

Non-Native English Teachers and Accent Diversity in Global English Education

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Abstract

This paper presents a theoretical examination of accent diversity among non-native English teachers and its implications for English language education in a global context. Although non-native teachers constitute a substantial proportion of the English teaching workforce worldwide, their professional legitimacy—notably in international and English-speaking settings—is often questioned based on accent rather than pedagogical competence. This paper argues that non-native accents that do not impede intelligibility should be understood as a normal feature of Global English rather than as a professional limitation. The concept of global English accents is proposed to describe the range of native and non-native accent varieties that remain mutually comprehensible in international communication. From this perspective, exposure to accent diversity is increasingly important for both native and non-native speakers of English in multilingual and mobile educational environments. The paper positions non-native English teachers as a pedagogical resource in supporting learners' adaptation to accent variation and in promoting tolerance toward diverse spoken English forms. The discussion outlines implications for teacher education, employment practices, and collaborative teaching models involving native and non-native teachers. It concludes that recognizing accent diversity as an educational asset may contribute to more equitable and contextually responsive approaches to English language education.

Keywords: *Global Englishes paradigm, Native-speakerism ideology, Language ideology, Accent perception theory, Sociophonetic variation, Listener-based evaluation; English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) framework*

1. Introduction

English now operates as a regional and global language for education, labour mobility, and cross-border collaboration across the Asia-Pacific and beyond. In this environment, English is routinely spoken with a wide range of accents shaped by speakers' linguistic repertoires, educational histories, and communicative communities. For education systems and institutions, accent variation is therefore not an exceptional circumstance but an operational

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reality—one that influences classroom interaction, teacher evaluation, and workforce decisions.

At the same time, accent remains one of the most visible and socially salient cues in spoken communication. A growing body of work shows that listener judgements about accented speech often do not straightforwardly track communicative effectiveness: perceptions of "accentedness" can be strong even when intelligibility is adequate, and evaluation outcomes can be shaped by familiarity, expectations, and institutional norms rather than by learning outcomes alone [1][2][3]. Recent evidence also indicates that negative evaluations linked to teacher accent can be mitigated when listeners are explicitly guided to reflect on accent bias and the legitimacy of accent diversity in instructional settings [1]. These dynamics matter directly for educational management, because staffing decisions, student satisfaction systems, and quality assurance practices can unintentionally reward conformity to narrow accent norms rather than competence aligned with curriculum goals.

Recent scholarship has advanced three relevant strands. First, research on the English language teaching workforce and professional legitimacy has continued to document how "native-speaker" norms remain embedded in employment and professional status structures, even as multilingual realities expand [4][5]. This line of research highlights that hiring and evaluation practices can privilege particular speech models—sometimes implicitly—through recruitment language, institutional expectations, and stakeholder perceptions [5]. Second, research on Global Englishes and lingua franca perspectives has increasingly emphasised that the practical target for many learners is not imitation of a single prestige accent, but effective participation in diverse communicative encounters where multiple accent varieties are present [6]. Classroom-based Global Englishes work suggests that learners' perceptions and orientations can shift through structured exposure and pedagogical innovation, with implications for pronunciation goals and assessment expectations [6]. Third, a parallel stream in speech perception and applied linguistics has strengthened the empirical distinction between accentedness, comprehensibility, and intelligibility, and has shown that listener background and accent familiarity meaningfully shape understanding and acceptability judgements [2][3][7]. Together, these findings call for a more management-relevant framing: accent is not merely a linguistic matter; it is also a governance, equity, and quality issue in educational systems.

However, despite the momentum of this literature, a persistent gap remains in how it is translated into actionable institutional reasoning. In practice, many schools and higher education institutions continue to treat "standard accent" as an implicit proxy for instructional quality, especially in high-stakes contexts such as hiring, probation, and student evaluation of teaching. This tendency is difficult to justify when evidence suggests that (a) intelligibility and learning-relevant communication can be adequate across a range of accent varieties, (b) negative reactions can reflect bias and low familiarity rather than actual communicative breakdown, and (c) pedagogical value can be derived from structured exposure to accent diversity [1][2][3][6][7]. Moreover, learner attitude studies in different regional contexts indicate that preferences for certain accents remain common. Still, they can be shaped by educational experiences and policy signals, which place responsibility partly at the institutional level rather than solely at the individual teacher level [8].

