



Preparing to teach English in the age of English as a global lingua franca: Insights from Austria and Hungary

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ABSTRACT

English Language Teaching (ELT) and English language teacher education should nowadays reflect the global role of English while also taking local realities into account. The aim of this study is therefore to investigate the use of English in everyday life and the views on teaching English of student teachers in two central European countries, Austria and Hungary, by means of a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The findings indicate that the attitudes and views of student teachers of English are similar in the two countries. The one pronounced difference between the groups concerns the ideal of the native speaker (NS) teacher. The study shows promising avenues for future research and highlights the potential benefits of international cooperation in teacher education.

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1. Introduction

English is widely regarded as the global lingua franca today (Galloway, 2017). Despite its global role, however, it is also important to note that “English is used in different ways in different contexts throughout the world” (Patel et al., 2023: 6). Moreover, despite great scholarly interest in English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), there does not yet appear to be agreement on what implications it might have for English Language Teaching (ELT) (Widdowson & Seidlhofer, 2023). Comparing Austrian and Hungarian student teachers’ experiences with English in their everyday lives and their views on teaching English,

therefore, offers a compelling lens through which to explore how national contexts shape educational beliefs and, ultimately, professional identities in ELT.

1.1. ELT and the changing role of English

Over the last decade, researchers have argued that the growing global role of English should be reflected in ELT practices. There have even been calls for “a paradigm shift in the field of ELT to match the new sociolinguistic landscape of the twenty-first century” (Rose et al., 2021: 157), and teachers have been urged to develop “a working understanding of current realities regarding the use of English internationally” (Sifakis, 2014: 323). It has even been argued that, as professionals, English language teachers today should think about Teaching English as a Dynamic Language (TEDL) (Mahboob, 2018) rather than traditional ELT, which would be very much in line with the idea of bridging the long-identified ‘authenticity gap’ (Henry, 2013) between English in the classroom and English outside the classroom.

The characteristics of the English which learners encounter outside the classroom and which forms the basis of their informal learning have received increased attention in the past decades as well under the umbrella term Extramural English (EE), which encompasses both intentional and incidental informal learning of English through learner-initiated activities either online or in real life (Sundqvist, 2009; Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016).

Research in various contexts has shown that engagement with extramural activities translates into English as a foreign language (EFL) vocabulary development (De Wilde et al., 2020; Puimège & Peters, 2019; Schwarz, 2020; Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012), into increased reading and listening comprehension (De Wilde et al., 2021; Muñoz et al., 2018), and even into productive skills development (De Wilde et al., 2021; Olsson, 2011; Olsson & Sylvén, 2015). Extramural language learning experience was found to have an impact on affective variables as well: it was identified as a strong predictor for motivated learning behaviour (Lajtai, 2020; Lamb, 2012; Sundqvist & Olin-Scheller, 2013), and also as a positive factor for willingness to communicate (Lee & Lu, 2023), suggesting that EE may benefit learners beyond skills development (Sundqvist, 2024). The Hungarian context is no exception to this (Fajt, 2021; Józsa & Imre, 2013; Lajtai, 2020), and in Austria as well, a recent study found that particular types of EE activities are significant predictors for academic verb knowledge (Ghamarian-Krenn, 2023; Ghamarian-Krenn & Schwarz, 2024). Likewise, Austrian students with high EE engagement were found to outperform their peers with low engagement in a range of tasks and on final grades (Hager, 2025). Taking these findings into consideration, EE should arguably not be seen as an optional ‘extra’ in ELT, but rather as a central component of contemporary L2 English learning (Sundqvist, 2024), which teachers need to be aware of when making pedagogical choices.

Being language aware in the sense of being “alive to language” (Arndt et al., 2000: 11) and specifically possessing Teacher Language Awareness (TLA) (Andrews, 2007) has long been recognised as vital for English language teachers. According to Arndt et al. (2000: 13), TLA results in “a broader and better-informed knowledge-base from

which to teach, thus boosting confidence, and widening teaching perspectives". TLA has been defined as "what [...] a teacher needs to know about English in order to teach it effectively as a second language" (Thornbury, 2017: xiv). Traditionally, the focus of TLA was on language systems, particularly on grammar, but it could be argued that an up-to-date conceptualisation of TLA has to include an awareness of the current realities of using English (Fürstenberg & Bicman, 2023).

These ideas have far-reaching implications for teacher education. Rose et al. (2021: xii) note that "teaching practices have largely lagged behind" research and publications in the area of teaching English as a global language. However, student teachers now undergoing their training are likely to have first-hand experiences of the developments which are currently affecting the way English is used: they themselves are potentially 'prosumers' (both producers and consumers) of English language content (Olin-Scheller & Wikstrom, 2010; Thorne et al., 2009), which can be expected to influence their language awareness, their ideas and beliefs about teaching, and possibly even their future classroom work. Teacher educators, therefore, need to understand the role English plays in student teachers' lives in order to enable them to use all the resources at their disposal as effectively as possible in their teaching in contexts where English language content is more readily available to learners than ever before. In this way, teacher education can take local realities into account and thus be locally appropriate and effective.

