The Relationship Between English Proficiency and EFL Students' Perceptions of ELF

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Abstract

A shift in the paradigm of English language instruction is proposed, driven by the recognition of English as a global language of communication (ELF). This acknowledgment makes it increasingly pragmatic for EFL students to prioritize the cultivation of effective global communication skills over the pursuit of *native* English language proficiency. Consequently, the examination of EFL students' perceptions assumes a pivotal role in understanding and addressing this shift. This study delves into the perceptions of EFL students regarding the use of English as a global language of communication and its educational implications. The participant pool comprised 570 students enrolled in the English preparatory program of a foundation university. Employing a quantitative research approach, a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire was utilized to systematically gather data. The results unveiled a consistent pattern across students' conceptions of English as a global language of communication and its instructional impacts, irrespective of their English proficiency levels. However, notable distinctions emerged upon closer scrutiny of the sub-dimensions, particularly concerning "English varieties" and "English teachers." It was discerned that as students progressed in their English proficiency, they exhibited an increased awareness of language varieties. Additionally, a preference for *native* English-speaking teachers over non-*native* counterparts became more pronounced. In the final section of this study, these findings are meticulously explored within the established framework. Subsequent to this exploration, comprehensive conclusions and pragmatic recommendations are presented.

Keywords: EFL students, English as lingua franca (ELF), English proficiency, Pedagogical implications.

İngilizce Yeterliliği ile Öğrencilerin İngilizcenin Ortak İletişim Dili Olmasına Dair Algıları Arasındaki İlişki

Öz

İngilizcenin küresel iletişimde oynadığı rol, İngilizce öğretim paradigmasında kaçınılmaz bir değişikliği beraberinde getirmektedir. Bu kabul, İngilizce öğrenen öğrencilerin artık sadece ana dili İngilizce seviyesinde dil becerisi hedeflemek yerine, etkili küresel iletişim becerilerini geliştirmeye öncelik vermelerini gerektirmektedir. Bu bağlamda, İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen öğrencilerin algılarının anlaşılması, bu değişimin etkilerini kavramada ve ele alınmasında önemli bir role sahiptir. Bu çalışma, İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen öğrencilerin, İngilizcenin küresel bir iletişim dili olma ve bu durumun eğitimsel etkilerine dair algılarını incelemektedir. Katılımcı havuz, bir vakıf üniversitesinin İngilizce hazırlık programına kayıtlı 570 öğrenciden oluşmaktadır. Beş noktalı Likert ölçekli bir anket aracılığıyla yapılan nicel araştırma, sistemli bir veri toplama yöntemi olarak kullanılmıştır. Sonuçlar, öğrencilerin İngilizcenin küresel iletişim dili olma ve bunun öğretimsel etkilere dair algıları konusunda, İngilizce yeterlilik düzeyleri gözetilmeksizin tutarlı bir model ortaya koymaktadır. Ancak, alt boyutlara daha yakından bakıldığında, özellikle "İngilizce çeşitleri" ve "İngilizce öğretmenleri" konularında belirgin farklılıklar ortaya çıkmaktadır. Öğrencilerin İngilizce yeterlilikleri ilerledikçe dil çeşitlerine ilişkin farkındalıklarının arttığı gözlemlenmiştir. Ayrıca, ana dili İngilizce olan öğretmenlere olan tercihin, dil öğretiminde daha belirgin hale geldiği tespit edilmiştir. Çalışmanın son bölümünde, elde edilen bulgular titizlikle ele alınarak kapsamlı sonuçlar ve pragmatik öneriler sunulmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: İngilizce'yi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen öğrenciler, ortak iletişim dili olarak İngilizce, İngilizce yeterliliği, pedagojik çıkarımlar.

INTRODUCTION

English has wielded a profound global influence on nations where it is not the *native* language. Recent technological advancements and the forces of globalization have facilitated increased interaction among individuals from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Mrak, 2000; Friedman, 2005). English, in this context, serves as the common language of communication (Kesgin & Arslan, 2015), leading to the phenomenon known as English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) (Jenkins, 2006). The prominence of English in international communication underscores the need to stay abreast of evolving trends in education and the changing perceptions of the language worldwide. Simultaneously, the proliferation of English-medium departments in higher education has elevated the significance of studying English, with students recognizing its importance for academic success and enhanced future employment prospects (Doğançay-Aktuna & Kızıltepe, 2005). Consequently, substantial efforts are required to equip learners with the necessary language skills and enhance their ability to communicate effectively in the ever-expanding global arena.

