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English Pronunciation Models in the Dialogue of Cultures: Attitudes and Concerns in Teacher Education in Russia

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Abstract

The global spread of English has resulted in a change in priorities with regards to pronunciation. The “English as a Lingua Franca” model has taken the dominant position worldwide. However, there is little consensus among researchers and practitioners on which pronunciation model, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), should be applied in teacher education. This study investigates the attitudes to EFL and ELF pronunciation models amongst participants in teacher education in Russia (students and lecturers of the Institute of Foreign Languages, Moscow State Pedagogical University). The study was mixed-method, quantitative and qualitative: the quantitative data were processed by means of descriptive statistics, and for the analysis of qualitative data, content analysis was applied. It involved one hundred and twenty-two students answering the questionnaire and twenty university lecturers responding to semi-structured interview questions. The results show that both students and lecturers would prefer the EFL model to be used in pronunciation instruction in the course of professional teacher education. From the pedagogical perspective, the key findings demonstrate that a balanced combination of the traditional EFL approach and ELF awareness may enhance the quality of pronunciation teaching in teacher education programmes in Russia. (*примљено: 28. априла 2022; прихваћено: 11. маја 2022*)

1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been an ongoing discussion about the pronunciation models used in L2 teaching programmes and in teacher education in particular. Unprecedented variation of English pronunciation, the status of English as a global language, and the corresponding development of New Englishes have all led to the revision of the priorities in pronunciation teaching (Rose et al., 2020). One of the key issues is which of the two models, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), is more effective in terms of multicultural communication and in pedagogical terms.

From a pedagogical perspective, any decisions concerning the design and content of an English phonetics course tend to be guided by attitudes to opposing sociocultural and ideological considerations, such as ‘multiculturalism’ versus ‘native-speakerism’; ‘tolerance to accents’ versus ‘accent discrimination’ (‘accentism’); etc. Consequently, the study of the attitudes to pronunciation models, which is our primary concern in this study, is highly relevant in the Russian educational context.

Previous research clearly indicates that the introduction and expansion of the ELF model, which seems to be replacing the traditional EFL model, was a reaction to the dramatic changes caused by globalisation. The fact that the majority of English speakers were non-native led to a revision of the generally accepted approaches to teaching pronunciation, which until that point had been based on two national pronunciation standards: British (RP), or American (GA). It was argued that orientation towards the imitation of ‘native speaker like’ pronunciation reduced the potential for self-expression of non-native speakers (Holliday, 2006).

The introduction of the ELF model in pronunciation teaching was, in summary, supported by the following reasoning: in the new multicultural community of speakers of English there is no need to rely on the rules followed by native speakers (NSs) and apply them to communication among non-native speakers (NNSs). Interestingly, this approach was later modified to include not only non-native speakers, but native speakers of English as well. Stating the value of Jenkins’ contribution to the description of English as a “truly global language, developing in a way to suit the communicative purposes of everyone who is using it”, Setter points out that in recent years the ELF paradigm “has come to include any form of English used as a lingua franca, which might also include L1 speakers, but the focus is not on the speakers of Older Varieties providing any kind of ‘norm’”(Setter, 2019: 202).

The supporters of the ELF model claim that multicultural awareness is of crucial importance for young teachers and teacher trainees:

If teacher trainees are not exposed to multicultural ideas and examples, they go out into the world as a certain zealous sort of religious missionary who seeks to show ‘they lost’ the error of their ways – without knowing anything about their ways. (Kachru/Nelson, 1996)

One can hardly argue with these principles, which are highly relevant in the context of international communication in English; however, they do not offer any guidelines regarding 'the norm', 'standard' or 'target' to be used in the phonetic training of pre-service teachers of English. If, as Setter (2019), cited above, suggests, we can no longer rely on the standards used by native speakers, which model should be used as a 'common ground' in the Russian classroom?

