



Principles of the ‘Lingua Franca Approach’ and their Implications for Pedagogical Practice in the Iranian Context

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Abstract

The last thirty five years have created a challenging situation for Iran and its people: on the one hand, the discriminatory British and American policies towards the country have given rise to considerable bitterness; on the other, we continue to teach both British and American English. If Iranian people wish to play a more active role internationally, it is time to review our English language teaching policy, practices, and pedagogy. There are many different approaches such as EIL (English as an International Language), WE (World Englishes) and ELF (English as a Lingua Franca), which have challenged the superiority of such notions as ‘the Queen’s English’, ‘Received pronunciation’, or ‘General American’. By adopting any one of the three approaches, we can align both our teachers and our English language teaching system with the new trends in thinking and teaching. The focus of the present paper is on ELF. It is a relatively new trend, which originated in Finland in 2008 and has spread to many European and Asian countries. Increasingly, the younger generation, irrespective of country, is interested in developing social and cultural relations with other parts of the world. ELF thus deserves a more prominent position in the Iranian educational system. This paper addresses six important principles of ELF. These are based on Kirkpatrick (*The Pedagogy of English as an International Language*, 2014). The paper discusses their relevance and potential in relation to the present cultural and teaching situation in Iran, focusing on the position of the native speaker and the importance of mutual intelligibility, intercultural competence, the importance of training local multilinguals, the value of lingua franca contexts as learning environments, the difference between spoken and written English, and the adaptation to the Iranian context of assessment procedures. Our paper ends with a brief discussion of the implications for pedagogical practice of the use of the Internet, including the use of blogs, in the ELF classroom.

Keywords: ELF, ELF Principles, Elf in Iranian Context, The Internet

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Introduction

Situated in the Middle Eastern part of Asia, Iran is one of the ‘Expanding Circle’ societies as defined by the three-concentric-circle model for World Englishes (Kachru, 1982). From 1979, and as a direct result of political events, Iranian students, like Iranian people in general, have not been able to interact with other countries. However, the situation has gradually changed in the past ten years and people are increasingly eager to travel to other countries. This makes it necessary to use English, which is the only international language taught in Iranian schools. Unfortunately, as we have demonstrated elsewhere, the Iranian education system has not been entirely successful when it comes to teaching English at primary and secondary school level (Ekstam & Sarvandy, 2017). The implications of this deficiency are discussed here in relation to English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). Our discussion ends with a brief consideration of the implications for pedagogical practices of the use of the Internet in the ELF classroom in Iran, and more particularly, the advantages of the blog.

One of the most significant barriers to the improvement of raising the level of English in Iran is the strong focus on native speaker English. There is a widespread misconception that learning and knowing English are the same as speaking the language like a native speaker (this is particularly true in relation to American English, which is the most popular form of English in Iran today). People also believe that having a native speaker accent means that one is automatically a proficient speaker of English. As a result, those who are not able to imitate the native speaker accent believe that they will never be able to master English properly.

On the other hand, and very importantly for the purposes of this article, Iranians who have travelled internationally have discovered that they really do not need a native speaker accent and that they can communicate with other, non-English speakers quite adequately, if not always as easily as they would like. What implications does this realization have for the Iranian educational system? Before addressing this question, it is important to acknowledge that English is a ‘language with functional and formal variations arising from divergent sociolinguistic contexts, ranges and varieties in creativity, and various types of acculturation’ (Kachru, 1992, p. 2). These differences can be classified either as English as an International Language (EIL), World Englishes (WE), or English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). The increasingly important role of English as a Lingua Franca in Asia, and particularly with respect to Iranian people who wish to travel, requires a critical review of the Iranian English language teaching policy, practice, and pedagogy. It is important to ensure that the Iranian educational system can keep up with and satisfy the expanding language needs of its people.

The following questions are particularly important in relation to Iran’s education system and the teaching and learning of English:

1. What are the most appropriate language learning goals for Iranians?
2. Should linguistic standards be derived from idealised native speaker norms or from Asian multilinguals?

3. Should a monolingual or multilingual classroom pedagogy be adopted?
4. Whose cultural norms should be taught?
5. Whose literatures should be taught in English classes?
6. What are the implications for pedagogical practices – including the use of the Internet and the writing of blogs, in implementing ELF?

