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BEYOND THE NATIVENESS PRINCIPLE
Rethinking English language learning in the era of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)[1]

THOMAS CHRISTIANSEN[1], LAVDOSH MALAJ[2]
[1]UNIVERSITÀ DEL SALENTO, [2]UNIVERSITETI I VLORËS "ISMAIL QEMALI"

Abstract – Drawing from two surveys and four experiments (Lambert et al. 1960) published as Christiansen (2017, 2018a, 2018b and 2019), this presentation explores NNES ELF users' attitudes towards learning English and measures their willingness to emulate the English of different personas.[2] The results reveal nuanced interactions between perceived nativeness, celebrity status, and attractiveness, in particular a feeling of affinity with speakers, rather than a simple desire to emulate native speakers, which is still the unquestioned premise of many approaches. These studies highlight the limitations of the *nativeness principle* (see: Seidlhofer 2001, 2011; Jenkins 2007), noting the absence of a singular native English model as well as the difficulty in accurately identifying NESs. Our findings suggest that NNES ELF users may not prioritize emulating NESs and instead exhibit the propensity to emulate or mimic other ELF users who they may find attractive as models in some way. Through qualitative and quantitative analysis of survey responses from almost 500 English learners in various countries, but mostly Italy, we compare responses on reasons for learning English and attitudes towards English norms. This study will identify a shift away from NES-norm orientation towards more diverse and fluid ELF-oriented perspectives. This shift signifies a changing paradigm in English language education, recognizing the importance of diverse language variations (Widdowson 2015) and flexible models of communication in rapidly changing global contexts.

Keywords: nativeness principle; attitudes to ELF; affinity; celebrity; emulation.

1. Introduction

This article examines the evolving role of the *nativeness principle* in English language learning, particularly in the context of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). Traditionally, native English speakers (NES) have been regarded as the ideal models for language acquisition; however, this study argues for a broader approach that considers non-native English speakers (NNES) as equally effective models. Drawing on recent studies by Christiansen (2017, 2018, 2019, 2022), this paper explores key influences on language attitudes, including affinity, emulation, and the impact of celebrity (§2 and 3). It further evaluates the significance of teacher qualifications, cultural knowledge, and local language proficiency over nativeness in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teaching (§5). The findings highlight a shift in learners' preferences toward ELF-oriented models, emphasising the reduced importance of nativeness in today's globalized language landscape. In §2, as a preliminary to our discussion, we will discuss the nature of the nativeness principle in ELF (English as a Lingua Franca).

[1] The authors have contributed equally to the overall drafting of this paper. Christiansen is responsible for Sections 1-2, 5 and 6; Malaj for Sections 3 and 4.

[2] This article was originally delivered by Christiansen as a paper of the same title at the XVIII CERCLES Conference "Multilingualism and the Anglosphere", 12-14 September 2024 at the University di Durham (UK).

2. The Nativeness Principle in ELF

The concept of nativeness has historically held a central position in language studies, typically serving as a benchmark for linguistic accuracy, fluency, and cultural authenticity. A native speaker, typically defined as an individual who has spoken a language from early childhood and navigates it intuitively,[3] has traditionally represented the ideal language model for learners. This tendency has also been strong in English language learning, despite the fact that it has become a policentric language. Consequently, rival models of native English speakers (NES), and, depending on specific parts of the world, the United States, United Kingdom or Austalia to name but three, have often set the standard for language use, pronunciation, and cultural norms.

However, the rise of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) — a dynamic variation of English used globally for cross-cultural communication—has called this principle into question. In ELF contexts, English is often spoken by non-native English speakers (NNES) for practical, instrumental purposes, and adherence to native norms is no longer a priority. This shift presents an opportunity to reassess the relevance of the *nativeness principle* and explore alternatives such as a so-called *core approach* (Jenkins 1998, 2000, 2002, 2007), which is based on mutual intelligibility for most of the participants regardless of whether they are a NES or not (Christiansen 2014).

Christiansen (2022a, p. 97), using the metaphor of the airport as a place where people pass through and no-one "belongs" as opposed to a town where people reside permanently highlights that in ELF contexts, the distinction between native and non-native becomes irrelevant as the language becomes a culturally neutral communicative tool rather than an identifier of any right to reside within the given communicative space. This transformation shifts the focus away from native models and introduces a range of acceptable language varieties that are intelligible and suitable for mutual understanding.

3. Learner Attitudes towards English in ELF Contexts

Christiansen's 2017 study on learner motivations for studying English reveals a shift in attitudes from native speaker-norms to ELF-oriented goals. Based on responses from 188 students, Christiansen identified varying reasons for learning English, including career advancement, travel, cultural interest, and participation in the global community. Participants were asked to select from various responses to the question, "Why are you learning English?" (see Figure1 below). They were presented with ten options and could choose as many as they wished:

1. It is an obligatory part of my studies
2. For my career in something specifically related to English language or literature (e.g. teacher, translator)
3. For my career in something not specifically related to English (e.g. business, engineering, science)
4. I love the English language and the cultures of English-speaking countries
5. For travel and tourism in general
6. For travel and tourism specifically in English-speaking countries
7. English is the international language and I want to play a part in the global community
8. I like languages and other cultures in general

[3] See Christiansen (2022a and 2022b) for deeper discussion of how this concept is usually defined in theory and understood in practice.