Over the last two decades, since the publication of Jenkins' (2000) *Lingua Franca Core*, the attitude towards the ELF model in the professional community has been highly positive and supportive. The pronunciation priorities outlined within this approach have been viewed as a significant step forward in the area of pronunciation teaching (Walker, 2010).

Both Couper (2017) and Nguyen (2019) argue that focus on intelligibility, instead of accent reduction, is in keeping with communicative pronunciation teaching (Couper, 2017; Nguyen, 2019). However, studies that support the intelligibility-based approach generally focus on learners whose academic field is not English or education. Clearly, the study of the learners' preferences involved in teacher education can hardly be restricted to the parameter of intelligibility and should include consideration for their professional needs.

Thus, Thir (2016) gives a detailed comparative analysis of EFL and ELF models and outlines the advantages of the ELF approach in teacher education in Austria (Thir, 2016). Typically, the title of the paper contains the word 'rethinking': taking a critical look at the EFL model, the author demonstrates the advantages of 'ELF-informed approach' to English pronunciation teaching in teacher education. It needs to be stressed here, that even though Thir (2016) claims that she shares the generally accepted critical view of the EFL model and challenges the so-called 'native-speakerism' from a psychological and pedagogical perspective, what she suggests in practical terms is, in fact, the coexistence of the two approaches.

This balanced approach is a relatively new trend, which can be traced in recent publications. For example, O'Regan (2014) highlights some of the negative tendencies of the rejection of EFL pronunciation standards in favour of ELF. These negative tendencies are particularly marked in situations that require a higher standard of oral and phonetic skills, such as academic discourse in which English is used as a medium of instruction. The principle of 'mutual intelligibility', which replaced the principle of 'accuracy', seems to be insufficient for the development of oral skills and professional eloquence, which are highly relevant for language teachers (Freydina, 2020).

In the last few years there followed a new 'revision' of the approaches to pronunciation teaching. Interestingly, in contrast to previous research, the term 'traditional' was now being used referring to the model English as a *Lingua Franca* (Dewey, 2014). An important contribution to this discussion was made by Swan (2017), who reconsiders the popular ideas concerning accent discrimination and language ownership and argues that "target likeness may be a more appropriate focus when concerning pedagogy" (Swan, 2017). Swan's argument, in essence, is

that the degree of accuracy required by non-native speakers depends chiefly on the situation and the aim of communication. While in such contexts as travel, a lower degree of accuracy is acceptable, in academic and educational contexts highly accurate English is expected and, in fact, required. Viewing ELF as a non-native type of English, in which 'norms' cannot be identified, he claims that "in order for language to be taught, there must be some standardisation to it (some set of codified norms)" (Swan, 2017). These observations are applicable in teacher education, where extensive use of ELF has already led to the blurring of the idea of standard, which in turn has resulted in vagueness of pedagogical principles and approaches.

Notably, the aforementioned authors tend to avoid dogmatic support for either ELF or EFL, preferring to sit on the fence. Thus, though Thir (2016) claims to be a supporter of the ELF model, what she relies upon in the design of her own phonetics courses is the so-called 'ELF-informed approach' to English pronunciation teaching in teacher education. This approach combines the use of RP and GA as models (but not norms) and the essentials of an ELF approach to pronunciation teaching. Similarly, having outlined the negative aspects of ELF, Swan (2017) still points out that 'ELF-aware teaching' is important.

It appears that in the ongoing discussion both the supporters and opponents of ELF tend to prioritise learners' needs and preferences. Such needs are viewed as an important empirical matter and a relevant concern for educators (Cunningham, 2009; Tokumoto/Shibata, 2011; Bai/Yuan, 2019; Nguyen, 2019). Although the research in this field is quite extensive, most of it is cross-sectional and culture-specific. As regards the Russian educational environment, we are unaware of any previously published research that examines learners' and teachers' preferences in terms of pronunciation teaching.