1.2. English in Austria and Hungary

English has no official status in either Austria or Hungary, yet it is the most important foreign language (FL) for students in both countries (Nagel et al., 2012; Öveges & Csizér, 2018). Also, informal learning of English outside a 'traditional' classroom setting plays an important role in both countries.

For example, a recent study of Austrian teenagers (Schwarz, 2020) showed that 15/16-year-old teenagers spend on average more than four hours per day engaging with English. This informal input far exceeds the input the teenagers receive in their English lessons in school (Smit & Schwarz, 2019). There can be no doubt that young people in Austria today see English as an international, global language and understand that they will use it not only as means to communicate with people from English-speaking countries, but also as a global lingua franca; thus, it seems obvious that English language teachers will have to adapt their classroom practices to this new reality, and teacher education will have to prepare them for this challenge. So far, in Austria, researchers have found rather 'traditional' beliefs among English language teachers regarding diverse aspects of language learning such as the influence of learners' L1 background (Erling et al., 2023) and grammar teaching (Wegscheider, 2019), although there are also indications that teachers are aware of the potential impact of globalisation and the global use of English on their role as English language experts (Moser & Kletzenbauer, 2019).

In Hungary, in a nationwide large-scale survey, Öveges and Csizér (2018) observed that even though students frequently engage in EE activities, the language classroom is not only the major source of target language (TL) input for learners, but also a primary

scene for practicing TL oral interactions. This seems to be somewhat challenged by the altered circumstances and rapid penetration of social media applications as well as streaming services witnessed in recent years (Fajt, 2024; Lajtai, 2020). As a result, English is at least partly transferred from the classroom to out-of-the-classroom contexts, providing learners with more opportunities not only to receive TL input, but also to practice the TL in meaningful, authentic contexts. Fajt (2024) found that listening to English music, checking Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok content, engaging in online games, and watching English movies are the most frequent EE activities pursued by Hungarian secondary school students. Also, learners were found to be open to including their own EE interests and tend to use the words and phrases they learned during EE activities, but they believe that their EFL teachers only rarely make use of EE activities in EFL lessons. Lajtai (2020) found that learners believed their out-of-school engagement with English was significantly more conducive to language learning than any in-class activities, showing that learners are not convinced about the effectiveness of formal learning contexts.

We know from Horwitz (1987) that learners' own experiences with learning, together with their values, translate into strong personal beliefs about language learning. In Hungary, student teachers have been found to believe that in-class learning should focus on form and should be dominated by the teacher as the model, despite their favourable experiences with changing learning environments. Thus, even if they are aware of the conducive roles of certain technologies or applications, they tend to believe that in-class learning and teaching should be taken more seriously (Dombi, 2019). In a quite similar vein, Schurz et al. (2022) found that Austrian teachers did not believe strongly that grammar can be acquired through informal, unstructured EE activities.

In this section, we have shown that English plays an important role in both Austria and Hungary, which might be expected to shape the way future teachers in both countries think about the language itself, their roles as professionals, and about ELT in general. We believe that teacher education in both countries needs to acknowledge and directly address these issues so that they are reflected in curricula and practices. By juxtaposing perspectives from the two settings, we aim to highlight context-specific influences and uncover potential commonalities that transcend national boundaries, thus offering insights relevant to broader discussions on teacher preparation in diverse European contexts.

To that end, we pose the following research questions:

1. What differences (if any) are there in how student teachers in Austria and Hungary, respectively, use English in their everyday lives?
2. In their view, which aspects of the changing role of English will impact their teaching in the future?

2. Method

Our study investigated how the role of English as a global language impacts the everyday use of English of Austrian and Hungarian student teachers of English and their views on teaching English once they enter the profession. Data were gathered by means of an online questionnaire and semi-structured interviews.¹

2.1. Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of three sections: 'Participant profile' (questions about the respondents' learner history including a language proficiency self-assessment and questions about their teaching experience so far), 'English language use' (questions about activities the respondents carry out in English in their everyday lives, their language learning goals, and their attitudes towards aspects of the changing role of English), 'Changes in teaching English' (questions about their views on current and future developments in ELT). It comprised Multiple Choice and Likert scale questions, open-ended questions, and semantic differential scales. The questionnaire took 35-45 minutes to complete and was distributed via a LimeSurvey link, which was shared on the respective learning platforms at both research sites.

Sixty-eight students (39 from Austria, 29 from Hungary) took part in our survey. All respondents are student teachers of English at universities in second-tier cities in their respective countries. They are all advanced students; the Austrian group having spent an average of 5.31 years (SD = 1.82) and the Hungarian group 3.79 years (SD = 0.66) studying English at university. 33.3% of the Austrian group had spent an extended period (defined as 'more than one month') in an English-speaking country, compared to none of the Hungarian students.