In numerous countries, English is mandated as a compulsory school subject (Gómez Burgos & Pérez, 2015). However, traditional English Language Teaching (ELT) pedagogy, particularly in countries where English is taught as a foreign language, has become outdated and unresponsive to learners' needs, largely due to its adherence to *native* speaker ideology. This ideology, rooted in American and British English, posits that *native* English speakers serve as the ultimate role models and language instructors, given their connection to societies shaping *native* English standards and teaching practices. However, the current status of English as a global lingua franca necessitates a reevaluation of long-standing beliefs about English language pedagogy by both EFL students and teachers to align with present realities. This shift is evident in the prevalent emphasis on *native* English language and culture as a teaching strategy in Turkey's English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes (Coskun, 2011; Atay, 2005), indicating a preference for *native* English speakers and their cultural norms in teaching strategies, curriculum, and standards. It is imperative to communicate the contemporary status of English as an International Lingua Franca (ELF) to students, providing them with the knowledge to make informed decisions on when and how to use English in diverse international contexts. Developing the ability to handle international relations with confidence and cultural sensitivity requires learners to make informed judgments, considering the complexities of ELF, adapting communication tactics based on cultural settings, and acknowledging the dynamic nature of the language.

Against this backdrop, the objective of this study was to assess the perspectives of tertiary-level Turkish EFL students regarding ELF and its instructional implications based on their proficiency levels (A1, A2, B1, and B2) as determined by the CEFR. The CEFR categorizes A1-A2 as basic users, B1-B2 as independent users, and C1-C2 as skilled users. Choosing tertiary-level English preparatory school students as the focus group stemmed from a gap in prior research, which had not thoroughly explored their viewpoints on how English is evolving as a lingua franca in foreign interactions, especially at the English preparatory school level. The perspectives of EFL students are crucial as they play a pivotal role in shaping language programs, and initiating change requires an understanding of their genuine sentiments. Consequently, language policymakers should scrutinize their opinions to make informed long-term decisions. In summary, this study aimed to contribute to the existing literature and the development of an English language teaching and learning program at the higher education level by examining the perspectives of tertiary-level English preparation program students.

Literature Review

In the Turkish context, English is crucial and widely used in industries such as technology, commerce, and tourism (Bektaş Çetinkaya, 2009). Consequently, English is the most often taught foreign language in Turkish schools (Karahan, 2007; Nilay, 2018; Şentürk, 2019). Moreover, English language training is mandatory from the second grade of elementary school through the university years. However, while some ELF research has been conducted in the Turkish setting with EFL students (Bayyurt et al., 2019; Griffiths & Soruç, 2019; Karakaş et al., 2016; Sönmez & Akyel, 2014; Kanık, 2013; Coşkun, 2011; Kaypak & Ortactepe, 2014), it is still far from sufficient. Similar to international studies, existing Turkish research consistently demonstrates that students, despite their understanding of English's function as the global lingua franca, do not choose to renounce their preference for *native* English standards.

The loyalty of EFL students to *native* English speakers and the teachers who teach their standards endures despite recent shifts in the position of English as a global language of communication (Buckingham, 2014). Functional characteristics based on real English usages in daily life are frequently subordinated to systemic

features based on *native* English norms, such as grammar rules and pronunciation standards, in English education, resulting in a focus on formal language acquisition rather than useful communication skills. Although one may be more essential than the other at various times, these accuracy features compatible with *native* English models can be divided into two categories: pronunciation (Waniek-Klimczak, 2015) and structural features (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017; Shahzadi & Janjua, 2016). The degree to which an individual's English ability matches that of a *native* speaker is used as a criterion for assessing their English proficiency due to the persistent emphasis on *native* English standards in industry and education. Hence, obtaining *native* English norms becomes a particularly pressing issue at school as well as in the business world in order to succeed (Almaqrn & Alshabeb, 2017). As a result, students dedicate a significant amount of time over their academic years to master *native*-like English.

Given the high proportion of non-*native* English speakers, there is a good likelihood that more English users will utilize it as a lingua franca in international contacts (De Meerleer, 2012). This highlights the issue of English language ownership, which grants non-*native* speakers the same rights as *native* speakers. In this context, English programs should teach students how to interact with varied English users throughout the world (Kirkpatrick, 2007), as well as how to communicate with non-*native* English speakers (Mansfield & Poppi, 2012). ELT stakeholders must respect ELF research recommendations due to shifting ownership and requirements (Coşkun, 2011). Though not comprehensive, ELF research has improved English teaching by fostering an awareness of the various linguistic and cultural settings in which English is used across the world (Calvo-Benzies, 2017). ELF research promotes an inclusive, flexible approach to teaching English that emphasizes successful communication and intercultural proficiency, as opposed to strict *native*-speaker requirements. These results underline the significance of continuous progress by opening the door for a more sophisticated English curriculum.

The outcomes of international research that have looked at how EFL students currently perceive ELF have been in favor of *native* English models. Since ELT industry places a value on *native* English-based grammatical accuracy (Shahzadi & Janjua, 2016), students place a higher importance on learning English grammar than on enhancing their communicative abilities (Nguyen & Lo, 2022; Umo-Udofia & Andera, 2018; Shahzadi & Janjua, 2016). Likewise, EFL students' preferences for *native* English speakers and their norms have been revealed in a variety of worldwide studies (Barrett, 2009; Dweik & Al-Barghouthi, 2014; Pilus, 2013; Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2014; Matsuda, 2003; Timmis, 2002; Kuo, 2006; Ranta, 2010). Even though they are aware that most of the people they will communicate with in the future will not be *native* English speakers, students do not want to abandon their *native* English alignment in language training (Jenkins et al., 2011; Pilus, 2013).