9. In today's world, it is just something that you have to know
10. To live and work in an English-speaking country

These opinions could be classified as to whether they represented: NS norm-oriented views; ELF oriented views; or were neutral (i.e. neither). The results of the survey are given below (the numbers next to each bar corresponding to the statements listed above):

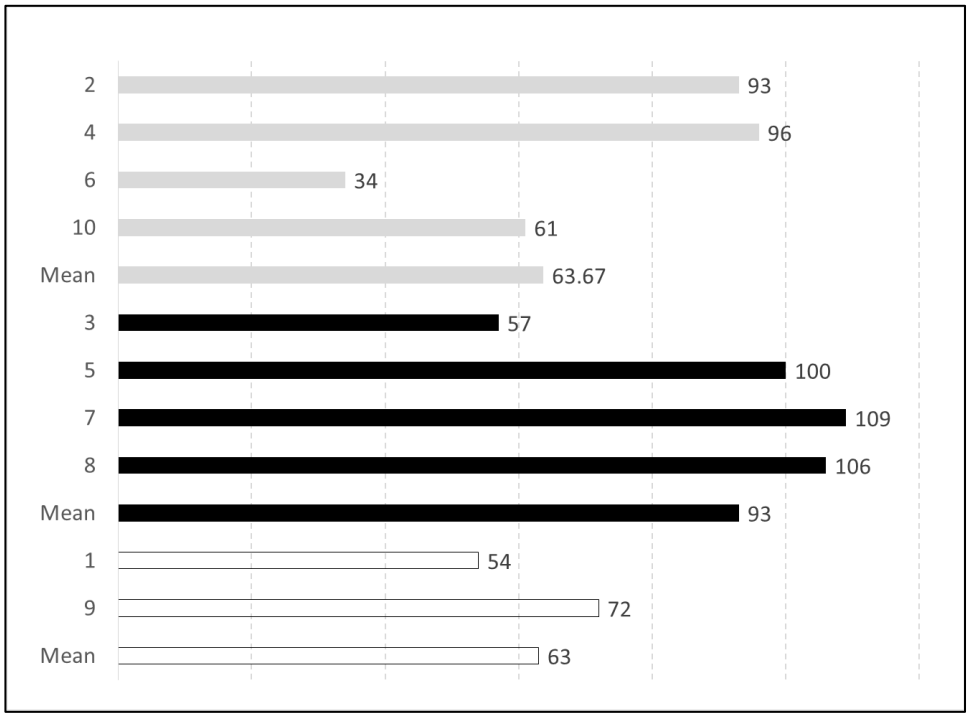

Figure1
Responses from the questionnaire grouped together according to whether they are NES-norm-oriented (light grey), ELF-oriented (black) or neutral (white) with total score from all respondents (Christiansen 2017, p. 64).

As can be seen from Figure 1, while some learners cited specific career-related motivations tied to native-speaking countries, a larger group voiced broader, global motivations that align with ELF, such as English's role as an international language and a desire to engage with the global community.

In a second survey, as part of the same paper, respondents were asked to rate on a five point Likkert scale twelve statements in relation to their own attitudes to learning English. These were:

1. "I am satisfied with the level of my grammar and vocabulary in English"
2. "I am satisfied with my pronunciation when I speak English"
3. "I try to hide my national / ethnic origins, when I speak English"
4. "English is not my native language but it is special to me. Using it feels natural."
5. "I like to experiment and be creative when I use English."
6. "When I speak English, I have an accent typical of someone from my country."
7. "To me, English is a foreign language. It is something that I borrow, not something that I can call my own."
8. "I sometimes speak English or use English words and expressions with my friends just for the fun of it."
9. "I will never sound like a native-speaker of English but I still feel confident using it"
10. "When I speak English, I feel like a different person to when I speak my own language."

11. "When speaking English, I think it is acceptable to use words and expressions from other languages if it helps communication."
12. "If I could, I would like to speak English so well that people would think that I was born in an English-speaking country."

As with the statements relating to Figure 1, these could be classified according to whether they were: NS norm-oriented views; ELF oriented views; or neutral. In Figure2, we give the results:

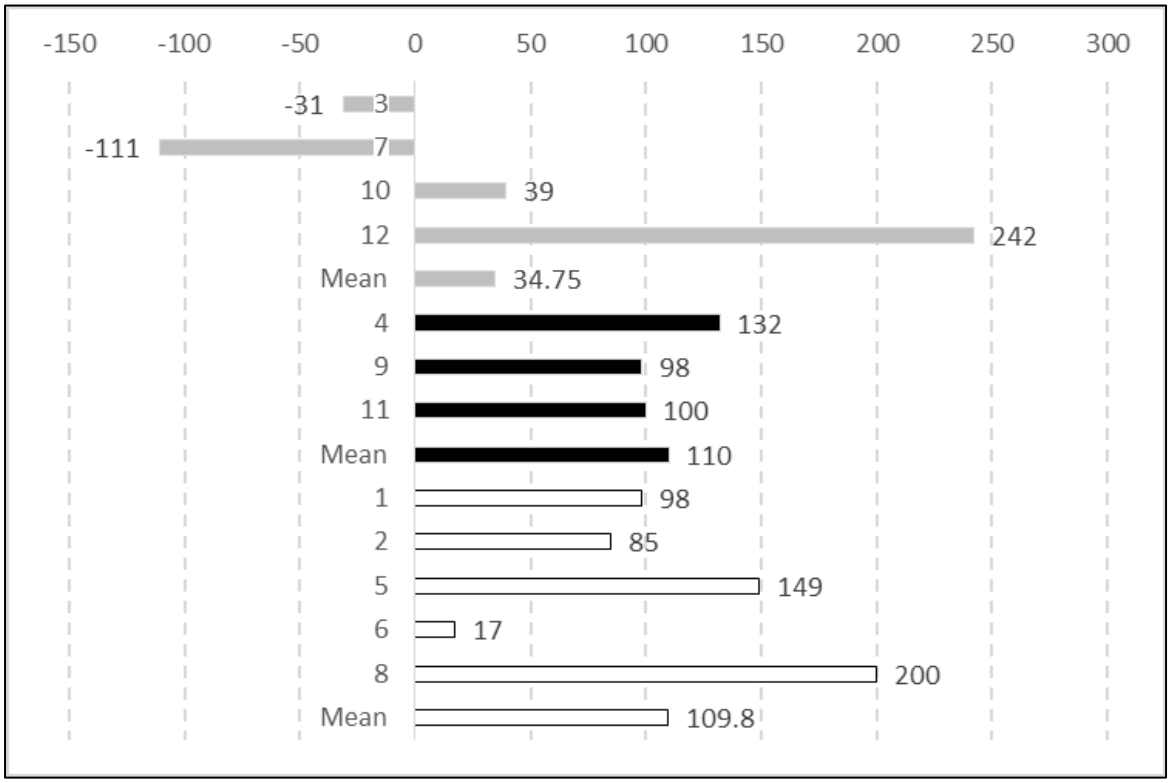

Figure 2
Responses from the questionnaire grouped together according to whether they are NES-norm-oriented (light grey), ELF-oriented (black) or neutral (white) with total score from all respondents (Christiansen 2017, p. 66).

