

# Attitudes toward English as a Lingua Franca in Multilingual University Contexts of Northeast Thailand<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This study examines attitudes toward English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) among international relations (IR) offices in universities of Northeast Thailand featuring a cosmopolitan climate of multilingual communities. The English language has become vital as a means of communication within such institutions. To collect quantitative data, a questionnaire was sent out electronically to 140 respondents including foreign students together with foreign lecturers, researchers, and Thai IR officials. With regard to qualitative data, there were 45 interview participants, including 18 Thai IR officials and 27 international visitors. The findings confirm the widely expressed view that ELF exists, and the research participants generally accepted a wide variety of English variants. They also showed a clear preference for the model of native English speakers as a reference for language learning.

**Keywords:** attitudes, English as a Lingua Franca, international relations offices

## Introduction

This paper presents a study of attitudes toward English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) among international relations offices (IR) in universities

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of Northeast Thailand. Although these institutions are not situated in the capital or in the better known central region of Thailand, there is an increasing tendency for foreigners to visit or study on campuses in the Northeast region. This results in a pluralistic environment and a multilingual community. The English language has become essential as a means of communication within such institutions. English has emerged as a Lingua Franca used by almost all personnel actively involved in running an internationalized university.

At present, while there are over 350 million native English speakers (NESs), it has been estimated that two billion or more speak English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL). The number of people who speak English as an international language (EIL) is growing constantly (Crystal, 2003), while the number of NESs has decreased (Graddol, 1999). Additionally, it can be said that the paradigm of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) is expanding because more people from various cultures with different first languages (L1s) now use English for communication to a greater extent (Jenkins, 2015). In this research, ELF is defined as the use of English to communicate between interlocutors speaking different L1s and who are from different cultural backgrounds. To clarify the notion of ELF, Seidlhofer (2011) explains that ELF is the use of English among speakers of different L1s whereby English is used as the communicative medium of choice and is often the only option. ELF thus achieves the status of language of communication between two or more people who did not acquire English as a first language. ELF speakers recently include NESs also adopting ELF as an additional language for intercultural communication (Seidlhofer, 2011). Consequently, people from different cultural backgrounds communicating in multilingual contexts are compelled to negotiate disparate meanings and find a form of communication intelligible to others.

Many research studies suggest that people perceive English as spoken by speakers from various socio-cultural backgrounds. These studies are positive toward and accept ELF users, who primarily need English to express their message understandably to another interlocutor. As a result, many English speakers tend to accept the use of ELF. Under

internationalized university circumstances, most people in these contexts are ELF users speaking different mother languages.

The main concern of this study explores attitudes toward ELF comprising emotions, beliefs and behaviors toward a particular ELF domain. They are in fact the result of personal experiences, which exert a powerful influence over behavior. This study adopts a broad definition of attitudes consisting of affective behavior, feelings, values, and beliefs detected in the subjects (Garrett, 2003: 1-23). Importantly, the relevance of the ideology, beliefs, and attitudes of NESs as a model and target in English language teaching (ELT) and in second language acquisition (SLA) has lately been increasingly questioned in relation to ELF (Kaura and Ramana, 2014). In SLA and ELT, the ultimate goal or target of acquisition has been the speech of a native speaker of English; therefore, non-native speakers of English are seen as imperfect compared to NESs. Above all, research in ELF flourishes and provides insightful discoveries regarding the functions of English in local contexts and their users; however, attitudes toward ELF are often less than favorable, even among NNESs (Holliday, 2005, as cited in Kaura and Ramana, 2014). Furthermore, Jenkins (2007) found that most NNESs display a more positive attitude toward native English models than to local or non-native English models. This could be due to deeply rooted ideologies, as most textbooks, pedagogical models and theories, and syllabuses are based on NES standards. After all, success and failure in the English language are always judged based on NES norms and standards (Kaura and Ramana, 2014). In the real world, NES ideology has been radically entrenched in NNES communities for years, including Thailand, where moving away from standards is usually considered wrong and leads to deleterious effects. According to Jenkins (2007, 2009), ELF is frequently not accepted and is viewed as being inferior to NES models; often ELF is termed as being too tolerant of errors and endorses an “anything goes” attitude.