Research problem. Educational institutions operating in multilingual environments face a recurring tension between (i) the operational reality of accent diversity in Global English use and (ii) the persistence of narrow accent norms embedded in stakeholder expectations and management practices. This tension can lead to inconsistent employment decisions,

misaligned quality indicators, and avoidable barriers to professional legitimacy for qualified teachers.

Problem statement. In English-language education, teacher accent is frequently interpreted as a marker of competence and instructional quality, even when communication remains intelligible and pedagogically effective. As a result, evaluation and employment practices may systematically privilege certain accent models, creating a mismatch between institutional decision criteria and the communicative demands of Global English education. Addressing this mismatch requires an explicit conceptual framing that treats accent diversity as a normal condition of Global English and clarifies how institutions can evaluate teaching to prioritise intelligibility, learning outcomes, and equitable professional standards.

This paper contributes a management-relevant conceptual synthesis by reframing accent variation through the proposed construct of global English accents—that is, native and non-native accent varieties that remain mutually comprehensible for competent users of English in international and intercultural communication. The novelty lies not in the observation that accent diversity exists, but in the explicit repositioning of accent diversity as an institutional design problem with practical implications for policy and workforce management.

Specifically, the paper contributes:

- A clarified evaluative lens that separates accent-based impressions from learning-relevant constructs such as intelligibility and comprehensibility, drawing on recent empirical findings on listener factors and perception outcomes [2][3][7].
- A policy-facing account of professional legitimacy that links native-speakerism and employment dynamics to institutional practices and quality assurance, consistent with recent reviews and analyses of workforce structures [4][5].
- A pedagogical and organisational rationale for leveraging non-native English teachers as a resource for structured exposure to accent diversity—an approach aligned with Global Englishes classroom innovations and the demonstrated malleability of listener attitudes under targeted interventions [1][6][9].
- Actionable implications for educational management, including how to align recruitment language, performance review criteria, and student evaluation systems with the realities of Global English communication and equity-oriented governance [1][5][6].

2. Related work

Research relevant to this study spans applied linguistics, English language education, and educational management. This section synthesises prior work across three intersecting areas: (1) accent, intelligibility, and listener perception; (2) teacher accent, professional legitimacy, and evaluation practices; and (3) Global Englishes-oriented responses in pedagogy and institutional policy.

2.1. Accent, intelligibility, and listener perception

A substantial body of recent research has demonstrated that accent-related judgements are multidimensional and cannot be reduced to a single construct of “understanding.” Studies consistently distinguish between intelligibility (actual understanding), comprehensibility (perceived ease of understanding), and accentedness (degree of perceived deviation from local norms), showing that these dimensions are only weakly correlated [11][12]. Importantly, speech that is perceived as strongly accented may remain highly intelligible, particularly for listeners with greater exposure to accent variation [11].

Listener-related variables—including linguistic background, familiarity with accented speech, and attitudinal orientation—have been shown to significantly influence comprehension outcomes and evaluative judgements [12][13][14]. Experimental and classroom-based studies indicate that repeated exposure to diverse accents improves processing efficiency and reduces negative affective reactions, even when phonological deviation remains unchanged [13]. These findings suggest that accent perception is not a fixed response to speaker output but a dynamic interaction shaped by experience and expectations.

From an institutional perspective, this line of research challenges the common assumption that accent is a reliable indicator of communicative effectiveness. Instead, it supports a shift toward intelligibility-oriented benchmarks that better reflect communicative demands in multilingual educational environments [10][14]. Such a shift has direct implications for how teaching quality is conceptualised, evaluated, and managed.

2.2. Teacher accent, professional legitimacy, and evaluation practices

A second strand of literature focuses on the relationship between teacher accent and perceptions of professional competence. Recent studies in higher education contexts show that instructors with non-local or non-native accents may receive lower student evaluations, even when instructional clarity and learning outcomes are comparable to those of instructors with local accents [15][16]. Because student evaluations are frequently embedded in formal performance management systems, accent bias can indirectly influence contract renewal, promotion, and institutional reputation management.

