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Developing Intercultural Awareness and Communication in Teacher Education Programs

ABSTRACT:

Despite interactions in English being mainly between NNSs, teaching methods remain chiefly centered on monolingual NSs. However, given today's international use of the language, an alternative would be to give more thought to the importance of intercultural communicative competence. For these changes to be applied, pre-service teacher education programs seem the ideal place for discussion. Bearing this in mind, this paper is centered on a study on how these issues are developed in Portuguese teacher MA programs, followed by some suggestions and approaches.

Introduction

Nowadays, the majority of the communicative interactions in English take place between non-native speakers (NNS) from diverse nationalities, who use the language for instrumental reasons in a variety of different fields like academia, business, and commerce, to name just a few. Meanwhile, English language teaching (ELT) methods have not quite gone hand in hand with the recent multicultural use of the language at an international level. Quite the contrary, traditionally, ELT approaches have barely taken into consideration learners' own languages (Alptekin, 2002), as educational systems' policies have maintained the monolingual native speaker (NS) as the standard model to follow. According to Alptekin (2002), it may be contended that NNS teachers are restricted by NS-based authenticity for two reasons. On the one hand, as multicompetent language users, they are discouraged from cultivating multicompetent minds by traditional educational systems' policies; while on the other hand, with English rooted in the NS model, its teaching also remains mainly connected to the NS culture, while the learners' own culture is many times disregarded.

More recently, learners' own cultures have in fact begun to be integrated

into the EFL classrooms; however, they continue without empowering learners to acknowledge themselves as legitimate users of English. In this sense, it may be argued that the traditional native speaker EFL model has not exactly excluded non-native learners' own cultures, but it certainly has not gone as far as viewing these learners on a par with the Inner Circle NSs (Kachru, 1985). Byram's five «saviors» paradigm (1997), for instance, not only proposes a structure for curriculum design when teaching intercultural communicative competence, but it also establishes a set of goals for assessment. The latter undeniably allows for learners' development, but it also establishes a standard (that belongs to the Other, the NS) by which to measure their evolution towards those very goals, and when unable to achieve them, they are perceived and assessed as «failed» learners (Seidlhofer, 2011).

Considering these issues, this paper proposes to reflect on alternative and additional approaches to ELT that can match the current demands for English language use. Therefore, notions like English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and intercultural communicative competence are viewed as key elements for successful communication in today's interconnected world, especially when considering language users' need to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes and critical cultural awareness necessary to effectively communicate, as well as to measure the cultural and social values of the interlocutors involved in interactions (Hülmbauer *et al.*, 2008; Seidlhofer, 2003).

In view of these matters, pre-service teacher education programs may be considered the ideal environment to introduce these new approaches or notions to ELT (Sifakis, 2007, 2009, 2014), seeing as both innovative theoretical thinking and practical teaching come together, in order to train/educate well-informed and self-reliant professionals (Kirkpatrick, 2007; Seidlhofer, 2011). Keeping this in mind, a study is presented on Portuguese pre-service teacher education programs (2011-2013), focusing namely on issues of culture, communicative competence and the diversity of English language varieties. From the results obtained in the questionnaires and the feedback received from trainees in the interviews, some suggestions in favor of developing intercultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence are presented as essential for today's teacher education programs. These proposals will hopefully not only allow trainees to look at language differently, but also to teach it differently, so that their students in turn, will similarly acknowledge the importance of these issues in their future use of the language.

1. ELF and intercultural competence in ELT

Several have been the definitions associated with the notion of ELF (e.g. Firth, 1996; House, 1999; Jenkins, 1998), however, the one considered here was put forth by Seidlhofer (2011: 7), who argues that ELF includes «*any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option* [in italics in the original form]». In this sense, ELF refers to communicative situations where English is the common language among different interlocutors (both NSs and NNSs), who do not share a mutual mother tongue and whose intent is to achieve successful intercultural communication.

