



Enhancing FL Learner's Perception of Non-native English Pronunciation with a Telecollaboration Project Work

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze the change in our students' opinions towards native and non-native English and their perception of non-native speakers' pronunciation. To this end, a telecollaborative project was carried out with students from Universitat Politècnica de València (UPV), Spain, and the National Technical University of Ukraine "Igor Sikorsky" Kyiv Polytechnic Institute (KPI), Ukraine. Our students were divided into an experimental and a control group. Both groups completed two questionnaires before and after the telecollaborative project, and their progress was measured. The first questionnaire asked students about their perception of other non-native English accents (adapted from He & Li, 2009), while in the second, they assessed the accents of other international students who were non-native speakers of English (based on Bayard, Weatherall, Gallois & Pittam, 2001; and Zahn & Hopper, 1985). The results showed that students who had been in contact with other non-native speakers positively changed their perception of that variety of English. In conclusion, telecollaboration seems to be a valuable tool to develop cultural competence and avoid prejudices against non-native speakers.

Keywords: Accent Perception, Telecollaboration, Project Work, Non-native English, Global English.

RESUMEN

Este trabajo tiene como objetivo analizar la opinión de los estudiantes hacia el inglés nativo y no nativo y su percepción de la pronunciación del inglés de hablantes no nativos. Para ello, en el marco de un proyecto telecolaborativo con estudiantes de la Universitat Politècnica de València (UPV), España, y del Instituto Politécnico de Kiev "Igor Sikorsky", Ucrania, los estudiantes se dividieron en un grupo experimental y otro de control. Ambos grupos completaron dos encuestas antes y después del proyecto de telecolaboración, y se midió su progreso. En la primera encuesta se preguntaba a los estudiantes sobre su percepción de otros acentos ingleses no nativos (adaptado de He & Li, 2009). En la segunda encuesta, los estudiantes evaluaron el acento de otros estudiantes internacionales no nativos de inglés (basado en Bayard, Weatherall, Gallois & Pittam, 2001; y Zahn & Hopper, 1985). Los resultados mostraron que los estudiantes que habían estado en contacto con otros hablantes no nativos cambiaron positivamente su percepción de esa variedad de inglés. En conclusión, la telecolaboración parece ser una herramienta valiosa para desarrollar la competencia cultural y evitar los prejuicios contra los hablantes no nativos.

Palabras clave: Percepción del Acento, Telecolaboración, Trabajo por Proyectos, Inglés no Nativo, Inglés Global.

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1. Introduction

English is the most spoken language in the world, with approximately 1,121 million speakers. English is followed by Chinese (1,107 million), Hindi (534 million), Spanish (513), and French (285), these being the top five most spoken languages in the world (Simons & Charles, 2018). A feature that distinguishes English from the other most spoken languages is that non-native speakers exceed the number of native speakers. At present, there are approximately 378 million native English speakers and 743 million non-native speakers in the world (Simons & Charles, 2018). As Crystal (2003) states, English is considered the Global Language for the world, which could explain why two-thirds of its speakers are non-native.

Since English gained the status of lingua franca, new non-native varieties have emerged worldwide, and their number will likely continue to grow (McKenzie, 2018). However, in the words of He and Li (2009), the standard varieties of British and American English have been accepted and promoted until recently as the only internationally acceptable pedagogical models for English language teaching. For the last few years, however, a debate has been conducted about which variety of English should be selected as the pedagogic model: native vs. non-native or Global. Hultgren (2020) explained the two sides of this debate. On the one hand, some have highlighted positive aspects such as enabling communication between speakers with different mother tongues. In contrast, others have been more sceptical, equating the drive for native-speaker type English with linguistic imperialism or colonialism that destroys other languages and cultures. Without participating in this debate, we agree with Jenkins (2017), who suggests that English promotes multilingualism, and this fact helps people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds communicate.

From this perspective, we also agree with Medgyes (1992), who claimed that the objective of non-native speakers should not be to achieve a native speaker's competence but a near-native one based on their efforts. Although differences between native and non-native speakers of a language should be acknowledged, a language is used correctly when the speakers use grammar, lexicon, spelling, and pronunciation accurately (McCambridge & Saarinen, 2015), although the language should also be intelligible, a fact that applies to native as well as non-native speakers (Greenbaum, 1986; Smith & Rafiqzad, 1979). This idea of correctness should also be linked to the concept of communicative competence, which involves grammatical/linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, strategic and discursal competence (Hymes, 1977; Canale & Swain, 1980). Of these four sub-competencies, grammatical competence concerns the linguistic rules of a language, which include phonetics, phonology, syntax, lexicon, and semantics. However, this should not be related to the nature of the speaker's accent. Low (2015:11) explained that the accent refers to "the segmental (vowels and consonants) and suprasegmental (e.g., stress, rhythm, and intonation) features of a person's pronunciation that give rise to a particular pronunciation patterning". In addition, the accent could be defined as a "characteristic style of pronunciation determined by (or at least associated with) the speaker's regional, social, or linguistic background" (Riney, Takagi & Inutsuka, 2005: 442). In this respect, accent is a factor that affects non-native speakers as well as native ones.

With respect to the native speaker, Bloomfield (1927) described them as someone who speaks the language as a first language from a very young age. According to Chomsky (1965), a native speaker is an ideal speaker-listener who knows the language perfectly, and his or her competence is seen as indicating an intuitive knowledge of what is grammatically correct or incorrect in the language. Similarly, Paikeday (1985: 40) defined a native speaker as someone with an idea, an instinctive understanding of grammar, and who has developed the language as a child alongside other physical development. These definitions coincide with the idea that being a native speaker is an innate competence that a non-native speaker is not going to be able to achieve. It must be

acknowledged that this concept should be understood as an advantage for the native speaker, rather than discrimination against non-native speakers of a language (Hansen, Rakić & Steffens, 2014).

At this point, the definition of Widdowson (1994) explaining that a native speaker is someone who speaks 'the right variety' of the native language is an example of discrimination for the other varieties of a language, either native or non-native. This definition shows the existence of some prejudices about certain accents, i.e., those considered to be 'not the right ones' or 'not as good as' other accents. The existence of prejudices related to the perception of accents is the focal point of this research.

Based on these ideas about accent perception, the purpose of this paper is, therefore, to analyze the change in the opinions of our students', from the Universitat Politècnica de València (UPV), towards native and non-native speakers of English, as well as their perception of the language when it is used by non-native speakers of the language after they had participated in our telecollaboration project work with students from Kyiv Polytechnic Institute (KPI), Ukraine. In addition, an experimental group was also created. Both groups completed two surveys before and after the telecollaborative project, and their progress was measured. Our research question is whether participation in telecollaboration project work will change students' perception of other non-native speakers of English. On the basis of this, our two hypotheses are that (1) a telecollaboration project work based on virtual encounters can modify the participants' perception of other non-native foreign accents in a positive way, and (2) the participants will positively change their perception of other non-native English speakers, especially of those they had met previously.