As demonstrated by the above-described studies with varying study foci, further investigation is still necessary to fully understand how university-level English majors in particular perceive ELF. The learning process and the outcomes for students may be positively or negatively impacted by their perceptions of the language that they are learning (Ahmed, 2015; Soleimani & Hanafi, 2013). Furthermore, how students perceive the English language may influence how much effort they put out when studying it (Umo-Udofia & Andera, 2018). In this way, poor learning results will arise from unfavorable perceptions of the language they are learning (Almaqrn & Alshabeb, 2017). One component that is likely to favorably influence how students perceive the language they learn is its practical significance in everyday life (Crystal, 2008). Because of this, the results will almost likely be unsatisfactory if *native* English standards, which are no longer applicable or practical, are placed as the students' ultimate learning goal (Mat & Soon, 2010).

Overall, the research on the current state of English as an international lingua franca reveals that Turkish EFL students do not appear to choose to abandon their preference for *native* English norms. Furthermore, given the need for additional research in EFL contexts, the current study intends to evaluate tertiary level EFL students' perspectives of ELF and its instructional consequences in connection to their English proficiency. The study addresses the following questions with this goal in mind.

1. Do tertiary level Turkish EFL students' perceptions of ELF differ depending on their English proficiency in terms of: a) English varieties, b) ELF features, and c) English learning objectives?
2. Does English proficiency affect how tertiary level Turkish EFL students perceive the educational implications of ELF?
3. Do tertiary level Turkish EFL students' perceptions of educational implications of ELF differ depending on their level of English proficiency in terms of: a) English teachers, b) English exams, c) target language culture, and b) global cultures?

METHOD

Design

This study delves into the perceptions of tertiary-level EFL students regarding English as a lingua franca (ELF) and explores its pedagogical implications relative to their English proficiency. To achieve this objective, a descriptive survey model was employed to gauge the sentiments of EFL students towards ELF and its educational ramifications. Notably, the chosen methodology, as outlined by Karasar (2012), scrutinizes the current state of affairs, specifically in an ELF-oriented context vis-à-vis an EFL-oriented education. In essence, descriptive research aims to impartially portray phenomena as they presently exist, refraining from altering any variables. In this context, the researcher adopted a descriptive survey approach to comprehend the pedagogical implications stemming from EFL students' perspectives on English as a lingua franca. Moreover, the researchers' commitment to elucidating current circumstances without altering participants' experiences is evident in their methodological choice. This approach aligns with a descriptive epistemology, emphasizing an understanding of things in their natural state rather than imposing or rationalizing causal relationships.

Setting and Participants

Regarding the context, the rationale behind choosing a foundation university in İstanbul as the context of this study was the fact that it drew students and scholars from around the world, given that English was the medium of teaching in a significant number of its departments. The English preparatory school where the research was conducted uses the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The CEFR typically consists of three groups and six levels, which may be categorized as basic user (A1, A2), independent user (B1, B2), and master user (C1, C2) (CEFR Guide, 2013). However, English preparatory school terminates at the B2 level; as a result, the curriculum does not cover the C1 and C2 levels. Additionally, students are required to take a placement exam to determine their starting level featured by the CEFR before beginning the preparatory school program. Weekly classes are 26 hours and include 18 main courses, 4 reading and writing, and 4 listening and speaking. Notably, when a student completes a level of study with a grade average of 70 or more, they are deemed successful at that level and move on to the next. Finally, students complete the B2 level in the same manner, and then they are finished with the English preparation program. As research subjects, the study included a total of 570 EFL students. Each participant was a student who spoke Turkish as their *native* tongue. There were 255 male students and 315 female students among the 570 EFL students. Their ages ranged from 18 to 21, and they were selected through convenience sampling. International students were removed from this study in order to allow for a more focused examination of the Turkish background. The students who took part in the study were those who were continuing their education in accordance with the CEFR levels that were in effect at the time the study was performed. Thus, the number of EFL students who participated in the study and their respective CEFR modules were as follows: 126 were in A1, 222 were in A2, 112 were in B1, and 110 were in B2. During the investigation, there were no students at the C1 and C2 levels since they were not part of the English preparation program. As a result, these levels were not included in this study.

Instrument

For the current investigation, a questionnaire was created that included key topics gathered from relevant literature (Biricik Deniz et al., 2016; Cogo & Dewey, 2012; Coşkun, 2011; Jenkins, 2015; Seidlhofer, 2011; Sönmez & Akyel, 2014; Soruç, 2015; Ton & Pham, 2010). This instrument underwent expert consultation for feedback on items and instructions, followed by necessary adjustments. Subsequently, it was tested on English preparatory school students to identify and address any potential confusion. The Kolmogorov–Smirnov test indicated non-normal distribution (p = 0.000), while Cronbach's α demonstrated a reliable score of 0.71, considered satisfactory in social sciences (Dörnyei, 2007). Notably, no item significantly impacted α when removed, underscoring the questionnaire's consistency. Upon conducting a factor analysis utilizing principal component analysis, along with equimax rotation and Kaiser normalization, it was observed that all items cohesively formed a distinct group. After the pilot study and factor analysis, a total of twenty-six questions were collected, with 13 focused on ELF and the remaining 13 addressing the pedagogical implications of ELF. Importantly, there were no significant differences between the first and second revisions of the questionnaire except for the use of synonyms or antonyms in a few items.

