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PERCEPTIONS OF UNIVERSITY-LEVEL ESL LEARNERS ABOUT ENGLISH AS AN INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE



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Abstract

This study enquires into the perceptions of ESL students' about their pronunciation norms, their accents, and comprehensibility in learning English as an international language (EIL). It used a quantitative, descriptive research design. For this purpose, a sample of 120 ESL students from public and private universities was selected through convenience sampling technique. Data were collected via a structured survey which was comprised of 12 close-ended questions designed to assess students' attitudes toward pronunciation instruction, accent preferences, exposure to English varieties, and teaching materials. Findings show that learners prioritize comprehensibility over native-like pronunciation which aligned with the global emphasis on intelligibility in EIL. While 92.5% valued clear pronunciation, 66.7% considered native-like accuracy essential. The learners favored native accents such as British and American but also showed regional preferences, with 72.5% favoring the Pakistani accent. In addition, 60.8% learners acknowledged the importance of exposing students to diverse accents and 54.2% preferred multimedia resources for pronunciation instruction. However, traditional native-speaker norms persist, with 72.5 % supporting teaching non-native varieties of English. Again 60.8 % preferred bilingual ESL teachers for bridging linguistic and cultural gaps. These findings reflect a balance between traditional practices and inclusive approaches, highlighting the ongoing shift toward EIL principles emphasizing diversity and intelligibility..

Keywords: EIL, ESL teachers , comprehensibility, native pronunciation norms , accent preferences, non-native pronunciation norms, bilingual educators, intelligibility.

Introduction

The rich linguistic landscape comprised of 70 different languages spoken in different geographical regions of Pakistan makes it a multilingual country (Farid & Iftikhar, 2023). However, as the medium of instruction English language has acquired, in elite educational institutions, an important place. It is considered a compulsory qualification for sure access to global level opportunities. In spite of the advantaged status of English language , it continues to be a barrier for many Pakistani English language learners. In relation to pronunciation, vocabulary, and cultural references, etc. the Pakistani learners encounter those teaching models that align native-speaker norms which besides alienating students also fails in recognizing the global status of English language as a lingua franca. According to Jenkins (2000), research suggests that exposing learners to diverse varieties English language proves to be more beneficial. She further adds that the pedagogical approaches which value communicative competence as compared to native-like accuracy are more beneficial for the learners.

In Pakistan, English language is considered both as a socio-economic symbol and a means for international or global communication .In this relation, the effectiveness of communication practices is often determined by the users' pronunciation because it is considered a critical aspect of language learning. Usually as the standard for English language teaching (ELT), the native-speaker models such as received pronunciation (RP) and general American (GA) are considered and the same is also true about the Pakistani context .However, in the present era other norms are also gaining importance in the ELT contexts such as the role of English as a global lingua franca, the legitimacy and acceptance of non-native pronunciation norms which place more importance to intelligibility over native-like accuracy. In English language teaching contexts, pronunciation instruction has evolved from giving preference to native-like proficiency

to aiming for intelligibility and comprehensibility (Gilakjani, 2017; Takidze, 2024). Again (Takidze, 2024) stresses the need for enabling the learners to communicate effectively with both native and non-native English language users. In this regard, the both teachers' and students' preferences play a vital role in selection and modeling of pronunciation norms in English language classrooms. Besides shaping the classroom practices these choices also shape learners' perceptions and preferences of English language pronunciation norms. Therefore, this study aims to investigate Pakistani university students' preferences for English language pronunciation norms in classrooms and how these preferences reflect broader pedagogical and sociolinguistic trends.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

The expansion of English globally has generated scholarly discussions on the selection of pronunciation norms in English language communication as well as in classroom instruction between native or non-native pronunciation norms especially in multilingual contexts. Traditional pedagogy shows preferences for native norms, on the other hand, alternative models such as world Englishes (Kachru, 1985, 1990) and English as a lingua franca (Jenkins, 2000, 2006) urge greater inclusivity. The prominent position of English language in educational and official settings and ambivalent attitudes towards ESL pronunciation norms makes this debate equally pertinent in Pakistani ESL context too. Therefore, this study investigates the perceptions of Pakistani ESL students' of private and public sector universities toward native and non-native English language pronunciation norms.