Each of these questions is addressed in the present article. We propose a new approach to the teaching of English as a Lingua Franca that will lead to more effective English language teaching and learning while at the same time promoting the international status of Asian cultures and languages. Since ELF is largely unknown in Iran, we provide an introduction to the method and its principles and consider how it is possible to incorporate these into the Iranian education system. While the principles discussed below are based on Kirkpatrick's (2014) article, they are related specifically to the Iranian situation.

Principles of the Lingua Franca Approach

Principle 1. The native speaker of English is not the linguistic target: mutual intelligibility is the goal.

In ELF English is used primarily by and between multilinguals who have learned the language as an additional language. For such users there is no need to comply with or imitate native speaker norms. The increasing use of ELF also means that more and more multilinguals who have learned English as an additional language use English internationally (Kirkpatrick, 2014, p. 25). This has resulted in a multitude of different accents and pronunciations.

In such circumstances, it is not so much whether or not one sounds like a native speaker that is important; it is mutual intelligibility that must be the primary goal. Where this is achieved, participants are able to understand each other irrespective of the type of English used. Being a native speaker is not in itself a guarantee of mutual intelligibility. Indeed, there is a growing body of research that indicates that speakers of new varieties of English can communicate even more efficiently in certain contexts than can native speakers (Smith & Rafiqzad, 1979; Kirkpatrick et al., 2008 as cited in Kirkpatrick, 2014, p. 26). Pedagogically speaking, the incorporation of a strong 'lingua franca core' into the curriculum may thus have important advantages for non-native users (Kirkpatrick, 2014, p. 26). We argue that this is certainly the case in Iran.

As Jenkins (2007) has illustrated, the lingua franca core consists of phonological features that have been shown to be particularly important in terms of intelligibility when English is used as a lingua franca. Non-standard phonological features that do not affect intelligibility are 'non-core' and do not therefore need to be an essential part of the curriculum. What the lingua franca core does is 'reduce the number of pronunciation features to be learnt', thereby reducing 'the size of the task while increasing teachability' (Jenkins, 2007). The lingua franca approach also includes the teaching of communicative strategies to negotiate meaning and to help

repair failure in communication, thereby enhancing mutual intelligibility (Kirkpatrick, 2007; Kirkpatrick, 2014). In the ELF context, what is therefore important for an ELF speaker is not, for example, to sound either British or American but to communicate adequately and comfortably with other ELF speakers. We wish to argue that in systems such as the Iranian one, where spoken English is not prioritized, the lingua franca approach has special advantages.

Removing the requirement to sound like a native speaker has a further important implication: it has been demonstrated that children are more adept at acquiring certain traits of native-like pronunciation than are adults. This is one of the reasons why it is commonly believed that the earlier a foreign language is learned, the better (Lenneberg, 1967). However, when it is accepted that native speaker pronunciation is not necessary, the primary reason for learning a foreign language as early as possible is negated (Kirkpatrick, 2014, p. 26). The major point to be stressed here is that there is no linguistic reason why ELF speakers of English should sound like, for example, an Australian or an American. It is possible, in fact, for Iranian multilinguals to express their unique identity and culture in the very way that they speak English.

This begs the question, 'where does the lingua franca approach stand in relation to the adoption of syntactic norms?' In discussing the distinction between spoken and written English, the focus in the following is on spoken English (Kirkpatrick, 2014 p. 27) - and more particularly, vernacular varieties of native speaker Englishes that are characterized by the use of non-standard forms. As Britain has pointed out in his research on vernacular varieties of British English, '[e]very corner of the country demonstrates a wide range of grammatically non-standard forms, reminding us that these are the rule rather than the exception in spoken English' (2010, p. 53). That is to say, native speakers of English routinely use a wide range of non-standard forms when they speak, and even when they write. It is thus questionable (even if it were practically possible, which is doubtful), if we should demand that non-native speakers such as Iranian nationals should use only standard forms when they speak English (ibid).

Researchers have noted that speakers of different vernacular varieties of British English share a number of non-standard forms (Breiteneder, 2009; Mauranen & Ranta, 2009 as cited in Kirkpatrick, 2014, p. 27). Interestingly, many of these also occur in the vernaculars of British English. Non-standard marking of the present tense -s, for example, is common in vernaculars of British English, even if there is some variation. This phenomenon also appears among Iranian speakers of English.

