Pronunciation in English as an International Language (EIL) Contexts: Efficacy of EFL Classes, Teachers' Views, and Felicitousness of Nonnative Models

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Abstract

The present study set out to gain insights into the status of English as an international language (EIL) in Iranian EFL contexts with three primary aims including the efficacy of EFL classes apropos of pronunciation, EFL teachers' opinions about some considerations in EIL pronunciation, and appropriateness of nonnative pronunciation models for EFL learners. Data were gathered through a questionnaire and interviews with 82 EFL teachers. The findings suggested that while some of the participants' views were close to EIL principles, most of the attempts made to aid students' pronunciation in order to interact in an EIL context were futile. Moreover, it was found that in case our nonnative models are conversant with the principles of EIL, they can be effective pronunciation models to pursue. The findings contribute to the understanding of EIL principles which can be incorporated in EFL classes.

Keywords: English as an international language, English as a lingua franca, pronunciation, native/nonnative models

Introduction

Regarding the geographical pervasiveness and the number of people who use it, English is the most prevalent language in the world today. It is difficult to arrive at the precise number of English users due to the obscurity in the definition of "English users" and the paucity of statistical information across countries (Matsuda, 2012). However, based on the information obtained from the 24th edition of the *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* (Eberhard, Simons, & Fennig, 2021), this number is estimated to be around 1.35 billion, 370 million of which are the native speakers of English (NSs). English is used alongside other languages in many countries, rather than being the only means of communication. Therefore, only for a minority of people English is the first language. Moreover, almost 80% of communication takes place among English multilingual or bilinguals (Graddol, 2006), which means that the monolingual NSs of English have become "the minority" (Jenkins, 2009; McKay, 2003). In light of this situation, English, as an international language, is not culture-bound and owned by NSs (McKay, 2018).

Besides, through globalization, advances in information technology, and human mobility across the world, it can undoubtedly be claimed that today's communication is plurilingual in nature, considered as "variation in linguistic and cultural behaviour" (Xu, 2002, p. 231), and takes place among speakers with often diverse and complex lingua-cultural backgrounds (Sakaeva, Yahin, Kuznetsova, & Latipovna, 2019; Marlina & Giri, 2014). With this growth in the number of plurilingual and multilingual speakers of English and the global expansion of English, different varieties of world Englishes have emerged (Graddol, 2001). Thus, today, users of English can present their cultural identities and convey their cultural conceptualizations (Sharifian, 2011) to people all around the world. They can use varieties of English and implement different pragmatic strategies to negotiate with other speakers of English to reach mutual intelligibility (Marlina & Giri, 2014).

Although the position of English as the chief global language is rarely in doubt, the study of English as an international language (EIL) and its importance in language teaching is still in its initial phases (Kirkpatrick, 2007; Xu, 2018). A subject of controversy is the teaching of English to speakers of other languages and the ownership of language, that is, who is eligible to lay down standards for language learning and teaching. Regarding an appropriate model to pursue, until now English learners all over the world have been advised to follow native British or American English models (Wang, 2015). Nevertheless, many would concur with Kirkpatrick (2007) who believes, "As many learners of English worldwide are learning English to communicate with fellow non-native speakers, the appropriateness of native speaker models and the cultures associated with them needs to be questioned" (p. 3).

In fact, views expressed over the matter are diverse but can be divided into those in support of formulating a variety of English, particularly befitting people who learn it for use in international contexts, and to those who find no reason to retreat to the traditional native-speaker models in teaching English, and especially, pronunciation.

Models for pronunciation

Kirkpatrick (2006) propagates three models for learners of English that can be used according to the country they live in and the learners' background. The models are a native-speaker model, a nativized model, and a lingua franca model.

Native-speaker model

Over the past century, Received Pronunciation or RP has been the most pursued model of pronunciation in Europe (Przedlacka, 2005). Since it has been broadly codified and ample materials are readily accessible, it is considered to be the most prevalent model (Kirkpatrick, 2007; Przedlacka, 2005; Trudgill, 2005). The name "Received Pronunciation" originated from the accent that British

children were trained to exploit in private schools (Kirkpatrick, 2007). However, RP is locally neutral in England compared with regional dialects (Przedlacka 2005). RP is used chiefly in broadcasting in Britain. Consequently, it is sometimes mentioned as the BBC English, Queen's English or Oxford English (Mesthrie, 2009).