Considering the multiplicity of its speakers, ELF is therefore defined functionally by its use in different intercultural interactions rather than formally by its reference to standard NS norms. From this standpoint, ELF users counteract the deficit view many times associated with lingua franca English, seeing how identical communicative rights are implied for all its users, rather than barriers being put up between «first class and second class language users». As Hülmbauer *et al.* (2008) further argue, the essential factor lies on how all speakers are allowed to adopt and adapt English for their own purposes, without there being an over-deference to NS norms. Needless to say though that when adopting and adapting a language, it is necessary for all users to rely on the negotiation of meaning (e.g. in terms of variety of norms, vocabulary, pronunciation, etc.), to keep in mind the specific context and domain, as well as the interlocutors involved. In the same way as the English language inevitably develops into local norms as well as global uses, speakers inevitably need to also become more flexible and creative in order to accommodate to this variation. It is the cooperation involved between both parties that leads to effective and successful communication. This being said, the notion of achieving a definitive command of an idealized standard variety does not necessarily imply intelligibility, however, nor is the recognition of all linguistic variations virtually possible. Taking these issues into consideration, Mauranen (2012: 239) argues that «intercultural sensitivity and adaptation skills are crucial in successful communication in a globalized world, and more often than not they bear no reference to Anglo-American cultural presuppositions.»

Traditionally, cultural perspectives in ELT have mainly been (and by and large still continue to be) taught from an American and/or British point of view; however, from an ELF standpoint, it is believed that there is no single identifiable culture that users may refer to, though this does not mean ELF communication is «de-cultured», as Dogancay-Aktuna and

Hardman (2012) emphasize. Quite the opposite, since ELF contexts usually involve both NSs and NNSs from a variety of linguistic backgrounds, these situations inevitably rely on intercultural communicative competence as an essential feature for effective interaction; that is, grasping the full meaning of culture and going beyond what may be simply conveyed as the «postcard culture» (e.g. reference to monuments, holidays and so on). Like Dogancay-Aktuna and Hardman (2012: 110) further reiterate, «developing intercultural competence demands an understanding of culture and the role of culture and cultural variation in all communication.» In view of the variable cross-cultural contexts that depict today's society, it can be further argued that users of English should preferably even develop what is denoted as a meta-cultural awareness, which can be adopted within an array of contexts, so as to apprehend not only the cultural elements of a given communicative scenario, but also the social and linguistic components involved.

Considering these relevant issues, new perspectives and approaches to ELT are called upon, which rethink the traditional notion of English as a foreign language (EFL), where form is viewed as predominating over function, as is argued in Cavalheiro (2013: 15):

> «The notion of teaching English as a foreign language, based on processes and objectives that are unrealistic, no longer seems to meet the communicative needs of those who wish to take part in today's multicultural society in constant transformation. To counteract this tendency, an ELF approach emerges as an alternative way to think about ELT; an approach in which form gives way to function and to a redefined intercultural communicative competence.»

In this sense, the current communicative panorama is characterized by the increasing need for learners to develop intercultural communicative competence, as well as by the pressure to develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes and critical cultural awareness necessary to communicate successfully (Hülmbauer *et al.*, 2008; Seidlhofer, 2003). As a result, the role of language educators must likewise be reevaluated, as they are increasingly required to become more multifaceted on account of the considerable divergence in terms of beliefs and values across cultures. Friedrich (2012) thus emphasizes how language educators need to assume the arduous task of facilitating communication in terms of linguistic forms, of intercultural awareness-building as well as of communicative strategy development; in other words, encouraging the development of an «intercultural sensitivity» (Mauranen, 2012).

Unfortunately, this type of approach is not always visible in Expanding

circle environments, as the pressure for NS-based authenticity many times restricts NNS teachers, especially on two accounts. Firstly, as multicompetent language users, educators are persuaded against fostering multi-competent minds by conventional educational policies, which often value monolingual NS standards. Because of that, ELT curricula on many occasions neglect to reconsider the appropriate goals or situations for learners in a given context, and teaching methods rarely tend to contemplate the role/presence of learners' mother tongues on a par with the English language. Secondly, with English still rooted in two main NS cultures (mainly British or American), its teaching has also largely continued to be associated with those very same cultures, and as a result, learners' own cultures have many times been overlooked and marginalized. Even though NNS teachers feel at ease with their own culture, and share a similar linguistic and cultural background as their students, they are usually obliged to mainly center their approaches on NS norms and strategic/sociolinguistic skills (Alpetkin, 2002). When considering this type of approach, not only does it make learners feel apprehensive, but it also makes them feel uncomfortable, as they are being taught, and are expected to act and communicate like someone else beside themselves. Contrastingly, when employing an ELF perspective, teachers are believed to have much more freedom when considering culture, especially since they have the liberty and are encouraged to actually explore their own particular and familiar cultural context, which should be equally respected (McKay, 2012).

