



## **THAI UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS ELF IN CLASSROOM CONTEXTS: A MIXED-METHODS STUDY**

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### **abstract**

English has long acted as a powerful language in the world since it is spoken by various people from diverse cultural backgrounds and places around the globe. As a number of non-native speakers (NNSs) are rapidly growing, English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) has become more widespread among English users. This study aimed to investigate Thai university students' attitudes towards ELF. Particularly, attitudes towards learning English, varieties of English, and ELF used as a medium of instruction in the classroom were examined. Employed a mixed-methods research design, the questionnaire and semi-structured interview were used to collect the data. 23 undergraduate students studying at Xavier Learning Community (XLC), Chiang Rai, Thailand, participated in this study. The findings revealed that effective communication with other English speakers was the paramount goal of learning English. Moreover, the students have begun to express positive attitudes towards different varieties of English used in the classroom as they showed their interest in non-native cultures. This study suggested that supportive learning environments where the students could expose to various varieties of English both inside and outside the classroom would raise their awareness of ELF. Also, ELF teachers should adjust their teaching strategies to meet students' needs in the future.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Needless to say that English has continuously acted as a powerful language in the world as it is spoken by various people from diverse cultural backgrounds and places around the globe (Dogancay & Hardman, 2017). When looking at the number of English speakers in the 21st century, it is roughly estimated at around 1.5 billion (Crystal, 2012) and the number of young English learners is gradually increasing every year. Nevertheless, the rapid growth of non-native speakers (NNSs) of English has swayed the role of English (Ke & Cahyani, 2014). A study by Crystal (2012) shows that English is used as a foreign language by 750 million non-native speakers in which the number is higher than the native speakers (Seidlhofer 2011). In other words, as an international language, English is widely used in education, media, politics, etc. and is no longer limited in the inner circle (UK, USA) or owned by native speakers (Jenkins, 2006). Rather, it belongs to all English speakers in the

outer circle (e.g., Singapore & India) and more importantly, in the expanding circle (e.g., Indonesia, Vietnam, China).

Accordingly, English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) has become well-known among current English users. Indeed, ELF is used as a language for communication between two people who share different mother tongue (Borghetti & Beaven, 2017). In other words, non-native speakers use English as a “tool” to interact with other non-native speakers. Accordingly, ELF plays a significant role in non-English-speaking countries for several reasons. For instance, ELF can be used as a medium of communication for the cultural exchange among different countries (Wang, 2013), or a “contact language” in the international business, and tourism industry. On the other hand, the role of ELF has also influenced the English teaching and learning contexts. That is to say, the new perceptions of ELF and English as “a global language” arouse the debate of introducing ELF in the teaching and curriculum. For example, several studies on English textbooks point out that most learning materials are designed based on two standards of English, British and American (Lopriore & Vettorel, 2015). Besides, Matsuda (2012) argues that the two standards of English fail to promote “the use of English among non-native speakers”. Besides, Jokilehto (2014), addresses that the role of ELF has not reached both English teaching and materials.

In Thailand, the integration of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 2015 has raised both teachers’ and students’ awareness of the English language (Nomnian, 2014). As English has been announced to be “the working language” in ASEAN countries, Thai people are encouraged to learn English, at least for communication purposes. Moreover, it seems that the role of ELF among Thai people is clear since English is primarily used for interacting with non-native English speakers, mostly from Asian countries (Kongkerd, 2013). However, implementing ELF in Thailand may have some challenges, limitations, strengths, and weaknesses. Therefore, several studies have been conducted to investigate those issues. Thon (2017), for example, examines 55 international students studying in a Thai university where English is used as ELF. He finds out that students used ELF for both academic and social purposes and they are not anxious in using ELF for communication. Further, Phusit and Suksiripakonchai (2018) explore 146 Thai students’ attitudes towards the desired English pronunciation model in ELF contexts. They reveal that participants show negative attitudes towards ELF pronunciation model and rather prefer native accents. Besides, the results also show that the participants believe that maintaining a Thai English accent can be disregarded.

