



## Developmental Shifts in ELF Perceptions: How Teaching Experience Shapes Thai Pre-service and In-service Teachers' Readiness for ELF-Informed Pedagogy

Apirat Akaraphattanawong<sup>1</sup> , Niwat Wuttisrisiriporn<sup>2\*</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Silpakorn University, Nakhon Pathom, Thailand

<sup>2</sup> Burapha University, Chon Buri, Thailand

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### Abstract

This study investigated how teaching experience influences Thai pre-service and in-service teachers' ELF perceptions and examines their perspectives on incorporating ELF-informed approaches into classroom practice. Using an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, 92 participants from the same ELT teacher education program were recruited across three groups: junior pre-service teachers ( $n = 30$ ), senior pre-service teachers ( $n = 36$ ), and in-service teachers ( $n = 26$ ). A questionnaire adapted from Curran and Chern (2017) measured perceptions across four ELF-related dimensions, supplemented by focus-group interviews with 15 volunteers (five per group). ANOVA results indicated that teaching experience significantly influenced views on language models and intercultural competence, with in-service teachers showing less attachment to native-speaker norms and greater prioritization of communicative effectiveness. Qualitatively, a developmental progression emerged. Junior pre-service teachers expressed uncertainty about ELF, senior pre-service teachers showed growing pedagogical awareness, and in-service teachers offered more critical, experience-informed perspectives. All groups endorsed bilingual practices, particularly L1 use to support comprehension. These findings underscore the centrality of experiential learning in developing ELF awareness and call for stage-specific, scaffolded ELF integration within teacher education programs, with implications for curriculum reform and professional development in expanding-circle contexts.

**Keywords:** English as a lingua franca, English in Thailand, teaching experience, teacher perceptions, teacher training

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\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: niwatw@buu.ac.th

## Introduction

English has transcended its traditional boundaries to function as the world's primary lingua franca, reshaping how the language is taught, learned, and conceptualized globally (Graddol, 2006; Jenkins, 2015). This transformation gave rise to English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), a paradigm that challenges traditional English as a Foreign Language (EFL) approaches by prioritizing communicative effectiveness, mutual intelligibility, and pragmatic adaptability over adherence to native-speaker norms (Jenkins, 2015; Seidlhofer, 2011; Zhang, 2022). These shifts are particularly consequential in expanding-circle contexts, where learners predominantly use English for communication with other non-native speakers across multilingual settings (Canagarajah, 2006; Kirkpatrick, 2010).

Teachers play a critical role as primary gatekeepers in introducing ELF perspectives and implementing ELF-informed pedagogical approaches, such as exposing learners to diverse English varieties. They facilitate intercultural interactions and prioritize communicative effectiveness over native-like accuracy (Dewey, 2012; Galloway & Rose, 2018). Their perceptions significantly influence instructional decisions, material selection, and assessment practices, directly mediating learners' understanding of English as a global communicative resource (Lopriore, 2024; Ramadhani & Muslim, 2021). Yet integrating ELF principles into practice remains contested, since institutional pressures, standardized assessments, native-speaker ideologies, and limited teacher preparation all resist departure from Inner Circle norms (Baker, 2012; Matsuda, 2012).

Against this backdrop, Thailand presents a compelling context for ELF research given its ASEAN membership, where English functions as the official working language (Baker, 2012; Kirkpatrick, 2010). Thai learners predominantly use English with other non-native speakers in academic, professional, and intercultural settings, making ELF-oriented competencies especially relevant (Boonsuk & Ambele, 2021). However, English education in Thailand continues to prioritize British and American norms, creating a disconnect between classroom instruction and actual language use patterns (Wongsothorn et al., 2002). This disjunction is further reinforced by teacher education programs that emphasize linguistic accuracy and exam preparation while offering limited exposure to global English varieties or ELF-informed pedagogy (Hayes, 2009; Kanoksilapatham, 2013; Zhang, 2022). Such circumstances raise substantive questions about whether ELF awareness can develop without deliberate institutional support.

Despite growing scholarly interest in ELF pedagogy and documented evidence of effective ELF-informed activities in Thai classrooms (e.g., Boonsuk et al., 2024; Mair et al., 2026), little research has systematically examined how teaching experience shapes ELF readiness across career stages. The present study addresses this gap by comparing three groups from the same English Language Teaching (ELT) teacher education program: junior pre-service teachers (no teaching experience), senior pre-service teachers (practicum experience), and in-service teachers (sustained classroom experience). This design controls for institutional context, cultural background, and initial training, enabling experience to be examined as a developmental variable. The study thus conceptualizes ELF readiness not as a fixed outcome

but as an evolving orientation shaped by accumulated professional experience. Such findings are intended to inform stage-specific ELF integration in teacher education across expanding-circle contexts. The significance of this inquiry lies in its practical implications. Without understanding to what extent and at what career stage ELF awareness develops, teacher education programs cannot intervene effectively to accelerate that development.

The study is guided by two research questions:

1. To what extent do junior pre-service, senior pre-service, and in-service teachers differ in their ELF perceptions?
2. What perspectives do teachers at different experience levels hold regarding their readiness to incorporate ELF-informed approaches into classroom practice?