Figure 2 highlights some obvious contradictions in the replies that respondents give to NS-norm-oriented opinions. Statement 12 gets the highest score of agreement with any of the questions on the survey, yet very few agree with opinion 3. This is clearly inconsistent*: how can a learner make people think they were born in an English-speaking country if they don't try to hide their national / ethnic origins?* The low mean score for the NS norm-oriented category (34.75), especially opinion 7, would be much lower if it were not for the anomalously high score for opinion 12. This seems to be because such a view may be a commonplace drilled into learners and something that they "parrot" without putting much thought into.

The mean for ELF-oriented opinions is markedly higher than that for NS-norm oriented, 110 (or 372.19%). The reactions to the opinions expressed are also more consistent – there all being positive. The replies to opinion 4 and opinion 7 (norm-oriented) also chime:

agreement with 4 above but disagreement with "To me, English is a foreign language. It is something that I borrow, not something that I can call my own."[4]

In conclusion, the results of the surveys reported in Christiansen (2017) suggest that learners surveyed were comfortable with their own English as long as it enabled effective communication. This trend toward ELF reflects a growing acceptance among learners that sounding like a native speaker is not a primary goal. In fact, many respondents reported feeling confident in their English abilities without aspiring to "native-like" fluency. Statements such as "English is not my native language, but it is special to me" and "I will never sound like a native-speaker of English, but I still feel confident using it" (Christiansen 2017) indicate a positive shift in learner self-perception. For ELF-oriented learners, English becomes a practical skill that fosters confidence and the chance to participate in an international / global community, rather than a marker of an Anglocentric cultural identity tied to native norms.

4. Investigating factors which determine who learners see as models in ELF contexts

The previous section has shown that, due to the ever growing status of English as a Lingua Franca, learners are not as inclined as even they themselves may believe to be NS norm-oriented in their approach to language learning. It follows from this that learners may be influenced in their linguistic behaviour not just by NESs but also by other NNESs. In a series of follow up studies, Christiansen (2018a, 2018b, 2019) tries to identify which precise characteristics of a given ELF user, NES or NNES, may make that speaker a potential model for learners.

In Christiansen (2018a), an experiment based on the matched-guise test technique is described. In a survey, respondents were asked to listen to recordings of various NNESs (mostly well-known personalities: Donald Tusk, Jackie Chan, Youssou N'dour, Queen Rania of Jordan, Shakira, and an English teacher identified only as "Kevin" – name changed). Each of these people was also presented with a short description, e.g. "Donald Tusk, the President of the European Council and former Polish PM".

By simply asking respondents to listen to and grade recordings on a Likert scale, it was possible to observe from another perspective their unguarded attitudes to both NESs and NNESs. From the survey, it emerged that respondents' attitudes to the way that people speak Englsih are strongly influenced by the background information that they are given.

Respondents generally gave higher marks to those identified as NESs, except in the case of "Jack". Linguistic competence is a factor; "Alfonz" scores higher than Tusk in any of his incarnations, but results indicate that social class is also a factor shaping attitudes to other peoples' English, and may also account for why "Jack" the unemployed NES, arguably the lowest in social status, gets lowest marks. Perhaps, respondents wrongly concluded that his version of English (in reality that of Tusk) constituted a non-standard variety of native speaker English, which is possibly frowned upon by the respondents. The reaction of those surveyed to "Jack" is very interesting as it shows that learners are not automatically favourable to the English of *any* NES. Furthermore, it indicates that, in certain

[4] Indeed, if one included responses to opinion 8 (classed as neutral) in ELF oriented "I sometimes speak English or use English words and expressions with my friends just for the fun of it", which is also in line with opinion 4, then the average for this category would have been considerably higher: 131.5 (a 142.90% increase).

circumstances social status or prestige will trump being a NES when it comes to being a potential model for ELF users.

This is a point which is explored further in Christiansen (2018b), which analysed responses from non-native English-speaking (NNES) ELF users through a Likert Scale, where they rated recordings of various speakers, all female to eliminate the parameter of gender from the study. Some of these speakers were native English speakers (NES) from the inner circle, while others were highly proficient ELF users from the outer circle (Graddol 2007). Participants were presented with recordings of the same six speakers in different, randomly assigned guises according to two factors: NES status (±NES) and celebrity status (±Celeb), the latter selected for its potential influence as models and the largely subconcious desire it might engender in respondents to emulate people whom they aspired to be like.

The participants were asked to rate how pleased they would be to speak like each persona (i.e. Adele, Beyoncé, Cheryl Cole, Shakira, Emma Watson, and Queen Rania of Jordan), authentic or false (but presented as genuine, e.g. the fictitious "Annie a fast food worker from England"; "Ana Barbu, singer song-writer from Moldavia" or "Annie a fast food worker from Moldavia" – all of whom, in fact, the singer Adele).

The aim was to determine if specific patterns emerged from the interaction of NES and celebrity status on attitudes toward various forms of English, particularly exploring whether a "celebrity effect" might rival the traditional preference for NES accents. From the results of the survey, respondents showed a positive attitude to NES, but only in its standard forms. There was for example, a marked preference for traditional British RP English (Emma Watson). By contrast, non-standard NES varieties (e.g., the Estuary English / Multicultural London English of Adele, AAVE of Beyoncé, Geordie of Cheryl Cole) rated highly only when correctly identified as NES and celebrities.

The recording of Adele in its various guises (whether correctly identified or not) presents a marked non-standard NES variety (Estuary English and some elements of Multicultural London English) and scored lower scores than the other speakers. This shows that, unless it is associated with the celebrity in question, this kind of non-standard English is not favoured by respondents for imitation. The fact that the –Celeb –NES gets more than the corresponding –Celeb, +NES was reminiscent of "Jack" / "Jerzy" in Christiansen (2018a) mentioned above.

