



## **Towards Integrating Lingua Franca in Thai EFL: Insights from Thai Tertiary Learners**

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English nowadays serves as a global lingua franca (ELF) for diverse ethno-lingua users. This research aims to explore how Southern Thai university student's view ELF, and its integration into English language teaching (ELT) in Thailand where English is used as a foreign language (EFL). 250 students from five southern-Thai universities purposely participated in questionnaires data collection, out of which 15 were selected for interviews. Descriptive statistics combined with a qualitative content analysis were utilized for data analysis. The findings showed a favorably perception of ELF by most participants. The participants apparently did not feel pressured in adopting native norms or mimic their linguistic patterns. They report that English users should not be penalized for grammatical mistakes nor be compelled to employ inner circle English provided there is no communication breakdown. The students felt comfortable with their Thai English accent as it represents their cultural identity. They opined that non-native English varieties should not be considered problematic for use. They suggested that learning different English varieties is important for intercultural communication. Therefore, ELT should integrate ELF pedagogical policies to promote English diversification and equip students with the changing roles of English.

Keywords: learning English, perceptions, English as a lingua franca, Thai students, English language teaching

### **INTRODUCTION**

TESOL has recently reported the importance of English as a global language as the increase number of teachers teaching English are from diverse lingua-cultural backgrounds. Learning English from teachers who share a similar mother tongue with the learners in expanding circle countries where English is used as a foreign language, such as China, Japan, Korea and Thailand, is therefore not just practical, but also a very

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positive learning experience. In Thailand, for example, it is evident that English was used as one of the criterion that qualified staff members as competent English language teachers. This further increased the demand for English in Thailand. When considering English language teachers, Watson Todd (2006) maintains, however, that one of the main issues relates to the native backgrounds of the teachers. He states that native speakers' educators seem to be "better", nevertheless, the fact that there are more nonnative English speaking teachers in Thailand suggest that the goal of learning English should be based on English as an international language (EIL) approach rather than any native English Standard. When English as a lingua franca (ELF) is understood as a reference medium of communication among people of dissimilar first languages and are often understood to mean their second (or later) language, then, English in Thailand is employed as a lingua franca; a language used among English nonnative speakers (NNSs) and not between or among native speakers (NSs) and NNSs.

Based on Kachru (1985) model which reflects the spread of English in three circles: the inner, outer and expanding circles, Thailand is in the expanding circle where English is used as a foreign language. In this Thai EFL context, it is of great interest to give preference to local or nonnative teachers considering the language context is one with more nonnative speakers than native speakers. Worth noting that the main interlocutors of Thai university graduate students are mainly from non-native English speaking countries (Wongsothorn et al, 2002). Boonyavatana (1996, p. 6), a professor in one of Thailand's universities pointed out that English in Thailand is frequently not used with speakers from Kachru's Inner Circle: "Take Thailand as a case study ... we are dealing with a new demand of cross-cultural communication between Thai and the English-speaking people of different cultures, most of them are not even native speakers of English". This could imply that utilizing English based on NES model as located in the inner circle countries may not be considered appropriate in Thailand (Baker, 2012). In this sense, it seems that the use of ELF in Thailand and other ASEAN nations, by extension, is probably the most appropriate model.

English as a global language is now being used by people across a broad range of nationalities and languages due to globalization. However, the increasing number of people with an interest in learning and using English every year to communicate internationally is alarming. Different people use English in different ways thereby resulting in different English varieties globally. Under global Englishes which include all English(s) used in the world, ELF is a growing area that focuses and reflects the reality that the number of non-English speaking users use English to communicate with each other rather than native English speakers (Ambele & Boonsuk, 2020; Bayyurt et al., 2019; Si, 2019). ELF has thus become an outstanding phenomenon for various linguistics scholars and researchers. The outcomes and implications of this study will not only add new knowledge in a Thai teaching context for educational stakeholders but will also provide some suggestions to reshape and reconsider the English contents to allow development within this group to enable supporting and meeting learners' social needs. In addition, the results of this study can contribute to a deeper understanding of how English is actually used and how it can be applied to be part of the English curricula.

It should therefore be interesting to explore more closely what students think about this new language evolution to better understand how they use English to serve their communicative needs within and beyond their contexts. Given that they are the ones learning/using the language (for which teachers expect them to use in and out of the classroom), their perception of how the ELF approach can be integrated in the teaching of English as a global language may provide realistic insights to educational stakeholders on the learners' everyday actual English-usage practice. This might in turn influence language policy and shape English language curriculum design and developments in such ELF contexts. Put differently, with such insights from students, educational stakeholders (learners, teachers, policy makers, curriculum designers, and administrators) could be able to appropriately design realistic policies of how English should be learnt and taught especially when English is currently considered as a global language with more than one variety. This research therefore probes into the perceptions of Thai university students in Southern Thailand towards using and integrating English as a lingua franca approach in a Thai EFL context. This research aim was addressed via the following research question: What are the attitudes of Thai university students towards using and integrating English as a lingua franca in teaching English in Thailand?