2. Literature

The perception of an accent can bring either positive or negative connotations. Some people may feel that a person sounds friendly, intelligent, competent, sincere, confident, arrogant, and aggressive because of their accent (He, 2015; Heise, 1970; McKenzie, 2006). This is a consequence of the fact that some accents are considered 'better' or 'worse' than others, which can lead to the discrimination of some individuals because of the way they speak (Anchimbe; 2006; Cunha de Souza, Pereira, Camino, Souza de Lima & Rosas-Torres, 2016; Maum, 2002). According to Buss (1961), prejudice can be defined as aggression or hostility toward others because of their group. In this sense, Buss (1961) considered that the aggression could be either physical, verbal, or indirect, implying discriminatory practices. Whereas physical or verbal aggressions are quite easily recognized, indirect aggressions or discriminatory practices can be more challenging to identify. Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz, and Kaukiainen (1992) explained that indirect aggressions imply harming others through covert means using social manipulation. In addition, hostility could be understood as a cognitive tendency to view others as harmful or dissatisfying (Hidayah, Maulina, Shyahnaz & Mahrita, 2020) or as a form of perception that leads to hatred with respect to people from 'groups' outside their own (Segel-Karpas & Ayalon, 2020). This paper aims to ascertain the degree of hostility towards other varieties of non-native English of a group of university students, and determine if telecollaboration project work helps reduce it and avoid prejudices.

To start with, Cunha da Souza et al. (2016) reported some examples of discrimination and hostility towards foreign accents. They found cases of discrimination concerning how speakers with non-standard accents were disadvantaged in the workplace (Hosoda, Stone-Romero, & Walter, 2007; Huang, Fridiger, & Pearce, 2013). In addition, in a survey by the European Union (2008), 34% of the respondents believed that a job applicant could be at a disadvantage compared to an equally qualified applicant because of his or her way of speaking and principally because of his or her way of speaking or accent. In the same study, the number rose to 45% among managers who were in a position to hire. Similarly, other researchers have also found that non-standard accents

can be perceived as less competent but friendly (Bradac, 1990; Ruscher, 2001). Another example is provided by Ballard and Winke (2017), who suggested that students would like to have a 'prestigious' native accent to avoid discrimination, especially in the professional context. In the view of some researchers (Devine, 1989; Dovidio, 2001), prejudiced attitudes can manifest both consciously and unconsciously.

In contrast, however, other studies have shown that contact with other foreign speakers helps to avoid prejudices in accent perception and discrimination (Braine, 2010; Moussu, 2002; 2006). Related to this idea, the second hypothesis of this study states that developing a relationship with other non-native speakers or simply being exposed to a particular variety of non-native English would change our students' perceptions towards those speakers or that variety of non-native English. In this sense, Sifakis and Sougari (2005) claimed that familiarity with other non-native English varieties influences and promotes their acceptance. Similarly, Kirschner (2015) found that telecollaboration project work using video conferences and blogs was positive, changing the participants' perceptions of stereotypes. Therefore, if the speakers become familiar with a certain variety of the language or with the other non-native speakers of that language, their attitudes towards these speakers will be more positive (Derwing, Rossiter & Munro 2002; Kraut & Wulff 2013; Major, Fitzmaurice, Bunta, & Balasubramanian, 2005). In the same line, Buckingham (2014) found that explicit training on or with non-native accents would also improve students' perception of foreign accents. This fact supports our first hypothesis in which we suggest that telecollaboration project work can positively modify the participants' perception of other non-native foreign accents.

Telecollaboration is a form of virtual exchange, most typically used in foreign language teaching (O'Dowd, 2018), which can be defined as an activity of online mobility that follows similar rules as a physical mobility (Scherer-Bassani & Buchem, 2019). Bueno-Alastuey (2013) suggested that telecollaboration is a suitable approach in foreign language learning because it encourages its participants to have multiple encounters with other participants whose first language is different from their own. Thus, their shared interest in communicating with a foreign language should help them achieve their learning goals (O'Rourke, 2005). Furthermore, telecollaboration is based on continuous meaning negotiation, highly recommended within the foreign language classroom (Ellis, 2003). In this sense, telecollaboration seems to be beneficial in different ways. For example, it has been reported to help develop and extend lexicon, grammar, and pronunciation (Bueno-Alastuey, 2011; Guth & Marini-Maio, 2010), language fluency, and confidence in using the foreign language (Polisca, 2011; Tian & Wang, 2010). Besides, raising learners' motivation (Jauregi & Bañados, 2008) and developing digital competence (Cunningham & Vyatkinina, 2012) and intercultural competence (Helm & Guth, 2010) have also been reported as benefits. Dooly (2017) sees telecollaboration in the foreign language classroom as a valuable approach since it engages students in multiple interactions through teaching based on tasks, project-based learning, and language teaching based on communication methodologies.

The work of Newton (2016) in this theoretical framework should also be acknowledged. According to this author, telecollaboration with participants from other countries where the target language is different from their mother tongues will inevitably lead to comparisons and connections as the students explore and share their cultures while working collaboratively. As a result, this exploration is beneficial for the students because it promotes an inner sense of the equality of the cultures, and understanding and positive interest in the other culture, concerning similarities and differences, as also suggested by Tomlinson, 2001. Newton (2016) explains that this comparison between self-culture and the other culture is not the real purpose, but a positive reason, for connect the participants. The real purpose is to create a 'third place', an intercultural position where students can negotiate differences and interact comfortably across cultures (Kramsch, 1993). This competence will allow the learners to understand the other culture accurately and help prevent cross-cultural and linguistic prejudices. This

multicultural practice implies that language learners could become ‘intercultural speakers’, a condition that implies the ability to communicate and interact across cultures (Byram, 2006). In this sense, the development of cross-cultural competence through meeting other non-native speakers should promote the acceptance of other non-native accents of any language and avoid any prejudices about them.

3. Method

This project was carried out in the fall term of 2021/22, lasting for ten weeks, from 1 October 2021 to 3 December 2021. Although students were not given a set number of hours that they should work on this project, we expected each student to spend approximately 15 hours on it. A total of 52 students from Universitat Politècnica de València (Spain) voluntarily agreed to participate in this experiment. The experimental group was formed of 27 students who participated in the project work, whereas the other 25 students were used as the control group, and followed the regular classes. These students were aged between 19 and 22 years old, and all of them were Spanish. They were students of Industrial Engineering, taking the subject of English B2 (6 ECTS). Participation in this project was validated as having completed certain obligatory activities in this subject, representing 1.5 ECTS (15 hours of work).