1.2. Significance

This research study contributes to critique of dominance of native-speaker models in English language instruction especially in pronunciation instruction and supports the shift toward intelligibility and communicative competence as the primary goals of English language pedagogy. Practically, it highlights the effectiveness of non-native pronunciation models and advocates for contextualized ESL instruction that prioritizes intelligibility and comprehensibility over unattainable native-like standards for Pakistani learners. The findings of the this research may be utilized in design of inclusive teacher training programs and alignment of the curriculum with contemporary global trends in ESL instruction such as English as a lingua franca (ELF) and English as an international language (EIL). Furthermore, this research advocates the recognition of diverse pronunciation models favoring non-native English varieties. Finally, it also provides practical recommendations for balanced pronunciation instructions in multilingual contexts like Pakistan.

2. Literature Review

Research reveals that Jordanian ESL students prefer native speakers for pronunciation instructions and spoken skills but value non-native teachers more for grammar and writing skills instructions (Dweik & Al-Barghouthi, 2014). Moreover, students in Hong Kong generally favor non-native teachers especially the final-year students show more positive attitudes towards non-native teachers (Cheung & Braine, 2007). These research findings highlight the increased acknowledgement of non-native teachers' strengths.

Research reveals complex dynamics in relation to research on attitudes towards native and non-native English varieties. It links the preference for native varieties with status and competence (Chien, 2018; Prakaianurat & Kangkun, 2018) and non-native varieties with social attractiveness (Chien, 2018). It further reveals that expanding circle varieties generally inner and outer circle ones are preferred (Chien, 2018). Research also reveals increasing acceptability of non-native varieties and new norms in various countries (Lowenberg, 1986). Sociocultural contexts and language contact shapes these varieties and they do not impact listening comprehension tests performance negatively (Abeywickrama, 2013). In short, the research insights highlight the need for increasing importance of the awareness and tolerance of diverse varieties of English language in the larger context of English as an international language (EIL) (Prakaianurat & Kangkun, 2018).

In the case of significance and pronunciation instruction objectives in ELT, the findings indicate a shift of focus from native-like accuracy to focusing on comprehensibility and intelligibility (Gilakjani, 2017). Research establishes that native and non-native ESL instructors are equally important and value the instruction quality more than native or non-native status of the teachers (Levis, 2016). Again Takidze (2024) maintains that the goal of ESL instruction should be to focus on making the learners speech easily understandable and intelligible both by the native and non-native speakers without unnecessary stress. It is important to note that the present day teaching practices rely more on teachers' opinions than on research findings. However, Vančová (2019) suggests that a strong theoretical background can enhance the awareness of students and their pronunciation performance. After examining 22 peer-reviewed papers published between 2014 and 2023, Wang et al (2024) suggests that non-native English-speaking teachers emphasize intelligibility more than native-like pronunciation. In the light of research, it can be safely concluded that pronunciation instruction should be based on a balanced approach considering standard pronunciation, identity preservation of the learners and their native language influence (Takidze, 2024).

If we consider the goals of pronunciation teaching and learning, the recent trends show that second language instructions has shifted towards prioritizing intelligibility over native-likeness "as a more practical and effective goal" (Levis, 2020). Wang & Wen (2023) shows that ELT curriculum standards are gradually shifting from the nativeness to intelligibility principle which promotes personalized instruction. This shift reflects the increasing acceptance of intelligibility as more feasible goal and social implications of pronunciation differences.

Research also highlights the importance of exposing learners both to native and non-native English models and emphasizes non-native varieties for global and real-world communication preparedness (Cunningham, 2009; van den Doel, 2010). This very transition or shift challenges native-speaker-centric notions or approaches and advocates for inclusiveness in language teaching practices reflecting global role of English (van den Doel, 2010). Furthermore, Monfared & Khatib (2018) reveals that the expanding circle teachers favor native-speaker and American English pronunciation, on the other hand, outer circle teachers give more importance to local English varieties. In connection to preferences of English language models, research findings depict the complex attitudes of both learners and teachers towards native and non-native models. For example, Jin (2005) found that Chinese students prefer Chinese teachers as well as Chinese English model which was because of their positive attitudes towards EIL. Similarly, Thi Trang Loan (2023) discovers support and preferences for non-native English materials in ESL teaching and learning at the university level by the teachers and students both.