Table 1. Subcategories of the Questionnaire about EFL Students' Perceptions towards ELF and its Pedagogical Implicantions related to their English Proficiency

Questionnaire	Subcategories
EFL Students' Perceptions Towards ELF	1. English Varieties
	2. ELF Features
	3. English Learning Goals
EFL Students' Perceptions towards the Pedagogical Implications of ELF	4. English Teachers
	5. Target Language Culture
	6. Global Cultures
	7. English Exams

Table 1 displays the subcategories derived from the factor analysis, organizing the survey items into coherent themes: English varieties, ELF features, English learning objectives, English teachers, target language culture, global cultures, and English exams. The first section of the survey probed participants' perceptions of ELF, while the second section explored their views on the pedagogical implications of ELF. Notably, items marked with an asterisk (*) in the questionnaire indicate reverse items (see Appendixes 1 and 2).

Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection process involved the use of a 5-point Likert-type questionnaire. At the outset of the study, permits were requested, including those from the ethics committee and participant consent forms. Students were also made aware that participation was voluntary. Additionally, participants were informed about the purpose of the investigation. Then, according to the number of students, printed versions of the questionnaire were produced. After completing these preliminary phases, the study was conducted in collaboration with classroom teachers. It took them about a half hour to respond to all of the questions and return the papers. A total of 570 students completed the questionnaire according to the guidelines. The researcher used SPSS 25 to analyze the data obtained in this research. A mix of descriptive and inferential statistics were used. Using the students' English competence as a predictor, a One-way ANOVA was done to see if the replies of the students varied in any manner. Certain items on the questionnaire were written in opposition to ELF in order to verify students' perspectives. To obtain aggregate results for overall study, the questionnaire items opposing the definition of ELF and its pedagogical effects were reverse coded in favor of the ELF viewpoint which were marked * in the questionnaires (Appendixes 1 and 2). Thus, it became possible to compare modules identified by the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), indicating the students' English proficiency levels.

FINDINGS

The initial research question aimed to explore the potential impact of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students' proficiency on their overall perception of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). To delve into this inquiry, quantitative data was systematically collected and subsequently subjected to analysis through both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. The ensuing presentation of results is encapsulated in the following tables, where Table 2 specifically delineates the descriptive statistics pertaining to EFL students' perceptions of ELF. This categorization is based on their varying levels of English proficiency, providing a nuanced understanding of the relationship between proficiency and perception.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics on EFL Students' Perceptions of ELF Based on their English Proficiency Levels

	Modules	N	M	SD
EFL Students' Perceptions towards ELF	A1	126	3.25	.43
	A2	222	3.21	.45
	B1	112	3.31	.46
	B2	110	3.20	.48

Table 2 provides a comprehensive overview of the student population across modules A1, A2, B1, and B2. In addition to presenting the total number of students, the table includes mean values and standard deviations, offering insights into their perceptions of the ELF concept. Notably, regardless of their proficiency levels in English, all students exhibited a neutral stance towards the ELF construct. This neutrality manifested as a reluctance to acknowledge variations in English, a tendency to prioritize intelligibility over the correct usage of English, and a preference for focusing on international communication rather than adhering to either the American

or British models of English. Building on these observations, Table 3 delves into the results of a One-way ANOVA analysis, specifically exploring EFL students' perceptions of ELF based on their varying levels of English proficiency.

Table 3. Results of One-way ANOVA on EFL Students' Perceptions of ELF Based on their English Proficiency Levels

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
EFL Students' Perceptions towards ELF	Between Groups	.830	3	.277	1.297	.275
	Within Groups	120.770	566	.213		

*p<0.05

In Table 3, the absence of statistically significant variations in students' judgments regarding English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) becomes evident, both within and among groups ($F = 1.297$, $p = .275$), particularly in relation to their English language proficiencies. This suggests that the level of students' English competence does not exert a significant influence on their interpretations of the ELF concept. With a *p*-value exceeding .05, the lack of statistical significance further emphasizes the uniformity in perceptions. Consequently, discernible differences in opinions about the ELF concept among modules A1, A2, B1, and B2 are not observed. In summary, regardless of their English proficiency, students consistently maintain similar opinions about this phrase.