2.2. Interviews

Out of the 29 Hungarian participants, 4 students volunteered to take part in the interview phase. In Austria, 3 students out of 39 agreed to be interviewed. The same procedure, which had been agreed on before the start of data collection, was strictly adhered to at both research sites. The Research Ethics Committee granted approval for the study after reviewing both the questionnaire and the interview protocol.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted separately at the two universities in the student teachers' respective L1s to minimise barriers to communication. The questions pertained to the role of English in their lives (RQ1) and their ideas about the changing role of English (RQ2). The face-to-face interviews (duration: between 30 and 44 minutes) took place in the researcher's office at both sites. They were audio recorded with consent and then transcribed verbatim by the researcher. At both sites, the researcher and a research assistant coded the data for emerging themes. The research

¹ The data collection tools are available upon request via email.

assistants were involved to enhance the credibility of the thematic analysis. They helped double-code a subset of the interview corpus so that inter-coder agreement could be established. The interview data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis: following transcription, the researcher first familiarized themselves with the data through repeated reading and preliminary note-taking. Initial codes were then generated to capture salient features relevant to the research questions. These codes were systematically reviewed and organized into potential themes, which were refined by checking their coherence against the coded extracts and the data set as a whole. To enhance the credibility of the analysis, the two researchers independently coded a subset (50%) of the interview transcripts with 96% agreement. Divergences were discussed and resolved subsequently.

3. Findings and discussion

In this section, the findings that are pertinent to each research question will be addressed separately. For each research question, both questionnaire data and interview data will be presented and discussed.

3.1. Student teachers as users of English: Exposure to English and proficiency self-assessment

Regarding the first research question, student teachers' exposure to English in their everyday lives was investigated. They were also asked to self-assess their English language skills. In this context, we also attempted to understand how they position themselves in relation to native speakers (NS) of English.

The questionnaire data show that there are no significant differences in the way the students in the two groups use English in their everyday lives. They spend a sizeable proportion of their free time carrying out activities in English (Austrian group: on average 15.82 hrs/week [SD = 15.41], Hungarian group: 21.31 hrs/week [SD = 31.42], $p = 0.273$). In both cases, a considerable part of their interactions in English takes place online (Austrian group: 37.74% [SD = 32.26], Hungarian group: 43.62% [SD = 29.74], $p = 0.445$), and the majority of their interactions in English are with other non-L1 speakers of English (Austrian group: 58.21% [SD = 34.90], Hungarian group: 66.38% [SD = 31.42], $p = 0.323$).

They also assign similar importance to various activities for improving their English. In both groups, watching films and series tops the list (with the Hungarian group giving preference to series, while the Austrian group rates the importance of films slightly more highly), followed by reading books, online interactions, websites about English, and reading newspapers.

Table 1: Activities in English considered important for improving proficiency (1: not important, 10: extremely important)

Activity in English	Austrian group	Hungarian group	<i>p</i>
Watching films	8.69 (SD = 1.38)	8.55 (SD = 1.80)	0.717
Watching series	8.59 (SD = 1.76)	8.62 (SD = 1.76)	0.943
Reading books	7.92 (SD = 2.23)	7.66 (SD = 2.33)	0.632
Online interactions	6.77 (SD = 2.65)	7.38 (SD = 2.60)	0.347
Websites about English	6.54 (SD = 2.64)	6.45 (SD = 2.90)	0.894
Reading newspapers	5.74 (SD = 2.86)	6.14 (SD = 2.77)	0.571

Comments from the interviews likewise indicate that the respondents use English habitually in their lives outside the classroom. Watching films and series in English is an activity that is mentioned frequently. The respondents often stress that they actively prefer the English to the (dubbed) German version: “At home, [I watch] films, series only in English, because I hate German dubbing” (AT1, 11-12);² “It’s awful sometimes when you choose the German voices” (AT1, 25-26). This is also stressed in the Hungarian interviews: “I don’t even like when they translate or make subtitles, because I think that the original is always better in any language” (HU1, 04-05). Reading in the original language is also highlighted as a major source for English, and respondents tend to label English sources as more authentic: “I prefer to read my books in the original language, as I sometimes notice that the essence sometimes disappears in the translation” (HU4, 02-03); “English is the easiest way to access these things [authentic news], especially politics” (HU3, 08-09).

These similar results in the two groups are somewhat surprising for several reasons. Firstly, in light of the different L1 backgrounds of the respondents, more differences might have been expected. German, a Germanic language, is much more closely related to English than Hungarian, a Finno-Ugric language. In addition, both researchers had visited each other’s universities and cities several times previously for data collection and had formed the impression that the linguistic landscape was more influenced by English at the Austrian site than at the Hungarian site, which might be due to the fact that in Hungary there is a law regulating that public texts only contain foreign expressions as long as they provide the equivalent in Hungarian as well (Act no. XCVI 2001³). By contrast, while studies on the linguistic landscape of Austria tend to focus on Vienna, researchers have highlighted the high profile of English in the linguistic landscape of the research site compared to other languages, e.g., the languages of neighbouring countries in particular. They cite the international role of English as the likeliest explanation

² AT1 is the first interview in the Austrian corpus; HU1 is the first interview in the Hungarian corpus and so on. The numbers following the code for the interview refer to line numbers in the respective corpora.

