

Investigating Costa Rican English Teachers' Attitudes Towards Their Native or Non-native Pronunciation: A Cross-Sectional Survey

Investigando la actitud del profesorado de inglés hacia su pronunciación nativa o no nativa: una encuesta transversal

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Abstract

Pronunciation plays a fundamental role on non-native English speaker teachers' (NNESTs) communication, and some may even think that by having a native accent they could be better instructors. Thus, to analyze and ascertain educators' view on pronunciation and how it affects their performance, this study has focused on 23 elementary and high school teachers working in Circuit 03, *Dirección Regional de Educación de Guápiles*. A cross-sectional survey design, which employs a web-based questionnaire with different closed-ended, semi-closed-ended, and open-ended questions, is utilized. The results have shown that there is a rooted idea that the American and British accents must be used by both educators and their students, which reflects *native-speakerism*. Even though there was a high degree of satisfaction among these teachers when rating their accent, a small percentage felt that it did influence their desire to communicate or avoid any exchange with other speakers. Moreover, a certain percentage of English as a Foreign Language teachers also believed that their pronunciation affected their performance when communicating in different environments, mainly in trainings.

Keywords: accent, elementary school teachers, high school teachers, native-speakerism, NNESTs, pronunciation.

Resumen

La pronunciación juega un papel fundamental en la comunicación del profesorado no nativo de habla inglesa (NNESTs, por sus siglas en inglés) y algunos incluso podrían pensar que, teniendo un acento nativo, ellos podrían ser mejores instructores. Por consiguiente, para analizar y determinar la perspectiva de los educadores sobre la pronunciación y cómo esta afecta su desempeño, este estudio se ha enfocado en 23 docentes de escuela y colegio que trabajan en el circuito escolar 03, *Dirección Regional de Educación de Guápiles*. Se utiliza un diseño de encuesta transversal, en el cual se recurre a un cuestionario electrónico con diferentes preguntas cerradas, semicerradas y abiertas. Los resultados han mostrado que existe una idea arraigada de que los acentos estadounidenses y británicos deben ser utilizados tanto por el profesorado como por su estudiantado, lo cual refleja una práctica llamada *preferencia del nativo hablante*. Aunque hubo un alto grado de satisfacción entre estos docentes, cuando calificaron su acento; un pequeño porcentaje sintió que esta sí influenciaba su deseo de comunicarse o evitar cualquier intercambio con otros hablantes. Además, cierto porcentaje del profesorado de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera también creyó que su pronunciación afectaba su desempeño cuando se comunicaban en diferentes ambientes, principalmente en capacitaciones.

Palabras claves: acento, profesorado de escuela, profesorado de colegio, preferencia del nativo hablante, NNESTs, pronunciación.

Introduction

Speaking in a foreign language is valued more than any other of the three macro skills that anyone can acquire, such as listening, reading, and writing (Ortiz-Gómez, 2021). Being able to produce orally seems to be a synonym for managing the whole system of a language. In fact, when people want to make sure if someone knows a language, they will probably ask if you can speak it (Nation, 2011; Lazaraton, 2014). However, when it comes to teachers, the speaking skill acquires even more importance because learners expect to have a good role model to follow and learn from. This means that fluency is a must for someone who is teaching English, for example, because even though instructors may demonstrate a high performance in the other skills, if they do not prove to be fluent enough to communicate verbally about different topics, they may be judged by students and colleagues as educators who do not know the target language.

Besides having fluency, English teachers are also required to have exceptionally good pronunciation to be considered models for students. That means that having an accent that resembles that of an important English-speaking city is considered more suitable than using a pronunciation that sounds more like a non-native speaker of a city from France, China, or Chile (Cook, 2007). Having an accent that differs from that of native speakers' can be considered a failure (Cook, 1999). This demand for sounding like natives of an English-speaking country, even though teachers may have been born, grown up, and lived their entire lives in a non-English-speaking country, is

the result of a practice described by Holliday (2003) as *native-speakerism*.

Native-speakerism does not value that teachers may have other pronunciation than that of a native speaker. Llurda (2018) has considered that requiring people to speak in just one correct way is no more than a prescription, and failing to comply with that prescription results in breaking a rule that condemns those who do not obey it. The consequence of having non-native pronunciation means being judged as poor English teachers that are not able to imitate the sounds that they thoroughly studied at university. That also implies a sense of failure for English teachers who tried as students and later as educators to sound like Americans, British, or any of the other three nationalities belonging to what Kachru (1985, 1996) has called as the *Inner Circle*, i.e., Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Not only does it mean a failure to have an accent different from that of the countries of the *Inner Circle*, but it also carries some stereotypes for non-native teachers (Ng, 2018).

Native-speakerism implies more than having pronunciation from an Anglophone country for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers. It also means to accept that "those who speak English as a native language are the best qualified to teach it" (Glasgow et al., 2020, p. 192). This idea is not far from the *pure language myth* (Watts, 2011), which supports the notion that native speakers can be considered perfect in speaking and writing. Thus, based on the previous ideas supported by *native-speakerism*, it seems that EFL and ESL teachers who do not have that native English accent are

bound for disaster in teaching the target language in their native countries. Everything is reduced to pronunciation rather than methodology, strategies, motivation, experience, or any other attribute that can help educators to teach English. Thus, after many years of studying in a university to become teachers, many instructors are forced to face a hard reality, which is being considered good or bad depending on how they sound to the ears of students, parents, principals, and advisors; not to mention that in some private institutions they may not be hired because only native speakers qualify for the teaching positions.

There is ample literature concerning *native-speakerism* and its influence on other educational systems in different countries. For example, Kaur and Raman (2014) have investigated how pre-service teacher trainees at a public university in Malaysia rated native speaker and non-native speaker accents. The findings indicated that the British, American, and Australian English accents “were perceived and rated to be the most correct, most acceptable, most pleasant and most familiar” in comparison to other seven accents, including Brazilian English, Spanish English, and German English (Kaur & Raman, 2014, p. 256). Other authors such as Whitehead and Ryu (2023) have also investigated what 14 public Korean elementary school English teachers faced when teaching English pronunciation. The findings reported by Whitehead and Ryu showed lack of confidence by eleven teachers; one of the subjects of the study even considered that she did not have appropriate pronunciation because she sounded Korean, even though Whitehead and

Ryu reported that she had a “highly comprehensible pronunciation” (p. 6). There are also studies concerning *native speakerism* and its influence in a country such as Japan. By following an autoethnographic approach, Ng (2018) has narrated how his university students felt uneasy when he spoke with his Singaporean English and how he managed to gain their acceptance by coming up with different strategies.