Research on employment practices in English language education further demonstrates that preferences for “native speakers” persist in recruitment discourse and decision-making, particularly in international and private-sector contexts [17][18]. These preferences are often justified through assumptions about student expectations, marketability, or institutional branding rather than through empirically validated links to teaching effectiveness [17]. As a result, accent and nativeness can operate as informal gatekeeping mechanisms within education systems.

Importantly, recent analyses argue that such practices are not merely individual biases but are sustained by institutional structures, policy language, and quality assurance regimes [16][18]. This perspective reframes accent-related inequities as a management and governance issue rather than solely a pedagogical concern. It also underscores the need for clearer evaluative criteria that distinguish between linguistic prejudice and legitimate instructional requirements.

2.3. Global Englishes perspectives and institutional responses

The third body of work examines how English-language education systems are responding to the realities of Global English use. Pedagogical research grounded in Global Englishes and English as a Lingua Franca perspectives increasingly argues that learners must be prepared to engage with a wide range of English varieties rather than a single prestige model [19]. Classroom-based studies show that structured exposure to accent diversity can positively influence learner attitudes and listening strategies, contributing to greater communicative flexibility [20].

However, recent reviews also highlight a persistent gap between conceptual endorsement of Global Englishes principles and their practical implementation, particularly in assessment and teacher evaluation [19][21]. While educators may support accent diversity in theory,

institutional assessment frameworks often continue to prioritise conformity to standardised pronunciation norms, creating tension between policy aspirations and operational practices [21].

From an educational management standpoint, this literature suggests that accent diversity must be addressed not only through curriculum design but also through staff development, evaluation systems, and institutional communication strategies [20][21][22]. Recognising accent diversity as a normal condition of Global English use requires coordinated action across pedagogical, managerial, and policy domains—an issue that remains underexplored in existing research.

3. Conceptual framework: Global English accents

3.1. Conceptual grounding

As demonstrated in the preceding review, contemporary English language education operates in an environment of increasing accent diversity, shaped by global mobility, multilingualism, and the expanded use of English across international and regional contexts. Prior research has established that accent-related judgements are unreliable indicators of communicative effectiveness and that perceptions of accent are mediated by listeners' experience, institutional expectations, and evaluation practices. At the same time, existing Global Englishes scholarship has highlighted a persistent gap between conceptual recognition of accent diversity and its systematic integration into institutional policy and management.

To address this gap, the present study advances a conceptual framework that positions accent diversity as a structural feature of Global English education that requires a deliberate institutional response. The framework centres on the concept of global English accents and integrates linguistic, pedagogical, and management dimensions into a unified analytical model.

3.2. Global English accents as a core construct

In this study, global English accents refer to native and non-native accent varieties through which English is used effectively for international and intercultural communication, provided that such varieties remain mutually intelligible for competent users of the language. This definition deliberately separates accent variation from assumptions of communicative deficiency and aligns evaluation with intelligibility-based criteria rather than conformity to a single prestige norm.

Unlike traditional native-speaker-oriented models, the proposed construct is functionally and institutionally oriented. It treats accent diversity as a predictable outcome of the use of Global English and establishes mutual intelligibility as the baseline for acceptability. This reframing provides a principled basis for educational institutions to maintain rigorous communication standards while avoiding empirically unjustified accent hierarchies.

3.3. Framework structure and relationships

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework of global English accents in English language education. The framework is organised around a central construct—Global English Accents—and four interrelated components that operate dynamically and recursively.