## Literature Review

The ELF paradigm reconceptualizes English as a contact language used by speakers from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. It shifts emphasis from native-speaker accuracy toward communicative effectiveness, mutual intelligibility, and pragmatic strategies such as accommodation and negotiation (Jenkins, 2007; Seidlhofer, 2011). These shifts carry significant implications for curriculum design, teacher education, and classroom practice.

### *1. ELF Pedagogy: From Theory to Practice*

ELF-informed pedagogy encourages exposure to diverse English varieties, cultivation of intercultural competence, and recognition of learners' first languages as communicative resources rather than interference (Jenkins, 2000; Seidlhofer, 2011). The Global Englishes Language Teaching (GELT) framework bridges theory and classroom application by foregrounding awareness-raising and intercultural communicative competence (Galloway & Rose, 2018; Rose & Galloway, 2019). Such approaches have been shown to foster learner confidence and reduce the native-speaker performance anxiety that many non-native teachers and students internalize (Dewey, 2012; Zhang, 2022). In Thai university contexts, Boonsuk et al. (2024) documented effective ELF-oriented activities (e.g., student-foreigner classroom interaction, video-based English exposure, and film analysis) that helped shift learners' self-perception from being linguistically incompetent non-native speakers toward becoming capable multilingual users, underscoring the transformative potential of deliberate ELF implementation. Such out-of-class activities extend learning beyond formal classrooms by connecting students with the linguistically varied interlocutors they are likely to encounter in real-world ASEAN settings.

### *2. Implementation Challenges and Teacher Preparation*

Despite its theoretical appeal, ELF implementation remains constrained by standardized testing, prescribed curricula, and societal expectations equating proficiency with native-speaker accuracy (Canagarajah, 2006; Jenkins, 2006). Scholars have documented persistent theory-practice gaps across contexts. In particular, institutional frameworks often privilege standard language norms over the communicative and plurilingual orientations that ELF-

informed teaching demands, and the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) has itself been critiqued for insufficient accommodation of ELF principles (Dewey, 2012; Hynninen, 2014). In Thailand, these pressures are compounded by deeply entrenched native-speakerism, with textbooks, assessments, and institutional policies continuing to privilege Inner Circle varieties (Ambele & Boonsuk, 2021; Wongsothorn et al., 2002). Teachers across expanding-circle contexts also report limited access to ELF-oriented materials and institutional pressure to conform to norms that directly conflict with ELF principles, further perpetuating these gaps (Si, 2019; Zhang, 2022).

Teacher preparation is central to addressing these challenges. However, many expanding-circle programs offer limited exposure to World Englishes or ELF pedagogy, maintaining traditional orientations focused on native-speaker accuracy (Koseoglu & Gilanlioglu, 2021; Zhang, 2022). Without explicit preparation, pre-service teachers may lack both the conceptual understanding and practical skills needed for ELF-informed implementation. This is particularly concerning given that teacher education significantly shapes subsequent classroom practice and can effectively circulate native-speaker norms across generations (Si, 2019).

### *3. Teacher Perceptions: Pre-service and In-service Perspectives*

Research across Asian, European, and multilingual contexts consistently shows that pre-service teachers demonstrate conceptual ELF awareness yet maintain strong attachments to native-speaker standards (Curran & Chern, 2017; Jeong et al., 2022; Koseoglu & Gilanlioglu, 2021; Zhang, 2022). While scholars advocate for transformative ELF-aware teacher education that emphasizes critical reflection and sustained engagement (Mair et al., 2026; Sifakis & Bayyurt, 2017), such approaches remain underrepresented in outer-circle and expanding-circle contexts. In these settings, ELF concepts are more often introduced theoretically than practically, leaving pre-service teachers insufficiently prepared to implement them within rigid curricula and high-stakes testing environments.

In-service teachers display more nuanced, experience-informed perspectives. Evidence from Thailand, Vietnam, China, Indonesia, and Bhutan shows that experienced teachers generally acknowledge ELF's importance and express support for flexible pedagogies (Ambele, 2022; Chanwaiwit & Kantisai, 2022; Ramadhani & Muslim, 2021; Thao et al., 2022; Wangdi & Dhendup, 2024). However, these positive orientations are consistently tempered by insufficient institutional support, assessment-driven cultures, and limited professional development opportunities (Si, 2019; Zhang, 2022). Critically, most existing studies treat in-service teachers as a homogeneous group, overlooking how ELF beliefs and implementation readiness may evolve across different career stages. This gap points directly to the need for experience-differentiated research.

### *4. The Present Study*

Despite growing cross-national research on ELF attitudes, few studies have examined how teaching experience within a single institutional context shapes ELF readiness across career stages. While Boonsuk et al. (2024) document the transformative potential of ELF-informed

activities in Thai university contexts and Mair et al. (2026) demonstrate how ELF-focused professional development fosters collaborative negotiation of linguistic and pedagogical practices, pre-service and early-career teachers' views of implementation feasibility remain underexplored. By comparing junior pre-service, senior pre-service, and in-service teachers from the same ELT teacher education program, this study isolates the developmental effects of teaching experience on ELF perceptions and generates differentiated, stage-specific insights to inform teacher education in Asian EFL contexts and beyond.