Supporting and following *native-speakerism* damages language teaching (Holliday, 2015). Therefore, in view of the negative repercussions for educators and their identities, there is a need to analyze the role of pronunciation in the Costa Rican educational system, since propagating such negative ideals among English teachers goes against their rights as individuals. In this country, *native speakerism* has been analyzed by Villalobos (2014). In her study, Villalobos administered a questionnaire to 272 participants, including academic coordinators, teachers, and students of seven different language schools of English, Spanish, French, Portuguese, and Italian. Among the results, Villalobos found out that “57% of the coordinators, 48% of the teachers and 43% of the students responded that it is very necessary” to be a native speaker teacher. Fallas (2017) has also investigated students’ views on pronunciation in Costa Rica. For example, Fallas interviewed 11 fourth-year students taking a B.A. in English and the same number of participants studying a B.A. in TESOL. Some of the results indicated that learners saw a relationship between being highly proficient and “sounding native-like and being able to ‘think’ in English”, whereas other participants considered that being exposed to non-native speakers is also

valuable for their real-life experiences (Fallas, 2017, p. 274).

However, even though there are studies focusing on *native speakerism* in language schools and universities in Costa Rica, there is still a need to focus on EFL teachers working in both elementary and high schools in the Ministry of Public Education (MEP, for its acronym in Spanish), since the analysis of teachers' views may shed light on what many professionals in the public system may feel regarding their pronunciation. For example, some educators may carry the idea that something is wrong with them and that their English is not as good as others' due to their lack of a native pronunciation.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to determine what English accent EFL teachers, working in Circuit 03 of the *Dirección Regional de Educación de Guápiles* (DREG), Limón, Costa Rica, aim to have and how their similar or different production of that accent affects their self-perception as instructors and performance while communicating in the target language in different environments. The research questions of this article are the following:

RQ1: To what extent do EFL teachers working in Circuit 03 of the DREG aim to have an American or British pronunciation rather than other accents?

RQ2: How do EFL teachers working in Circuit 03 of the DREG rate their current pronunciation?

RQ3: How does EFL teachers' perception about their current pronunciation affect their confidence as educators?

RQ4: How does EFL teachers' perception about their current pronunciation affect their performance when communicating in different environments?

Literature Review

English as an International Language

Due to the widespread use of English among peoples around the world, English as an International Language (EIL) should be the norm rather than the exception. Nowadays, the goal of studying English extends beyond communicating with natives to interacting with different groups of people who live in a diversity of contexts (Llurda, 2018). That means that it is necessary to have what Canagarajah (2013) has defined as *language awareness*, which is the ability to manage different English types and languages. Similarly, Tan et al. (2020) have stated that due to the expansion of EIL, learners' aims are different, since pronunciation that resembles that used by native speakers' is not what they need anymore. Low (2015) has also stressed the importance of understanding and communicating with speakers who use different English types. This latter idea is clear because, according to Tupas and Rubdy (2015), there are Englishes in plural instead of one singular English. Hence, focusing on just one native variety does not represent the use of English worldwide (Wang, 2015). Besides that, Baratta (2019) has defended that "one variety is not inherently better or worse than another" (p. 42). Consequently, stressing the use of just one dialect by teachers to the detriment of many others used around the world does not fit into today's reality.

Native English Speaker Teachers

Native English Speaker Teachers (NESTs) have long been considered superior in the EFL field. The sole reason

for this is because they have been born in countries where English is spoken as a first language. However, there is no pedagogical reason supporting such an issue. In fact, Phillipson (1992) has referred to this belief that praises NESTs over non-native teachers as the *native speaker fallacy*. It entails that native speakers have superiority and that they can preserve the language against any corrupted form (Canagarajah, 1999). Besides that, there is a supposition that because teachers are native speakers, they are the rightful speakers (Glasgow et al. 2020).

Simply by being native speakers, teachers have acquired a privileged position in the English Language Teaching (ELT) field, even though they may not be prepared to teach. That is not likely to happen in other professions. For example, hiring someone as a chef just because that person was born in France seems to be a quite unorthodox decision that many would consider illogical. Nevertheless, the apparent reason to consider NESTs as authorities in a career that some may have never studied lies in different assumptions. One is that they reflect how language should be used (Fairbrother, 2020). NESTs may not be questioned at all because there is an idea that what they can give learners of the target language cannot be provided by any other teachers who do not have English as their L1.

Another reason why NESTs have acquired a superior position in ELT in comparison to nonnative teachers is that they are considered to have certain knowledge no one else has. For example, the teaching of culture, which is associated with the teaching of the target language, has put NESTs in

the best position to teach it (Murtiana, 2013). They are considered by many as ideal teachers because of what they know and can give learners (Phillipson, 1992; Kubota, 2019; Fairbrother, 2020). However, Nonaka et al. (2020) have considered that all these preferences for NESTs reflect colonial times with their position as conquerors. However improbable it may be, NESTs have become victorious in many educational systems that give them priorities over other teachers.

Non-native English Speaker Teachers

Non-native English Speaker Teachers (NNESTs) face a challenge in ELT in comparison to NESTs. To begin with, in English, the term that describes them has a “neo-racist meaning” which is not present in other languages (Holliday, 2015, p. 11). For some reason, being a non-native speaker implies something negative when compared to native speakers (Oda, 2017). While being native carries a sense of superiority in ELT, its opposite implies a sense of inferiority, which is the result of a belief (Mora, 2015). Even though NNESTs study, communicate, and can teach, the fact of having been born in a non-native country seems to undermine their knowledge and capacities by default. Bouchard (2018) has even asserted that being non-native parallels imperfection, in contrast to the positive perception of native speakers. However, what is interesting about such opinions and even very rooted principles is that they are not supported by anything other than perception and bias.