The initial research question further aimed to explore EFL students' perceptions of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) in relation to their English competency, involving the evaluation of specific variables such as English varieties, English learning goals, and ELF features. The subsequent analysis delved into the examination of relevant sub-dimensions, with Table 4 presenting descriptive statistics detailing EFL students' perceptions of ELF-related variables across different levels of English proficiency.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics on EFL Students' Perceptions of ELF Related Variables Based on their English Proficiency Levels

Modules	N	M	SD
English Varieties			
A1	126	2.91	0.70
A2	222	2.85	0.67
B1	112	3.06	0.71
B2	110	3.01	0.62
ELF Features			
A1	126	3.99	0.73
A2	222	3.88	0.69
B1	112	3.97	0.67
B2	110	3.76	0.75
Learning Objectives			
A1	126	2.68	0.73
A2	222	2.75	0.75
B1	112	2.73	0.76
B2	110	2.69	0.71

Table 4 presents the enrollment numbers for modules A1, A2, B1, and B2, while also providing mean values for key factors from the ELF questionnaire in each module—such as English varieties, ELF features, and English learning objectives. Notably, when comparing students' perspectives on ELF between modules focusing on ELF features and English learning objectives, no significant differences emerge. However, a noteworthy distinction surfaces in the context of English varieties, revealing a substantial variance in students' views on the meaning of ELF between modules A2 (*M* = 2.85) and B1 (*M* = 3.06). This disparity implies that students in the B1 module, characterized by greater experience and agreement, differ significantly from those in the A2 module regarding English varieties. Furthermore, a comprehensive examination of these variables within and across groups is elucidated. The subsequent analysis, detailed in Table 5, outlines the outcomes of a One-way ANOVA investigating how EFL students perceive ELF-related variables based on their English proficiency levels.

Table 5. Results of One-way ANOVA on EFL Students' Perceptions of ELF Related Variables Based on their English Proficiency Levels

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
English Varieties					
Between Groups	4.24	3	1.41	3.03	0.029*
Within Groups	264.15	566	0.46		
ELF Features					
Between Groups	3.56	3	1.18	2.35	0.72
Within Groups	286.37	566	0.50		
English Learning Objectives					
Between Groups	0.54	3	0.18	0.32	0.808
Within Groups	315.58	566	0.55		

*p<0.05

Table 5 illustrates the absence of a significant variation in ELF features and English learning objectives. However, a noteworthy discovery emerges as a statistically significant difference is detected in relation to English varieties ($F = 3.03$, $p = .029$). Specifically, students enrolled in module B1 exhibit a more favorable perception towards deviations from native-English varieties compared to their counterparts in module A2. To delve deeper into these group distinctions, a post-hoc Tukey test was conducted, revealing a significant disparity between modules A2 and B1 concerning this specific factor. The comprehensive results of this post-hoc analysis are presented in Table 6, shedding light on how EFL students perceive ELF-related variables based on their respective English proficiency levels.

Table 6. Results of Post-hoc Tukey Test on EFL Students' Perceptions of ELF Related Variables Based on their English Proficiency Levels

Modules (I-J)	SD	Sig.
English Varieties		
A1 - A2	0.07	0.872
A1 - B1	0.08	0.292
A1 - B2	0.08	0.638
A2 - B1*	0.07	0.035*
A2 - B2	0.07	0.170
B1 - B2	0.09	0.945
ELF Features		
A1 - A2	0.07	0.513
A1 - B1	0.09	0.997
A1 - B2	0.09	0.081
A2 - B1	0.08	0.692
A2 - B2	0.08	0.531
B1 - B2	0.09	0.148
English Learning Objectives		
A1 - A2	0.08	0.809
A1 - B1	0.09	0.951
A1 - B2	0.09	0.999
A2 - B1	0.08	0.994
A2 - B2	0.08	0.905
B1 - B2	0.10	0.983

*p<0.05

Table 6 presents the results, revealing that the factors influencing ELF features and English learning objectives do not show statistical significance. Put differently, when the *p*-value exceeds 0.05, the variations concerning these variables are deemed unimportant. Nevertheless, a notable contrast emerges in the realm of English varieties between modules A2 and B1 ($p = 0.035$). This discrepancy underscores a significant finding: as

students' progress from A2 to B1 proficiency levels, there is a concurrent enhancement in their understanding and acceptance of linguistic variations. This observation suggests a positive correlation between English proficiency and the capacity to comprehend and embrace diverse linguistic elements.

The third research question delved into the perceptions of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students regarding the pedagogical impact of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), considering their proficiency in English. To elucidate this inquiry, the subsequent data elucidates the ensuing implications. Specifically, Table 7 offers descriptive statistics that outline EFL students' viewpoints on the pedagogical ramifications of ELF, categorized according to their respective levels of English proficiency.

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics on EFL Students' Perceptions of Pedagogical Implications of ELF Based on their English Proficiency Levels

	Modules	N	M	SD
Students' Perceptions towards the Pedagogical Implications of ELF	A1	126	3.01	.49
	A2	222	2.98	.49
	B1	112	2.96	.52
	B2	110	2.84	.47

Table 7 illustrates the overall student enrollment in modules A1, A2, B1, and B2, offering mean values and standard deviations of their opinions regarding ELF's educational implications. Notably, the data reveals a consistent neutral perception among students, irrespective of their English proficiency, towards the pedagogical consequences of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). This neutral stance is evident in their acceptance of English's role as a link language for international communication. Building upon this observation, further analyses are presented in subsequent tables. Table 8, for instance, showcases the results of a One-way ANOVA conducted to explore EFL students' perceptions of the pedagogical implications of ELF, categorized based on their levels of English proficiency.