## Method

### *1. Research Design and Participants*

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative and qualitative data to provide complementary insights and enhance credibility and trustworthiness (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). To examine how teaching experience affects Thai pre-service and in-service teachers' ELF perceptions, participants with varying levels of teaching experience were recruited from a program that did not explicitly include ELF in its curriculum. Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Institutional Review Board (IRB approval no. IRB2-105/2567).

Participants consisted of 30 junior pre-service teachers (JPTs), 36 senior pre-service teachers (SPTs), and 26 in-service teachers (INTs), totaling 92 individuals. JPTs were second-year students with no teaching experience, while SPTs were fourth-year students who had completed teaching practicums in Thai public schools. Both groups were enrolled in an ELT teacher education program accredited by the Ministry of Education at a large public university in central Thailand. INTs were in-service English teachers with at least three years of classroom experience in Thai public schools, all of whom were graduates of the same ELT program. JPTs and SPTs were recruited via simple random sampling from their respective cohorts using class registration lists. INTs were identified through purposive sampling of alumni networks from the same program, as the study required participants who shared the same institutional training background. All INTs who met the experience criterion and agreed to participate were included.

In general, ELT teacher education programs in Thailand prepare university students to become licensed English teachers in the basic education system. Program curricula typically include linguistics for teachers (e.g., morphology, syntax, and phonetics), literary studies, language teaching methodology, language assessment, and English skills development. Notably, the ELT program examined in this study did not include courses on ELF, World Englishes, or related topics in either its core curriculum or elective offerings, making it particularly suitable for examining the effects of teaching experience on ELF perceptions without the confound of prior formal ELF exposure.

All 92 participants completed an ELF perception questionnaire via Microsoft Forms. Subsequently, focus-group interviews were conducted with 15 volunteers (five from each

group) to explore their views on incorporating ELF into classroom practice. Pseudonyms (e.g., JPT1, JPT2, SPT1, SPT2, INT1, INT2) were assigned to protect participant identities.

## 2. Research Instruments and Data Collection

Both quantitative and qualitative instruments were employed to explore ELF perceptions. For the quantitative phase, a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire adapted from Curran and Chern (2017) measured participants' agreement with 20 statements covering four ELF perspectives: Models of English (10 statements), Using English for Communication (2 statements), The Role of Language and Culture (4 statements), and Language Use in Class (4 statements). Statement numbers reflect their original position in the full questionnaire instrument; non-consecutive numbers within any table indicate that only the statements belonging to that dimension are displayed. The questionnaire was written in English with Thai translations for clarity and distributed electronically via Microsoft Forms using QR codes.

The instrument was piloted with 30 participants whose qualifications matched those of the target sample. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which indicated good reliability ( $\alpha = .82$ ; George & Mallery, 2003). During data collection, participants first provided background information, including their status (pre-service or in-service), education level (for pre-service teachers), or years of teaching experience (for in-service teachers), before rating their agreement with each statement on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The quantitative findings informed the qualitative phase. Focus-group interviews were conducted via MS Teams with 15 participants (five from each group) using a semi-structured interview guide designed to elicit their views on incorporating ELF principles into classroom practice (see Appendix A). All interviews were conducted in Thai to ensure clarity and depth of expression. Each session lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and was video-recorded with participants' permission. The interview data were then analyzed qualitatively to complement the questionnaire findings and to provide deeper insights into participants' ELF perceptions.

## 3. Data Analysis

For the quantitative data, each statement on the five-point Likert scale was scored, and descriptive statistics, including mean ( $M$ ) and standard deviation ( $SD$ ), were calculated and are presented in Tables 1–4. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine whether significant differences existed in overall perceptions and individual statements within each perspective among the three groups. Prior to analysis, the data were checked against statistical assumptions for ANOVA. Shapiro–Wilk tests confirmed normality ( $p > .05$ ), and Levene's test verified homogeneity of variances ( $p > .05$ ). All statistical analyses were performed using R (R Core Team, 2024).

For the qualitative phase, data from the focus-group interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-step process: familiarization with data, initial coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.

To ensure reliability, two researchers independently conducted the analysis, consistent with O'Connor and Joffe's (2020) recommendation for multiple coders in qualitative analysis. We independently familiarized ourselves with and coded the data, then compared and discussed our interpretations, reaching consensus on theme definitions and labels to ensure credibility and trustworthiness (Nowell et al., 2017). Relevant excerpts were incorporated into the report to illustrate data patterns. To further enhance validity, member checking was conducted by sending participants a summary of identified themes and selected quotations. No participants requested modifications or revisions.