A marked bias against NNES, in line with the nativeness principle, was also apparent. Recordings identified as NNES speakers consistently scored lower when correctly identified as NNES. For example, Queen Rania, scores lower when presented in her real identity than as a NES persona ("Princess Alexandra, Duchess of Beverley").

As regards the posited celebrity effect on scores, with NES speakers, the celebrity status increased scores. However, with NNES speakers, the correlation between celebrity and high scores was far weaker. In four out of the six recordings the +Celeb NNES scored lower than the –Celeb NNES. For example, the case of Shakira, celebrity status decreased scores, that is her non-celebrity persona, "Laura a youth worker from Colombia" was awarded higher scores. With NESs, such a thing occurred only in the case of Emma Watson, whose –Celeb NES persona ("Emily, a factory worker and union official from England") received the highest scores. The reason for this discrepancy is not immediately apparent but Christiansen (2018b) ventured that perhaps a third potential factor was at play: affinity between the respondent and the speaker. This became the focus of Christiansen's fourth study (2019).

In Christiansen's 2019 study, the concepts of affinity and emulation are explored as significant influences on learners' attitudes toward English language models. Affinity refers

to a learner's sense of connection or similarity with a particular speaker, while emulation[5] involves the desire to adopt traits or characteristics of a speaker who embodies aspirational qualities. These concepts, it is posited, play a role in how learners perceive both native and non-native English speakers as potential language models.

This experiment assessed NNES ELF users' reactions to ostensibly different speakers, with some speakers identified as NES and others as NNES ELF users from the outer circle. Two speakers—one NES and one highly proficient NNES—each recorded various short clips in a studio following a loose script. These recordings were altered using specialized voice-changing software to make them sound like different individuals, while maintaining clear pronunciation. Respondents rated, on a Likert scale, how pleased they would be to speak like each presented persona. The goal was to explore patterns in how the factors of nativeness and affinity influenced attitudes toward different varieties of English, in particular, whether an "affinity effect" might provide an alternative to the nativeness principle. In other words, the study investigates whether ELF users might look to other ELF users, whom they find attractive in some respect, as language models, rather than idealized NES. Both speakers were female and under 25 years of age, one of whom NES, the other a highly proficient NNES (certified C1).

The different personas presented were designed to test different parameters: gender (M or F), age (>25 or <25 years old), and a final category related to their occupation and the views that they expressed, something which we may here for shorthand dub "heroes" vs. "villains". In Table 1, we illustrate how this worked by giving a brief break down of the different personas, their background, and what they said (those with a white background being those expressing views that are fairly mainstream among students, those shaded expressing views which are controversial).

Speaker 1, Penelope, Financial Consultant	• Praises Donald Trump • Argues against paying taxes to help poor people • Talks about how accumulating large amounts of money is important
Speaker 2, Raimondo, Unemployed	• Shows lack of sympathy towards friends at university • Shows no desire to find a job • Talks about how his father found him a job but he keep being late for it • Says that he is content to live off his parents
Speaker 3, Emily, Human Rights Lawyer	• Talks about miscarriages of justice and the importance of fair trials • Talks about the problems of poor people who do not have money to defend themselves • Emphasises the universality of human rights
Speaker 4, Imperia, Politician	• Argues that university fees should be raised • Maintains that most students fail to take studies seriously • Proposes that universities should be privatised and accept only paying students
Speaker 5, Fabian, Actor	• Expresses enthusiasm for acting • Talks about his next film project • Talks about how he deals with criticism, especially negative reviews
Speaker 6, Richard, Student	• Talks about his studies and his ambition to record songs • Expresses determination to succeed • Talks about students' problems and the things that cause them stress

Table 1 continues …
Table 1 continued …

[5] See: Tomasello (1996); Chartrand and Bargh (1999).

Speaker 7, Jessica, Unemployed	• Talks about what she did after leaving school and how she got sacked • Says she is content to live off parents and grandparents • Shows lack of sympathy towards friends at university • Maintains that success is just a matter of luck
Speaker 8, Valentina, Actress	• Talks about what makes her a successful actress and her passion for her work • Shows a stoic attitude to the idea of an uncertain future • Talks about how she deals with criticism, especially negative reviews
Speaker 9, Aurelio, Financial Consultant	• Talks about how accumulating large amounts of money is important • Argues against paying taxes to help poor people • Praises Donald Trump
Speaker 10, Giulia Student	• Talks about being a student and the advantages of living at home • Talks about the different languages that she studies • Says why she loves going to university and meeting new people
Speaker 11, Rupert, Politician	• Says that government does too much to help young people and that young people should look after themselves • Argues that the voting age should be raised • Says that young people use social media too much and are incapable of understanding complex political issues
Speaker 12, Paolo, Human Rights Lawyer	• Talks about the universality of human rights • Talks about prejudice and the death penalty • Emphasises importance of fair trials for all people whatever their backgrounds

Table 1
Summary of background of each persona and the views they expressed with those whose opinions are more "controversial" shaded in black.

Results of Christiansen's research (2019) show that learners are more inclined to award higher marks to language features of speakers they find relatable or aspirational, regardless of the speakers' nativeness. For instance, learners might feel a sense of affinity with individuals from similar cultural or professional backgrounds, perhaps leading them to view these speakers, consciously or subconsciously, as acceptable role models. Alternatively, emulation motivates learners to imitate speakers they admire, such as figures who embody a confident, effective use of English. This duality of affinity and emulation in language acquisition underscores the evolving idea that effective English models are not limited to native speakers but include any speaker who demonstrates communicative competence and desirable social traits.

5. Implications for the role of NS in ESOL Teaching

The shift away from the nativeness principle has significant implications for English Language Teaching (ELT). The studies cited above point not only to the fact that the nativeness principle is losing its grip on conventional wisdom but also question the need for native speaker teacher. Christiansen (2022a, 2022b) discuss this issue at length. It is interesting therefore to examine learners' attitudes to understand where they stand as regards the issue of native speaker teachers.

