ENGLISH AS AN INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE AT UNITED WORLD COLLEGE EAST AFRICA: ATTITUDES TO NATIVE AND OUTGROUP ACCENTS: QUALITATIVE METHOD

MARTA NOWACKA
University of Rzeszów, Poland
mnowacka@ur.edu.pl

ANTONI NOWACKI
Bucknell University, Lewisburg, PA, USA (student)
ann005@bucknell.edu

Abstract
This paper presents qualitative results on attitudes to English as an International Language (EIL) at a multicultural, highly diversified community of United World College East Africa, Tanzania, Moshi campus. The results reveal that nearly half of the respondents admit to preferring one native variety of English, with most of the outgroup participants expressing the wish to speak with a British or American accent. The most common ways of adjusting speaking for the benefit of communicative partners are paraphrasing, repetition and slowing down. Vietnamese, Asian English in general, and Irish turn out to be the most difficult accents to comprehend. Pronunciation is the most frequent reason for incomprehensibility. Among the ways of adjusting to accents, listening carefully and immersion are the most often used.

Key words: EIL, UWC, native accents, outgroup accents, qualitative method

1. Introduction

1.1. English as an International Language and Lingua Franca Core

This paper discusses qualitative results regarding English as an International Language (*henceforth* EIL) and attitudes to accents at United World College East Africa, Tanzania, Moshi campus. It is a school with English medium instruction, a name given by Smit (2023: 499) to "any form of formal education in which teaching is carried out in English."

As observed in literature – for example by Marlina (2018), Selvi and Galloway (2025) – there is a wide array of terms, such as English as an International Language (EIL), English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and World Englishes (WE) or Global Englishes (GE), all of which relate to the same phenomenon of teaching English as a pluricentric language for use with outgroup rather than native users of English. Selvi, Galloway and Rose (2024:2) define a paradigm of GE as:

> a pluricentric orientation to language standards and linguistic repertoires, heightened ethnolinguistic, sociocultural, and pragmatic sensitivity, and translingual strategies for effective communication in contexts and communicative situations characterized by flexibility, hybridity, fluidity, and creativity in an ever-increasing globalized and translingual world.

Although for the purpose of this paper the term EIL has been chosen, it should be regarded as synonymous with what other authors refer to as ELF, WE or GE.

Jenkins (2009: 201) gives a description of the main characteristics of EFL/EIL speech, comparing it with English as a Native Language (ENL):

> ELF, like ENL, involves a good deal of local variation as well as substantial potential for accommodation – the scope for its users to adjust their speech in order to make it more intelligible and appropriate for their specific interlocutor(s). This can involve, for example, code-switching, repetition, echoing of items that would be considered errors in ENL, the avoidance of local idiomatic language, and paraphrasing.

The study which follows examines the typical features of communication in English among native and outgroup[1] members of this multi-accent group.

It seems right to present the definitions of EIL given by its users, the students of UWCs, presented in Quinn-Novotná et al. (2013: 10): "… easier to understand and/because [its] grammatical rules are less straight\rigid," "a great amalgam of accents and expressions from diverse varieties," "a mix of everything everyone around [...] speaks," and "[s]everal variants together, as it is an international school and it should celebrate diversity, even in the language taught." Although over 64% of their cohort were not familiar with the concept of EIL, most of them showed pro-EIL attitudes. IE was defined as a blend, the resultant of different native and non-native accents of proficient speakers. The cohort was found to appreciate the universality, democratic, global nature and neutrality of IE, and seemed to be in favour of a more polymodel approach. It was argued in the following way: "it entails less status loaded words that puts people with a better proficiency level at a higher level of social status. It's more democratic," or "it is less culturally biased and accented, and within reach of most people," and "a functional and communicative form of English that does not stress on the correctness of the speech. The main goal is to get the message across and now that I come to think of it, it's more or less the kind of English we use here at UWC English as a Lingua Franca!" (2013:11) and "[since UWCs are international

[1] In this paper, as well as in the discussion of the quantitative method of the same study in Nowacka and Nowacki (20025), the term *outgroup* (henceforth O), a concept from Tajfel/Turner's (1979) social identity theory, is used as a substitute for *non-native* – which can be perceived as demeaning – in contrast with *native*.

institutions] the best solution is to accept people's various accents and grammatical differences." (2013:10)

1.2. United World Colleges (*henceforth* UWC[2]): a thematic literature review

United World Colleges, since the foundation of the first school in Wales in 1962, have been widely studied – this paper summarises the findings of more than 30 studies. Historical accounts constitute a great body of research (e.g., Holland, 2016; Maclehose et al., 2021; Peterson, 2003; Samaranayake, 1991; Shekleton, 1978; Sutcliffe 1983, 1991, 2012). However, the greatest number of researchers have been engaged in sociological and cultural dimensions of UWC education (e.g., Branson, 2003; Davison & Tešan, 2021; Flesh et al., 2021; Hayden & Thompson, 2010; Holland, 2016; Huckle, 2023; Rawlings, 1999; Satok, 2014; Tsumagari 2010; Van Oord & den Brok 2004) and its educational philosophy and curriculum (e.g., Branson, 2003; Bunnell & Savvides, 2022; Codrington, 2006; Fernandez et al., 2021; Hill, 2012; Krulj et al., 2020; Maclehose, 2018; Mahlstedt, 2003; Peterson, 2003; Rawlings, 1999; Sylvester, 2002). Other areas of UWC-oriented research interest concern organizational structure and management (e.g., Clark et al., 2022; Hayden & Thompson, 2013; Perez, 2018) and, to a lesser degree, linguistic and communication studies (e.g., Huckle, 2023; Nowacka & Nowacki 2024; Quinn-Novotná, 2016; Quinn-Novotná & Dunková, 2015; Quinn-Novotná et al., 2013) – the latter of which is the focal point of this paper.

An examination of the number of the above-mentioned publications on UWC per decade shows that interest has been gradually increasing from one publication in the 1970s and 1980s, through three in the 1990s, six in 2000s, twelve in the 2010s, to nine so far in the 2020s.

Historical Accounts

Shekleton (1978), Sutcliffe (1983, 1991), Samaranayake (1991) and Peterson (2003) provide the historical context of the UWC movement, from its origins – the Atlantic College in Wales, the involvement in shaping International Baccalaureate (IB)[3], to worldwide expansion and future challenges. In addition to that, the founder of UWC, Kurt Hahn, is presented in Sutcliffe (2012) and Holland (2016) – the former offers an extensive biography of Hahn and other UWC founding figures, the latter

[2] During the literature search, the abbreviation UWC also yielded *University of Western Cape*, and *underwater communication* entries, not connected with *the United World Colleges*' movement.

[3] As I am reviewing this introduction of August 25, 2005 Russia has declared IB an undesirable organisation and bans its activities in 29 schools in the country, after already deeming 'undesirable' such foreign educational organizations as the British Council and Yale University. The Prosecutor General's office claims that IB shapes Russian youth according to the Western models through, for example, anti-Russian propaganda and inciting interethnic hatred and promoting non-traditional values based on the ideology of banned extremist organisations. This action should be understood as revenge after Russia being condemned by these institutions for their full-scale invasion of Ukraine which started on the 24th February, 2022 and continues up-to-date.

sketches Hahn's path to formulating the basis for experiential education. In turn, Maclehose et al. (2021) discuss Sutcliff's own contribution to the UWC movement.

Sociological and Cultural Dimensions

UWCs have been comprehensively researched as models for identity construction, social transformation and intercultural understanding.

Identity formation is the most recurring theme (Flesh et al., 2021; Holland, 2016; Satok, 2014; Tsumagari, 2010). For example, Tsumagari (2010) focuses on the impact of UWC education on her life, from her own perspective of a UWC graduate over the period of a quarter of a century. This autoethnography reveals enduring personal, cultural and social transformations of the UWC experience, namely UWC as: a reference point in the world (different from the country of origin), a foundation of life navigation (learning to make life decisions), cognizance of self in own context (redefining herself and the values in a new community), examination of assumptions (an open-minded approach), a reminder of roots (maintaining her national and local identity), a driver for seeking relevance to the changing world (being meaningful) and the power of personal connection (international togetherness). It emphasizes the need for more longitudinal research to understand how students are affected by this values-based education and if they actively demonstrate the UWC philosophy after graduation. Satok (2014) analyses the UWC movement through interviews and site visits, focusing on intercultural exchange, identity, global issues, and peace building. He finds that students strengthen their national identity, intercultural skills and global awareness while enhancing their own assets, connections, knowledge and reputation. Recommendations for improvement, though, include more support for conservative students, expanded peace-building and strengthening national committees. In addition, Holland (2016) researches identity construction at the UWC USA, by means of observations and interviews with fifteen subjects, and distinguishes three phases in that process: first, nationalization, initial retreat into national identity; then, 'self-effacement in the common cause' through shared activities; finally, the so-called 'triumph of the personal', eventual personal empowerment because of the development of personal connection in the community. On the other hand, Flesh et al. (2021) obtain results contrasting with Holland's (2016). They investigate the concept of global and local identity of twenty Israeli students at UWC and at local secondary schools by means of semi-structured interviews. Both of their cohorts exhibit a shift from a global perspective towards locally oriented identities for different reasons, a pattern shaped by their nation's political situation.

Both Rawlings (1999) and Branson (2003) show that UWC education has a formative and enduring impact on graduates' lives and global citizenship. Rawlings (1999) explores micro-effects of globalization in the domain of education, and in particular the dynamics between international education and human attitudes and behaviour in the context of an international student community of UWC Adriatic in Wales, and concludes that the movement's education is a powerful instrument for

social transformation. The UWC students and alumni see themselves as world citizens and show global responsibility, respect differences, learn to meet challenges and to act for the benefit of the whole world. Branson (2003) finds that the alumni report that they have committed their lives to the UWC culture and its core values such peace, justice, understanding and cooperation, and that the movement has affected many aspects of their lives, e.g. knowledge, skills, life experience, personal potential and priorities, along with their active local, national and global citizenship. It helped them develop the skill of value analysis and critical thinking to be able to participate in an impartial debate and, if necessary, find tolerable scope to differ. It also motivated them to envisage paths of action in the future.