³ Act XCVI of 2001 on the Display of Commercial Advertisements and Business Signs and Logos, and Public Announcements in the Hungarian Language. <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a0100096.tv>

(Schrammel-Leber & Lorenz, 2013). A possible explanation for the similarities between the two student groups is that their exposure to English in online spaces overrides the differences in their physical environments.

In addition to reporting on their activities in English, student teachers were also asked to self-assess their English language proficiency. They were given a choice of labels which were presented in no particular order so as not to suggest a hierarchical progression from lowest to highest proficiency: ‘advanced’, ‘native’, ‘intermediate’, ‘near-native’, ‘native-like’, and ‘proficient’. Four students from each group had to be excluded from the results because they chose more than one label, rendering their responses ambiguous. Again, there are no significant differences between the two groups overall ($p = 0.525$), although a closer look at specific labels shows some differences: the Hungarian students were more likely than Austrian students to describe themselves as ‘intermediate’ (difference: 14.3%), whereas the Austrian students picked the labels ‘near-native’ (difference: 8.0%) and ‘advanced’ (difference: 7.4%) more often. In all other cases, the difference between the groups is less than 4.0%.

Table 2: Labels chosen by respondents to describe their proficiency.

	Austrian group	Hungarian group	Difference in %
‘Near-native’	7 (20.0%)	3 (12.0%)	8.0%
‘Native-like’	4 (11.4%)	3 (12.0%)	0.6%
‘Native’	1 (2.9%)	0 (0.0%)	2.9%
‘Intermediate’	2 (5.7%)	5 (20.0%)	14.3%
‘Advanced’	11 (31.4%)	6 (24.0%)	7.4%
‘Proficient’	10 (28.6%)	8 (32.0%)	3.4%
	35 (100%)	25 (100%)	

Grouping the labels that take the idealised NS as a point of reference for assessing language proficiency (i.e., ‘native’, ‘near-native’, and ‘native-like’) and the more general labels that are often used informally to describe the level of language courses or course-books does not reveal any significant differences between the groups ($p = 0.391$). Both groups favour the ‘general’ labels, with the Hungarian group even less likely to pick a ‘native’ label than the Austrian group:

Table 3: Labels grouped into ‘native’ and ‘general’ category.

	Austrian group	Hungarian group
‘native’ labels	12 (34.3%)	6 (24.0%)
‘general’ labels	23 (65.7%)	19 (76.0%)
Total	35 (100%)	25 (100%)

Interestingly, in the interview data, when the respondents were asked to self-assess their English language proficiency, they spontaneously used the levels of the CEFR even when the interviewer actively suggested the labels (both ‘general’ and ‘native’) used in the questionnaire, for example: “I’d say C1. If somebody asked me, I would spontaneously say C1” (AT1, 95-96). It is also interesting that Hungarian students again refrained from using the ‘native’ terms to describe their proficiency: “I’m sure I’m not close to

native.” (HU2, 19); “C1, perhaps C2, but I don't dare say it's close to native” (HU4, 51-52).

These findings point to the persistence of the myth of the NS repeatedly described in the Hungarian context, starting with the early works of Medgyes (1994). Around the same time, in the Austrian context, Seidlhofer (1996) points to the discrepancy between discourses in the ELT community that are influenced by perceptions of English as a global language (e.g., ELF) and the insecurities of teachers who still aspire to an NS model. It is an intriguing finding that the changes in the world of ELT in the three decades that have passed since the publication of these studies seem to have affected the two countries to a different degree. While both Medgyes (1994) and Seidlhofer (1996) argue for the importance and legitimacy of the non-native speaker (NNS) teacher, Hungarian student teachers seem to be more affected by the learned feelings of inferiority regarding their English proficiency. By contrast, Dewaele et al. (2021) found very little implicit bias against NNS teachers of English in a study of student teachers from Austria and Germany, concluding that the newer generation of German and Austrian teachers can finally overcome the dichotomies of the past. In contrast, Hungarian student teachers feel that they need to define themselves with reference to an idealized NS model that they cannot reach. This corroborates earlier findings in the Hungarian context reporting on students' perception of NS teachers as better teachers of conversation and better models for language use (Benke & Medgyes, 2005).

Data from the questionnaire study further confirms the higher esteem Hungarian student teachers hold for NS teachers concerning their ability to provide an authentic model of English for learners. Among the few statistically significant differences between the two groups was their attitude to the concept of the ideal NS model. All statements in the questionnaire pertaining to NS teachers' imagined superiority received more agreement from the Hungarian students, with significant differences between the two cohorts in two cases: The Hungarian student teachers agree more strongly that NS speakers provide a more authentic model of English for their learners than the Austrian participants (4.41 vs. 3.46, $p < 0.001$), and they also believe more strongly that learners learn more from NS teachers than from NNS teachers (Hungarian group: 3.41 vs. Austrian group: 2.72, $p = 0.006$, 6-point Likert scale, 1 = disagree strongly, 6 = agree strongly).

