# The Investigation of Different English Accents on Listening Comprehension

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper investigates the potential effects of different English accents on non-native English speakers' listening comprehension and tries to shed light on their perceptions and opinions on the matter. This study was carried out with 38 pre-service English language teachers, and three data collection tools were utilized throughout the process. The participants were requested to complete the listening comprehension tests following a semantic differential scale and a reflective paper. The audio scripts with different English accents were randomly utilized in the listening comprehension tests. The findings uncovered that familiarity with WEs is a significant issue in fostering listening comprehension skills and eliminating bias toward non-native English accents. The implication of the present mixed-methods study may lead to positive changes in English Language Teaching curriculums to enhance familiarity with WEs.*

## INTRODUCTION

As a result of a myriad of interactions emerging in the world, English has become the primary source of these interactions over time by possessing the status of lingua franca, but how? According to Crystal (2003), this process had started with colonization in the British Empire first and continued with the power of the United States in the economy. Thus, English began to be used in different areas and places by millions of people around the globe. Already in the 2000s, Crystal (2003) indicated that the ratio of non-native English speakers (NNESs) had drastically left far beyond the percentage of native English speakers (NESs). When this has been considered, it is not very difficult to estimate today's situation regarding the usage of English and the number of NNESs as it is known the interactions in English do not solely happen among NESs anymore (Graddol, 2006). Also, NNESs' aim to learn English has shifted from communicating with NESs to NNESs. In other words, the center of communication worldwide went in one direction: from NESs to NNESs. Hence, Widdowson (1994) supports the idea that ownership of English needs to be shared by those who speak it, which means English does not only belong to NESs but also NNESs and emphasizes the importance of comprehensibility in communication.

This kind of usage of English by different nations has led Kachru to distinguish between the place and importance of English in those nations. In his concentric circles, Kachru (1992) explains the usage of English in countries with three circles: inner (e.g., UK, USA), outer (e.g., India, Nigeria), and expanding circle (e.g., China, Russia). The inner circle refers to the countries using English as their native tongue; the outer circle countries use English as their

second language while the expanding circle countries use it as a foreign language. The inner circle is accepted as norm-providing, the outer circle as norm-developing, and expanding circle as norm-dependent. Therefore, the inner circle accents are the most faced accents in almost all educational settings. In contrast, other accents from the outer and expanding circles are usually somehow less presented.

It becomes very natural to have differences in phonology as the English language is used by many individuals having various backgrounds. For instance, the Japanese language does not have /f, v/ sounds, and these sounds are changed with [ɸ, β] sounds in the process of performing English, according to the statement by Armstrong (2012). Expecting an individual to have an entirely native-like pronunciation may sound utopic. This expectation could harm language learners psychologically and handicap language learners' motivation to learn English due to different sound patterns among languages. It may cause individuals to have a sense of failure and a feeling of inadequacy. Also, the inner circle has differences and varieties in accent, for example, Australian English, Canadian English, and so forth. It could be deduced that neither all NESs have the features of Received Pronunciation nor all NNESs have a native-like accent.

This issue brings the importance and necessity of exposure to different English accents into all learning and teaching platforms. Especially language teacher education programs have a crucial role in training students to be global speakers accepted by other speakers. Thus, it would not be wrong to say that acceptance is related to intelligibility, as human beings tend to listen and respond to the ones that they are able to understand. The more exposure is provided to learners the more their competence in listening is possible to be improved as a consequence of being familiar with non-native forms. As long as the pre-service English language teachers are equipped with an awareness and understanding of these accents, they will transfer what they know to their students, and their students will be able to grasp different English accents, too. This is a need for the continuation of the globalization loop.

**Why is ELF needed to be more voiced?**

Recently, there has been a growing interest in the concept of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). Seidlhofer (2011) regards ELF as a linguistic movement since its focus is the oral communication in English performed by NNSs (Sifakis, 2009). Regardless of their native tongue, ELF gathers individuals by means of English and uses it as a mutual tool to communicate (Seidlhofer, 2011). In such a rich setting in accents, interrelated terms such as familiarity and exposure become crucial to eliminate bias and understand one another.