Some researchers investigate intercultural understanding and culture-induced expectations and discrimination, e.g. Davison and Tešan (2021; Hayden and Thompson, 2010; Huckle, 2023; Van Oord and den Brok, 2004. Fostering cross-ethnic interaction among Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks in post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina is a focal point of Hayden and Thompson (2010) as well as Davison and Tešan (2021). The former, by means of questionnaires, interviews and seminars, evaluated the role of UWC in Mostar in promoting integration among the said segregated ethnic communities and international students. They report strong intra-UWC integration but limited engagement with the local Gymnasium students due to language barriers, societal divisions and the balancing of dual educational cultures. The recommendation for future includes strengthening UWC's integrative environment while expanding outreach to local students and the broader community, for example, through organizing activities with common goals. The latter, Davison and Tešan (2021), highlight the role of community-driven public spaces – such as the Sarajevo Film Festival, Banja Luka park – in nurturing cross-ethnic integration, contrasting them with extrastatecraft, externally imposed government projects like the reconstruction of the Old Bridge of Mostar.

Van Oord and den Brok (2004) show that cultural expectations also affect preferred teacher-student interpersonal relationships. The examination of the perceptions of one hundred and seventy-six UWC students and thirty-nine teachers, in Norway and Wales, by means of the Model for Interpersonal Teacher Behaviour[4] reveals that the former cohort considers their best teachers as stricter than do the students in Wales, while the latter favours those teachers who provide more freedom. As regards gender-related differences, males prefer more strictness, discontent and reprimand than females. When it comes to variations between students within schools, related to the cultural background, the study shows that the respondents from South and Central America assign lower ratings to their most preferred teachers on helpful/friendly behaviour than students from other parts of the world.

In contrast to the above-mentioned positive findings, Huckle (2023) presents a critique of inequities within the UWC environment. He reviews critically the concept of intercultural understanding and competence in international schools and identifies

[4] This model categorizes teacher behaviors into eight sectors such as leadership, helpful/friendly, understanding, student responsibility/freedom, uncertain, dissatisfied, admonishing, and strict.

problematic assumptions in IB documents, e.g. inequities and power asymmetries. He gives examples of discriminatory practices from a #Do Better report at Singapore's United World College of Southeast Asia, Dover campus, in which nearly 43% of the survey respondents (n=199) report having experienced or witnessed a racist incident at school.

All in all, a positive socio-culture picture emerges from the UWC practices. Education at this institution benefits the development of the individual's identity, social transformation and intercultural understanding. A majority of UWC students and alumni consider themselves world citizens, are responsible for the planet and put the movement's ideal into practice in their life. They promote integrating dividing communities by outreaching to local communities.

Educational Philosophy and Curriculum

The UWC model stems from a long tradition of international education. Sylvester (2002) notes that London-based Spring Grove International College, founded in 1866, and in operation till 1889, by a group including Charles Dickens and Thomas Huxley, was the first peace-focused school that admitted students of different nationalities. Hill (2012) observes that it was Comenius in the 17th century who founded the concept of international mindedness on which the UWC ideology is based. Comenius as a founder of timeless didactic principles is explored further by Krulj et al. (2020). Peterson (2003) and Maclehose (2018) reflect on UWC Atlantic College's pioneering role in collaboration with the International School of Geneva in the process of creating the International Baccalaureate. The resulting IB Diploma incorporated UWC's ideals, such as Creativity, Activity, Service, and Geneva's bilingual emphasis and global perspective. They forged an academic programme characterized by such values as idealism, intercultural understanding and trust.

Mahlstedt (2003) examines the concept of global citizenship education, in particular such aspects as universalism, relativism, the state of the planet awareness, interdependence of all life, connection between local and global citizenship and cross-cultural awareness, and he concludes that teaching methods confirm that it is effectively implemented at UWC.

Rawlings (1999) and Branson (2003) prove UWCs to be effective in meeting their aims especially in relation to citizenship education while Codrington (2006) points to four distinctive aspects of UWC education: academics, creativity, action and service (*henceforth* CAS classes), special projects and residential life, based on a Li Po Chun UWC in Hong Kong. Branson (2003) evaluates the perspectives of UWC students, graduates and teachers in eight UWCs by means of semi-structured interviews, student journals, informal observations, documentary evidence and a postal questionnaire. Informal interactions are found to shape the outcomes more strongly than the formal curriculum. Rawlings (1999), having researched the UWC Adriatic in Wales, suggests the incorporation of the UWC concept of world citizenship in curriculums worldwide should have significant implications for human development as then individuals will regard themselves as

trustees of the planet, recognise the oneness of humanity, which will help to eliminate prejudice. Intercultural awareness and a positive self-concept play a particular role in that process.

Short-term and the pandemic adaptive UWC learning show similar potential. Fernandez et al. (2021) report on UWC blended learning and a variety of digital tools during the Covid-19 pandemic with the application of the concept of hope, understood as principles of agency, self-determination, engagement, belonging and a sense of purpose to support youth well-being, action towards positive engagement and improved educational outcomes. Bunnell and Savvides (2022) find the UWC 10-day residential short course to be a strongly inter-connecting, inspiring, transformational, life-changing, soft-skill building experience, enhancing the participants' confidence, identity exploration and communal trust.

Organizational Structure and Management

Some research reveals how the UWC mission, vision, values and goals are implemented.

Hayden and Thompson (2013) in their taxonomy of international schools, classify UWC as a Type B ideological international institution, promoting global peace and understanding, different from Type A traditional expatriate and Type C elite national schooling. Perez (2018) identifies the UWC movement's best practices, based on interviews, observations and document analysis at four colleges, in Wales, Germany, Costa Rica and the Netherlands, and the International Office. The following factors are found to play a significant role in mission operationalization and alignment: (1) an entrance (Orientation Day) and exit strategy for members of the organization; (2) selection of passionate and committed organization members; (3) curricular choice and mission-centric teaching methods; (4) use and structure of the physical space, e.g. in the artwork, promotional materials, food displays; (5) mission-centric programming and extracurricular activities; (6) residential life (housing arrangement); (7) the opportunity to reflect on the mission; and (8) simplicity and tangibility of the mission statement.

Clark et al. (2022), in the most extensive four-year study of impact regarding educational experiences and outcomes at eighteen UWCs, find that autonomous learning and interpersonal informal interactions are most impactful in relation to attitudes such as open-mindedness and skills such as critical thinking. A mixed-method approach was used to collect quantitative and qualitative data through surveys, interviews (720, $n = 720$: students, alumni, staff), site visit and remote video observations. The research aimed to examine three areas: firstly, the most impactful parts of the educational experience (surveys: $n = 2.168$ in 2020 and $n = 2.666$ in 2021) and alumni ($n = 6.894$); secondly, the effect of these experiences on respondents; thirdly, their impact on the world and the definition of the impact.

Recommended areas for improvement include workload balance, assessment, a perceived Western bias, intentional intercultural interaction, mental health support, a lack of systematic awareness and systemic real-life influence in the discussions of the topic.

Linguistic and Communication Studies

The multilingual and multicultural environment of UWCs is ideal for research on ELF/EIL. The studies by Quinn-Novotná and her colleagues (Quinn-Novotná, 2016; Quinn-Novotná & Dunková, 2015; Quinn-Novotná et al., 2013) provide the most exhaustive account of the role and functions of English at these international schools.

Quinn-Novotná et al. (2013) in a comprehensive survey on English at five United World Colleges – with 235 respondents of 69 different nationalities, users of different 58 native languages – show that CLIL at UWC is characterised by an equal focus on content and language and attention to specialised vocabulary. The UWCees prioritize communicative effectiveness over native-like accuracy. Learning in these schools is conducive to fostering linguistically open attitudes and heightened language awareness. The high exposure to a wide array of Englishes and demanding social and academic challenges positively impact linguistic sensitivity, confidence and proficiency in English as well as social and intercultural skills.

Quinn Novotná and Dunková (2015) discuss the integration of CLIL through ELF in UWC schools and make recommendations for ELF-aware teacher training programmes. Their study comprises both on-site classroom observation and a survey of 379 respondents: students (n=315) of 87 nationalities, users of 71 different L1s, and teachers (n=64) at seven UWC schools. It confirms that teaching by means of ELF is carried out successfully thanks to the adoption of appropriate teaching attitudes and priorities, liberal language policy, focus on content and specialised terminology, friendly and supportive student-teacher atmosphere, high exposure to English, the development of linguistically sensitive attitudes, the use of a wide array of communicative strategies, e.g. code-mixing or code-switching, multilingual resources and challenges of CLIL. They postulate the need to redefine proficiency, which should be understood as international intelligibility and comprehensibility, a wide range of vocabulary and the ability to accommodate to different N and O speakers and should not be associated with native-like or near-native competence, which agrees with Levis (2005, 2020). The proficient users of English should be communicative and not fear imprecision, not being expected to achieve nativeness. Embracing different World Englishes and accepting ELF as a rightful means of communication should be one of the goals. The future teachers should receive some training in metalinguistic skills to be able to increase the students' linguistic sensitivity.