General American or GA is to some extent the American matching part to RP since it is regarded as the standard accent of the US and is regularly taught to EFL learners. On the other hand, for one thing RP and GA differ in that there is not a single high-status accent in the United States (Mesthrie, 2009). Although GA is seemingly very common, Preston (2008) believes that it does not, indeed, exist. Instead, it is the variety of American English that has the least number of negative stereotypes attached to it. However, American English is regarded as the most dominant variety in the world (Kirkpatrick, 2007) which has affected the popularity of RP in ELT today, including Iran.

Though RP and more prevalently GA are typically the two "standard" models presented and offered to learners of English in Iran, there is also disapproval of their supremacy in teaching (Li, 2009, p. 81). First, it cannot be verified that RP and GA are superior to other accents. Likewise we cannot prove that RP and GA are easier to learn than other varieties (Remiszewski, 2008). Second, as Kirkpatrick (2007) states, since English is a diverse language, choosing one native model for learners is giving them a wrong or bad image and as an alternative they should be made aware of its worldwide variation, especially if English is taught as an international language.

Local/nativized models

Local/nativized models of English are generally the varieties of English that are used in countries where local languages are used beside English and where English is a formal language but not essentially the only one. In other words, in these contexts, English is used as a second language in multilingual communities in education, work and the media (Crystal, 2002, p. 2). Nativized varieties like Indian English, Ghanaian English, and Singapore English have been affected by local languages and they may differ from the so called "standard" or native varieties in certain linguistic aspects, including pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and cultural patterns of discourse (Kirkpatrick 2007).

In Iran, however, English is not used officially and there is not a variety that could be labeled as Iranian English. Therefore, a local model of English is not an option for Iranian learners.

Lingua franca model

The third model is the lingua franca model. As Holliday (2009) states, the lingua franca movement supports the notion that there is no need for a comprehensive code for the aim of communication between non-native English speakers

(NNSs) in international contexts and a reduced code can be adequate for this purpose. Jenkins (2000) introduced the lingua franca core (LFC) for millions of English learners worldwide who do not intend to or are not able to learn American or British pronunciation. Her model originates from the EIL or World Englishes movement, which emphasizes that millions of NNSs who use English to communicate with each other do not need to have a near-native accent and, therefore, they should not be obliged to select a native accent.

With respect to teacher training courses, Jenkins asserts that a "native speaker bias" is reflected in these courses and unrealistic pronunciation targets are usually promoted for the learners. Jenkins (2000) reported certain localized sounds which are more essential for successful meaning communication. She collected the data over a long period of time and described her study as an "… attempt ... to scale down the phonological task for the majority of learners, by leaving to the individual learner's discretion and to later acquisition outside the classroom the learning of peripheral details, and focusing pedagogic attention on those items which are essential in terms of intelligible pronunciation" (Jenkins, 2000, p. 123). Finally, she introduced the LFC as a pedagogical core of phonological features that she found essential to successful communication in English as a lingua franca (ELF) and which learners of English who wish to communicate internationally should try to master. Her scaled-down LFC list is supposed to include more teachable and learnable pronunciation points found at her own study on intelligibility errors among NNSs. The LFC consists of the following core areas:

Table 1
The lingua franca core (Jenkins, 2000, p. 159)

1. The consonantal inventory with the following provisos:	rhotic [ɹ] rather than other varieties of /r/
	intervocalic /t/ rather than [ɾ]
	most substitutions of /θ/ and /ð/, and [ɫ] permissible
	close approximations to core consonant sounds generally permissible
	certain approximations not permissible (i.e. where there is a risk that they will be heard as a different consonant sound from that intended)
2. Phonetic requirements:	aspiration following the fortis plosives /p/,/t/, and /k/
	fortis/lenis differential effect on preceding vowel length
3. Consonant clusters:	initial clusters not simplified
	medial and final clusters simplified only according to L1 rules of elision
4. Vowel sounds:	maintenance of vowel length contrasts
	L2 regional qualities permissible if consistent, but /ɜː/ to be preserved
5. Nuclear stress:	production and placement and division of speech stream into word groups

According to Table 1, several points, that have always been crucial in the teaching and learning of pronunciation, are excluded in this model. As Jenkins (2000, p. 2) further emphasizes sometimes both teachers and learners unnecessarily aggravate their workload and they could instead focus on "what is convenient for teacher to teach" and "what is effective for learners to learn". Therefore, describing pronunciation points in detail might be redundant for most learners.