Another meaningful study focusing on implementing ELF in Thailand is from Baker (2012). He suggests that there are several further concerns needed to be discussed and examined. Firstly, although English is increasingly used as a medium of instruction, yet it is limited and well-prepared in big cities (schools) only and has not yet reached out to the poorer rural area. Secondly, the lack of resources for teaching and low English proficiency of teachers and students hinders the ability in applying ELF in the classroom. Consequently, as seen above, several studies have been conducted focusing on ELF and communication, ELF pronunciation model, and implementing ELF in Thailand. However, little has observed students' attitudes towards ELF in classroom contexts.

Xavier Learning Community (XLC) is an education project of the Jesuit foundation in Thailand. Its vision and mission are to build a culturally diverse learning institution empowering young people from ethnic communities to get a better opportunity to study in a higher education. As people from different cultural backgrounds, tribes, nationalities, and countries live in one big community, ELF has taken a significant role in this institution. Hence, ELF is mainly used for interaction by students and teachers who share varied mother tongues. Nonetheless, English is not only used as a tool for communication purpose, but also as a medium of instruction in the classroom. Then, in the teaching and learning process, XLC students inevitably encounter “Englishes” or the varieties of English from different teachers (e.g., Filipino, Indonesian, Thai, Singaporean, Australian, and American). Consequently, students' perceptions of ELF are worth investigating for the reason that most of the English learners have been taught to rely on either American or British English (Jensen, Denver, Mees, & Werther, 2013). This study, therefore, was a mixed-methods study investigating Thai university students' attitudes towards ELF. The researchers attempted to find out Thai university students' attitudes towards learning English in ELF environment, attitudes towards varieties of English, and towards ELF used as a medium of instruction in the classroom.

### **English as a Lingua Franca**

As English is considered as a “worldwide language” or a “global language”, English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) has drawn attention to more and more scholars to be interested in this phenomenon. According to Kirkpatrick (2011), the term ‘Lingua Franca’ is originally from Germanic Franks in the 5th century when he traveled to Gaul and adopted a local language. Later, this language is broadly known as the “language of Franks” or “lingua

franca” which is derived from Latin. At that time, lingua franca was an “unofficial language of wider communication” and was first used when Frank went on Crusades.

Many years after, Kachru (1985) postulates the “three circles’ model” (inner, outer, and expanding circle) to explain the spread of English and its role in different countries (Jokilehto, 2014). Firstly, the inner circle covers the English-native speaking countries where English is used as a mother tongue (L1) including the UK, USA, Canada, and Australia. Secondly, the outer circle covers the colonized countries where English is officially used as a second language (L2). For instance, South Africa, India, Nigeria, Singapore, and the Philippines. Lastly, the expanding circle is showing any countries where English is taught in schools as a foreign language (EFL) and it is not official (e.g., Thailand, Indonesia, China, and Japan).

In the past decades, ELF was not yet well-known among English users. In contrast, the term “World English or Global English” were more prevalent (Jenkins, 2006). However, ELF is considered as a common term to present the role of English in today’s world. In addition, ELF is used as a contact language by people who share different languages (Jenkins 2009) and ELF speakers can be anyone who has different cultural backgrounds or mother tongues using English for communication purposes. Besides, ELF is also viewed in terms of interactions by House (1999). He denotes that “ELF interactions are defined as interactions between members of two or more different linguacultures in English, for none of whom English is the mother tongue”. Therefore, ELF interactions occur between two people “whose mother tongue is not English”. This definition can be seen from the examples of the interaction between Thai students and their Indonesian teachers or the business correspondents between one company in China and Spain.

Based on the definitions above, it seems that ELF interactions occur merely between non-native speakers (NNSs) and native speakers are excluded. In contrast, Seidlhofer (2011) proposes a broader definition of ELF interactions. He argues that those interactions of ELF may include English native speakers. Nonetheless, it does not mean that the interactions will need to follow the two English standards or norms because of the NSs’ presence. Rather, they should be based on “mutual negotiation and accommodation” (Jenkins 2009).

## **Students' attitudes towards ELF**

The concept of attitudes has been defined in different ways. The Cambridge Dictionary defines an attitude as “the way people think and feel about something and later they behave towards”. Oppenheim (1982) defines the attitude as an “inner mental part expressed through different aspects of action” and influenced by personal experiences. Moreover, Gardner and Lambert (1972) emphasize the importance of students' attitudes in learning a language in which they believe that it can lead to either failure or success. According to Ishikawa (2017), attitudes consist of three key components as he describes:

“First, attitudes are evaluative, in other words entailing a varying degree of favorableness or unfavorableness. Second, attitudes are directed to a psychological object, and in the case of language attitudes a linguistic phenomenon at any level, including “language topics in general”. Finally, as being dispositions formed through experience, attitudes cannot be directly observed but can be inferred from relevant responses including verbal accounts. These responses are not necessarily the direct reflection of attitudes themselves owing to various situational influences”.

