

# **“I Decided to Be a BRAVE English Speaker”: A Case Study of Learner Responses to a Global Englishes-informed Listening Curriculum Intervention**

*Calum To<sup>1</sup>*  
*Heath Rose<sup>2</sup>*

Nara Women's University, Japan<sup>1</sup>

University of Oxford, United Kingdom<sup>2</sup>

\*Corresponding author's email: calumphilipto@gmail.com

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## **Abstract**

This multiple case study investigated learner responses to a Global Englishes-informed listening curriculum intervention targeting comprehension of varieties of English through explicit and implicit classroom exposure. Two adult learners engaged in the use of English as a Lingua Franca in their professional contexts took part in a four-week curriculum intervention introducing accents they had identified as important to their professional lives. A mixed-methods approach was employed, with data collected through participant logs and journals, interviews, and pre- and postclass activities eliciting numerical ratings of attitudes, comprehension, intelligibility, accentedness, and comprehensibility. Despite no improvement in numerical ratings, both learners developed new listening strategies, expressed increased confidence and evaluated the curriculum intervention positively, particularly explicit phonological instruction. The impact on attitudes was more mixed, with one participant expressing negative views about classroom exposure to varieties of English. Given positive affective outcomes, this study recommends teachers incorporate a wider range of English varieties into classroom activities. However, with the negative attitudinal impact potentially due to a lack of tasks encouraging engagement with global English use today, such exposure should be accompanied by critically reflective activities.

**Keywords:** listening comprehension, English varieties, accent,  
English as a Lingua Franca, Global Englishes

Over the past five centuries, English has become the predominant lingua franca, with global English interactions today largely taking place between interlocutors without a common first language. This calls for a reevaluation of traditional assumptions, particularly that all learners' future interlocutors will be L1 English speakers (Rose & McKinley, 2025). Rather, English use today requires learners to develop the skills to communicate effectively in a range of local and global contexts.

The present study was motivated by the first author's experience teaching professionals using English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). Many reported persistent listening challenges, with difficulties often attributed to unfamiliar accents and

reported in ways suggesting a relationship between listening anxiety, attitudes, and comprehension abilities. However, as few actionable suggestions for the classroom could be found, a core objective was to examine how varieties of English might be best introduced, whether through simple exposure or explicit phonological training.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Global Englishes***

Global Englishes is a research and pedagogical paradigm that challenges the traditional centring of native speaker (NS) norms in the field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. It aims to highlight the linguistic and sociocultural diversity of English use in global communication today (Rose et al., 2021).

These aims are operationalised in the Global Englishes Language Teaching (GELT) Proposals by Rose and Galloway (2019) which include calls for increased exposure to diverse Englishes and respect for multilingualism and cultural diversity. The GELT Framework offers guidance for curriculum innovation by repositioning future interlocutors according to learner needs and in doing so begins to challenge standard language ideologies.

### ***Attitudes and Anxiety Towards Varieties of English***

Attitudes are commonly conceptualised as having cognitive, affective, and behavioural components (Rosenberg & Hovland, 1960). Cross-sectional studies investigating accent attitudes report cognitive components generally reflect an attachment to standard accents among learners (e.g., Hansen Edwards et al., 2019). However, studies examining interactions between components suggest a complex picture, with mixed-methods research in particular highlighting a tension between affective preferences for NS accents due to perceived prestige and cognitive beliefs emphasising communicative success (e.g., Funada, 2025).

Longitudinal classroom research reveals similar ambivalence, with studies explicitly introducing Global Englishes suggesting learners may continue to hold NS pronunciation norms for themselves, despite facilitating attitudes toward others (e.g., Chiu & Lin, 2024; Sirijanchuen & Tangkiengsirisin, 2025). These tensions are particularly well-suited to investigation using mixed-methods, such as in Subtirelu's (2013) longitudinal case study with Chinese ( $n = 4$ ) and Arab ( $n = 4$ ) students at an American university: although survey responses reflected a continued attachment to NS norms, positive attitudes toward accent diversity were expressed in interviews.

Learner attitudes are additionally important for their impact on listening comprehension. Listening anxiety is argued to negatively affect aural comprehension (Elkhafaifi, 2005), with research findings suggesting accent attitudes as an important cause (e.g., Wilang & Singhasiri, 2017). However, curriculum interventions exploring attitude shifts through increasing classroom exposure to English varieties have been found to reduce this anxiety (e.g., Boonsuk et al., 2021; Rajani Na Ayuthaya & Sitthitikul, 2016).

### ***Listening Construct Definitions***

Accent and listening research generally measure the constructs of comprehension, intelligibility, comprehensibility, and accentedness. Intelligibility typically refers to word recognition and is often operationalised through transcription, comprehension tasks, or a combination of both (Derwing & Munro, 2015). In this literature review and the current study, intelligibility will be operationalised as transcription, whilst comprehension tasks will be taken as measures of (listening) comprehension. Comprehensibility refers to perceived ease of understanding, with accentedness conceptualised as the perception of a “foreign accent” (Munro & Derwing, 1995, p. 79). Both are frequently measured using Likert scales (e.g., Kennedy & Trofimovich, 2008).

### ***Cross-Sectional Research on Accents***

Cross-sectional studies have often found contradictory relationships between constructs. Whilst some report accentedness negatively impacts listening comprehension (e.g., Ockey & French, 2016), others suggest comprehensibility has a greater impact (e.g., Derwing & Munro, 2009). Additional findings suggest accentedness may not affect comprehension, despite impacting comprehensibility and intelligibility.

Several studies have examined potential mediating variables, though again with conflicting findings. For example, some research has found familiarity can improve intelligibility for L1 English listeners, despite having no impact on accentedness or comprehensibility (e.g., Kennedy & Trofimovich, 2008). In contrast, findings with L2 English listeners suggest a lack of familiarity may reduce both comprehension and comprehensibility (Kurtuldu & Özkan, 2022). Perceived speech rate, also referred to as speed in some studies, has also been found to affect comprehensibility and comprehension (e.g., Bamroongkit & Aowsakorn, 2021).

### ***Accents and Listening Comprehension***

Given their complexity, classroom interventions also report varying effects across constructs, often dependent on implicit or explicit instruction. Whilst implicit instruction only involves the use of different accents in listening materials, explicit instruction introduces students to phonological features of the target accent(s). The question of which type of instruction is more useful is largely driven by questions of pedagogical efficiency and effectiveness.