Interestingly, when a number of NNES teachers were surveyed by Kaur (2013) in Malaysia, they showed a preference for the NES model in their teaching over the NNES model. In addition, the attitudes

and awareness toward ELF among forty NNES teachers of various nationalities from Georgia and UAE were studied by Mikeladze and Al-Hariri (2018). The findings indicated that the participants in both groups had similar perceptions of ELF. To the participants' understanding, ELF was defined as a bridge language used for communication, i.e. as a tool for international communication between speakers of different languages or nationalities, and as a means of communication with foreigners (non-native speakers) (Mikeladze and Al-Hariri, 2018).

Albi-Mikasa (2009) investigated whether NES norms and English language teaching (ELT) affect NNESs who are not English teachers. Her interviews suggested that most NNESs were not too stressed coping with ELF. However, a small percentage of NESs demonstrated anxiety regarding unsuccessful communication with NNESs in an ELF community. While NESs were afraid of not being understood by NNESs, NNESs were more concerned about how to say what they wanted and how to articulate elegantly in the English language.

Furthermore, Wang and Ho (2013) also reported attitudes toward ELF in terms of users, diversity, and acceptance shown by both international and non-international college (IC) students, in that both groups held a substantially positive attitude toward ELF, recognized the fact that English language users were not limited to native speakers, and accepted that one effect of ELF is its diversity. However, both groups of students tended to favor the native speaker model for English language learning and experienced a moderate level of difficulty in understanding NNESs. The results of this study also have pedagogical implications, particularly for non-IC students, who were encouraged to increase their exposure to ELF and nurture a more positive attitude toward ELF. However, they held less favorable attitudes toward ELF diversity and its acceptance. Therefore, this implies a need for pedagogical intervention to strengthen their sense of ELF, which will contribute significantly to the success of university students in similar contexts for intercultural communication.

Turning to recent studies that were conducted in a Thai context, there has been research specifically related to attitudes toward ELF. Ploywattanawong and Trakulkasemsuk (2014) conducted a survey to determine comprehension levels of ELF. They found that grammatical features were considered positively. They concluded that there was the possibility for Thais and others to gradually accept ELF if they could expose them more to ELF users.

Akkakoson's recent (2019) study sought to understand students' sense of ownership of English by adopting a written interview format. The study revealed that participants did not think they owned English (77.27%), although half of them (52.27%) related a positive experience using English and mentioned that it increased confidence, improved motivation and was a source of inspiration. Another research was conducted by Boonsuk and Ambele (2021) on students' views of ELF. The study revealed a positive perception of ELF. Moreover, respondents also felt it impractical to associate English with any nation or culture.

A next recent study by Huttayavillaiphan (2021) on Thai university students' awareness of English variation and Global Englishes (GE) revealed that the participants stated that a teacher should focus on language flexibility rather than fixed rules when communicative competencies and strategies were more important, and any speakers of English could claim ownership and could adjust the language to suit their purposes.

Another recent research by Timyam (2021) showed that forms of relative clauses in the context of Thai ELF users were one universal mechanism in ELF communication that operated at all linguistic levels. Moreover, Wilang and Siripol (2021) conducted a research project with Thai respondents subscribed to one Facebook group on attitudes toward intelligibility, the use of English to communicate with NESs and NNESs, learning materials for a multicultural environment, and exposure to varieties of English. The results indicated that the respondents were in favor of English variants, but they preferred British and American standard dialects.

As previously demonstrated, although several empirical studies investigating attitudes toward ELF have been carried out, they were mostly conducted with both students and teachers and only with Thai research participants. There is still a lack of research on specific ELF users in a community similar to the one in this study. In addition, when many foreigners come to Thai universities, they must contact international relations (IR) offices. These IR offices project the university image, so it is necessary and beneficial to obtain data on their attitudes toward ELF use. If the research participants perceive positive attitudes, it might also imply effective ELF communication.

This research examined the attitudes toward English as a Lingua Franca at an international relations (IR) office within a multilingual Thai higher education context in order to provide specific answers to this research question: What are different users' attitudes regarding the use of English as a Lingua Franca in a Thai university international relations office setting?