With these concerns in mind, pre-service teacher education programs seem the ideal place for discussion and reflection on new approaches to ELT. It is at universities that pre-service teachers engage with more academic and theoretical issues, while in basic and secondary schools they get the chance to participate in more practical pedagogical issues; considering these two facets, teacher education courses are in the best position if change is to come into effect – firstly with future language teachers, and afterwards with their learners. In order for this change to come through though, instead of simply preparing trainees for a limited set of pre-formulated teaching methods, a more widespread education should be given to them, allowing them to assess the implications of ELF use for their own ELT environments, and to adjust their teaching in relation to the specific needs of their students. If this were to be done, trainees would be able to assess and understand the fundamental issues involved in intercultural communication as well as comprehend the unreliability of «universal solutions», as is put forth by Seidlhofer (2004: 228):

«such teacher education would foster an understanding of the pro-
cesses of language variation and change, the relationship between
language and identity, the importance of social-psychological fac-
tors in intercultural communication and the suspect nature of any
supposedly universal solutions to pedagogic problems.»

In view of these arguments, teacher education programs (especially
pre-service education) should be reanalyzed and reevaluated, in order to
verify whether these pressing issues are being taken into account. Besides,
it is also central to assess the impact teacher education has on future ELT
teachers' opinions when considering language itself as well as different
teaching approaches.

2. A study

Considering this imperative need for reflection, a study was conducted
between the 2011-2013 school years focusing on pre-service teacher edu-
cation MA programs (English plus another foreign language)[1] at five pub-
lic Portuguese universities. Besides observing the structure of the courses,
a questionnaire was also given at two different stages – first, to trainees
beginning their MA studies, and second, to those ending their courses.
Out of the 166 trainees enrolled and attending English related seminars,
66% (N=109) responded to the questionnaire. Sixty-six percent (N=61)
were first-year trainees beginning their MA degree and 64% (N=48) were
second-year trainees in the last semester of their degree. Semi-structured
interviews (N=6) were conducted as well to second-year trainees, so as to
confirm the data retrieved and also to explore other topics that could not
be delved into via questionnaires.

Among other issues, the importance given to intercultural awareness
and communication in these programs (namely regarding the notions
of culture, communicative competence and language varieties) will be
here reflected on, so as to verify whether these programs contribute
to any changes in trainees' attitudes regarding ELT. With the results
obtained from this particular group of trainees, some suggestions and new
approaches are subsequently suggested for Portuguese pre-service teacher
education courses in the future.

Taking into consideration the concepts of native- and non-native speak-
erness, trainees were asked to consider a number of statements regarding
their role as language teachers and to classify them accordingly on a 5-point
Likert scale ranging from one (*strongly agree*) to five (*strongly disagree*):

I think…
1. NS teachers play a fundamental role in the correct use of the language.
2. NNS teachers play a fundamental role in the correct use of the language.
3. I should spend more time getting students to communicate in English.
4. I should spend more time getting students to obtain a native-like accent.
5. I should spend more time trying to eradicate mistakes typical of European NNSs.
6. It is important to teach that various cultures use English differently.
7. It is important to teach English features that make one understood internationally and not only in some societies.