Even though most English teachers are non-native speakers (Burns, 2013), that does not preclude them

from what Braine (2010) has called “marginalization and stigmatization” (p. 9), which can even result in suffering discriminatory practices in jobs. Such discrimination, however illogical it may be, is basically due to pronunciation. NNESTs are judged not because how well-prepared they are to teach learners, pedagogically speaking, but because of how they pronounce the L2. Thus, ‘non-native’ teachers have been given a second position in teaching just because the assumed belief has been that they lack the same knowledge and performance that native speakers have (Braine, 2010, 2013). Interestingly, a native-like pronunciation is expected not only by pupils or the ELT field but also by NNESTs themselves. This is supported by Jenkins (2000) who has expressed “that L2 [second language] accents are still regarded negatively even by the majority of EFL teachers” (p. 14).

In a study by Porto (2020), in which she surveyed and used semi-structured interviews with 75 English teachers from Buenos Aires, Argentina, to record their opinions about the advantages and disadvantages of NESTs and NNESTs, she found out that teachers mentioned difficulty in pronunciation as disadvantages of NNESTs. It is evident that EFL teachers consider that pronunciation plays an important role in their careers. Nonetheless, despite any negativity due to the lack of a native accent, NNESTs’ value should not be determined by “place of origin, the colour of their skin, or their first language” (Llurda, 2018, p. 526). Teaching English is more complex than sounding like the native speakers of that language.

NNESTs’ possible goal of reaching a native-like pronunciation is

unrealistic. First, being a native speaker in its accurate meaning is not possible for someone who already has a first language (Cook, 2007). Hence, any teacher who has not been born in a native-speaking country and who has acquired a language other than English has no place as native speaker of that L2. For example, Costa Rican-born NNESTs may laboriously try to pass as native English speakers, but that does not change their nationality or background. They have to accept who they really are. Furthermore, even though NNESTs as L2 language users may force themselves to fit into the native standard that many admire, their possibilities of achieving it are scarce, and even null, for the majority (Cook, 1999, 2007; Oda, 2017). As a result, if NNESTs set as their goal to be native-like, they might end up frustrated by such an unfeasible objective (Cook, 2002). In this respect, Kachru (1996) has even criticized Selinker’s (1972) concept of *interlanguage*, since it is not non-native speakers’ final goal to reach native speakers’ competence. It means that adhering to *interlanguage* would place NNESTs again at a disadvantage, because few can acquire such expertise and the rest would qualify as failures in the use of the L2.

Due to the adherence to the *native speaker fallacy*, pronunciation is a factor that affects how NNESTs perceive themselves (Zacharias, 2018). Aggravating this, teachers may not feel free to make mistakes because they consider “the society will doubt their capability as English teachers” (Liu & Cheng, 2017). As a result of their negative perception, which might not be based on facts, teachers may perform less optimally in their career. In this respect,

Lee et al. (2017) have found that teachers may be affected in their teaching by the opinion they have about themselves. In the same vein, authors such as Zacharias (2018), Kamhi-Stein (2014) and Arnold (2011) have considered confidence, self-esteem, and sense of growth as factors to be essential for teachers to perform well in their job.

In addition, NNESTs' perception can not only affect their own performance but also their ability to communicate with other colleagues. For example, Lee et al. (2017) reported, in an article about teachers' view of their competence in Korea, that 5 out of 20 teachers in their study were insecure when communicating in the target language with other NNESTs that were more proficient. Furthermore, not only do NNESTs have to deal with their self-perceptions as non-native teachers, but they also have to consider how learners perceive them, since students might desire a NEST as a model (Murtiana, 2013).

Instead of focusing on trying to be native speakers, NNESTs ought to think about being proficient (Kamhi-Stein, 2014). Moreover, correctness is not as important as intelligibility (Kubota, 2019). Regarding the latter concept, Kirkpatrick (2014) has stated that "mutual intelligibility means that the interactants in any communicative activity are able to understand each other" (p. 26). On the other hand, Kirkpatrick has also contradicted the belief that intelligibility is assured simply because someone is a native speaker. In respect to pronunciation, Deterding and Lewis (2019) have concluded that it is essential to be intelligible, but not every point in pronunciation has the same importance.

NNESTs must understand that even though they may not have a native-like pronunciation that many prefer due to personal beliefs more than pedagogical reasons, educators are paramount in ELT. For instance, Medgyes (2001) has expressed that they have the same opportunities to be as effective as their counterparts, the NESTs. If NNESTs believe the opposite, it may be, according to Llorca (2018), because of the scarce interaction both inside and outside the classroom that may make them believe that their skills have been insufficiently developed. This means that that lack of practice may create a sense of failure. Consequently, NNESTs must focus on practicing and improving their skills so that communication can be possible with both learners and other colleagues, but without the goal of becoming someone they are not. They should take pride in their own identity and accent.

English Language Teaching

ELT has also been influenced to a great extent by *native speakerism*. For instance, when referring to authentic material, many assume that the language to be used is that of native speakers' (Holliday, 2015). It is often supposed that the closer the input that NNESTs use in their classrooms is to natives' interactions, the better they are as teachers, because they are exposing learners to 'real language'. In respect to this, Burns (2013) has gone even further by expressing that "curricula, content, materials and tasks are still based extensively on native speaker models" (p. 30). In the same vein, Cook (2002) has criticized that

the vocabulary and grammar taught is based on native speakers' regular use, not on what he has called "L2 users" (p. 333). By using such models and practices, the system's requirement becomes clear: the students' goal is to resemble a native speaker model (Cook, 1999; Hino, 2018). On the other hand, when learners do not achieve that ultimate objective, they are punished, since it is assumed that accepting non-standard language would be poor instruction (Tollefson, 2007). It can be deduced that teachers perpetuate the demand for authentic language because no one wants to be considered a bad educator. Thus, this belief is repeated generation after generation in NNESTs.