To do this, a survey was set up, once more using a tried and tested 5-point Likert test format. A total of 280 learners at higher education institutes[6] in three countries[7] (96 in Albania, 140 in Italy, and 44 in Kosovo)[8] completed an online survey where they were asked to rate twelve different fictitious teachers by answering the simple question "How would you feel about having the people below as your English teacher" (see Figure 2):

Figure 2
Example question from survey.

In the profiles, the local language was adapted according to the group of respondents. For example, for the Albania and Kosovo groups, the profile of Leike van de Donk reads "Speaks excellent English and Albanian". Similarly, when it came to the profiles of "local teachers", those who come form the same country as the respondents, we use Albanian names and cities for Albanians, Italian names and cities for Italians, and Kosovar / Albanian names and Kosovar cities for Kosovars, e.g.

> (1) Edona Biqkaj, from Gramsh, Albania / (2) Giulia Rossetti, from Pavia, Italy / (3) Edona Biqkaj, from Gjacova, Kosovo. Native speaker of (1) Albanian / (2) Italian / (3) Albanian. Speaks excellent English. She has worked as a secretary in London for many years. She has a diploma in "Office Management".

The teachers presented are all female and of an undefined age in order to eliminate gender or age bias on the part of respondents. The parameters which we wished to focus on were: whether the teacher in question were a NES (±NES); qualified in an area *specifically* related

[6] In Italy, the respondents were students at the University of Salento. The authors thank their colleagues for distributing the survey link to their students: in Albania, Zamira Alimema, Veneranda Hajrulla, Kozeta Hyso, and Ilda Kanani ("Ismail Qemali" University of Vlorë), Merita Isaraj ("Eqrem Çabej" University of Gjirokastra); in Kosovo, Majlinda Bregasi and Lindita Rugova ("Hasan Prishtina" Univerisity of Pristina). The authors also express their gratitude to Merita Isaraj for her precious help in penning together with them an article specifically on this survey (forthcoming).

[7] It should be noted that respondents were not limited to being Albanian, Italian or Kosovar. All of the 96 respondents identified themselves as Albanian; in Italy, 98 identified themselves as Italian, 1 each as Brazilian and Romanian, and 40 were undeclared; in Kosovo, 43 identified themselves as Kosovar, and one was undeclared.

[8] The respondents in Kosovo were studying at Albanian speaking institutions, and one might be tempted to treat the Albania and Kosovo responses as a single group, totalling 140, coincidentally exactly the same as for Italy. However, as our results will confirm, there are notable differences between the responses of the two groups perhaps due to the two communities' different histories (in particular post WW2). The former was a severely totalitarian regime, which kept its citizens as prisoners isolated from the rest of the world; the other was a province of Serbia (and still is according to Serbia and some other countries), itself part of Yugoslavia. This was one of the more liberal of the communist regimes in Europe and sought ties not just with the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact countries but also with the West.

to language teaching (±Q);[9] whether they spoke the learner's language (±LL); and finally whether they were a "local", i.e. if they came from the same country as the leaner (±Lc).

Taken together, these four parameters have 16 combinations. In the interests of keeping the survey fairly short and simple to complete, we chose to present only 10 of them, those most likely to occur in real life.[10]

In Table 2, we give a summary of the Teachers and the combinations of the parameters which they manifest, using those presented to the Italy group of respondents of the survey:

+NES +Q +LL -Lc	1. Emma Clarkson. From Exeter, England. Native speaker of English. Speaks French and Russian and excellent Italian. She has worked as a language teacher in state institutions and private language schools in Europe for many years. She has a master's degree in "Teaching English as a Foreign Language".
+NES +Q -LL -Lc	2. Margaret Hill. From Durham, England. Native speaker of English. Speaks German and Russian, but does not know any Italian. She has worked as a language teacher in state institutions and private language schools around the world for many years. She has a master's degree in "Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages".
+NES -Q +LL –Lc	3. Lisa Williams. From Chester, England. Native speaker of English and can also speak excellent Italian. She has worked as a dancer for many years. She has a diploma in "Performance and Modern Dance".
+NES -Q -LL -Lc	4. Jennifer Porter. From Norwich, England. Native speaker of English. Speaks a little Spanish, but does not know any Italian. She has worked as hairdresser and beautician for many years. She has a diploma in "Hairdressing and Haircare".
-NES +Q +LL +Lc	5. Sara Di Leo. From Treviso, Italy. Native speaker of Italian. Speaks excellent English and Arabic. She has worked as a language teacher in state institutions and private language schools around the world for many years. She has a master's degree in "Teaching English Linguistics and Language Teaching".
-NES +Q +LL -Lc	6. Freja Björk. From Uppsala, Sweden. Native speaker of Swedish. Speaks excellent English and Chinese and can also speak excellent Italian. She has worked as a language teacher in state institutions and private language schools in Europe for many years. She has a master's degree in "Teaching English Language to Non-Native Speakers".
-NES +Q -LL -Lc	7. Katarzyna Makowska. From Krakow, Poland. Native speaker of Polish. Speaks excellent English and German, but does not know any Italian. She has worked as a language teacher in state institutions and private language schools in Europe for many years. She has a master's degree in "Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Theory and Practice".

Table 2 continues…

[9] All the personas were qualified in some respect, and were the kinds of people who might in our own experience occasionally find employment in ELT. Apart from wishing to present the respondents with realistic scenarios, our intention was not to offer them with too stark a choice between suitable and unsuitable teachers. The qualifications relevant to ELT that we cited were those that we felt would match respondents' background knowledge of the field (i.e. formal academic qualifications), and not any of the many professional certificates, which are perhaps more common, but lesser known outside ELT circles.

[10] The six we excluded were: +NES, +LL, +Q, +Lc (the all-round perfect option: a NES, who speaks the learner's language, is qualified, and comes from the same country as the learner); +NES, -LL, +Q, +Lc (the anomaly of a NES who is qualified, comes from the same country as the learner, but cannot speak their language); +NES, +LL, -Q, +Lc (i.e. a NES, who speaks the learner's language, comes from the same country as the learner, but is not qualified); +NES, -LL, -Q, +Lc (another implausibility: a NES, who comes from the same country as the learner, but cannot speak their language and is not qualified either); -NES, +LL, -Q, +Lc (perhaps the least ideal option: someone who speaks the learner's language, comes from the same country as the learner, but is a NNES and unqualified); and finally -NES, -LL, -Q, +Lc, (i.e. another anomaly, a local who cannot speak the learner's language and is also neither NES nor qualified).