Quinn Navotná (2016) compares teaching through ELF at multilingual UWC colleges and the monolingual 1st International School of Ostrava. She finds that, similarly to UWC in a monolingual school, the focus is placed on content and subject specific vocabulary rather than form. Because there is less varied and frequent exposure to different Englishes it is recommended that these types of school launch school partnerships, reach out to other monolingual teaching institutions in neighbouring countries, for example, through exchange visits, online discussion forums or blogs, to provide the students with access to speakers of other Englishes. Another suggestion is to draw on multilingual resources at hand, that is to invite speakers of other languages or LF users, e.g. students'

parents who speak English of a different variety than the local one to talk about their hobbies or work. It is also essential to choose teaching materials informed by EIL, WEs or ELF, and adopt CLIL through English, even for just one subject. She concludes that a combination of factors that lead to a successful ELF user are as follows: liberal and relaxed attitudes, help and support from both teachers and peers, focus on content and vocabulary, enhancing students' confidence, encouraging thinking, and the ability to express ideas freely and ask questions, all of which contribute to heightened language awareness and increased proficiency of the students.

On the contrary, Huckle (2023) points to different forms of discrimination including prejudice against Asian and Chinese accents at these schools, which are generally inclusive and embrace differences, based on a #Do Better report (uwcdobetter, 2020) at Singapore's United World College of Southeast Asia, Dover campus, made public through Instagram.[5]

Nowacka & Nowacki (2025), on the basis of UWCEA diploma students' attitudes, observe that EIL users value intelligibility over nativeness. They believe that speaking English with a foreign accent does not imply unintelligibility and incomprehensibility, and that familiarity with accents enhances their comprehension. Immersion in a multi-accent community positively affects the respondents' comprehension, recognition and familiarity with English accents and immersion among East African English users improves the ability to recognise this accent. Native English accents are regarded as being easier to understand than outgroup ones. The majority believe their English has features of many Englishes, aim at being understood, and do not deliberately use their L1 accents in English. Some, 42.5%, overtly admit to neutralizing their L1 accents in English. Half of the informants prefer and strive for a native English accent and nearly the same number prefer one variety of English over others. They also feel pressurized to aim at a native accent and approximate to standard English norms in international exams and undertaking studies in English-speaking countries.

To sum up, taken together, these studies reveal that the UWC movement has been successfully educating teenagers for more than six decades, since the foundation of UWC Adriatic in 1962. It was actively engaged in the creation of the International Baccalaureate. It unites students of different nationalities in

[5] "Not too sure why Asian accents are so heavily mocked. It's an accent. It's the way a place speaks. My cousin had moved from India and attended UWC but left at the end of the year he joined because he was bullied for his Indian accent so much/ (anonymous quote posted on Instagram);" and "I am Chinese and have already gotten use to people making jokes and mocking my accent, but I find it unacceptable when people make fun of my country. I am not a nationalist, but I do appreciate the culture and history of my country and when people make jokes about it, or the way we look, it is really sad and I am scared to stand up to them." (anonymous quotes posted on Instagram #DoBetterDover, 2020b, in Huckle 2023:1).

a mission promoting global peace and understanding. It has a positive, formative, life-long effect on the UWCees. Its mission is embedded in daily life, e.g. by means of extracurricular activities, CAS. Informal interactions and social life on the school campus prove more transformative than the formal curriculum. Linguistic studies show that immersion in the environment of a great number of English accents enhances the individuals' command of English. The research indicates sporadic examples of discrimination in these multicultural settings. Recommendation for future research and practice include workload balance, assessment, a perceived Western bias, intentional intercultural interaction and the improvement of mental health support.

2. Method

2.1 Aims and research questions

The aim of the study is to investigate five aspects in the international students' attitudes to native and outgroup accents of English, namely:

1. preference for a variety of English and a type of English they would like to use (N, NN[6], IE, intelligible, etc.)
2. techniques of facilitating understanding of their own speech,
3. ways of solving misunderstanding based on mispronunciations,
4. changes in their own English with respect to pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar due to UWCEA immersion,
5. familiarity with accents before and after UWCEA regarding:
   a. comprehensibility,
   b. pronunciation features responsible for incomprehensibility,
   c. ways of adjusting to incomprehensible accents.

This paper intends to address ten open-ended questions, which were phrased in the questionnaire as follows:

1. I prefer one native variety of English over others. If you marked 'strongly agree' or 'agree', which native variety do you prefer?
2. If it were possible, I would like to pronounce English like…

[6] In the questionnaire, to avoid misunderstanding among the respondents, the term *non-native* instead of *outgroup* was applied.

3. What do you do to facilitate understanding of your speech?
   - paraphrase,
   - slow down,
   - repeat,
   - ask openly if I am understood,
   - use gestures,
   - use translanguaging, changing from one language to another,
   - others (what, for example?)
4. Describe any anecdotal situations concerning misunderstanding based on your own or other person's (mis)pronunciation. How was the meaning clarified?
5. Reflect on how your English has changed, since you started the study at UWCEA, with respect to:
   - pronunciation (of words, Vs, Cs, fluency, etc.),
   - vocabulary (e.g., 'bajaji', 'duka', 'Asante'),
   - grammar.
6. Which English accents were you familiar with before UWCEA?
7. At the beginning I could not much understand … accent(s).
8. The most difficult accent to understand is/was: ….
9. What made it difficult to understand this accent?
10. How did you adjust to these incomprehensible accents?

2.2 Instrument and procedure

The responses to the ten questions, listed above, were collected by means of an online form on the Microsoft Teams platform. They complemented some close-ended questions of the quantitative method discussed in Nowacka & Nowacki (2025), which comprised 32 statements on a 5 point-Likert scale from "strongly agree" (5) to "strongly disagree" (1), in which descriptive statistics were used to show measures of central tendencies (mean) and variability (standard deviation).

2.3. Participants[7]

Forty diploma students of UWCEA, Tanzania Moshi campus, representatives of twenty-two (73%) single and eight (27%) dual nationalities, of which 12.5% Tanzanians were the most numerous,8 took part in this online survey. The cohort

[7] The detailed data on respondents, i.e. their nationality, country of living, the number of native and foreign languages in use, the self-assigned level of proficiency in English, the variety of types of English learnt or acquired can be found in Nowacka & Nowacki (2025), which discusses the quantitative results. Here we provide a summary of this information.

[8] It agrees with Wilkinson's (1998) observation that UWCs aim specifically for 25% of the student body representing the local nationality.

included two informants each of American, Lebanese, Pakistani, Polish and Portuguese origin. The remaining single nationalities were as follows: Armenian, Bangladeshi, British, Canadian, German, Hungarian, Indian, Irish, Italian, Mauritian, Mexican, Palestinian, Spanish, Timorese, Ukrainian. Dual citizenship comprised, i.e.: American and Indian, English and French, Latvian and Canadian, Lithuanian and Beninese, Mauritian and Australian, Tanzanian and Kenyan, Tanzanian and Indian (Punjabi), as well as Welsh and British.

72.5% of the respondents reported to have been brought up in one country, while 27.5% admitted to having lived in between two and five countries. All of the participants were preparing for their IB exam, of which 47.5% were in the first grade and 52.5% in the final year of the two-year IB course.

80% of the respondents were users of one native language (NL), e. g., English (20%), Kiswahili (7.5%) Arabic, Polish, Portuguese (5% each). 17.5% could speak two L1s and only one (2.5%) was a user of three NLs.

The participants were able to communicate in languages, which belong to the following language families:

a) the Indo-European (23), within the following nine branches:

- Indo-Aryan (6 Ls[9]: Hindi, n = 4; Gujarati, n = 3; Punjabi, n = 3; Bangla, Marathi, Urdu, n = 1 each),
- Romance (5 Ls: French, n = 15; Spanish, n = 15; Portuguese, n = 3; Italian, n = 2; Catalan, n = 1),
- Germanic (3 Ls: English, n = 5; German, n = 4; Danish, n = 1),
- Slavic (3 Ls: Russian, n = 3; Polish, n = 2; Ukrainian, n = 1),
- Baltic (2 Ls: Latvian and Lithuanian),
- Celtic (2 Ls: Irish and Welsh),
- Armenian (1 L),
- Iranian (Pashto) (1 L).

b) the Niger-Congo (3 Ls: Swahili, n = 11, Luganda and Pare, n = 1 each).

c) Afro-Asiatic (1 L: Arabic, n = 3),

d) Creole languages (2 Ls: Mauritian Creole, n = 2 and Tetum, n = 1),

e) Austronesian (1 L: Indonesian, n = 1).

f) Uralic (1 L: Hungarian, n = 1),

g) Turkic (1 L: Turkish, n = 1).

As expected, most of the cohort acknowledged having learnt or acquired mainly native inner-circle varieties of English, such as British (80%) and American English (73%), but also Canadian and Irish (3% each). Outer-circle Englishes such as East

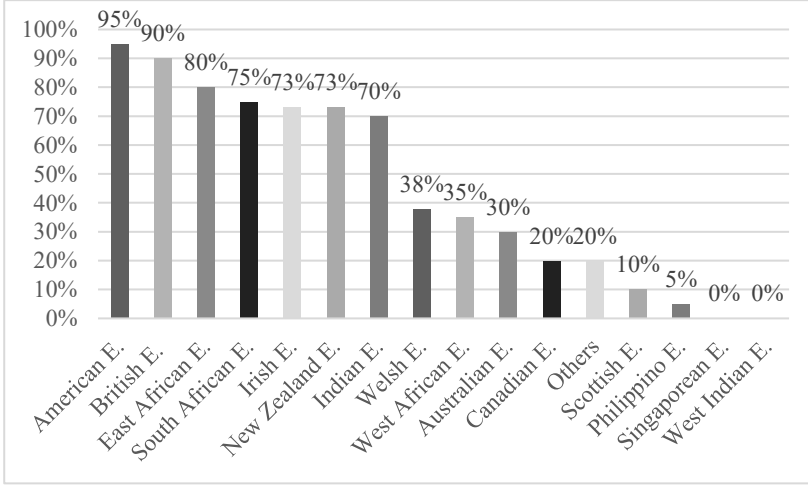
[9] Ls stands for languages.