(Ishikawa, 2017 p.233)

Several researchers have conducted empirical studies to investigate the students' attitudes towards ELF and they present various findings in different aspects. Groom (2012), for example, explores NNSs' attitudes towards ELF to find out students' desire to be taught in native or non-native English. This study reveals that students prefer native varieties (UK, USA) both for learning and teaching. Jensen et al., (2013), examine university students' attitudes to non-native English lecturers where ELF is used as a medium of instruction. With 1,700 students involved in this study, the results show that students' attitudes towards English lecturing are influenced by the lecturers' English skills. Similarly, Bolton and Kuteeva (2012) also find out that lecturers' poor English skills could be considered as incompetent lecturers. Therefore, the English language proficiency of lecturers is important for students' learning attitudes. Wang (2013) pointed out that students perceived “testing and university requirements are devices to drive students to conform to native English norms”. Ishikawa (2017) conducts conversational interviews to investigate Japanese students' attitudes towards their English and ELF awareness. Interestingly, students' negative language attitudes are

discovered. However, they tend to have positive attitudes to ELF as they perceived English is crucial for international communication.

Given that various empirical studies have been conducted to examine student's attitudes towards ELF, to date, however, investigations into the Thai university students' attitudes towards ELF in classroom contexts have not been substantial. First, to the best knowledge of the researchers, ELF used as a medium of instruction in classrooms among Thai students has not been studied. Second, there is still a limited amount of investigations carried out in Thailand where the students are taught to use either American or British English in the classroom. Consequently, this study was conducted to fill these gaps and further give more information on how to raise students' awareness of ELF in the classroom contexts.

### **English Teaching and Learning in Thailand**

According to Phusit and Suksiripakonchai (2018), English was introduced to the school curriculum as one of the compulsory subjects for all primary schools in Thailand in 1996. In earlier times, English was perceived as an academic subject rather than as a means of communication (Wongsothorn, 2002). However, English was agreed to use as a medium of communication in 2002. Additionally, the role of English (also ELF) in Thailand seems to be greater than before as English is used as an official working language in ASEAN.

English teaching and learning in higher education mainly focus on improving students' communicative skills (Somsai & Intaraprasert, 2011). Yet, Thai students' communication proficiency remains questionable. Kanoksilapatham (2013) points out that insufficient exposure to the English language impeding Thai students in developing their communication skills. Without a doubt, problems and challenges found in English language teaching and learning have been concerned for many years in Thai history (Nomnian, 2013). For instance, according to (Ulla, 2018), English is not extensively used as a medium of instruction in schools or universities and that has directed Thai students to face difficulty in speaking and understanding the English language. Furthermore, despite following traditional teaching models based on the inner circle (British and American), teaching English is likely to fail in producing Thai students who are ready for the real world of English speaking (Kongkerd, 2013).

Recent studies have found several factors influencing Thai students' unproductive and unsuccessful learning. Firstly, ELT in Thailand tends to benefit students to pass the

examination to be accepted in well-known universities and the crucial objectives of learning the English language are left behind (Luangpipat & Padgate, 2015). Unexpectedly, the low language proficiency scores in TOEFL compared to other nations in ASEAN (Noom-ura, 2013) are found. Secondly, Thai teachers are not skilled and well-trained in teaching materials or using the English language. Consequently, the misconception in the contents of the subjects has been taught and learned by students from generation to generation and their teaching methods have not been developed and changed to meet the student's needs. Finally, most English lessons in Thailand are conducted using a teacher-centered method and students became passive learners (Wiriyachitra, 2002). Therefore, this learning style hinders students from their creativity, high-order thinking, and independent learning.