Table 2 continued …

-NES –Q +LL +Lc	8. Giulia Rossetti. From Pavia, Italy. Native speaker of Italian. Speaks excellent English. She has worked as a secretary in London for many years. She has a diploma in "Office Management".
-NES -Q +LL –Lc	9. Lieke van de Donk. From Zwolle, Holland. Native speaker of Dutch. Speaks excellent English and Italian. She has worked as a dental assistant for many years. She has a diploma in "Dental Hygiene and Healthcare".
-NES -Q -LL -Lc	10. Birgit Ellermaa. From Viljandi, Estonia. Native speaker of Estonian. Speaks excellent English and Russian, but does not know any Italian. She has worked in hotels and on cruise ships for many years. She has a diploma in "Catering and Hospitality".

Table 2
Speaker profiles from Italian survey illustrating parameter combinations.

The platform used for the survey was JotForm.[11] On this, it is possible to randomise questions so there were no concerns about so-called question order bias (Israel, Taylor 1990). It also has the advantage that no registration is required, and the link for direct access to the survey can be shared easily by email, social media or messaging service.

As regards results, in Figure 3, we give the mean scores for each category of respondent (Albanian, Italian or Kosovar) for each teacher as listed on Table 2:

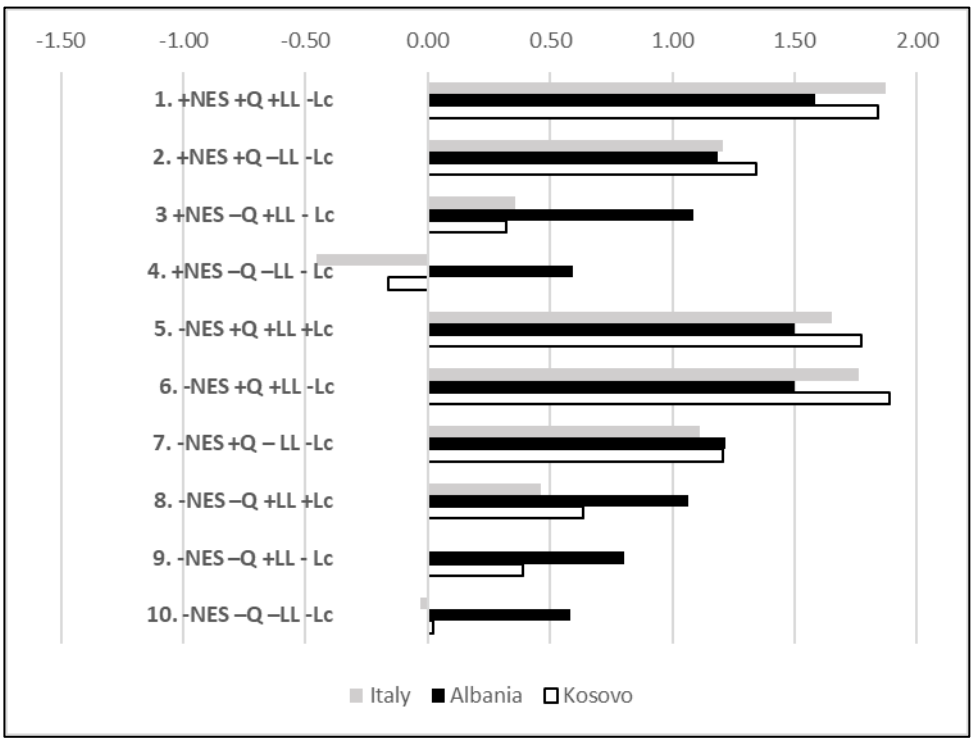

Figure 3
Mean scores for each Teacher according to category of respondent.

Overall, it can be seen that the mean scores for respondents in Albania differ markedly from those of either the Italy or Kosovo group. All of the teachers are judged more or less positively by the Albanian group, even number 4, who is rejected strongly by the Italy and Kosovo groups, and number 10, who is barely acceptable to the other two groups. Indeed, in 5 out of 10 cases (Teacher 3, 4, 8, 9 and 10), the Albanian group shows itself much easier

[11] www.jotform.com.

to please than the Italy or Kosovo groups. By contrast, except for Teacher 9, the Italy and Kosovo groups give similar scores, with the former being slightly more discerning.

The fact that Teacher 4, receives the lowest mark of all, despite being a NES is worthy of note. One may ask whether, as with the case of Jack, the unemployed man from Manchester in the survey reported in Christiansen (2018a) – see §4 – unqualified NES[12] can be the objects of disapproval, in this specific case, caused perhaps by resentment at the phenomenon of under qualified NESs finding jobs in ELT, when it is often harder for better qualified NNES teachers to do so as an illustration of the "gold plating" that Rinvolucri (2001) talks about (see below). That there is obviously some negative feeling, whatever its cause, is shown by the fact that even the unqualified NNES (10) or unqualified local (8) receives higher scores than Teacher 4.

It is also clear form Figure 3, that NES teachers (1-4) do not consistently receive the highest marks. For all groups of respondent, Teachers 5 and 6 (both NNESs) score higher than 2, 3 or 4.