African (20%), Indian (8%), South African (5%) and Pakistani (3%) were reported by a minority.

3. Results

In the biographical part of the survey the respondents were asked to tick the English accents they could hear at UWC. Figure 1 sums up these results.

Figure 1: English accents (native and second language varieties) heard at school



In the informants' opinions, the ranking of Englishes that could be heard at school, either from the mouths of the staff or the students, is as follows: 95% American (n = 38), 90% British (n = 36), 80% East African (n = 32), 75% South African (n = 30), 73% Irish and New Zealand (n = 29), 70% Indian (n = 28), 38% Welsh (n = 15), 35% West African (n = 14), 30% Australian (n = 12), 20% Canadian, and others (n = 8 each), 10% Scottish (n = 4) and 5% Filipino (n = 2). There were no occurrences of Singaporean and West Indian Englishes listed.

The open-ended category "others" chosen by four respondents included eight kinds of Englishes comprising four general ones, e.g., Caucasian, Eastern European, Middle Eastern and South Asian; and four specific ones such as: Arabic, German, Spanish and Vietnamese.[10]

Question 1 addresses their preferred English variety. The results are presented in the graphs below.

[10] In Quinn-Novotná et al. (2013) the respondents believed that they were taught by means of several varieties of English depending on the teacher's English (45.6%), International English (23.4%), standard British (13.6%) or American English (7.2%),[10] which means that more than 60% reported that they were not learning through any specific variety of English but rather by using a blend of NS and OS varieties. The respondents based their answers mostly on their personal feelings (51.2%) as well as the accents and nationalities of their teachers (34.6%).

Figure 2: I prefer one native variety of Eng. over others.

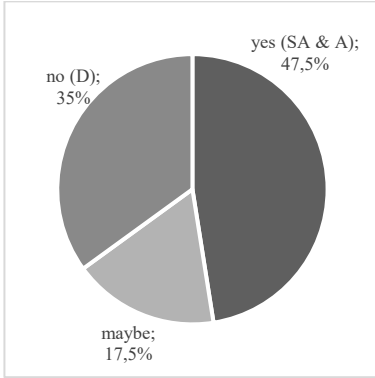


Figure 3: Which native variety do you prefer?

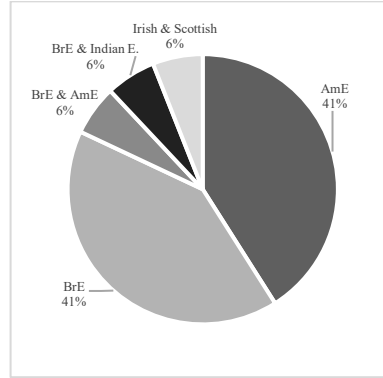


Figure 2 demonstrates that nearly 48% admitted to preferring one variety of English, which, as presented in Figure 3, turned out to be American or British English (41% each) but also a combination of British and American, British and Indian, Irish and Scottish (6% each).

Question 2 examines the respondents' preference for their own pronunciation in English, examples of which are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: If it were possible, I would like to pronounce English like …

No.	**Question 2**	**Number/31**[11]	***%***[12]
1.	British	10	32.3%
2.	American	6	19.4%
3.	native speaker	4	12.9%
4.	speakers of my mother tongue	3	9.7%
5.	Australian	2	6.5%
6.	Irish	1	3.2%
7.	New Zealander	1	3.2%
8.	international	1	3.2%
9.	"The way that makes me feel comfortable."	1	3.2%
10.	Malcolm X	1	3.2%
11.	Mr Bean	1	3.2%
12.	Mr Alaister (South Africa)	1	3.2%
13.	Justina (Tanzania, EAE)	1	3.2%
14.	no preference	1	3.2%

[11] The total number of responses shown in Table 1 is thirty-one. Nine responses were excluded because seven informants used the option: "I do not know" and two did not answer the question.

[12] The sum of percentages does not equal 100% as the informants could provide a few examples.

In general, native accents, listed on the grey background in Table 1, were selected most often as an answer to what the respondents would like to sound like (26/31, 84%). The chosen inner-circle Englishes were as follows: British (32.3%), American (19.4%), native-speaker English (12.9%), Australian (5%), Irish and New Zealand (3.2% each). Two students listed the name of a person, who used an inner-circle English, e.g. Malcolm X and Mr Bean (3.2% each).

9.7% did not mind their mother-tongue accent in English. One person included international English (3.2%) as an optional preferred accent, another pointed to intelligible English that makes them feel comfortable (3.2%). Two other respondents (6.4%) opted for outer-circle Englishes and indicated the names of people: Mr Alaister from South Africa, Justina – Tanzanian, a speaker of EAE, and yet another had no preference regarding the way they would like to sound in English.

In more detail, a British accent, including an Englishman, was chosen by ten respondents (5 native[13] and 5 outgroup speakers of English), e.g., "British English (I do already kind of)" (British in Tanzania, S.23) and "the funnier accents of British English, for fun" (Polish, S.1). An American, was selected by six informants, one native - American and Indian (S.21), and 5 outgroup speakers: two Tanzanians (S.27, S.33), Spanish (S.11), Timorese, (S.30) and Ukrainian (S.35), e.g., "… but not too American" (S.33, Tanzanian) or "Someone from the US (Illinois specifically) because I will be studying there." (S.35, Ukrainian). Native speaker pronunciation, without an identification of what type of native accent, was marked by four respondents: two Americans (S.16, S.34) and one Italian (S.37) and Lebanese (S.24). Three students expressed a wish to sound like speakers of their own mother tongue, e.g., "my original accent" (Portuguese, S.25), "… most Hungarians do (strong Eastern-European accent)" (Hungarian, S.39), or "I pronounce it now. It is not a standard accent, but it reflects my upbringing and heritage." (Latvian and Canadian, S.40). An Australian accent was favoured by two outgroup users: German (S.38), and Bangladeshi (S.26), for whom "… it sounds really funny." The following answers were selected once each: an Irish (Irish, S.5), a New Zealander: (British in Tanzania, S.23), International, e.g., "a British or Australian because I like those accents. I also like just sounding international." (German, S.38), comfortable in English "the way that makes me feel comfortable" (Tanzanian and Kenyan, S.7), Malcolm X (Tanzanian and Indian (Punjabi), S.29,), Mr Bean (actually) (Mauritian and Australian, S.2), Mr Alaister (Palestinian, S.36) and Justina (Ugandan, S.18). One student admitted to not having a preference in that respect (Pakistani, S.4).

Question 3 provides information on the communication accommodation techniques applied by the UWCees to make themselves understood.

[13] Native speakers were represented by respondents whose nationality was: British (S.24), British in Tanzania (S.23), British and Welsh (S.13), English and French (S.3) and Canadian (S.6).

Figure 4: What do you do to facilitate understanding of your speech?

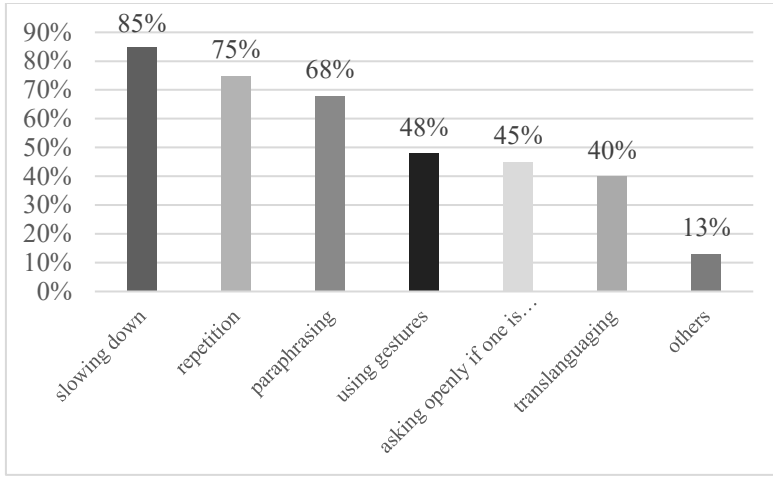
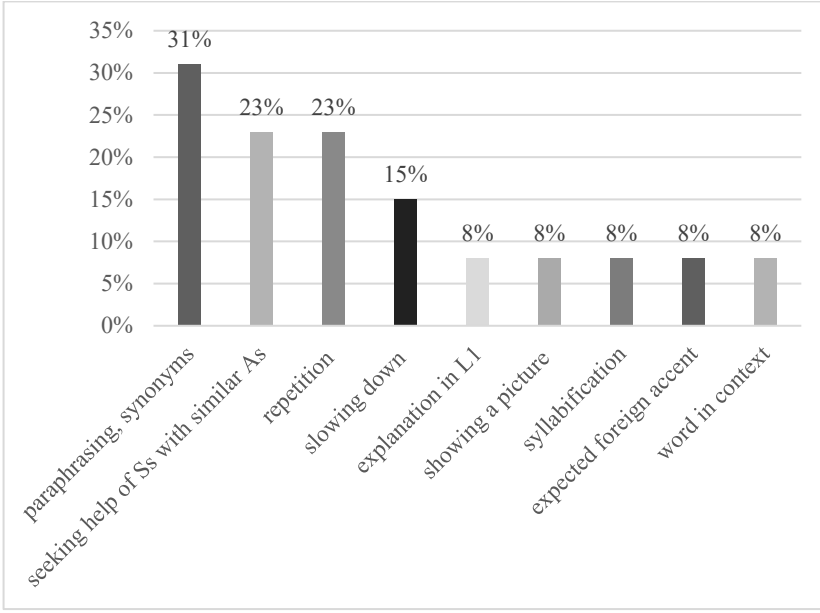


Figure 4 reveals that the most common ways of adjusting speaking for the benefit of communicative partner(s) are slowing down (85%), repetition (75%), paraphrasing (68%), using gestures (48%), asking openly if one is understood (45%), translanguaging (40%) and others (12.5%). The last option comprised: adjusting the accent slightly, speaking in a neutral English accent and removing one's own native accent, using common phrases and expressions of 'native' American and British English for others to understand somebody more (S.40 Latvian/Canadian) and giving definitions of words and emphasising the [sounds].