#### **Global Role of ELF**

The concept of 'English as a lingua franca' has in recent years emerge to describe communicative interactions between and among speakers of different first languages. By this, research has shown that the number of non-native speakers of English (NNSE) is now greater than that of native speakers (NS) (Jenkins, 2014; Galloway, 2013, Galloway & Rose, 2014). In China alone, according to Kirkpatrick (2007), the number of English-speaking learners is more than the total population of the Inner Circle countries. Likewise, teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) outnumbers native teachers. As a result, the interactions between NNSE and NNSE are much more frequent than the interactions between NNSE and NSE. Therefore, in view of this, English is no longer owned by NSs but by all users of English (Ambele & Boonsuk, 2020; Kirkpatrick, 2020). Nevertheless, the international spread of English has led to what is referred to as 'global Englishes' (Boonsuk & Ambele, 2019).

Without any doubt, English has become an international language and has acquired an international status. Emphatically, the international role of English, based on some scholars, have tried to describe English based on its worldwide functions, such as a global language (Crystal, 1997); English as a world language (Brutt-Griffler, 2002); English as an international language (Jenkins, 2000); English as a 'glocal' language (Pakir, 2009), and most frequently used, English as a lingua franca (Jenkins, 2006; Kirkpatrick, 2010, 2020). Although these descriptions have slight differences, they equally emphasize the sociopolitical and sociolinguistics realities of the use of English around the globe. ELF is an increasing field that focuses on and reflects the fact that a number of non-English - speaking users use English to communicate with each other rather than native English speakers under global English, which encompasses all

English(s) used in the world. For different linguistic scholars and researchers, ELF seems to have been adopted or recognized as a widely appropriate term representing many of the current uses in the world (McKay, 2008; Bayyurt et al., 2019). English language has therefore been changed to an international medium for lingua franca communication, mainly in order to serve different communicative purposes (Bayyurt et al., 2019; Si, 2019, 2020).

The phenomenal distribution of English indicates that it serves as a communicative resource not only for native and nonnative interaction but also for interactions among nonnative speakers. Seidlhofer (2011) notes, in particular, that English plays a vital role as a lingua franca in today's world. Jenkins (2009, p. 143) describes “ELF as a language of communication for speakers of various first languages. However, Seidlhofer (2001, p.134) indicates that the term ELF goes further than conventional native and nation-bound varieties and ELF users are free to accept, modify codes, create new types of Englishes, which vary from standard Native English requiring no native speaker sanctions by “skillfully co-constructing English for their own purposes” (Jenkins, 2011: 931). Seidlhofer (2011, p. 88) concludes that ELF’s “process of linguistic dynamics is indeed the one in which the users adapt and modify the language to suit changing situations of its use”. In this respect, the language is adopted as the lingua franca, rather than what is appropriate to the new communicative context (with reference to standard or native-speaker norms).

In the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) community where Thailand is a member, as a case where the current research is conducted, scholars (Bayyurt et al., 2019; Si, 2019, 2020) have argued that Inner Circle English does not make a good reference for speakers since those who use English are nonnative speakers who “skillfully co-construct English for their own purposes by treating the language as a shared communicative resource within which they have the freedom to accommodate to each other, code-switch, and create innovative forms that differ from the norms of native English and do not require sanctioning by native English speakers” (Jenkins, 2011, p. 931). As Baker (2009) posited, in such contexts, ELF serves as the main communication tool for education, trade and tourism. On his part, Kirkpatrick (2010) concluded that ELF is based on its educational and linguistic background, not on the native-speaking model. Consequently, ELF transcend traditional native norms/varieties to “poymodels and pluricentism” (Seidlhofer, 2001, p. 134).

#### **Elt in Elf Context: A Case of Thailand**

According to Keyuravong (2010), English in Thailand is taught as a foreign language to serve six different objectives as stated in the English curriculum in 1996. With this, native English varieties (British and American) have for a long time been accepted and promoted as the only internationally acceptable pedagogical models for ELT in Thailand (Ambele & Boonsuk, 2020). However, the linguistic phenomenon of ELF has provided new insights into whether English should be taught and used on the basis of native norms, or on the environment and context of the learners (for example, their context and immediate interlocutors). In some specific foreign settings, for example, Asia, where approximately 812 million people use English as communication medium,

understanding and using only native British or American English varieties have been observed to be impractical (Kirkpatrick, 2020).

While English is commonly used as a lingua franca in Thailand (Baker, 2012; Boonsuk & Ambele, 2019; Kirkpatrick, 2010, 2020), studies have shown that most educational stakeholders still continue to believe in the idea of native English language teachers (NEST) as the most suitable model for English language teaching. Their English variety have been regarded as good, correct, norm, perfect, natural and authentic (Boriboon, 2011). These explanations contrast with the representation of the English language used by teachers who do not speak English (NNESTs). They have been deemed to be lower or second class (Jindapitak & Teo, 2012). English has therefore been typically taught and learned in Thailand according to the expectations of Native speakers' norms. Consequently, most Thai English teachers and students have still been educated to practice, teach and learn, on the basis of a specific set of Western country theoretical guidelines (Boriboon, 2011). By this ideology, English classes in Thailand do not seem to equip students to use English in the real multilingual world but as imitators of native-like competence. ELF on the other hand promote the use of other Englishes in an EFL contexts given that the English users in such contexts are from varied lingua-cultural backgrounds. ELF should not be considered as 'a part of modern foreign languages' like EFL, but a theoretical and conceptual approach in ELF needs to be based on difference perspective rather than deficit perspective (Jenkins 2006, p. 139). Thus, variation and diversity in Englishes should be considered as a natural outcome of language contact and evolution. In order to address these problems, with insights from Thai students' perspectives, this study hopes to present how English should be taught, learned and used to make it more realistic and relevant to the Thai ELF context. Studies have suggested that Kirkpatrick (2012) "Lingua Franca" approach is one of the most influential strategies for the ELF classroom context as it represents how English is employed in real-life. This approach combines four observations from Kirkpatrick (2012, p. 40) as:

- 1) the purpose is not to teach students to sound native-like, but assist them to successfully use English in lingua franca contexts; they will, of course, sound as multilingual;
- 2) the curriculum must cover aspects of regional and local culture specific to of lingua franca users, as well as cultural and intercultural skills based on ASEAN / Asian cultures and literature;
- 3) the curriculum should therefore be designed so that students can engage in discussions in English objectively about their own and other cultural values and interests; and
- 4) the curriculum should comprise listening materials that familiarizes students with the languages and language styles of their fellow Asian multilingual English speakers in lingua-franca contexts.

With the lingua franca approach, Boonsuk et al., (2018) and Mauranen (2006) have observed that English teachers can be able to move from the unpleasant periphery of

EFL native norm to the position of authority (by themselves) and to develop a more suitable ELF teaching and learning materials and educational environments for their students. To this end, teachers might see how changing their native teaching and learning materials and teaching techniques to ELF would realistically prepare their learners for the real-world English usage. Therefore, as Baker (2012), Boonsuk & Ambele (2019), and Kirkpatrick (2010, 2020) have reported, the goal of learning English in an ASEAN context like Thailand is no longer to attain a native competence; “insisting on a single target standard is considered to be unacceptable, impractical and unnecessary in multilingual societies such as the ASEAN” (Kirkpatrick, 2010). From this point of view, Mauranen (2006, p. 147) assert that “ELF must be one of the main concerns if we want to consider the use of English and ELT in today's world”.

### **Students' Attitudes towards Elf**

English is the world's popular medium for international communication. Being globally utilized as ELF implicates that more non-native users are involved in the language. In fact, most English discourses are being produced by NNES in this era of globalization. Nevertheless, Jenkins (2007) and Galloway and Rose (2015) reported that a substantial number of English users in the global community still perceive that English revolves around the British and the American English varieties and inner-circle countries own the language.

As evident in non-native contexts, such as Thailand, students reportedly aspired to either speak British English or American English and avoided speaking words with their Thai English accent (Jindapitak & Teo, 2013; Snodin & Young 2015). The notion indicated that NNES were pressured by inner-circle ELT and forced to see these primary English varieties as ideal English learning targets. These influences further encouraged ELF speakers to devalue teachers with Thai English pronunciation. As Phusit and Suksiripakonchai (2018) pointed out, many Thai language learners became obsessed with imitating British English and American English and paid less attention to ELF communication success factors such as meaning negotiations and linguistic accommodation. Even worse, Episcopo (2009) and Sung (2016) concluded that ELF users demonstrated negative attitudes towards and dissatisfaction in expanding-circle English varieties and any form of non-native accents. In some cases, interlocutors did not attempt to finish the communication when strong accents were involved, causing unnecessary communication breakdowns. In contrast, conversations with native accents were welcomed with positivity. These phenomena reflected deeply rooted fallacy, where ELF users favor native accents over communicative intelligibility. Negative attitudes towards non-native English and local accents should be eradicated for one to succeed in ELF communication as most ELF interlocutors are non-native, and the purpose of communication is to deliver messages across successfully.

Nonetheless, as Jindapitak and Teo (2012) observed, in Thailand, Thai students using Thai English accents were perceived to demonstrate poor English proficiency compared with those who could adopt native English norms and pronunciation. With social recognition embedded in the English nativeness, many students were pressured to feel embarrassed and avoid non-native accents and attempt to imitate native English to be

socially recognized. When Buripakdi (2008) surveyed professional writers' attitudes towards Thai English, it was found that the writers viewed non-native English as non-standard, flawed, dissatisfactory, disapproving, faulty, unprofessional, informal, uneducated, and unreliable. Contrarily, native English was viewed as standard, flawless, satisfactory, approving, functioning, professional, formal, educated, and reliable. As a result, native English was symbolized as perfection, correctness, and social prestige. As documented in many studies above, ELF users in Thailand used native English to indicate success in English language development and criteria for social segregation. Since speaking English with non-native accents became a face-losing embarrassment, many ELF users were willing to sacrifice intercultural communicative intelligibility in the process. This conceptualization further prevented them from learning other global Englishes, resulting in inadequate knowledge of English diversity and prejudice in ELF communication.

## **METHOD**

### **Participants**

The participants in this study were 250 undergraduate students in their third and fourth year across five universities in Southern Thailand. Considering this study aims to explore southern Thai students' perception of ELT in ELF and applying the notion of ELF in a Thai ELF context, the participants were purposively recruited on the basis of their experience and understanding of the English language with varied interlocutors across different lingua-cultural backgrounds. Without such experience they might be unable to elicit information that addresses the research objectives in the study. The 250 participants involved 50 students from each university to elicit quantitative data that was used for analysis. However, to be able to complement the quantitative data with qualitative elicitations on the participant's own thoughts on the investigated phenomenon, 15 students were randomly selected to be interviewed based on practical criteria such as geographical proximity, willingness to interviewed and available at certain times. With regards to the selected universities, they represent the most prestigious universities in the Southern provinces of Thailand with a high influx of Thai and foreign students studying in programs where English is used as a medium of instruction or English major programs.