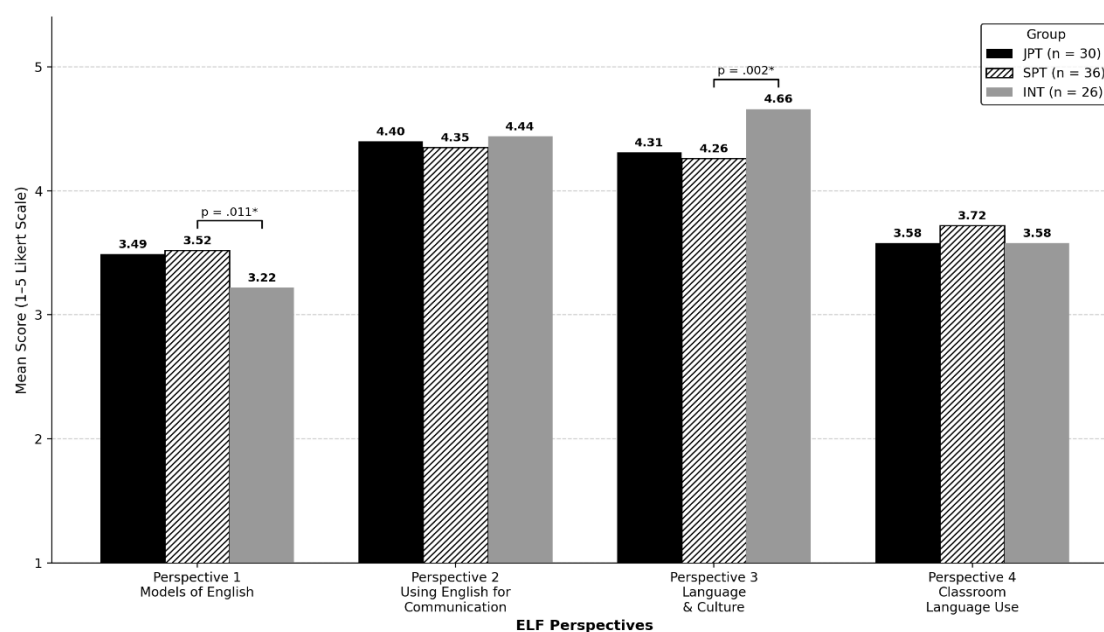
## Findings

### 1. ELF Perceptions among Pre-service and In-service English Teachers (RQ1)

Quantitative analysis addressed RQ1 by examining ELF perceptions across the three groups, beginning with overall perspectives followed by the four specific dimensions.

#### Figure 1

Overall Perspectives on ELF among Thai Pre-Service and In-Service Teachers



#### 1.1 Overall Perspectives on ELF

A one-way ANOVA revealed that teaching experience significantly affected two of the four ELF perspectives. For Perspective 1 (Models of English),  $F(2, 89) = 4.463$ ,  $p = .011$ . Tukey HSD post hoc tests indicated that INTs agreed significantly less with traditional English norms than both JPTs ( $p = .044$ ) and SPTs ( $p = .009$ ), with no significant difference between JPTs and SPTs ( $p > .05$ ). As shown in Figure 1, Perspective 2 (Using English for Communication) showed no significant group differences ( $p > .05$ ), indicating general consensus across all three groups. For Perspective 3 (Language and Culture),  $F(2, 89) = 6.08$ ,  $p = .002$ . INTs scored significantly higher than JPTs ( $p = .011$ ) and SPTs ( $p = .002$ ), reflecting a greater emphasis on

global communicative competencies, while JPTs and SPTs did not differ significantly ( $p > .05$ ). Perspective 4 (Classroom Language Use) also showed no significant differences ( $p > .05$ ), indicating shared orientations across experience levels.

### 1.2 Models of English

Table 1 presents findings for ten statements addressing models of English, revealing varied views on the roles of native and non-native models in teaching and learning.

Statements 6 and 11 received the highest ratings across all groups. Statement 6 (exposing students to proficient L2 speakers' English) ranked highest among JPTs and INTs and second among SPTs. A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant group difference,  $F(2, 89) = 3.836$ ,  $p = .012$ . Tukey HSD post hoc tests indicated that INTs expressed significantly stronger agreement than both JPTs ( $p = .021$ ) and SPTs ( $p = .010$ ). For Statement 11, SPTs ranked it highest ( $M = 4.14$ ,  $SD = 0.72$ ), while JPTs ( $M = 3.85$ ,  $SD = 0.73$ ) and INTs ( $M = 4.31$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ) ranked it second. Across all groups, there was strong agreement on the importance of incorporating both native and non-native English models into instructional materials.

**Table 1**

#### *Perceptions towards Models of English*

Statement	JPT (N = 30)		SPT (N = 36)		INT (N = 26)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1. English teaching materials should only use native-speaker models.	3.04	0.92	2.92	0.97	2.75	1.18
2. It is important that students try to sound like native speakers of English.	2.95	3.82	3.16	3.90	2.19	3.31
3. It is not necessary for my students to sound like native speakers to be proficient speakers of English.	3.50	1.27	3.50	1.06	3.12	1.54
4. It is important that students be exposed to English spoken by a range of native speakers (e.g., Australians, Indians, Africans, etc.).	3.50	1.03	3.75	0.73	3.81	1.38
5. It is confusing to introduce students to many different English accents in class.	3.23	1.24	3.42	1.10	3.25	1.44
6. It is important that students be exposed to English used by proficient second language speakers.	3.96	0.82	3.94	0.72	4.62	0.50
10. It is important that classroom materials provide a single model of English, either American or British.	3.42	1.06	3.51	1.12	3.29	1.47
11. It is important that classroom materials provide a range of models of English used by L1 and L2 speakers.	3.85	0.73	4.14	0.72	4.31	1.08
18. Native speakers of English should be the role model for Thai students.	3.73	1.04	3.78	0.87	2.81	1.47
19. Being proficient in English means being able to behave like a native speaker of English.	3.69	0.92	3.06	1.09	2.06	1.06

Note. 1.00 – 1.49 = Strongly disagree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Neutral; 3.50 – 4.49 = Agree; 4.50 – 5.00 = Strongly agree.