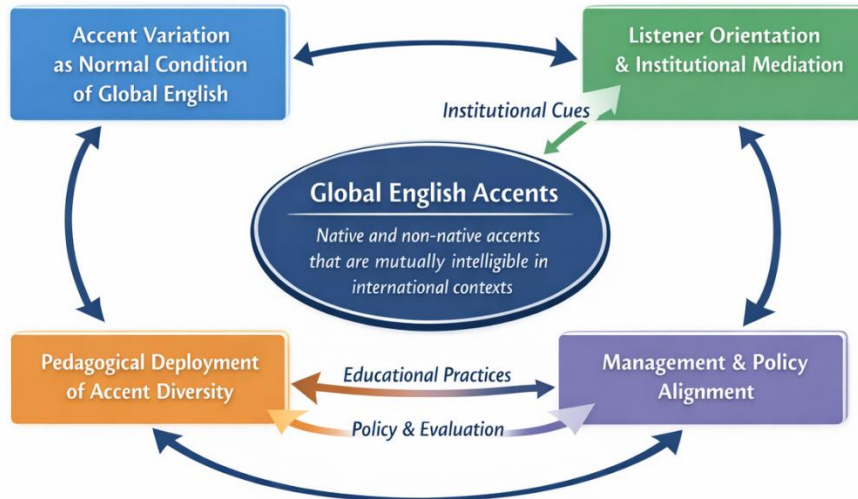


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of global English accents in English language education

At the core of the framework is the recognition of accent variation as a normal condition of Global English. This component establishes the foundational assumption that accent diversity is inherent to global language use rather than a deviation requiring correction. From this premise, the framework emphasises listener orientation and institutional mediation, highlighting how perceptions of accent are shaped by institutional cues such as recruitment criteria, assessment rubrics, student evaluation systems, and professional standards.

The framework further incorporates pedagogical deployment of accent diversity, conceptualising non-native English teachers as legitimate and valuable contributors to English language education. Within this component, structured exposure to diverse accents is treated as a pedagogical strategy for developing learners’ communicative flexibility, listening competence, and tolerance toward variation in spoken English.

Surrounding these components is management and policy alignment, which represents the institutional mechanisms through which accent diversity is either reinforced or mitigated. Hiring practices, teacher evaluation procedures, and professional development policies are positioned as key levers for aligning institutional decision-making with intelligibility-oriented standards and Global English realities.

The directional relationships depicted in Figure 1 indicate that accent variation influences listener perceptions, which are, in turn, mediated by institutional practices and shape pedagogical and management outcomes. Feedback loops illustrate that sustained exposure, policy alignment, and evaluative reform can recalibrate listener orientations over time, contributing to more equitable and context-responsive educational systems.

3.4. Contribution of the framework

The principal contribution of this conceptual framework lies in its repositioning of accent diversity as an educational management issue, rather than solely a linguistic or pedagogical concern. While prior studies have examined accent perception, teacher legitimacy, and Global Englishes pedagogy in isolation, this framework integrates these strands into a coherent institutional model.

By introducing global English accents as an operational construct, the framework provides:

- a clear evaluative distinction between accent variation and communicative effectiveness;
- a management-relevant lens for examining employment and evaluation practices;
- a principled rationale for recognising non-native English teachers as pedagogical assets; and
- a foundation for aligning policy, assessment, and professional standards with the realities of Global English use.

3.5. Role of the framework in the study

This framework guides the subsequent analysis and discussion by informing how teacher preparation, collaborative teaching models, employment criteria, and evaluation systems are examined. As illustrated in Figure 1, global English accents are treated not as a problem to be eliminated but as a defining feature of contemporary English-language education that requires an intentional and evidence-informed institutional response.

4. Implications for educational management and practice

The conceptual framework of global English accents presented in Section 3 and illustrated in Figure 1 foregrounds accent diversity as an institutional concern requiring systematic and coordinated responses. Rather than positioning accent as an individual attribute of teachers, the framework highlights how recruitment practices, evaluation systems, professional development structures, pedagogical design, and policy signals collectively shape how accent diversity is interpreted and managed within English language education. The following subsections elaborate on these implications in detail, with Tables 1–4 summarising key management alignments.

4.1. Recruitment and employment practices

Recruitment represents the first point at which institutional assumptions about accent are operationalised. In many educational contexts, accent serves as an implicit screening mechanism, particularly when "native speaker" norms are embedded in job advertisements or informal selection criteria. Such practices risk conflating familiarity with an accent with instructional competence.

Aligning recruitment with the global English accents framework requires institutions to make communicative effectiveness and pedagogical expertise explicit selection criteria. This shift enhances transparency, reduces bias, and strengthens alignment between hiring decisions and actual instructional demands. Table 1 summarises this realignment.

