To improve my pronunciation, I should imitate native English speakers | |
| 8. I think I should travel to America/Great Britain to develop my English | |
| 9. Native-like English pronunciation is important for communication | |

Table A1.

Part 3: Please answer the following questions

- (1) Do you think that your teachers should have a native-like pronunciation of English? Why?
- (2) Do you expect to speak with native-like pronunciation, after graduation, with EFL/ESL speakers? Why?

Thank you for your cooperation and time!

About the author

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