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Perceptions of ESP instructors regarding implementation of English as a lingua franca in the classrooms of Saudi universities

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تصورات أساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية لأغراض محددة حيال استخدام اللغة الإنجليزية المشتركة في الفصول الدراسية في الجامعات السعودية

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الملخص

أدى اتساع العلاقات الدولية في المملكة العربية السعودية إلى إعادة التفكير في الطريقة التي يتم بها تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية. تهدف هذه الدراسة التعرف إلى تصورات أساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية فيما يتعلق بدمج تدريس مهارات استخدام اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة مشتركة مع تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية لأغراض محددة في الفصول الدراسية في الجامعات السعودية من أجل تعزيز التواصل العالمي. تم توزيع استبانة مكونة من 14 سؤالاً على 50 من أساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية العاملين في 14 جامعة سعودية، وتم إجراء مقابلات مع ستة من هؤلاء المشاركين. توصلت الدراسة إلى أن العديد من الأساتذة كانوا مدركين لأهمية تدريس مهارات استخدام اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة مشتركة، إلا أن عدم رغبة الطلاب في تعلمها ونقص فرص التدريب المهني والصورة النمذجية لمتحدثي اللغة الإنجليزية الأصليين مثلت عقبات أمام تدريس هذه المهارات. ترى الدراسة أن على صانعي سياسات تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية في دول الشرق الأوسط والتي تسعى إلى نماء علاقاتها الدولية إعادة النظر في إمكانية تدريس مهارات اللغة الإنجليزية المشتركة وهو موضوع لم يحظ باهتمام حتى الآن.

الكلمات المفتاحية

التعليم العالي، اللغة المشتركة، المملكة العربية السعودية، تدريس الإنجليزية، تصورات، مهارات التواصل.

Perceptions of ESP instructors regarding implementation of English as a lingua franca in the classrooms of Saudi universities

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Abstract

The expansion of international relationships in Saudi Arabia has led to a recognition of the need to rethink the way that English is taught. This study aims at identifying the perceptions of English language instructors regarding the integration of the teaching of English as a lingua franca (ELF) with English for specific purposes (ESP) classrooms at Saudi universities in order to strengthen global connectivity. A 14-item questionnaire was administered to 50 ESP instructors working at 14 Saudi universities, and of these respondents, six were interviewed. It was found that many of the instructors were aware of the value of teaching ELF; however, students' lack of willingness to learn it, lack of professional training opportunities and the image of native-speakerism as the ideal are obstacles to teaching ELF skills. This study encourages English language policymakers in Middle Eastern countries that are expanding their international relationships to consider teaching ELF, an under-recognised approach.

Key words

Communication Skills, Higher Education, Lingua Franca, Perceptions, Saudi Arabia, Teaching English.

1. Introduction

As part of its increased use as a global language, English is now increasingly used to communicate between non-native speakers (hereafter NNSs). English as used by NNSs is referred to as English as a lingua franca (ELF) (Firth, 1996; Jenkins, 2006). The investigation of ELF has refuted the previously dominant view, here called native-speakerism that NNSs are simply deficient users of English. Native-speakerism in language teaching considers learners to be in need of a live native speaker (NS) model to follow (Rajagopalan, 2004). However, positioning NS as the model for language learners has led to discrimination against NNSs. This perspective has gained ground since the emergence of voices claiming that approaches to English language teaching (ELT) that conform to NS norms may not adequately prepare English learners to use ELF skills for international communication (e.g. Luo, 2017; Matsuda, 2003; Sharifian, 2009; Sifakis, 2009; Sifakis, 2019). Learners need to feel that it is acceptable to communicate with others in their NNS English and that they can communicate effectively without being an NS (Matsuda 2003).

ELF is underpinned by a theory of communicative competence that emphasises the social and contextual knowledge of utterances (Hymes, 1972). Hymes's (1972) notion of communicative competence contrasts with Chomsky's (1965) idea of linguistic competence, which focuses on the linguistic knowledge of monolingual speakers. Communicative competence is expanded to include four types of competencies identified by Canale and Swain (1980) and Canale (1983):

Chomsky's linguistic competence, referring to an abstract and innate system of rules;

sociolinguistic competence, referring to the use of language to convey messages in relation to contexts;

strategic competence, referring to verbal and non-verbal strategies;

discourse competence, referring to coherence and cohesion.