Although some classroom-based studies with L1 English participants suggest both implicit and explicit instruction have limited impact on comprehension and intelligibility, explicit training may have a positive impact on attitudes and confidence (e.g., Derwing et al., 2002). On the other hand, other research has also found that in addition to being perceived positively by participants, explicit classes can have a positive impact on intelligibility despite a lack of comprehension gains (Lindemann et al., 2016).

Studies with L2 learners also suggest explicit training can significantly improve intelligibility, both at the primary (Sriwang et al., 2020) and university level (e.g., Johansen, 2019). However, it should be noted that in contrast to many of the findings above, Johansen's (2019) study found significant intelligibility gains only followed implicit exposure. There is some limited evidence of comprehension gains from explicit instruction, though these may be unsustainable (e.g., Miao et al., 2025). Nevertheless, as with L1 English participants, despite limited measurable comprehension gains, interventions are often viewed positively by learners (e.g., Milliner & Dimoski, 2019).

### ***Summary and Gaps in Research***

Despite growing interest in Global Englishes-informed research, important gaps remain. Whilst attitudes toward English varieties have been widely examined, their complexity warrants greater use of mixed methods. Cross-sectional and longitudinal research indicate a complex and often contradictory relationship between listening comprehension, intelligibility, comprehensibility, and accentedness. Suggested links between these constructs, and attitudes and anxiety, then highlight the need for a holistic examination. Conflicting findings regarding explicit and implicit training underline the need for further studies examining how they are perceived by learners, with previously reported limited measurable gains further emphasising the importance of incorporating learner feedback.

Despite the suitability of case studies for examining such complexity, other than Subtirelu (2013), these designs are relatively rare. Additionally, few studies include coding frames for this kind of qualitative case-study data, limiting the practical guidance available to researchers approaching similar analyses. Finally, as most research has been conducted in educational contexts, further research is needed to explore how to support adult learners in professional settings given the growing use of ELF in the workplace (Rose et al., 2021).

### ***Research Questions***

To explore themes related to the above gaps, the present study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do learners in a professional ELF context respond to implicit and explicit curriculum interventions targeting listening comprehension, intelligibility, comprehensibility, and accentedness of selected varieties of English?
2. How does classroom exposure to varieties of English relate to learner attitudes toward English varieties and NS norms?
3. How do learners in a professional ELF context respond to classroom exposure to varieties of English in terms of their reported listening anxiety?

## **Methodology**

### ***Case Study Research Design***

This study adopted a longitudinal, multiple case study design to investigate learner responses to a Global Englishes-informed curriculum intervention.

According to Yin's (2003) case study typology, this case study was exploratory in that it aimed to examine interactions between the large number of variables identified. In addition, given the opportunity to collect data from multiple perspectives, this case study also aimed to be descriptive in the sense of attempting to provide as "complete [a] description" as possible of the cases (Yin, 2003, p. 5). Multiple data sources were therefore used, with qualitative data collected longitudinally through diaries and semi-structured interviews, and descriptive numerical data from pre- and postclass activities measuring comprehension and intelligibility, elicited attitudes and ratings of comprehensibility and accentedness. The nature of this case study constrains the ability to perform inferential quantitative analysis (Duff, 2008), though where possible elements of triangulation have been employed to explore contradictions across sources. Given the study's research questions, this triangulation was aimed at elucidating the cases in and of themselves, rather than to attempt to establish causal relationships between variables (Yin, 2018).

### ***Participants and Context***

Two Chinese professionals participated in the study. Prior to the curriculum intervention, Linabell (pseudonym) had studied weekly, one-hour, online one-to-one tutoring classes with the first researcher for a year. Nina (pseudonym) had attended similar classes for approximately two and a half years. Classes were scheduled during student lunch breaks at work and, other than for the current study, followed a flexible, rolling syllabus built around student interests and needs. Although issues related to online classes and the potential impact on learning through degraded audio quality have previously been raised (e.g., Cribb, 2023), this was offset to a certain extent by the ecological validity of online delivery as both participants' issues often stemmed from experiences during online meetings.

Nina works for a multinational pharmaceutical company in Beijing and started learning English during middle school. Due to limited opportunities for accent exposure and communicative practice, she reported significant difficulties when attending online meetings with international colleagues.

Linabell works for a state-run Chinese investment bank. Despite beginning English education earlier than Nina at 5 years old, Linabell also reported limited experience with accent diversity and similarly described frequent communication difficulties at work, leading to a tendency to avoid oral communication in favour of email.

Participant proficiency was assessed using the online self-evaluation tool by the European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe (n.d.). Linabell self-assessed her skills as listening (B1), reading (C2), spoken interaction (B2), spoken production (B2), and writing (C1). Nina self-assessed her skills as listening (B1), reading (B2), spoken interaction (A2), spoken production (B2), and writing (C1). All classes took place online using Microsoft Teams.

### ***Materials Design***

Following the GELT Framework, materials design prioritised learner needs: what students wanted and needed to learn and what they were not yet able to do. Linabell chose French English as the variety most relevant for instruction, whilst Nina chose American English.

To explore responses to the two approaches, the lessons followed either implicit or explicit training designs adapted from Lindemann et al. (2016). Implicit lessons involved traditional listening activities featuring target accents. Explicit training introduced the selected pronunciation features through comparisons with other varieties, followed by comprehension questions about these phonological features. Participants then completed listening activities using the target accent and, finally, cloze activities. For implicit exposure classes, the explicit-instruction activities were replaced with additional practice listening to the target accents. Selection of phonological features to include in instruction initially drew on the Lingua Franca Core (Jenkins, 2002). This was further supplemented by empirical investigations into intelligibility (e.g., Kang et al., 2020). Features relevant to receptive intelligibility were also included. See Appendix A for phonological feature inclusion rationale and sample lesson plan.

### ***Data Collection Methods***

Data collection was primarily qualitative through diary entries and pre- and postcurriculum intervention interviews. This was supplemented by descriptive numerical data from pre- and postclass activities. Listening comprehension and intelligibility activities functioned both as research instruments and classroom activities, whilst instruments eliciting ratings of comprehensibility, accentedness and attitudes were employed to provide a clearer descriptive picture of participant responses to the classes.