There is no explicit indication in the interviews that the student teachers model their language use on NS use of English or aspire to 'native-like' English proficiency. Interestingly, one of the Austrian interviewees still sees reaching an 'NS level' as a personal aspiration, however: “I don't believe that it's absolutely necessary to be at the 'NS level' [to be able to teach]. I'd say you could teach in such a way that ten-year-olds understand you even if you had B2 level. So [...] it's not really necessary. But I do think it's desirable” (AT1, 381-385). Similar ideas were also mentioned in the Hungarian interviews: “Obviously, I think it's very difficult to achieve a pronunciation close to a 'native level', [...] so the teacher has to pay attention to this, so that they can bring themselves as close as possible to being understood [...]. Well, it's good that someone knows English, but if they speak with such a strong accent that the other person doesn't understand it, it's essentially the same as if they don't know English” (HU3, 67-70). A Hungarian student

teacher seems to have mixed ideas on this. They tend to see a somewhat broader picture, even possibly embracing language change: “The language is anyway so fluid and constantly changing that what I learned is probably not the same today either;” still, they also think that “the basics, the standard, should be taught in school as it is” (HU1, 58-59, 78-79).

The two groups are in agreement concerning the areas in which their skills are better and report stronger receptive than productive skills. While the difference between the groups is not significant, the Austrian group shows stronger agreement than the Hungarian one with the statement that their receptive skills are better (4.26 vs. 3.72 on a 6-point Likert scale). The same tendency to rate receptive skills more highly than productive skills is also visible in the interviews, which corroborates the questionnaire results: “Well, I can read [English] very quickly at this point and I understand pretty much everything. When I speak [English], I often notice that everyday language is missing” (AT2, 503-505). Similarly, Hungarian students also stress that their language skills are heavily influenced by their academic commitments: “Right now, I would say it's strong when we have to formulate such academic things... our ability to speak, maybe... it develops the least, because there are a lot of lectures and we don't really speak there, do we?” (HU1, 11-12). Interviewees sometimes also go into more detail, differentiating further between writing and speaking: “Well, when it comes to writing, I would say around C1, so pretty good. Spoken [English], well, that's not as good, shall we say, simply because there is less time to think while speaking. I'd almost say between B2 and C1 for that” (AT2, 517-520). They also rate different areas of proficiency differently: “Especially since when I speak, my grammar is not as good as when I write [...] and my vocabulary is somehow much smaller when I speak than when I have to write” (HU2, 18-20).

As users of English, both groups agree that they can express themselves better in their L1 (same level of agreement, namely 4.03, for both groups). While they report that there are things they find harder to do in English than in their L1, they also say that there are things they find easier to do, and their agreement with the latter statement is stronger. In the case of the Hungarian group, the difference is greater (3.72 vs. 4.52) than in the Austrian group (4.05 vs. 4.62).

In the interview data, students mention academic language as one area where they do better in English because they have been exposed to academic English more than to academic German/Hungarian: “And sometimes I feel as if I can express myself better in English when it concerns my [academic] area of specialisation. Literature, for example. [...] So, personal stuff is easier for me in German, but academic subjects are easier [to talk about] in English” (AT2, 556-561). The same idea appears in all four Hungarian interviews: “I can still speak better in Hungarian, that's for sure. But I think I can write any assignments in English much better than if I had to write the same in Hungarian” (HU2, 21-22). An Austrian interviewee cites the formal ‘Sie’ that is required in German as one reason why they find English easier in certain situations: “I believe that in English, you don't have to think about it so much because there's the ‘you’ principle and that's it. And in Austrian [German] you have ‘Sie’ and ‘Ihre’ and so on [...] and I've noticed that it's just a bit more relaxed in English” (AT1, 135-147). Another Austrian interviewee

believes that they have a better command of certain idiomatic expressions in English than in their L1 (German):

With slang and idioms, I am more comfortable [in English] than in German. And I feel that they come to me much more naturally in English than in German. And definitely proverbs and sayings, I would say that I like the English ones better than the German ones, and I am better at using them in context. I can think of many, many more English proverbs than German ones. This is definitely an area where I would say that I can do this a lot better in English (AT1, 114-120).

One Austrian interviewee struggles to decide whether they used more English or more German in their everyday lives, indicating that English – as suggested by the questionnaire data – is a part of this student teacher’s life rather than simply an academic subject:

I have to say, because of social media, there’s more English overall. But it’s more of a mix. I would say, generally, there’s a balance, but with certain topics, I don’t know, like, social media, Instagram with all those posts, newspapers like the New York Times or the Guardian... but there’s a mix. Still, I would say there’s more English [...] it’s somehow included in every part of my life, less in some areas and much more in others (AT3, 840-847).

The Hungarian interviewees express similar ideas with English having a major role in their everyday communication: “I slowly feel like I’m forgetting my own mother tongue because I don’t use it so much other than in the home context [with my parents]” (HU2 01-04). This is underscored by a comment by an Austrian interviewee who believes that their emotional vocabulary is better in English than in German: “I have to say, I have much better expressions to describe emotions in English than in German” (AT3, 816-817). In a similar vein, the idea of codeswitching appears in two Hungarian interviews: “...a lot of English words appear in Hungarian, so that we often embed an English word in a sentence [...] because] I feel that English conveys something better with that word” (HU1, 33-34).