Outside of the classroom, verbal communication is not always monolingual, and ELF users may practice translanguaging (i.e. switching between languages) (García &

Wei, 2014). ELF users may rely on diverse linguistic resources to enable smooth interactions (Cogo, 2020). ELF users may switch to other languages to express themselves (overt translanguaging), or they may create new meanings from their background in English, such as transforming idioms (covert translanguaging) (Cogo, 2020). Because of the diversity of linguistic and non-linguistic resources available in multilingual contexts, Hall (2018) called for the term interactional competence to be replaced with interactional repertoires. This suggests the importance of providing adequate space for practicing ELF and multilingualism in ELT classrooms.

These advantages of being an ELF user emphasise the need to integrate ELF practices in English for specific purposes (ESP) classrooms. ESP prepares learners for their future careers, which are shaped by contemporary trends in globalisation and by technical developments. ELF practices are manifest in the workplace (e.g. Nurmi & Koroma, 2020; Räisänen, 2020). Integrating ELF in ESP classrooms will create meaningful learning opportunities that resemble real-life communication. Thus, ELF and ESP share some goals. The question of integrating ELF in teaching ESP has been raised by House (2003). ESP is generally taught according to NS norms (Csizér & Kontra, 2012; Pérez Gómez, 2020). Because of the scarcity of international research directly linking the fields of ELF and ESP, no straightforward and clear relationship can be drawn between ELF and ESP. Integrating ESP and ELF may lead to learners' success in their professions (Csizér and Kontra, 2012). In Saudi Arabia, the question of teaching ELF skills is rarely raised, all the more so for ESP classrooms (see Al-Ahdal & Al-Awaidh, 2018; Elyas et al., 2020). This study investigates whether ELF has a place in ESP classrooms in Saudi Arabia by obtaining the views of ESP instructors to identify the merits and challenges of ELF implementation and thus to clarify the relationship between ELF and ESP.

Language instructors have become aware of the need to increase learners' awareness of ELF practices (Calafato, 2019). The value of and processes involved in having instructors implement ELF have been examined. Sifakis (2009) proposed a C-bound perspective to teach English as an intercultural language, consisting of communication,

comprehensibility and culture. Sifakis (2019) called for ELF to be integrated with ELT and for an awareness of the importance of ELF to be promoted in the context of global connectivity. He identified the parties involved in ELF teaching: stakeholders, language teachers and students and placed a significant emphasis on designing teacher development programmes that prepare teachers to understand and implement ELF in their English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms. Sifakis (2019) identified the three phases required in the design of teaching programmes to promote awareness among ELF instructors:

1. familiarising instructors with ELF research and the complexities of ELF communication;
2. raising awareness of the challenges of teaching ELF among ELF instructors;
3. involving language instructors in creating action plans for ELF practices to facilitate the integration of ELF pedagogies in the EFL classroom.

This study extends the scope of the present discussion of teaching ELF and pinpoints its importance of ELF, particularly in ESP classrooms. It identifies certain merits and challenges relating to teaching ELF, in line with the perceptions of ESP instructors and more particularly in the context of Saudi higher education (HE) as it becomes internationalised and in the light of the ongoing socio-economic changes in the country. The study addresses the following question:

How do ESP instructors working at Saudi universities perceive integrating the teaching of ELF into ESP classrooms?

This main question is divided into the following sub-questions

1. What are the benefits of teaching ELF in ESP classrooms, as perceived by ESP instructors?
2. What are the possible limitations of teaching ELF in ESP classrooms, as perceived by ESP instructors?
3. How, if at all, do socio-demographic factors such as years of experience, area of specialisation, or gender related to perceptions of integrating the

teaching of ELF in ESP classrooms?

The third sub-question tests the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Teachers' choice of teaching the native-speaker norms is affected by their students' preferences to learn the native-speaker norms.

Hypothesis 2: The length of teaching experience affects teachers' awareness of the communicative value of ELF-related skills.

Hypothesis 3: The length of teaching experience affects the implementation of teaching ELF skills.

Hypothesis 4: Teachers' views of teaching ELF-related skills as being challenging affects their implementation of teaching ELF skills.

Hypothesis 5: The length of teaching experience affects teachers' views of teaching ELF-related skills as being challenging.

Hypothesis 6: The difficulty of teaching ELF-related skills affects teachers' views of the usefulness of teaching ELF-related skills.