This model seems to meet the pronunciation needs of the majority of Iranian learners.

Statement of the problem

Although the position of English as the chief global language is rarely in doubt, the study of EIL and its importance in language teaching is still in its initial phases (Kirkpatrick, 2007; Xu, 2018). English teachers still hesitate over whether to consider the implications of EIL studies in their classes (Si, 2019; Xu, 2018). Moreover, few studies have been conducted in Iranian contexts to investigate the appropriateness of the English classes to meet the needs of the students who are going to utilized English in international contexts (Tajeddin & Pashmforoosh, 2020). Therefore, due to this lack of knowledge, teachers might fall at extreme ends. On the one hand, as it was explained earlier, it might not be needed to waste learners' and class time on points which are not necessary to be invested in our EFL classes. On the other hand, some teachers may go to the other extreme and ignore certain crucial points which influence intelligibility.

In addition, as discussed by Bayyurt and Sifakis (2017), despite the pervasiveness of research on EIL and ELF discourse, there is no generally accepted perspective concerning teaching EIL (Matsuda & Duran, 2012, Mozaheb & Monfared, 2020) and ELF (Park & Wee, 2011). Therefore, multiple, to the point studies are required to guide EFL teachers who aspire to take advantage of EIL/EFL principles in order to have more efficient classes.

Therefore, this study is an attempt to consider the mentioned issues and, accordingly, answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent may our available EFL classes facilitate or hinder students' pronunciation in EIL contexts?
2. How close are the teachers' views towards pronunciation to the LFC model?
3. Are our available nonnative models appropriate models to pursue?
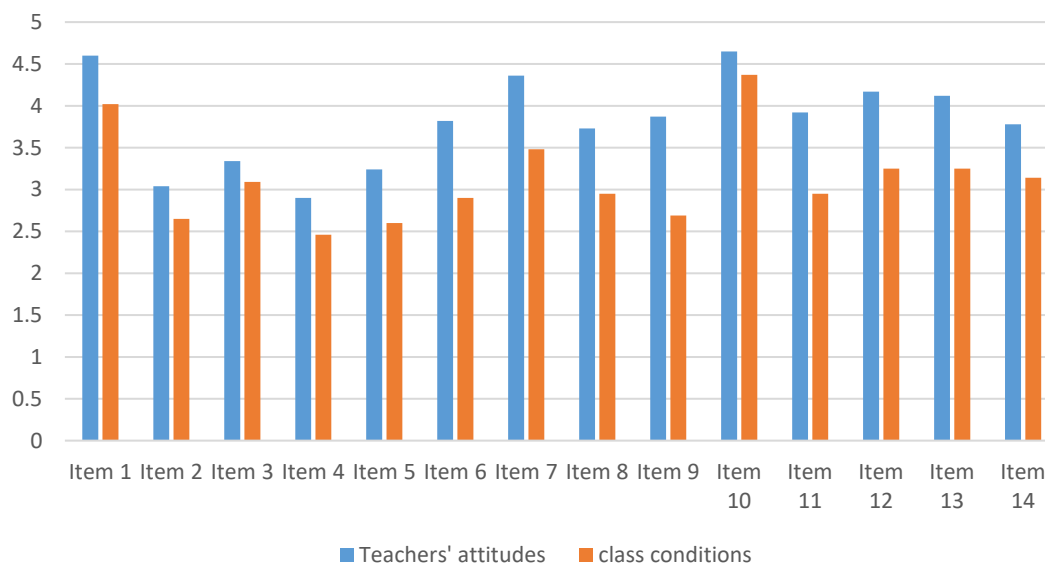
Materials and methods

A total of 82 male and female English teachers participated in this study. They were all PhD or MA holders majored in English with at least 4 years of experience and were teaching in different language schools throughout the cities of Isfahan, Shiraz, and Tehran. The participants were teachers of upper-intermediate or advanced levels and were from 27 to 41 years of age.