Table 8. Results of One-way ANOVA on EFL Students' Perceptions of Pedagogical Implications of ELF Based on their English Proficiency Levels

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Students' Perceptions towards the Pedagogical Implications of ELF	Between Groups	1.911	3	.637	2.592	0.52
	Within Groups	139.144	566	.246		

*$p<0.05$

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) results, presented in Table 8, revealed no significant differences in students' opinions on the instructional implications of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), irrespective of their English proficiency level ($F = 2.592$, $p = .052$). As the omnibus test did not reach statistical significance, post-hoc tests were not conducted. A closer examination showed no significant variations in the judgments of ELF's instructional implications among specific proficiency groups (A1, A2, B1, and B2). Similarly, there were no noteworthy differences in students' perceptions of ELF's instructional consequences across different modules. In essence, these findings collectively indicate that English competence level does not exert a significant influence on students' perspectives regarding the educational outcomes associated with ELF.

The fourth research inquiry aimed to expand upon the scope of its predecessor by incorporating various dimensions, such as English instructors, English tests, target language culture, and global cultures. In Table 9, we present descriptive statistics elucidating EFL students' perceptions of the pedagogical implications arising from variables related to English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), stratified by their levels of English proficiency. This approach not only allows for a comprehensive exploration of the multifaceted aspects of ELF but also enables a nuanced analysis of how these factors may influence the pedagogical landscape for students at different proficiency levels.

Table 9. Descriptive Statistics on EFL Students' Perceptions of Pedagogical Implications of ELF Related Variables Based on their English Proficiency Levels

Modules	N	M	SD
English Teachers			
A1	126	2.88	0.85
A2	222	2.77	0.82
B1	112	2.62	0.81
B2	110	2.56	0.69
English Exams			
A1	126	2.91	0.75
A2	222	2.94	0.78
B1	112	2.95	0.80
B2	110	2.81	0.84
Target Language Culture			
A1	126	3.36	0.97
A2	222	3.43	1.05
B1	112	3.53	0.96
B2	110	3.21	0.92
Global Cultures			
A1	126	3.16	1.09
A2	222	3.16	1.07
B1	112	3.25	0.97
B2	110	3.25	1.00

Table 9 provides a comprehensive overview of student enrollment in modules A1, A2, B1, and B2. It also presents mean values for key factors influencing the pedagogical consequences of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) within each module. These factors encompass English teachers, English exams, target language culture, and global cultures. The analysis reveals no significant disparities across modules concerning EFL students' perspectives on the pedagogical consequences of ELF in relation to variables such as exams in English, British culture, and global cultures. Nevertheless, a noteworthy distinction emerges when examining the influence of English teachers on students' perceptions. Specifically, a substantial gap is identified, with module B2 students displaying a greater inclination towards having *native* English teachers in their classes compared to their counterparts in module A1. To further delve into these variations, Table 10 outlines the results of a One-way ANOVA, specifically focusing on EFL students' perceptions of the pedagogical implications of ELF-related variables categorized by their English proficiency levels.

Table 10. Results of One-way ANOVA on EFL Students' Perceptions of Pedagogical Implications of ELF Related Variables Based on their English Proficiency Levels

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
English Teachers					
Between Groups	7.87	3	2.62	4.02	0.007*
Within Groups	368.85	566	0.65		
English Exams					
Between Groups	1.42	3	0.47	0.75	0.523
Within Groups	358.51	566	0.63		
Target Language Culture					
Between Groups	6.19	3	2.06	2.07	0.102
Within Groups	562.99	566	0.99		
Global Culture					
Between Groups	1.04	3	0.35	0.32	0.811
Within Groups	618.20	566	1.09		

*$p < 0.05$

In the analysis presented in Table 10, a One-way ANOVA was utilized to explore potential variations in the three pedagogical implications associated with English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) factors—namely, English exams, target language culture, and global cultures—both within and between groups. The obtained results indicated an absence of statistically significant differences across these factors ($F = 4.02$, $p = .007$). Notwithstanding, a notable distinction surfaced, particularly with respect to English teachers. Subsequent post-hoc Tukey testing brought to light a significant difference ($p = .01$) between modules A1 and B2 regarding the inclination toward *native* English teachers. Consequently, students enrolled in module B2 exhibited a stronger preference for *native* English teachers in English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms compared to their counterparts in module A1. For a more in-depth exploration of EFL students' perceptions regarding the pedagogical implications of ELF-related variables, the detailed results of the Post-hoc Tukey Test, categorized by their English proficiency levels, can be found in Table 11.