## **Research Methodology**

### **Research Sites and Research Participants**

The international relations (IR) offices of four universities in Northeast Thailand were the research sites for collecting data for this analysis. Although these sites are located in regional areas, they are multilingual communities where English is used as a Lingua Franca. With regard to quantitative data collection, a questionnaire was sent out electronically to reach all respondents. For qualitative data collection, the research participants were invited for interviews at their convenience in order to provide more in-depth information.

In total, 140 (47.3%) of 296 responded to the questionnaire. For international visitor respondents, 114 foreign students (both undergraduate and graduate) and together with foreign lecturers and researcher were invited to respond to the online questionnaire sent via email and social networking sites. Totals of 43 (37.7%), 48 (42.1%), and 23 (20.2%) were either pursuing or had doctoral degrees, master's degrees, and bachelor's degrees respectively.

In addition, there were 26 official Thai IR participants (hereafter called TS) responding to the questionnaire. Of the 26 TSs, the majority of them (42.3%) had been working for IR offices between one and three years and eight (30.8%) of them for three to six years. Three (11.5%) of the respondents had been working as IR officials for more than 12 years. Of 78 international respondents (hereafter called IV), 37 (47.4%) of them had been staying in Thailand for one to three years. These respondents' nationalities were diverse, making up 22 nationalities. The highest number of respondents by nationality was Indonesian (20 respondents). Chinese and Vietnamese shared the second highest.

With respect to the questionnaire respondents' first language, 25 first languages were reported, Chinese being the most frequent. Apart from their first language and English, at least 27 other languages were spoken by the questionnaire respondents, including Thai, Korean, Dzongkha, Chinese, Indonesian, Spanish, German, Malay, and French. What stands out in connection with the respondents' spoken languages is their variety, comprising approximately 50 languages in total. English was reported as one of them. Turning to the respondents' major fields of study, these were from various disciplines. Twenty-one (41.2%), 22 (43.1%), and 8 (15.7%) were in the humanities and social sciences, science and technology, and medical sciences respectively.

The questionnaire respondents from the four research sites were also invited for the interviews. There were 45 interview participants, including 18 TSs and 27 IVs. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were various health restrictions, which led to the interviews mainly being completed online, e.g. via Zoom, Google Meet, Skype, Line, Facebook, and by telephone. Therefore, pre-arranged appointments had to be carefully planned due to hygienic restrictions as well as different time zones, as some interviewees were residing abroad during that time. However, these circumstances did not affect the main operation of the interview sessions.

The eighteen TS interview participants had been working as TS from three months to 20 years. Six of them possessed a master's degree in English, English and Communication, or TEFL, and the rest possessed

a bachelor's degree in English, English and Communication, International Affairs, or Social Development. All of them used Thai as their first language and spoke very few other languages, apart from English.

The twenty-seven IVs had been staying in Thailand the shortest was 10 months and the longest was 12 years. The international interviewees were from 15 different countries: Australia, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, China, England, India, Indonesia, Japan, Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines, Tanzania, USA, and Vietnam. In terms of spoken languages, about 23 different languages were spoken by the IVs, including Arabic, Bahasa Indonesia, Chinese, Dutch, English, and Filipino. Regarding the positions of these international interview participants, twelve were lecturers, eight were master's degree students, five were doctoral students, and two were foreign experts.

### **Research Instruments**

The questionnaire asked for clarification and detailed data on the participants' attitudes toward ELF. The questionnaire, written in English, was basically adapted from Wang and Ho (2013) and contained two main parts: ELF recognition and acceptance, and English learning models.

Regarding the validity and reliability of the questionnaire survey, the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC), determined by obtaining scores from three experts, was used to check the validity and reliability. The three invited experts were experienced teachers and researchers in the fields of applied linguistics, English language teaching, and English as a Lingua Franca. Both the questionnaire survey and the interview questions were also pilot-tested with a similar group of research participants to ensure the questions were clear, measured what they were intended to measure, and produced sufficiently identical results in repeated trials. To clarify IOC conduct, 10 out of 24 items scored at 0.33, which was lower than 0.5, while reserved items scored equal to or higher than 0.5. As a result, specific items which were commented on for improvement by the three experts were revised.