We utilized two instruments for the present study. First, we developed a questionnaire after some preliminary interviews with a few TEFL professors and English teachers who were familiar with the field of EIL. However, the main source of the questionnaire development was a book entitled *The Phonology of English as an International Language* by Jenkins (2009). We scrutinized the book and prepared 14 items based on the core features of the LFC, including consonant and vowel sounds (items 1-5), weak forms (items 6-7), connected speech (item 8), word stress (item 9), intonation (item 10), nuclear stress (item 11), contrastive stress (item 12), and word groups (item 13). To ensure the appropriateness and comprehensibility of the items, we piloted the questionnaire with a group of 10 teachers. Following the piloting, it turned out that some items were not fully comprehensible for the teachers. Consequently, we stated the items in more details and we added relevant examples. For each item, we asked the teachers to mention both what they believed and what actually happened in their classes. Moreover, they could state any extra points related to each item (refer to Appendix). We finally gave the questionnaire to a representative sample of the corresponding participants and we used the Cronbach's alpha test to check its reliability and internal consistency. The alpha test for the questionnaire was greater than 0.9, which shows high internal consistency with a coefficient of 0.9 or higher (George & Mallery, 2003).

In addition, we asked 14 teachers to participate in an in-depth, semi-structured, face-to-face interview. According to Dörnyei (2007), in this type of interview, even though there are some preplanned guiding questions and prompts, it follows an open-ended form and the researcher encourages the respondents to elaborate on the questions in an explanatory manner. Finally, we classified and analyzed the results obtained from the questionnaire and to get a more in-depth picture on the topic, we utilized the relevant views found through the interview. In the discussion section, we developed the qualitative and quantitative phases to gain comprehensive insights.

Results

The questionnaire contained 14 items. Each item was further divided into two parts: what teachers believed was right and what happened in practice in their classes (Appendix). The mean pattern ranging from 1 (a little) to 5 (to a great extent) for each item is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Items Mean Pattern

According to Figure 1, for all the items what teachers believed exceeded what actually happened in their classes, which had been anticipated. However, the difference between teachers' attitudes and practice for most of the items was very slight. The two highest mean patterns were related to items 10 and 1 which investigated the rising and falling intonation of yes/no and information questions and the articulation of the dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/, respectively. On the other hand, the two lowest mean patterns were found in items 4 and 2 which examined the aspiration following the fortis plosives /p/, /t/, and /k/ when they occur in initial position in a stressed syllable and production of clear [l] and dark [ɫ].

Table 2 displays the summary descriptive statistics for the first questionnaire. According to Table 2, almost all of the respondents stressed and practiced the precise articulation of the dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ (item 1). A few teachers believed in and practiced the precise production of clear [l] and dark [ɫ] (item 2). Item 3 examined the pronunciation of the voiced flap [ɾ] instead of intervocalic /t/. Almost half of the teachers emphasized the importance of this point. Aspiration following the fortis plosives /p/, /t/, and /k/ when they occur in initial position in a stressed syllable was investigated at item 4. Most of the teachers disagreed to spend time on this point. Regarding the effect of a final consonant on the length of a preceding vowel (item 5), there was great disparity between what teachers believed and what actually was practiced in class. While most teachers believed it was important, it did not occur significantly in practice. The same was observed for items 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, and 14. Item 10 examined the rising and falling intonation of yes/no and information questions. This item had the highest mean score both for what teachers believed and what actually was practiced in class.

Table 2
Frequency percentile of responses to questionnaire

		Not at all	A little	To some extent	To a moderate extent	To a great extent
1. Precise articulation of the dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/, as in "thick" and "they".	What teachers believe	3/66	0/00	4/88	14/63	76/83
	What is practiced in class	9/76	3/66	4/88	37/80	43/90
2. Precise production of clear [l] and dark [ɫ], as in "lick" and "kill".	What teachers believe	28/05	9/76	19/51	14/63	28/05
	What is practiced in class	37/80	14/63	14/63	9/76	23/17
3. Pronunciation of the voiced flap [ɾ] instead of intervocalic /t/, as in matter.	What teachers believe	23/17	4/88	19/51	19/51	32/93
	What is practiced in class	23/17	14/63	19/51	14/63	28/05
4. Aspiration following the fortis plosives /p/, /t/, and /k/ when they occur in initial position in a stressed syllable, as in "possible".	What teachers believe	37/80	4/88	4/88	34/15	18/29
	What is practiced in class	42/68	14/63	9/76	19/51	13/41
5. The effect of a final consonant on the length of a preceding vowel, as in "seat" and "seed".	What teachers believe	13/41	14/63	29/27	19/51	23/17
	What is practiced in class	18/29	29/27	34/15	9/76	8/54
6. Weakening of the small structural items, such as the prepositions "to" and "from", the auxiliary verb "have", the dummy operator "do", the pronouns "her", "your", and so on, to focus on the more important content words.	What teachers believe	8/54	0/00	19/51	43/90	28/05
	What is practiced in class	18/29	24/39	19/51	24/39	13/41
7. Teaching learners to produce schwa /ə/.	What teachers believe	8/54	0/00	9/76	9/76	71/95
	What is practiced in class	18/29	4/88	19/51	24/39	32/93