Native speakerism has influenced not only classroom practices but materials written by publishers. Jenkins (2000) has noted that features such as "connected speech, rhythm, and intonation patterns" are a must to be acquired by students, according to publishers focused on ELT (p. 14). Similarly, Leung and Street (2012) have remarked that this goal of the majority of ELT published materials emphasizing native speaker models is for students to have effective communication. That being said, there is a supposition that learners can be successful just if they use material that resembles the language, culture, and values of native speakers. If NNESTs believe that, so do learners. It seems to be difficult to question a belief when many books follow the same pattern. But something interesting to note is that this native speaker pattern rooted in published materials by many companies is simply to promote their business. This is defended by Kachru (1996), who has remarked that there is a race between countries such as the

United States and the United Kingdom, mainly, to find customers, and so they compete to promote "models of English...[and] marketing methodologies" (p. 147).

NNESTs may not have to teach just English, but they could also be required to focus on standard English, however difficult it may be to define that concept. In this regard, Kubota (2019) has brought up the idea that many consider that standard English in both speaking and writing is the most appropriate. Hence, teachers have to deal with native speakerism's view of the native as the only good model in the EFL classroom, and to complicate things even more, they also have to try to comply with what Milroy and Milroy (2012) have called the *standard ideology*, which does not accept other varieties as correct. Such preferences for a standard language are already rooted in teachers' ideas. For example, Vodopija-Krstanović and Marinac (2019) have found in a study with 53 EFL teachers in Croatia that 57.14% chose British English to be the best in ELT, and 51.43% decided that American English was the second-best option. Interestingly, in this article, these authors did not find that teachers considered English from countries of the *Outer Circle* or the *Expanding Circle* to be good options for ELT. There was just some reference that Australian English got the third position, whereas Canadian English was the fourth option. However, even though there are preferences by NNESTs when choosing a standard dialect as a model for teaching, they have to reconsider this opinion seriously. This is clear because, for instance, Matsuda and Friedrich (2011) have stated that

“it would be impossible to find a language, let alone a variety, that would always work” (p. 341) because whether a language is appropriate or not does not depend on itself but on the “members of the speech community” (p. 341). Consequently, these authors have found it quite difficult to adhere to one variety when it is the listeners who define what is correct.

Methodology

Approach

To ascertain EFL teachers’ preferences and attitudes towards their pronunciation and how it influences their confidence and performance, this study has employed a quantitative research methodology. Such an approach has been chosen due to the purpose statement and research questions, which focus on “collecting numeric data from a large number of people using instruments with preset questions and responses” (Creswell, 2015, p. 13). Furthermore, this article has utilized a cross-sectional survey design (Fraenkel et al., 2012; Creswell, 2015) to answer the posed research questions.

Participants

The sample included 23 elementary and high school English teachers who worked in public institutions belonging to Circuit 03 of the *Dirección Regional de Educación de Guápiles* (DREG). This sample represented teachers of 27 elementary schools and 4 high schools located in this circuit (Circuito Escolar 03, Dirección Regional de Educación Guápiles, 2021). To be more specific, 56.5%

worked at elementary schools and 43.5% at high schools. The respondents were 78.3% women and 21.7% men. Moreover, 17.4% of them had a master’s degree, 73.9% a Licenciatura degree, and 8.7% a bachelor’s degree. In respect to their English level, 21.7% of the teachers expressed that they had a C1, 69.6% a B2, 4.3% a B1, and 4.3% an A2.

Instruments

The instrument used consisted of a web-based questionnaire with three parts. The first part was aimed at asking participants their personal background, such as gender, age, highest degree, university where they got that degree, experience, job, and English level according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). The second part consisted of 20 closed-ended items, which used multiple-choice questions with one or multiple answers; and 5-point Likert scales that measured agreement, satisfaction, frequency, and importance; and 4 semi-closed-ended questions that required participants to choose one option and explain why. And the last part of the instrument consisted of 9 open-ended questions. Moreover, the questionnaire was first written in English, but it was translated into Spanish to administer it so that teachers did not feel evaluated when providing their opinions; finally, the results were translated into English to present them in this article.

Procedures

Data were collected from respondents by means of a web-based questionnaire designed using Google Forms. In respect to how the sample

for this study was chosen, the instrument was administered by following both convenience sampling and snowball sampling (Creswell, 2015). In the former case, a list of different high school and elementary school English teachers working in Circuit 03 of the DREG with their different numbers was used to contact them. The list contained 12 teachers: 2 from elementary schools and 10 from high schools. A text on WhatsApp was sent to each of them introducing the purpose of the instrument and stating that it had been designed for teachers of that specific circuit. Once each teacher accepted to participate, a link was sent through the same application in which they were contacted. In the latter case, since the author did not have contact with more than 2 elementary school teachers, so the only two that were contacted forwarded the link of the questionnaire on WhatsApp by following a request and instructions from the author to make sure that all their colleagues worked in Circuit 03. Finally, the instrument was available from May 29 to June 5, 2021.

In respect to the ethical considerations taken into account to safeguard the participants' anonymity in their personal background and opinions provided in each of the different parts of the instrument, the questionnaire did not require that the teachers entered their names or school or high school where they worked or any other characteristic that identify them as any specific educator of Circuit 03. Additionally, a statement assuring anonymity of the answers by using a pseudonym in the data analysis was written as part of the introduction of the web-based questionnaire so that the respondents were confident to give their opinions.

Data Analysis

Regarding the first part of the web-based questionnaire, which included seven background questions, the author analyzed each participant's answers to find out characteristics that teachers from that specific circuit had. In respect to the closed-ended questions, the percentages were calculated by using the reports provided by Google Forms with its spreadsheets. However, as indicated earlier in the instruments section, each question and graph presented had to be translated from Spanish into English by the author. Finally, since in the semi-closed-ended and open-ended questions participants answered part or the whole question by providing prose rather than numerical information, the author read each response and classified it according to viewpoints and the research question that each opinion related to.

Results and Discussion

This section of the study deals with the results obtained from the web-based questionnaire administered to 23 elementary and high school English teachers working in public institutions in Circuit 03 of the DREG. Each research question introduces the data and the discussion regarding the instructors' preferred English accent, their pronunciation rating, and how their views about their pronunciation in the target language affect their confidence and performance.