Additionally, the English teaching-learning problems mentioned above are likely to be heard by Thai government as various strategies and policies have been introduced to help Thai students to learn English better (Punthumasen, 2007). For example, a number of native and non-native teachers, especially Filipino teachers, have been hired and employed to reform language instruction and improve the English language proficiency of the students (Ulla, 2018). Furthermore, the ministry of education has encouraged schools and universities throughout the country to establish the English Program (EP) to create a supportive English learning environment. It is expected that this bilingual program will enable Thai students to approach virtual English teaching and learning and successfully enhance their English proficiency.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design and Participants**

To answer the research questions, this study employed a mix-methods research design. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2007) state that “mixed methods research involves the use of more than one approach to or method of design, data collection or data analysis within a single program of study” (p.12). The quantitative data were collected through a questionnaire that was adapted from Jokilehto (2014) and semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain qualitative data. The populations involved in this study were 70 students studying at Xavier Learning Community (XLC), Chiang Rai, Thailand. However, in the middle of this study, only 23 students were able to participate because of several limitations and difficulties. Participants' demography profile is presented in table 1.

Table 1. Demographic survey of the participants' background

|                | Frequency | Percentage |                           | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------|-----------|------------|---------------------------|-----------|------------|
| <b>Gender:</b> |           |            | <b>Ethnicity:</b>         |           |            |
| Male           | 8         | 34.8       | Karen                     | 11        | 47.8       |
| Female         | 15        | 65.2       | Akha                      | 7         | 30.4       |
| <b>Age:</b>    |           |            | Hmong                     | 1         | 4.3        |
| 15-20          | 4         | 17.4       | Lahu                      | 2         | 8.7        |
| 21-25          | 19        | 82.6       | Lanna or Thai             | 2         | 8.7        |
| <b>Batch:</b>  |           |            | <b>Major:</b>             |           |            |
| Freshmen       | 2         | 8.7        | English for Eco Tourism   | 15        | 65.2       |
| Sophomores     | 13        | 56.5       | English for Public Health | -         | -          |
| Juniors        | 8         | 34.8       | English for Teaching      | 8         | 34.8       |

Shown in table 1, the majority of the participants were female (65.2%), and the prominent age was between 21 to 25 years old, 82.6%. Sophomores were the biggest population in this study (56.5%). Furthermore, the majority of the participants were from ethnic minority groups who had various levels of English proficiency. Karen was the prominent group of the participants (47.8%). Finally, most of the participants were major in English for Eco-Tourism and Hospitality (65.2%). However, none of the students from English for Public Health Service participated in this study.

### Data Collection Tools and Procedures

The researchers employed two primary data collection tools in this study. Firstly, a questionnaire was found to be an appropriate tool to gather the quantitative data of this study. Acharya (2010) defines a questionnaire as “a document containing questions and other types of items that are equally used in survey research, experiments and other modes of observation.” The questionnaire was divided into four main parts to answer three research questions. Part A was a short demographic survey of the participants' backgrounds. This included their personal details: name, gender, age, ethnicity, batch, and major. Additionally, at the end of this part, the researchers gave one open-ended question to find out whether the participants knew the term ELF or not. After that, under part B, C, and D, participants were required to respond 15 five-point Likert scale statements by choosing whether they strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree.

Part B was designed to answer the first research question namely participants' attitudes towards learning English in ELF teaching and learning contexts. The statements in this part covered participants' English learning goals, particularly in terms of the conformation to the two varieties of English. Next, part C in the questionnaire allowed the

researchers to investigate participants' attitudes towards varieties of English as the second research questions. This part was generated to find out participants' awareness of other varieties of English such as the Filipino, Australian, Indonesian, and Thai. Finally, part D was aimed to response to the third research question. It was aimed to find out the participants' attitudes towards ELF used as a medium of instruction in the classroom. The 5 statements in this part were formulated to reveal their feeling of different English used by diverse teachers, the benefits of ELF, and the appropriation of English in the classroom. Additionally, as the participants were living in Thailand while the researchers were studying in Indonesia, the researchers overcame this problem by creating the questionnaire using the Google Form was sent via Email.