Recent research highlights mixed preferences of university students for native and non-native English language teachers. For pronunciation they favor native teachers while they value non-natives ones more for grammar instruction and understanding of learners difficulties. It means that many students recognize the complementary strengths of both type of teacher. In this reference, (Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2014; Echiverri et al., 2021) relate learners' preferences to their skill and proficiency. Furthermore, (Tajeddin et al., 2017) reveals learners' preference of non-native English teachers for linguistic aspects and their flexible attitude for EIL pragmatic norms by supporting the use of L1 norms for the communication that requires cultural responsiveness and appropriacy.

Research also reports challenges in implementation of English as an International Language (EIL). For examples, Christou et al. (2022) reveals the positive beliefs of pre-service ESL teachers about EIL but they struggle in implementing it. On the other hand, Lai (2008) and Zacharias (2014) discover that experienced ESL teachers often depend upon native speaker models and further maintains that they believe that EIL is better for improving perceptions but they hold an opinion that it is very difficult to translate the theory into practice. Zacharias (2014) expresses the need for the shift towards EIL in Malaysia but it also highlights that "ESL teachers' limited understanding of EIL pedagogy' hampers this transition. These

findings suggest that there is a need for better training and teacher preparation in World Englishes particularly in expanding circle countries.

English language teaching (ELT) research literature highlights the need for integration of diverse cultural contexts into English language teaching material resources so that English language pedagogical approaches may reflect English as an International language. Shin et al. (2011) discovers that current ELT resources emphasize inner-circle cultural content which reflects the lack of deeper cultural reflections in the ELT materials.

However, according to Monfared et al. (2016) scholars and ELT experts emphasize the need for culturally responsive materials which incorporate a blend of local and international perspectives. Moreover, Hino (2017) suggests that English-Medium Instruction (EMI) in higher education may support EIL learning even in the homogeneous groups of students. These insights highlight the increasing demand for ELT practices that foster intercultural awareness and communication skills. Finally, Saeed et al. (2025) explored ESL teachers' perceptions of English as an International Language and found that teachers prioritize comprehensibility over native-like pronunciation, aligning with the global emphasis on intelligibility in EIL. Teachers favored native accents like British and American but also showed regional preferences. This indicates the ongoing shift towards EIL principles emphasizing diversity and intelligibility. The literature review given above highlights the researches done. It indicates the scarcity of researches conducted in this area. There is one notable research conducted but that research is on learners' perspective. Since the perspectives of the learners are also important and by undertaking this research the researcher will make an attempt to fill this gap by investigating the learners' perspectives in this regard.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Jennifer Jenkins' Lingua Franca Core (2000). It emphasizes the significance of such pronunciation features that enhance intelligibility and compressibility in international communication. It advocates for an emphasis on core pronunciation features rather than native-like perfectionism. This framework offers a lens for examining teachers and learners' preferences and their pedagogical implications for pronunciation.

Research Questions

1. What are the university ESL learners' perceptions about the place of pronunciation, accent, and intelligibility when teaching English as an International Language (EIL)?
2. What preferences do university-level ESL students report for the selection of accents norms, breadth of exposure to English varieties, and teaching aids in pronunciation instructions in EIL setting?

4. Methodology

This section outlines the comprehensive description of the research methodology that guided research process.