A notable contrast emerged in third-ranked items. JPTs ( $M = 3.73$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ) and SPTs ( $M = 3.78$ ,  $SD = 0.87$ ) both ranked Statement 18 (native speakers as role models) third, while INTs rated it markedly lower ( $M = 2.81$ ,  $SD = 1.47$ ), reflecting a neutral rather than agreeing stance. INTs instead ranked Statement 4 (exposing students to a range of native English varieties) third ( $M = 3.81$ ,  $SD = 1.38$ ), rating it higher than JPTs ( $M = 3.50$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ) and SPTs ( $M = 3.75$ ,

$SD = 0.73$ ). This pattern suggests greater awareness of real-world language use shaped by sustained teaching experience.

Statements 2 and 19 received the lowest ratings overall. For Statement 2, JPTs and SPTs were neutral on whether students need to sound like native speakers, whereas INTs disagreed significantly ( $p = .015$ ). Statement 19 (behaving like a native speaker as a marker of proficiency) showed the starkest group differences ( $p < .001$ ). JPTs agreed ( $M = 3.69$ ,  $SD = 0.92$ ), SPTs were neutral ( $M = 3.06$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ), and INTs disagreed. Taken together, these findings suggest that teaching experience fosters more flexible, communication-oriented conceptions of proficiency over native-speaker imitation.

### 1.3 Using English for Communication

As shown in Table 2, all groups strongly agreed that English programs should prioritize real-life communication and prepare students for interaction with non-native speakers. Statement 14 received mean scores ranging from 4.61 to 4.85, and Statement 15 also received consistently high agreement ( $M = 3.96$ – $4.12$ ). These findings reflect a shared commitment to equipping students for effective communication across diverse linguistic and cultural contexts.

**Table 2**

#### *Perceptions towards Using English for Communication*

Statement	JPT (N = 30)		SPT (N = 36)		INT (N = 26)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
14. The major focus of an English program should be teaching students to use the language in real-life communication.	4.85	0.47	4.61	0.55	4.75	0.45
15. An important focus of an English program should be to prepare students for communication with people who are not English native speakers.	3.96	0.99	4.08	0.77	4.12	1.15

*Note.* 1.00 – 1.49 = Strongly disagree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Neutral; 3.50 – 4.49 = Agree; 4.50 – 5.00 = Strongly agree.

### 1.4 The Role of Language and Culture

As shown in Table 3, all statements received mean scores above 4.0, indicating strong consensus on the importance of promoting understanding of both native- and non-native-speaker cultures. INTs consistently reported the highest ratings, particularly for Statement 7 (using English to share one's own culture) and Statement 20 (teaching intercultural awareness). The latter yielded a statistically significant group difference, with INTs scoring higher than both JPTs and SPTs ( $p = .014$ ). This pattern suggests that sustained teaching experience deepens appreciation of cultural competence. Nevertheless, the uniformly high ratings across all groups indicate a broadly shared commitment to integrating intercultural skills into English language instruction.

**Table 3**

*Perceptions towards the Role of Language and Culture*

Statement	JPT (N = 30)		SPT (N = 36)		INT (N = 26)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
7. It is important that students can use English to share information about their own culture and traditions.	4.42	0.81	4.45	0.61	4.81	0.41
8. It is important that English teachers help students to better understand exchange students or people from other countries with whom they are likely to use English.	4.42	0.76	4.39	0.69	4.50	1.03
9. It is important that students become familiar with the culture and traditions of native speakers of English.	4.08	0.74	4.06	0.86	4.44	0.81
20. It is important to teach students to be aware of intercultural differences and encourage them to talk about such differences.	4.31	0.68	4.14	0.90	4.88	0.34

Note. 1.00 – 1.49 = Strongly disagree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Neutral; 3.50 – 4.49 = Agree; 4.50 – 5.00 = Strongly agree.

*1.5 Language Use in Class*

As shown in Table 4, Statement 12 (English-only instruction) received neutral ratings across all groups ( $M = 3.25\text{--}3.38$ ), reflecting ambivalence toward monolingual instructional approaches. In contrast, Statements 13 (bilingual approach with Thai support) and 17 (teaching code-switching strategies) received strong agreement across all groups, with INTs consistently expressing the highest ratings. This pattern suggests that teaching experience fosters a more pragmatic orientation toward bilingual classroom practices.