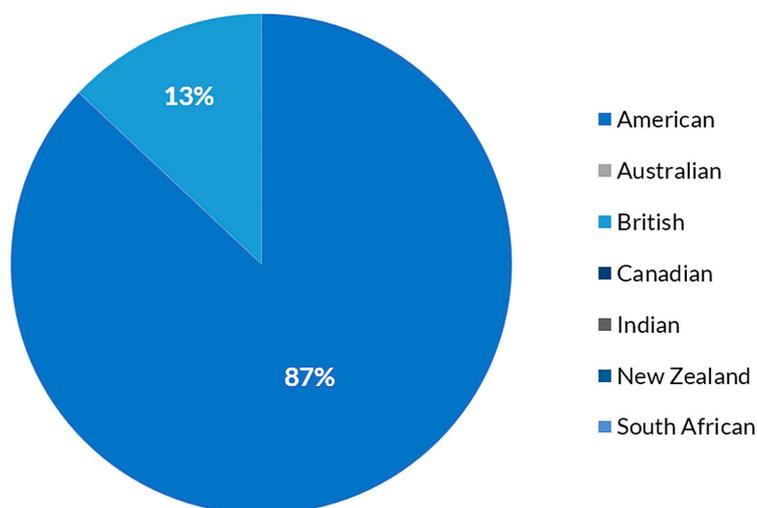
RQ1: To what extent do EFL teachers working in Circuit 03 of the DREG aim to have an American or British pronunciation rather than other accents?

The first research question in this study aimed to determine if EFL teachers working in Circuit 03 of the DREG had as a goal to have the same accent from Americans, British, or any other accent in the English language. To analyze that, different statistics are displayed that respond to these EFL teachers' desired pronunciation.

To identify if EFL teachers wanted to have an American or British pronunciation rather than any other accent from what Kachru (1985, 1996) has called the *Inner Circle*, the *Outer Circle*, or the *Expanding Circle*, they

were asked which pronunciation they aimed to have. As shown in Figure 1, the results showed that 87% of the EFL teachers wished to have an American accent, and just 13% preferred the British pronunciation. These results paralleled a study done by Vodopija-Krstanović and Marinac (2019) in the sense that American and British accents dominated teachers' preferences. The only difference with the latter study is that in the case of teachers in Circuit 03, they preferred the American accent by a much higher percentage.

Figure 1
English Accent that EFL Teachers Aim to Have



Note. Author's own creation

Besides knowing which pronunciation EFL teachers preferred, it was also important to find out why they had such a preference. Thus, when asked the reason for choosing the ac-

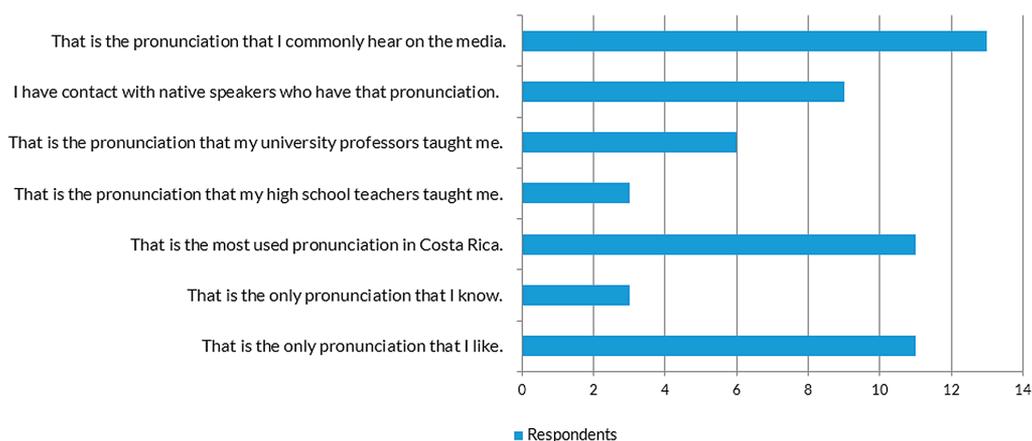
cent they liked to have, American and British according to Figure 1, 13 respondents (56.5%) selected that the reason was that it was the pronunciation they commonly heard in the me-

dia. Besides, 11 teachers (47.8%) chose that they were influenced by that specific accent because that was the one most used in Costa Rica. And there were other 11 teachers (47.8%) that chose that they preferred to have their

accent because that was the only one they liked, as noted in Figure 2. These results showed that the American pronunciation, and the British one to a lesser degree, is rooted in the country and thus in the teachers' preferences.

Figure 2

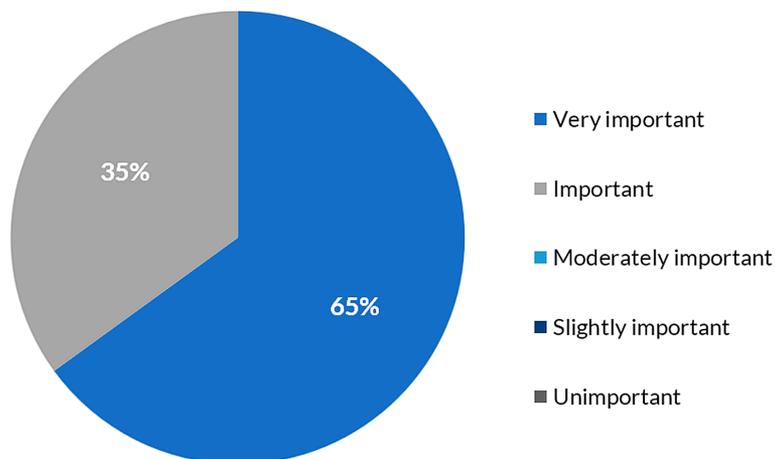
Reasons Why EFL Teachers Aspire to Have a Native-like Pronunciation