Following Scheuer (2008) and Subtirelu (2013), we view the limitations of the previous research as a reflection of the complex and ambivalent character of 'attitudes', as well as imperfect research instruments. The approach used in the present study is based on the assumption that when analysing the attitudes of learners whose academic field is English education, it is necessary to consider pragmatic, socio-cultural and institutional factors.

We believe that support for the ELF model and unwillingness to concede its limitations, especially for people being trained as teachers of English, is due to a tendency to want to appear inclusive. This, whilst acceptable for general learners of English, is not acceptable for future teachers, who must be examples to students, and thus held to higher standards.

The present study is an attempt to examine the attitudes to pronunciation models in Russia's educational environment. We focus on the practices used in teacher education programmes at the Moscow State Pedagogical University. Our basic assumption was that preferences regarding the pronunciation model are influenced, among other factors, by the traditions of a particular educational institution and national educational environment (educational philosophy),

learners' previous and current learning experience, as well as their professional needs and aspirations. The study is also aimed at identifying the potential influence of these factors on the choices made in the design and content of the course of English phonetics in teacher education programmes.

The study examines the following research questions:

1. How do the participants in teacher education in a Russian University (students and lecturers) perceive EFL and ELF pronunciation models?
2. What are the factors that influence their preference for a particular model?

2. Methods

The research was carried out at the Moscow State Pedagogical University, Institute of Foreign Languages, where a course of English phonetics is an important part of the curriculum and assessment process.

Our participants were: 100 Bachelor students and 20 Master's programme students. Both groups included males and females, aged from 20 to 25. Figure 1 shows the groups of students according to their gender and age.

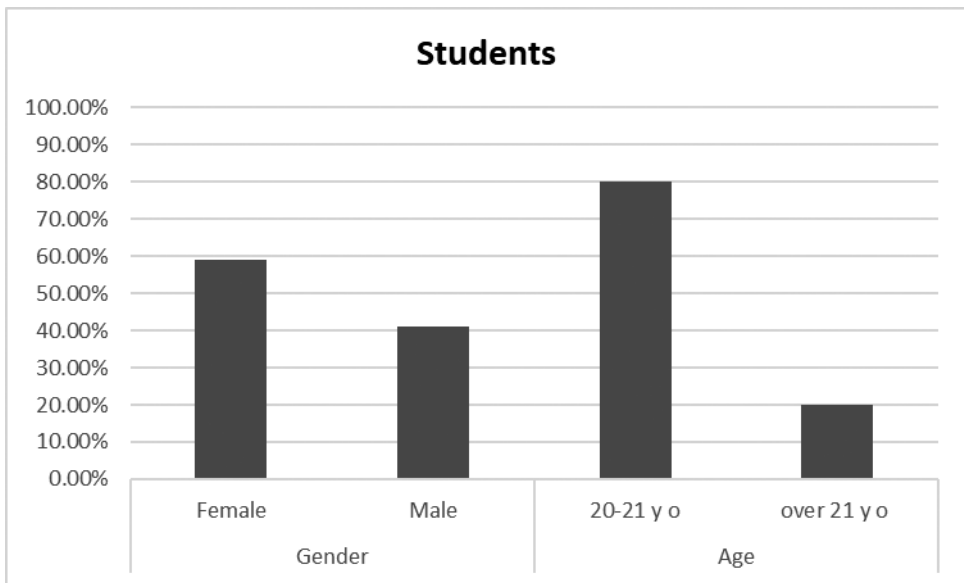


Figure 1. Student participants according to their gender and age

We also sent an invitation letter to lecturers from the Institute of Foreign Languages. Twenty university lecturers, including the Chair of English Phonetics and Lexicology volunteered to participate in Focus Group (FG) interviews. All lecturers had a PhD or Doctorate in Philology (N.B. in Russia PhD and Doctorate are separate qualifications) and had extensive experience in teaching practical and theoretical phonetics (Figure 2).