8. Focusing on assimilatory processes (features of connected speech), such as elision (the omission of sounds), catenation (the linking of sounds across words), assimilation (the replacing of sounds to make them closer to neighboring sounds), linking of /r/, and intrusion of /j/ and /w/.	What teachers believe	3/66	0/00	39/02	34/15	23/17
	What is practiced in class	13/41	14/63	48/78	9/76	13/41
9. Providing some general guidelines on teaching of word stress, e.g. stress-bearing suffixes such as "–ee" and "–ese", or stress-shifting suffixes such as "–ion" and "–ic".	What teachers believe	3/66	4/88	19/51	43/90	28/05
	What is practiced in class	24/39	23/17	14/63	34/15	3/66
10. Rising and falling intonation of yes/no and information (wh-) questions.	What teachers believe	3/66	0/00	4/88	9/76	81/71
	What is practiced in class	3/66	0/00	14/63	18/29	63/41
11. Nuclear stress, which highlights the most salient part of the message (indicating where the listener should pay particular attention).	What teachers believe	3/66	4/88	24/39	29/27	37/80
	What is practiced in class	14/63	28/05	24/39	13/41	19/51
12. Contrastive stress, which is the stress imposed on a word or syllable contrary to its normal accentuation in order to contrast it with an alternative word or syllable or to focus attention on it.	What teachers believe	3/66	0/00	24/39	19/51	52/44
	What is practiced in class	18/29	19/51	9/76	23/17	29/27
13. Word groups or the way in which English speakers divide their utterances into smaller meaningful units or chunks.	What teachers believe	3/66	4/88	9/76	39/02	42/68
	What is practiced in class	8/54	24/39	19/51	28/05	19/51
14. The ultimate goal is to sound as "native-like" as possible.	What teachers believe	8/54	4/88	29/27	14/63	42/68
	What is practiced in class	13/41	14/63	34/15	19/51	18/29

Discussion

Based on the results, most of the teachers emphasized the importance of practising and, therefore, spending time on the precise articulation of the dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/. Most of the teachers in the interview stated that they spend a lot of time on this point since these sounds are absent in Persian and most of the students have problems in articulating them. However, most of them asserted that when students use these words in less controlled communication, that is, when they do not pay much attention to the form, they usually do not articulate them correctly. This is in agreement with what Jenkins (2009, p. 138) claims at the LFC model that "despite much classroom time expended on the RP/GA forms, few learners ultimately acquire them." She also reminds since these sounds do not necessarily affect the intelligibility in EIL, learners should not spend much time on learning them. Likewise, as Dauer (2005) contended, students need to produce and distinguish all consonants but not /θ/ and /ð/. She believes in an ELF context, students can easily substitute these sounds with /t/ and /d/ without any loss in intelligibility. However, our study indicated that our teachers are spending too much time on this point and they had better know that efforts to achieve the precise production of these sounds would be futile.

The results from the questionnaire and interview indicated that few teachers stressed the precise production of clear [l] and dark [ɫ]. Since for most English learners the production of dark [ɫ] is problematic, they usually replace it with either clear /l/ or /ʊ/. This is not problematic for intelligibility in EIL and, thus, acceptable. It seems that our teachers are doing well in this case and do not waste their class time on the precise articulation of dark [ɫ]. However, the results from the interview demonstrated that teachers, truly, did not emphasize this sound since most of them did not clearly know what the distinction between these two sounds was. Whatever the reason was, our classes conformed to the LFC.