Then, the respondents' task was to give an example of any anecdotal situations concerning misunderstanding based on their own or other person's (mis)pronunciation, to which 32.5% responded (Question 4). Figure 5 presents a summary of the results and reveals that the most common techniques to solve misunderstanding were: paraphrasing and synonyms (31%) and then seeking help from students with similar accents/multilinguals to translate one's words and repetition (23% each) and slowing down (15%).

Figure 5: Techniques used to clarify pronunciation-based misunderstanding



One of the techniques was the intentional use of a foreign accent by a Tanzanian to be understood in Swahili: "I pronounced a Swahili word how it is meant to be pronounced but they didn't understand so I used the English accent, and they understood" (S.23). Another citation shows how a breakdown in communication was negotiated and the misunderstood word was explained by gestures and using it in another context:

> 'gun' vs. 'gone'. There is a movie called 'Gone Girl' [/gʌn/]. When I was telling my friend about this movie, he said that the name for the movie was weird. I was confused and asked my friend if he heard me correctly. He said [,] "gun girl" and showed a gun with his hands. And then I explained that I meant 'a girl who's gone missing' (S.36).

In addition, an Irish speaker of English is well aware that her fast pace of speaking, accent and the use of slang makes it difficult to understand her: "I have been told, I speak too fast, or my accent makes it difficult to be understood. Native English 'slang' that I use has also caused difficulties in others understanding me" (S.5). Thus, it seems that slowing down and avoiding the use of slang would make it easier for her to be understood by interlocuters who do not share and/or are familiar with her accent.

Question 5, answered by 57% of the respondents ($n = 23$), asked them to reflect on how their English had changed with respect to pronunciation (of words, vowels and consonants, fluency, etc.), grammar and vocabulary (e.g., 'bajaji', 'duka', 'Asante') since they started to study at UWCEA.

Two respondents made an observation that gaining higher proficiency in English allowed them to take care of their accent: "Before my accent was huge and I just

focused on my grammar and being understood. Now that my English has improved, I can focus on modulating my accent" (S.11, Spanish); and: "My English has become clearer as I started focusing on the enunciation of vowels. My English also improved when I slowed down my speech, as when talking quickly I default to German sounds" (S.38, German).

For another informant, a better command of English, improved communicative skills and being able to understand more accents lead to the loss of a mother tongue accent: "I got much better in expressing myself in English and understanding others, but it made me mask my Hungarian accent, and now I speak in a neutral accent" (S.39, Hungarian). A regret about losing their L1 accent after striving for sounding native-like in their home country was heard (n = 1): "When I was learning English back home, I tried my best to sound like a native. I ended up losing my country's accent, and I would like to have it now" (S.25, Portuguese).

A positive influence of this international immersion on the outgroup individuals' production and perception was also noted (n = 1): "I started feeling more comfortable with my accent, I started understanding other accents which in a sense impacted my pronunciation" (S.24, Lebanese). It was indicated that the students' English had become more American (n = 2), e.g., "…thanks to exposure to some native American English speakers, I've learned to sound more American" (S.35, Ukrainian). In addition, others reported that their pronunciation: had improved (n = 2), or had been affected by American and British teachers (n = 1).

Native speakers of English made some comments about noticeable changes in their English. For example, an Irish informant observed that her English was described as 'posh' by her family because of the elimination of glottalizations and that her rate of speaking had slowed down to be understood more easily by interlocutors: "I speak slower and now pronounce my 'ts', at home people say I now speak posh" (S.5). The accent of a Welsh-and-British respondent exhibited some signs of immersion in a multicultural, multi-accent, EIL community (n = 1): "I sound as though I have been around non-English speakers" (S.13).

Three informants made a comment that their English had not changed at all (n = 3):

> Since I studied at an American school growing up, my English remained unchanged during my time at UWC (S.4, Pakistani).
>
> In terms of surroundings outside of UWCEA, my English has not changed very much because I have always been around many accents and languages and considering that the school is located in my hometown, most of the changes have come from interacting with individuals on campus (S. 23, British).
>
> My native language uses similar pronunciation like Swahili [;] therefore English is basically the same as in the beginning (S.28, Lithuanian and Beninese).

Examples of words whose pronunciation had been improved because of studying at UWCEA are *height* and *chance,* e.g.: "My pronunciation of words has improved, I used to pronounce *height* as *heyt* but now I pronounce it as *hit*" (S.27, Tanzanian); and "I now sometimes pronounce the word *chanc*e with clearer 'aaaa' sound instead

of the 'eeee' sound because I hear the word spoken in South African English very often" (S.31, Polish).

Two informants pointed to learning to use various accents for different purposes: "Deliberate use of a Slavic accent, specifically in phrases containing /r/, e.g., *Hello, sir.*, *How are you*? I subconsciously adopted certain pronunciations from other English accents, depending on the situation, e.g., British English when mocking, broken Indian accent when exaggerating" (S.1, Polish); and "I … learned how to speak a few English accents, but just for the fun of it, I barely use this in a professional setting" (S.38, German).

Seven respondents made some references to the use of vocabulary such as: 1) slang expressions (n = 1): "I also adopted a lot of exclamative phrases that I often use regardless of situation such as *girl*, *work whore, bitch, beloved, bestie*, all of which are usually positive, e.g. referring to a closer friend, or affirmative (*work*, pronounced *werq* is vernacular slang – a word of encouragement similar to saying *Nice!,* or *Great!*" (S.1, Polish); 2) incorporation of words from other languages, especially from Swahili (n = 5):

> My English got so much diverse in terms of words that we used in our community, varied with Swahili and Irish vocabulary (S.39, Hungarian).
>
> … I'm still mixing English with other words that I know that everybody on Campus understands, such as *Asante*[14] (S.11, Spanish).
>
> My English has improved a lot, but I have also learned many different languages which I incorporate into my English. For example, I speak Swahili and English and when I am speaking to someone who knows Swahili and English as well, I will incorporate Swahili into my sentence when speaking English like if my friend is sick, I would tell them to get *dawa* which means medicine and combine both Swahili and English (S.7, Tanzanian and Kenyan).
>
> I have been in UWCEA for over 10+ years, and I can say I incorporate Swahili into my vocabulary, though less than my other friends who study in local Moshi schools (S.29, Tanzanian and Indian (Punjabi)).

One respondent did not see any change in their vocabulary: "Not so much, many words are similar to languages I speak at home, e.g., *duka = dukaan = shop*" (S.10, Indian). The comment below seems to refer to English pronunciation of Swahili words: "I used to pronounce them as how they are meant to be pronounced but as more people pronounce them the English way so did I" (S.22, Tanzanian).

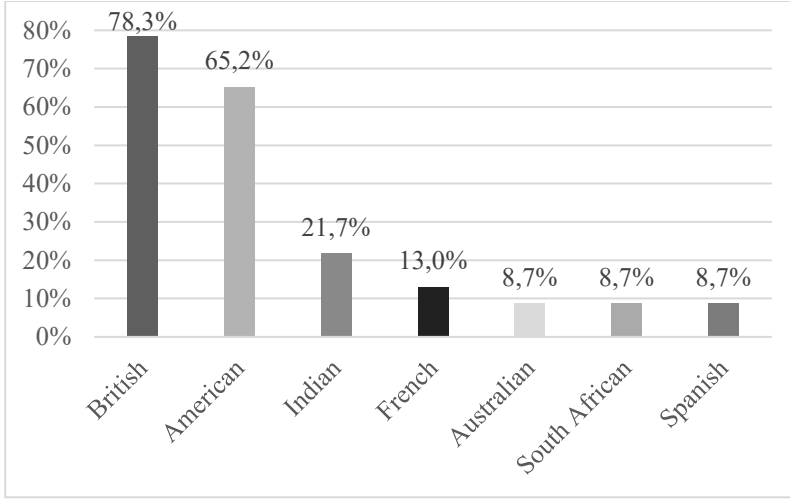
Apart from the positive influence of the IB course on the students' range of vocabulary, a negative effect in the form of flawed syntax as a result of many varieties of native and outgroup Englishes was exemplified: "My English vocabulary improved by studying English literature in the IB, however, my sentence structuring became a bit strange by native standards by being exposed to the large variety of English accents and non-native speakers" (S.34, American).

Twenty-three students answered the question about their familiarity with English accents before the study at UWCEA. Figure 6 lists the most frequent responses (Question 6).

---

[14] *Thank you* in Swahili.

Figure 6: Familiarity with English accents before UWCEA



Two inner-circles varieties, British (78.3%) and American (65.2%) receive the highest results. These are followed by Indian (21.7%) and South African (8.7%) outer-circle Englishes, one more inner-circle Australian (8.7%) and two expanding-circle English accents: French (13%) and Spanish (8.7%).

The detailed results are included in Table 2.