The following section reviews findings in the literature on teaching ELF in different contexts.

2. Literature Review

2.1 ELF research in international contexts

The importance of teaching ELF in HE has been investigated by many researchers. Most studies have focused on teachers' perception of teaching ELF and how it can be integrated within existing teaching practices. For instance, Sifakis (2009) proposed an ELF teacher education programme in Greece developed to connect teachers with NNSs from other countries using technological means. Similarly, Suzuki (2011) investigated the perceptions of varieties of English among student teachers in Japan and concludes that the informants were reluctant to accept English varieties other than standard American or British English even though they reported understanding the impor-

tance of English diversity. To emphasise the importance of English varieties, Suzuki suggested that teacher educators include the concept of English diversity in school curricula. At a broader level, Oanh (2012) investigated the attitudes of educators, administrators and teachers towards global and local varieties of English in Asian countries, including Singapore, Vietnam, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines. Local varieties of English have increased in prevalence.

The above studies address ELF in EFL classrooms. The benefits of incorporating the teaching of ELF in ESP classrooms have not been widely researched, as noted above. ESP classrooms can be a fertile environment for the practice of real-life communicative strategies that the students will need for the workplace (Csizér & Kontra, 2012). The majority of available studies focus on teaching business ELF (BELF) (e.g. Pérez Gómez, 2020; Sing, 2017, the special issue of the *Journal of English as a Lingua Franca* entitled 'Teaching ELF, BELF and/or Intercultural Communication?', 2015). ESP includes the needs of tourism, engineering, law and others; hence, ESP courses should provide a space for teaching common ELF communicative strategies that can work in any professional context. Identifying real-life ELF strategies requires discourse studies to build a corpus of common ELF strategies for the workplace. There are already a few corpora of natural ELF data, such as the Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE) (2013), which includes educational, professional and leisure talks. Pedagogical research to identify effective practices of integrating ELF into ESP classrooms is still needed.

Issues of ELF in the Arab world are less documented than in Asian-Pacific countries. Alhassan (2017) interviewed 13 Sudanese teachers and learners of English language regarding their views on teaching and learning ELF and deduced that the participants were generally unaware of the concept of ELF. In the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, which share many cultural and socio-economic values, the population of non-Arab expatriates is high, and English is widely used as an ELF because of the difficulty of learning Arabic (UNESCO, 2019). However, few studies have investigated the use of ELF in GCC countries. In the United Arab Emirates, ELF

is widely spoken in public and among people of all educational levels (Hopkyns et al., 2018). The next sub-section examines ELF in Saudi Arabia.

2.2 ELF in Saudi Arabia

Few studies have explored ELF in the Saudi context in particular. Mahboob and Elyas (2014) explored the varieties of English that exist in Saudi Arabia. They examined published textbooks used in secondary schools and identified several commonly used grammatical features that differ from English norms in other contexts. The authors explained that these differences were not mistakes but indications of an emerging Saudi English, which has its own local identity. Elyas et al. (2020) reviewed the small number of studies that have identified the syntactic, semantic and phonological features of Saudi English. They acknowledge that it is difficult to distinguish Arabicised English from the emerging Saudi English. They add that the recognition of Saudi English might be opposed by those who fear that this English will impact their identity. Bukhari (2019) identified certain features of Saudi English, including the use of Arabic words that do not have equivalents in English and the use of Islamic expressions. More research is needed to clearly distinguish Saudi English from other varieties of English with an Arabic flavour. Al-Ahdal and Al-Awaid (2018) considered it important to provide more space for ELF in the country, and this importance arises from the role of English in Saudi Arabia's socio-economic development.

This study was undertaken to extend the scope of the few studies available on the use of ELF in Saudi Arabia and the feasibility of teaching ELF at Saudi universities. The following sub-section explains why ELF is a necessity in the Saudi Arabian context.

2.3 Why teach ELF in Saudi Arabia at this time?

Saudi Vision 2030 has three core goals for the nation: to be ambitious, to have a thriving economy and to have a vibrant society. The country has been moving steadily towards attaining a significant global position, particularly in economic terms. SA hosted the Future Investment Initiative 2018 conference to encourage international in-

vestment and business initiatives. Saudi Arabia's move towards becoming a global tourism destination was clearly seen on 27th September 2019. It is working on building new tourist destinations and encouraging foreign investment (Oxford Business Group, 2018).