The picture becomes even clearer when we look at mean scores given by each respondent group for each parameter (±NES, ±Q, ±LL, ±Lc), Figure 4:

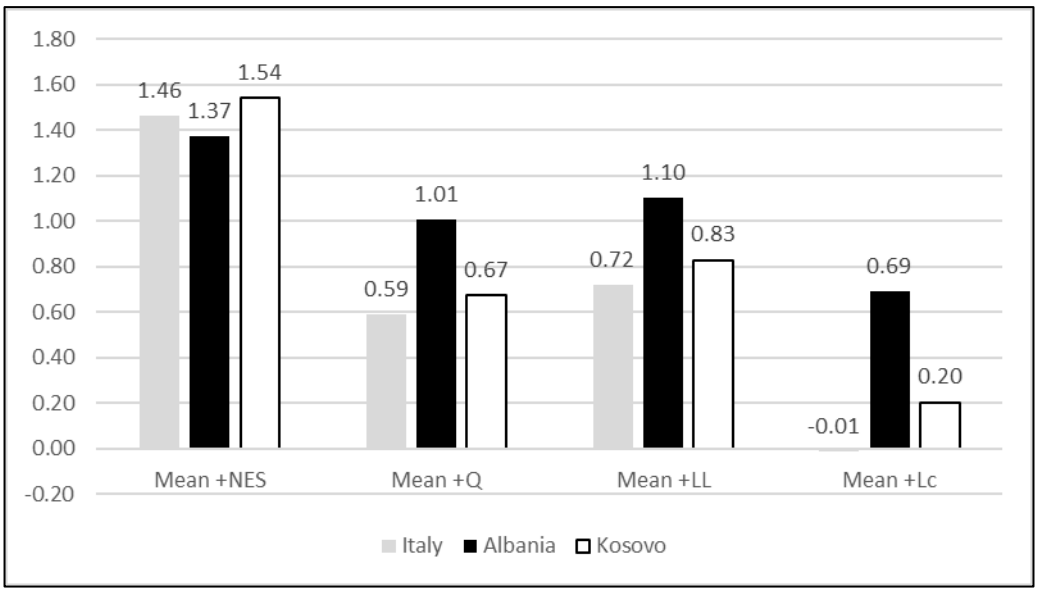

Figure 4
Mean scores for each parameter according to category of respondent.

From these figures it emerges that for all three respondent groups, being +NES receives highest approval rating followed by knowing the learners' language (+LL). The third best-received feature is being qualified, with being a "local" coming in last. Indeed, it is in this category that we see most difference between the three groups. In Albania and Kosovo, this is seen as a positive, while in Italy, it is seen as a negative.

Cultural aspects probably come into play here. The market for ESOL in Italy is much older and much better established that it is in either Albania or Kosovo. Italy is of course a much richer country than either of the latter, and generally has long been able to attract NES teachers not only because of the pay, the prestige of many of its language schools and institutions, but also because of the perceived attractiveness of the Italian *dolce vita*. By

[12] Interestingly, persona 4 is described as once a hairdresser and beautician, which, although a bona fide profession involving skill, creativity and technical knowledge, may, rightly or wrongly, not be taken as academic enough for a teacher: not according to students at least.

contrast, Albania and Kosovo are both considerably less prosperous, and have both come through periods of intense political and economic instability within the last 30 years making them less attractive to workers or visitors from abroad. Furthermore, ESOL has blossomed only relatively recently (very much so in Albania: before the fall of communism, studying foreign languages was strictly controlled and only for a select few). In neither place is there the mass of NES teachers that schools and institutions in Italy have come to rely on (even if in recent years their numbers have been decreasing).

This over reliance on NES teachers is however a trend which Rinvolucri (2001) in particular has seen as negative. As we mention above, he dismisses NES teachers as "gold plating", i.e. a kind of expensive gimmick and way by which the private sector has promoted the so-called *direct method*, which involves banishing the learner's L1 from the learning process in favour of exclusive use of the target language.[13] It was not until the noughties that in Italy such an approach could be widely offered by the free state education system, and then mostly only in the form of special publically funded projects outside normal teaching hours.[14]

Learners in Italy, as in many Western European countries, have come to expect that a language teacher be a native speaker, and, much to the disadvantage of home-grown language graduates (paradoxically, what many of the respondents to this survey hope to become) have come to see their fellow NNESs and compatriots as a poor substitute for "the real thing" so to speak.

In Albania and Kosovo by contrast, as in many parts of the world, language teachers have largely had to be locally-produced, and learners have not usually come to expect a NES as a teacher.

Figure 4, showing simple averages, though illuminating, does not tell the whole story as it only gives figures for each parameter as a single group total, and ignores the influence that any single parameter may have on scores for individual teacher as shown on Figure 3. To do this one needs to calculate the so-called correlation coefficient (coefficent *r* or *r* value). This is a statistical measure that quantifies the strength and direction of the relationship between two variables, in this case, to determine how closely two variables are connected (e.g., being a NES and being viewed favourably by respondents as their possible teacher). The calculations involved are complicated, but they can be worked out automatically by Excel using the classic Pearson formula. The final figure will be a number between 0 and ± 1.0 Zero indicates that there is no correlation (*none*), ± 1 that there is a *perfect* one. Between these two extremes, there are three grades: ± 0.30 (*weak*); ± 0.50 (*moderate*); and ± 0.70 (*strong*).

In Figure 5, we show the different coefficient *r*s for the three parameters of ±NES, ±Q, and ±LL) according to group of respondents ignoring the category of ±Lc because only 2 of the 10 teachers were +Lc.[15]

[13] Rinvolucri is not alone in his doubts about the didactic efficacy of the direct method. Many scholars, among whom, Corder (1967), Selinker (1972), or Graddol (2007), have also questioned its effectiveness and rationale. Recent studies in *translanguaging* (García 2009; García, Li 2014; Li 2018) actively promote learner's using all the linguistic resources in their repertoire in the process of language acquisition. For a more general discussion of this point, see Christiansen (2022b)

[14] Rinvolucri (2001, pp. 41-42): "When we look back over the past 25 years, it is clear that a lot of money has been made by many schools and a little money has been made by many teachers through sustaining and propagating the view that the native speaker of English who does not know the students' language is the teacher the students will learn most and best from."

[15] By contrast, five of the persona were +NES, five were +Q, and six were +LL. The slight discrepancy in the last proportion does not actually effect the calculation of the *r* value as this merely requires an adequate range of values to compare; only two for +Lc does not constitute one.