Note. Author's own creation

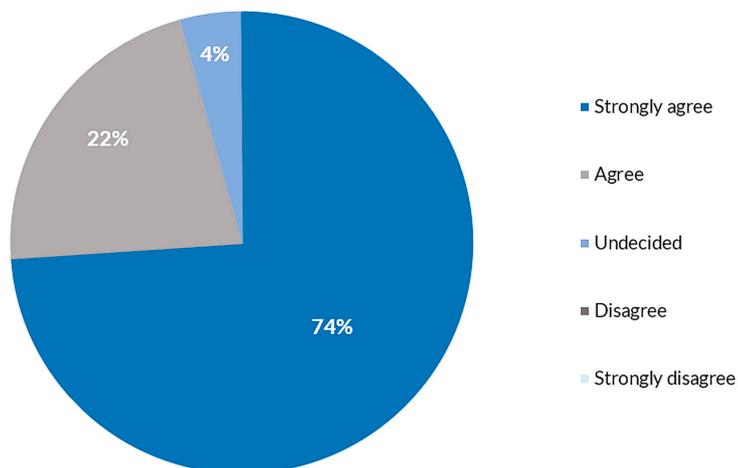
When teachers were asked how important it was for an English teacher to have a native-like pronunciation, 65% believed that it was very important, and 35% considered that it was

important. These results shown in Figure 3 clearly demonstrate that most respondents were influenced by the idea that teachers must have or imitate a native-like pronunciation.

Figure 3**Importance of Having a Native-like Pronunciation According to EFL Teachers***Note.* Author's own creation

EFL teachers have shown that having a native-like pronunciation is important, not just for them but for their students, too (see Figure 4). This is evident because when asked if they

agreed with the idea that their students learned a native-like pronunciation, 74% of teachers strongly agreed with this aim, whereas 22% agreed, and just 4% of them were undecided.

Figure 4**EFL Teachers' Desire that their Students Learn a Native-like Pronunciation***Note.* Author's own creation

To better understand why EFL teachers in Circuit 03 of the DREG preferred to have a native-like pronunciation and why they considered that that same accent should be learned by their students, the answers to the question that asked them if they thought that having a native-like pronunciation could make them better teachers can be analyzed. The respondents expressed opinions such as the following:

Yes, of course, since it can be given a better teaching to the students regarding the correct pronunciation of the language and its use.

Yes, mainly to inspire a major degree of confidence.

Yes, because the better the pronunciation, the students can get their points across with native speakers.

Yes, since pronunciation is copied from the one who teaches.

Nevertheless, some EFL teachers' opinions did not agree that having a native-like pronunciation could make them better teachers. For example, some expressed ideas such as the following:

No, all of us have an accent.

No, because being a good English teacher does not depend solely on pronunciation.

Not precisely. Not all people who have a good pronunciation or a good English level know how to teach.

When analyzing the results obtained to answer the first research question, it is evident that EFL teachers working in Circuit 03 of the DREG favor, by a great majority, the use and teaching of a native-speaker pronunciation. This view responds to what

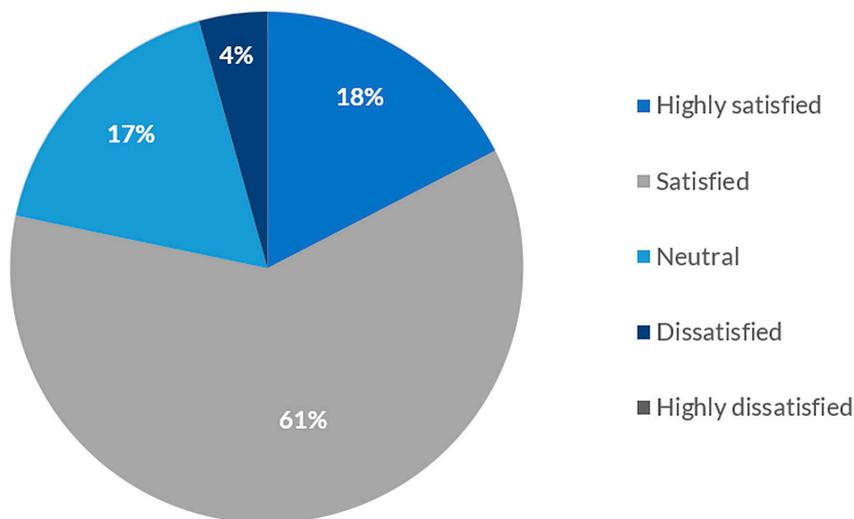
Holliday (2003) has called *native-speakerism*, or, on the other hand, what Phillipson (1992) has referred to as the *native speaker fallacy*. Based on the data, teachers not only preferred and expected to sound as Americans or British, which has been clearly seen, but also wanted their students to have the pronunciation that they favored. There is a sense of advantage attached to an accent from the countries already mentioned, even though few teachers still did not link a native-speaker pronunciation to good teaching.

RQ2: How do EFL teachers working in Circuit 03 of the DREG rate their current pronunciation?

The second research question in this article is aimed at finding out how EFL teachers rated their current accent so that later it can be identified how that self-evaluation determines their confidence and performance (**RQ3** and **RQ4**).

As it can be seen in Figure 5, when the respondents were asked to express how satisfied they were with their pronunciation, 18% mentioned that they were highly satisfied, 61% were satisfied, 17% were neutral, and 4% were dissatisfied. These results showed that the majority of EFL teachers, who have already chosen the American and British pronunciation as the ones they aspire to have, believed that their accent is similar or very similar to that of native speakers'; otherwise, they would have rated their pronunciation negatively.

Figure 5
EFL Teachers' Level of Satisfaction with their Current English Pronunciation

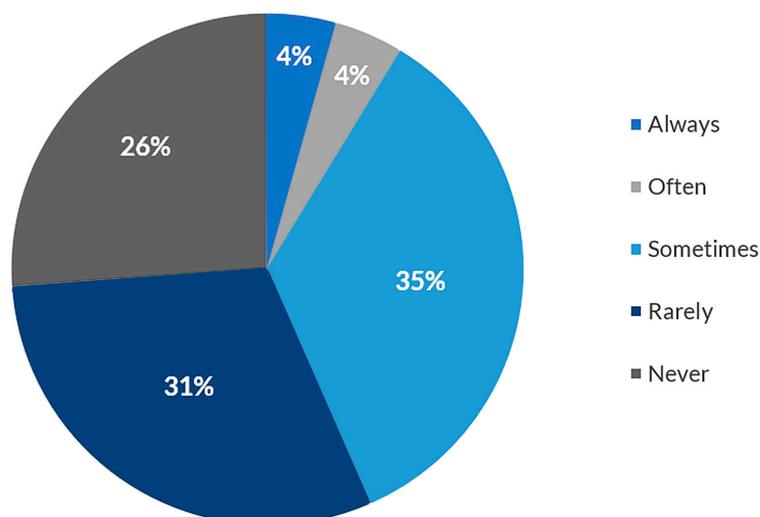


Note. Author's own creation

Interestingly, when EFL teachers were asked to rate their level of dissatisfaction with their pronunciation while teaching, 4% of them chose always, 4% of the participants were often, 35% expressed sometimes, whereas 31% of the teachers said rarely. On the other hand, 26% of respondents mentioned never. These results contrast to a certain degree with the ones