In the Asian Corpus of English (ACE; a corpus of naturally occurring spoken English as a Lingua Franca in Asia), which is currently being collected by several teams throughout Asia, non-marking of -s is more common than adding -s to plural subjects. However, it should be stressed that it is far less common than standard forms. In fact, although research into spoken ELF is still relatively new, the ACE data suggests that the use of non-standard verbal forms is less frequent than in some vernacular varieties of British English (Kirkpatrick, 2008).

The presence of these shared, non-standard syntactic forms in many vernacular varieties of native speaker Englishes, as well as in ELF, must be acknowledged and understood by all English language teachers. This is particularly true for teachers in countries such as Iran, where non-standard versions of English should be regarded as acceptable providing that mutual intelligibility can be assured. In *spoken* English (as opposed to *written* English), an insistence on standard forms should be replaced by a demand for mutual intelligibility. In the Iranian ELT curriculum, one of the main aims has been to teach students in such a way that they can ‘speak English perfectly’ (Mirhosseini & Khodakarami, 2015, p. 27).

Principle 2. The native speaker’s culture is not the cultural target: intercultural competence in relevant cultures is the real goal.

The ELF culture curriculum, which incorporates the cultures of different English-speaking countries, can be enhanced by including local literatures in English as well as texts on popular culture. There is an abundance of Asian literature written in English. Iran itself has many writers who publish in English, including Dr. Bahram Meghdadi and Dr. Behzad Ghaderi. Reading these authors not only gives the reader an insight into local cultures but also into ways in which English can be adapted to both reflect and uphold local cultural values. As will be shown below, under principle 4, ELF cultural milieus are excellent learning environments. Within such environments, local popular culture is the primary focus, and both English and local languages are represented (Lee & Moody, 2012). Students and teachers are likely to be familiar with texts that illustrate how English can be used in multilingual/multicultural ways. They can, for example, show how English and local languages can combine to reflect local and regional cultural experience. Kirkpatrick discusses this important function in some detail, arguing that:

The lingua franca curriculum can also include topics that might be considered to be culture with a lower case ‘c’. It is evident, for example, from the Asian Corpus of English that the topics that Asian multilinguals discuss are primarily concerned with Asian events and phenomena. These topics are wide-ranging and include discussions about the advantages and disadvantages of the public and private sectors in Asia, rules of Islamic finance, the qualities of different types of rice and discrimination against ethnic minorities. (Kirkpatrick et al., 2013, as cited in Kirkpatrick, 2014, p. 28)

All these topics can usefully be included in the ELF curriculum in Iran.

Principle 3. Local multilinguals, who are properly trained, provide the most appropriate English language teachers.

In Iran, as in many other countries, there have been consistent moves to provide support for non-native speakers of English to ensure that they receive adequate training. Many scholars, themselves non-native speakers of English, have demonstrated that prejudice against non-native teachers of English is a problem (Braine, 2010; Moussu & Lurda, 2008). It is a requirement of the lingua franca approach that non-native speakers of English be recruited (Kirkpatrick, 2014). Given that the language learning goal should not be to approximate native speaker norms

but ensure that learners can interact successfully with fellow multilinguals, it follows that an Asian multilingual who is proficient in English and who has the relevant qualifications is the most appropriate teacher in countries such as Iran. As explained below, being multilingual in at least one Asian language in addition to English gives teachers obvious advantages when teaching languages, especially if they speak the language(s) of their students.

First of all, such teachers will already have successfully achieved what they are setting out to teach and can thus understand the problems that their students are facing (Medgyes, 2002). Secondly, Asian multilinguals who are proficient in English and who come from the same or similar linguistic backgrounds as their students are not only good role models, they also provide the most appropriate linguistic models for their students. Local multilingual teachers who are familiar with the linguistic background of their students are, we argue, in the best position to help the latter achieve their linguistic goals.

It has traditionally been assumed that one of the greatest advantages of the native speaker teacher is that s/he can offer students a guide to the target culture (cf. Moussu & Lurda, 2008). However, as argued above, the cultures that Iranian and other expanding-circle learners need to know and understand are primarily those to be found in, for example, Asian or Persian countries. Thus, the Asian English language teacher must possess intercultural competence in regional cultures as well as be able to transmit, or at least introduce, such competence to the learners through the medium of a language that they can understand and are striving to master. We must, however, make native speaker (NS) teachers aware of the fact that while World Englishes (WEs), English as International language (EIL) and ELF paradigms are 'post-normative' (Dewey, 2011), and constitute anti-'Native-Speakerism', these paradigms are not against native speakers per se. Enlightened NS practitioners can play an important role in the transmission and formation of post-normative paradigms (D'Angelo, 2014).