Regarding the first two statements, according to the respondents from both groups, NS and NNS teachers equally play a fundamental part in correct language use, with those *mostly/strongly agreeing* ranging well over the 80% mark and with little variation from the first to the second year (see Table 1). As for obtaining a native-like accent and eradicating mistakes typical of European NNSs, these statements generated the most contradiction with opinions ranging from one end of the scale to the other, along with relatively high percentages of undecidedness (between 23% and 42%); however, difference between first and second-year trainees' opinions is visible. In the first case, roughly half of the first year group (46%) *mostly agrees* with getting students to obtain a native like accent, while in the second year the tendency is for trainees to *mostly/strongly disagree* (42%). As for eradicating mistakes typical of European NNSs, about a third of the respondents in both groups (31% and 35%, respectively) seem undecided on this notion, most probably because of their uncertainness in what this particular statement involves. Even so, similar to what was verified in the previous statement, the percentage of those who *mostly/strongly agree* decreases slightly by 6% from one year to another, while the percentage of those who *mostly/strongly disagree* has a minor increase of 2%. In this sense, it can be argued that notions of nativeness and correctness, more strongly manifested in first-year trainees, give way to that of communicative effectiveness, as can also be observed in the next three statements. It is clear, for instance, that spending more time trying to get students to communicate in English is one of the most important concerns for trainees, with the percentage of *mostly/strongly agreeing* reaching 92% and 94% of first and second-year trainees. However, in order for effective communication to take place in an international scenario, it is also vital that: a) students understand that various cultures use English differently

and b) that they are taught specific features/strategies in order to make themselves understood at a global level. In both cases, it is clearly visible that trainees are also alert to these notions with percentages for *mostly/strongly agree* starting at 80% and higher. The last statement especially received 92% and 93% of the responses in favor of being understood in international situations, reflecting the importance given to lingua franca scenarios and intercultural communication. These last three cases can then be considered an example of the growing tendency and increasing awareness, however little it may be, of function over form from the first to the second year.

Table 1 – First and second-year trainees' opinions on their role as language teachers

	1st year	2nd year
NS teachers play a fundamental role in the correct use of the language.	86.9% (strongly/mostly agree)	87.5% (strongly/mostly agree)
NNS teachers play a fundamental role in the correct use of the language.	83.3% (strongly/mostly agree)	85.4% (strongly/mostly agree)
I should spend more time getting students to communicate in English.	91.8% (strongly/mostly agree)	93.8% (strongly/mostly agree)
I should spend more time getting students to obtain a native-like accent.	45.8% (mostly agree) 32.2% (strongly/mostly disagree)	31.3% (undecided) 41.7% (strongly/mostly disagree)
I should spend more time trying to eradicate mistakes typical of European NNSs.	45.9% (strongly/mostly agree) 31.1% (undecided) 22.9% (strongly/mostly disagree)	39.6% (strongly/mostly agree) 35.4 % (undecided) 25% (strongly/mostly disagreed)
It is important to teach that different cultures use English differently.	83.3% (strongly/mostly agree)	89.6% (strongly/mostly agree)
It is important to teach that English features that make one understood internationally, and not only in one or two societies.	91.7% (strongly/mostly agree)	92.7% (strongly/mostly agree)

These answers can also go in line with the following section, in which first and second-year trainees were asked to rank from first place to fifth place, what they believe is most important to focus on when teaching English. Participants' responses were as follows:

Table 2 – First and second-year trainees' ranking of most important issues

	1st year	2nd year
1st	Standard variety (e.g. BrE/AmE)	Lingua franca dimension
2nd	Lingua franca dimension	Standard variety (e.g. BrE/AmE)
3rd	Syllabus for practical field (e.g. business, tourism)	Syllabus for practical field (e.g. business, tourism)
4th	Post-colonial/emerging varieties	Post-colonial/emerging varieties
5th	Other	Other

When comparing the responses from this group of trainees at the beginning of their degree and at the end, it is at the top two positions where change is most evident, while the rest is maintained. At the beginning, standard varieties are valued as the main element in ELT, whereas towards the end an international or lingua franca perspective is increasingly recognized and valued, at least at a theoretical level. Having a practical syllabus (e.g. English for Specific Purposes) is ranked afterwards in third place, hence accentuating the instrumental use of the language; and in fourth, can be found post-colonial varieties, judged as the least important. As for the «other» option, respondents had the possibility of giving their own suggestions, of which four main ideas stand out. Firstly, it is that of language and language skills, where emphasis is placed on certain difficulties or errors that learners may have or make, and the need to correct them; in other words, the prevalence of form over function. Secondly, the notion of communication and the need to urge learners to communicate is also highlighted, which contrastingly, gives primacy to function over form. Thirdly, reference to culture is yet another essential issue according to trainees. On the one hand, mention is made to the traditional concept of culture associated with EFL, such as the culture of the language one is learning (namely the British or American culture); while on the other hand, there is also the understanding and consideration of other cultures that are essential if English is to be used as an international language.