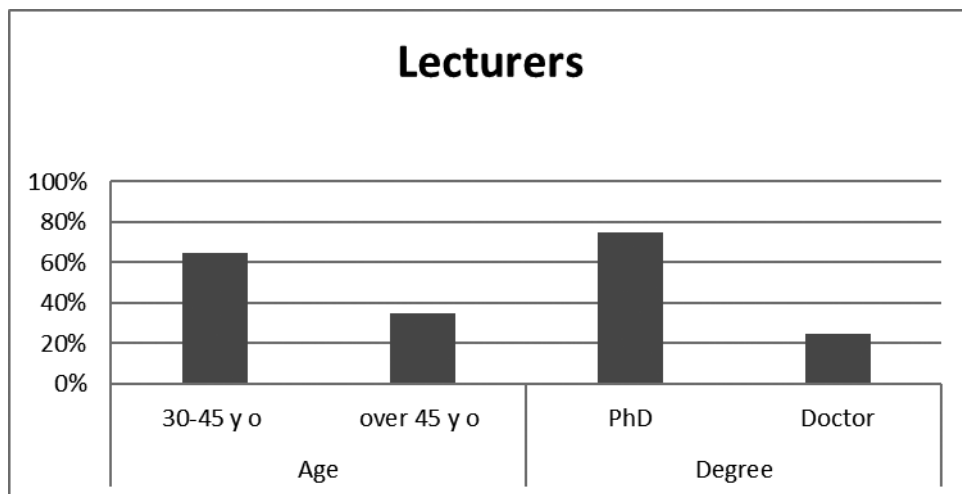


Figure 2. Lecturers according to their age and academic degree

The study employs a mixed method approach (quantitative and qualitative) to evaluate attitudes to pronunciation models in teacher training education. The main methodologies for the study were classroom observations, educational programme analysis, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with focus groups. To aggregate variability in systematic and random factors, a one-way ANOVA method was used.

Classroom observations, as well as educational programme analysis, allowed us to make predictions about the views of students and teachers on the status of ELF in English Language teaching and in intercultural communication.

The questionnaire was designed with 15 questions, separated into two parts, A and B: the participants' general information and the students' views on the accents in English Language Teaching (ELT). In part A (4 questions), students were required to give their demographic information, including their age, their experience in learning English, their educational background, and their professional skills. In part B, students were asked to fill out a questionnaire, in which a multiple-choice method was used. Part B (9 specific questions) was aimed at identifying the students' views on accents in ELT and the status of EFL and ELF models in teaching and everyday communication practice. The responses included four options to choose from. For example, students were asked which accent should be taught as a norm (any accent, it's not important; RP; General American; other).

First, the questionnaire was delivered to students online in Google forms. After all the students completed the forms, all the answers were used to draw graphs and pie charts, to find out the percentage of each of the 4 options (where 1=RP, 2=GA, 3=ELF, 4=other) in total figures.

Focus group interviews with the lecturers comprised two parts. In the first part, each of the lecturers answered questions that elicited their views on different teaching techniques, and the number of hours allocated to practical phonetics in

the curriculum. In the second part of the interviews, each teacher was asked to discuss their approach to teaching pronunciation in a multicultural framework, as well as their main concerns about the current trends in phonetic training.

The data were collected from the end of April through the beginning of June in the academic year 2020–2021, and at the end of November through the beginning of December in the academic year 2020–2021.

3. Results

The first stage of the research (questionnaire) examined how the students perceive EFL and ELF pronunciation models. We also analysed the factors that influence their preference of a particular model. The primary factors affecting the choice of a particular model are the students' personal educational experience and the aim of communication – learning, teaching, informal interacting with friends and peers (Table 1).