Vision 2030 has underpinned educational reform in the country. Saudi Ministry of Education (MoE) has called on Saudi universities to adopt Vision 2030's values in their academic programmes, research and community service activities. To bring this era of transformation ever closer, the MoE has drawn the attention of Saudi universities to the significant value that international collaboration can bring to all aspects of academia. In April 2018, the MoE organised its first annual conference, the International Research and Development Collaboration Conference, in Riyadh; it attracted international educationalists, researchers and policymakers. The purpose of this conference was to link 42 Saudi universities with international bodies to establish international collaboration agreements and widen the scope of knowledge and research at international levels. However, recent economic developments in SA have indicated the need for the country to expand its international outreach, and this awareness has contributed greatly to the development of education, particularly in the HE sector. Many Saudi universities have concluded agreements with top-ranked international institutions to transform their academic programmes and research centres and develop their staffs' skills. To successfully internationalise Saudi universities, graduates must be prepared for the labour market, which entails being able to communicate effectively in English with NNSs of Arabic. Promoting university students' awareness of ELF is an important move that will facilitate the global integration of young Saudis.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Participants

This study explores the perceptions of ESP instructors regarding implementing ELF in their classrooms. Table 1 presents some background information on the participants obtained from the questionnaire.

Table (1) Background information on participants

| | | No. | % |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|-----|------|
| Sex | Female | 37 | 74.0 |
| | Male | 13 | 26.0 |
| Experience | <5 years | 21 | 42.0 |
| | 5–10 years | 13 | 26.0 |
| | >10 years | 16 | 32.0 |
| Education | BA | 3 | 6.0 |
| | MA | 29 | 58.0 |
| | PhD | 18 | 36.0 |
| Specialisation | Applied linguistics | 27 | 54.0 |
| | Literature | 7 | 14.0 |
| | TESOL | 1 | 2.0 |
| | Theoretical linguistics | 7 | 14.0 |
| | Translation | 8 | 16.0 |
| Nationality | Egyptian | 2 | 4.0 |
| | Not Stated | 4 | 8.0 |
| | Pakistani | 2 | 4.0 |
| | Saudi | 42 | 84.0 |

3.2 Assessments and measures

The methodology of this study was inspired by Luo's (2017) work on the perceptions of Taiwanese university language instructors on teaching ELF. The value and clarity of the research methodology used in that study and the scarcity of comparable research addressing teaching ELF in HE in a Middle Eastern context have encouraged me to follow its lead.

A questionnaire and interviews, with materials adapted from Luo's (2017) study, were used to gather the perceptions of ESP instructors regarding ELF teaching. The questionnaire was first distributed online via emails to the researcher's circles of ESP colleagues. Because of the limited number of responses received (34 respondents), the researcher posted a participation call via Twitter to collect additional responses from volunteers. The target participants were ESP instructors holding MAs or PhDs in ELT who were teaching in language centres at Saudi universities. There were 50 respondents from 14 universities (43 females and seven males). The participants and their universities were kept anonymous because of ethical considerations. Interviews were conducted with six of the total group of participants (four females and two males). A reliability analysis of the questionnaire's quantitative items resulted in a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.734.

In the analysis of the interviews and comments in the questionnaire open-ended questions, salient points were identified and coded into themes (Robson, 2011). The qualitative results were merged with the questionnaire results to support the study findings.

3.3. Statistical analysis

The statistical results were analysed and presented descriptively (i.e. Mean, Standard Deviation and Frequencies). In addition, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to test the relationship between years of experience and the questionnaire items (hypotheses 2, 3 and 5). Pearson's correlation was conducted to test relationships among questionnaire items (hypotheses 1, 4 and 6) and between socio-demographic characteristics and questionnaire items. All analyses were conducted using SPSS version 25. The level of statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

4. Results

This section addresses the main research question and sub-questions:

How do ESP instructors working at Saudi universities perceive integrating the teaching of ELF into ESP classrooms?

Sub-questions:

(1) What are the benefits of teaching ELF in ESP classrooms, as perceived by ESP instructors?

What are the possible limitations of teaching ELF in ESP classrooms, as perceived by ESP instructors?

How, if at all, do socio-demographic factors such as years of experience, area of specialisation, or gender related to perceptions of integrating the teaching of ELF in ESP classrooms?