Figure 1 below presents the attitudes of Austrian and Hungarian students concerning the role of English in their lives. In the questionnaire, they were asked to indicate which statement in a pair of contrasting statements (see below) they agree with more.

There is an overall similarity between the attitudes of the two groups of students, with only minor, non-significant differences. The Hungarian group believes that their use of English is more spontaneous and that they learn more vocabulary from the world around them compared to the Austrian group, while the Austrian group agrees more strongly with the statement that English connects them to the wider world. Student teachers in both countries have a very strong conviction that English is a part of their everyday lives rather than just an academic subject, echoing earlier findings in both contexts (e.g., Fajt, 2021; Schwarz, 2020). It is important to keep this in mind for the discussion of the respondents’ views on teaching English in their professional future.

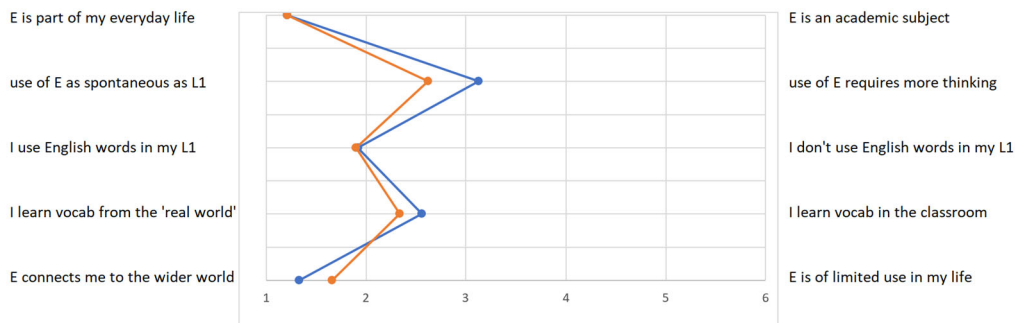


Figure 1: Attitudes to English. (Blue line = Austrian group, orange line = Hungarian group. Scale from 1 to 6, values closer to 1 indicate agreement with the first statement; values closer to 6 indicate agreement with the second statement)

3.2. Student teachers' views on teaching English

Our second research question concerns student teachers' views on their future teaching, taking into consideration their own use of English. We investigated whether they had a more 'traditional' or 'progressive' teaching style in mind with regard to EE. We also tried to find out how they see themselves in comparison to NS teachers.

Student teachers in both Austria and Hungary assume that their learners are picking up more English outside the classroom now than previous generations did (5.44 and 5.38, respectively, on a 1-6 scale).

In the interview data, they ascribe this change to the Internet, social media, and streaming services: "Input has changed a lot in the last 15 years. Since the Internet appeared, most people use English on social media, participate in English-speaking communities" (HU4, 69-70); "When I was in high school, I was so happy when I could watch something in English or with subtitles, and now Netflix is there, I change the language to English and there you go" (HU1, 40-41). They also notice differences even compared to their own schooldays and their own previous social media consumption habits, which are less than ten years in the past, as in this comment from an Austrian respondent:

What I hear from my students is that they watch lots of YouTubers who are English speakers, never mind if they are American or British. And in comparison to my own schooldays – that simply didn't happen when I was at school. It was more the German YouTubers who were popular then, and we were more likely to watch those. And today [...] it's the other way round, it's the English-speaking ones who are trendy (AT1, 160-173).

A further point that the respondents believe would affect their future teaching is the abundance of social media platforms now flourishing and providing English language content, as one Hungarian interviewee highlights: "We weren't this much addicted to social media... we only had Facebook and, to some extent, Instagram, now they have Snapchat, TikTok, BeReal, everything" (HU2, 107-109). An Austrian interviewee points

out that 'Internet English' is also passed on from young people to their younger siblings and spreads in this way as well: "And what she [the interviewee's younger sister] hears at home [from her older siblings] gets passed on to her friends. So, it keeps getting passed on in a way" (AT3, 1254-1259), thus in all likelihood entering the classroom. In line with this, the questionnaire data show that student teachers also believe that their future learners would notice if their English was not up to date (4.13 for Austrians and 4.38 for Hungarians). The omnipresence of English in learners' lives could therefore mean that they hold their teachers to higher standards than previous generations.

In the interviews, the student teachers sometimes seem unsure about the pedagogical value of their learners' EE activities. There are positive comments such as this one from an Austrian respondent: "I think, when I reflect on this a bit, that this is a great advantage of TikTok - that this medium, which uses a lot of English, kind of pushes the learners in that direction a bit. [...] In that sense, it has had a positive influence on the learners" (AT1, 160-173). Another Austrian interviewee points out, however, that not all learners are likely to benefit from EE to the same degree, which places great demands on teachers:

It's good on the one hand. But on the other hand, I think that we as teachers will have to be able to direct this a bit [...] we'll have to be prepared for the greater differences that will exist within a classroom. For example, when one student understands everything and can talk about everything, and another one hardly knows anything at all [...] if you direct this [as a teacher] and take the aspect of differentiation into account, you can do a lot with that. But it can also go very wrong (AT3, 950-969).