4.1. Research Design

The present study focuses on attitudes towards English pronunciation specifically when viewed as a lingua franca and as an international language. As a theoretical construct attitude is viewed as a construct which serves to account for a human behavior which is shaped by variables like age, gender, community, and media (Baker, 1992). There are two main approaches to assess attitudes-direct methods and indirect methods. The direct methods rely on using questionnaires and interviews whereas the indirect methods rely on having the research participants listening to the speakers of different accents, rating them and inferring the participants' attitudes from the choices they make. This research employed a direct method (using closed-ended questions in a questionnaire) to collect data from the teachers. This research adopted a quantitative research design to investigate the university-level ESL learners' attitudes about pronunciation, accent and comprehensibility when teaching English as an international language. Therefore, it can be safely concluded that this research utilized direct method approach to study the learners' attitudes. Then the

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second objective was to find preferences of university-level ESL students regarding the accent norms, breadth of exposure to English varieties, and teaching aids in pronunciation instructions in EIL setting. Finally, using descriptive statistics, the research participants responses were summarize in the form of frequencies and percentages.

4.2. Participants

In this research, a total of 120 university-level ESL students participated. They were recruited from various public and private sector universities across Lahore which is a culturally diverse metropolitan city. For this purpose, the participants were chosen using convenient sampling strategy. The reason for selection of this approach, is primarily its utility regarding efficient collection of data in view of limited time and resources. In addition, since Lahore is a city which accommodate students from all the provinces and regions of Pakistan; the sample will constitute a diverse and representative cross-section of Pakistani ESL student population. This diversity of the learners varied backgrounds will support in gathering each participants distinct linguistic and cultural influences regarding their understanding and preferences in relation to the topic being researched. In short, this sampling approach altogether accommodates both the limitations of the study and ensures that data is representative of and the results are applicable to wider Pakistani ESL-university leaners.

4.3. Instrument

The tool to gather data for this study was a questionnaire which was adapted from an earlier research instrument which was developed by Knollmayr (2004). It was further used in Coskun (2011) and Ali (2023). This tool was developed to investigate learners attitudes and preferences about English as an International Language (EIL) and the extent to which they attach importance to it. It was divided into two sections. The first section contained demographic inquiries meant for collecting personal data. It includes participants gender, academic credentials ad their current academic position. The second part of the questionnaire was based on a dozen closed-ended questions. In this regard, items 1 and 2 were about general preferences and reasons for those preferences of English varieties. Item number 3, 4, and 5 examined the perceived significance of pronunciation instruction and determined whether they give more privilege to native-like accent or to clarity and comprehensibility. Then items 6 and 7 were about the intended outcomes of the pronunciation instruction. Then questions 8 and 9 asked if the participants wanted to restrict themselves to a single non-native English model or they like being introduced to numerous different varieties. The question 10 drew out participants' views about an exemplary pronunciation instructor and question 11 assessed their familiarity with EIL .Lastly, the item number 12 directed the focus on the content of pronunciation instruction.

4.4. Data Collection Process

This research study employed a standardized survey instrument which was administered digitally through Google forms which is an internet-based platform. The link to survey was shared with various WhatsApp groups catering to higher education students. This approach ensured and facilitated data collection process by gaining access to a heterogeneous cross-section of respondents. Moreover, it offered the respondents freedom to respond to the survey according to their own schedules. Furthermore, utilizing the contacts and relationships with teaching and research communities helped in ensuring that the final sample is broad and heterogeneous enough to capture the manifold experiences of representative ESL students.

5. Results and Interpretation

This section presents the results and interpretation of the data collected by the respondents

5.1. Individuals' Accent Preferences and the Rationales behind these Inclinations

Table 1

Preferred Accent While Speaking (Preferred Spoken Accent)

Statement	Pakistani		British		American	
1.The accent typically adopt while speaking	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
	87	72.5	16	13.3	17	14.2

The results of the table 1 indicate that 72.5% of respondents adopt a Pakistani accent followed by 14.2% with an American accent and 13.3% with a British accent. The preference for Pakistani accent by Pakistani respondents indicates a sense of identity and comfort. The choice of British and American accents may reflect the traditional norms in English education in Pakistan and the influence of media or societal prestige attached to native models. These findings highlight the preference of practicality of intelligibility over strict adherence to native accents. Most of the respondents emphasize accents that are understandable locally and globally indicating alignment with EIL goals.