In contrast, the control group followed the subject guidelines and completed the obligatory activities, not participating in the telecollaboration project, but completing language activities in a computing laboratory. In addition, 26 Ukrainian students from the National Technical University of Ukraine “Igor Sikorsky” Kyiv Polytechnic Institute (KPI) participated in our experiments and worked together with the experimental group; however, they were not considered for our research. The Ukrainian students were also taking a class of English B2, and they were also students of Industrial Engineering. The participants in the experimental group were divided into 12 groups of 4 students (2 Spanish, 2 Ukrainians) and 1 group of 5 (3 Spanish, 2 Ukrainian).

The implementation of this project started with an agreement of telecollaboration between the two universities. The guidelines were created, and the two institutions agreed to participate, with approximately 25 students from each institution. First, both the experimental and control groups completed an online survey about native and non-native English (adapted from He & Li, 2009, see Table 1) which asked about their opinions on the supremacy of British and American English in in-class materials (question 1), who should teach English as a foreign language (questions 2, 3, 4), their preference for either sounding like a native speaker or showing their accent and depicting their nationality, (questions 5, 6), the status of the standard variety of English (questions 7, 10), and their opinions on the teachers’ need to communicate in English with others (questions 8, 9). Responses were assessed using a Likert Scale 1-5, ranging from completely disagree (1) to completely agree (5).

Q.1	British English and American English are the major varieties of English used in our textbooks.
Q.2	College English should be taught by local non-native teachers (French teachers teaching English in France).
Q.3	College English should be taught by native speakers.
Q.4	College English should be taught by both native speakers and local non-native teachers.
Q.5	When I speak English, I want to sound like a native speaker.
Q.6	When I speak English, I want my nationality to be clearly identified.
Q.7	The non-native speakers can also speak Standard English.
Q.8	Most non-native teachers need English to communicate mainly with native English speakers.
Q.9	Most non-native teachers need English to communicate mainly with other non-native English speakers.
Q.10	There are many standard Englishes.

Table 1. Survey 1: Participants’ opinions about native and non-native English accents.

Next, the students from the experimental group and the Ukrainian students recorded a video introducing themselves in one minute. Then, all the participants were assigned videos from other students, which they had to watch, and then complete a survey based on the performances of the person in the video. The experimental group watched four videos, two from students they would later meet and two from students who would remain unknown to them during the implementation of the project. In the case of the control group, they had to watch two videos of students introducing themselves who remained unknown to them. In the survey, the participants had to assess the accent of the international students from the videos who were non-native of English. This survey was based on and adapted from Bayard, Weatherall, Gallois, and Pittam (2001) and Zahn and Hopper (1985). This survey (see Table 2) focused on the understanding of the message (questions 1, 2, 3, 4) and the viewer's perception of the video maker's language regarding social attractiveness (questions 5, 6), status (questions 7, 8), and competence (questions 9, 10). After the project started, the participants from the experimental group met two of the students whose videos they had previously in online encounters where another two unknown students also participated. Responses were assessed with a Likert Scale 1-5, ranging from completely disagree (1) to completely agree (5).

Q.1	I fully understand the speaker
Q.2	His/her English is accurate
Q.3	His/her English is fluent
Q.4	His/her accent is correct
Q.5	The speaker sounds pleasant
Q.6	The speaker sounds sophisticated
Q.7	The speaker sounds honest
Q.8	The speaker sounds credible
Q.9	The speaker sounds hardworking
Q.10	The speaker sounds competent

Table 2. Survey 2: The assessment of other participants' accents in English.

After completing these initial questionnaires, the main task started, and students were required to work in groups. The main task was to create an original video talking about the differences between the two countries. The length of the video had to be between 4 and 5 minutes. The participants could use different video editing tools (e.g., TikTok). In addition, the group needed to hold at least three recorded meetings in which they discussed differences between Spain and Ukraine and negotiated the creation of their video. The group members chose the topics, but they had to be related to their professional or educational interests. After creating their videos, the group members had to meet again to assess the work of another group.

The last stage of this project was the repetition of the two initial questionnaires. In both cases, our goal was to see how their interaction with other international students had modified their perception of non-native English speakers and their accents. The first survey aimed to analyse our students' perceptions of other non-native English speakers and their perception of the English language when spoken by non-native speakers before and after participating in a telecollaborative project. The purpose of the second survey was to see how the participants' perception of other foreign English accents would change, considering non-native speakers whom they had previously met and the students who had not met during the project. Students from the experimental group had to watch two introduction videos from the students of their group and two videos from other students who they had not met. The control group only watched two introduction videos from students who had never met. In both cases, the participants in this survey assessed the same students in both the pre-test and the post-test.

In order to assess their performance on this project, students were informed about their assessment beforehand. The initial presentation and the completion of the pre-test was 10% of their mark. Attendance at the online group meetings accounted for another 10%. Their group videos were assessed by both the teacher (50%) and another anonymous group of students from the project (20%). and finally, completion of the post-test was 10% of the final mark.

Regarding the tools used to complete this project, students were grouped in Google Classroom. This platform permitted students from two different institutions to work together and each group had access to a cloud folder in Google Drive where they could store their files (e.g., videos and audios) and different Office tools (e.g., Word). Google also enabled the videoconference software Meet to be used to record their meetings, although the use of other videoconference software such as Skype or Zoom was also accepted. Students were free to decide how to create their videos; however, we recommended using the application TikTok. The platform Google Forms was used to create and administer the questionnaires.

4. Results

This section introduces the results obtained in our experiment. It has been divided into two parts, and each shows the results from one of the two questionnaires in which our students participated. Firstly, results from the first survey about participants' opinions about native and non-native English accents are presented in table 3, and are also commented on individually throughout this section. The results showed that participation in the telecollaborative project changed students' opinions about native and non-native English accents in general. In this sense, they showed more acceptance towards non-native English varieties. Table 3 shows the mean results, and also the number of students who selected each option in the questionnaire (1-5). The second survey focuses on the students' assessment of other participants' accents in English with the results compiled in table 4.

EXPERIMENTAL GROUP (27)													% Var. Pre-Post
PRE-TEST							POST-TEST						
Q	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	
Q.1	0.00	7.41	14.81	37.04	40.74	4.11	0.00	3.70	7.41	37.04	51.85	4.37	6.33
Q.2	3.70	25.93	48.15	22.22	0.00	2.89	0.00	25.93	40.74	25.93	7.41	3.15	9.00
Q.3	0.00	3.70	40.74	37.04	18.52	3.70	3.70	7.41	44.44	25.93	18.52	3.48	-5.95
Q.4	0.00	7.41	29.63	18.52	44.44	4.00	0.00	0.00	25.93	37.04	37.04	4.11	2.75
Q.5	0.00	11.11	14.81	48.15	25.93	3.89	0.00	14.81	22.22	37.04	25.93	3.74	-3.86
Q.6	3.70	48.15	29.63	18.52	0.00	2.63	14.81	22.22	37.04	18.52	7.41	2.81	6.84
Q.7	0.00	7.41	11.11	59.26	22.22	3.96	0.00	0.00	7.41	62.96	29.63	4.22	6.57
Q.8	0.00	3.70	25.93	48.15	22.22	3.89	3.70	3.70	18.52	48.15	25.93	3.89	0.00
Q.9	0.00	22.22	29.63	37.04	11.11	3.37	0.00	18.52	33.33	37.04	11.11	3.41	1.19
Q.10	0.00	0.00	48.15	40.74	11.11	3.63	3.70	7.41	44.44	33.33	11.11	3.41	-6.06