presented in Figure 5, since 79% of EFL teachers expressed they were either satisfied or highly satisfied with their accent, whereas in Figure 6, satisfaction with pronunciation while teaching as expressed with rarely or never is reduced to 57%. This indicates that teaching a class poses some pressure on EFL teachers that make them increase their dissatisfaction.

Figure 6
EFL Teachers' Frequency of Dissatisfaction with their English Pronunciation while Teaching a Class



Note. Author's own creation

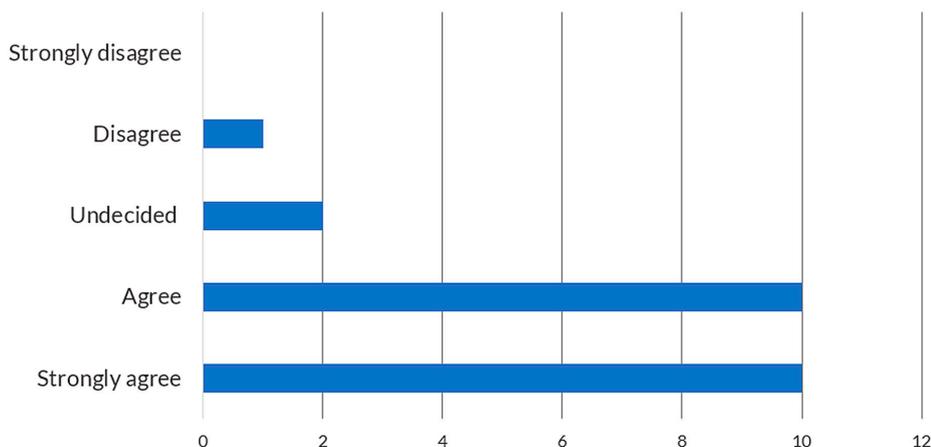
After analyzing EFL teachers' satisfaction with their current pronunciation (Figure 5) and their dissatisfaction with their accent while teaching a class (Figure 6), the respondents were asked to rate if their current pronunciation was an advantage for them as teachers. The responses showed that 10 teachers (43.5%) strongly agreed while the other 10 (43.5%) agreed. 2 respondents (8.7%), on the other hand, were undecided while 1 (4.3%) disagreed, as shown in Figure 7. The findings in this part suggest to a great extent that EFL teachers considered their current accent as an advantage.

When analyzing how EFL teachers rated their current pronunciation, it is evident that the majority felt satisfied with their performance in this micro skill. It seems to be that they considered that their accent is native-like, since they preferred American and

British pronunciation and they have shown a greater acceptance towards their accents. If respondents had rated their pronunciation negatively, that would have meant that they had felt their accent far from the one they aspired to have. On the other hand, there is also a possibility that they preferred a native-like accent, but they could have also recognized that even though theirs is not similar, they accepted their performance in that micro skill. In either case, the participants have shown that their accents are something positive in their profession rather than a handicap. They understand that, as Kamhi-Stein (2014) has stated, "teachers do not need to be native speakers of English to teach the language" (p. 599). The findings have shown that instructors recognize they can be successful educators with their pronunciation.

Figure 7

EFL Teachers' Opinions if their Current Pronunciation Is an Advantage for them as Educators



Note. Author's own creation

RQ3: How does EFL teachers' perception about their current pronunciation affect their confidence as educators?

The third research question in this article had as an objective to analyze if EFL teachers had confidence problems due to their perception about their current pronunciation. It is important to know how that self-perception about their accent influenced them either positively or negatively in their profession (see Table 1).

When asked how their English pronunciation negatively affected their confidence as teachers, 4.3% of the respondents mentioned always, 13% chose often, whereas 21.7% expressed that sometimes. On the other hand, 30.4% of the teachers said rarely, and the same amount, 30.4%, mentioned never.

Regarding the question that asked EFL teachers if they avoided speaking in English with other colleagues due

to their pronunciation, the results indicate that 8.7% mentioned that they often avoided it, whereas 26.1% said sometimes. On the other hand, 39.1% of the respondents answered rarely, and 26.1% expressed that they never avoided the target language when communicating with colleagues.

In a similar question, EFL teachers were questioned how often they avoided speaking with someone because they thought that that person had a native-like pronunciation. The answers indicate that there is a little difference in respect to the previous question. Just 4.3% of the respondents chose often, 17.4% mentioned sometimes, 39.1% said rarely, and the same amount, 39.1%, answered never.

In the final question that aimed to determine how pronunciation affected EFL teachers' confidence, they were asked how often they avoided speaking with someone because they considered

that that person had a better pronunciation than they did. The answers indicate that 8.7% mentioned often, 30.4% said sometimes, 21.7% chose rarely, whereas 39.1% indicated never.

When analyzing the data of this third research question, it is evident that most teachers did not feel affected to a great extent by their pronunciation in the target language. However, there is still a certain amount that did recognize that their accents had a negative influence on their confidence and on

their communication with other speakers. These results parallel Zacharias's (2018) view that states that "among the factors affecting NNESTs' self-image, pronunciation appears to be the most salient variable" (p. 2). The data have shown that this micro skill was considered essential by EFL teachers when communicating, and that perceiving that there is a good command may make the difference when talking about confidence.