The interview questions, also prepared in English, asked about the research participants' basic understanding of ELF and their attitudes toward ELF and toward NESs and NNESSs. When the research participants were interviewed, ELF interactions were also exemplified for their benefit. For the reliability of the research, in particular the interview sessions, strategies were employed to help ensure honesty in the participants when contributing data. For example, the participants could choose not to answer questions. Consequently, the data was collected only from those willing to take part freely. In addition, the researchers established a rapport at the opening of the interview by stating that there were no right answers to the questions that would be asked (Shenton, 2004). Moreover, on-the-spot checks of the transcripts were made by the participants to determine the accuracy of their answers.

### **Data Analysis**

Quantitative data from the questionnaire were descriptively analyzed for frequency and percentage means, while the qualitative data from the recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, so the transcriptions were exactly the same as the original words spoken by all interviewees. The transcriptions were then coded. At this stage, themes could be derived from the guide of the constructed interview questions. This facilitated the researchers when conducting a content analysis, and it helped shorten the inter-coding time.

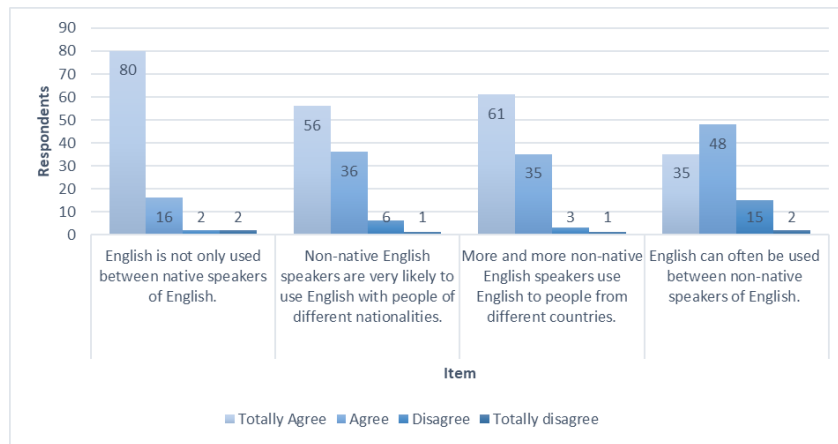
### **Research Findings**

The findings are presented in five parts: attitudes toward English users and the use of English, attitudes toward ELF interactions with NESs and NNESSs, ELF preference, ELF acceptance and intelligibility, and attitudes toward the models of native English speakers as a reference for language learning.

#### **Attitudes toward English Users and the Use of English**

To begin, regarding users of English, a majority of the respondents (80%) remarked that English is not only used by native English speakers

(NESs). Forty-eight percent indicated that English is often used among non-native English speakers. What is striking about the figures in Figure 1 is that 61% completely agreed that more and more non-native English speakers (NNEs) used English with people from different cultures.



**Figure 1** Attitudes toward English users

The interview data revealed participants' feelings when speaking English with TSs or with IVs. Fifteen out of 18 TSs felt happy when they used English with their IVs. One of them mentioned that because IVs were not native English speakers, just like the TSs, it was sometimes difficult to understand each other because of different accents. However, both tried to ensure that the message was understood correctly. They provided several reasons, as in the following example extracts:

**Extract 1**

Most of them are not native speakers. So, sometimes we have to like adapt to each other because my accent and their accent are different.... So, that's why I feel happy (TS1 [Participant code], 2019).

**Extract 2**

...better than we use Thai language or their language. I think it's easier to understand (TS8 [Participant code], 2019).

In addition, twelve of the interviewees mentioned several reasons why they used Standard English. They mentioned that perfect English was not necessary. It was instead important to use simple English to better convey their meaning. One TS explained that Standard English was enough for foreign students to get the message. Extracts 3-4 provide examples of TS explanations:

**Extract 3**

I think they are not from the native speakers.... If we use perfect English, sometimes they don't understand that (TS4 [Participant code], 2019).

**Extract 4**

I think the purpose is to communicate. If we understand, just fine (TS7 [Participant code], 2019).

It can be inferred that although there are some difficulties in communicating in this ELF context, they managed to negotiate intent using Standard English.