#### ***Pre- and Postclass Activities***

Consistent with the aim of designing ecologically valid, research-informed classroom activities, existing validated scales were drawn upon, with comprehensibility operationalised using the 9-point scale from Kennedy and Trofimovich (2008), whilst accentedness used Munro and Derwing's (2001) 9-point scale. Given the brevity of

the intervention, the added granularity provided by a 9-point scale was intended to support the observation of even small shifts.

Following Kang et al. (2020), listening comprehension was measured using texts and questions from the Official TOEFL iBT Tests Second Edition practice book and intelligibility was measured through transcription of nonsense sentences (i.e., syntactically normal but semantically meaningless sentences) from test banks in Nye and Gaitenby (1974). The use of nonsense-sentence tasks as an intelligibility measure has been found to be among the strongest predictors of comprehension scores among L2 listeners evaluating accented speech (Kang et al., 2020), consistent with its role as a context-independent measure of decoding ability but distinct from the global, meaning-assisted understanding captured by comprehension measures.

The same speakers, recruited through the first researcher's personal contacts (an L1 American English speaker working in education and an L1 French speaker working in the petroleum industry), were used in pre- and postclass activities, though different scripts were used. Scripts were selected to be of similar length and style (Kang et al., 2020) and to ensure they did not contain too many technical terms (Ockey & French, 2014). AntWordProfiler was used to confirm comparable linguistic difficulty (Milliner & Dimoski, 2019). Texts were then divided into 10-second chunks containing 30 to 40 syllables to ensure speech rate fell approximately within the recommended 3.2–3.8 syllables per second to reduce the potential for speech rate as a confounding variable (Munro & Derwing, 2001).

To provide numerical ratings of attitudes, the English as an International Language Perception Scale (EILPS) was used (Nakamura et al., 2018). A 5-point Likert scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) elicits responses to 14 items across four factors shown as reliable and structurally valid in Nakamura et al. (2018): current status of English (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .91$ ), varieties of English (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .85$ ), strategies for multilingual/multicultural communication (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .87$ ), and English speakers' identity (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .78$ ). This study used the varieties of English (VE) and English speakers' identity (ESI) factors. It is important to note that despite its label, the ESI factor more closely aligns with an examination of respondent attitudes toward NS norms; please see Appendix B for a copy of the EILPS administered to participants.

### ***Diary Methods***

A mixed diary design was employed, with participants completing event-contingent logs following workplace English use, and twice-weekly reflective diary entries on these experiences. It was hoped the event-contingent log would facilitate memory retrieval for the reflective diary entries. Before the classes, learners were instructed in completing the logs and diary entries. Please see Appendix C for log template and a diary excerpt.

## ***Interviews***

An unstructured, precurriculum intervention interview on educational background was conducted to provide background. Postintervention semi-structured interviews explored participants' perceptions of the classes. An interview schedule (see Appendix D) was created drawing on the constructs from the study's RQs. Questions drawing on diary entries were later added. Following piloting with a non-participant learner, unclear question wording was subsequently edited.

## ***Procedures***

Each participant received explicit instruction in the accent they had identified as most important for their professional needs, and implicit-instruction classes on the other participant's priority accent, with participants receiving instruction in both accents in a repeated-measures, within-subject design. It should be noted that although this was done to allow for a comparison of learner responses to methods, this meant participants spent their own class time learning an accent that was not of particular relevance for them. Whilst Linabell was happy for the extra listening practice, Nina did mention that in her context, it was extremely rare to encounter French English.

In total, this resulted in each participant receiving four hour-long classes across two modules: two classes per accent variety. At the start of the first class and the end of the second class for each accent, comprehension and intelligibility were tested, followed by measurements of comprehensibility and accentedness. The first and second EILPS measures were taken at the start and end of the whole four-week curriculum intervention period. Semi-structured interviews were then scheduled. Participants filled in the logs and diaries throughout the intervention period. Please see Table 1 below for a detailed timeline.

**Table 1**  
*Research Procedure Timeline*

| <b>Participant</b> | <b>Date</b> | <b>Activity</b>                       |
|--------------------|-------------|---------------------------------------|
| Linabell           | 20/11/2024  | Precurriculum intervention interview  |
| Nina               | 29/11/2024  | Precurriculum intervention interview  |
| Linabell           | 2/12/2024   | Explicit French Lesson 1              |
| Nina               | 2/12/2024   | Explicit American Lesson 1            |
| Linabell           | 9/12/2024   | Explicit French Lesson 2              |
| Nina               | 13/12/2024  | Explicit American Lesson 2            |
| Linabell           | 17/12/2024  | Implicit American Lesson 1            |
| Nina               | 20/12/2024  | Implicit French Lesson 1              |
| Linabell           | 23/12/2024  | Implicit American Lesson 2            |
| Nina               | 23/12/2024  | Implicit French Lesson 2              |
| Linabell           | 30/12/2024  | Postcurriculum intervention interview |
| Nina               | 6/1/2025    | Postcurriculum intervention interview |

### ***Data Analysis***

Interviews were transcribed using a model adapted from Galloway and Rose (2014), with additional conventions added based on Heath et al. (2010). Please see Appendix E for further details. Transcripts and diary entries were then uploaded together to NVivo15 for analysis as a single data set (see Appendix F for transcript excerpts).

Initial coding categories were both concept-driven and created from precurriculum intervention interview data. Qualitative content analysis was then conducted, with new concepts encountered during the analysis added to a draft coding frame. These were then named and given a description and positive examples. To segment the data, segments centred on a single theme were used, though where constructs co-occurred, units were double-coded (Miles et al., 2014).

Although it was not possible to measure interrater reliability because of time and staffing constraints, to confirm intrarater reliability, initial coding was followed 14 days later by a second round. Because consistency was initially moderate ( $\kappa = .51$ ), substantial adjustments were made to the coding frame. This process was then repeated with the new coding frame. Agreement improved to  $\kappa = .88$ , which Landis and Koch's (1977) benchmarks classify as "almost perfect" (p. 165) (see Table F1 in Appendix G for the final coding frame).

Disagreements between coding rounds resulting in kappa rates falling below .80 were reviewed and documented in a researcher diary (see Appendix H for an excerpt).