CONTROL GROUP (25)													% Var. Pre-Post
PRE-TEST							POST-TEST						
Q	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	
Q.1	4.00	4.00	8.00	44.00	40.00	4.12	4.00	4.00	4.00	48.00	40.00	4.16	0,97
Q.2	0.00	36.00	48.00	8.00	8.00	2.88	0.00	40.00	44.00	8.00	8.00	2.84	-1,39
Q.3	0.00	12.00	28.00	56.00	4.00	3.52	8.00	4.00	28.00	48.00	12.00	3.52	0,00
Q.4	0.00	0.00	40.00	36.00	24.00	3.84	0.00	0.00	48.00	16.00	36.00	3.88	1,04
Q.5	0.00	4.00	24.00	40.00	32.00	4.00	0.00	8.00	16.00	40.00	36.00	4.04	1,00
Q.6	4.00	60.00	24.00	12.00	0.00	2.44	8.00	56.00	24.00	12.00	0.00	2.40	-1,64
Q.7	0.00	0.00	8.00	60.00	32.00	4.24	0.00	0.00	8.00	56.00	36.00	4.28	0,94
Q.8	8.00	12.00	16.00	56.00	8.00	3.44	8.00	12.00	24.00	44.00	12.00	3.40	-1,16
Q.9	8.00	20.00	28.00	44.00	0.00	3.08	16.00	8.00	32.00	40.00	4.00	3.08	0,00
Q.10	0.00	16.00	36.00	40.00	8.00	3.40	0.00	24.00	20.00	44.00	12.00	3.44	1,18

Table 3. Results from survey 1: Participants' opinions about native and non-native English.

On the first question, 'British English and American English are the predominant varieties of English used in our textbooks', results in the post-test showed that the students from the experimental group changed their opinion by 6.33% to support this idea. The results show that most students had agreed or completely agreed with this statement before the project, and their opinions changed from 4.11 to 4.37 in the post-test. On the other hand, results among the control group were similar, and these barely changed in the post-test (0.97%). It appears, then, that participation in the project made students more conscious of the origin of their material in class. As can be observed, 88.89% of the participants from the experimental group agreed or completely agreed with this statement, whereas 88% of the participants from the control group marked the same options in the post-test. These results suggest that students are influenced by materials designed by native speakers of the language, as He and Li (2009) stated. According to these authors, the standard British and American English varieties have been accepted and promoted until recently as the only internationally acceptable pedagogical models for English language teaching.

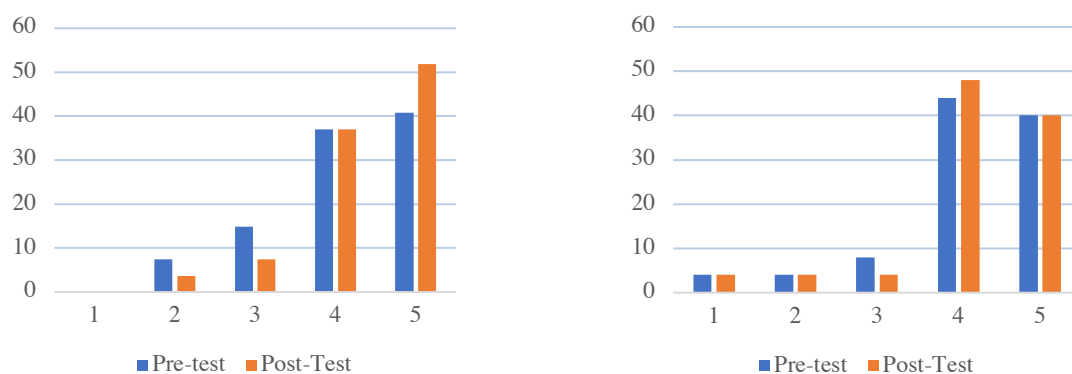


Figure 1. Q1: British English and American English are the major varieties of English used in our textbooks. Results from survey 1: Participants' opinions about native and non-native English.

The second, third, and fourth questions asked the students who should teach English as a foreign language. In this scenario, students responded about their preference towards native, non-native teachers, or both. As observed in figure 2, most students showed a neutral position or disagreement about whether a non-native teacher should teach the target language. Among the experimental group, 25.93% disagreed with this possibility, 40.74% remained neutral, and 33.34% agreed or completely agreed in their post-test. On the other hand, the control group was more sceptical, and 40% of the respondents disagreed, 44% remained neutral, and only 16% agreed or completely agreed in their post-test. Thus there were no relevant changes within the control group for this question (Q2: -1.39%) while in the experimental group, their opinions on who should teach a foreign language varied, and their preference for a non-native teacher increased by 9.00%. Complementary to this, question 3 focused on asking participants about native teachers. As shown in figure 3, more students agreed with this option. The results in the post-test showed that 11.11% disagreed with this possibility within the experimental group, 44.44% remained neutral, and 44.45% agreed. Among the control group, 12% rejected this possibility, 28% were neutral, and 60% agreed or completely agreed. We also observed no changes of preference between the pre-test and the post-test among the control group (0%), but the preference for a native teacher decreased by 5.95% among the experimental group.

Finally with respect to the teacher, the possibility that both native and non-native teachers collaborated was also considered (see figure 4). The responses were quite positive in both groups, with a percentage of agreement of

74.08% for the experimental group and 60% for the control group in the pre-test. Changes after the project were insignificant for the control group (1.04%) and a small change for the experimental group (2.75%). These results suggest that the influence of the project work slightly changed students' views on who should teach a foreign language after they met the other students speaking English with a foreign non-native accent.

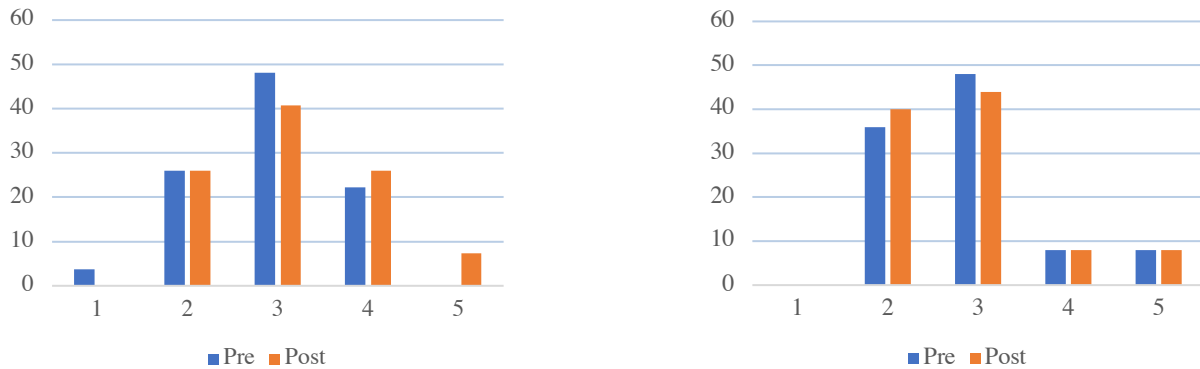


Figure 2. Q2: College English should be taught by local non-native teachers.