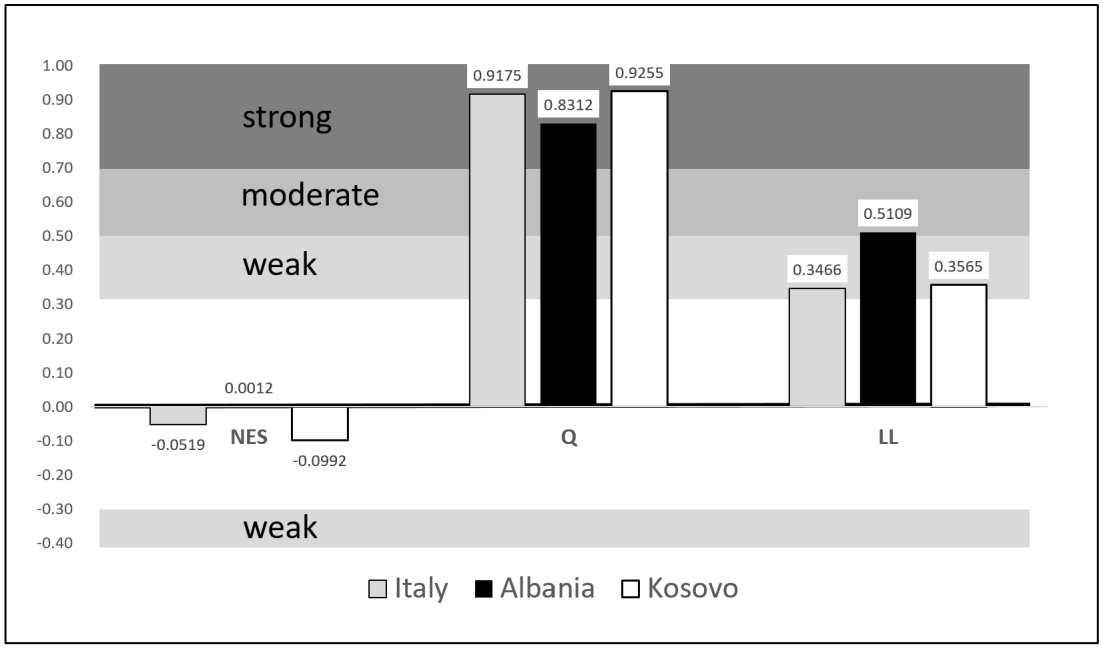

Figure 5
Coefficient *r*s for each parameter (±NES, ±Q, ±LL), according to respondent group.

Surprising as it may seem to adherents of the nativeness principle, in none of the countries surveyed did being NES correlate with how high respondents scored them as potential teachers. In fact, the relationship cannot even be classed as *weak.* It is indeed negative indicating if anything, a slight, but in any case *insignificant*, preference for NNES. Qualifications, and, to a lesser degree, speaking the learner's language were much more relevant. There is in fact a *strong* correlation between whether the potential teacher is qualified and how high respondents rate her.

As regards the desirability of knowing the learner's language, which, as we point out above, runs counter to the much vaunted *direct* or *natural method* of teaching (Krause 1916), in Albania there was a *moderate* correlation, in Italy and Kosovo, a *weak* one.

In all, the picture that emerges from Figure 5, is very different to the conventional wisdom in ELT regarding what makes an ideal ESOL teacher. From a learner's perspective, this survey has shown that a teacher's qualifications and ability to communicate in the learner's local language often outweigh their status as a native English speaker. Results indicate that learners consider qualities like professional training, cultural understanding, and linguistic flexibility as key in selecting effective ESOL teachers. In some cases, unqualified NESs were rated lower (e.g. Teacher 4) than highly qualified NNESs (Teachers 5 or 6), highlighting the importance of teaching skills and affinity with the learner over nativeness.

For ESOL programs, these findings suggest a need to expand the criteria for teacher selection to include non-native English speakers who possess strong pedagogical skills and local linguistic and cultural knowledge. Moving forward, redefining what constitutes an "ideal" English teacher may better align with the communicative needs of today's global learners and promote an ELF-oriented learning environment.

6. Conclusion

The shift from a nativeness-oriented model to a more inclusive ELF approach reflects an evolving understanding of language learning that values communicative efficacy over native-like fluency. Christiansen's research reveals that English learners today prioritize practicality, cultural relevance, and personal affinity when choosing language models, moving beyond traditional native English speaker (NES) norms. Factors such as nationality, age, and affinity with non-native English speakers (NNES) play a crucial role in shaping learners' attitudes, while the desire to emulate aspirational figures such as celebrities further diversify acceptable language models.

Christiansen's work also suggests that learners in ELF settings benefit from exposure to multiple English varieties, including those used by proficient NNES speakers. By moving beyond the nativeness principle, ELF enables learners to develop skills that are inclusive of diverse forms of English, better equipping them to communicate effectively in multicultural settings.

In practical terms, the findings of the §5 suggest that ESOL teaching programs, rather than lazily defaulting to nativeness as the gold standard, can benefit from expanding their recruitment criteria to include qualified NNES teachers who offer pedagogical expertise, cultural sensitivity, and familiarity with learners' backgrounds. By embracing an ELF-oriented approach, ESOL educators and institutions can better align with learners' communicative needs in a globalized context, ensuring that English education remains accessible, relevant, and responsive to diverse linguistic identities.

Bionotes: Thomas Christiansen is a full professor in English Language and Translation at the Università del Salento (Italy) and former Director of the University Language Centre. He has taught in various positions at various universities in Apulia (Italy), the UK, and Poland. He completed his PhD in textual linguistics at Salford (UK). He has researched into various areas of linguistics including systemic linguistics and functional grammar, varieties of English, ELF, teaching English, language testing, and analysis of different corpora, including spoken discourse. He is a qualified teacher trainer and has also worked as an expert consultant for Cambridge Assessment English for many years.
Lavdosh Malaj is a full-time lecturer in the Department of Foreign Languages at the University of Vlora (Albania). He has a Ph.D. from the University of Tirana (Albania) in the field of Language/Didactics of English Language Teaching with a thesis entitled "Summary of the Literary Text in English." He also has a master's degree from the University of Tirana specialising in the impact of literary texts on second language acquisition. He has published articles in Albania, Italy and Poland, and spoken at national and international conferences in Albania, Italy, Germany, Romania and Montenegro.

Authors' addresses: thomas.christiansen@unisalento.it; lavdosh.malaj@univlora.edu.al

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