Generally speaking, many language instructors indicated awareness of the value of teaching ELF; however, their fears of obstacles have led to the dominance of NS norms in instruction. This section identifies the value of and challenges related to teaching ELF, as perceived by these instructors. Table 2 presents descriptive data of the questionnaire results. Responses were generally positive

for all items; only item 14 (You consider EFL learners as deficient users of English that is owned by its native speakers) had a mean value of less than 3.

4.1 Positive perceptions of teaching ELF

4.1.1 Importance of ELF for communicating with the world

The majority of instructors indicated that their approach to English teaching was based on NS norms (item 3; 28% strongly agree and 46% agree). A few respondents were not sure about their teaching approach (10%), 4% strongly disagreed and 12% disagreed with this statement (item 3, $M = 3.82$, $SD = 1.1$). The reason that the majority of language instructors followed the NS norms seemed to relate to how English was taught to them (see item 4), as 30% strongly agreed, and 32% agreed with this point (item 4, $M = 3.72$, $SD = 1.1$). However, this high percentage of instructors who follow NS norms did not mean a large percentage in favour of teaching ELF. In the replies to item 9, the majority of instructors expressed a positive view of ELF, as they think that ELF is in line with the country's Vision 2030 (30% strongly agreed and 50% agreed). Only 18% were not sure on this point, and 2% disagreed with it (item 9, $M = 4.08$, $SD = 0.75$). This positive view was confirmed by their replies to item 6, which demonstrated that the majority of instructors had an awareness of the value of ELF skills (30% strongly agreed and 44% agreed). They also demonstrated that they were aware of the importance of ELF skills for learners in item 7 (44% strongly agreed and 44% agreed) (item 7, $M = 4.3$, $SD = 0.73$). In an interview, one respondent said, 'There are so many expatriates in the country, so I think it is very helpful to teach our students how to communicate with non-native speakers'. All of the interviewees expressed positive views about ELF. Sahar said, 'I'm familiar with the concept of ELF from my PhD studies and yes I think it's very important to teach our students how to communicate with both native and non-native speakers. They will feel more comfortable with using the language if we do that.' This point was emphasised by some respondents to the questionnaire. One participant, for instance, wrote 'I believe it is the time to teach our students ELF skills because English users are everywhere now'. Additionally, half of the participants reported that

they incorporate ELF teaching into their classes (item 11.a, 8% strongly agreed and 48% agreed). This prompts us to ask why the other half, as evidenced by the responses to 11.a, did not speak in favour of teaching ELF-related skills in their classes or were unsure of their practices (26% disagreed and 18% were not sure; item 11, $M = 3.38$, $SD = 0.96$). This point will be discussed in the next sub-section in relation to the challenges of teaching ELF.

Table (2) Descriptive analysis of instructors' perceptions of implementing ELF teaching

| Items | Percentile of likert scale items | | | | | Mean | SD |
|---|----------------------------------|----|----|----|---|------|----------|
| | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | | |
| 1. English teaching should focus on the strengths of the communicative use of English. | 60 | 36 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 4.56 | 0.577115 |
| 2. You are aware of the notion of ELF for international communication. | 32 | 52 | 14 | 0 | 2 | 4.12 | 0.798979 |
| 3. Your approach to English teaching is based on native speaker (NS) norms, i.e. teaching a standard that conforms to NS norms. | 28 | 46 | 10 | 12 | 4 | 3.82 | 1.100835 |
| 4. The English you learned as a learner is based on NS norms, i.e. learning a standard that conforms to NS norms. | 30 | 32 | 20 | 16 | 2 | 3.72 | 1.125584 |
| 5. You think your students would like to learn Standard English that conforms to NS norms. | 22 | 46 | 26 | 6 | 0 | 3.84 | 0.8417 |
| 6. You are aware of the communicative value of ELF-related skills. (e.g. familiarising your students with non-native varieties of English, such as Indian English). | 30 | 44 | 16 | 10 | 0 | 3.94 | 0.9348 |
| 7. Learning ELF-related skills is useful. | 44 | 44 | 10 | 2 | 0 | 4.3 | 0.7354 |
| 8. Learning ELF-related skills is feasible in English language policies followed by your institution/department. | 20 | 44 | 30 | 6 | 0 | 3.78 | 0.840068 |
| 9. Learning ELF-related skills is necessary for meeting the goals of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030. | 30 | 50 | 18 | 2 | 0 | 4.08 | 0.751597 |
| 10. You think your students would like to learn ELF-related skills. | 14 | 32 | 46 | 8 | 0 | 3.52 | 0.838852 |
| 11. You are teaching your students ELF-related skills. | 8 | 48 | 18 | 26 | 0 | 3.38 | 0.966585 |
| 12 Teaching of ELF-related skills is challenging. | 14 | 52 | 26 | 8 | 0 | 3.72 | 0.809132 |
| 13. You consider yourself as an intercultural communicator of ELF. | 10 | 46 | 30 | 12 | 2 | 3.5 | 0.909137 |
| 14. You consider EFL learners as deficient users of English that is owned by its native speakers. | 4 | 22 | 38 | 30 | 6 | 2.88 | 0.961292 |