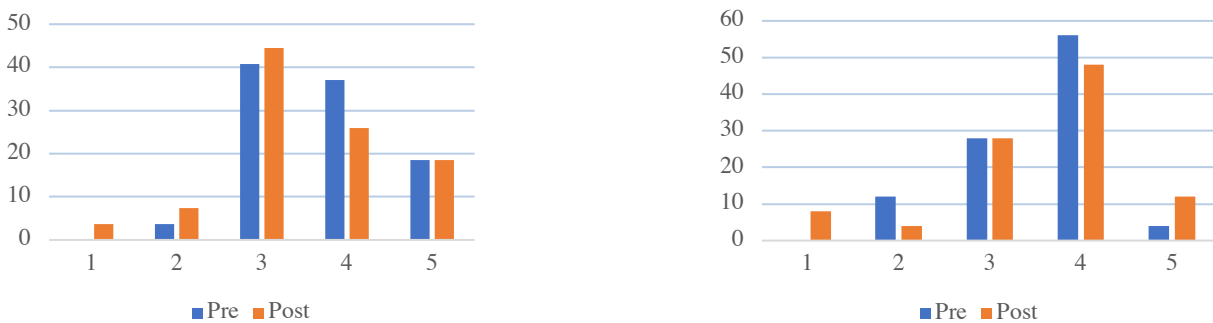


Figure 3.

Q3. College English should be taught by native speakers.

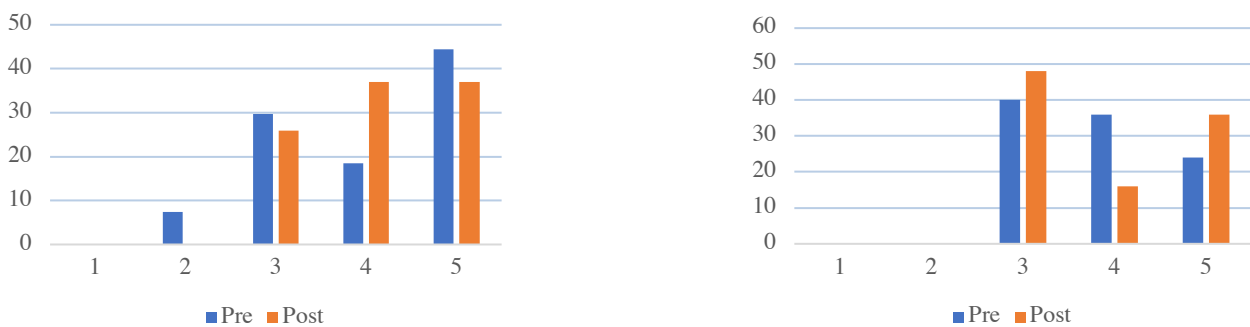


Figure 4. Q4: College English should be taught by native speakers and local non-native teachers.

Questions five and six concerned the participants' opinions on whether they preferred to sound like a native speaker or if they preferred to show their accent and depict their nationality. On the question of whether participants wanted to sound like native speakers, the results showed that the percentage of students agreeing with this from the experimental group changed from 74.08 in the pre-test to 62.97% in the post-test. Among the control group, 72% of the respondents showed agreement in the pre-test and 76% in the post-test. In general, we can see that while changes within the control group were less significant (1%), the participants in the project

reduced their desire to sound like a native speaker by 3.86%. On question 6 about showing the speakers' nationality through their accents, figure 6 shows that 51.85% of the respondents from the experimental group showed disagreement in the pre-test and 37.03% in the post-test. In this sense, the degree of agreement rose from 18.52% to 25.93% within the experimental group, and no changes were evidenced within the control group on this aspect. We could also observe that the percent variation between the pre and post-tests was 6.84% within the experimental group, whereas the variation within the control group was -1.64%. These results might be related with the first question that 'British English and American English are the major varieties of English used in our textbooks' in the sense that students are generally influenced by the prejudice that the only correct English language is the one with a native accent. This telecollaborative project may have changed their thoughts on this topic after meeting and working together in English with other foreign non-native speakers of the language.

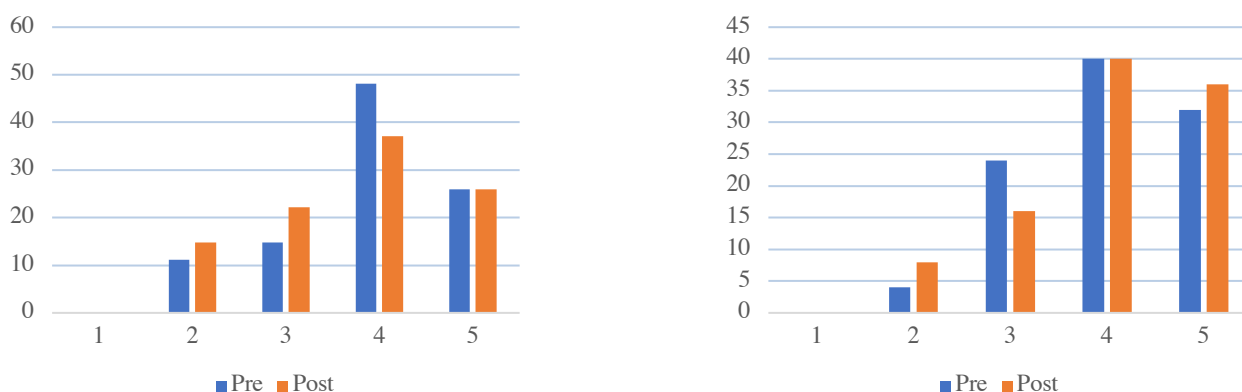


Figure 5. Q5: When I speak English, I want to sound like a native speaker.