Source Variation	of d.f.	SS	MS	F	p-value	F crit	Omega Sqr.
Between groups	2	2,645.33333	1,322.66667	23.06977	0.01508	9.55209	0.88033
Within groups	3	172.00000	57.33333				
TOTAL	5	2,817.33333					

Table 1. The results of one-way statistical analysis of the respondents' answers by the aim of communication

As shown in Table 1, the difference between groups was significant ($F = 23.06977$). Given the degrees of freedom (2) and the probability level of 0.05, the critical F-value was 9.55209. The null hypothesis can thus be accepted, since $F < F$ critical, i.e. the aim of communication is crucially important.

Another question the participants were asked was related to the pronunciation skills they would like to master. The majority chose Standard British or General American and mentioned their value and impact (Table 2).

Standard British/General American	Answers
reliable	100 out of 120 students
status marker	all students
weighty	102 out of 120
more effective	118 out of 120

Table 2. The students' perception of standard pronunciation (Standard British/General American)

Regardless of their level of language, the learners emphasised the significance of 'nativeness' in such speech situations as public speaking and conferences. The

prevalence of such attitudes demonstrates that ‘mutual intelligibility’ does not prove to be a sufficient target in pronunciation training for Russian learners of English. Another observation is the students’ awareness of the pedagogical implications of achieving a high level of accuracy in their pronunciation.

A significant difference was found between the attitudes expressed by the two groups of students (Bachelor’s programme students and Master’s programme students). The students in the first group seem to depend more on the choices made by their university instructors. In other words, their support of the EFL model can be accounted for, at least partly, by the fact that they were exposed to this model in their university course of phonetics. The students in the second group appear to be more independent in their choices, because their previous educational experiences varied considerably. Interestingly, students who did not have any specialised phonetic training as part of their bachelor’s programmes considered it to be a serious drawback and expressed very positive attitudes to native-like pronunciation and the EFL model.

We asked the participants to choose an accent they were taught and the one they considered the most appropriate for teaching. Again, the difference was significant ($F = 11.45277$ vs. $F_{crit} 5.19217$), which means the hypothesis that the choice is affected by the tradition in learners’ education and their own preference can be accepted (Tables 3 and 4).

Source of Variation	d.f.	SS	MS	F	p-value	F crit	Omega Sqr.
Between groups	4	2,231.00000	557.75000	11.45277	0.00988	5.19217	0.80699
Within groups	5	243.50000	48.70000				

Table 3. The results of one-way statistical analysis of the respondents’ answers about their learning experience

SOURCE OF VARIATION	d.f.	SS	MS	F	p-value	F crit	Omega Sqr.
Between groups	3	1,668.37500	556.12500	9.95302	0.02511	6.59138	0.77050
Within groups	4	223.50000	55.87500				
TOTAL	7	1,891.87500					

Table 4. Results of one-way statistical analysis of the respondents’ answers to ‘Which accent should be a teaching norm?’

Turning now to the results we obtained during the interviews with the lecturers, we should point out that the majority of lecturers (15 out of 20) expressed their concerns about recent changes in the curriculum. They considered it inappropriate and counterproductive to cut the hours allocated for phonetic training. One of the interviewees said:

Foreign language teaching requires a high level of accuracy in pronunciation, which makes phonetic training one of the core subjects of the teacher education programme.

Commenting on the current debate about accuracy and fluency, one respondent said:

There is nothing wrong with fluency and mutual intelligibility, but why can't they be combined with accuracy?

While discussing the paradigm shift in the way English is taught, all informants (lecturers) shared their doubts about the ELF model as the only choice in present TEFL. They admitted that the ELF model is simpler to apply, and it may be better when it comes to intercultural communication. As one of the interviewees noted:

Having emerged as a game changer, ELF is now positioned as the only choice in TEFL. The main reason is that the students will have a better chance of successful communication worldwide. Otherwise, they will not fulfil their potential as competitive and experienced professionals.

However, half of this focus group (10 out of 20) considered the recent changes rather distressing and troublesome. One stated:

The problem is that what once began as a notion, 'new reality', new way to make the learning process easier, has become a theory of the mind which has been used to justify changes in the curricula. New courseware, instructions, research data are rigorously imposed upon teachers and students.