4.1.2 *Instructors' self-representation as ELF users outside the classroom*

The responses to item 13 present an alternative perspective. Many instructors classified themselves as ELF communicators (10.4% strongly agreed and 43.7% agreed). This result adds to the positive views held by instructors on ELF; only a small number described themselves as native-like speakers (2.1% strongly disagreed and 12.5% disagreed) (item 13, $M = 3.5$, $SD = 0.90$).

In an interview with Mr. Rami, an MA holder, he explained, 'I studied at a multicultural Australian university, and I can see the point of ELF communication. My communication with multicultural classmates has equipped me with the necessary skills and experience for overcoming misunderstanding' (Rami/Interview).

Another interviewee, Ms. Alya, said, 'I think we are all ELF speakers because we are not native speakers and we use English more with non-native speakers. I was raised in the United States where my Dad was studying for his PhD, and my English sounds more American, but I never encourage my students to stick to a particular kind of English. They should not obsess themselves with how to sound like a native speaker. Just speak like who you are'.

One of the questionnaire respondents commented 'I become an ELF communicator outside the classroom, but I keep my well-accented English in the class'.

4.2 *Challenges to implementing ELF within teaching practice*

4.2.1 *Learners' preference for learning NS norms*

The majority of instructors thought that their students would like to learn Standard English conforming to NS norms (22.9% strongly agreed and 47.9% agreed) (item 5, $M = 3.84$, $SD = 0.84$). In line with this view, many of the responses to item 10 indicated that instructors were not sure whether their students wished to learn ELF-related skills (14.6% strongly agreed and 31.3% agreed) (item 10, $M = 3.52$, $SD = 0.83$). This view might result in a hesitation among instructors to teach ELF-related skills in the classroom. The communicative approach has shaped language

teaching in the country (see Elyas and Badawood 2016, for full details of the objectives set out by the MoE for teaching English in SA). One of the instructors who was in favour of encouraging communication in her classroom wrote in a comment to the survey, 'I sometimes go off topic, and I discuss my way of teaching and how to make learning a better experience... I guess they're looking for more communicative learning' (Salma/Questionnaire).

In the interview with Ahmed, a PhD holder, he said, 'I think our students are too much exposed to American media and it is really hard to introduce the concept "let it pass". Students want to communicate like native speakers to feel the sense of achievement' (Ahmed/Interview).

4.2.2 *EFL speakers could be deficient*

Another worrying finding was that some teachers (39.6%) were not sure if speaking EFL could be considered a deficiency (item 14). 4.2% strongly agreed and 20.8% agreed with the view that EFL is a deficiency. Conversely, 31.3% disagreed and 4.2% strongly disagreed with this proposition (item 14, $M = 2.88$, $SD = 0.96$). This could explain why instructors' practices were mainly limited to teaching NS norms, according to their reports. Therefore, awareness of the advantages of ELF should be emphasised.

One instructor, Sana, said in her interview, 'I would love to familiarise my students with ELF but I think my students may not like the idea. I have taught them in the pre-service teacher programme and in one of the discussions on the criteria of good language instructor, they insisted on the instructor's ability to speak American or British English properly. Their attitudes make me hesitant to think of teaching ELF... I myself watch my accent in the classroom. I spent a long time in the UK for my PhD and I try to stick to the British accent in order to keep my good image of a language instructor.'

Reem, a PhD holder, said, 'I do not think it is important to teach ELF. We teach English to our students as spoken by native speakers. Why do we need to teach them ELF? I know they might use ELF outside the classroom, but I think in class we need to focus on how English is used properly instead of teaching ELF that students can learn

independently outside the classroom. I do not even think the students will be happy to learn ELF because they will say this is not English' (Reem/Interview).