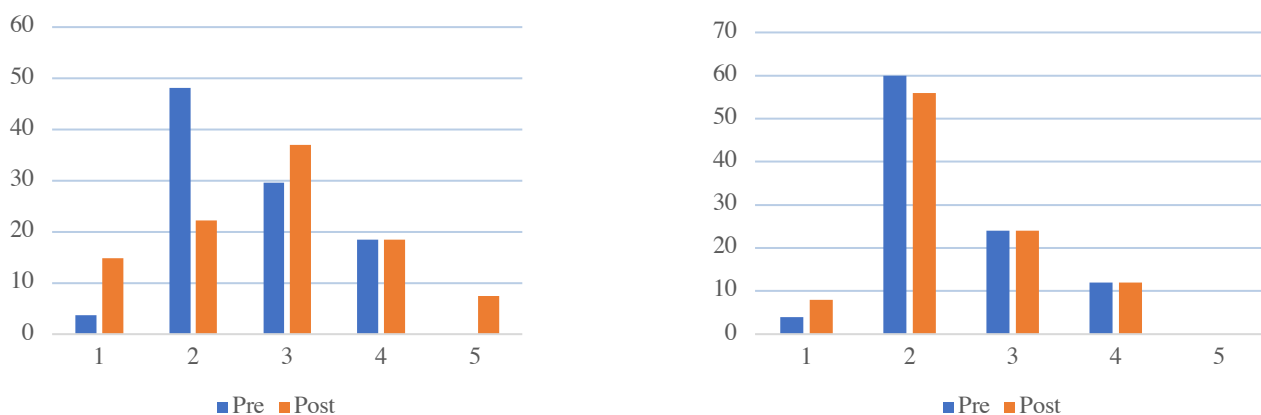


Figure 6. Q6. When I speak English, I want my nationality to be clearly identified.

Questions seven and ten focused on the participants' perceptions of the status of Standard English. The results showed that agreement with the statement 'the non-native speakers can also speak Standard English' was 81.46% among the experimental group in the pre-test and 92.59% in the post-test. Concerning the control group, 92% of the respondent of this group showed agreement in both tests. In this respect, we found that changes within the experimental group were more significant than with the control group according to the results in our test. The experimental group increased their degree of acceptance on the idea that non-native speakers can also speak Standard English by 6.57%. On question 10 about the existence of many standard *Englishes*, fewer students from the experimental group showed agreement in the post-test than in the pre-test. As observed, 51.85% of these respondents in the pre-test showed agreement, and this percentage was reduced to 44.44% in

the post-test. In general, the variation between the pre and post decreased by 6.06%. We believe that this result could support the idea that students understand Standard English as the standard variety of English spoken by the native speakers, whereas Global English is the standard variety of English spoken by the non-native speakers.

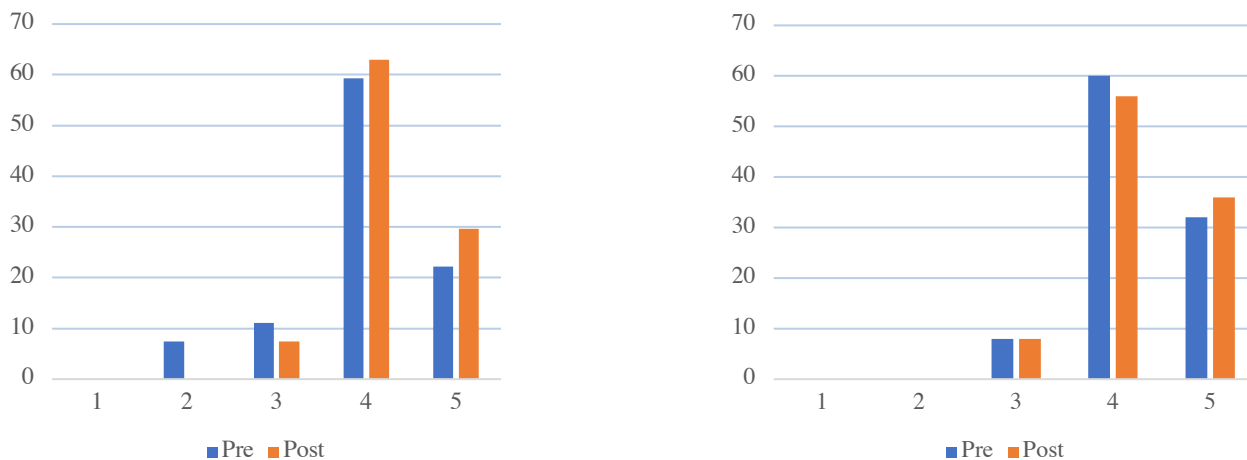


Figure 7. Q7. The non-native speakers can also speak Standard English.

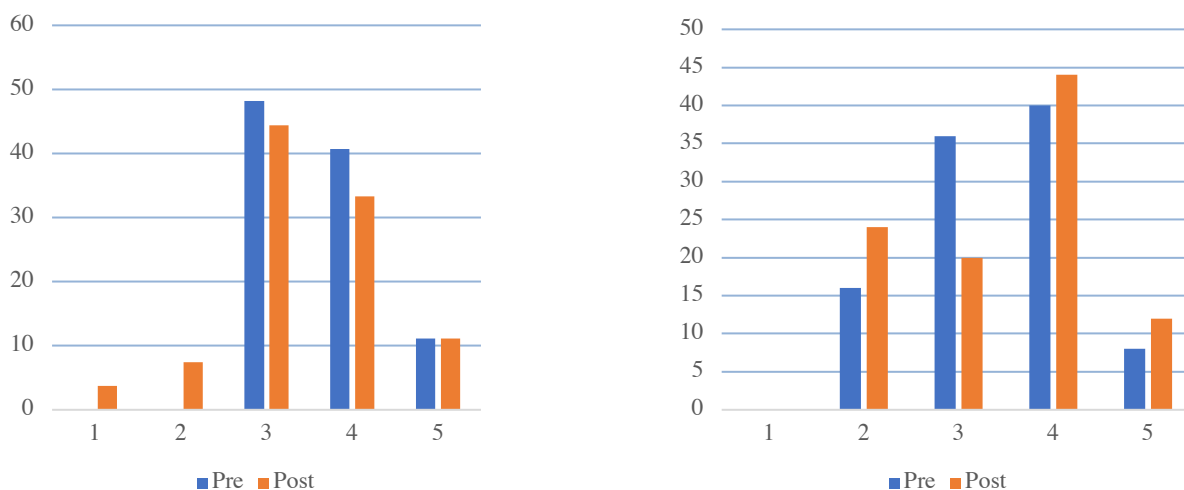


Figure 8. Q10. There are many standard Englishes.

Questions eight and nine asked the participants about their opinions on the teachers' need to communicate in English with others. In this case, the opinions of both the experimental group (Q8: 0%; Q9: 1.19%) and the experimental group (Q8: -1.16%; Q9: 0%) did not vary greatly. On their opinions about question 8, the results show that 70.37% of the respondents from the experimental group showed agreement in the pre-test, whereas this percentage rose to 74.08% in the post-test. Among the control group, the percentage of acceptance was 64% in the pre-test and 56% in the post-test. On question 9, the percentage of acceptance among the experimental group in the pre-test was 48.15%, and it remained the same in the post-test. The percentage of acceptance among the control group was also similar (44%), and this result did not change in the post-test.