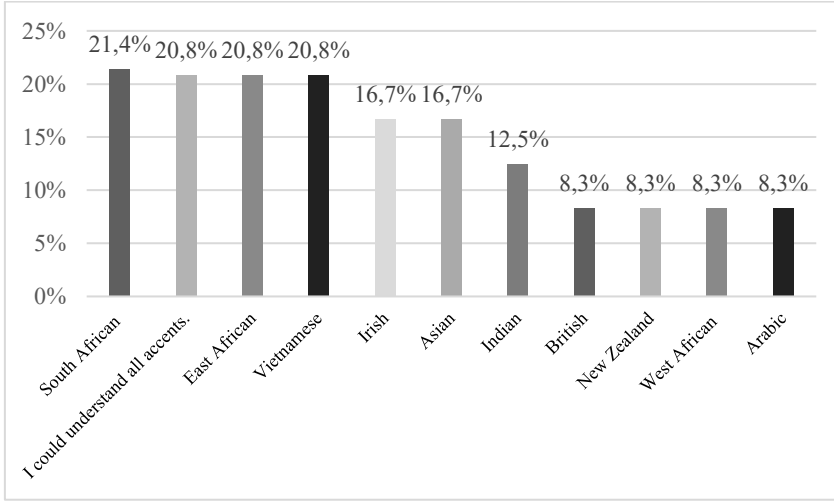
Table 2: Which English accents were you familiar with before UWCEA?

No.	**Familiarity with E. accents before UWCEA**	Number	% = number/23
	INNER CONCENTRATION CIRCLE		
1.	British	18	78.3%
2.	American	15	65.2%
3.	Australian	2	8.7%
4.	Canadian, Irish, New Zealand, dialects of UK	1 (each)	4.3% (each)
	OUTER CONCENTRATION CIRCLE		
5.	Indian	5	21.7%
6.	South African	2	8.7%
7.	Caribbean, Southern African, West African	1 (each)	4.3% (each)
	EXPANDING CIRCLE: EFL		
8.	French	3	13.0%
9.	Spanish	2	8.7%
10.	Chinese, German, Hungarian, Korean, Latvian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Arabic, Slavic, Caucasian, Eastern European, Middle--Eastern	1 (each)	4.3% (each)

Besides British and American English, the other inner-circle Englishes, known to the informants before their education in Tanzania, were as follows: Canadian, Irish, New Zealand and dialects of UK (4.3% each). The familiar outer-circle English accents, apart from Indian and South African, were Caribbean, Southern African, West African (4.3% each). The cohort listed altogether sixteen examples of expanding-circle English accents, eleven of which corresponded to speakers of countries in which English is a foreign language: French (13%), Spanish (8.7%), Chinese, German, Hungarian, Korean, Latvian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian (4.3% each) and five broader descriptions: Arab(ic), Slavic, Caucasian, Eastern-European and Middle-East (4.3% each).

The question on which accents the respondents found difficult to understand at the beginning of the study at UWCEA, answered by 24 informants, yielded a variety of answers (Question 7). Figure 7 presents the English accents with the highest scores.

Figure 7: At the beginning I could not much understand an accent(s) such as …



It is evident that South (21.4%) and East (20.8%) African English, posed some challenge to international interlocutors. Five respondents (20.8%), two native and three outgroup speakers of English, claimed that no accents created a problem, e.g., "There is no accent you cannot understand, if they speak English then you can infer what they are saying" (S.7, Tanzanian and Kenyan). Second language Englishes such as Vietnamese (20.8%), Asian (16.7%) and Arabic (8.3%) were also difficult to understand at first. Other native inner and outer English accents that turned out unintelligible for the cohort were: Irish (16.7%), Indian (12.5%); British, New Zealand and West African (8.3% each).

Table 3 presents the complete lists of Englishes that were regarded as unintelligible at the beginning of the study in Africa. The Englishes on the grey background exhibit the highest scores and are presented in Figure 7. The accents reported as challenging by only one respondent each (4.2%), complementing the most unintelligible Englishes discussed above, included Englishes of 1) the inner circle: Australian and Welsh; 2)

the outer circle: Western African, Kenyan and Nepali; 3) the expanding circle: Afghani, Dutch, Latino, South American and some Eastern European ones.

Table 3: At the beginning I could not much understand an accent(s) such as …

No.	**Accents difficult to understand at the beginning of UWCEA**	Number[15]	%[16]
1.	none	5	20.8%
I.	**INNER CONCENTRATION CIRCLES:**		
1.	Irish	4	16.7%
2.	British	2	8.3%
3.	New Zealand	2	8.3%
4.	Australian, Welsh	1 (each)	4.2% (each)
II.	**OUTER CONCENTRATION CIRCLES:**		
1.	East African	5	20.8%
2.	South African (from Johannesburg - 1)	3	21.4%
3.	Indian	3	12.5%
4.	West African	2	8.3%
5.	Western African, Kenyan, Nepali[17]	1 (each)	4.2% (each)
III.	**EFL**		
1.	Vietnamese	5	20.8%
2.	Asian: south-east (1), East-Asia (2)	4	16.7%
3.	Arabic	2	8.3%
4.	Afghani, Dutch, Latino, South American, some Eastern European	1 (each)	4.2% (each)

The informants were also asked to indicate the accent that was not easy from them to comprehend (Question 8).

[15] 24 respondents answered this question.

[16] The sum of percentages does not equal 100% as the informants could provide a few examples.

[17] Trudgill and Hannah (2002:123) list English as a second language variety in Nepal.

Table 4: The most difficult accent to understand is/was …

No.	The most difficult accent to understand is/was:	Number[18]	%[19]
1.	Vietnamese	8	34.8%
2.	Irish	4	17.4%
3.	(non-native south/)(South-Eastern)/ Asian English	3	13.0%
4.	none	2	8.7%
5.	Australian, Brazilian, East African, Indian, New Zealand, Scottish, Welsh, English mixed with some Swahili words	1 (each)	4.3% (each)

Vietnamese (34.8%) and Asian English (13%) turned out to be the most difficult. Irish placed second (17.4%). Two respondents (8.7%) claimed that that no accent was difficult for them to comprehend. Other accents: Australian, Brazilian, East African, Indian, New Zealand, Scottish, Welsh, and English mixed with some Swahili words, were mentioned once each.

We can speculate that the tonal character of Vietnamese might have contributed to the high rates of its low comprehensibility among intonational language speakers. The respondents might have not been familiarized with this accent before their studies at UWCEA or perhaps a Vietnamese English speaker or speakers they referred to exhibited low comprehensibility and intelligibility in English.

The next question (Question 9), answered by 22 students, asked for reasons for not being able to understand some accent(s).

Table 5: What made it difficult to understand a particular accent?
The reason I could not understand it was …

No.	The reason for not being able to understand some accent(s) was:	Number/22[20]	%[21]
1.	pronunciation (9) of: words (2), vowels (1), consonants (1)	13	59.1%
2.	the (fast) rate of speaking (mumbling)	4	18.2%
3.	overall accent/tone	1	4.5%
4.	intelligibility	1	4.5%
5.	comprehensibility	1	4.5%
6.	connected speech	1	4.5%
7.	interference	1	4.5%

[18] Table 4 includes responses from 23 individuals. 17 responses were excluded because 13 informants did not provide an answer, the options *I don't know* was chosen three times and *non-applicable* was selected once.

[19] The sum of percentages does not equal 100% as the informants could provide a few examples. Two respondents provided two answers.

[20] Table 5 includes 22 responses. 18 responses were excluded because 15 informants did not provide an answer, the options *I don't know* was chosen once and *non-applicable* was selected twice.

[21] The sum of percentages does not equal 100% as the informants could provide a few examples.

8.	short syllable sounds	1	4.5%
9.	incoherence of the sounds	1	4.5%
10.	lack of emphasis on each sound	1	4.5%
11.	lack of my Swahili knowledge	1	4.5%

Table 5 demonstrates that pronunciation in general, including more specifically the rendition of words, vowels and consonants is top of the hierarchy (59.1%), followed by the fast pace of speaking (18.2%).

Other respondents pointed to such aspects as: overall accent/tone, intelligibility issues, e.g. "I just can't hear any words that sound like English." (S.9), general lack of comprehensibility, connected speech: "I struggle to separate the words I hear." (S.32), interference, e.g., "differences between languages" (S.28) and lack of familiarity with Swahili, understanding Western African English and English that incorporated Swahili vocabulary. Three responses identified short syllable sounds, incoherence of the sounds, lack of emphasis on each sound.

Finally, the last question (Question 10) gathers information on the cohort's ways of adjusting to incomprehensible accent(s).

Table 6: How did you adjust to a difficult-to-understand accent(s)?

No.	**Ways of adjusting to incomprehensible accents**	**Number[22]**	**%**
1.	listening carefully, attentively, to accent(s) more (3)/ paying more attention to what was being said (4)	7	31.8%
2.	being immersed in the multi-English accent surrounding my ability to understand English accents naturally improved	7	31.8%
3.	talking with the people whose accent I could not understand	2	9.1%
4.	asking to repeat slowly or rephrase	2	9.1%
5.	getting support from friends who were more familiar with the accent	1	4.5%
6.	trying to understand	1	4.5%
7.	realizing what kind of changes were made by the speaker	1	4.5%
8.	familiarizing oneself with the irregularities	1	4.5%
9.	looking for words I could understand	1	4.5%
10.	repeating and providing examples to ensure mutual understanding	1	4.5%
11.	incomprehensible interlocuters' ability to sound more like a native English speaker improved	1	4.5%
12.	learning some basic Swahili words, spotting some patterns	1	4.5%

[22] Twenty-two respondents gave an answer to this question.

Listening carefully to accents and paying attention to them (31.8%), as well as improving understanding of accents because of immersion, were top of the list (31.8%), e.g., "I think I never adjusted consciously, but by being surrounded by such a variety of accents daily, I automatically learned to understand various pronunciations of the same words." - (S.38, German, raised in Germany, Tanzania and Malawi, about a thick Indian accent, East African and Arabic). It was also pointed out that a fast rate of speaking was responsible for initial lack of understanding: "I didn't adjust, really; it was once or twice this happened because I was taken aback by the speed. Quite easy to understand it after that" (S.23, British in Tanzania about Irish).