4.3 Hypothesis testing

No significant correlation was found between questionnaire items 3 and 5, thereby rejecting hypothesis 1 that teachers' choice of teaching native-speaker norms is affected by their students' preferences to learn such norms. The results of a one-way ANOVA revealed that years of teaching experience did not significantly impact participants' awareness of the communicative value of ELF-related skills (item 6), teaching implementation (item 11) or their perception of teaching ELF-related skills as being challenging (item 12). Therefore, hypotheses 2, 3, and 5 must be rejected. No significant correlation was found between items 11 and 12, which indicates that hypothesis 4 must be rejected. However, a significant and moderate correlation was found between items 12 and 7, thereby indicating that hypothesis 6 can be accepted, which stated that teaching difficulty is related to teachers' views of the usefulness of teaching ELF skills.

4.4 Additional Correlations

Further analyses demonstrate correlations between several questionnaire items not covered by the hypotheses (Table 3). Although years of experience was not related to items 6, 11, or 12, there is a moderate and positive significant relationship between this variable and teachers' views of the usefulness of teaching ELF skills. Additionally, we found a moderate correlation between area of specialisation and perceptions of ELF learners as speakers of a deficient form of English (item 14; $r = .329$, $p = .02$); that variable was not correlated with any other items. Notably, item 14 was also weakly and positively correlated with learning and teaching English based on NS norms (items 3 and 4) and moderately and positively correlated with perceptions of students' interest in learning ELF.

Item 11 was moderately and positively correlated with items 6–10, indicating a relationship between ELF skills implementation and the communicative value, usefulness, feasibility, and necessity of ELF as well as students' inter-

est in learning. However, item 12 was positively correlated with item 6, thereby indicating a relationship between perceived difficulty of teaching ELF skills and views on their value. The strongest correlations were found between learning and teaching English according to NS norms ($r = .766$, $p = .000$) and between perceptions of the value and usefulness of ELF skills ($r = .62$, $p = .0000$).

5. Discussion

This study highlights the merits and challenges of adopting an ELF-based approach for teaching ESP, as perceived by ESP instructors. It indicated that many ESP instructors perceive the teaching of ELF positively and are aware of its importance for the country's development. This finding is in line with Luo's (2017) study, which finds that instructors hold positive attitudes towards ELF and practice them in the classroom. However, as indicated by this study and other similar works, teaching ELF is not straightforward because of certain obstacles associated with it that need to be tackled. First, the dominance of NS norms, which are believed to be preferred by language learners, has limited practical approaches to ELF practices. This preference, as perceived by many instructors in this study and in Luo's (2017) study, limits the opportunity to flexibly adopt ELF practices. Another limiting factor highlighted in this study and other similar studies (see Calfato, 2019) is the misconception that NNS instructors are deficient users of English when they do not follow NS norms. This misconception has been at the centre of a large debate in ELF teaching (Calfato, 2019). Third, instructors' uncertainty regarding the meaning and practices of implementation, as reported in this study, has been identified as another obstacle by Luo (2017). The section below offers suggestions for addressing challenges in teaching ELF.

Taking the advantages of ELF communication and the calls to prepare students to become ELF users (e.g. Matsuda, 2003; Sharifian, 2009; Sifakis, 2019) into consideration, language educators across the globe must rethink the implementation of ELF in their policies. In line with Luo's (2017) and Sefakis's (2019) research, this study suggests that it is important to teach using both ELF and NS norms. ELF needs to be integrated within the ESP classroom. Learners may need NS norms to achieve the highest pos-

sible level of communication in their future professions, but it is also important to teach ELF-related skills to prepare them to contribute to the development of their countries, which is only gaining in importance in the context of globalisation and as countries continue to expand their international relations (Luo, 2017; Sifakis, 2019). Therefore, language instructor training programmes should be designed to address the challenges of teaching ELF, as discussed above. Language teaching and ELF must be integrated (Sifakis, 2019). Doing so is challenging because its success relies on raising awareness among language policy authorities, language instructors and language learners. This study shows that language instructors are reluctant to implement ELF practices because they have not been provided with adequate guidance by language authorities, and learners might prefer the NS norms. Additionally, teacher-training programmes need to focus on Sifakis's (2009) C-bound notion of ELF teaching, focused around communication, comprehensibility and culture. This notion goes hand in hand with the view of NNS instructors as proficient multilingual teachers who are culturally aware and know how languages work (Calfato, 2019). Promoting the confidence of NNS teachers in their unique multilingual identities can raise awareness of the value of ELF

communication and can encourage them to integrate ELF practices in their classrooms.