Secondly, the semi-structured interview was conducted on April 6, 2020 to collect qualitative data and gain deeper information regarding participants' attitudes towards ELF. Three participants, two male and one female students, were randomly selected to be involved in this interview. The researchers intentionally select three participants to be representatives of each batch since they experienced different learning experiences and amounts of contacts with English speaking teachers. As mentioned earlier that there was a limitation to conduct face-to-face interview, online interview, therefore, seemed to be the best way to solve this problem. The researchers first made an appointment with each interviewee and they were interviewed one by one. Additionally, the interview was conducted in Thai language and took around 20 minutes for each and it was audio-taped

Table 2. Mean range for the questionnaire

| <b>Mean Range</b> | <b>Interpretation</b> |
|-------------------|-----------------------|
| 3.68-5.00         | High                  |
| 2.34-3.67         | Moderate              |
| 1.00-2.33         | Low                   |

### **Data Analysis**

After quantitative data were gathered from all participants, the researchers analyzed the data using descriptive statistics. First, the raw data were counted by focusing on the number from every degree of agreement. Next, the researchers calculated the obtained data into percentage and mean score as shown in table 2. Additionally, the description for each statement based on the data was constructed. Finally, the researchers interpreted the results and presented them in tables. For the data gathered from the semi-structured interview, the

researchers first transcribed the interview audio-recording. After that, the researchers translated the transcript from Thai into English. Open-coding was used to label the keywords and all participants were given pseudonyms as participants Adam, Brian, and Catherine.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Learning English in ELF environment

The first objective of this study was to explore Thai university students' attitudes towards learning English. Therefore, the second part of the questionnaire was designed to find out the students' personal learning goals. However, the statements in the questionnaire were not concerning about their learning goals in general (e.g. future careers, interests). Rather, the statements were aimed to find out whether students would like to pursue the two varieties of English (American and British) or not. The results from the questionnaire are presented in table 3.

**Table 3. Students' attitudes towards learning English**

| No. | Statement   | Mean |
|-----|---|------|
| 1   | My goal of learning English is to communicate with any English speakers and it does not matter what accent I have.  | 4.00 |
| 2   | I think I should learn to speak English as closely to American or British as possible.  | 4.13 |
| 3   | The more I can imitate the native English speakers, the more confident I become.  | 4.26 |
| 4   | I feel that other varieties of English (e.g., Singaporean, Australian, Indonesian, etc.) are complicated. Thus, I prefer learning those two standards of English. | 3.34 |
| 5   | I am really proud of my Thai accent.  | 2.95 |

According to table 3, the primary goal of learning English for the participants was to effectively communicate with other English speakers (M=4.00). 9 participants strongly agreed that having good communication was more important than the accents they had. However, statements 2 and 3 indicated contradictory results. Both statements showed that the majority of the participants still preferred either American or British English (M=4.13, 4.26). However, some participants have shown positive attitudes to other varieties of English (statement 4). Considering Thai accent, the majority of the participants were not satisfied with their Thai accent (M=2.95) and preferred to have a better accent.

Communication (as an interaction with other English speakers around the world) was the first goal of learning English for XLC students. This finding was supported by the results

from the interview when one of the interviewees mentioned that effective communication skill was the main reason for learning English.

*I think, for many Thai students, effective communication is the goal and the reason why they decided to learn English. (Adam)*

*The accent may define who you are, where you are from but it is not important. What important is English allows me to meet people from all over the world. (Catherine)*

In addition, although the results showed that the accent was less important, XLC students preferred to have either an American or British accent. The finding was in line with a study by Phusit and Suksiripakonchai (2018) who found that “pronunciation aim of Thai students is to master or approximate native-like”. Therefore, it could be implied that Thai students were more confident in their communication skills when they could speak English as close as native speakers. Additionally, as mentioned previously that most Thai students were taught using the two main varieties of English, consequently, teachers play an important role in students’ pronunciation.

*I think both American and British English have their uniqueness. For me, I am more familiar with American English because based on my experiences, most of the teachers who have taught me used an American accent. Therefore, I could say that my previous teachers influenced me a lot. (Brian)*

Lastly, when asking XLC students about their Thai accent, the majority of the participants were satisfied with the accent. However, through the interview, the researchers obtained broader information since three of them shared different perceptions. For example, Adam worried that his mispronunciation could cause misunderstanding to the listeners. Meanwhile, Brian was pleased with his accent but Catherine did not even know her own accent. However, she was content whenever she used Thai accent.