Finally, the participants were asked about teaching norms. They unanimously (20 out of 20) claimed that *"codified norms in pronunciation teaching are essential, not only in terms of the students' pronunciation skills, but also as the foundation of their own professional skills: their ability to explain, to demonstrate, to speak in public, to work out their own approach to teaching English phonetics"*.

The main argument here is their own experience in teaching English pronunciation:

My extensive experience in the field shows that learners of English do not perform any differently if they are taught some particular native-like model and given detailed information about other accents, including ELF.

4. Discussion

One of the aims of this study was to identify the attitudes of students to EFL and ELF models. The obtained data suggest that there are strong links between the target of language learning, professional aspirations and the preference of a particular model. Another important finding is the students' awareness of the pedagogical implications of achieving a high level of accuracy in their pronunciation.

Acquiring a native-like accent as well as general phonetic competence is perceived as an indispensable component of their professional training and is viewed as both desirable and achievable. This finding confirms previous research (Farish et al., 2020).

Perhaps one of the most interesting findings is that the students' beliefs are influenced by the ideologies and teaching practices used in their educational institution. A possible explanation is that since teacher education in Russia is generally rather conservative and teacher-centred, the students tend to accept the approaches used at their university. Traditionally, the system of EFL teaching in Russia has been based on Received Pronunciation (RP) as the 'teaching norm' (Sokolova et al., 2010). The participants of the study were exposed to this model in their course of practical phonetics, which may account for its positive perception. These results echo prior findings on the impact of teachers' initial training on the way they teach pronunciation (Murphy, 2014; Derwing, 2018).

This observation can be further supported by another finding. The study demonstrated certain differences in the attitudes expressed by the two groups, the students of the Bachelor's and Master's programmes. The students belonging to the first group seem to depend more on the choices made by their university instructors. Those who study for their Master's degree appear to be more independent in expressing their preferences, because their previous educational experiences varied considerably. Interestingly, the students, who did not have any specialised phonetic training as part of their bachelor's programmes, considered this to be a serious drawback and expressed very positive attitudes to native-like pronunciation and the EFL model.

The results of the study also indicate that support for the EFL model, based on a pragmatic approach to language learning with regards to professional goals, does not imply any disregard for multicultural ideas or ELF awareness.

Regarding the attitudes and concerns of the university lecturers and instructors, the study has found that they are well aware of the paradigm shift towards ELF in teaching pronunciation. However, they have serious reservations about the application of this model in teacher education.

It is acknowledged by all participants that teacher education requires a high level of accuracy in pronunciation, which makes the EFL model more appropriate. The interviewees claim that codified norms in pronunciation teaching are essential, not only in terms of the students' pronunciation skills, but also as the foundation of their own professional competence: their ability to explain, to demonstrate, to speak in public, to work out their own approach to teaching English phonetics.

Another relevant opinion concerns the necessity of special training in English intonation and speaking styles, which can only be achievable within the framework of the EFL model. Besides the technical phonetic skills, it is important to acquire expertise in choosing the appropriate phonetic means and prosodic means, particularly in discourse.

The belief shared by the participants is that phonetic training in teacher education contributes to the development of speech culture and professional eloquence, which is hardly possible within the framework of the ELF approach.

These results echo the ideas expressed by Crystal (2019), who claims that knowledge of the phonetic system “ought to be routine in the training of teachers”, because it is essential for the teaching of reading, for promoting oral fluency (oracy) and developing eloquence (Crystal, 2019).

Expressing their support for the ELF model, the participants agreed that students should be exposed to different variants of English and should be able to communicate in multicultural environments.

One of the key findings is that both the teacher and student participants share a belief in the importance of pronunciation training within the framework of EFL approach. It seems possible that the educational philosophy and teaching practices in a particular educational institution have a strong impact on the views of the participants. The validity of this observation requires further study.