Many studies have investigated beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes towards ELF and World Englishes (WEs). Some of the previous studies on NNESs' perceptions (Wach, 2011; Jindapitak & Teo, 2013; Pilus, 2013; Sung, 2014; Fang, 2015; Melchien, 2016; Kagitci-Yildiz, 2017; Ceyhan-Bingöl & Ozkan, 2019) indicate that participants who lack ELF familiarity either have a bias to non-native English accents or prefer native English accents over non-native accents. However, participants from other studies (Ahmed, Abdullah & Heng, 2014; Buckingham, 2015) knowing ELF approach positively to non-native forms.

Regarding listening, there is a gap in the literature in terms of studies researching WEs about their intelligibility and familiarity. Kang, Vo, and Moran (2016) conducted a study on Vietnamese accented English speech based on intelligibility, comprehensibility, and accentedness. The results showed that Vietnamese English was difficult to comprehend in general for the participants as a reason of unfamiliarity and participants stated that Vietnamese English carried the strong phonological indicators of the mother tongue, Vietnamese. In Kagitci-Yildiz's (2017) study, it was stated that participants had a bias about not going to be able to understand NNESs' accents. Yet, the findings did not confirm their opinion as there was no significant difference between NNESs' and NESs' accents. On the other hand, Sriwang,

Prabjandee & Kewara (2020) researched the NNESs' accents and found that participants' listening comprehension skills increased after introducing participants to these accents.

It could be roughly summarized that enabling students to interact with the non-native English accent varieties provides reviewing their biased opinions and lead to a positive impact on their perceptions about these non-native forms and their listening skills. This kind of interaction may need to be seen as a process of learning, and a reflection of real-life as stated by Alptekin (2002) since interactions merely with native forms do not meet the real-life requirements when the number of NNESs' population is taken into consideration. In other words, familiarity with non-native forms becomes prominent in terms of being a competent speaker in intercultural settings, especially when the increasing exchanges among non-natives over the years are regarded.

As a conclusion of related issues briefly summarized above, English Language Teaching (ELT) departments training future language teachers need to review their teaching programs to keep pace with world realities, which could be probably achieved by encompassing different English varieties as a global issue. Therefore, introducing English in classes by embracing materials related to ELF such as different accented audio scripts could reinforce the listening comprehension skill, assist learners in expanding their vision, and boost their accommodation skills in real life since the more exposure is given the more competency in listening skills is likely to be gained by the language learners and teachers.

## Why listening?

Listening as a receptive skill is often less valued since learners do not produce any form of language while this skill is active. Wolvin and Coakley (1996, p.69) define listening as "the process of receiving, attending to, and assigning meaning to aural and visual stimuli". Similar to this definition, Barker (1971) sees listening as a process in which individuals hear, sense, and recall auditory signals. Pourhosein and Ahmadi (2011) regard listening as the most crucial skill since it needs much elaboration with a combination of sub-skills (e.g., hear, sense, recall, etc.) compared to reading, writing, and speaking. Celce-Murcia (1995, p.366) signifies that the sub-skills are achieved over time as the auditory data is deciphered throughout listening, which turns the listening process into "complex, dynamic, and fragile".

Many researchers in the literature (Brewster, Ellis & Girard, 2002; Osada, 2004; Pinter, 2006; Helgesen & Brown, 2007; Hamouda, 2013) regard listening as an active process that is a combination of listening and comprehension. Karavas (2015) implies that listening takes the first place both in the acquisition order and in the extent of use among other language skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking); however, listening takes fourth place when it comes to the teaching order in language classes. This displays that listening skills are not valued in language classes as much as the other three language skills are.

Apart from negligence, there might be some extra-linguistic factors from which the audience can be affected during listening, such as gender, proficiency level, and so forth, as some researchers mentioned (Wipf, 1984; Rubin, 1994; Ahn & Kang, 2016; Ockey & French, 2016). The combination of different issues (e.g., negligence, extra-linguistic factors, different accents) causes listening to be more difficult. In light of this, more emphasis should be placed on listening skills to eradicate extra-linguistic factors and enable students to learn different accents so that they will be able to perform listening skills better in the target language.