*I am worried about my English, especially my accent...my speaking skills. I have a problem with my pronunciation such as L, R, TH, and W words. When I mispronounce, I am afraid that people will misunderstand. (Adam)*

*I do not worry about my accent at all because English is my second language. Thus, it is acceptable if my pronunciation does not reach the level of the standard one. In fact, I am happy with my English. (Brian)*

*I do not even know about my accent. I mean I cannot say my accent belongs to American, British or other accents. I do not know but at least I feel relaxed when I speak in Thai accent...my own accent. (Catherine)*

These findings were slightly different from what Phusit and Suksiripakonchai (2018) found in their study. They found that Thai students believed that “maintaining their Thai English pronunciation model was not important” (p. 22). However, their findings resulted from the factors that students lack experiences to expose to other English varieties. In contrast, XLC students encountered diverse varieties of English.

To sum up, the majority of the participants considered effective communication with other English speakers was the utmost objective of learning English. However, even though the accent was less essential, most participants still preferred to speak English as close as native speakers since it increased their confidence in speaking. Nevertheless, some participants were pleased with their Thai English. Consequently, it seems essential for Thai schools as well as teachers to create effective teaching and learning to meet Thai students’ needs. In this case, it is crucial to find ways and strategies to improve students’ communication skills as it is seen to be the paramount goal of learning English.

### **Varieties of English**

The second objective of this study was to examine Thai university students’ attitudes towards varieties of English. As explained in the research method section, participants were asked one open-ended question regarding their knowledge about English as a lingua franca (ELF). The results indicated that none of the participants knew the term ELF. The questionnaire results are illustrated in table 4.

Table 4. Students’ attitudes towards varieties of English

| No. | Statement   | Mean |
|-----|---|------|
| 1   | I believe that American and British English are the best.                       | 3.49 |
| 2   | English does not belong to America and England since it is spoken by people all | 3.72 |

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|   |  |      |
|---|--|------|
|   | over the world.  |      |
| 3 | I am open up and interested in other varieties of English.   | 3.95 |
| 4 | It is really weird for me whenever I hear people speak English with the accent that I never heard before.  | 3.17 |
| 5 | I think English lessons and textbooks in Thailand pay too much attention to American and British cultures. | 3.97 |

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Statement 1 examined whether participants considered that American and British English were important than other varieties. The results showed that participants had a moderate attitude towards these two varieties (M=3.49). Statement 2 focused on participants' opinions about the ownership of English. The majority of participants agreed that English belonged to all English speakers. Furthermore, statements 3 and 4 explored participants' attitudes towards non-native varieties of English which demonstrated that participants were interested in other varieties of English (M= 3.95, 3.17). Statement 5 revealed participants' opinions on English lessons and materials influenced by the two varieties (M=3.97).

In line with the finding from Ishikawa (2017) that students tended to have positive attitudes to ELF, the results in this study indeed revealed that XLC students had positive attitudes towards different varieties of English. Moreover, the students were also interested in other varieties. Additionally, these discoveries could be the outcomes from an environmental factor that the researchers found that it could change or increase positive attitudes towards varieties of English. As pointed out earlier that XLC students lived in a big community where they had an opportunity to expose varieties of English (e.g. Filipino, Indonesian, Singaporean, Thai, Australian, and American), supportive environment, therefore, influenced their attitudes towards ELF.

*I am not saying that other English accents are worse. I think I am familiar with different accents because as you know, we face teachers from various countries and they have different accents. I like to learn other accents as well such as Australian. You know, I have learned some useful slang words. I think learning another English opens my point of view and motivates me to learn English better. (Adam)*

The excerpt above also indicated that Adam acknowledged the advantages of learning different varieties of English when he addressed that learning Australian English helped him learn better. Further, Brian shared his opinions on two varieties of English where he found

that sometimes native English was difficult to understand. He also thought that Filipino English was easier.

*I think they (American, British) are quite the same. They might be slightly different in terms of accents and vocabulary. Sometimes, it is really hard for me to understand when native speakers speak fast. If you ask me which one I prefer the most, I cannot say which one is better but many times I mix them in my speaking. Honestly, the Filipino accent is easier for me. (Brian)*

In addition to the positive attitudes towards varieties of English discovered above, participants' opinions on English teaching and learning in Thailand were examined. It was expected to find out whether English lessons and textbooks were too much influenced by the two varieties of English or not. Results from the questionnaire and interview indicated similar findings. They showed that XLC students (N=13) agreed that the teaching-learning process was influenced by native speaking countries. Moreover, the findings were related to what Matsuda (2012) found in his study. He pointed out that "ELT textbooks have repeatedly shown that materials have traditionally tended to focus on 'established' and standard representations of language" (p. 171). Accordingly, Catherine shared her previous experiences about this issue when she was in high school.