Talking with the people whose accent was initially challenging (9.1%) and asking them to repeat or rephrase (9.1%) were some other frequently used techniques, e.g. "I also learned respectful ways of asking my friends politely to repeat if I did not understand something due to me not being familiar with the accent (S.39, Hungarian for whom Latinx accents, and accents from East-Asia, especially Vietnamese, were most challenging)."

The following six different ways of trying to understand an incomprehensible accent were listed once each: getting support from friends who were more familiar with the accent, trying to understand, realizing what kind of changes were made by the speaker, familiarizing oneself with the irregularities, looking for comprehensible words, repeating and providing examples to ensure mutual understanding.

It was also observed that over time the difficult-to-understand students' accents changed and resembled native-like pronunciation, which facilitated communication. Learning some basic Swahili words and spotting some patterns helped the Ukrainian respondent (S.35) understand Western African English and English that incorporated some Swahili words.

One respondent openly stated that he did not adjust to a Vietnamese accent:

> I did not really, because I did not speak much with this person, so I did not have many occasions to actively try and understand their accent. … The person's pronunciation [made it difficult to understand them]. It's only from one person, another one had a lighter accent and enunciated better, and I understood them perfectly (S.1, Polish about Vietnamese).

4. Discussion

There is a scarcity of research on the role of accents and pronunciation at UWC, since respecting the diversification and differences is one of the missions of the UWC movement, therefore the results of this study are compared with mainly three works: Quinn-Novotná, 2016; Quinn-Novotná & Dunková, 2015; Quinn-Novotná et al., 2013. Besides, as observed by Quinn-Novotná et al. (2013) native accents together with pronunciation, grammar, fluency and eloquence are crucial but less important in communication at UWC than being able to get a message across, communicating ideas and having a solid grasp of vocabulary, which are prioritized. During the lessons, UWC teachers pay more attention to knowledge of the subject matter than to language form, e.g. grammar and pronunciation mistakes were not commented on (Quinn Novotná and Dunková, 2015).

This research makes it clear that half of the informants of the UWCEA community strive for a native English accent (50%), prefer one variety of English over others (48%) and it is usually American or British English. In Quinn-Novotná et al. (2013) the most convenient varieties of English to use in the school environment are: (standard) BrE (31%), (standard) AmE (20.7%) and what is different from our study, International English (19.2%).

Our study shows that most of the informants would like to speak with a native accent (90.4%) as 84% opt for inner-circle Englishes, mostly British (32.3%) and American (19.4%), and only 6.4% choose outer-circle, South and East African Englishes. A minority do not mind their mother-tongue accent in English (9.7%), or select: English as an International Language, English that makes them feel comfortable, or they have no preference in that respect (3.2% each). In a question about the ideal model speaker of English, Quinn-Novotná et al. (2013) obtain similar results as most of her cohort (68.1%) opt for native models and the minority (27.2%) for outgroup ones.[23]

Here, the most common techniques used to solve misunderstanding include slowing down, repetition, paraphrasing, using gestures, asking openly if one is understood, translanguaging, seeking speakers with similar accents or multilinguals to translate one's words; in Quinn-Novotná et al. (2013) some respondents used accommodation strategies for communicative effectiveness. The ability to adapt to the interlocutor was regarded as more important than speaking correctly or native-like. In NS to OS communications some NS admitted to pronouncing more clearly, using simpler vocabulary, and speaking more slowly. The use of idiomatic or culturally loaded language appeared to be a cause of misunderstanding. The 'make it normal' and 'let it pass' principle as well as code-mixing and code-switching were reported to be often applied in communications of OSs. Talking extremely slowly as an accommodation strategy used by some NS in a conversation with OS was perceived negatively.[24] The use of accommodation strategies especially in terms of pronunciation and lexis and the need for consistency, clarity and comprehensibility in communication was stressed. Moreover, Quinn Novotná and Dunková (2015:168) observed the following pro-communicative strategies: "the use of politeness phenomena, backchanneling supported with laughter,

[23] In more detail, Quinn-Novotná et al. (2013) observe that according to the cohort, the 'ideal' model speaker of English was embodied by: proficient OSs (almost bilingual) (18.8 %), educated NSs of standard BrE (16.8 %), NSs of BrE (15.7 %), educated NSs of General AmE (11.2 %), NSs standard of inner-circle variety of English, other than BrE or AmE (10.9 %), NSs of AmE (8.6 %), OSs capable of dealing with most international communication situations (8.4 %), NSs of some dialectal, regional or nonstandard variety of English (4.9 %), 'other' (4.7 %).

[24] Besides, 41.1% of Quinn-Novotná et al.'s (2013) cohort claimed to be more confident in communication with an outgroup speaker and 19% with a native speaker, 33.4% did not have any preference, 11.7 % opted for 'others.' Some of the justifications were as follows: OSs "… speak more slowly," and "understand each other better." Several respondents observed that confidence or ease of communication is person-dependent rather than NS/OS-dependent and that NSs cannot always be accommodating when communicating with NSSs.

task-orientedness and focus on message, the let-it-pass principle, and the presence of long pauses within and between turns".

This study reveals that both positive and negative influences of immersion on the respondents' English were reported. Outgroup informants observed that gaining higher levels of proficiency in English allowed them to take care of their accent. Some students started to sound more American; others lost their mother tongue accent in English. In retrospect, the loss of an L1 accent was referred to as a negative outcome by one individual. In Quinn-Novotná et al. (2013) adhering to and not disguising their linguacultural identity was regarded as crucial by OSs. Several respondents stated that they were proud of their outgroup accents in English.

On the other hand, this study shows that as regards native speakers of English, some of them reported having started to speak more slowly and having stopped using /t/-glottalization. They also revealed that their syntax acquired features untypical of native English communication. Some informants admitted to making some sporadic changes in the pronunciation of words, e.g., *height*, *chance*, and using different accents for specific purposes, e.g., in general for fun, or British accent for mocking, Indian for exaggerating.

In Quinn Novotná and Dunková (2015), 89% of the teachers indicated huge progress in the students' English over the period of two years on account of not only the curriculum but also extracurricular activities and social involvement. Both the teachers and the students showed heightened linguistic sensitivity, represented by a wide array of communicative strategies, e.g. code-mixing or code-switching, linguistically open attitudes and acceptance of variation, as well as the ability to draw on multilingual resources. The impact of CLIL on proficiency in English, motivation and cognitive processes was observed to be beneficial and challenging for both the students and the teachers. Only a small fraction of native and proficient English users pointed to feeling slowed down in their own progress and efficiency of work by the students with lesser command of English.

In our study, before UWC the respondents were familiar with mostly Englishes of: 1) the inner circle, e.g. British (78%), American (65%), Australian (8.7%), but also of: 2) the outer circle, such as: Indian (21.7%) and South African (8.7%), and: 3) the expanding circle, e.g. French (13%) and Spanish (8.7%).

The English accents, the respondents found difficult to understand at the beginning of the study at UWCEA were South (21.4%) and East (20.8%) African English. 21% claimed that no accents created a problem. Three EFLs that were also difficult to understand at first were: Vietnamese (20.8%), Asian (16.7%) and Arabic (8.3%). Overall, Vietnamese English, Asian English and Irish turned out to be the most difficult accents for the respondents to comprehend. Pronunciation in general, including the rendition of words, vowels and consonants and a fast pace of speaking were listed as the main reasons for not being able to understand some accents. Listening carefully to accents and paying attention to them as well as improving understanding of accents via immersion, talking with the people whose accent was initially challenging and asking them to repeat or rephrase, were listed as the most frequent ways of adjusting to unintelligible English speech.

Quinn Navotná (2016) stresses the importance of varied and frequent exposure to different Englishes in the monolingual 1st International School of Ostrava. She suggests this could be achieved firstly by launching school partnerships, reaching out to other monolingual teaching institutions in neighbouring countries, through exchange visits, online discussion forums or blogs; secondly, drawing on multilingual resources at hand, inviting speakers of other languages or LF users, e.g. the students' parents who speak English of a different variety than the local one to talk about their hobbies or work; thirdly, choosing teaching materials informed by EIL, WEs or ELF informed teaching materials and; lastly, adopting CLIL through English, even for just one subject.

5. Conclusions

UWCEA is a highly multicultural multi-accent CLIL school where EIL is used by international students who prepare for IB. During instruction attention is paid to content rather than form and the emphasis is placed on the development and use of specialised vocabulary. The study confirms that UWC students make use of translingual strategies to be able to communicate effectively. They accommodate, adjust their speech to make it more intelligible and comprehensible, by using various techniques, e.g. paraphrasing, seeking help from a person with a similar accent, repetition and slowing down. They believe that the best way to get used to accents that are difficult to comprehend, which turned out to be Asian accents, including Vietnamese, as well as Irish and East African at the beginning of the study, is by listening carefully and immersion. Pronunciation and a fast rate of speaking are regarded as the main causes of misunderstanding. Although intelligibility is valued more than near-nativeness, half of the respondents aim at speaking with a native English accent, either British or American, which might stem from the earlier educational requirements in the respondents' native countries. A mere 10% report adhering to English with their mother tongue accent. The UWCees realise that their English is affected by everyday interactions with speakers of different native and outgroup English accents. Most outgroup speakers notice huge progress in their English, and an improvement in their communicative skills and understanding others. Some students boast having acquired a native-like accent and others notice a loss of their mother-tongue accent, which they would prefer to have retained. On the other hand, some native speakers observe, e.g. their own slower rate of speaking and the of syntax with untypical native features - the latter of which may exemplify what Selvi, Galloway and Rose refer to as a flexible, hybrid, fluid and creative aspect of EIL.

Although this research, carried out with a small number of participants at UWCEA in Moshi, Tanzania, addresses only a fraction of pronunciation-related questions, it is believed that it shows what role English outgroup and native accents play among linguistically and culturally sensitive EIL users.