Table 1. Recruitment Practices: Traditional Orientation and Global English Alignment

Dimension	Traditional Orientation	Global English–Aligned Orientation
Accent expectations	Preference for native or standard accents	Acceptance of diverse accents meeting intelligibility thresholds
Hiring focus	Accent as a proxy for competence	Pedagogical qualifications and instructional clarity
Job advertisements	Explicit or implicit native-speaker framing	Language-neutral, competence-based criteria
Institutional justification	Marketability and prestige	Equity, transparency, and effectiveness

This alignment enables institutions to articulate defensible recruitment rationales that reflect contemporary uses of Global English while maintaining high academic standards.

4.2. Teacher evaluation and quality assurance

Teacher evaluation systems are a critical site of institutional mediation, as Figure 1 highlights. Student evaluations, peer observations, and performance reviews may unintentionally reinforce accent-related bias when evaluation criteria are underspecified or when accent familiarity influences perceptions of clarity and authority.

The framework suggests that evaluation systems should explicitly distinguish between accent presence and teaching effectiveness. Communication-related criteria should be anchored in intelligibility, interactional competence, and instructional organisation rather than accent conformity. Table 2 outlines recommended adjustments.

Table 2. Teacher evaluation criteria and accent-sensitive alignment

Evaluation Component	Risk of Accent Bias	Framework-Informed Adjustment
Student evaluations	Accent conflated with clarity	Guidance emphasising intelligibility and learning support
Peer observation	Comparison to local norms	Use of standardised pedagogical indicators
Performance review	Accent noted without impact analysis	Focus on instructional outcomes
Quality assurance	Inconsistent benchmarks	Institution-wide intelligibility-based standards

Such refinements strengthen the validity and fairness of evaluation systems while ensuring consistency across institutional units.

4.3. Professional development and staff support

Professional development plays a pivotal role in reshaping listener orientation and reinforcing institutional values regarding accent diversity. Rather than framing accent as a skill deficit to be corrected, professional learning can support teachers in developing instructional clarity, confidence, and interactional strategies that enhance intelligibility.

Importantly, professional development should target both native and non-native English teachers. For non-native teachers, this may involve strengthening professional identity and classroom communication strategies. For native teachers and academic leaders, it may involve developing awareness of listener bias and strategies for inclusive evaluation. Table 3 summarises these priorities.

Table 3. Professional Development Focus Areas

Staff Group	Traditional Focus	Global English-Aligned Focus
Non-native English teachers	Accent reduction	Instructional clarity and professional confidence
Native English teachers	Unexamined accent normativity	Listener adaptation and bias awareness
Academic leaders	Informal judgement	Evidence-based evaluation literacy
Institutions	Ad hoc workshops	Ongoing, framework-aligned professional learning

These initiatives reinforce the feedback loops shown in Figure 1, whereby institutional cues progressively reshape perceptions and practices.

4.4. Pedagogical practice and curriculum design

At the pedagogical level, the framework supports the intentional inclusion of accent diversity within curriculum and instructional design. Exposure to multiple English accents through multimedia resources, collaborative teaching, and authentic listening tasks prepares learners for real-world communication and reduces reliance on a single prestige model.

Educational managers can facilitate this alignment by endorsing curriculum guidelines that normalise accent diversity and by supporting instructional innovation. Such practices position non-native English teachers as contributors to learners’ communicative development rather than as exceptions to an assumed norm.

4.5. Policy alignment and institutional positioning

Sustainable implementation of the framework depends on explicit policy alignment. Institutional policies related to internationalisation, diversity, and quality assurance serve a signalling role, shaping staff behaviour and student expectations. When policies remain silent on accent diversity, informal norms may dominate decision-making.

Table 4 illustrates how policy frameworks can be aligned with the concept of global English accents.