**Table 4**

*Perceptions towards Language Use in Class*

Statement	JPT (N = 30)		SPT (N = 36)		INT (N = 26)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
12. English should be used as the only medium of instruction in English language classes.	3.38	0.69	3.31	0.75	3.25	1.24
13. A bilingual approach where Thai is used as a support in English language classes is more effective for Thai students.	3.85	0.89	4.14	0.77	3.56	1.21
16. Using Thai in class makes it more difficult for students to develop effective meaning negotiation strategies.	3.19	1.13	3.28	0.94	3.38	0.96
17. It is important to teach students strategies of effective code-switching between English and Thai.	3.92	0.90	4.14	0.72	4.12	0.81

Note. 1.00 – 1.49 = Strongly disagree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Neutral; 3.50 – 4.49 = Agree; 4.50 – 5.00 = Strongly agree.

*2. Incorporation of ELF Principles into Classrooms (RQ2)*

Thematic analysis of the focus-group interviews yielded five themes reflecting a developmental progression from initial hesitancy among JPTs, through emerging pedagogical awareness among SPTs, to pragmatic, experience-grounded confidence among INTs: (1) self-perceived proficiency and confidence concerns, (2) practical experience and pedagogical growth, (3) classroom realities and student proficiency concerns, (4) prioritizing effective communication over native-speaker norms, and (5) systemic barriers and curricular advocacy.

### *2.1 Self-Perceived Proficiency and Confidence Concerns*

JPTs identified limited teaching experience and perceived English proficiency as the primary barriers to ELF implementation. JPT2 captured this dual concern: “I have no experience with teaching, which makes it difficult for me to confidently apply concepts like ELF in a real classroom.” JPT1 similarly admitted being “worried that my own English isn’t strong enough to teach it effectively.” These reflections indicate that linguistic insecurity overshadowed theoretical knowledge at this early career stage, a pattern further compounded by the absence of ELF-informed pedagogy in participants’ formal training.

### *2.2 Practical Experience and Pedagogical Growth*

Practicum experience prompted a meaningful reorientation among SPTs. SPT2 reflected: “It’s not just about learning English for exams; it’s about preparing them to use English in real-life situations,” signaling a shift from viewing English as an academic subject toward understanding it as a communicative tool. SPT1 reframed L1 use not as a departure from ELF principles but as an enactment of them: “I learned that effective communication sometimes means using L1 support, that is, using whatever resources help mutual understanding.” SPT3 captured the broader shift: “I realized my job isn’t to make them sound native but to help them communicate clearly with each other.” Together, these reflections illustrate how supervised teaching transformed abstract ELF concepts into practical strategies. SPTs increasingly came to treat code-switching and intelligibility as pedagogically justified choices rather than theoretical compromises.

### *2.3 Classroom Realities and Student Proficiency Concerns*

Both JPTs and SPTs identified student proficiency as a significant constraint on ELF implementation. JPT4 questioned feasibility in lower-level classrooms: “Not all students have a strong foundation in English. How can they communicate when they don’t even know basic vocabulary?” SPT4 offered a more nuanced perspective: “Student proficiency varies widely in one classroom. Some can handle discussions about communication strategies, but others are still learning basic grammar. Differentiating ELF-informed activities for mixed-ability classes is really challenging.” However, practicum experience prompted an important reframing among SPTs. SPT3 observed: “One student with weak grammar still communicated effectively by using gestures and simple words. That’s actually ELF in action. Strategic competence matters. Maybe we’re too focused on accuracy with beginners when we should emphasize communication from the start.” These reflections suggest ELF was beginning to be understood as a communicative orientation applicable across proficiency levels, though this understanding remained less fully developed than among INTs.

### *2.4 Effective Communication over Native-Speaker Norms*

INTs consistently prioritized communicative effectiveness over native-speaker conformity, reflecting pedagogical maturity shaped by sustained classroom experience. INT4 explained: “When students worry too much about sounding American or British, they become afraid to

speak. But when I tell them intelligibility is what matters, they relax and actually communicate better.” INT2 reinforced this orientation: “Students who focus on getting their message across, even with Thai-accented English, develop better fluency and confidence.” INT3 grounded this stance in professional reality, noting that former students in ASEAN workplaces rarely interact with native speakers and simply need to be understood. INT1 affirmed: “Students need to know that their Thai English is legitimate.” Together, these perspectives reflect a decisive shift toward communication-oriented pedagogy anchored in authentic student needs.