Thirdly, the reason why the local multilingual is the most appropriate English language teacher for Asian students is that s/he can use the language of the students to help them learn a form of English that is not only mutually intelligible but also accessible to native speakers. A bi- or multilingual pedagogy should thus ideally be applied in the classroom. In the Iranian context, adopting a bi- or multilingual pedagogy can be more effective than adopting a strict monolingual pedagogy. The first language must be used in such a way as to help the student learn the second language. Even if the first language and English are kept separate in the classroom, it is unlikely that they will be distinct in the minds of the learners. The bilingual brain does not store the two languages in separate 'boxes' that are completely separate from each other. Rather, the two languages are in contact with and 'talk' to each other (Swain et al., 2011). It is hard to justify a monolingual pedagogy when the aim of all language learning is, by definition, to create multilinguals. One cannot, and indeed should not, deny students and teachers the right to make use of their shared linguistic resources in language learning.

Fourthly, the reason why a local multilingual is the preferred English language teacher is that an important goal of language learning is to develop the use(s) and potential of multilingualism. Multilinguals deserve respect since they have the ability to think and talk in their own language at the same time as they have a good understanding of the language and culture of English-speaking nations. The multilingual teacher is in a position to instill in his/her students a sense of respect for multilinguals and multilingualism. It is important to establish a classroom culture in which the English language learner is not judged according to native speaker norms, where students are likely to fall short of the mark; instead, the language learner must be seen to develop multilingual proficiency (Kirkpatrick, 2014). There is extensive evidence to support the idea that the student's first language can be used to promote second language learning with the aid of, for example, bilingual dictionaries or bilingual grammar; such aids can be particularly useful for those who are less proficient. If students do not understand what they are hearing (or reading) in English, they are unlikely to learn it. Furthermore, with the growth of the Internet, You-Tube, blogs, and so forth, opportunities to hear and read English outside the classroom have increased dramatically in recent years (Swain et al., 2011).

Principle 4. Lingua franca environments provide excellent learning environments for lingua franca speakers.

It is generally assumed that the best way to learn a language is to go to where the language is spoken and become immersed in it. In many cases, of course, this is true. However, in the context of Iran, sending students of English to native speaking countries may not be possible because of the current political climate. Instead, sending them to countries where English is used as a lingua franca can be a more viable alternative. Indeed, in native speaker countries, Iranian multilingual students may even feel awkward or inferior as they may assume that their English will be evaluated according to native speaker norms. This may lead to their becoming silent observers rather than active participants.

Research into the experience of international students in Anglophone centers demonstrates that multilingual backgrounds tend to be seen as problematical rather than as a resource, and students are likely to mix more easily with fellow international students than with local students (Liddicoat et al., 2003; Preece, 2011). Instead of sending students to Anglophone centers such as Great Britain or the United States, they could go to places where English is used as a lingua franca, e.g. Singapore, Korea, China, and Georgia. The great advantage of such centers for Asian learners of English is that the presence of the native speaker is less conspicuous, enabling learners to use their English without fear of being judged according to native speaker standards. At the same time as the ELF context is less threatening, students will also develop greater understanding of different Asian cultures and ELF accents. Not only will the students' English language proficiency improve but also their Asian intercultural proficiency.

Principle 5. Spoken is not the same as written.

The principles discussed above apply to the teaching and learning of English as a *spoken* language. Principle 5 is different because it draws attention to the important, if sometimes neglected fact that *written* language is not the same as spoken. The issue of the role of writing in ELF teaching is addressed briefly below.

Firstly, it should be emphasized that written English has to be consciously learned by all, including native speakers. There are no ‘native speakers’ of written English. All learners, irrespective of their linguistic background, must learn how to write. That is why some native speakers may remain more or less illiterate, or at least semi-literate, all their lives (ibid). Secondly, disciplines and genres determine the rhetorical structures and styles used. They also set the norms or standards of the written form. The norms are different for each discipline and genre. Writers of English, Iranian as well as native speakers, need to learn these norms (ibid). As the differences between the disciplines and genres are vast, becoming a skillful writer requires a great deal of practice and study. This is a challenge for native speakers but is particularly difficult for those who are writing in a second language, such as Iranians.