### ***Trustworthiness***

As the primary data were qualitative, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) concept of trustworthiness, as composed of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, was the primary evaluative benchmark. Following their recommendations, these were supported by prolonged engagement, methodological and source triangulation, and the maintenance of a full audit trail, including raw interview transcripts, iterative versions of the coding frame and decision logs regarding category revisions.

To help mitigate the potential for previous interactions as teacher/student to create pressure to participate, formal informed consent procedures confirmed participation was voluntary and that participants could withdraw at any point. Elements of collaborative ethnography, with participants reviewing preliminary and final analyses, were also used to ensure no misrepresentation took place.

## **Results**

The results are presented according to the research questions. As discussed above, given the nature of the numerical data collected, these results are presented as descriptive data for comparison with the qualitative data to examine contradictions.

## ***RQ1 Learner Responses to Implicit and Explicit Curriculum Interventions Targeting Listening Comprehension, Intelligibility, Comprehensibility and Accentedness***

Across three of the four constructs examined, listening comprehension, intelligibility, and comprehensibility, a consistent pattern emerged regarding responses to implicit and explicit instruction, with the latter more consistently viewed by participants as having had a positive impact, though contradictions often appeared in comparisons between numerical ratings and interview responses. Accentedness, discussed last, differed from this pattern, with implicit instruction largely viewed more positively.

### ***Listening Comprehension***

Both participants reported a perceived improvement in listening comprehension following classes. Nina emphasised explicit instruction with American English was “VERY VERY USEFUL.” Linabell also highlighted explicit instruction as particularly helpful, explaining that it had allowed her to anticipate pronunciation patterns because she “knew, they WOULD speak like that.” Explicit instruction had then led to the creation of “a::n French accent ENVIRONMENT” and a “FEELING of French accent.” In addition to the more generally positive response to explicit instruction though, Nina also noted implicit instruction had helped “practise more like (2) CONNECTED speech,” allowing her to identify her “shortage of listening.”

Despite perceived improvements in listening comprehension, these perceptions contrasted with pre- and post-class comprehension quiz results (see Table 2), suggesting learners may develop increased confidence, even in the absence of measurable gains.

**Table 2**

*Listening Comprehension Quiz Scores Prior to, and Following, Instruction*

| Participant | Instruction       | Precurriculum Intervention | Postcurriculum Intervention |
|-------------|-------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Nina        | Explicit American | 4/6                        | 3/6                         |
|             | Implicit French   | 4/6                        | 3/6                         |
| Linabell    | Explicit French   | 6/6                        | 4/6                         |
|             | Implicit American | 6/6                        | 5/6                         |

*Note.* Scores from answers to 6 multiple-choice questions

In addition to accent, in interviews speed was also frequently cited as negatively affecting comprehension. When discussing American English, Nina “lost a lot of information @ because she or he speak TOO fast.” Similarly, Linabell recalled a meeting in which lack of familiarity with an accent and “because of the SPEED,” resulted in it being “very, HARD (2) to communicate.”

### ***Intelligibility***

Although intelligibility scores in Table 3 suggest explicit instruction only had a measurable positive impact only for Nina, interview data indicated that Linabell also found instruction valuable.

**Table 3**

*Intelligibility Transcription Scores Prior to, and Following, Instruction*

| Participant | Instruction       | Precurriculum Intervention | Postcurriculum Intervention |
|-------------|-------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Nina        | Explicit American | 16/32                      | 21/32                       |
|             | Implicit French   | 22/32                      | 15/32                       |
| Linabell    | Explicit French   | 21/32                      | 20/32                       |
|             | Implicit American | 28/32                      | 24/32                       |

*Note.* Scores are for totals of correct words transcribed. See Appendix K for scoring conventions

Despite having previously *noticed* accent features, it was only after explicit instruction that she knew “how to USE this phenomenon.” During out-of-class communication, Linabell remembered that “French is will drop (.) drop H? H sound,” and so she “FOUND (2) myself adding an /h/ in my mind.” Explicit instruction then promoted a sense of familiarity as it “helped to (2) to (.) enhance the ↑impression of some of their base of of speaking?”, although she added that “one class is introduction is not enough.”

Adding to this growing confidence in decoding, Linabell wrote in a diary entry that having had explicit classes on French English, she realised she could use small talk to “get myself adapted to their accent,” which meant that “those adds up to (2) to (1) a more confident my me MYSELF.” Following explicit classes, Nina similarly reported in a diary entry developing listening strategies of not focusing “on single words that I don't know”.

Despite these benefits, Linabell noted issues with some of the phonological features introduced during explicit instruction: particular attention was paid to issues caused by French English generally lacking the distinction between /i:/ and /ɪ/. However, Linabell felt that “for ME as a Chinese [...] it's STILL hard for me to tell the difference between those words.”

### ***Comprehensibility***

Despite ratings (see Table 4) suggesting limited improvement overall, except for Linabell's response to implicit instruction in American English, in interviews both Linabell and Nina emphasised the facilitative role explicit instruction had in giving a sense of familiarity, resulting in an increase in comprehensibility. For Linabell, it was “easier to understand I GUESS is because I RECENTLY I became familiar with that FRENCH accent.” Nina specifically referred to the explanation of the flapped [r] of a General American English accent (Jenkins, 2002), suggesting more instruction would make it even “↑easier to to to know the meaning.”

**Table 4**

*Comprehensibility Ratings Prior to, and Following, Instruction*

| Participant | Instruction       | Precurriculum Intervention | Postcurriculum Intervention |
|-------------|-------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Nina        | Explicit American | 8                          | 8                           |
|             | Implicit French   | 5                          | 8                           |
| Linabell    | Explicit French   | 5                          | 6                           |
|             | Implicit American | 4                          | 3                           |

*Note.* Comprehensibility rated in response to the prompt: “How easy were the recordings to understand?” Responses were on a 9-point scale (1 = very easy; 9 = very difficult)

Although the impact of implicit instruction was not mentioned as facilitating comprehensibility, both participants did report implicit exposure *outside* the classroom as leading to increased familiarity and comprehensibility. Referring to a Greek client, Linabell explained that “after the repeatedly calls for online meetings? I I I just find it easier to understand.” Nina also felt that after “a lot of global meetings that are English (2) [...] for the ↑accent for the ↑listening [...] I think it's also much better than before.”