*I remember my teachers always taught us using English names in sentences such as John, Sam, Mary, and Jane instead of using Thai names. For example, in grammar, conversation, and writing class. Besides, I noticed that American and British cultures took a huge impact on textbooks because even the pictures illustrated inside were about their cultures. (Catherine)*

In summary, it is reasonable to say that XLC students showed positive attitudes towards different varieties of English. Furthermore, the students also presented their interests in other varieties as it was an external motivation for them to learn English better. In other words, they perceived learning other varieties as a benefit for extending their English competence.

In addition, one significant factor in raising students' positive attitudes towards other varieties of English was an environmental factor. As discussed above, it demonstrated that creating supportive learning environments where learners were given opportunities to expose to other varieties could raise their awareness of ELF. Therefore, it is challenging for Thai education policymakers, authorities, and teachers to build such environments whether it be in

the classroom or community to raise Thai university students' awareness and positive attitudes towards different varieties of English.

### **ELF in the Classroom**

The last objective of this present study was to find out Thai university students' attitudes towards ELF used as a medium of instruction in the classroom. As XLC students had to encounter different teachers from different countries, the last section of the questionnaire was designed to investigate their attitudes towards different varieties of English used in the classroom.

Table 5. Students' attitudes towards ELF used as a medium of instruction

| <b>No.</b> | <b>Statement</b>  | <b>Mean</b> |
|------------|---|-------------|
| 1          | It does not matter what accent my teachers use in the classroom as long as they have good proficiency in English.   | 3.95        |
| 2          | My teachers are too strict on grammar and "school English". I think the "real-life English" is more important for me in the future.                       | 4.17        |
| 3          | Varieties of English in the classroom allow me to understand various cultures of my teachers from different countries.                                    | 4.26        |
| 4          | English spoken in the classroom should meet the level of standard English because different accents can create misunderstandings.                         | 3.42        |
| 5          | American and British English should be taught in the classroom since most of the national or international tests are conducted using these two varieties. | 3.60        |

Shown in table 5, statements 1 and 3 indicated participants' positive attitudes towards different varieties of English used by various teachers (M=3.95, 4.26). Further, the mean score in statement 2 could be inferred to participants learning goals in the first section which they considered "real-life English" was crucial for their future (M=4.17). Next, statement 4 showed that participants were exposed to different accents (M=3.42) and many of them disagreed that different accents could be problems in the classroom. Similarly, statement 5 revealed that many participants disagreed on teaching English by mainly following the two varieties (M=3.60).

The results revealed above can be drawn to the conclusion that XLC students had positive attitudes towards ELF used as a medium of instruction in the classroom. First of all, they showed positive attitudes towards different accents used by teachers from various

countries. However, the students still considered teachers' good language proficiency as an essential element for all teachers, no matter what accent they used. This could ensure participants that they were learning English with competent teachers. This finding was in line with Bolton and Kuteeva (2012) who found that poor language proficiency could trigger negative attitudes towards the teachers. Consequently, the English language proficiency of the teachers has a big impact on students' learning attitudes.

Secondly, the majority of the participants realized that it would be more advantageous from learning how to communicate effectively in real-life situations than from learning about grammar. By doing so, XLC students believed that they would be able to maximize the use of the English language on a broader scale. Furthermore, as seen in table 5, 15 out of 23 the students agreed that the teaching and learning process tended to focus on grammar and the rules of the language rather than the practical skills for the future. Besides, the results from the interview also supported this finding as Catherine mentioned this issue when he shared about his friends' story in one public university facing the difficulty to communicate in English.

*My friends in a public university told me that their teachers focused on grammar and the structure of the English language. They rarely had opportunities to use in the real world of English speaking. Some of them took extra courses hoping to increase their English skills. Sadly, they were not even confident to communicate with foreigners.*

**(Catherine)**

Thirdly, it could be claimed that XLC students had positive attitudes towards using varieties of English in the classroom. The reason is that they considered ELF used a medium of instruction as a means of cultural exchange. Meaning to say, the majority of XLC students agreed that they could gain better understandings of different cultures through varieties of English spoken in the classroom.