As we can see, respondents are divided as to whether this exposure is beneficial for their students. Although the advantages of social media usage for language learning are well researched and documented (see Barrot, 2021, for a review), studies on teachers' beliefs show a more nuanced picture. For example, Schurz and Sundqvist (2022) found that teachers in various European countries believe that writing skills and grammar do not benefit from EE activities as much as, for example, students' knowledge of informal English or their spoken skills. The findings of our study confirm that this attitude is present in student teachers as well as participants tended to be sceptical about non-standard or slang usage appearing in the classroom.

There are also critical reflections on the algorithms which determine the content the learners consume online from one of the Austrian interviewees. They point out that the diversity of the content which learners consume online will make it difficult to integrate it into their teaching, resulting in a greater need for differentiation: "Everybody has their own, what do you call it, algorithm [which decides] what they watch. And that makes it difficult to address specific topics and keep working on them [with the learners] because they are entirely different [for everyone]" (AT1, 260-266).

A further concern which is also related to the workings of social media and their effects on learners' attention span was noted by a Hungarian interviewee: "Also, I can't really keep the group engaged for more than 5 minutes, so I can't bring in a task that needs longer engagement, [...] and I think this is precisely the effect of the new social

media, that everything is very fast and spinning on TikTok, and these videos are a few seconds long only” (HU2, 112-115). This will have to be reflected in the tasks and activities that future teachers design for their learners, making the process of choosing and adapting teaching materials more challenging.

While the interviewees acknowledge the role of EE, there is also some agreement (slightly stronger in the Hungarian group, 4.07 compared to 3.67 for the Austrian group) in the questionnaire data with the idea of the teacher as a linguistic role model for learners, which is somewhat contradictory to answers regarding EE as the major source of TL input. In addition, acknowledging the role of input from various sources outside the classroom raises the question of standards and accuracy, and the respondents were asked about their reactions to several statements about these topics in the questionnaire. The first statement concerned teachers’ use of standard English and revealed that the Hungarian student teachers believe significantly more strongly (3.74 vs. 4.34, $p = 0.003$) than the Austrian group that teachers should use standard English, which is in line with their idea that a teacher should provide a model for their learners.

For example, one interviewee is concerned about fluency taking precedence over accuracy and whether that is really the desired goal of teaching English: “[When I was in school, teachers had to] beg for someone to speak up, because we didn't dare to use the language so much if we weren't sure that what we were saying was good. These kids nowadays just keep going on and on, it doesn't matter if it's correct or not” (HU2, 120-124). However, another interviewee is more relaxed about informal English. She works as a tutor and says that she has noticed “an awful lot of informal English, particularly American English [...]. I am not so strict about that, I have to admit. It is more important to me that they understand what it's all about and that they can express themselves in some form” (AT2, 629-641). This more forgiving attitude is also present in one of the Hungarian interviews: “These meme pages, for example, then they are all in English, the comments are in English. And maybe the students use these slangs they see there more confidently, which are not necessarily always correct from a grammatical and formal point of view, but they know them, they can make themselves understood with these expressions” (HU4, 71-74). An Austrian interviewee who already has some teaching experience, however, is pessimistic about the impact of non-standard English on learners’ language use: “Well, I would say that I notice slang words occasionally, [non-standard] pronunciation. ‘Innit’ is a classic example of a word that they keep using – ‘innit’ for ‘isn’t it’. They keep using that. But does [EE] have a positive impact on their language use? I’d say no” (AT1, 222-231). A firm conviction that the standard should be adhered to is also apparent in this statement by a Hungarian interviewee: “When I see a sentence like ‘it do be like that’ in a homework, I know it was taken from TikTok, and I know it's used in AAVE, but I say: no, we don’t use this in RP, and let’s follow that because I should teach based on that” (HU2, 43-45). These concerns for the curricular requirements are also present in other interviews with the Hungarian cohort: “In such cases, you have to bring it up in class and explain: yes, it [ungrammatical expression, slang] is used in everyday spoken language, but we have to follow the graduation requirements in class” (HU4, 144-145). Thus, even if student teachers are aware of the current realities

of English (Fürstenberg & Bicman, 2023), this awareness does not translate into more openness to living English, if nonstandard, in the classroom.

As regards approaches to teaching, the two groups of participants again display considerable similarities. Figure 2 illustrates the reported attitudes of the two groups to ‘traditional’ / ‘non-traditional’ teaching approaches. Attitudes associated with a more ‘traditional’ approach to teaching are on the left. The illustration shows a tendency on the part of the respondents in both groups to pick the more ‘progressive’ option (listed on the right), with Hungarians being a little more, but not statistically significantly more ‘traditional’. There is one notable exception (grammar teaching) that appears to be rather important to both groups.