Table 11. Results of Post-hoc Tukey Test on EFL Students' Perceptions of Pedagogical Implications of ELF Related Variables Based on their English Proficiency Levels

Modules (I-J)	SD	Sig.
English Teachers		
A1-A2	0.09	0.603
A1-B1	0.10	0.064
A1-B2*	0.10	0.011*
A2-B1	0.09	0.384
A2-B2	0.09	0.106
B1-B2	0.10	0.932
English Exams		
A1-A2	0.08	0.991
A1-B1	0.10	0.975
A1-B2	0.10	0.779
A2-B1	0.08	0.998
A2-B2	0.09	0.538
B1-B2	0.10	0.547
Target Language Culture		
A1-A2	0.11	0.912
A1-B1	0.12	0.555
A1-B2	0.13	0.669
A2-B1	0.11	0.838
A2-B2	0.11	0.229
B1-B2	0.13	0.084
Global Cultures		
A1-A2	0.11	1.000
A1-B1	0.13	0.906
A1-B2	0.13	0.907
A2-B1	0.11	0.895
A2-B2	0.12	0.896
B1-B2	0.13	1.000

*p<0.05

The investigation into students' perceptions of the pedagogical implications of ELF factors for modules A1, A2, B1, and B2 is extended by examining the findings presented in Table 11. The table illustrates that, for the three identified factors—English exams, target language culture, and global culture—no statistically significant differences exist. Put simply, when $p > .05$, there is no meaningful distinction between these variables. However, a noteworthy contrast emerges in relation to the factor of English teachers, with a significant difference observed between modules A1 ($M = 2.88$) and B2 ($M = 2.56$). These results imply that as students progress from level A1 to B2, there is a discernible shift in preference, indicating a greater inclination to prioritize *native* English teachers over their non-*native* counterparts in classroom settings.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

This study initially delved into the perceptions of EFL students regarding ELF across varying English proficiency levels (A1, A2, B1, and B2), focusing on English varieties, ELF features, and English learning objectives. The findings indicated no statistically significant differences in how EFL students, irrespective of their proficiency levels, perceived ELF in general. A neutral stance prevailed across all groups concerning English's status as a lingua franca and how it related to their perceptions of *native* English varieties. However, past research highlighted student preferences for *native* English due to factors such as pronunciation, learning objectives, and social prestige, though no explicit preference for *native* English variations emerged within this study.

A more in-depth exploration of ELF sub-dimensions, specifically English varieties, unveiled a noteworthy discrepancy. Statistical analyses revealed that students in the A2 module displayed less awareness of global diversifications in English compared to their counterparts in the B1 module. The results indicated that as English proficiency levels increased, so did students' awareness and acceptance of the heterogeneity within the English language. Lower-level students tended to perceive English as more monolithic and standardized, governed by consistent rules. This aligns with previous research by Galloway (2013) and Subtirelu (2013), who found that students' expectations of ELF were influenced by their views on *native* English, language learning pedagogy, and anticipated achievements.

Furthermore, aligning with CEFR level descriptions, students in A1 and A2 modules were categorized as basic users capable of communication in familiar contexts. In contrast, B1 and B2 level students were characterized as autonomous users capable of navigating unforeseen linguistic challenges. The CEFR positions B1 as a transitional level where students no longer rely solely on familiar linguistic properties. At this stage, students begin to recognize differences in English, prompting a reconsideration of their earlier perceptions of the language's "monolithic conceptualization" (Hall, 2017, p. 137). However, an increased awareness of English variations at higher levels, specifically B1 and B2, did not imply a complete abandonment of *native* English models, especially considering that C1 and C2 levels were not part of the English preparatory school curriculum.

Overall, the first section of this study revealed a nuanced understanding of how EFL students perceive ELF at different proficiency levels, shedding light on the influences of English varieties, ELF features, and learning objectives. While a neutral stance prevailed regarding ELF in general, disparities emerged when examining English varieties in more detail. These findings contribute to our understanding of how students' perceptions evolve as they progress through various English proficiency levels, offering valuable insights for language educators and curriculum developers.

The second section of this study delved into the perceptions of EFL students regarding the pedagogical implications of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). The investigation considered English teachers, target language culture, global cultures, and English examinations, categorizing responses based on English proficiency levels (A1, A2, B1, and B2). Despite these distinctions, the overall statistical analysis revealed a consistent trend across all proficiency levels: EFL students exhibited a collective hesitation to recognize ELF classroom practices, attributing this reluctance to the prevailing influence of *native* English dominant pedagogy. This finding aligns with existing research that highlights the resistance of both teachers and students to embracing ELF's implications, particularly due to concerns related to assessments (Bayyurt et al., 2019; Griffiths & Soruç, 2019; Jenkins et al., 2011; Kanık, 2013; Sönmez & Akyel, 2014).

Further exploration of the sub-dimensions of ELF's pedagogical implications uncovered a notable distinction between modules A1 and B2, particularly concerning English teachers (*native* and non-*native*). Specifically, students in the B2 module expressed a preference for teachers whose first language is English, echoing earlier studies (Sönmez & Atay, 2009; Ürkmez, 2015). As English proficiency advanced, students increasingly viewed *native* English speakers as role models for English language education. Conversely, students in the A1 module exhibited a preference for non-*native* teachers, particularly Turkish English teachers, over their *native* counterparts. This preference was rooted in the need for grammar explanations in their *native* language during the early stages of language learning (Arıkan et al., 2008).