However, diary data again indicated that speaker-variables beyond accent continued to impact comprehensibility, with Linabell writing “my clients today can speak fluent English, but they spoke very quickly, with some connected speeches, which made it harder to understand them.”

### *Accentedness*

Findings regarding the impact of classes on accentedness suggests complex, often contradictory, perceptions, though with a tendency to emphasise the benefits of implicit instruction. For example, although Nina’s accentedness ratings for French English increased slightly following implicit introduction (see Table 5), during interviews she nevertheless reported finding the accent “less strong.” On the other hand, Linabell’s ratings decreased following implicit exposure as she “DIDN’T NOTICE the American accent very much,” suggesting a more straightforward improvement following implicit instruction across both the qualitative data and numerical ratings.

**Table 5**

*Accentedness Ratings Prior to, and Following, Implicit Instruction*

| Participant | Instruction       | Precurriculum Intervention | Postcurriculum Intervention |
|-------------|-------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Nina        | Implicit French   | 4                          | 5                           |
| Linabell    | Implicit American | 4                          | 3                           |

*Note.* Accentedness rated in response to the prompt: “How strong did you think the accent of the speaker was?” Responses were on a 9-point scale (1 = no accent, 9 = very strong accent)

Tensions can be further seen in Linabell's perceptions following explicit instruction in French English: whilst ratings suggested no change (see Table 6), she felt the accent was "more obvious or mo:::re? easier? for me to listen to," although the rising intonation on 'easier' and hesitation ('mo:::re?') may point to her own uncertainty.

**Table 6**

*Accentedness Ratings Prior to, and Following, Explicit Instruction*

| Participant | Instruction       | Precurriculum Intervention | Postcurriculum Intervention |
|-------------|-------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Linabell    | Explicit French   | 7                          | 7                           |
| Nina        | Explicit American | 3                          | 4                           |

*Note.* Accentedness rated in response to the prompt: "How strong did you think the accent of the speaker was?" Responses were on a 9-point scale (1 = no accent, 9 = very strong accent)

For Nina, explicit instruction in American English led to slightly higher ratings for accentedness, which she attributed to finding the accent "difficult for me ALL the time yeah." This link between comprehensibility and accentedness, together with the emphasis on "ALL," suggests short curriculum interventions may be unlikely to impact deeply ingrained beliefs, particularly in relation to explicit instruction and its impact on accentedness. In addition, for Nina it was not accentedness alone that affected responses, but that it "really depends on the speakers @@."

Across qualitative data, participants also noted other speaker characteristics as mediating accentedness. Speech rate was noted by Linabell in her diary as "even with thick accent, if the person speaks slowly, it's easier to understand." This was echoed by Nina during interviews as she felt she could "understand different accents maybe because they speak slow."

### ***RQ2 and RQ3: Reported Anxiety and Learner Attitudes in Response to Classroom Exposure to Varieties of English***

#### ***Anxiety***

Prior to classes, both Nina and Linabell reported anxiety when communicating with colleagues and clients, with Nina referring to this feeling as "my (2) MONSTER, deeply in my heart."

Although Linabell noted nervousness remained during meetings, she stated "I think the first thing I I GET from our classes is (.) CONFIDENCE." Classes instilled a belief that "even if they cannot understand ME or I cannot understand THEM" it was still possible "to make each other CLEAR about what we were discussing." This points to a realisation that responsibility for communicative success is co-constructed.

Whilst Nina also still felt nervous during global meetings, she also believed that classes "to be honest make me more CONFIDENT." Specifically in relation to explicit instruction, this led to a sense that if she knew "MORE accents and the the the SPECIALTY of the accents, I can understand more my colleagues."

Both participants further noted they had developed personal strategies for managing anxiety following classes. Before meetings with international colleagues, Nina stated she “tried to (.) make myself calm down. (2) and listen (.) listening more carefully.” Linabell described becoming a “↑bold or a BRAVE English speaker,” and that pronunciation “doesn’t MATTER and this makes me make me feel more confident.”

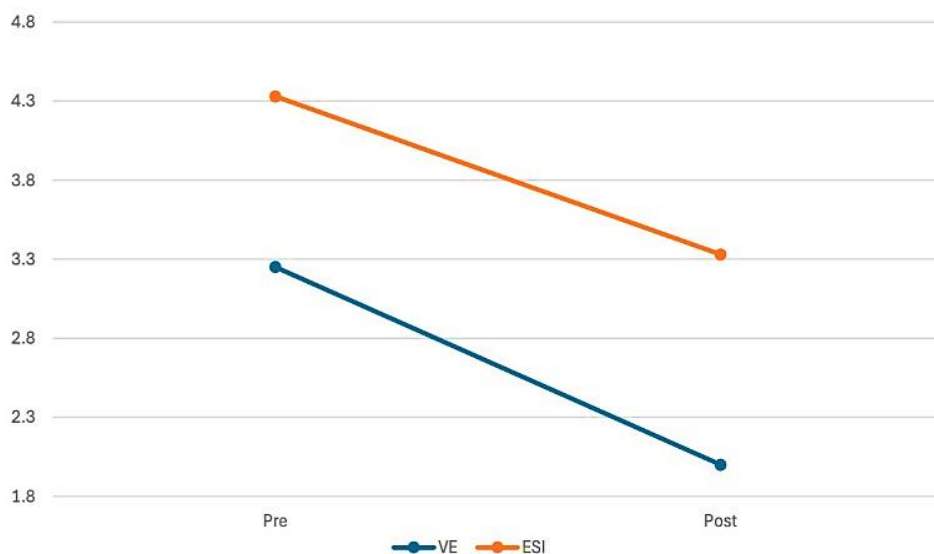
### *Attitudes*

Despite the largely positive impact on anxiety, findings regarding attitudes were mixed. Both participants reported increased acceptance of their own English following classes. Nina noted that rather than sounding “like a British or like America or like India yeah @@@,” that “people UNDERSTAND” was the most important thing. Linabell, who had previously thought sounding “like native speakers it (1) is very cool,” ultimately reported that “accent it doesn’t ↑matter that MUCH” because “language is a TOOL for people to communicate.”