Table 4. Policy-level alignment with global English accents

Policy Domain	Conventional Positioning	Framework-Aligned Positioning
Internationalisation	Emphasis on standard English norms	Recognition of Global English use
Diversity policy	Focus on cultural identity	Inclusion of linguistic diversity
Quality assurance	Accent-neutral but implicit norms	Explicit intelligibility-based criteria
Institutional messaging	Prestige through nativeness	Credibility through communicative effectiveness

For institutions in the Asia-Pacific region, where linguistic diversity is a defining characteristic, such alignment strengthens both educational legitimacy and operational coherence.

4.6. Summary of management implications

Taken together, the implications outlined in this section demonstrate that accent diversity is not a peripheral issue but a core consideration in educational management. Tables 1–4 illustrate how the conceptual framework of global English accents can be translated into concrete institutional practices across recruitment, evaluation, professional development, pedagogy, and policy. By aligning these domains, institutions can move beyond reactive responses to accent variation and adopt proactive, evidence-informed strategies that reflect the realities of Global English education.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

This study has examined accent diversity in English language education through the lens of educational management, advancing the concept of global English accents as a framework for aligning institutional practice with the realities of Global English use. Building on prior research on accent perception, teacher legitimacy, and Global Englishes pedagogy, the paper

has argued that accent variation—when it does not impede intelligibility—should not be treated as a deficit or proxy for teaching quality. Instead, it should be recognised as a structural and predictable feature of English in multilingual and international educational contexts.

By integrating linguistic evidence with management considerations, the study makes a distinct contribution to the literature. It shifts the focus from individual teacher attributes to institutional systems that shape how accent diversity is interpreted, evaluated, and managed. The conceptual framework presented in Figure 1 demonstrates that recruitment practices, evaluation mechanisms, professional development structures, pedagogical design, and policy signals interact to either reinforce or mitigate accent-based inequities. Importantly, the framework positions non-native English teachers not as exceptions to a norm, but as legitimate and potentially valuable contributors to learners' communicative preparedness in Global English environments.

For institutions operating in the Asia–Pacific region, where linguistic diversity is especially pronounced, the findings underscore the need for deliberate, coherent, and evidence-informed approaches to managing accent diversity. Failure to address this issue at the institutional level risks misalignment between educational goals, quality assurance practices, and workforce realities.

5.2. Policy and practice recommendations

Based on the conceptual framework and analysis presented in this paper, the following recommendations are proposed for educational leaders, administrators, and policymakers.

Recommendation 1: Adopt intelligibility-oriented standards in recruitment and evaluation.

Institutions should explicitly define communication expectations in terms of intelligibility, instructional clarity, and interactional effectiveness rather than accent conformity. Recruitment criteria, job advertisements, and evaluation rubrics should be reviewed to ensure alignment with these standards.

Recommendation 2: Review teacher evaluation instruments for accent-related bias.

Student evaluations of teaching and peer review processes should be designed or revised to minimise the conflation of accent familiarity with teaching effectiveness. Where appropriate, explanatory guidance should be provided to students to contextualise accent diversity as a normal feature of Global English use.

Recommendation 3: Integrate accent diversity into professional development frameworks.

Professional learning initiatives should support both native and non-native English teachers. For non-native teachers, development should focus on instructional communication and professional confidence rather than accent elimination. For native teachers and academic leaders, training should address listener orientation, evaluative bias, and inclusive pedagogical practices.

Recommendation 4: Embed accent diversity within curriculum and instructional design.

Educational managers and curriculum designers should encourage the inclusion of diverse English accents in learning materials, listening tasks, and classroom interaction. Such practices prepare learners for authentic communication and align instructional delivery with real-world language use.

Recommendation 5: Align institutional policies with the realities of Global English.

Policies related to internationalisation, diversity, and quality assurance should explicitly acknowledge linguistic and accent diversity. Clear policy articulation provides consistent signals that support equitable practice across recruitment, evaluation, and teaching.

5.3. Final remarks

Recognising global English accents as a defining feature of contemporary English language education requires more than pedagogical goodwill; it demands coordinated institutional action. By reframing accent diversity as an issue of educational management and policy alignment, this study offers a practical and theoretically grounded pathway for institutions seeking to balance communicative effectiveness, equity, and academic standards. Future research may build on this framework through empirical validation in specific institutional contexts, further strengthening the evidence base for policy and practice in Global English education.

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