Secondly, different cultures adopt different rhetorical rules, which are usually determined by discipline and genre. Writing about science may, for example, be less influenced by local cultural influences than writing about philosophy. In any event, it is important to stress that intercultural competence requires an ability to write ‘interculturally’, to speak ‘interculturally’, and to accommodate and master different genres (Kirkpatrick, 2014).

Increasingly, multilingual speakers and writers of English are influencing the way in which texts in English are written, even if it must be acknowledged that the main critics in certain arenas, and particularly academic ones, are still native speakers of English. The latter are, for example, the main reviewers for prestigious journals and publishers. The standard norms for written English are not, however, solely determined by native speakers. Traditions and genres are continually developing throughout the world as new forms of writing, such as blog entries, are created, while older forms are dropping out of use. Keeping up with trends is a challenge for all, not least for those who are not part of the inner circle.

Principle 6. Assessment must be relevant to the Iranian ELF context.

There is clearly no point in adopting the five principles outlined above if one continues to assess students according to native speakers’ norms and cultures. Assessment must be clearly aligned with what is being taught. This means that Asian students need to be assessed on how successfully they can use English in *Asian* settings or indeed in other ELF contexts. This, in turn, entails developing measures of functional proficiency, i.e. measures to assess whether students are able to perform certain tasks in the language as opposed to evaluating how closely students’ English conforms to native speaker norms. When it comes to spoken English, for example, a pronunciation benchmark that only awards the top level to speakers whose accent betrays no first language influence, is precisely the type of standard that needs to be discarded if English is to be promoted in Asia. This is

particularly relevant where Asians need to take an active part in events and contexts that require a measure of English-language proficiency.

Traditional standards need to be replaced by criteria that measure how successfully students can get their messages across and perform tasks that require linguistic competence. It must be underlined that it is important that Iran develop its own methods of assessment rather than relying on general international standards. New standards for the country might include an acceptable and understandable command of English in an international context, or the ability to communicate mutually and intelligibly with other ELF users irrespective of accent. Only then can such assessment be properly linked to the aims of English language teaching programmes.

What is the role of ELF in EFL pedagogy?

The process of globalization has challenged a number of our expectations of the role of English in the world. Teachers increasingly need new ways of revisiting the language they have spent so many years learning and now find themselves teaching (Sifakis et al., 2018). As Sifakis demonstrates, ELF is a discourse that is produced in the interaction between speakers of different first languages. The full potential of ELF only becomes clear when we understand how ELF works (Sifakis, 2017). As Siqueira (2015) observes, to realise the full potential of ELF, teachers must perceive language as a social practice that governs the meeting of people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Both Sifakis and Bayyurt (2018, p. 7) argue that teachers must find their own ways to integrate ELF into their teaching context. This is achieved ‘through a continuous process of critical reflection, design, implementation and evaluation of instructional activities that reflect and localize one’s interpretation of the ELF construct’.

As Seidlhofer (2015, p. 26) points out, an understanding of ELF can encourage teachers and indicate how ‘they might use their existing textbooks’, to reinterpret, broaden and localize the materials they are using, or are familiar with. This can be achieved by ‘using the textbook as a prompt rather than a script’ (Seidlhofer, 2015, p. 26, emphasis in original).

As for the challenges associated with creating and implementing ELF-aware materials, teachers may feel insecure because the expectations of learners, parents and school boards may not be in line with ELF principles. It is thus important to raise awareness of the value and relevance of ELF to all sections of the population, not just teachers. Where technology is used to support ELF principles, there are additional challenges: some teachers may either not have the necessary equipment or feel nervous about using it. As Cavalheiro (2018) explains, teachers may fear that the equipment will not work or they have not considered its full potential because they have not received specific ICT (Information Communication Technology) training. Such fears are apparent in Iran but they must be overcome as technology enables teachers to gain access to authentic materials in a way that regular course books do not. This is not to denigrate the value of course books (see Vettorel, 2018, for example), but we must recognize that working exclusively with ‘a static pre-constructed body of material is simply out of date’ (Harmer, 2015, p. 72).