**Attitudes toward ELF Interactions with NESs and NNEs**

The next findings concern attitudes toward interactions with NESs and NNEs. When TSs were further asked about their level of comfort and confidence when they talked to an NES, half of them (nine TSs) stated that they felt at ease and confident because they could reply to statements and communicate even though they spoke imperfectly. They also selected only important words to say. They noted that it was easier to communicate with NESs because they spoke more clearly than NNEs. For those nine TSs who were not comfortable and confident using English with NESs, this was mainly because they were afraid of making mistakes. They were also afraid of using inappropriate vocabulary or of losing confidence and feeling pressure when repetition was requested.

Sometimes, NESs spoke too quickly for the listener, which made it difficult to understand them. Moreover, sometimes British accents caused confusion because they were not familiar with some regional variants. Furthermore, infrequent use of English led to less confidence, such as a lack of opportunities to speak English daily. Extracts 5-6 illustrate TSs' perspectives on this issue:

**Extract 5**

Sometimes, I speak it's not perfect, but they can understand me, they try to understand me because it's their English. So, they understand me. So, I'm okay with this (TS4, [Participant code], 2019).

**Extract 6**

I think I could be wrong with some words, so I'm afraid of that. Maybe, I lose my confidence when they ask me, "What did you ask?", "pardon", or something... (TS3, [Participant code], 2019).

Regarding the level of comfort and confidence when TSs were speaking English with NNESs, the majority of TSs (15) felt at ease and confident for a number of reasons. TSs stated that NNESs use English the same way they do or are of the same status, so they do not worry about making mistakes. They also mentioned that NNESs understood them well even when they were using incorrect vocabulary. The next extract shows how one TS felt when they interacted with NNES IVs:

**Extract 7**

I actually feel more comfortable when talking to the non-native speakers. Because when you talk to non-native speakers, they are like maybe they understand us more because I'm also the non-native speaker (TS6 [Participant code], 2019).

Turning to the level of comfort and confidence of IVs when speaking English with NESs, 11 IVs expressed that they were at ease and confident while 10 lacked comfort and confidence.

The first group provided the following reasons for their stance:

- NESs' pronunciation is very clear and easy to understand.
- Just need to talk faster, the same speed as NESs
- No problems because English is my native language.
- Very comfortable, as long as the subject is understood.

The second group provided the following reasons for their position:

- NESs speak fast.
- NESs do not understand my pronunciation.
- A little hesitant to speak up.
- NESs use more vocabulary when they speak.
- Feel under pressure sometimes.

When IVs were asked about their levels of comfort and confidence when they interact with NNES, 20 of them stated that they felt at ease and confident. They noted that they felt relaxed, and it was easy to communicate, although there were sometimes problems. One IV explained that their own personal experience, as well as making them more mature, allowed them to feel more confident and relaxed. The following extracts exemplify how IVs felt:

**Extract 8**

I'm confident. But the problem is the environment. Their fluency... (IV16 [Participant code], 2019).

**Extract 9**

I feel more relaxed because it's not my first language, so making mistakes is something that's tolerable (IV18 [Participant code], 2019).

The level of comfort and confidence when ELF speakers were talking to NESs and NNESs might be an effect from factors like their familiarity with a particular NES accent. Some of them have frequently been exposed to American or British accents while learning the language from the educational materials typically utilized in Thailand.

### ELF Preference

Regarding their ELF preferences, 8 out of 18 TSs (44.4%) affirmed that they preferred ELF to English as a native language (ENL). This gave rise to their stance on the purpose of communication. They explained that being communicable and understandable was enough; ELF was easy for them to understand and just communicate. Moreover, they noted that they preferred ELF, because it was used to communicate with people of various nationalities around the world, and in their offices they do not have a native speaker.

For IVs' views, 12 out of 27 (44.4%) of them preferred ELF to ENL. They provided several reasons for their preference, including that English was not the TSs' native language and that their English was not near an NES level. For them, ELF was used by a foreigner who could not speak or pronounce English like NESs. Sometimes, simple words and body language could also be used for communication in ELF and were preferred for more complete understanding. Furthermore, ELF was easier to use when talking with other staff. In addition, ELF usage was not too strict with regard to grammar and pronunciation, as long as it were understandable, because communication was more important than structure or form. Extracts 10-11 illustrate this point:

#### Extract 10

We can speak like (not too strict) with the grammar, pronunciation, something as long as we can understand each other. So, I think it's better for communication (IV15 [Participant code], 2019).