### **Instruments**

A mixed-method research design was adopted in this study since it attempts to explore deeper insights and patterns into the perceptions of the participants towards ELT in ELF context and applying the notion of ELF in Thai EFL classrooms. The mixed-method approach was employed by means of two research instruments: questionnaire and semi-structured interviews for both quantitative and qualitative data, respectively. The questionnaire was adapted from Jenkins (2007) and Jindapitak and Teo (2012). Some items from their questionnaires were adapted to meet the research objectives and, above all, the study context in order to make it more effective and appropriate for the study. The researchers also created some new questionnaire items to cover all other aspects of the research focus. The questionnaire mainly focused on students' general attitudes to ELT in the Thai ELF context. The questionnaire had three key sections. For

the first section, information on the student's language background was collected. The second section was about the students' English learning background, with focus on their English language proficiency level and the duration of studying English with Thai teachers and native English teachers. The reasons why they chose to study English or study in English, as the case may be, was also part of the question in this section. The third and most critical section was on the student's attitude towards English as lingua franca. This section contained Likert scale kinds of questions. Brown (2001, p. 41) reports that "Likert-scale questions are effective for gathering respondents' views, opinions, and attitudes about various language-related issues". In order to identify the responses of the respondents, a single structure questionnaire with a unique multiple choice questions and ranking criteria on a Likert scale were administered. Brown (2001) also states that by using this close-response style, questions are more concise and answers are relatively easy for the respondents to miss. Eventually, by using this questionnaire format, statistical analysis of a data from a large population is typically robust and reliable, and the findings are more consistently transmitted by those large groups of participants. The semi-structured individual interview was the second instrument used in this study to elicit participants' data. The issues raised in the questionnaire were further rephrased as interview questions to be able to access in-depth information on the participants' attitudes, as well as understanding their personal views in ways only possible by this tool as opposed to others like surveys or observations (Dörnyei, 2007).

#### **Data Collection and Analysis Procedures**

The researchers made separate individual contact to each of the universities during this process in order to schedule convenient times/date to meet with the participants. Once the scheduling was fixed, the researchers then fully engaged at administering the questionnaire to the participants in the classroom - a space offered by the universities for this purpose. The researchers interacted, in a friendly manner with the students to get them comfortable and relaxed. Discussions on general issues about their English language learning experiences were the focus of this interaction. The students then were told of the study's aims and were assured of anonymity throughout the research. The students were also presented with information on the questionnaire to confirm that they understood exactly what they had to do. Thereafter, they signed the informed consent form to show their willingness to be part of the study. The questionnaire was administered and later collected within the duration of the questionnaire administration. The contact information of those who indicated willingness to further participate in the interview was collected at the end of the questionnaire. The questionnaire items were designed in both Thai and English and the participants could answer the questions in either of these languages to ease their comprehension. The questionnaire data was quantitatively analyzed, descriptively using frequencies, percentages means and standard deviations. The choice of descriptive statistics is because "Descriptive statistics are used to summarize sets of numerical data in order to conserve time and space" (Dörnyei, 2007: 209). In the course of this analysis, mean values were compared across tables with all question items reviewed to identify key themes or any relevant participants' problems in the study. After collecting the questionnaire data from the participants, SPSS 21 was



employed for analysis, provided that the answers were coded into numbers to reflect variable values. The data were carefully input and double-checked to minimize errors. According to Dörnyei (2007), the data were added to the software in three steps: creating data files, establishing the variable coding framework, and inputting the data. Subsequently, the program ran Cronbach's alpha analysis to validate the questionnaire's reliability.

In order to elicit in-depth information on the participants' perceptions on using English as a lingua franca in Thai ELF context and their perceptions towards applying the notion of ELF in ELT classroom practices, 15 students were randomly selected to be interviewed. The interview with the participants was conducted in Thai ranging around 15 minutes. This interview data was analyzed qualitatively using content analysis as a tool that offers in-depth information in order to understand the participant's attitudes. The justification behind using qualitative content analysis was to explore contextualized meanings, identify patterns, and draw conclusions with sufficient reliability (Dörnyei, 2014; Patton, 2002, 2014). Hence, with this analysis, word and conceptual patterns could be generated from raw textual data. To work with content analysis, this study's interview data, live audio records, were used to create literal transcriptions and English translation. Note that this study's priority was to obtain answers from the interviewees, prosodies were disregarded in the transcription. After the data were transcribed and translated into English, the interviewees received and reviewed a copy of their data log to ensure that the data offer an accurate match to their intended communication. Consequently, after the reviews, the data were thoroughly read and reread for themes and patterns based on relevance to the study. Coding was also implemented to explain, categorize, and provide meanings to the data. The study employed a mixed-methods design with top-down, deductive coding implemented with pre-generated codes based on the research focus and questions and bottom-up, inductive coding gathered as they emerged from the data. The combination of the two coding methods ensures that the codes and coding remained relevant with the aims and questions of this study, and it was conducted in a framed process, while unanticipated themes and points of information, probably beneficial to future research, could be captured and considered.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Demographic Information of the Participants**

The total number of students for the questionnaire was 250, categorized in percentage by university as follows: A (28%), B (26%), C (16.8%), D (22) and E (7.2%). There were 180 female and 70 male students across different programs: English Program and Hospitality and Tourism Program. Most of them were in their third year (70%), while the rest were fourth year (30%). Additionally, all of them have had NESTs and NNESTs exposure, with 86% having received NNEST English learning experiences for more than ten years. When compared with those with NEST English learning experiences (13.2%), the figure is nearly seven times. On English language ability, most students described their English competence as "Good" (81.6%). Among the 250 students, only 3.2% perceive their language proficiency to be "Fluent." Finally, the main incentive for them to study English is the increased professional opportunity after graduation (75.2%).