### 2.5 Systemic Barriers and Advocacy for Reform

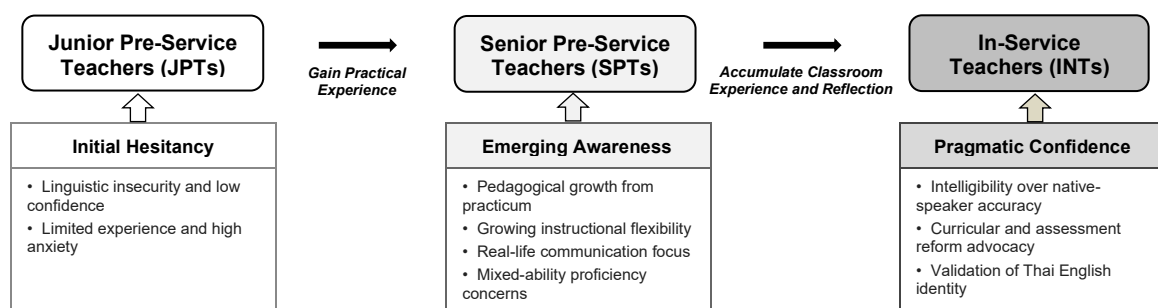
Unlike pre-service participants, INTs adopted a broader systemic perspective, identifying structural barriers across curriculum, teacher preparation, and assessment. INT3 captured the central contradiction: “The curriculum mentions communicative competence, but the actual materials and assessments still test grammar accuracy and native-like pronunciation. That fundamental contradiction undermines everything.” INT4 observed that some educators misunderstand ELF as teaching broken English or lowering standards, a misconception that perpetuates resistance to reform. INT2 reinforced the assessment dimension: “We’re teaching one thing and testing another. Until assessments align with ELF principles, teachers will always be caught in this contradiction.” Despite these challenges, INTs proposed concrete reforms, including dedicated ELF coursework and exposure to diverse English varieties, reflecting professional maturity that moves beyond personal readiness toward systemic advocacy.

## Discussion

This study examined how teaching experience shapes Thai teachers’ ELF perceptions across four dimensions. The findings reveal a selective pattern: experience significantly affected views on language models and intercultural competence, while communicative orientations and bilingual practice support remained stable across all groups. Qualitatively, teachers progressed from initial hesitancy through emerging awareness to pragmatic confidence, a three-stage developmental trajectory (Figure 2) that demonstrates ELF readiness is not a static belief but an evolving capacity shaped through situated classroom practice.

**Figure 2**

*Progression of ELF Readiness across Teaching Experience*



### *1. Experience-Related Differences in ELF Perceptions*

In-service teachers demonstrated lower adherence to native-speaker norms and stronger intercultural orientation than both pre-service groups. Critically, no significant differences existed between JPTs and SPTs despite practicum completion, suggesting that supervised teaching alone cannot transform ideological orientations without explicit ELF scaffolding. This finding challenges the assumption that classroom exposure automatically develops ELF awareness, a pattern documented across Taiwanese, Chinese, Spanish, and multilingual European contexts (Curran & Chern, 2017; Jeong et al., 2022; Zhang, 2022).

In contrast, communicative orientations and bilingual practice support remained uniformly strong across all groups, indicating that these reflect contemporary professional discourse rather than experience-dependent development. This aligns with findings from Vietnam, Bhutan, and Indonesia (Ramadhani & Muslim, 2021; Thao et al., 2022; Wangdi & Dhendup, 2024), suggesting that ASEAN contexts share a form of functional ELF recognition even among novice teachers. This widespread bilingual acceptance represents a grassroots readiness for flexible multilingual practice that teacher education programs have yet to systematically leverage.

In the Thai context specifically, this finding carries direct policy implications. Thai ELT continues to be shaped by national curriculum guidelines that privilege native-speaker accuracy as the target norm, despite English functioning primarily as a lingua franca in ASEAN academic and professional settings (Baker, 2012; Boonsuk & Ambele, 2021). The consistent endorsement of bilingual practices across all three participant groups reflects a well-documented gap between official monolingual policy and actual classroom reality in Thailand. This tension represents a concrete opportunity for the Teachers' Council of Thailand and ELT teacher education programs to formally recognize ELF-informed, bilingual pedagogy as a legitimate professional competency rather than a departure from standard practice.

More broadly, the selective nature of these experience effects reveals that only certain ELF dimensions develop naturally. Ideological stances and cultural competence evolve experientially, while communicative goals and language use preferences remain relatively stable. This selectivity calls for targeted curricular intervention beyond what experience alone can achieve.

### *2. Perspectives on ELF Integration across Experience Levels*

Junior pre-service teachers overwhelmingly viewed their own Thai English through a deficit lens, perceiving their proficiency as inadequate for ELF-informed teaching. This orientation appears transnational, as pre-service teachers in China, Spain, Sweden, and Cyprus similarly reported reluctance and self-contradiction in the face of ELF implementation (Jeong et al., 2022; Koseoglu & Gilanlioglu, 2021; Zhang, 2022). The consistent pattern across contexts suggests that without explicit ELF preparation, pre-service teachers internalize native-speaker ideologies regardless of setting. Critically, none of the 92 participants in this study received formal ELF instruction during teacher preparation, reflecting gaps documented across Asian EFL contexts (Si, 2019; Thao et al., 2022). This absence creates what Si (2019) describes as a

circulation system wherein native-English-based teacher education perpetuates these norms across generations.

SPTs demonstrated pragmatic shifts, reframing code-switching as a legitimate communicative strategy aligned with ELF principles rather than a failure to maintain target language use. However, the absence of quantitative differences from JPTs reveals these insights remain tentative. Practicum serves as a catalyst for emerging awareness but falls short of consolidating ELF beliefs without explicit scaffolding. This challenges teacher education programs globally to structure supervised experience intentionally rather than assuming that exposure alone produces development (Si, 2019; Zhang, 2022).