Lastly, reference is made as well to students' own aims; an aspect that is many times forgotten due to the syllabus imposed, but which plays a crucial part in motivating and persuading students to learn and use the language. Taking into account these responses, it can be said that there is a tendency to favor both standardization and form; even so, there is a growing awareness (especially from the first to the second year) in what concerns international use and language function.

The part dedicated to culture, more specifically attitudes toward native and non-native cultures, begins by observing the quantitative data collected in the questionnaire and afterwards the qualitative data from the interviews. In the first case, in the questionnaire, trainees were asked to rank from one to six (being one the most important and six the least important) how they view the teaching of different cultures, so as to observe whether their opinions are more oriented toward native communities or an international perspective (Table 3).

Table 3 – Most popular position chosen for each culture

	1st year trainees	2nd year trainees
British culture	1st (82%)	1st (69%)
American culture	2nd (71%)	2nd (65%)
Other English-speaking cultures	3rd (56%)	3rd (60%)
L2 cultures	4th (41%)	4th & 5th (42% each)
Other worldwide cultures	6th (54%)	6th (54%)
Students' own culture	3rd & 4th (25% each)	6th (27%)

Although participants widely recognize the significance of teaching how various cultures use English differently (as seen in Table 1), when it comes to the actual teaching of culture, the two main cultures traditionally associated with EFL continue to assume leading positions in both years – British culture in the first place and American in the second. It is worth noting though that in the second year both of these cultures lose some ground to other ones, namely to other English-speaking cultures and L2 cultures. With this in mind, it can be argued that the teaching of culture in English language classes continues to be very much associated with the nations where it is spoken, regardless of them being L1 or L2 countries, while other worldwide cultures are largely neglected and positioned in the last place. When taking into account the students' own culture, responses

from participants are primarily ranked between third and sixth place, although the tendency is for it to be positioned at a lower level. Bearing this in mind, it can be claimed then that some recognition is given to students' local/national culture; still, it is never fully recognized as being critical for the learning of the language. It is worth mentioning that these results are comparable to those found in Guerra (2005), who also enquired students on similar cultural issues in Portugal. In his study, preference was also manifested in favor of the British and American cultures (with 86% and 74% respectively deemed them as *important/very important*), while ESL cultures, Portuguese culture and EFL cultures can be found at the other end of the scale (35%, 37% and 56%, respectively, are believed to be *unimportant/very unimportant*). Considering these two studies, it is visible how native cultures clearly continue to weigh heavily in ELT. This position may have to do with the longtime tradition of ELT materials being mainly centered on the British (and American) culture. Nonetheless, as communication in English today is increasingly characterized for its flexibility and mutability, it becomes ever more important that learners know how to express themselves and interact in different cultural situations.

Bearing this in mind, the interviews conducted functioned as a way to get trainees to further explore this complex notion of culture. The responses received go beyond the strict set of options given in the questionnaire, with answers greatly varying between interviewees. One of the trainees, for example, referred to the importance of comparing different English-speaking cultures (mainly American and British), having as a point of departure the students' own culture. Another trainee went even further and referred to the importance of teaching other global cultures that differ from Western society (e.g. Asian cultural issues). The reason for this lies on the fact that we currently live in a global village in which cultural aspects do not widely differ among Western countries, and from this particular trainee's experience, learners react positively when presented with issues that vary greatly from their own. Yet another trainee mentioned the importance of adapting the concept of culture according to each student's/group's area of study, seeing that what may be appropriated in one case may not be in another. However, not all opinions manifested by interviewees share this openness towards culture. Reference was also made to how essential it is for ELT teachers to visit Britain or the US, for instance. According to one trainee, it is crucial for teachers to be familiar with the culture they are teaching in class; that they experience the «real culture» in loco, so as to properly explain matters in class and have the answer to any questions that may arise during class. Considering these responses, it is evident that culture is a much more

complex issue than can be initially thought, with opinions greatly varying among the several interviewees.