### Attitudes of Students towards English as a Lingua Franca

The students were to answer the ELF attitudinal questionnaire by rating their expressions on a 5-point Likert scale, i.e., from Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Neutral (N), Disagree (D), to Strongly Disagree (SD). The following tables represent the ELF perceptions of 250 students in the five universities.

Table 1

Student perceptions towards English as a lingua franca (N=250)

Student perceptions towards English as a lingua franca	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	Standard Deviation SD)
1. Inner circle English perception	2.60	.801
2. Thai English	4.38	.918
3. Ownership of English	4.23	.559
4. Variety of English	4.06	.575
5. English teaching model	3.98	.651
6. Communicative competence	3.13	.727
Total	4.12	.769

Table 1 presents the overall perceptions of students from five universities concerning ELF. The overall mean perception score is positively high ( $\bar{x}$ =4.12). Dimensionally, the students indicated that they felt most positive about Thai English ( $\bar{x}$ =4.38), followed by Ownership of English ( $\bar{x}$ =4.23), Variety of English ( $\bar{x}$ =4.06), English teaching model ( $\bar{x}$ =3.98), Communicative competence ( $\bar{x}$ =3.13), and Inner circle English ( $\bar{x}$ =2.60), respectively. The positive attitudes of the students in these aspects (as seen in Excerpts 1-3) is so given the global spread and use of English as a lingua franca where variation, varieties and diversity in language forms are a common outcome. Six of the succeeding tables individually present in-depth results of these variables. From the interview data, the participants' views on these issues raised are presented in Excerpts 1-3.

#### Excerpt 1

The roles of English have changed dramatically in the last decades giving rise to different varieties of English, including Thai English. Just as others feel proud of their English variety, I also feel happy with my Thai English because it's the truest expression of who I am and where am from – it's my identity.

#### Excerpt 2

With the globalization of English as an international language, no single country can claim to own English. Different countries appropriate the language and use it differently for varied purposes within their contexts. In this regard, English is not the sole language of a particular country but that of any country that uses it.

#### Excerpt 3

Thailand is a context where English is used a lingua franca and so the idea of still or only focusing on native ELT norms in an ELF context seems contradictory. Teaching and learning should be geared towards communicative competence with less emphasis on grammar rules or the grammatical correctness of utterances.

### Student Perceptions towards Thai English

Table 2  
Student perceptions towards Thai English (N=250)

Items	Thai English	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	Standard Deviation (SD)
1	I am pleased with my pronunciation in English, as long as people can understand me.	4.53	.570
2	I don't care that people would think English is not my first language.	4.23	.559
3	I am pleased with the English pronunciation that I have.	4.75	.581
6	Often when I have to talk in a group / to a wide audience, I feel nervous about my English pronunciation.	2.03	.544
10	When people hear my accent that I'm not a native English speaker I don't like it.	3.96	.605
14	Thai accent I think is easier to understand than the accent of a native speaker.	4.50	.718
15	I want to speak Thai accented English.	4.46	.651

Among the six variables previously discussed, Thai English was the most positive and significant attitudinal variable among the students. This notion indicates that the students took pride in using their own Thai English variety and felt that it is not necessary to speak English like a native speaker. Based on the findings, the students felt satisfied with their current Thai English pronunciation ( $\bar{x}$ =4.75), felt happy to pronounce English in their own Thai style as long as it is still comprehensible to others ( $\bar{x}$ =4.53), and believed that their Thai accent is more natural to grasp when compared to native ones ( $\bar{x}$ =4.50). Furthermore, the students preferred speaking English with their Thai accent ( $\bar{x}$ =4.46) as their identities are embedded in Thai English ( $\bar{x}$ =4.23) and they accepted that speaking nonnative varieties of English is not a problem nor that it would be problematic when others could not recognize them ( $\bar{x}$ =3.96).

In general, the participants were pleased with speaking Thai-English (see Excerpt 1), they viewed their accent as a sign of their identity that distinguishes them as a country, they felt proud every time they used it, and had no regret about using it as a medium of communication. For these reasons, native English accents in interaction are no longer important or required (see Excerpts 4-6). Rather, communicators should be able to use their English accents to convey their identities and origins based on their preferences.

#### **Excerpt 4**

In a context where English is a lingua franca like Thailand and where most of its users are from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, adhering to native norms or accents is an impossible thing to do.

#### **Excerpt 5**

The accent of certain speakers reveals their identity and country of origin. This brings about beauty in the way English is used as a medium of communication. Am proud of my Thai accent even though some Thai people may differ with me on this but to a larger extent, I think every local accent should also be given priority in teaching and learning as well as the native accents of Britain and America.

**Excerpt 6**

People use their accents to convey their local identity so if we expect every learner to pick up native accents, then, what we are saying is that their local accent should be relegated to the background for native accents. This is the same as asking one to deny who he/she is; that they can only be recognized as important if they speak using a particular native accent.