These issues again bring the necessity of exposure to different English accents into the language teacher education programs. Their competence in listening skills could be enhanced by being exposed to different varieties of English accents. Considering the investigation of listening effects of WEs, there is a gap in the literature as more focus is placed on perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes. Thus, this study aims to help fill the gap in the literature. In the present

paper, answers to the questions below were sought out.

**1.** How is the pre-service English language teachers' L2 listening comprehension affected by different English accents?

**2.** How do the pre-service English language teachers approach L2 listening materials with different English accents?

## METHODOLOGY

This study reflects an abridged version of a Master's thesis (Kurtuldu, 2019) that investigated the potential effects of different English accents on non-native speakers' listening comprehension. It sought out practical solutions to eliminate the potential negative effects in the pre-service teacher education programs. Also, it aimed to get a grasp of NNESs' perspectives about WEs. In this mixed methods research, the pragmatic paradigm encompassing the variability of personal realities (Creswell, 2003) was applied due to the mutable atmosphere of WEs. The study focused on English accents and their probable effects on listening from the perspective of an English language teaching program.

### Context

To test challenges in listening comprehension that NNESs go through while listening to different English audio scripts and find out the effects of these audio scripts, six speakers from Kachru's (1992) concentric circles were randomly selected. Two speakers from each circle were requested to record the given script with their accents. The scripts were C1 level in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The audio scripts included three different categories for accents as *inner*, *outer*, and *expanding* circle accents.

The American and Australian accents from *the inner* circle, the Pakistani and Malaysian accents from the *outer* circle, and the Hungarian and Mexican accents from *expanding* circle accents were utilized during the listening comprehension tests. In presenting the accents, the study was composed of two phases, and each phase had one accent from each concentric circle. The American, Pakistani, and Hungarian accents were used in the first phase while the others were used in the second phase. While listening to and reflecting on each accent, the participants were not informed about which accent they listened to until they completed the process they had been exposed to.

### Participants

The present study was conducted with 38 ELT students enrolling in the elective course "Globalization in ELT" in the Fall Term of 2018-2019 Academic Year at a state university in Turkey. This course in the fourth grade in the pre-service teacher education program was offered to students to raise awareness on English usage on the global level. Purposive sampling was applied to select the participants. They were all Turkish; 25 were females and 13 males. Their average age was 22, and they had been learning English for at least seven years. Out of 38 participants, 19 specified that they often practiced their listening skills in English by watching videos on social media platforms. Before implementing this research, their proficiency level was tested and identified as C1 according to the CEFR by the Council of Europe (2001).

**Data collection tools**

Three data collection tools were employed during the study to examine six accents and their effects on listening skills. The listening comprehension tests appropriate to the participants' level were utilized. The semantic differential scale from the study by Ahmed et al. (2014) was adapted, and reflective papers were distributed to understand participants' views better. The quantitative data was obtained from listening comprehension tests and semantic differential scales while the qualitative data was obtained from reflective papers. In order to test the effects of the targeted accents on comprehensibility, six listening comprehension tests were employed. The tests had different question types, such as true-false, fill-in-the-blank, and multiple-choice questions, and there were five questions in each test with two fill in the blank questions, two true-false questions, and one multiple-choice question. The test items varied to eliminate the chance/guessing factor and increase the test validity. The listening comprehension tests were followed by a semantic scale and a reflective paper. The semantic differential scales included a list consisting of 17 adjectives (e.g., familiar, strong, etc.) related to accents in five options differing from *not at all* to *very*. The semantic differential scales provided insights into the issue of participants' perceptions about the targeted accents. The reflective papers were also intended to unveil the participants' perceptions and opinions about WEs by providing a deeper understanding of their choices in the semantic scales.