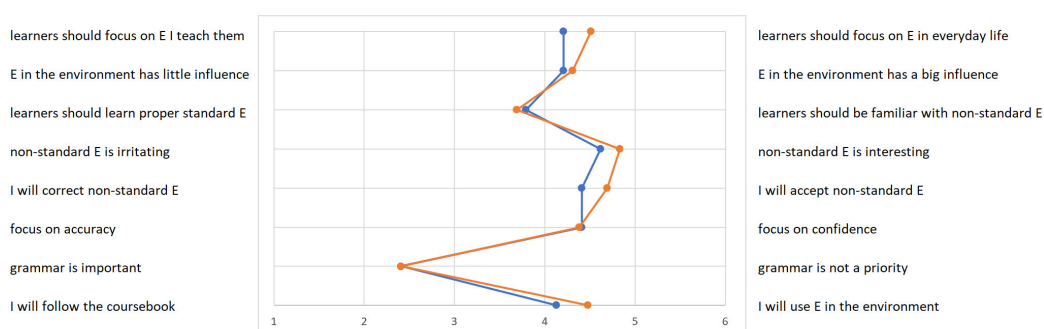


Figure 2: More ‘traditional’ vs. more ‘progressive’ approaches to teaching. (Blue line = Austrian group, orange line = Hungarian group. Scale from 1 to 6, values closer to 1 indicate agreement with the first statement; values closer to 6 indicate agreement with the second statement).

As the interview data show, this focus on grammar is combined with a belief that communication is an important element in ELT, as in this statement from an Austrian interviewee: “Yes, I think those are the three main aspects. Definitely, vocabulary in the first place, because even if you know zero grammar, you still need words to be able to communicate. Next, grammar and after that, pronunciation, that’s how I would rank them” (AT1, 371-374). This trinity of “correct grammar, large vocabulary, good pronunciation” (HU2, 67) features in all Hungarian interviews as core requirements of good teachers. Another Austrian interviewee gives further reasons why teachers need a good command of grammar: “As a teacher, in my opinion, you are not taken seriously [if you cannot explain grammar properly] because it’s a sign that you do not really understand the language” (AT3, 1201). A Hungarian interviewee also expressed uncertainty as to how important grammar should be for their teaching: “I myself have noticed that I try to shift more towards them being able to speak rather than learning grammar rules. But I don’t have a firm position on this yet, I’m just trying to figure out what proportion would be ideal” (HU3, 91-93). This preoccupation with grammatical accuracy in both groups is also consistent with the rather negative attitudes towards non-standard usage already discussed in Section 3.1.

These findings are similar to the views of practising teachers in both countries. Schurz, Coumel, and Hüttner (2022) found that Austrian teachers are unsure about the benefits of EE because of their reliance on explicit grammar instruction, which is also an important feature of Hungarian classrooms (Dombi et al., 2009; Öveges & Csizér, 2018). Such a discrepancy between beliefs about and practices of grammar teaching has been observed before (Phipps & Borg, 2009), and has important implications for teacher education in that student teachers should be provided with opportunities to reflect on and reconcile conflicting beliefs and attitudes (see also Dombi, 2019).

4. Conclusion

Overall, the findings of our study indicate that the student teachers who were surveyed use English frequently in their lives outside the classroom. English is clearly part of their lives rather than simply an academic subject they study, and they feel that the language connects them to the wider world.

Student teachers in both countries acknowledge that their learners will be exposed to more English outside the classroom than previous generations. Despite this, there is clear, if not strong, agreement with the idea that learners' linguistic role model should be the teacher rather than extramural content, and that teachers should use standard English in the classroom. This is also reflected in the importance accorded to grammar teaching by both groups. The respondents in both groups also seem unsure whether exposure to EE results in better English language skills.

While there is some agreement with the idea that NS teachers provide a more authentic model of language use in the Hungarian group, student teachers in both groups mostly disagree with or are ambiguous about statements that indicate that NS teachers have advantages compared to NNS teachers. A significant difference between the two groups is that Hungarian student teachers believe more strongly that learners could learn more from an NS teacher and that an NS teacher is a more authentic model for learners.

Our study has implications for teacher education in both contexts: student teachers should be given the opportunity to reflect on their own EE use as a preparatory step for designing activities that bridge the gap between EE and the classroom. Teacher education needs to repeatedly address the issue of accuracy, as it seems that prescriptive approaches are not a thing of the past but rather a central preoccupation even for the next generation of teachers. Also, dialogue and exchange between the two contexts could broaden student teachers' conceptualization of nativeness and its impact on teaching effectiveness.

In an era when the ELT world is negotiating emerging alternatives to the native speaker model (Llurda & Calvet-Terré, 2024; Matsuda, 2021; Selvi et al., 2024) and to standard language use (Jansen et al., 2021; Modiano, 2024; Widdowson, 2021), our findings are particularly relevant insofar as they provide insight into the beliefs of the next generation of teachers in two different contexts. Crucially, the comparative design of the

study allowed the researchers to examine the influence of both global trends and local particularities.

Future research should look into other European contexts to further test our findings. Such research would also foster cooperation between teacher educators in different European countries, thus contributing to the internationalisation of the teaching profession.

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