*I like teaching and learning English in XLC. You know why? Because we get a good chance to encounter English in everyday class. We practice conversations with friends from other countries. In the class, we learn all four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Additionally, we learn about cultures from our teachers, we learn about the accents as well. **(Adam)***

Adam addressed his happiness about the teaching and learning process in XLC where he could practice English, learn, and exchange cultures with other people from other languages, tribes, and countries. Besides, he expressed his positive attitudes towards his teachers' ways of teaching with different accents. Additionally, Catherine denoted her experiences when she faced diverse accents in the community and how she overcame this problem.

*I hardly find XLC students who are able to speak like native speakers. We mostly speak with our own accent.... However, we accept different accents and learn from each other. (Catherine)*

Lastly, although most national and international standardized tests in Thailand were conducted using the two main varieties of English, a number of XLC students remained receptive to other varieties. In agreement with Wong (2015), participants realized that teaching and testing in the university sometimes forced them to confront native English norms. Also, Catherine shared her strategies in learning and preparing for the test outside the classroom.

*Nowadays, there are various ways of learning English and knowledge is no longer limited in the classroom. Technology advance allows students to access multi-learning materials which can be used to enhance their English 4 skills. I have seen many people learn online courses through YouTube before their examination. (Catherine)*

Again, the majority of the participants in this study presented positive attitudes towards different varieties of English used as a medium of instruction in the classroom. Therefore, participants were interested in other varieties of English which could be taught in the classroom aside from those two main varieties. However, as mentioned earlier, teachers' English language proficiency should be concerned as it contributed a significant impact on students' learning attitudes.

## **CONCLUSION**

This present study was aimed to investigate Thai university students' attitudes towards English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) in classroom contexts. The findings from both quantitative and qualitative data analysis can be drawn into three categories. Firstly, in terms of Thai university students' attitudes towards learning English, the findings revealed that the majority of the students considered effective communication as the ultimate goal of learning English

which was more important than the accent they had. However, even though the accent was less necessary, it was not surprising to find out that most of the students preferred native English pronunciation as their model. Additionally, it was found that students' pronunciation preferences were influenced by their prior experiences of learning English in the classroom.

Secondly, in terms of students' attitudes towards varieties of English, this study discovered that students' in this study present positive attitudes towards different varieties of English. Also, they showed their interest in learning non-native cultures since they believed that it was a means to extend their knowledge of the language. These findings could be perceived as a result of the opportunities of the students in exposure to various varieties of English in their community. Consequently, schools in Thailand need to create supportive learning environments where provided a chance for Thai students to experience other varieties of English. By doing so, the schools will be able to raise students' positive attitudes or at least their awareness of other varieties of English.

In terms of students' attitudes towards ELF used as a medium of instruction in the classroom, similarly, the majority of the students expressed their good attitudes towards ELF although they did not know the term before. Moreover, students were receptive to different accents that teachers used in the classroom as long as the teachers possessed proficient language competence. Besides, different varieties of English in the classroom enabled students to have better understandings of other cultures, languages, and ways of thinking. However, the majority of the students realized that they would benefit more from practicing effective communication in real-life situations than memorizing grammar rules. Therefore, Thai English teachers must be able to change and adapt their teaching styles and strategies to meet Thai university students' needs in the future.

In addition to the findings above, this study also has several limitations. Firstly, the findings from this study cannot be generalized or represented to all Thai university students since the participants in this study were from one particular university. Moreover, the majority of the participants were from different ethnic minorities who experienced various varieties of English during their study. The findings from this present study, therefore, might be different from other Thai universities. Secondly, this study was initially designed to involve 70 students studying in three majors. Unfortunately, because of the limited time and several difficulties, only 23 students were able to participate. With more participants, the findings in this study could be stronger. Finally, the findings in this study were merely

derived from Thai university students' attitudes towards ELF. Therefore, it is recommended for future studies to investigate Thai teachers' perceptions of using ELF in the classroom to explore profound information regarding strengths, challenges, and weaknesses of implementing ELF in classroom contexts.

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