Despite this growing self-confidence, Linabell’s responses to the EILPS, with changes in the composite scores for each subscale/factor represented in Figure 1, suggest a more negative impact on attitudes toward NS norms and the use of varieties of English within classroom materials.

**Figure 1**

*EILPS Changes: Linabell*



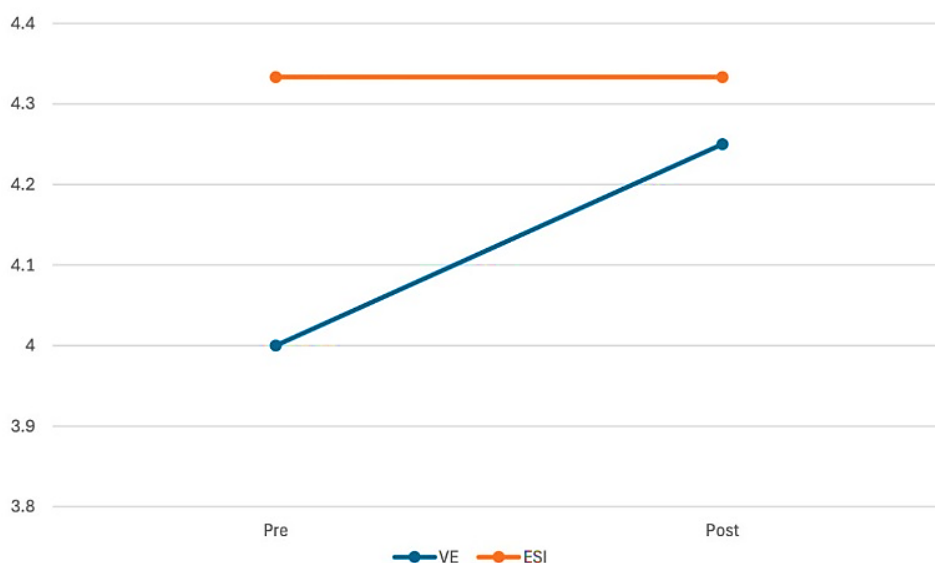
Ratings for Varieties of English were computed from the mean of four items measured by the EILPS. Ratings for English speaker identity were computed from the mean of three items measured by the EILPS.

Whilst she initially supported classroom exposure to accents, following the curriculum intervention she felt teachers should “NOT use different kind of English” but rather “make the students to speak RELATIVELY standard or NATIVE English.” Drawing on her experience learning Mandarin, she suggested exposure to multiple accents could be confusing as “if everyone speak with their OWN accent it sometimes is harder to understand each other.”

However, Nina’s increased support for classroom use of English varieties, as demonstrated by her responses to the EILPS in Figure 2, again demonstrate the highly individualised nature of responses to curriculum interventions.

**Figure 2**

*EILPS Changes: Nina*



Ratings above for Varieties of English were computed from the mean of four items measured by the EILPS. Ratings for English speaker identity were computed from the mean of three items measured by the EILPS.

Despite mixed influences on cognitive attitudes, behavioural impacts were more positive. Although Linabell had previously avoided “having ↑phone call or ↑video call with” clients, following classes she noted a willingness to adapt language when misunderstanding arose, leading to increased confidence. Nina likewise noted she would now “NOT (2) focus on the ACCENT” when speaking with international colleagues.

Taken together, these findings suggest classroom exposure to diverse accents can support greater self-acceptance and reduce avoidance behaviour, although the persistence of standard language ideology alongside increased communicative confidence highlights the complexity of attitudinal change.

## Discussion

Across findings, two main patterns emerged. First, the curriculum intervention had clearer affective benefits rather than measurable gains, with participants perceiving the explicit classes as particularly valuable. Second, learner responses were highly individualised, and at times contradictory. Taken together, these suggest that evaluations of Global Englishes-informed pedagogy, particularly briefer interventions, may require greater use of qualitative evidence alongside numerical scores, especially in professional ELF contexts, to capture student responses more accurately.

### *Listening Comprehension*

The lack of improvement in comprehension scores contrasts with the findings reported in some other interventions (e.g., Miao et al., 2025), though the descriptive nature of the numerical data in the current study should again be emphasised.

Nevertheless, both participants reported perceived improvements and increased self-efficacy, aligning with other studies in which learners felt increased confidence despite no changes in test scores (e.g., Milliner & Dimoski, 2019). As with comprehensibility and intelligibility below, this perceived value was more consistently associated with explicit instruction. Linabell's description of explicit instruction facilitating a form of predictive decoding highlights the impact it had on real-world communication. Implicit instruction, by contrast, appeared to offer a narrower benefit: Nina noted it had specifically helped her practise connected speech, allowing her to identify her listening weaknesses.

Nina and Linabell's reported issues with speech rate are mirrored in much of the literature examining comprehension of English varieties (e.g., Bamroongkit & Aowsakorn, 2021). However, given speakers in the present study were matched for speech rate, Derwing and Munro's (1997) argument that "rate sometimes serves as a general scapegoat for perceived comprehension difficulties, whether it is the direct cause or not" (p. 14) seems relevant. Regardless, these findings suggest short Global Englishes-informed interventions may be better equipped to support *perceived* comprehension improvements rather than to produce immediate measurable gains.

### *Intelligibility*

The impact of classes on intelligibility was inconsistent, with measurable gains observed only for Nina following explicit instruction in American English. Whilst this is similar to the broader research pattern suggesting limited numerically measurable impact from training (e.g., Derwing et al., 2002) this is in contrast to Johansen's (2019) finding that explicit training did not improve intelligibility, although this may be due to the features chosen for explicit instruction as in Johansen's study, these were limited to suprasegmental features. This finding also contrasts with Lindemann et al.'s (2016) finding that both implicit and explicit instruction significantly improved intelligibility, though this may be due to instrument design:

Lindemann et al.'s transcription task used excerpts from the same lecture employed in comprehension activities, unlike the nonsense sentences used here.

Linabell's application of the knowledge gained through explicit instruction and Nina's decision to avoid focusing on individual words suggest that intelligibility-focused, explicit phonological instruction can promote important changes in real-world listening strategies, even when transcription scores show little to no improvement. As with comprehension above, no comparable benefit was reported for implicit exposure, continuing the pattern favouring explicit instruction that is discussed further, and contrasted with accentedness, below.