Besides the linguistic and cultural issues, towards the end of the interviews trainees were likewise questioned on whether they were familiar with the concepts of English as a Lingua Franca or English as an International Language, so as to understand if these issues had ever been developed throughout their MA programs. The feedback that was received consists in an array of answers, in which no reference had been made to these issues, in other cases just vaguely, while in others it had been developed to a certain extent. It is interesting to note that the interviewees, who manifested their unfamiliarity with these concepts, were quite interested in finding out more about them. The trainees from the University of Lisbon were the ones who most outwardly manifested their knowledge and understanding of the concept, seeing as they had attended seminars on Teaching Materials and English Didactics, in which this topic was discussed in class by the chair professors and by an invited guest lecturer[2].

Taking into account the responses gathered from the questionnaires and interviews, it is clear that these trainees exhibit some awareness toward intercultural sensitivity, though not yet fully developed, as there still continue to be strongly held beliefs typical of traditional EFL approaches, especially regarding culture. It is with this study in mind and the results obtained that several aspects may be reconsidered in pre-service teacher education programs.

3. Some suggestions

Similarly to what was verified in the questionnaires, Sifakis (2009: 346) states that there is evidence of «a mismatch between what ESOL [English Speakers of Other Languages] teachers seem to believe about the English that they teach to their non-native learners and the competences and abilities that they believe these learners need, when communicating with other non-native users (Sifakis and Sougari, 2005).» According to Sifakis, when actual teaching issues are taken into consideration, most NNS language educators seem to manifest more traditional and established beliefs regarding the importance of a single variety and culture (usually British or American) for their teaching situation. This is verified in the questionnaires with the Portuguese trainees, especially in what concerns culture, as participants beginning and ending their degrees continue to favor the British or American cultures as key models for the ELT classroom. Furthermore, first-year trainees likewise

exhibited preference for standard varieties (BrE/AmE) as the most important issue to focus on in ELT, although it is true that in the second-year, trainees did demonstrate preference in favor of a lingua franca dimension, followed by standard varieties.

Considering this evident mismatch, much still needs to be achieved for the notion of ELF to take on a more visible role in pre-service teacher education. These courses are particularly special due to their unique combination of academic viewpoints with practical teaching experience. As a result, they foment the ideal environment to promote dialog not only among trainees, cooperating teachers and university professors, but also with the Ministries of Education and those locally in charge of language planning.

In what concerns the specific case of ELF (and its importance in developing intercultural awareness and stimulating communication), some suggestions for pre-service teacher education programs include paying more attention to the education of future language teachers, and not only to their training. If this were to be done, trainees would be able to understand «the nature of language and its use that underpins their pedagogic practices» (Seidlhofer, 2011: 204), consequently enhancing their status as well informed and self-reliant language professionals. Such a framework would essentially favor process over form, awareness over certainty, and consider knowledge of language and knowledge about language as equally imperative. Taking for example the particular case of language proficiency in EIL teacher education, Dogancay-Aktuna and Hardman (2012: 111) stress the importance of focusing on its multidimensional nature, seeing as it is «a construct consisting of a combination of sociocultural, strategic discourse and grammatical/linguistic competences and an awareness of pluricentric English as opposed to having achieved 'native-like' fluency and pronunciation of a single Inner Circle variety like British or American English […].»

It cannot be ignored that when trainees enroll in teaching programs, they inevitably arrive with a set of preconceived ideas of what ELT is and of what it consists of, which only makes it more difficult to break down the barriers that may exist and introduce new alternatives to their way of thinking. Bearing this in mind, Sifakis (2009) argues in favor of the implementation of a transformative framework in teacher education, where language practitioners have the opportunity to become actively aware of the complicated issues that ELF research raises, and their implications for both communication and pedagogy. What is essentially expected of participants is for them to confront and change their opinions about ELF by providing hands-on information and getting them to a) understand and critically consider their suppositions, b) explore new terrains by testing new roles, c)

develop a course of action, d) obtain the information and necessary skills to carry out that plan, e) acquire self-confidence in their new roles and f) become reincorporated on the basis of conditions determined by the new perspective (Sifakis, 2009: 346).