**Data analysis**

The data analysis process started with the analysis of listening comprehension tests and semantic differential scales, and both were perused in SPSS version 20. The analysis of listening comprehension tests gave the ratio of correct and incorrect responses and examined the differences in answers between the distinct question types. The semantic differential scale went under a frequency analysis to see how the participants perceived WEs while the reflective papers were perused under grounded theory enabling thematic analysis and open coding (Charmaz, 2006). All accents used were shown below by categorizing the inner, outer, and expanding circle to compare easily. In Table I, II, and III, FiB represents fill in the blank questions, MC represents multiple-choice questions, and T/F represents true-false questions. C refers to correct answers, and IC refers to incorrect answers.

**FINDINGS**

**Potential effects of audio scripts with WEs**

For the American accent in the first phase, the participants' answers in the fill in the blank (FiB) questions had no consistency between the two FiB questions. 23 participants were able to jot down the correct answer to the blank while only four of them succeeded in typing the correct answer for the second FiB question. They performed better in true-false (T/F) questions when compared to FiB questions. 31 of them chose the correct answer for the multiple-choice (MC) question. The results were not very dissimilar while investigating the Australian accent in the second phase. The number of participants answering correctly for MC was quite similar to the American accent. The ratio in T/F questions differed; less than half of them (n=7) could not choose the correct option while more than half of them (n=23) were able to determine the correct answer in the second T/F question. Most of the respondents (n=15 & 34) did not perform well in both FiB questions. Table I shows the detailed results of *inner* circle accents.

**Table 1.** Inner circle accents

| Accent Type | Question Numbers | Question Types | Correct vs. Incorrect | f | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| American | Q1 | FiB | C | 23 | 60,5 |
| | | | IC | 15 | 39,5 |
| | Q2 | FiB | C | 4 | 10,5 |
| | | | IC | 34 | 89,5 |
| | Q3 | T/F | C | 31 | 81,6 |
| | | | IC | 7 | 18,4 |
| | Q4 | T/F | C | 23 | 60,5 |
| | | | IC | 15 | 39,5 |
| | Q5 | MC | C | 31 | 81,6 |
| | | | IC | 7 | 18,4 |
| Australian | Q1 | MC | C | 33 | 86,8 |
| | | | IC | 5 | 13,2 |
| | Q2 | T/F | C | 13 | 34,2 |
| | | | IC | 25 | 65,8 |
| | Q3 | FiB | C | 16 | 42,1 |
| | | | IC | 22 | 57,9 |
| | Q4 | T/F | C | 37 | 97,4 |
| | | | IC | 1 | 2,6 |
| | Q5 | FiB | C | 8 | 21,1 |
| | | | IC | 30 | 78,9 |

From the *outer* circle accents, the Pakistani and Malaysian accents were given. Out of four FiB questions in total, the ratio of correct answers in questions both in the first and second phase was low as almost all of the participants were not able to fill the blanks. Only the last FiB question in the Malaysian accent was answered correctly by 23 participants; however, the other FiB questions were not answered by nearly any of the participants (n=36, 38 & 36) in both tests. More than half of the participants (n=30 & 26) were able to identify the correct answer in T/F questions in the Pakistani accent while the number of correct answers (n=17 & 30) in the Malaysian accent differed between the first and second question. The participants performed similarly in MC questions in both accents. Table II displays the details.

**Table 2.** Outer circle accents

| Accent Type | Question Numbers | Question Types | Correct vs. Incorrect | f | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pakistani | Q1 | MC | C | 28 | 73,7 |
| | | | IC | 10 | 26,3 |
| | Q2 | T/F | C | 30 | 78,9 |
| | | | IC | 8 | 21,1 |
| | Q3 | T/F | C | 26 | 68,4 |
| | | | IC | 12 | 31,6 |
| | Q4 | FiB | C | 2 | 5,3 |
| | | | IC | 36 | 94,7 |
| | Q5 | FiB | C | 0 | 0,0 |
| | | | IC | 38 | 100,0 |
| Malaysian | Q1 | FiB | C | 2 | 5,3 |
| | | | IC | 36 | 94,7 |
| | Q2 | T/F | C | 17 | 44,7 |
| | | | IC | 21 | 55,3 |
| | Q3 | T/F | C | 30 | 78,9 |

| | | | IC | 8 | 21,1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Q4 | FiB | | C | 23 | 60,5 |
| | | | IC | 15 | 39,5 |
| Q5 | MC | | C | 20 | 52,6 |
| | | | IC | 18 | 47,4 |