### ***Comprehensibility***

Linabell's sense that explicit classroom instruction facilitated comprehensibility through familiarity and Nina's emphasis on the value of instruction in specific phonological features contrasts with the limited numerical gains, again highlighting contradictions between self-perceptions and measurements and the importance of employing mixed methods to uncover them. Participants' sense that explicit instruction supported comprehensibility through familiarity appears to align with similar findings for L2 English listeners in Kurtuldu and Özkan's (2022) study.

Conflicting comprehensibility ratings between participants, with Nina rating French English more comprehensible than American English at pretest, and Linabell's ratings the reverse, further suggest responses to the construct are highly individualised.

Linabell's identification of speech rate as a factor affecting comprehensibility should be viewed cautiously given Derwing and Munro's (1997) argument above. Nevertheless, this suggests comprehensibility is not only highly individualised, but difficult to isolate given the influence of other factors. Taken together, these findings suggest comprehensibility may be influenced as much by individual speakers, listeners, and other contextual factors, as by accent.

### ***Accentedness***

Contradictions between ratings and qualitative responses for accentedness are unsurprising given the construct's highly subjective nature (Kang et al., 2016). Nina's statements that she found French English "less strong," and Linabell's sense that it had become "more obvious" or "easier," despite no improvements in numerical ratings, may further point to an inherent instability in the construct. Additionally, in contrast to the comparatively greater perceived impact of explicit instruction on other constructs, implicit exposure appeared to facilitate accentedness more. Though speculative, this may suggest a closer alignment between, and among, these three constructs than with accentedness, similar to findings from Ockey and French (2016) and Derwing and Munro (2009).

That only Linabell's ratings for accentedness of American English improved may be related to extensive previous familiarity, though this would appear to contrast

with studies suggesting familiarity does not impact accentedness (e.g., Kennedy & Trofimovich, 2008). However, because the listeners in Kennedy and Trofimovich's study were L1 English listeners, this may point to familiarity's distinct role dependent on L1 background.

Qualitative findings also suggested the importance of accentedness during listening may be overridden by other factors, with both participants linking understanding primarily to speech rate rather than accent, lending support to findings highlighting the complex relationship between these constructs (Munro & Derwing, 2001).

### *Anxiety*

Given the impact anxiety can have on listening comprehension, both learners' reported increase in confidence represents an important finding. Linabell's reframing of communication as a shared willingness to negotiate meaning mirrors findings in other Global Englishes-awareness raising interventions (e.g., Boonsuk et al., 2021). Previous research has further found the inclusion of fluent L2 speakers in classroom materials can support self-belief by providing realistic, attainable models (e.g., Rajani Na Ayuthaya & Sitthitikul, 2016). As such both Linabell's decision to become a "BRAVE English speaker" and Nina's sense that classes had led her to be "more CONFIDENT," may be attributable to the inclusion in teaching materials of fluent, yet accented, speakers. This suggests increased diversity in pedagogical materials not only better reflects current sociolinguistic realities but can also offer a positive affective impact for learners.

Nina's sense that further explicit accents would help comprehension suggests classes helped her begin to view accent comprehension not as an abstract challenge, but as something to be improved through systematic targeted practice. Nevertheless, Nina's lingering anxiety may point to the inadequacy of a view of anxiety as linear, that if negative feelings go down, positive experiences must go up, but support the view that both positive and negative emotions may occur at the same time (Dewaele et al., 2019), with classes capable of improving positive emotions but unlikely to completely eradicate listening anxiety.

### *Attitudes*

The finding that exposure to varieties of English fostered more positive participant attitudes toward their own accents aligns with previous Global Englishes-informed intervention studies. Nina's reflection that fluency mattered more than attaining a native-speaker accent mirrors participant responses in Sirijanchuen and Tangkiengsirisin's (2025) study. Similarly, Linabell's recognition that the "ULTIMATE purpose" of language was mutual comprehension matches comments in Funada (2025) that "as long as we can convey our meaning, we don't need to achieve native-like English" (p. 211).

These improved attitudes contrast with findings in other studies which suggested learners continued to hold native-speaker expectations for themselves, despite a similar recognition of mutual understanding and increased tolerance of others' accents (e.g., Chiu & Lin, 2024). Such differences may be attributable to the fact that learners in the present study, as working professionals, already had particular communicative demands with specific interlocutors and therefore more immediate priorities on which to focus.

However, participant views on the inclusion of varieties of English in materials differed significantly, with Nina's increased support echoing the positive attitudes engendered by Sriwang et al.'s (2020) intervention. In contrast, Linabell argued that such exposure might confuse students and hinder intelligibility, a view similar to those expressed by participants in investigations by Galloway and Rose (2014) who felt NS accents offered better intelligibility.

Linabell's conflicting responses point to the deeply rooted nature of standard language ideologies. In addition to the short duration of the current intervention, this may be explained by the relative lack of critical engagement encouraged through the materials. This is of particular importance given research encountered after the study's design phase suggesting exposure without such engagement is insufficient to foster sustained attitudinal change (Crowther et al., 2025).

Ultimately, these contradictory findings point to the highly personal nature of responses to classroom interventions, and the need for further research with professional learners already engaged in ELF communication to gain a broader understanding of reactions to different interventions.

### ***Findings Summary***

Several tensions have emerged that point to the complex and interdependent nature of the listening constructs examined. For example, numerical gains in intelligibility did not correspond to any improvements in comprehension, comprehensibility or accentedness, echoing similar findings in other studies (e.g., Lindemann et al., 2016) and adding support to Jeong et al.'s (2021) suggestion that there is little direct correlation between constructs.

However, a distinct pattern did emerge at the qualitative level, with participant responses suggesting a more consistent improvement from explicit instruction on perceptions of comprehension, comprehensibility, and intelligibility, whilst accentedness was more closely associated with implicit exposure.

For Linabell, accentedness ratings for American English improved following implicit instruction, possibly due to her already extensive familiarity. Despite implicit instruction not resulting in any numerical improvements for Nina, she nevertheless felt she found the French speaker less accented. On the other hand, although explicit instruction with their chosen accents again led to limited measurable improvements,

these activities were highlighted as being particularly useful during real-world business communication and in facilitating a sense of listening development.