With this in mind, Sifakis (2009) goes even further and proposes a five-stage framework for teaching programs, which includes: 1) Preparation; 2) Identifying the primary issues of ELF discourse; 3) Fostering trainees' informed awareness about ELF discourse; 4) ELF and pedagogy; and 5) Formulating an ELF action plan. With this framework, language educators' opinions face a transformative adaptation in what regards their worldviews and outlooks toward ELT; hence, becoming not only aware of the features, but also of the challenges that ELF discourse and teaching provoke. The active reflection required plays an essential role in getting (prospective) teachers to consider these issues in relation to their own beliefs, contexts and teaching experiences. For this reason, Sifakis' general framework functions as an ideal model, seeing as training programs in different countries may adapt it according to their own specificities.

An example already implemented and presented at the 'Fifth International English as a Lingua Franca Conference' in Istanbul, is a seminar included in the teacher education program at Dortmund University and developed by Marie-Luise Pitzl (Pitzl, 2012). The seminar essentially aims at: familiarizing students with core concepts; presenting descriptive ELF findings and relating them to ELT local contexts; raising awareness of what an «ELF perspective» might mean for ELT; having students experiment with different cooperative teaching methods; as well as triggering reflective processes (namely, on NS models in ELT, their own experiences, their own ideals, standard discrepancies, among other issues). With this type of course, trainees have come to recognize the importance of mutual intelligibility over correctness, of teaching negotiation and communication strategies, and of focusing on different cultures.

Even though such transformation towards an ELF outlook is likely to be time-consuming, teachers will increasingly be expected to become fully aware of the features and challenges that ELF discourse and teaching provoke. The fundamental objective is to change their worldviews and perspectives about language teaching, and get them to actively reflect on such issues by relating them to their own experiences, beliefs and teaching contexts.

As Friedrich (2012: 50) argues, «If the only constant in lingua franca situations is diversity, then we should anchor our practices in that assumption and educate students to encounter such diversity with respect, curiosity and wisdom.»

4. Conclusions

As communication in English has proliferated around the world in both intra- and international contexts, nowadays the majority of the communicative scenarios are characterized by the hybridity of their interlocutors. Successful communication can no longer be restrained by standard linguistic forms, instead, critical cultural awareness becomes increasingly imperative for achieving high levels of intercultural competence; that is, holding the necessary skills and knowledge to evaluate each situation accordingly as well as its interlocutors, so as to adequately communicate.

It is with this in mind that this paper chose to reflect on the importance of the role of teacher education in modifying prospective teachers' perceptions on English and ELT. The study carried out helped to understand this particular group's outlook toward several relevant issues in terms of language, culture and communication, in addition to also verifying if there were any changes of opinion throughout their degrees. Although some changes were verified, opinions still continue being set according to certain traditions. Because of this, it is suggested that teacher education programs integrate specific instruction in what concerns ELF and its implications, hence fostering an awareness of the importance of developing intercultural communicative skills and stimulating communication.

Sifakis' (2007, 2009) transformative framework plays as well a fundamental role in how these notions can be implemented and integrated into teacher programs across the world. Functioning as a model that can be adapted according to each context, trainees have the opportunity to study authentic ELF discourse, read bibliography on ELF, reflect on and reconsider their own positions, reactions and opinions about ELF, tackle the preconceived views in their own teaching environments, and ultimately explore and project their role as ELF language teachers (Sifakis, 2007).

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[1] At Portuguese universities, English teacher training courses include another foreign language – French, German or Spanish. In addition, when concluding their MA degrees, trainees are qualified to teach in lower and upper secondary education, between the 7th and 12th grades. Nonetheless, trainees may go on to teach other lower educational levels (primary education, for instance) if there are no other available options.
[2] The guest lecturer invited was Professor Sávio Siqueira from Universidade Federal da Bahia (Brazil), who also works with the concept of ELF and who gave a talk on teaching materials and ELF, how these can be adapted considering today's current needs.

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