Nearly half of the teachers supported the pronunciation of the voiced flap [ɾ] instead of intervocalic /t/. Since the questionnaire findings did not give us a clear picture, we resorted to the results obtained from the interview. Clearly for teachers who lean towards GA variant, the voiced flap [ɾ] is preferred. However, teachers who are into RP variant would rather elect the intervocalic /t/. LFC chooses the RP variant of /t/ since there is the potential to lead to confusion for speakers who try to use the GA variant of [ɾ] because this flap is phonetically closer to /d/ than to /t/ which can lead to confusion in words such as "matter" to be heard "madder" (Jenkins, 2009, p. 140). In our study, teachers who did not have the RP or GA variants in mind mentioned different reasons in order to justify their choice. Some pointed out since it simply sounds more native like, they choose the flap [ɾ]. Others mentioned as the production of [ɾ] often sounds silly, they prefer the intervocalic /t/. Finally, the third group mentioned because both forms are true, they do not emphasize on this point, which seems more sensible.

While the aspiration following the fortis plosives /p/, /t/, and /k/ when they

occur in initial position in a stressed syllable has rarely included in pronunciation courses, it has been emphasized in the LFC. It is focused since in the absence of this puff of air, there might be confusion in identifying these sounds as voiceless. Therefore, unaspirated /p/ might be mistakenly perceived as /b/, /t/ as /d/, and /k/ as /g/. In our study, most of the teachers did not believe in spending time on this point. However, in spite of the LFC emphasis, this issue of inattention in the Iranian context should not be criticized because Iranians normally articulate these sounds with aspiration. They even put extra stress on these sounds and some teachers in the interview pointed out that students can be instructed to articulate these sounds with less puff of the air. Nevertheless, this excessive aspiration does not seem to affect intelligibility and, therefore, does not need to be regulated.

While most teachers declared the importance of weakening the small structural items, including the prepositions "to" and "from", the auxiliary verb "have", the dummy operator "do", the pronouns "her", "your", and so on, to focus on the more important content words, what happened in practice was totally different. It seems these features are not effortlessly teachable and learnable. As Jenkins (2009, pp. 132-133) asserts, "… the teachability - learnability distinction becomes far more salient in decisions about what to include in the LFC." Jenkins (2009) contends that it is not essential to weaken unimportant words in order to focus on content words. For instance, British, Scottish, and South African English actors typically do not weaken such words and this does not lead to intelligibility problems. Moreover, as our teachers pointed out, despite the time spent on teaching weak forms, learning hardly occurred. This is in agreement with what Jenkins (2009) maintains.

Almost all teachers believed teaching learners to produce schwa /ə/ is essential. However, most teachers declared students, and understandably teachers, are not able to pronounce this sound correctly. In the interview, teachers stated different reasons why schwa is important to them, including: first, the absence of this sound in students' first language, Persian, second, learners' frequent problem and questions around this sound, third, the importance of this sound in producing weak forms, and finally, to sound more native-like. However, in spite of this great emphasis on producing this sound, very few learners can pronounce it correctly and usually they use the sound /e/ instead of /ə/. Therefore, as Jenkins (2009) asserts, instead of teaching learners this seemingly futile exercise, we had better encourage students to shorten the involved vowel while preserving its quality.

Concerning the assimilatory processes and features of connected speech, such as elision, catenation, assimilation, linking of /r/, and intrusion of /j/ and /w/, the results from the questionnaire and the interview indicated that while teachers believed they were important in EFL classes, learners rarely use them in natural speech. Interestingly, learners are doing well here. These assimilatory processes facilitate speakers' articulation. Albeit, the hearer's perceptibility, which is assisted by dissimilatory processes, are considered more important. Therefore, assimilatory processes are put away to aid intelligibility.

Consequently, the features of connected speech are not included in the LFC.

As the LFC suggests, the full-scale teaching of word stress is not possible, and even if it were, it is not critical for intelligibility. However, due to its importance for nuclear stress and identification of sounds, the LFC recommends providing some general guidelines, such as some stress-bearing suffixes such as "–ee" and "–ese", or stress-shifting suffixes such as "–ion" and "–ic". Most of the teachers agreed with providing these guidelines since they are learnable, teachable, and not time consuming. Moreover, these points can help learners to generalize the guidelines which can lead to students' autonomy. However, in practice, teachers rarely present these points, mainly due to lack of teachers' knowledge around these guidelines.