Given explicit instruction in this study was centred on the *chosen* accents of each participant, broader claims to the objective efficacy of explicit instruction should be avoided. Nevertheless, it appears from the data that explicit instruction is, at the very least, *perceived* as of value to students. This perceived value appears linked to growing learner confidence and more positive attitudes toward their own accents, suggesting these affective shifts underpin much of the qualitative patterns observed, although the tension between the positive impact felt from classes and opposition to the inclusion of accent diversity in classrooms felt by Linabell remains unresolved.

## **Conclusion**

The current study explored learner responses to the inclusion of diverse English varieties in classroom listening activities. Less positive findings related to participant attitudes toward the inclusion of English varieties in the classroom have highlighted the importance of encouraging learners to reflect critically on the changing sociolinguistic realities of English use within materials. Whilst numerical measures showed limited gains, qualitative findings pointed to increased learner confidence in their listening abilities and own accents, highlighting a tension between measured outcomes and learner-perceived pedagogical value. With particular value placed on explicit instruction, such classes may be especially valuable where learners have specific accent-related listening needs.

## ***Pedagogical Implications***

Numerical ratings of accentedness and comprehensibility showed little improvement. Nevertheless, both participants reported increased confidence in their listening abilities, with participants noting specific actionable listening strategies they developed. This suggests the incorporation of English varieties into classroom activities can support learner self-efficacy, particularly in the explicit-instruction classes examined here. Given participants' reported perceptions of the value of explicit instruction on their chosen accent, teachers working alongside learners with similarly specific accent-related needs might consider incorporating such activities. Despite this relatively greater perceived benefit from explicit instruction, it should be recognised that it is not possible to untangle this from the fact that instruction took place with participants' professionally relevant accent. As implicit instruction was also seen as valuable by the current study's participants, in contexts where the pedagogical aim is not linked to a particular accent, implicit exposure might therefore also be recommended more broadly.

Teachers designing such activities should conduct needs analyses to identify varieties most relevant to their learners' goals, as in the present study. However,

findings that some phonological features identified from the research literature for instruction were not helpful for participants suggests that selection of these features should also be learner-driven, to include both segmental and suprasegmental features where appropriate.

Findings from the current study support the importance of critical classroom engagement with the sociolinguistic realities of global English use today. Incorporating brief in-class discussions or even reflective homework tasks could give learners the opportunity to examine their own assumptions and encourage attitudinal shifts to support learners' continued willingness to engage with such exposure beyond the classroom, potentially facilitating more long-term exposure and thereby offering further opportunities for listening development.

### ***Limitations***

The case study design allowed for an in-depth exploration of responses to a Global Englishes-informed curriculum intervention, highlighting complexity and variability. However, as with all case studies, findings are context-bound and at most can provide only analytic generalisations on the wider implications of the “lessons learned” from specific contexts (Yin, 2018, p. 40).

Given both students' busy schedules, time constraints proved to be a significant logistical limitation: to minimise time required for the intervention, proficiency was measured through self-assessment. Given previously voiced concerns regarding self-report data not accurately reflecting participants' proficiency (e.g., Ayers, 2010), this may have impacted attempts at providing sufficiently rich descriptions to improve transferability.

The brevity of the intervention itself is then also acknowledged as a limitation, although this may to some extent be mitigated by the ecological validity of such a short intervention: in addition to this limited time being similar to a situation faced by many teachers, given the primary pedagogical aim of the classes was to introduce particular features of specific accents, it can be argued that such a short curriculum intervention is appropriate for such a specific aim.

Several additional limitations emerged during analysis and interpretation of findings. Although use of single-item Likert scales aligned with previous research, the lack of measurable improvements suggests such instruments may lack sensitivity to uncover subtle changes. Of course, this may also have been due to the brevity of the intervention, although in this case, it should again be noted ratings primarily served to provide additional descriptive information and inform the qualitative data-collection instruments. As such, the absence of measurable numerical change allowed comparison with the improvements reported in the qualitative data, an elucidatory contrast supported by other studies (e.g., Antonek et al., 2000).

Whilst several other variables appeared through the study, familiarity in particular proved more influential than anticipated: inclusion of a preclass measure

of familiarity along with a more explicit focus during interviews might therefore have enabled a clearer exploration of its interactions with the other constructs.

The timing of the intervention also impacted opportunities Nina had to communicate with international colleagues as this coincided with their Christmas break, thereby limiting diary entries to the single occasion she considered relevant and worth recording. Linabell was able to complete three entries in total, although hers were also limited by a business trip that coincided with the intervention. The nature of the participants' work meant outside exposure to their target accents could not be controlled for and so the possibility that exposure and heightened awareness coloured responses must also be recognised as a potential limitation.

Crucially, materials and activities further lacked critical engagement with key Global Englishes concepts. Although time constraints limited the inclusion of such activities, it was nevertheless hoped that exposure might lead to positive attitudinal impacts. However, the current study's findings suggest that such passive exposure is not enough to foster positive attitudinal shifts and may even have a negative impact.

Finally, despite best efforts being made to ensure trustworthiness through the procedures detailed above, the lack of interrater coding must also be acknowledged as a significant limitation.

### ***Future Research***

The complex interrelationships between the constructs explored in this study have precluded neat conclusions, but highlight the importance of further research exploring these relationships in both breadth and depth. The influence of constructs on each other supports the need for as broad a range as possible of constructs to be examined to build a clearer picture and elucidate any contradictions. Particularly where interventions are brief or instruments and activities cannot capture sufficient granularity, ensuring the collection of student perceptions of their own development seems crucial.

The present study has further attempted to improve transparency through the inclusion of the coding frame used with the interview data, as a gap in this level of transparency was identified in the literature review. It is recommended that further studies might attempt to do the same.

Although limited in scope, this case study adds to a growing body of research that emphasises the need for localised, learner-sensitive Global Englishes-informed curricula. Future studies should continue to explore the dynamics found in the current study across learner groups and contexts, with attention to the methodological issues identified here, and the integration of critical reflection into curriculum design. Future studies would benefit from similarly triangulated designs, examining as broad a range of constructs as possible. As far as we are aware, this is among the first GE-informed classroom intervention studies to focus specifically on such a breadth of constructs with working professional learners, and clearly more are needed.

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