Table 1
EFL Teachers' Opinions About How their Pronunciation Affects their Confidence as Educators

Questions	Frequency				
	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
	%	%	%	%	%
How often does your English pronunciation negatively affect your confidence as a teacher?	4.3	13	21.7	30.4	30.4
How often do you avoid speaking in English with other colleagues because of your pronunciation?	0	8.7	26.1	39.1	26.1
How often do you avoid speaking with someone because you consider that that person has a native-like pronunciation?	0	4.3	17.4	39.1	39.1
How often do you avoid speaking with someone because you consider that that person has a better pronunciation than you?	0	8.7	30.4	21.7	39.1

Note. Author's own creation

RQ4: How does EFL teachers' perception about their current pronunciation

affect their performance when communicating in different environments?

To find out how EFL teachers' self-perception about their pronunciation affected their performance when communicating in different environments, they were first asked if they avoided speaking in the target language in public due to their accent (see Table 2). In this case, 13% mentioned that they often did, and 17.4% said that sometimes. On the other hand, 34.8% said that they rarely avoided speaking in

public in English, whereas 34.8% considered that they never avoided the target language in public due to their accent.

When asked how often they avoided speaking in English in trainings related to their job and subject due to their pronunciation, 4.3% of EFL teachers answered always, 8.7% said often; 34.8% mentioned sometimes, 17.4% chose rarely, and 34.8% expressed that they never avoided using the target language in such activities.

Table 2

EFL Teachers' Opinions About How their Pronunciation Affects their Performance When Communicating in Different Environments

Questions	Frequency				
	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
	%	%	%	%	%
How often do you avoid speaking in English in public because of your pronunciation?	0	13	17.4	34.8	34.8
How often do you avoid speaking in English in trainings because of your pronunciation?	4.3	8.7	34.8	17.4	34.8

Note. Author's own creation

Now, when asked if they considered that having a native-like pronunciation could help them to speak with more confidence in any place, EFL teachers expressed opinions such as the following:

→ Yes, sure, since it gives one a feeling of confidence and a major comprehension before others.

→ Yes, because of the security one develops.

→ Yes, of course, because it is a language whose objective is to express and make oneself understood.

Besides that, 12 out of 23 teachers responded that their pronunciation affected their confidence when having to talk in the target language in the following

places and/or situations (some of them coincided with their answers):

- In trainings
- In front of an advisor
- In workshops
- Almost everywhere
- In public
- Overseas
- With foreigners
- If having to talk about an unknown topic
- If dealing with unknown vocabulary

In terms of how EFL teachers' pronunciation affected their performance when communicating in different environments and/or situations, the data showed that a certain amount of them are, but mostly when having to talk in trainings or workshops. This means that using English when sharing with other colleagues poses a higher challenge for some. Hence, the respondents have accepted that pronunciation plays a crucial role when using the target language in different places, although a great majority has also demonstrated confidence. These results can be compared to the ones presented in Lee et al. (2017) in which they reported in an article about teachers' view of their competence in Korea that 5 out of 20 teachers in their study were insecure when communicating in the target language with other NNESTs that were more proficient. It is evident that some EFL teachers did feel insecurity when they considered that other colleagues were more competent.

Conclusions

The present study aimed to determine what English accent EFL teachers, working in Circuit 03 of the DREG, Limón, Costa Rica, wanted to have and how that accent affected their self-perception as teachers and performance while communicating in the target language in different environments. Now, after having administered a web-based questionnaire, findings indicate that these educators have a rooted idea that the American and British pronunciations are the ones to be imitated. This preference for these two accents by Costa Rican teachers parallels the results obtained by authors such as Kaur and Raman (2014) and Vodopija-Krstanović and Marinac (2019) in countries such as Malaysia and Croatia, respectively. Interestingly, there has not been any reference by any of the instructors to other pronunciations from *Inner circle*, *Outer circle*, or *Expanding circle* countries. In this sense, EFL teachers continue to be influenced by the idea that the more you sound as a native speaker, the better it is. In fact, there are still some teachers that believe that having a native-like pronunciation can make them better instructors. Of course, that preference may be the result of the great exposure they have to certain accents rather than others in the media, previous education, proximity to the United States, tourism, entertainment, among others. Nevertheless, that fact still does not justify that EFL teachers are not aware of the importance of recognizing that there are more accents and that all of them are essential to make visible to reduce the negative consequences of *native speakerism*.

In respect to how EFL teachers rated their pronunciation, findings have demonstrated that most teachers felt satisfied with their performance in this micro skill. They have even considered that their accent is advantageous in their jobs. There are clear data that indicate that the respondents' accent is not something they view as being a handicap or that they have it as a priority to improve, at least, not even more than other macro or micro skills.

When analyzing how EFL teachers' perception about their current pronunciation affect their confidence as educators, there is a small percentage of the respondents that felt that their accent did negatively influence their desire to communicate with other speakers. Thus, even though that is not the case of the majority, significant measures must be taken by the teachers themselves and the education authorities to empower educators so that they accept and value their accent, and that they see that their goal is not sounding like a native speaker to be able to interact with anyone in the target language. By doing that, EFL teachers of this circuit can become more confident, and thus, better teachers due to their appreciation for their different and unique characteristics.

There is a certain percentage of EFL teachers, although not the majority, whose perception about their current accent affected their performance when communicating in different environments. The data show an interesting increase when the respondents had

to answer if they avoided speaking in English in trainings due to their pronunciation in comparison to using the target language in public. The assumption may be that there is pressure to sound good, whatever that means, in front of other colleagues, whose accents of course may vary due to their different experiences with the language. Thus, it is paramount that some teachers get rid of the idea that having a native-like pronunciation is vital to feel confident to speak. They must consider that their English deserves to be valued as any other variety spoken around the world.

Finally, it would be essential for future research about *native speakerism* to include a bigger sample. Having administered a web-based questionnaire to 23 elementary and high school English teachers working in public institutions in Circuit 03 of the DREG allows the author to generalize the findings in that specific regional administration. However, to obtain a wider view of what other instructors think or how much they have been influenced by the *native speaker fallacy*, it would be recommendable to sample more educators working in other circuits and *direcciones regionales de educación*. Nevertheless, the findings in this study prove to be beneficial in that relevant measures can be considered by the regional educational authorities to make English teachers aware of their importance in the students' learning process, independently of the pronunciation they have learned.

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