Almost all teachers agreed that rising and falling intonation of yes/no questions should be instructed and practiced in class. In the interview, some teachers related the importance of this point to the matter of intelligibility. Some teachers believed intonation practice is not useful unless the learner gradually approaches an almost complete mastery of the target language. Others confessed although they focused on this point explicitly during the presentation of pronunciation part, they themselves did not follow it in practice and mainly approximated the intonation patterns to their mother tongue. In this respect, particularly in relation to yes/no questions, Levis (1999) states that:

> Because there is little clear meaning difference that can be attributed to intonation on yes/no questions for even native varieties, intonation on these questions is likely to play little or no role in intelligibility between inner, outer and expanding circle varieties of English and should thus be de-emphasized in pedagogy. (pp, 378-9)

Given that this intonation feature rarely leads to communication problems, great emphasis should not be placed on this point in pedagogy.

Most teachers highlighted the importance of nuclear stress, which marks the most salient part of the message (representing where particular attention should be paid), and contrastive stress, which is the stress put on a word or syllable despite its typical accentuation to focus attention on an alternative word or syllable or to contrast it with another. On the other hand, they reported it did not occur in practice as it deserved. In EIL, however, nuclear and contrastive stress are greatly highlighted because they are the most central clue to the speaker's intended message. As Jenkins (2009) argues, while most intelligibility problems are segmental, a considerable minority, the misplaced nuclear and contrastive stress, are intonational errors. She continues that learners typically acquire these features receptively and do not learn them to use them productively. This point was supported by our study where some teachers believed that learners gradually acquire these traits and do not need overt instruction. However, as Jenkins (2009) justifies, learners usually have problems in *producing* these intonational patterns and, therefore, nuclear and contrastive stress production needs overt classroom teaching of rules in order to avoid miscommunication. A problem in practicing this point is the way it is presented and worked in class.

Mainly, our teachers pointed out that they solely reminded students to stress the most important word. However, according to Jenkins (2009), this is not sufficient and learners need to be aided in working out how to recognize this word. Here, a contrastive approach between L1 and L2 similarities and differences in placing and signaling the nuclear stress is of great help. At this point the advantage of nonnative teachers is highlighted.

Regarding word groups or the way in which utterances are divided into meaningful units or chunks, while the teachers mostly considered this point significant, they did not substantially practice it in their classes. This feature also affects intelligibility and, therefore, needs to be practiced more in our EFL classes.

Finally, our last item investigated the teachers' attitudes towards sounding as native-like as possible. Generally our teachers favored this nativelikeness. However, the results obtained from the interview gave us a clearer picture. For most teachers this goal was rather axiomatic and they mainly sought the ways, like maximum exposure to L2, to achieve it. A few fell on the other side of the extreme and generally rejected most of the pronunciation points investigated in the questionnaire and the interview. Others stressed the intelligibility and believed the only thing that matters is the ability to communicate. However, they could not explain in detail what leads to this intelligibility and true communication.

Conclusion

In short, the results of our study indicated that most of the attempts made to aid students' pronunciation in order to interact in an EIL context are fruitless. This status is mainly related to wrong ideologies imposed on EFL contexts and individuals' (particularly teachers') unawareness of what is worth spending time on and what is not. However, one reason, which is a poor justification, may explain this futile effort: that speakers of standard L1 varieties still stigmatize these nonnative segmental and suprasegmental features. In this contest, we move back to the notion of the NSs as owners of English which is persistently challenged in EIL (Nguyen, 2017). Kachru's (1985) proposal of word Englishes which can be understood as an endeavor to identify varieties of English outside inner circle countries as the materialization of the pluricentrality of English instead of nonstandard or interlanguage forms now need to be taken on board.

The main issue raised in EIL is that most of English users are not NSs which, in turn, provide a reconceptualization of what English is and the relinquishment of the idea that native-speakerism should be considered as the norm for English teaching and learning (Holliday, 2005). Widdowson (1994, p. 385) is forward thinking as he maintains that EIL "means that no nation can have custody over it…It is not a possession which they (inner circle nations) lease out to others, while still retaining the freehold. Other people actually own it." In other words, the native speaker is no longer the absolute model for language use and learning. Consequently, in EIL, following native norms is not

at the focal point as interactions in English are no longer constricted to communication with NSs and the ownership which is not ascribed merely to NSs. Instead, it is essential to develop skills that permits learners to communicate in international contexts of the language.