References

Branson J. 2003. *An Evaluation of United World Colleges* [Doctoral thesis]. Institute of Education. University of London. https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10006651/

Bunnell, T. and N. Savvides. 2022. *The United World College experience and its framing: the evidence from a residential short course*. International Studies in Sociology of Education 33(4): 434–452. https://doi.org/10.1080/09620214.2022.2104743

Clark, S., D. Mucinskas, S. Magagna, K. Abramowitz and H. Gardner. 2022. *Educational experiences and outcomes at the United World Colleges: An investigation of impact*. [Summary Report]. The Good Project.

Codrington, S. 2006. *The United World Colleges: a Unique Model of International Education*. the 10th Anniversary Conference of the China Scholarship Council, Beijing, 16th June 2006.

Davison, J. and J. Tešan. 2021. *Public Spaces and Conflict Transformation: From Mostar's Old Bridge to Its United World College*. Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies 8(3): 244–261. https://www.jstor.org/stable/48710143 https://doi.org/10.29333/ejecs/768

Fernandez Abad, G. E., S.S Nga Wan and R. Warren. 2021. *Lessons learned by UWC Schools during the Covid-19 Pandemic* (abstract). INTED2021 Proceedings of 15th International Technology, Education and Development Conference, 8-9 March 2021 (online conference). https://doi.org/10.21125/inted.2021.1029

Flesh, H., M. Lee and M. Yemini. 2021. *Between the flag and the globe: the national identity of Israeli students at United World Colleges and at local Israeli schools*. Educational Review 74(1): 25–38. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2021.1874309

Hayden, M. and J. Thompson. 2010. *Student integration in Bosnia and Herzegovina: a study of the United World College in Mostar*. Reading: CfBT Education Trust, https://www.educationdevelopmenttrust.com/EducationDevelopmentTrust/files/e9/e9ba629b-687a-480e-b75f-71e26ae2b174.pdf

Hayden, M. and J. Thompson. 2013. *International Schools: Antecedents, Current Issues and Metaphors for the Future*. In R. Pearce (ed.) *International Education and Schools: Moving Beyond the First 40 Years*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing: 3–24.

Hill, I. 2012. *Evolution of education for international mindedness*. Journal of Research in International Education 11(3): 245–261. https://doi.org/10.1177/1475240912461990

Holland, J. D. 2016. *Kurt Hahn, the United World Colleges, and the Un-Making of Nation* [Unpublished PhD dissertation]. The University of Texas, Austin, USA.

Huckle, J. 2023. *Beyond "Interculturalspeak": The need for more critical approaches to intercultural understanding in international schools*. In M. R. Barker, R. C. Hansen and L. Hammer (eds.) *Handbook of Research on Critical Issues and Global Trends in International Education*. IGI Global:184–211. https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-6684-8795-2.ch008

Jenkins, J. 2009. *English as a Lingua Franca: interpretations and attitudes*. World Englishes 28(2): 200–207. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-971X.2009.01582.x

Krulj, J. R., S. T. Vidosavljević and N. R. Mladenović. 2020. *Comenius: The teacher of nations and the founder of didactic principles*. Zbornik radova Filozofskog fakulteta u Prištini [Collection of Papers of The Faculty of Philosophy] 50(3):101–121. https://doi.org/10.5937/ZRFFP50-26235

Levis, J. Michael. 2005: *Changing Contexts and Shifting Paradigms in Pronunciation Teaching*. TESOL Quarterly 39(3): 369–377. https://doi.org/10.2307/3588485.

Levis, J. M. 2020: *Revisiting the Intelligibility and Nativeness Principles*. Journal of Second Language Pronunciation 6/3: 310–328. https://doi.org/10.1075/jslp.20050.lev.

Maclehose, A. 2018. *United World Colleges and the International Baccalaureate*. In [no name] (ed.) *The International School of Geneva and the United World Colleges in the early years of the International Baccalaureate*. UWC Atlantic College: 39–46.

Maclehose, A., C. Reid, H. Thomas and P. Torsti (eds). 2021. *David Sutcliffe: Pioneer of International Education. His Life, his Words and his Legacy*. Sarajevo: UWC Mostar endowment 'Bridge to the Future'.

Mahlstedt, A. 2003. *Global Citizenship Education in Practice: An Exploration of Teachers in the United World Colleges*. International Comparative Education, School of Education, Stanford University.

Marlina, R. 2018. *Teaching English as an International Language. Implementing, Reviewing, and Re-envisioning World Englishes in Language Education, Routledge Studies in World Englishes*. London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315315768

Nowacka, M. and A. Nowacki. 2025. *English as an International Language at United World College East Africa. Attitudes to native and outgroup accents*. Linguistic Online 134(2): 125–144. https://doi.org/10.13092/lo.134.12183

Oord, L. van, and P. den Brok. 2004. *The International Teacher: Students' and Teachers' Perceptions of Preferred Teacher-Student Interpersonal Behaviour in Two United World Colleges*. Journal of Research in International Education 3 (2): 131–155, https://doi.org/10.1177/1475240904044384

Perez, A. B. 2018. *Mission Alignment and Operationalization: The Case of the United World Colleges*. International Research in Higher Education 3(4): 55–66. https:// doi.org/10.5430/irhe.v3n4p55

Peterson, A. D. C. 2003. *Schools Across Frontiers: The Story of the International Baccalaureate and the United World Colleges*. Chicago and La Salle: Open Court Publishing.

Quinn Novotná, V., J. Dunková and D. Grossner. 2013. *UWC schools: An Ideal ELF Environment?* Boğaziçi University Journal of Education, Special Issue: English as a Lingua Franca 30(1): 51–77.

Quinn Novotná, V., J. Dunková. 2015. *Teaching through ELF at International Post-Secondary Institutions: A Case Study at United World Colleges*. In H. Bowles and A. Cogo (eds) *International Perspectives on English as a Lingua Franca. International Perspectives on English Language Teaching*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137398093_9

Quinn Novotná, V. 2016. *Pedagogical implications of teaching through ELF: A case study of United World Colleges and the 1st International School of Ostrava*. In N. Tsantila, J. Mandalios and M. Ilkos (eds) *ELF: Pedagogical and interdisciplinary perspectives*. Athens: Deree – The American College of Greece: 112–120.

Rawlings, F. A. 1999. *Globalization, Curriculum and International Student Communities: a Case Study of the United World College of the Atlantic*. [Unpublished doctoral thesis]. University of London, Institute of Education, Education and International Development Academic Group.

Samaranayake, P. J. 1991. *United World Colleges: Bridges across Oceans: an Analysis of the Origin, the Current Status and the Future Prospects of the United World Colleges* [Unpublished Pd.D. Thesis]. Columbia University Teachers College.

Satok, A. 2014. *Education as a Force for Change: an Analysis of the United World College Movement* [Senior Thesis]. Princeton University. http://arks.princeton.edu/ark:/88435/dsp013j333242c

Selvi, A. F., N. Galloway and R. Heath. 2024. *Teaching English as an international Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108902755

Selvi, A. F., N. Galloway (eds). 2025. *The Routledge Handbook of Teaching English as an International Language*. London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003203261

Shekleton, P. R. 1978. *International Education with Particular Reference to the United World Colleges Project* [Unpublished M.Ed. Dissertation]. Canberra College of Advanced Education.

Smit, U. 2023. *English-Medium instruction (EMI)*. ELT Journal 77(4):499–503. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccad018

Sutcliffe, D. B. 1983. T*he First Twenty Years of the United World Colleges*. In D. R. Denning (ed) *The Story of St. Donat's Castle and Atlantic College with a Foreword by H.R.H. The Prince of Wales*. Cowbridge: D. Brown and Sons Ltd in conjunction with Stewart Williams Publishers, Barry: 85–118.

Sutcliffe, D. 1991. *The United World Colleges.* In P. L. Jonietz and D. Harris (eds) *International Schools and International Education.* World Yearbook of Education 1991. London: Routledge: 25–37.

Sutcliffe, D. B. 2012. *Kurt Hahn and the United World Colleges with Other Founding Figures*, UWC Adriatic, Italy.

Sylvester, R. 2002. *The "first" international school*. In M. Hayden, J. Thompson and G. Walker (eds) *International Education in Practice: Dimensions for National and International Schools*. London: Kogan Page: 3–17.

Tajfel, H. and J. C. Turner. 1979. *An integrative theory of intergroup conflict*. In W. G. Austin and S. Worchel (eds) *The social psychology of intergroup relations*. Monterey, Brooks/Cole: 33–48.

Trudgill, P. and J. Hannah. 2002. *International English: A Guide to Varieties of Standard English* (4th edition). London: Arnold.

Tsumagari, M. Ito. 2010. *The enduring effects of a United World College education as seem through graduate's eyes*. Journal of Research in International Education 9(3): 289–305. https://doi.org/10.1177/1475240910388916

uwcdobetter. 2020. *uwcdobetter Instagram Account*.
https://www.instagram.com/uwcdobetter/

Wilkinson, D. 1998. International education: a question of access. In M. C. Hayden and J. J. Thompson (eds) *International Education Principles and* Practice. London: Routledge Falmer: 227–234.

Marta Nowacka's research focuses on the pronunciation of Polish university students of English and on teaching phonetics. She has co-authored How Much Wood Would a Woodchuck Chuck?: An English Pronunciation Practice Book (Mańkowska et al., 2009) and Sally Meets Harry: A Primer to English Pronunciation and Spelling (Nowacka et al., 2011).

Antoni Nowacki is currently a student of Animal Behaviour at Bucknell University, PA, USA. At the time of the study, he was a diploma student at UWCEA, Moshi, Tanzania. His responsibilities included collaborating on the questionnaire design, piloting the study, and collecting data.