According to research, language and identity are inseparable from each other (Edwards, 2009; Llamas & Watt, 2010; Ren, 2014). Language serves as an identifier that gives insights about the speaker of a language as "everyone is familiar with accent, dialect and language variations that show the memberships of speakers in specific speech communities, social classes, ethnic groups and national groups." Therefore, a language "does not only represent who we are, but in some way it is who we are, and its use defines us directly and indirectly" (Llamas & Watt, 2010: 1).

**Student Perception towards Ownership Of English**

Table 3

Student perception towards ownership of English (N=250)

Items	Ownership of English	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	Standard Deviation (SD)
4	English no longer belongs to the native speakers but to everyone who uses it.	4.23	.559
24	English belongs only to the UK/US.	2.11	.527
25	English is a global language which anyone can claim ownership.	4.45	.725

The table shows that the students perceived English today as a language with global ownership ( $\bar{x}$ =4.45) and that means global members, regardless of their cultures and mother tongues, can also claim rights of ownership of English as long as they regularly employ the language in daily communication ( $\bar{x}$ =4.23). With the global role of English as a lingua franca predominantly used by non-native English speakers worldwide (Canagarajah, 2005; Crystal, 2003), it may seem inappropriate to describe English as the 'first' language spoken by those born in a native English-speaking country. The students also believe that English does not solely belong to the Inner circle group of people (e.g. the US and the UK) ( $\bar{x}$ =2.11). This idea significantly influenced the students' perception in this regard as such global role of English as a lingua franca makes no nation the sole owners of English or makes English a language belonging only to native countries like UK and US as seen in Excerpts 7 and 8.

**Excerpt 7**

Before we use to think that the right owners of English are the inner circle countries, namely, Britain and America but with the global use of English nowadays as an international language, every country can claim ownership to the English language.

**Excerpt 8**

Given the way in which English is used by many countries around the world, English now plays an international role serving different communicative needs. In this way, every country owns the English language as they can use it in any way they deem fit for whatever purpose without worrying about adhering to native or corrects grammatical rules.

The findings are consistent with previous studies, such as Jenkins (2006) and Shohamy (2006) who stated that English is neither geographically nor ethnically restrictive. As it is now widely used by global speakers, those born in the United Kingdom or the United States who speak it should not use it as a first language, nor should those from the rest of the world who have learned to communicate with native English speakers regard it as a foreign language. Congruently, Shohamy (2006: 171) added:

‘Who owns English?’ is a question frequently asked about the language that has become the ‘world’ language, the main means of communication, with no exclusive ownership of anybody. English is a free commodity as well, it is free to be used, shaped and moulded by anybody in different ways, as is the case for its million users who construct and create endless types of ‘Englishes.’ English does not belong to anybody specific, not to a nation, not to a group, it belongs only to those who want to own it.

From this quote, English is now a lingua franca in the world and no speaker or group is the sole owner of the language. In addition, the participants were significantly affected by the argument of Shohamy (2006) and began to feel confident in also claiming ownership of English. Through this change of paradigm, the dominance of non-native English speakers across the world using ELF, and even the notion of English ownership is strongly challenged (Canagarajah 2005; Crystal 2003).

**Students’ Perceptions on English Varieties**

Table 4  
Students’ perceptions on English Varieties (N=250)

Items	Variety of English	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	Standard deviation (S.D.)
12	A global English variety that is not restricted to a specific English speaking country and can be used anywhere needs to be developed.	4.59	.781
16	Understanding English varieties, e.g. Indian English, Singaporean English, Chinese English, etc. is vital.	4.72	.568
17	The understanding of different English accents is significant since English is a global language.	3.78	.691
18	Understanding various forms of the English language is really important.	3.71	.621
19	I can adapt to accommodate my listeners in the way I talk if I’m aware of different English varieties.	4.32	.482
20	We don’t need to recognize non-standard English varieties since they’re not native English varieties.	2.03	.605

Table 4 discusses the students’ attitudes towards linguistic variations and diversity of English. It is now abundantly clear that the students saw the importance to recognize more than one English varieties ( $\bar{x}$ =4.72). Hence, learning non-inner-circle Englishes is

a must to ensure efficient intercultural communication in this era. The students agreed that the concept of global Englishes (GE), without exclusive ties to specific English varieties or English-speaking nations, should be developed ( $\bar{x}$ =4.59) and that modern English language teaching should attempt to familiarize students with as many English accents as appropriate since English is a global language ( $\bar{x}$ =3.78). In addition, the students indicated that learning different pronunciation patterns sounded enjoyable ( $\bar{x}$ =3.71) and accommodating intercultural communication might require more knowledge of all English varieties ( $\bar{x}$ =4.32). Contrarily, some students believe that they do not need to recognize non-standard English varieties ( $\bar{x}$ =2.03). This is because the English language ideology in Thailand has instilled in some Thai students (despite the changing role of English) the idea that the native English variety is the most suitable model for English language learning (Boriboon, 2011; Keyuravong, 2010). This ideology has influenced the perceptions of these Thai students towards English.

The importance of the prevalence of different English varieties was observed by the participants in Table 4 (see Excerpts 9 and 10). They also realized that English does not only include British or American varieties, it also encompasses all existing and emerging variants which speakers from several linguistic and cultural backgrounds use in communication (Galloway & Rose 2018). The more global English has become, as addressed in Section 4.2.2, the more participants understand that imitating other English varieties (e.g., British and US) is not appropriate because virtually all nations have a separate language version (Fang & Ren, 2018; Galloway & Rose, 2015). This is the view shared by some of the participants in this study as we see in Excerpts 9 and 10.