Table 2

Reason for Preferring a Particular Accent Choice (Reason for preferring particular Accent)

Statement	Identification		It Sounds Best		Learned it at School	
2. Main reason for selecting a specific English accent	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
	28	23.3	45	37.5	47	39.2

The table 2 shows that the most dominant reason for accent choice is "Learned it at school" which is selected by 39.2% of the respondents, closely followed by "it sounds best" at 37.5 % and then by "identification" at 23.3%. The results suggest that learners' preferences for English accents are influenced by all the three factors with varying degree. The dominant reason indicated by 39.2% of learners indicates that the respondents' preferences stem from school exposure which indicates the role and influence of educational institutions developing learners' perceptions of accents. The secondly and almost equally dominant reason indicated by the respondents is "It sounds best" which highlights the significant role of cultural and subjective preferences. This aspect is linked with societal norms and media exposure which suggests that societal norms and media exposure play a crucial role in shaping what learners find appealing or prestigious in an accent. Lastly, 23.3% of respondents select an accent based on identification factor. It indicates the use and role of accents in establishing social identity and the aspiration to connect with specific English-speaking communities or global networks. Accents, in this context, become a means of self-expression and cultural affiliation.

5.2. The significance and objectives of pronunciation instruction

Table 3

Pronunciation Instruction Objectives (Pronunciation Instructional Objectives)

Statement	Important		Not Important	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
3. Importance of pronunciation instruction is at your university	111	92.5	098	7.5
4. Importance of Having native like pronunciation	80	66.7	40	33.3

5.Importance of having clear and intelligible pronunciation	114	95	06	5
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A substantial majority of 92.5 % learners consider pronunciation teaching to be important, whereas only 7.5% believe it is not important. This indicates that learners perceive and recognize pronunciation instruction as a vital component of English language education. Secondly, in connection to the necessity of achieving native-like pronunciation, only 66.7% learners considered it as important and 33.3% which is a considerable proportion disagreed that it is important. This indicates a shifting emphasis on native speaker pronunciation norms. Lastly, in relation to clear and intelligible pronunciation, a big majority of 95% respondents agreed that clear and intelligible pronunciation is highly important, with only 5% downplaying the significance of clear and intelligible pronunciations and the significant agreement in this regard reflects a shift in attitudes from traditional native-speaker pronunciation norms towards non-native pronunciations.

5.3. Pronunciation Instructional Goals

Table 4

Pronunciation Instructional Goals

Statement	Agree		Disagree	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
6. Goal of pronunciation instruction is to help learners become as native like as possible	105	87.5	15	12.5
7. Goal pronunciation instruction is developing intelligibility and comprehensibility	103	85.8	17	14.2

Table 4 examines attitudes toward two distinct goals of pronunciation teaching: achieving native-like pronunciation and focusing on intelligibility and comprehensibility. The dominant majority of 87.5 % of respondents agree with the goal of helping learners become as native-like as possible, whereas 12.5 % disagree in this regard. In relation to question seven, an overwhelming majority of the respondents with 85.8 % agree that pronunciation teaching should focus on intelligibility and comprehensibility whereas only 14.2% of the respondents disagreed with this idea.

This strong consensus underscores the central goal of EIL teaching and native speaker pronunciation norms reflect some ambivalence. It suggests the idea of enabling learners to communicate effectively and be understood in diverse international contexts, maintaining the native-like pronunciation as much as possible.

5.4. Importance of Learners' Exposure to Diverse Varieties of English Language

Table 5

Importance of Learners' Exposure to Diverse Varieties of English Language

Statement	Important		Not Important		May be	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
8. Students should be exposed to different varieties in pronunciation classes	73	60.8	6	5	41	34.2

The table 5 reveals perceptions about exposing students to different varieties of English pronunciation in classes. The results indicate that 60.8% of the respondents consider this exposure important, 34.2% are

uncertain, reflecting some ambivalence, likely influenced by traditional teaching norms or limited understanding of the benefits of exposure to multiple varieties. Only 6% consider it as not important. Overall, it indicates that the majority recognize the relevance of such exposure. The findings indicate that most respondent ESL learners value exposure to different varieties in pronunciation classes, aligning with the goals of English as an International Language (EIL) to equip learners for effective communication across diverse linguistic and cultural contexts. The ambivalence among a minority could be addressed through awareness of the practical benefits of this approach.