The findings have important implications for developing teacher education programmes and approaches to teaching pronunciation. Taken together, both students and teachers perceive pronunciation training as an important component of teacher education. Unfortunately, pronunciation is frequently neglected by educationalists, especially within the framework of communicative language teaching (Levis, 2018), which has resulted in minimising or even eliminating courses in phonetics. Following Crystal (2019), and based on the findings of the present study, it is necessary to address the needs of teacher education participants and include a phonetics course in teacher education programmes.

5. Conclusion

This study contributes to our understanding of the link between the attitudes and beliefs of the professional community and pronunciation teaching practices in the national educational environment. The results of the study show that participants in teacher education in Russia (both students and lecturers) perceive the traditional EFL approach to pronunciation teaching as more appropriate and more effective. The following considerations were given in support of the positive attitudes to the EFL model: the need for accuracy in the language teachers’ professional activity; the need for codified norms in pedagogical practice; traditional pedagogical approaches to teaching pronunciation, reflected in textbooks, dictionaries, teaching materials. Alongside this, the participants also acknowledged that awareness of phonetic variation as part of the socio-cultural landscape of multicultural communication in English, as well as of the fundamental principles of ELF, should be integrated into the course of English phonetics in teacher training programmes.

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings suggest that a balanced combination of the traditional EFL approach and ELF awareness is bound to provide the foundation for developing speech qualities, professionally relevant for the teacher of English, and for forming phonetic and socio-cultural competences required for effective multicultural communication.

The study has some limitations resulting from the research methodology, which only involved participants from one pedagogical university. To achieve more

generalised conclusions and to compare the status of EFL and ELF models in Russia and other countries, further studies should involve participants from other Russian universities with teacher education programmes.

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Sažetak

RAZLIČITI MODELI IZGOVORA ENGLESKOG JEZIKA U DIJALOGU KULTURA: STAVOVI I PROBLEMI TOKOM OBRAZOVANJA NASTAVNIKA U RUSIJI

Širenje upotrebe engleskog jezika na globalnom nivou izazvalo je određene promene u prioritetima kada je u pitanju izgovor. U svetu se engleski jezik uglavnom doživljava kao lingva franka. Međutim, među istraživačima nema pravog konsenzusa kada je u pitanju izbor odgovarajućeg modela izgovora (EFL, engleski kao strani jezik ili ELF, engleski kao lingva franka) prilikom obrazovanja nastavnika koji ovaj jezik predaju. Ovo istraživanje se bavi ispitivanjem stavova prema modelima izgovora EFL i ELF među ispitanicima iz oblasti obrazovanja nastavnika u Rusiji (u pitanju su studenti i predavači na Institutu za strane jezike Moskovskog pedagoškog instituta). U istraživanju smo koristili mešovitu metodu koja je uključivala kako kvantitativni, tako i kvalitativni pristup. Kvantitativni

podaci su obrađivani metodom deskriptivne statistike, a za obrađivanje kvalitativnih podataka koristili smo analizu sadržaja. Istraživanje je obuhvatilo 122 studenta, koji su odgovarali na pitanja iz upitnika i 20 predavača sa univerziteta, koji su u formi intervjua odgovarali na delimično strukturisana pitanja. Rezultati pokazuju da i studenti i predavači daju prednost primeni modela EFL prilikom učenja izgovora kada je u pitanju obrazovanje nastavnika. Gledano iz pedagoške perspektive, osnovni zaključak ukazuje na to da bi dobro balansirana kombinacija tradicionalnog pristupa EFL uz uzimanje u obzir modela ELF mogla poboljšati kvalitet nastave izgovora kada su u pitanju programi za obrazovanje nastavnika u Rusiji.

Ključne reči:

izgovor, engleski kao strani jezik (EFL), engleski kao lingva franka (ELF), stavovi polaznika, obrazovanje nastavnika