The paucity of discussions and publications on ELF in the Saudi Arabian context suggests that ELF in Saudi Arabian HE might remain limited until this issue becomes a focus of serious discussion among language policy authorities and instructors. Although the sample size in this study was not sufficiently large to allow for generalisation, the lack of discussions of ELF teaching in Saudi Arabian was clearly shown. Currently existing educational policy, research reports and articles largely ignore questions of ELF in Saudi HE. The researcher has attended several local conferences on language teaching and has observed that the topic is rarely raised. Thus, awareness must be raised among language instructors on the importance of ELF, stakeholders must set out a clear policy and language learners must become competent ELF users of the language. Further studies with more participants from other Saudi universities might lead to additional findings.

Table (3) Correlations between questionnaire items and years of experience

| Items | Years | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------|-------|-------|--------|--------|-------|-------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|------|------|------|--|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | |
| 1 | -.008 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | -.041 | .294* | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3 | -.105 | -.095 | .257 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4 | .034 | -.005 | .152 | .766** | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5 | -.107 | .146 | .120 | .166 | .124 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6 | .169 | .139 | .447** | .307* | .139 | .221 | | | | | | | | | |
| 7 | .338* | .173 | .424** | .194 | .202 | .079 | .620** | | | | | | | | |
| 8 | .110 | .049 | .375** | -.022 | -.002 | .238 | .425** | .307* | | | | | | | |
| 9 | .233 | .224 | .324* | .018 | .027 | -.076 | .414** | .510** | .513** | | | | | | |
| 10 | -.011 | -.192 | .270 | .214 | .049 | .062 | .197 | .304* | .253 | .256 | | | | | |
| 11 | .242 | -.060 | .098 | -.069 | -.257 | .101 | .477** | .353* | .507** | .379** | .305* | | | | |
| 12 | .222 | .037 | .274 | .011 | .002 | -.127 | .328* | .453** | .118 | .138 | .219 | .165 | | | |
| 13 | .039 | -.156 | .169 | .092 | -.020 | -.213 | .180 | .015 | .120 | .239 | .375** | .244 | .000 | | |
| 14 | .010 | .013 | -.220 | .288* | .289* | .026 | .060 | .110 | -.059 | -.015 | .307* | .182 | .192 | .047 | |

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, ***, $p < .001$

Finally, this study forms a contribution to the teaching of ELF at the international level. It emphasises the need for drawing the attention of ESP instructors to integrate ELF into their classrooms to prepare their students for their future professions in an increasingly globalised environment (Sing, 2017). It shows the interrelatedness of the theories of communicative competence by Hymes (1972), of interactional repertoire by Hall (2018) and of translanguaging by Cogo (2020) to understand ELF interaction and how it creates real-life social opportunities in ESP classrooms.

The adaptation of Luo's (2017) questionnaire for this research indicates that the questionnaire items are not context-specific; this observation may encourage researchers to investigate this issue in their own contexts, using the same questionnaire. The similarities of the findings in this study to those found in other publications may facilitate the development of professional training courses on teaching ELF that are suitable for language instructors across the globe.

6. Conclusion

This study examines the perceptions of English instructors at Saudi universities regarding teaching ELF in ESP classrooms. The study highlights the need to incorporate ELF teaching alongside the teaching of NS norms in classrooms to enable Saudi graduates to meet the needs of the country's workforce and its global requirements. This demonstrates that some instructors are unaware of the meaning of ELF. Others, who are aware of this concept, are also aware of its importance for language users, but they prefer to teach English according to NS norms, in response to learner desire. Although this study focuses on the Saudi Arabian context, it produces findings similar to those obtained in other studies in different contexts (e.g. Csizér & Kontra, 2012; Luo, 2017; Pérez Gómez, 2020; Sing, 2017); the similarities of the findings may come to enable the design of professional development courses for language instructors regarding the integration of EFL practices into ESP classrooms. It is hoped that the results of this study will come to the attention of language policy authorities and instructors to thus promote the merits of teaching ELF in ESP classrooms, specifically in the Arab world, where ELF teaching is rarely documented.

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