#### Extract 11

Obviously, I use this as a means of communication. So, for me, it's a Lingua Franca (IV16 [Participant code], 2019).

However, three TSs and nine IVs stated no preference for either ELF or ENL. They provided several reasons for this. They mentioned that it depended upon specific situations. For instance, ENL and perfect English were needed at official events. For basic conversations, convenient English, i.e. English that was less strict about form, was sufficient, depending on the situation.

### ELF Acceptance and Intelligibility (Understanding)

Another important aspect of attitudes toward ELF is its overall acceptance. A slight majority of the respondents (52 or 51%) indicated that they did not mind if people used English with an accent or if they used a different variety of English from theirs. Also, 44% suggested that it was understandable when NNESs used other languages while also speaking English. The findings regarding the acceptance of ELF are shown in Figure 2.

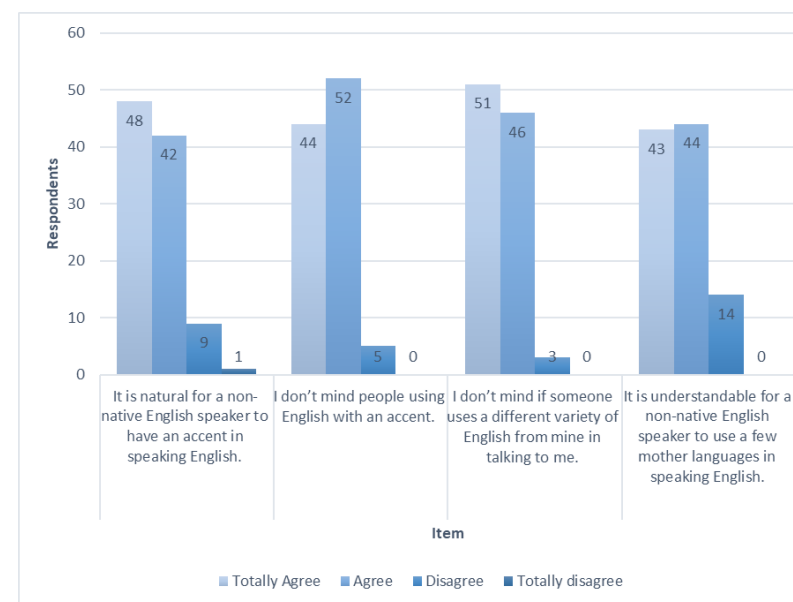
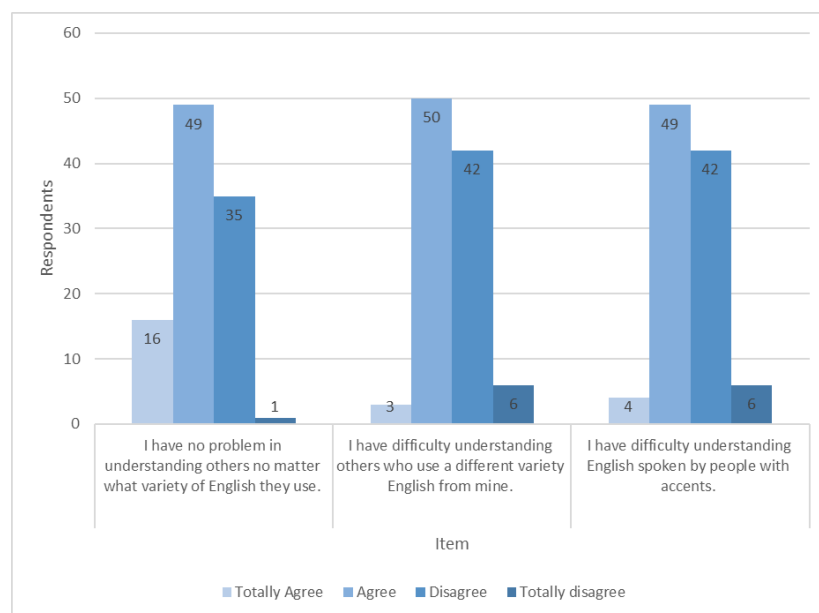


Figure 2 ELF acceptance

With respect to intelligibility, 49% of respondents agreed that they had no problem understanding others, no matter what variety of English they heard. However, 50% agreed that they had difficulty understanding others using a different variety of English from theirs. Moreover, as can be seen in Figure 3, 49% agreed that they had difficulty understanding English spoken by people with specific accents.