#### ***Excerpt 9***

To be able to produce effective English learners who can communicate well, there is a need for every English accents to be integrated in the curriculum so that learners can be aware and familiarize themselves with different accents and know in what appropriate context to use each.

#### ***Excerpt 10***

Teaching English today following just native speaking accent will be bias towards other English accents. If we say that English is a global language and used mostly by people who do not have English as their native language, then, we should expect to welcome varied accents or manner in which the language is used in communication. So real-life communication will require that learners are exposed to the different varieties that they are likely to meet outside the classroom.

In today's society where English is used mostly in cross-cultural contexts, false ideals favoring native speaking expert by ELT students or practitioners should be discarded because they provide little practical advantage (Jenkins 2015; Kirkpatrick 2012). Specifically, the conceptions of 'nativeness, sovereignty and idealized pedagogical norms ...' should be dismissed in the ELT cultures (Blair, 2015: 99) and multilingual frameworks should be integrated into the ELT pedagogy (Pakir, 2009).

### Student Perceptions towards English Teaching Model

Table 5  
Student perceptions towards English teaching model (N=250)

Items	English teaching model	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	Standard deviation (S.D.)
21	I prefer learning with NNESTs to increase my speaking skills.	3.72	.718
22	When I was learning English with NNESTs I could speak more fluently.	3.65	.561
23	If I practiced with NNESTs my pronunciation will be great.	3.45	.614
26	I can learn English from NNESTs as well as from NESTs.	4.50	.690
27	All teachers, be it NNESTs and NESTs are my positive role models in English learning.	4.85	.814
28	It wouldn't matter where my teachers are from, as long as they're good instructors.	4.78	.670
29	As long as my teachers are good teachers, I don't care if they are NNESTs or NEST.	4.81	.850
30	I don't mind if my teachers are NNESTs or NESTs as long as they are good teachers.	3.95	.771

On English teaching model, it's evident that the students would not mind nor discriminate NNEST. The findings showed that both NEST and NNEST are perceived equal in English language teaching ( $\bar{x}$ =4.85). Furthermore, the students did not mind their teachers' geographical origins, e.g., Great Britain, USA, or Asian nations ( $\bar{x}$ =4.78) as long as these teachers can deliver sufficient teaching efficiency and possess proper qualifications. More specifically, the students would not mind who (i.e., either native or non-native) would be their English-speaking ( $\bar{x}$ =3.95) or English-pronunciation ( $\bar{x}$ =3.45) teachers as long as they are proficient. To support these notions, the students perceived that even if they were to learn with NNEST, they could equally gain the learning confidence ( $\bar{x}$ =3.72) and English fluency ( $\bar{x}$ =3.65).

It seems that many of the participants did not just entrust NESTs as the best teachers. In addition, both NESTs and NNESTs were perceived to be adequate for ELT (see Excerpts 11 and 12). This idea indicates that the quality of English education and the personal background of teachers, such as being native or non-native, is not clearly connected. Therefore, teachers' personal background for example, country of origin, ethnicity, mother tongue and the physical characteristics should not be determining factors for the teacher's ability to teach English as some of the participants opined in Excerpts 11 and 12.

#### **Excerpt 11**

That someone is a native speaker of English doesn't necessarily make the person a good teacher of English. Nativity or country of origin is in no way a determinant to an effective English language teacher as, in my opinion, some of the best English teachers are not from any of the native English-speaking countries like UK and USA.

**Excerpt 12**

It's a myth that because a teacher is white skin or blond hair means the person can teach English. In fact, none of these are connected to effective language teaching: teachers' personal background for example, country of origin, ethnicity, mother tongue and the physical characteristics. Therefore, they should not be considered or used as the basis for who can best and effectively teach English (or not).

In contrast, English teachers should be assessed based on their professional characteristics (Kirkpatrick, 2010). Through this process, ELT stakeholders would begin to come to terms with the inaccurate dichotomy of falsely connecting their native backgrounds to effective teaching. With the proper implementation of this initiative, the recruiting practices in the ELT sector will be fairer and all teachers will be given equal access to employment, advancement and compensation. Moreover, they will work in more professional environments, which have equal opportunities for real performance and as results, earn respect, gratitude and psychological support.

**Student Perceptions towards Communicative Competence**

Table 6

Student perceptions towards Communicative competence (N=250)

Items	Communicative competence	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	Standard deviation (S.D.)
7	Before you can speak [English] you must make sure you speak it correctly.	2.03	.559
11	I'm not worried about the errors of other English learners as long as I understand what they're saying.	2.11	.605

In general, this table describes what the students believed to signify communicative competence. The findings revealed that the students did not hold interlocutors accountable for grammatical errors ( $\bar{x}$ =2.11) nor require others to always speak correct English ( $\bar{x}$ =2.03) based on the inner-circle norms as long as the conversations flow without major communicative barriers or communication breakdowns.

It was interesting to discover, as stated in Table 6, that participants preferred to be communicative intelligence over native background (see Excerpts 13 and 14).

**Excerpt 13**

A key to effective communication is comprehensibility and not grammatical correctness. People today really don't care much about whether one speaks correct grammar or not as long as the interlocutors understands what they are saying. In my opinion, I think this is because of the fact that English has now become an international language and is used in most contexts as a lingua franca among speakers of different first languages.