In the Hungarian accent, 35 respondents chose the correct answer for both T/F questions. The ratio of correct answers for FiB questions was different. For the first question, only five of them succeeded in filling the blank while the ratio of correct answers (n=31) increased in the second question. In the Mexican accent, both FiB questions were not answered by more than half of the population (n=32 & 26). The participants performed better in the T/F questions compared to FiB questions. To be examined MC questions, the participants had more accurate responses in the Hungarian accent than the Mexican accent. Table III demonstrates the ratio of answers.

**Table 3**. Expanding circle accents

| Accent Type | Question Numbers | Question Types | Correct vs. Incorrect | f | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hungarian | Q1 | T/F | C | 35 | 92,1 |
| | | | IC | 3 | 7,9 |
| | Q2 | T/F | C | 35 | 92,1 |
| | | | IC | 3 | 7,9 |
| | Q3 | FiB | C | 5 | 13,2 |
| | | | IC | 33 | 86,8 |
| | Q4 | FiB | C | 31 | 81,6 |
| | | | IC | 7 | 18,4 |
| | Q5 | MC | C | 21 | 55,3 |
| | | | IC | 17 | 44,7 |
| Mexican | Q1 | FiB | C | 6 | 15,8 |
| | | | IC | 32 | 84,2 |
| | Q2 | FiB | C | 12 | 31,6 |
| | | | IC | 26 | 68,4 |
| | Q3 | T/F | C | 15 | 39,5 |
| | | | IC | 23 | 60,5 |
| | Q4 | MC | C | 34 | 89,5 |
| | | | IC | 4 | 10,5 |
| | Q5 | T/F | C | 26 | 68,4 |
| | | | IC | 12 | 31,6 |

**Perceptions and opinions on audio scripts with WEs**

The findings obtained from the semantic differential scales and reflective papers were presented together to understand the participants' perceptions and opinions fully. The Cronbach's alpha of semantic differential scales was found as .952, which indicated high validity. The scales were composed of 17 items and five options for each item. However, the most emerging six items related to comprehensibility were chosen to be presented in this paper, and the most selected three options (not at all, medium, very) were shown below in Table IV. Besides, the wordings in the reflective papers were checked by authors and the grammatical correction was applied by cross-checking.

**Table 4.** Perspectives on all accents inclusive of three circles

| | | Inner | | Outer | | Expanding | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | American | Australian | Pakistani | Malaysian | Hungarian | Mexican |
| **Items** | **Options** | **Frequency** | | | | | |
| | Not at all | 3 | 3 | 11 | 5 | 3 | 9 |
| understandable | Moderately | 12 | 15 | 7 | 8 | 8 | 10 |
| | Very | 1 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 0 |
| | Not at all | 5 | 3 | 22 | 9 | 6 | 10 |
| clear | Moderately | 10 | 13 | 4 | 10 | 11 | 9 |
| | Very | 3 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| | Not at all | 4 | 3 | 14 | 3 | 3 | 6 |
| fluent | Moderately | 3 | 7 | 7 | 13 | 8 | 13 |
| | Very | 17 | 14 | 1 | 1 | 7 | 1 |
| | Not at all | 3 | 2 | 13 | 6 | 6 | 9 |
| strong | Moderately | 14 | 14 | 9 | 14 | 12 | 8 |
| | Very | 5 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 1 |
| | Not at all | 4 | 4 | 17 | 7 | 4 | 10 |
| familiar | Moderately | 12 | 12 | 8 | 14 | 8 | 10 |
| | Very | 5 | 6 | 1 | 0 | 9 | 1 |
| | Not at all | 1 | 2 | 12 | 6 | 6 | 3 |
| fast | Moderately | 10 | 11 | 10 | 11 | 14 | 18 |
| | Very | 12 | 12 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 1 |

Analysis from Table IV showed the pre-service teachers rated the Pakistani accent as *not at all* understandable, clear, fluent, strong, familiar, and fast. Yet, they perceived the Australian accent as *moderately* understandable, clear, and strong. The participants defined the Australian accent as *very* fluent while they preferred defining *moderately* fluent for the Malaysian and Mexican accents. They perceived the Malaysian and Hungarian accents as *moderately* strong and rated *moderately* familiar for the Malaysian accent. Lastly, they evaluated the American and Australian accents as *very* fast.