**Figure 3** Intelligibility

These TS participants already understood the ELF concept in part. Data from the interviews revealed they knew ELF speakers came from different countries but spoke English to communicate with one another. More than one TSs explained that ELF is used by non-native speakers as their language of communication. Some defined ELF in various ways, as shown in the following example extracts:

**Extract 12**

...different English among people in other places that we use the same language; that is English to communicate, and we use different accents, different vocabulary sometimes, but we understand each other. It's the difference with using English to communicate (TS7 [Participant code], 2019).

**Extract 13**

I think it's the combination of English language and the local language. Like in Thai contexts, we are usually familiar with the word “นะคะ” [/naka/means yes, right] and we say it all the time because we think that it's polite. When it's used with other languages, we also use it (TS5 [Participant code], 2019).

Turning to IV understanding of ELF, they explained that from their perspective ELF is English spoken by someone who is not a native speaker. In their opinion, ELF is a language used to communicate with people around the world and is more function-based than form-based. One IV also explained that ELF is a common world language. They provided various definitions, as in the following examples:

**Extract 14**

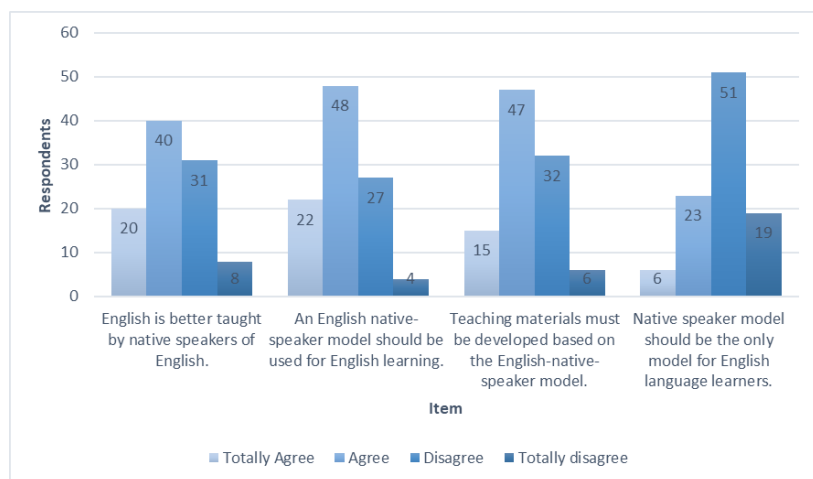
... is just communication, say your ideas to other people whose primary language is different than English (IV6 [Participant code], 2019).

**Extract 15**

English as a Lingua Franca is the use of English among non-native English speakers (IV8 [Participant code], 2019).

**Attitudes toward Models of Native English Speakers as a Reference for Language Learning**

With regard to models for English language learning, when the respondents were asked about the ideal English speaker model for learning, they agreed that the native-speaker model should be used for learning English. In addition, they felt that teaching materials must be developed based on the English native-speaker model. In contrast, a slight majority of respondents (51%) disagreed that the English native-speaker model should be the only model for English language learners, while only 40% agreed that English is better taught by native speakers of English. Figure 4 illustrates their responses:



**Figure 4** Attitudes toward the native English speaker as a model for learning

Hence, an obvious preference for ELF was demonstrated by the participants, although some claimed it depended on the situation. Generally, ELF was preferred because speakers only need English as a communicative tool, which did not always require a perfect English formula.

### Discussion and Implications

There are similarities between the attitudes expressed in this study and those detected by Wang and Ho (2013) and Zheng and Zhang (2019), reporting that the attitudes held by their participants demonstrated a considerably positive attitude toward ELF. Moreover, their participants recognized that English users are not limited to native speakers, acknowledged ELF as legitimate, and accorded high prestige to English overall; however, some international students also voiced concern over the dominant status of English in academic communication and expressed a desire to also learn a local language.