The Internet has played an essential role in the passive and active transmission of information worldwide. It has, for example, contributed to the development of many networks, allowing users to interact almost instantaneously. A variety of studies demonstrate the importance of the Internet in the English teaching classroom today (Grugorović, Chapelle & Shelley, 2013). Indeed, Warschauer (1998) argues that ‘to know English well in the present era includes knowing how to read, and communicate in electronic environments’ (p.758). Blogs, sometimes called ‘weblogs’, are a case in point. These can take the form of online journals. They are useful learning tools as they facilitate reading comprehension and learning autonomy (Ducate, Lomicka & Lord, 2008). In addition, blogs promote critical thinking and provide an authentic learning context (Noytim, 2010). As Ward (2004) points out, blogs can also reduce the stress that is often associated with face-to-face communication, where immediate response is required and where participants may feel undue pressure from their fellow participants.

Blogs, as Campbell (2003) argues, also enable students not only to keep up-to-date with their own ideas, but also update them. Such updates are immediately accessible to others. Students gain in confidence when they read others’ comments and compare them with their own.

Indeed, the Internet in general, which has become an important part of most students’ lives, has the potential to be an important source of teaching materials for use in both spoken and written English. Such materials can easily be adapted to the EFL classroom. Not only may teachers develop new materials/activities on current topics, but they might also capture their students’ interest by breaking away from more traditional approaches, which tend to be less authentic. As Ware et al. (2012) argue,

the power of digital media in the classroom stems in part from its potential to bridge in class activities with out-of-class use, to blur the lines between formal instruction and informal learning, and to validate the wide range of registers and uses of English on the global scene. (p. 77)

By developing web-related materials/activities, teachers not only create real output opportunities (written and oral), but also promote direct and indirect interpersonal communication. In addition, they help develop twenty-first century skills, including effective communication (collaboration and virtual interaction). Such materials also have an ethical and social dimension, thereby furthering social responsibility and social change (Cavalheiro, 2018).

Conclusion

This article has discussed the lingua franca approach in teaching English, presenting six principles upon which English language teaching in Iran can usefully be based in order to enable Iranian users of English to be both more confident and more active in international contexts. The lingua franca approach provides a radical departure from the traditional methods and tenets of English language teaching, where native speaker English has been preferred. This has been at the expense of other varieties of English. Most importantly, the approach suggested here takes into account that English is being used as a lingua franca in settings far removed - geographically,

politically and linguistically, from traditional Anglophone and Anglocultural centers. Native speakers of inner circle varieties of English are *not* the major actors here but Asian multilinguals such as Iranians. This means that the goal of English language learning cannot be to adhere rigidly and without question to native speaker norms but should be to communicate successfully with fellow Asian multilinguals *as well as* native speakers.

This also means that the cultures with which learners need to become familiar are not solely those associated with Anglo-based ones but also Asian. It thus follows that the most appropriate teachers are not necessarily native speakers of inner circle varieties of English, whose knowledge of non-Anglo cultures may be limited. Instead, the most appropriate teachers in such contexts are, we suggest, trained Asian multilinguals. Such teachers provide linguistic role models for their students and can act as cultural experts because they have a good understanding of their students' native culture and norms. In addition, lingua franca environments within Asia are likely to provide more cost-effective language training, a not insignificant point given the large numbers of students who need to learn English in Iran as well as in other Asian countries.

The lingua franca approach distinguishes between spoken and written English, stressing that all learners of English who must write in English must learn how to write according to carefully constructed guidelines related to the specific disciplines, genres, and cultures. Iranians must understand that they are not alone in needing to follow such guidelines.

The lingua franca approach also highlights the fundamental importance of evaluating what is being taught; summative assessments that are based on native speaker norms and cultures are not relevant within the lingua franca approach. Instead, assessment should be more functional and measure the extent to which learners are able to communicate successfully and accomplish specific tasks. This is extremely important in Iran, where promoting confidence and ability in using the English language effectively is a major challenge.

We wish to add that although the lingua franca approach presented here is based primarily on the Iranian context, we recognize that the principles discussed in the present article are also relevant to other contexts where English is used either as a lingua franca or as an international language (McKay, 2002). Iran is an important example of what can, and indeed, what needs to be done, to promote multilingualism in an increasingly multilingual world. The needs and problems are clear; they must be highlighted and addressed as part of Iran's move to promote and enrich relations with the rest of the world. The educational system has an extremely important role to play in this difficult but very necessary process.

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