From their reflective papers, it was clear that the participants were not familiar with the Pakistani accent, which was the potential reason for their low ratings on the semantic differential scale. This finding highlighted the importance of *familiarity*. A high number of participants (n=22) expressed that the accent was unclear. As a reason for unfamiliarity, they were not able to grasp the meaning of the audio script as they jotted down in the reflective papers. Some of them explained their thoughts related to *familiarity,* and their comments are shown below:

**P4**: "The accent was a big problem for me because I don't understand Eastern accents much."

**P5**: "It was difficult to understand but more exposure can lead to more competency in this accent, I think."

**P9**: "I couldn't understand the main idea because I did not understand most of it."

**P10**: "I was not accustomed to her accent so I felt confused and stressful during the listening."

**P11**: "I felt so lack of English while listening to the conversation. As I was not familiar with the accent, I couldn't answer the questions in a way that I wanted. It makes me feel

uncomfortable when I hear an accent that is unfamiliar to me."

The last reflection on the Pakistani accents showed that the participants were prone to have *the feeling of incompetence* when they did not perform successful listening, especially when faced with an unfamiliar accent. About the Mexican accent, some of the participants agreed that the accent was moderately strong (n=8) and fast (n=18), and some of them clarified the issue of *emphasis* and *speech rate* with these words:

**P4**: "He speaks a little fast and his accent is difficult to understand."

**P5**: "Some of the h sounds were strong and I did not like this."

**P21**: "It was a strong accent and you could hear the characteristics of his mother tongue in his speech in English so many words were wrongly pronounced but it wasn't really difficult to understand for me."

Although the pre-service teachers did not rate low intelligibility for the Malaysian accent, they elucidated that the speaker's *intonation* was not decent and energetic, and these reasons affected their ratings. Furthermore, one of the participants stated they often interacted with either British or American English instead of WEs, which arose the *familiarity* theme as seen in the Pakistani accent. A few of their comments were presented:

**P5**: "It was understandable, but it was not energetic because she spoke very monotonous."

**P9**: "There was no stress; the intonation didn't change at all so I didn't like it."

**P16**: "Her accent was unusual for me as we dealt with either British or American accents before, so I found it difficult to understand."

Some participants expressed that they were able to understand the Hungarian accent, so it was *intelligible* to them. However, some of them realized that they were not practicing different accents. Listening to audio scripts with WEs enabled them to notice this issue. Their interpretations are shown below:

**P1**: "It was intelligible, clear, and fluent."

**P3**: "It was really good and understandable."

**P11**: "It made me realize that I was passive about different accents."

Lastly, the pre-service English language teachers interpreted the American and Australian accents fast, and they could not understand what the speaker was speaking due to the *speech rate*. Some of their comments were listed related to this theme. The first comment belongs to the American accent, and the last two comments belong to the Australian accent.

**P21**: "The man was speaking fast and also talking too much, so it was difficult to understand."

**P12**: "He speaks too fast, so I couldn't fill the blanks."

**P18**: "It was good. It was not very difficult to understand, but he talked a little bit fast."

Some participants reported that the intonation was a problem when listening to the American accent. The intonation did not change, which caused monotony and decreased their motivation to listen to the rest of the audio script. The related interpretations of monotony are displayed.

**P32**: "The speaker's tone of voice was flat flow, and his intonations were weak, so I didn't like it."

**P33**: "The speaker was always speaking at the same level; it was not bad, but it was boring because of the voice, so I couldn't concentrate. Even if I could, I lost my concentration. If he could raise his voice or put some stress and intonation to the speech, it could be better."