**Excerpt 14**

In my opinion, communicative intelligibility is prioritised nowadays over grammar as most people now use English as a lingua franca. This now makes the idea of following native norms in communication irrelevant as people can still be understood even without sounding native.



Given the fact that nonnative speakers use English as their second or foreign language in conversations with native and nonnative speakers, local varieties gradually emerged in the Inner, Outer and Expanding Circles (Jenkins, 2006) in this globalized world with intense cultural integrations.

### Student Perceptions towards Speaking English like a Native Speaker

Table 7  
Student perceptions towards Inner circle English (N=250)

Items	Inner circle English	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	Standard deviation (S.D.)
5	Should everyone sound like a native speaker when speaking English?	2.10	.651
8	I don't think speaking like a native English speaker is necessary.	4.23	.559
9	Often, I find it difficult to understand people with a strong non-English accent who speak English.	2.13	.605
13	I want an American accent because this English accent is considered correct.	2.03	.512

Parallel to the findings in previous tables, many students did not find values in attempting to imitate native English speakers or adopt native-like competency when it comes to using English ( $\bar{x}$ =4.23). Moreover, they felt that it is unnecessary to adopt the British or American varieties of English and employing non-British or non-American accents are not significant communicative barriers ( $\bar{x}$ =2.13). Adding to the notion, they did not give priorities to the British or American varieties as the non-inner circle varieties of English are equally worth learning ( $\bar{x}$ =2.03).

Although many studies have reported higher standards and acceptability of inner circle English (Dewey, 2015; Jenkins, 2007), this study found a surprising contrast which challenges the original conception. Most participants agreed that native English languages such as English and American are not necessary in some channels of communication (see Excerpts 15).

#### **Excerpt 15**

Needless to ignore the fact that many varieties of English exist today than it used to be. It is no longer just the native British or American varieties in existence but others like Thai English too. This makes teaching and learning English curriculum to be inclusive of all these varieties to give learners better local and global exposure of English. This is not to suggest that native varieties are not important but that other varieties should also be recognized as well in English language teaching.

The notion suggests that Englishes in the inner circles are no longer the only recognized varieties. Apparently there are many English users who are still able to communicate with each other with various English varieties, with no communication breakdown (e.g. Blair, 2015; Canagarajah, 2005; Fang & Ren, 2018; Galloway & Rose, 2015, 2018; Jenkins, 2009; Ren, 2014). The influence of globalization and intensive cultural integrations has brought about a distinctive development of their local English for English speakers in the inner, outer and expanding circles. Consequently, the extent of diversification is so high that English has now moved from a monocentric to a

pluricentric situation. Therefore, a speaker no longer needs to stick to a one particular variety and ignore the others. After all, English speakers should have the right to speak English as they wish and to be free from the fixation of native English.

### **CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

The findings from the analysis in this research indicate that associating English with any nation or culture is impractical. It is seen as a way of expressing people's national identity and culture, whether it comes from the countries in the inner, outer or expanding circles. As a result of today's shift in the role of English as lingua franca, in multilingual and multicultural society, English is taught, learned and utilized in various ways. With respect to ELT, Dewey (2013) and McKay (2006), in particular, report that ELT should be reviewed and amended to meet this the current role of English. On this point, Blair (2015: 99) argues that "ELT should be excluded from the definition of 'native, ownership and idealized pedagogical standards'" in order to understand how English is actually used. The goal model for English students should indicate a move away from NS models to bilingual or multilingual language speakers target (Pakir, 2009). It can be inferred that ELF aims to inform educational stakeholders (in particular, policy makers, teachers and students) that it is insufficient and less realistic to attempt to use the English language today based on the native speaker models as its applicability in typical ELF contexts like Thailand may not support its implementation in ELT in Thailand. Therefore, the goals and curricula of ELT and learning should be updated, particularly when teaching or learning English is an ELF context, in order to implement universally appropriate English in ELT classrooms rather than a specific native variety of English that is tied to a nation.

As Widdowson (2003) pointed out, educators should not aim to be exclusive, such as relying on a set of linguistic norms and targets, when teaching English as a foreign language. Priorities should be given to strengthening skills, communicative competencies, and context-based adaptability (i.e., in local and international settings). As a result, both educators and learners should be fostered through education and training to recognize ideologies such as English diversity, pluricentricity, and the new status of English, which is as a lingua franca (ELF) (Blair, 2015; Dewey, 2015; Seidlhofer, 2011). Furthermore, education curriculums for teachers should be revised to embrace theories on practical and pragmatic English, recognition of today's English varieties, communication intelligibility, linguistic accommodation, meaning negotiation, and cross-cultural communicative facilitation through English. With these pro-ELF bodies of knowledge, future ELT educators and practitioners are projected to be more equipped to teach diverse English and help eliminate the fallacy favoring Native English speaker models. As Dewey (2015) highlighted, NNESTs have tremendously suffered from unequal treatment in ELT hiring when compared to NESTs, while many of them proved to be outstanding in drawing on their personal experiences to design foreign language lessons.

However, it was noteworthy to mention that the small number of participants is a major limitation of this study. The findings only reflect the perceptions of 250 students (50 students from each university) from five universities. Therefore, further studies are

suggested to include a larger participant group and cover more contexts, such as ESL and EFL. Furthermore, researchers should go beyond a students' perception survey. It would be fruitful if researchers would consider examining ELF-related attitudes from the perspectives of parents, teachers (both NESTs and NNESTs) from other disciplines in further studies.

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