5.5. Preference for Exposure to a Non-Native English Varieties

Table 6

Preference for Exposure to a Non-Native English Varieties

Statement	Yes		No	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
9. Students should be exposed to different non-native varieties in pronunciation classes	87	72.5	33	27.5

The table examines opinions on whether a preference should be given to teaching non-native varieties of English. The results indicate that 72.5% of the respondents believe that preference should be given to teaching a non-native variety of English, reflecting a recognition of the growing role of non-native English in global communication and its practicality in diverse contexts. Similarly, 27.5% of the respondents disagree with the idea indicating that an almost an one-fourth proportion still holds on to the traditional emphasis on native varieties, possibly due to societal perceptions or long-standing teaching norms in the educational system.

5.6. Model/Ideal Pronunciation Teacher

Table 7

Model/Ideal Pronunciation Teacher

Statement	Native Teacher		Bilingual Teacher	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
10. An ideal pronunciation instructor should be	47	39.2	73	60.8

This table explores preferences for the ideal pronunciation teacher. According to the table 7, 39.2% university ESL learners prefer a native English teacher. It suggests that native speakers are still seen by some as the standard for authentic pronunciation and language expertise. However, a larger proportion of 60.8% of the university ESL learners favor bilingual teachers. This indicates a preference for teachers who can relate to learners' challenges, offer explanations in a familiar context, and bridge the gap between native and learners' speech patterns.

5.7. Understanding English as a Lingua Franca

Table 8

Understanding English as a Lingua Franca

Statement	English with a Specific Accent	English Easily Understood by Everyone	English Spoken by Natives
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11. Your understanding of the term English as an international language (EIL)	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
	28	23.3	77	64.2	15	12.5

Table 8 captures respondents' understanding of English as an International Language (EIL). It indicates that 64.2% of the ESL university learners believe that EIL is a variety of English that is easily understood by everyone. It highlights the practical emphasis on mutual comprehensibility and global communication over strict adherence to specific norms or accents. In addition, only 23.3% associate EIL with "English with a specific accent" indicating that most respondents do not view a single accent as definitive for international communication. Furthermore, 12.5 % respondents define EIL as English spoken by natives reflecting a minimal belief in native-centric models for international use. Finally, the overwhelming recognition and preference for EIL as English easily understood by everyone aligns with its core notions or objective which fosters global understanding and communication. This perspective once again reinforces the practicality of intelligibility and clarity of expression over native-like proficiency or specific accents, emphasizing inclusivity and adaptability in teaching and learning English in diverse international contexts.

5.8. Resource Types for EIL Instruction

Table 9

Resource Types for EIL Instruction

Statement	Multimedia Resources for Different Accents		Exercises Tailored to EIL Context		Recordings of Native Speakers	
12. Resources and materials most helpful for teaching EIL pronunciation	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
	65	54.2	35	29.2	20	16.6

This table highlights the preferences for resources and materials deemed most helpful for teaching EIL pronunciation. The results of the table 9 indicate that 54.2% of respondents favor multimedia resources for different accents, indicating a preference for tools that expose learners to diverse pronunciation styles and promote adaptability in global communication. In addition, 29.2% prefer exercises tailored to the EIL context, suggesting a smaller but important emphasis on specialized activities that focus on intelligibility and cross-cultural communication skills. Moreover, 16.6 % value recordings of native speakers, reflecting a recognition of native models as a supplementary but not primary resource for teaching EIL.

6. Discussion

The literature review indicates a nuanced perspective on native vs. non-native English-speaking teachers. Findings from various studies (e.g., Wang & Fang, 2020; Cheung & Braine, 2007) show growing acceptance of non-native teachers, emphasizing their unique strengths. This is reflected in the data showing learners' preferences for different accents. While a slight inclination toward native accents for pronunciation

persists, the responses challenge traditional biases, highlighting a broader shift towards valuing teaching effectiveness over nativeness.