Corroborating these findings, research by Ürkmez (2015) and Sönmez and Atay (2009) highlighted that, in higher-level classes, students favored *native* English-speaking teachers for speaking practice and exposure to target language culture. In contrast, they leaned towards non-*native* English teachers in lower-level classes, valuing their assistance in learning grammar and writing. Lower-level students perceived Turkish English teachers as more effective in providing guidance on English grammar. However, as students progressed through their modules, there was a discernible shift in their preferences. The desire to attain a native-like competence, influenced by the

prevailing ideology of *native* English in English Language Teaching (ELT), led students to expect non-*native* English teachers to focus on receptive skills at lower levels and *native* English teachers to emphasize productive skills at higher levels.

In conclusion, this study aimed to explore EFL students' perceptions of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and its instructional implications, specifically examining these perceptions in relation to their English proficiency levels as determined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The study's findings suggest that, overall, there were no significant differences in EFL students' views on the concept of ELF when considering their English proficiency levels. Regardless of their proficiency, all students tended to adopt a neutral stance toward the phenomenon of ELF when evaluating various aspects of an ELF questionnaire. However, upon closer examination of the questionnaire components, a noteworthy disparity emerged in students' perspectives on different types of English in modules A2 and B1. This divergence could be attributed to an increase in their English proficiency levels. As students' proficiency improved, so did their comprehension and discernment of the various types of English. Similarly, statistical analysis revealed no substantial variations in EFL students' assessments of the instructional consequences of ELF concerning their English skills. In this regard, all students, irrespective of their proficiency, displayed an ambivalent perception towards the implementation of ELF in the classroom. Yet, a more detailed exploration of the pedagogical implications of ELF questionnaire components identified a significant difference in the perceptions of students in modules A1 and B2, particularly concerning the role of English teachers. As EFL students' English proficiency increased, there was a preference for *native* English speaker teachers in their classrooms. Consequently, the study concludes that EFL students tend to adopt a neutral standpoint rather than outright denial of ELF, a trend consistent with findings from various studies (Cogo, 2010; Kalocsai, 2009; Peckham et al., 2012), which suggest a growing receptivity in perceptions toward ELF.

The implications derived from this study bear significance for the methodology employed in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching. As the definition of EFL has undergone a noteworthy evolution, transitioning from a politically correct stance to one that is functionally purposeful, specifically as English transforms into a lingua franca, it becomes imperative for students in our globalized society to grasp the contemporary linguistic realities of the English language. In this context, adopting an EFL teaching style that critically evaluates *native* English ideology and pedagogy can foster a more tolerant perception of unorthodox Englishes, their speakers, and associated cultures. It is crucial for students to be exposed to the linguistic diversity and non-*native* variations stemming from evolving sociolinguistic dynamics in the modern world, moving beyond an exclusive focus on *native* English variants (Galloway & Rose, 2013; Kemaloğlu Er & Bayyurt, 2019; Kemaloğlu Er & Biricik Deniz, 2020). Consequently, EFL teaching methods should strive to enhance students' awareness of various models of English, both spoken and written, thereby augmenting their ability to interact and communicate effectively with those using English as a second language. Furthermore, the findings of this study hold implications for tertiary-level English preparatory school programs. Consequently, program planners should reassess the components of English teacher selection, target language culture incorporation, global cultural integration, and English proficiency assessments, all within the framework of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). Acknowledging the contemporary reality that English has evolved into a multi-centric language, the English preparatory school curriculum must reflect this characteristic. However, this crucial aspect is frequently overlooked, and English preparatory programs often adhere to standardized English models that fail to meet the needs of present-day learners. Thus, when crafting curricula for these programs, organizers must reevaluate their perspectives based on ELF research and implement necessary updates to align with the changing landscape of English language usage.

This research, despite its contributions, is not without limitations. Firstly, the study was confined to a single institution, diminishing the generalizability of its findings. The exclusivity of the context raises concerns about the relevance and applicability of the results to other settings or populations. To enhance the study's external validity, future research should aim for a more diverse range of contexts. Secondly, while this study exclusively utilized a quantitative methodology, employing a mixed-methods approach could offer a more comprehensive analysis. Relying solely on quantitative techniques may result in a one-dimensional analysis that overlooks nuanced aspects of the research topic. Thirdly, expanding the participant count is crucial to bolster the study's statistical power, generalizability, and the credibility of the conclusions drawn from the collected data. A larger participant pool would provide a more robust foundation for meaningful insights. Furthermore, the restriction to Turkish students in this study narrows its scope and limits the generalizability of the results. A comparative analysis involving both Turkish and international higher education students would offer a broader perspective, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of potential distinctions or similarities between these groups.

Looking ahead, future research should explore evolving trends in English Language Teaching (ELT) in light of the prospects for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. Such research would contribute to the field by operationalizing the changing realities of English in higher education and beyond, addressing the dynamic landscape of language education.

Statements of Publication Ethics

The author affirms that there are no unethical problems with this study. The approval was received from Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University (approval date:28.01.2021 and number:2021/01).

Conflict of Interest

The author states this study has no conflict of interest.

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