 With the increasing general acceptance and approval of EIL in learning a foreign or second language, there is no doubt that our nonnative models *can* be appropriate models to pursue, provided that they are well informed about EIL considerations (research question 3). However, as the findings of this study indicated, our EFL teachers were not conversant with the principles of EIL. As Bayyurt and Sifakis (2017) argue, this is mainly due to the fact that unlike ESL/EFL, EIL/ EFL is not still identified as a teaching and learning construct. Yet, changing teachers' perspectives is a marathon process requiring their active engagement with the principles of EIL (Dewey, 2012; Rajagopalan, 1999; Sifakis, 2009).

 Finally, as Dauer (2005) points out, it is okay to have a "foreign accent". English teachers, test makers, and the public are advised to see NNSs' pronunciation as regional variation and be more tolerant of it. Hence, instead of trying to change the L1-influenced speech patterns, teachers can accept these variations and focus more on intelligible speech (Suntornsawet, 2019).

 While this paper has revealed that our current status is not an appropriate one based on EIL considerations, it is hoped that the study reported in it, together with the future similar ones, would add to our teachers' understanding of the problem in order to make their classes more efficient and socioculturally inclusive.

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Note on Contributor

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Appendix

Dear colleague,

The following questionnaire is part of a research project that investigates the views of English teachers and the pronunciation status of Iranian English classes. Please consider the following questions while completing the questionnaire:

1. To what extent do you think the following pronunciation points need to be emphasized in our EFL classes?
2. To what extent do you actually practice the following pronunciation points in your EFL classes?

1: Not at all   2: A little   3: To some extent   4: To a moderate extent
5: To a great extent

		1	2	3	4	5
1. Precise articulation of the dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/, as in 'thick' and 'they'.	What I believe					
	What is practiced in class					
Notes (if any):						
2. Precise production of clear [l] and dark [ɫ], as in 'lick' and 'kill'.	What I believe					
	What is practiced in class					
Notes (if any):						
3. Pronunciation of the voiced flap [ɾ] instead of intervocalic /t/, as in matter.	What I believe					
	What is practiced in class					
Notes (if any):						
4. Aspiration following the fortis plosives /p/, /t/, and /k/ when they occur in initial position in a stressed syllable, as in 'possible'.	What I believe					
	What is practiced in class					
Notes (if any):						
5. The effect of a final consonant on the length of a preceding vowel, as in 'seat' and 'seed'.	What I believe					
	What is practiced in class					
Notes (if any):						
6. Weakening of the small structural items, such as the prepositions 'to' and 'from', the auxiliary verb 'have', the	What I believe					
	What is practiced in class					

dummy operator 'do', the pronouns 'her', 'your', and so on, to focus on the more important content words.						
Notes (if any):						
7. Teaching learners to produce schwa /ə/.	What I believe					
	What is practiced in class					
Notes (if any):						
8. Focusing on assimilatory processes (features of connected speech), such as elision (the omission of sounds), catenation (the linking of sounds across words), assimilation (the replacing of sounds to make them closer to neighboring sounds), linking of /r/, and intrusion of /j/ and /w/.	What I believe					
	What is practiced in class					
Notes (if any):						
9. Providing some general guidelines on teaching of word stress, e.g. stress-bearing suffixes such as '–ee' and '–ese', or stress-shifting suffixes such as '–ion' and '–ic'.	What I believe					
	What is practiced in class					
Notes (if any):						
10. Rising and falling intonation of yes/no and information (wh-) questions.	What I believe					
	What is practiced in class					
Notes (if any):						
11. Nuclear stress, which highlights the most salient part of the message (indicating where the listener should pay particular attention).	What I believe					
	What is practiced in class					
Notes (if any):						
12. Contrastive stress, which is the stress imposed on a word or syllable contrary to its normal accentuation in order to contrast it with an alternative word or syllable or to focus attention on it.	What I believe					
	What is practiced in class					

Notes (if any):						
13. Word groups or the way in which English speakers divide their utterances into smaller meaningful units or chunks.	What I believe					
	What is practiced in class					
Notes (if any):						
14. The ultimate goal is to sound as 'native-like' as possible.	What I believe					
	What is practiced in class					
Notes (if any):						