The results in Table 2, shows 37.5% respondents preferred Pakistani accent based on subjective appeal "It Sounds Best" which contrast with the emphasis in prior studies on native English accents like British and American linked with prestige and clarity (Wong, 2018). However, the results aligns with the studies highlighting the influence of formal education on accent preference (Wong, 2018), 39.2% of respondents in Table 2 cited "Learned it at School." Additionally, the 23.3% citing "Identification" reflects a cultural. These findings suggest a shift toward localized preferences and challenges the traditional views on native accent dominance.

The literature emphasizes comprehensibility and intelligibility over native-like pronunciation (Levis, 2016; Takidze, 2024). The survey results align with this, with 95% considering clear and intelligible pronunciation highly important as compared to 66.7% who value native-like pronunciation. These findings highlight the growing importance on practicality and communicative competence in ESL pronunciation instruction.

Literature review of the prior studies highlights the increasing recognition of intelligibility as a practical goal (Levis, 2020; Wang & Wen, 2023). Table 4 reflects this shift, with 85.8 % of the respondent ESL learners favoring pronunciation teaching aimed at intelligibility. This contrasts with the 87.5 % of them supporting native-like pronunciation. It reveals that although native norms remain influential, practical intelligibility is prioritized in teaching contexts.

Cunningham (2009) advocates for exposure to diverse accents to prepare learners for global communication. Table 5 supports this, with 60.8% considering such exposure important. The data also suggests increasing acknowledgment of non-native varieties', their relevance and growing challenges for native-speaker-centric approaches.

Studies (Jin, 2005; Wong, 2018) highlight mixed attitudes towards teaching non-native varieties. The findings in Table 6 also reflects that 72.5 % of the respondents supports the idea of prioritizing non-native varieties. This indicates an acceptance of non-native varieties in ESL education.

Furthermore, (Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2014; Echiverri et al., 2021) illustrates the complementary strengths of NESTs and NNESTs. The table 7 reveals a preference for bilingual teachers 60.8%, aligns with research suggesting their ability to bridge language and cultural gaps effectively, especially in multilingual learning environments like the Pakistani one.

Moreover, (Christou et al., 2022; Zacharias, 2014) reveals challenges in adopting EIL principles. Table 8 highlights a clear preference 64.2% for English easily understood by everyone, reflecting a practical understanding of EIL that prioritizes mutual intelligibility over adherence to specific native norms.

In relation to ELT materials (Shin et al., 2011; Monfared et al., 2016) emphasize the need for culturally responsive and diverse materials. Table 9 reflects this, with 54.2% favoring multimedia resources for different accents and 29.2% learners favor exercises tailored to EIL context. This supports the growing emphasis on incorporating varied linguistic and cultural perspectives in ELT materials.

In summary, the results of this study both support and challenge the findings of previous research. While they confirm the growing prioritization of intelligibility and the continued favorability of native accents, they reveal persistent divisions regarding non-native varieties and exposure to diverse pronunciation models. These discrepancies highlight the need for further efforts to promote inclusive practices in English language teaching, aligning with the globalized and multicultural realities of English usage today.

7. Conclusion

ESL learners prioritize comprehensibility over native-like pronunciation in teaching English as an International Language (EIL). Most respondents 95% valued clear and intelligible pronunciation, while

only 66.7% emphasized native-like pronunciation. Although native accents like British and American are preferred, regional and cultural familiarity also influences accent preferences, as seen in the favorability of the Pakistani accent is 72.5%. In addition, 92.5 % students view pronunciation as crucial in EIL instruction, aligning with the growing focus on mutual intelligibility rather than linguistic uniformity.

ESL learners exhibit a preference for native English accents but show increasing openness to exposure to diverse English varieties, with 60.8% supporting such exposure. In addition, 54.2% students favor multimedia resources for teaching of different accents, though traditional native-speaker materials still play a significant role. The divided preference for teaching non-native varieties 72.5% in favor, 27.5% in opposition, reflects ongoing debates and transition in perspectives about EIL instruction. Moreover, 60.8% learners prefer bilingual educators for pronunciation teaching, recognizing their ability to bridge cultural and linguistic gaps. Overall, the results reflect balance of traditional norms with inclusive practices, though the full adoption of EIL principles remains in progress.

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