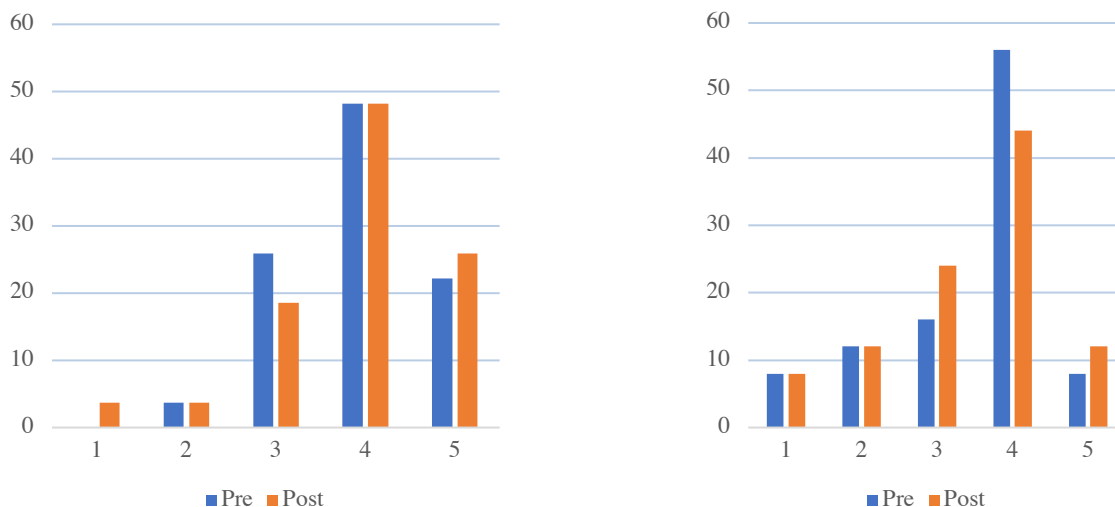


Figure 9. Q8: Most non-native teachers need English to communicate mainly with native English speakers.

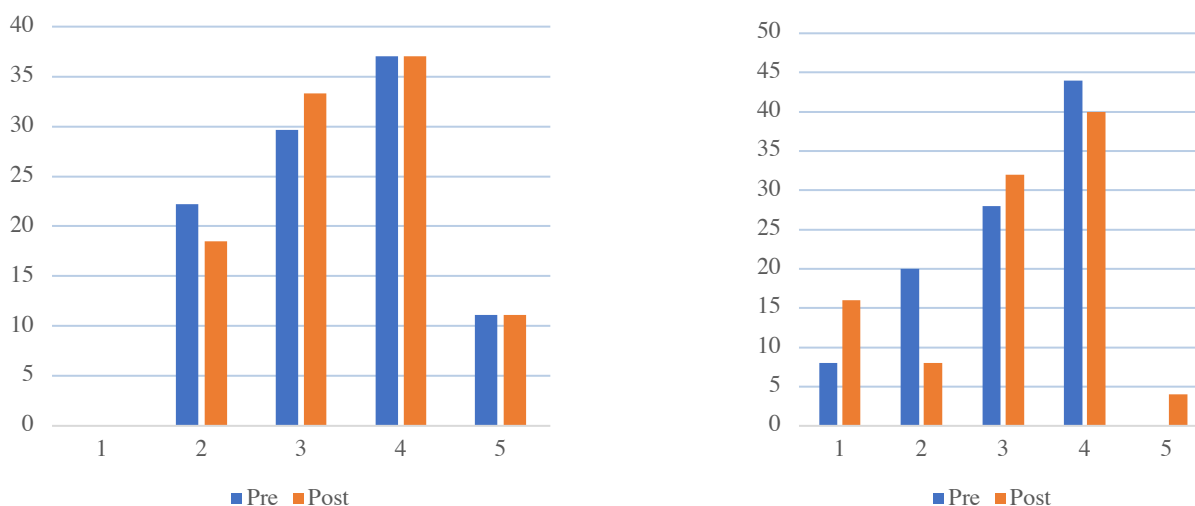


Figure 10. Q9: Most non-native teachers need English to communicate mainly with other non-native English speakers.

The second part of our experiment concerned the change of attitudes towards the accent of non-native speakers of English, specifically a group of Ukrainian students. As can be seen in Table 4, the variation between the pre-test and post-test was lowest in the control group, who had not interacted with students from Ukraine. The general variation was 0.01%, almost inexistent, in this case. Among the students who participated in the telecollaborative project, the results show that the percent variation between the pre-test and the post-test was higher if the respondents met the other speakers (3.01%). If the students had not met the speakers, the pre and post-test variation was lower than for the students they had met but was higher than the results of the control group.

	Students who they meet online						Students who they do not meet		
	Control PRE	Control POST	V%	UP PRE	UP POST	V%	UP PRE	UP POST	V%
I fully understand the speaker	3.70	3.66	-1.08	4.13	4.16	0.73	4.22	4.3	1.90
His/her English is accurate	3.66	3.6	-1.64	3.89	3.97	2.06	4.00	4.17	4.25
His/her English is fluent	3.72	3.75	0.81	3.96	4.02	1.52	3.89	4.13	6.17
His/her accent is correct	3.50	3.57	2.00	3.88	4.03	3.87	3.91	4.11	5.12
Mean 1	3.65	3.65	0.00	3.97	4.05	2.02	4.01	4.18	4.31
The speaker sounds pleasant	3.44	3.51	2.03	3.83	4.01	4.70	3.89	4.13	6.17
The speaker sounds sophisticated	3.25	3.22	-0.92	3.59	3.81	6.13	3.72	3.9	4.84
Mean 2	3.35	3.37	0.60	3.71	3.91	5.39	3.81	4.02	5.52
The speaker sounds honest	4.01	3.92	-2.24	4.24	4.14	-2.36	4.46	4.3	-3.59
The speaker sounds credible	3.94	3.9	-1.02	4.13	4.16	0.73	4.35	4.4	1.15
Mean 3	3.98	3.91	-1.64	4.19	4.15	-0.84	4.41	4.35	-1.25
The speaker sounds hardworking	3.75	3.81	1.60	3.89	3.98	2.31	3.91	4.02	2.81
The speaker sounds competent	3.76	3.78	0.53	4.04	3.98	-1.49	4.02	4.07	1.24
Mean 4	3.76	3.80	1.07	3.97	3.98	0.38	3.97	4.05	2.02
Global Mean	3.67	3.67	0.01	3.96	4.03	1.82	4.04	4.15	3.01

Table 4. Assessment of other participants' accent in English.