This result aligns with an earlier study by Pilus (2013), which showed that despite English learners' admiration of the native English

accent, particularly a British one, they felt more comfortable with their own Malaysian accent. Similarly, Chit Cheung's (2016) study found that exposure to different English accents was viewed as considerably beneficial for learners, i.e. many participants seemed to be aware of the value of exposure to different native and non-native accents. However, there was less support for such exposure in practice (Chit Cheng, 2016). Contrary to the aforementioned studies, most Thai undergraduate participants in a study by Kalra and Thanavisuth (2018) demonstrated negative attitudes toward Japanese and Burmese English accents and stated that they believed that a native-like accent was better than English accents from these speakers.

According to Yadave (2018), only four percent of English conversations presently involve only NESs, while the rest involve at least one NNEs. Consequently, as noted by MacKenzie (2015), many researchers expect ELF to have a major effect on ENL. In general, what has plausibly been embedded in most English speakers is best described as an ideology which divides English speakers into two opposing camps, native and non-native English speakers. Consequently, this has involved assigning a set of stereotypical characteristics to each, and it positions one group as superior to another, which leads to a situation where those perceived as native speakers might be seen as culturally, pedagogically and linguistically superior to those perceived as non-native speakers ("How to Tackle Native Speakerism", 2019). This is an ELT perspective that plays an important role in the mindset of speakers of English. These recent findings explicitly reflect the fact that English learners and users prefer an NES model for learning and materials design and development. Furthermore, although the research participants in the present study noted that the NES model should not be the only option, almost half of them still believed that English would be better taught by native English speakers. These results are supported by several research studies which have found that NNEs show a positive attitude toward the native speakers of English model (e.g., Jenkins, 2007; Kaura and Ramana, 2014; Kaur, 2013).

As can be seen in the findings above, about 40% of the participants said they had no problems speaking English in this context, while half of them insisted that they had difficulty understanding different accents. This is supported by the lack of opportunities to listen to various English accents. Hence, for pedagogical purposes, more exposure to different accents, not only British and American, should be introduced to English language learners; for example, listening practice materials should be mixed with different regional accents, e.g., the English spoken by Indian, Spanish, and Japanese people.

The research findings also indicate that the participants had some knowledge and awareness of the ELF concept. They correctly defined ELF as the use of English among NNESs. Crystal (2003) stated that most ELF interaction takes place among NNESs. More recently, Seidlhofer (2011) noted that ELF speakers include NESs who, although not as commonly, also adopt ELF as an additional language for intercultural communication. In other words, the state of ELF research is that the majority of ELF research, such as Jenkins's earliest ELF research (Jenkins, Cogo and Dewey 2011: 283), is based more (sometime exclusively) on NNES–NNES interactions, although the vast majority of ELF researchers do not exclude NES from ELF communication.

Although most of the interview participants mentioned that ELF is used only by NNESs, they were basically aware that ELF is for global communication purposes. These results reflect those of Mikeladze and Al-Hariri (2018), who also found that their NNES research participants had some knowledge of ELF, which they defined as a common language used for communication.

## Conclusion

All in all, the findings regarding the attitudes of Thai international relations staff and international visitors toward ELF reported in this study are generally consistent with the data obtained by previous studies (Albl-Mikasa, 2009; Akkakoson, 2019; Erling and Bartlett, 2006, Jenkins, 2007; Kaur, 2013; Kaura and Ramana, 2014; Mikeladze and

Al-Hariri, 2018; Wang and Ho, 2013). They widely expressed the view that ELF exists and generally accepted different accents of English. The research participants also showed a clear preference to a model of native English speakers as the most suitable reference for language learning. In conclusion, although the findings of multilingual speakers who use English as a Lingua Franca in this context show their acceptance of ELF, there remains tension between their linguistic practice and their attitudes. Their beliefs may even oppose their means, as evidenced by a preference for the native English speaker model as a reference for language learning. Further studies might explore the attitudes of undergraduate students, because younger participants may voice views differently, and the present study obtained data mainly from postgraduate students and lecturers.

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