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings from the reflective papers and semantic differential scales showed no similarity with the studies by Sung (2014), Fang (2015), and Ceyhan-Bingöl and Ozkan (2019)

since the participants in this study did not show any bias to NNS forms. They did not have a more positive approach for NNS accents rather than NS accents, which showed dissimilarity to the study's findings by Ahmed et al. (2014). Yet, they held a positive approach towards NNS forms as in the studies by Buckingham (2015), Pilus (2013), and Sriwang et al. (2020). Therefore, it could be summarized that the participants of this study expressed neither strong negative nor strong positive approaches to WEs. The most repeated themes from the reflective papers seemed to be *familiarity*, *speech rate*, and *intonation*. *Familiarity* theme highlighted that being unfamiliar with an accent (e.g., Pakistani accent) negatively affects NNSs' listening comprehension skills. On the other hand, being familiar with an accent (e.g., American accent) affects their skill positively, as seen in their listening comprehension test results. Unlike the study's findings carried out by Ahmed et al. (2014), non-native accents were less familiar to the present study's participants. The most remarkable theme emerging became *the feeling of incompetence*. One of the participants noted that unfamiliarity could cause language learners to feel incompetent in their listening ability due to inadequate exposure to different accent varieties.

The listening comprehension tests displayed that the participants were mostly successful in answering MC questions and their success in FiB questions was low. In this view, it is possible to conclude that the participants were able to comprehend the main idea of the audio scripts. The questions requiring sub-skills, such as the FiB questions, were challenging for them as they could not differentiate the sounds as a result of inadequate exposure to the related accent. As Celce-Murcia (1995) stated, this makes the process of listening tough and delicate, and the sub-skills in listening need time and practice to be improved. These skills could be supported positively by exposure. In general, the participants were successful in American and Australian English while having problems in WEs. Although there were some significant changes in rating between native and non-native accents, it could be remarked that they did not have any bias to WEs since the participants did not rate all items in *outer* or *expanding* circle accents strictly low. When their overall score in each accent was perused, the first three accents that they became the most successful in listening comprehension appeared to be the Hungarian (*expanding*), American (*inner*), and Australian (*inner*) accents while the accents they were the least successful became the Pakistani (*outer*), Malaysian (*outer*), and Mexican (*expanding*) accents.

Their low ratings arise from unfamiliarity; hence the reflections from the papers highlighted the emphasis between *familiarity* and *listening performance*. The participants expressed that they became demotivated and felt unsuccessful when they faced a different accent, which raised the theme of *the feeling of incompetence*. Similar to the findings by Kagitci-Yildiz (2017), the most repeated themes from the reflective papers became *familiarity* and *speech rate*, which could be associated with intelligibility. In sum, the results showed that the students unfamiliar with WEs accents had difficulty in understanding the audio scripts, which led to low ratings both on the semantic differential scales and low success on the comprehension tests.

When the participants' performances in the American and Australian accents are considered, it could be inferred that their performance increased in familiar accents. The opposite effect was observed in the unfamiliar accents except for the Hungarian accent. As in the study by Kagitci-Yildiz (2017), the participants drew attention to the fact that NNESs can also be intelligible if they speak with clear pronunciation and good intonation, which ease the interlocutors' understanding. However, some NNESs having different backgrounds may not eradicate the effects of their mother tongue while performing a speech, as indicated by Kang et al. (2016). Hence, being familiar with an accent to improve listening skills in English becomes prominent.

In conclusion, embracing ELF in language classrooms could boost students' listening comprehension in English, as seen in the study by Sriwang et al. (2020), facilitate reducing or eliminating their bias toward non-native accents, and widen their perspectives about the world and its realities. It could enhance their self-confidence in listening, and communication skills and better prepare them for real-life situations such as having students from different backgrounds or attending global conferences with individuals with diverse English accents. The study highlights the importance of such an integration of ELF accents in language classes as they could promote legitimization for the community of NNESs in pre-service teacher education programs and pave the way for a change in ELT curriculums by fostering to include various English accents as richness instead of weakness.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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