This analysis was divided into four categories: (1) understanding of the message; and perception of the language regarding (2) social attractiveness, (3) status, and (4) competence. Regarding the understanding of the message, the mean percentage variation of this category was zero among the control group. The variation within the experimental group was 2.02% for the students who remained unknown and 4.31% for the students who had been met. In the category of social attractiveness, the students who participated in the project showed a higher acceptance towards the non-native variety of English compared to the control group (0.60%). The difference in this category between the students they had previously met (5.52%) and those who remained unknown (5.39%) was very close. The third category provided negative results; in this case, maintaining contact with non-native speakers did not change the status of the speakers, and the respondent did not feel that they sounded more honest or credible in the post-test. Similarly, the results on the perception of competence did not vary considerably. In this case, the result changed by 1.07% in the control group; this percentage was slightly higher than the group of students who had remained unknown to the experimental group (0.38%). The assessment for the students from the experimental group who had previously met had slightly higher variation (2.02%).

5. Discussion

As English has gained the status of Lingua Franca or Global Language, it seems inevitable that non-native varieties of the language have emerged. The reality is that the number of non-native speakers of no other language in the world is double that of the number of native speakers (Simons & Charles, 2018). Although languages have historically been associated with the people from a specific location and their culture, this is not the case for the English language, and it thus makes this case particularly worthy of study. The point is that the people and their culture make a language evolve; in the case of English, it is used by people all around the globe for professional, academic, and even daily issues. As a result, such diverse influences will have multiple effects on the language.

There has been a long-term discussion on whether the non-native forms of English should be accepted as varieties of the language. Beyond this debate, the truth is that people's prejudices towards non-native English

have been found in previous research (Widdowson, 1994). The fact that a language is correctly or incorrectly used should be determined by intelligibility (Greenbaum, 1986) and the use of accurate grammar, lexicon, spelling, and pronunciation, regardless of accent (McCambridge & Saarinen, 2015). In this sense, if accent was considered to determine the correctness of a language, it would be necessary to choose one variety as the correct one as there is a wide range of diverse native accents within the UK, the US, Australia, Ireland, Canada, Jamaica, and Barbados, among other countries where English is spoken as a first language.

This paper aimed to analyze the change in our students' opinion towards native and non-native English and their perception of the language when non-native speakers speak it. Our research question was whether participation in telecollaboration project work could change students' perception of other non-native speakers of English. As an initial response, we hypothesized that participation in a telecollaborative project with virtual encounters would (1) modify the participants' perception of other non-native foreign accents in a positive way, and (2) positively change their perception of other non-native English speakers, especially of those they met in the course of the project.

We have found that the first hypothesis was validated, based on our results. To this end, a survey adapted from He and Li (2009) was used. The results showed a positive change in the opinion and perception of students' towards native and non-native varieties of English. Firstly, students became more aware of differences between native and non-native varieties. Secondly, even though the opinion was relatively neutral for both the control and the experimental group in terms of their preference towards native or non-native teachers, the results showed that the preference towards non-native teachers increased among the experimental group, whereas that for a native teacher decreased. And thirdly, students who participated in the project also changed their views towards their desire to sound like a native speaker, with some participants possibly losing their distaste or anxiety towards their non-native accent and preferring to defend their own accents, thus more clearly depicting their nationalities.

Regarding the second part of this research, our second hypothesis also seemed to be supported in that participants in the telecollaborative project assessed the other non-native speakers more positively than the control group did. In addition, the idea of familiarity (Sifakis & Sougari, 2005) was also present in the sense that the other non-native speakers whom students had met during the time of the project were given higher grades in the assessment questionnaires than those who remained unknown to them. However, our test was divided into four categories, and the results for the categories were different. In this sense, while what was explained above was true for the block relating to language accuracy, there were some differences with the other three blocks.

On the one hand, social attractiveness was the item that had a stronger influence on the participants. In this sense, the difference between the change in perception between the experimental and the control group was significant. However, there was no notable difference in terms of the experimental group's evaluation of other non-native students they had met and those who remained unknown. These results suggest that the sense of social attractiveness is influenced by listening to a concrete variety of non-native English, not only by concrete individuals. On the other hand, the results regarding status and competence did not differ to any great extent between the experimental and control group, nor on the basis of whether participants had met during the project or not.

These findings suggest that participation in telecollaboration project work changed our participants' perception of other non-native speakers of English in a positive way. It helped the participants connect remotely with other non-native students, as suggested by Buckingham (2014), Kirschner (2015), and Dooly (2007). As a result, the attractiveness of or acceptance towards another variety of non-native English was enhanced. The participants also seemed to accept that their non-native accents should not be a barrier to communication and did not suffer

from any feeling of inferiority towards native speakers. In this sense, telecollaboration with other non-native English speakers helped the participants get involved with people from a different culture; and they also had the opportunity to communicate with people whose accent in English is different from their own and different from native speakers. As a result, we intuit that our participants realized that their communication was effective when communicating with other individuals in English, and they gained confidence in using the language (Polisca, 2011; Tian & Wang, 2010), and even when they committed grammatical, lexical, spelling, or pronunciation mistakes they should see them as part of the normal process of learning, or at least in a positive way (Derwing, Rossiter & Munro 2002; Kraut & Wulff 2013). All in all, even though it was not directly tested, project work with telecollaboration seemed to have raised learners' motivation (Jauregi and Bañados, 2008), and this probably had a positive effect on the development of intercultural competence (Helm & Guth, 2010), which affected the perception of non-native accents.

6. Conclusion

This research has shown how telecollaboration project work between two institutions whose students were non-native speakers of English and with different mother tongues has helped to change students' opinions towards both native and non-native varieties and their speakers, including the perception of their own accents. To this end, an experiment was conducted with students from Universitat Politècnica de València (Spain), who participated in a telecollaborative project with students from the National Technical University of Ukraine "Igor Sikorsky" Kyiv Polytechnic Institute (Ukraine). As previously explained, the students who had been in contact with other non-native speakers positively changed their perception of another variety of non-standard English.

Our findings in this research have been that telecollaboration in this scenario promoted more acceptance towards non-native varieties of English and towards non-native teachers of English. It also helped students to rid themselves of their complexes towards their own non-native accent, and the participants learned to distinguish between or become more aware of both native and non-native varieties of English. In addition, the perception of non-native accents with respect to their accuracy and social attractiveness was positively perceived by the participants in the project. However, no significant changes were found regarding changing the perception of status and competence among non-native speakers.

Regarding limitations and further research, we believe that implementing a more extended telecollaborative project in which the students had an increased number of hours in contact, could provide different results. The participants would likely continue developing their intercultural skills and familiarity with the target culture and the individuals with whom they had contact. In the same way, a group with more participants would have probably offered more reliable and generalisable results. In further research, a focus on other aspects related to the development of intercultural skills would be of interest, and it would also be complementary to this research. In conclusion, telecollaboration project work seems to be a valuable resource to develop cultural competence and avoid prejudices against non-native speakers.

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