INTs articulated pedagogically mature perspectives grounded in real-world evidence, consistently prioritizing intelligibility over native-like accuracy. Their orientation is well supported contextually, as Thai university graduates interact predominantly with non-native English speakers in ASEAN settings, making native-like proficiency an impractical target (Baker, 2012; Boonsuk & Ambele, 2021; Kirkpatrick, 2010). INTs also demonstrated significantly higher intercultural orientation, consistent with Curran and Chern's (2017) finding that greater professional exposure strengthens support for ELF's intercultural dimensions. Most critically, INTs identified curriculum–assessment misalignment as a fundamental structural barrier. Communicative competence goals are systematically undermined by assessments that continue to privilege grammatical accuracy and native-like pronunciation. This pattern is evident across Asian EFL contexts, including China, Bhutan, and Vietnam (Si, 2019; Thao et al., 2022; Wangdi & Dhendup, 2024), revealing that assessment reform is a shared prerequisite for meaningful ELF integration.

### *3. Critical Implications: Moving beyond Experience-Dependent Development*

Taken together, the findings confirm that experience shapes ELF readiness, but three critical limitations require intervention.

First, the progression depends on years of unsupported practice. The absence of JPT–SPT differences means teachers spend extended periods perpetuating native-speaker norms before developing ELF perspectives, a trajectory documented across Asian and European contexts (Chanwaiwit & Kantisai, 2022; Jeong et al., 2022; Zhang, 2022). Second, experience develops only certain ELF dimensions, indicating that naturalistic learning alone cannot produce comprehensive ELF readiness. Third, even experienced teachers face systemic barriers, including curriculum–assessment misalignment, materials scarcity, and institutional inertia, that individual development cannot overcome.

These limitations point toward the need for stage-specific scaffolding. For JPTs, transformative approaches are needed that go beyond exposing teachers to ELF principles toward fundamentally reconstituting their convictions about language teaching (Sifakis & Bayyurt, 2017). For SPTs, practicum must be intentionally structured with ELF workshops, reflection protocols, and mentor preparation, as exposure alone is insufficient. For INTs, professional learning communities can channel existing expertise toward institutional reform, as Mair et al.

(2026) demonstrated in their study of ELF-focused collaborative professional development.

Beyond individual stage support, systemic reform is equally essential. This includes integrating ELF as core rather than supplementary content in teacher education, developing ELF-informed materials to address resource scarcity across ASEAN contexts, and reforming assessment criteria toward communicative effectiveness. International models demonstrate that this is achievable. Examples include critical materials analysis in China (Si, 2019; Zhang, 2022), community-of-practice approaches in Bhutan (Wangdi & Dhendup, 2024), practical classroom activities in Thailand (Boonsuk et al., 2024), and ELF-aware teacher training in Indonesia and Vietnam (Ramadhani & Muslim, 2021; Thao et al., 2022). What these models share is the recognition that sustainable ELF integration requires simultaneous intervention at the teacher, curriculum, and policy levels.

## Conclusion

Teaching experience shapes Thai teachers' ELF perceptions selectively, significantly influencing views on language models and intercultural competence while leaving communicative orientations and bilingual practice support stable. This forms a three-stage trajectory from initial hesitancy through emerging awareness to pragmatic confidence. This trajectory mirrors patterns across Asian and European EFL contexts (Curran & Chern, 2017; Jeong et al., 2022; Thao et al., 2022; Zhang, 2022), suggesting a transnational phenomenon that extends beyond the Thai context. Critically, practicum alone cannot transform ideological orientations without explicit ELF scaffolding. Moreover, the complete absence of ELF instruction across all 92 participants reflects systemic gaps shared with China, Vietnam, Bhutan, and Indonesia (Si, 2019; Wangdi & Dhendup, 2024).

The key theoretical contribution of this study is the reconceptualization of ELF readiness. Rather than treating it as a fixed pedagogical attribute, this study conceptualizes ELF readiness as a developmentally shaped capacity. It evolves through situated experience yet remains constrained by structural conditions that individual development alone cannot overcome. Among these conditions, curriculum–assessment misalignment emerges as the most critical systemic barrier. Sustainable ELF integration will therefore require simultaneous intervention at the teacher, curriculum, and policy levels.

For Thai education stakeholders, these findings offer a stage-specific roadmap. Junior pre-service teachers require transformative approaches that legitimize non-native varieties and rebuild language ideology (Sifakis & Bayyurt, 2017). Senior pre-service teachers need practicum structured around ELF reflection and mentoring. Meanwhile, in-service teachers need professional learning communities and institutional support to translate ELF understanding into sustainable classroom practice (Mair et al., 2026). As Thailand's integration into ASEAN deepens, equipping teachers for multilingual communication is no longer supplementary but rather a core educational priority.

Despite these contributions, several limitations of the present study should be noted. First, the focus on a single program restricts generalizability. Second, the cross-sectional design captures

differences between groups but cannot establish causality. Future research should address these limitations by employing longitudinal designs across diverse Thai institutions and other ASEAN contexts. Additionally, further studies should investigate the relationship between linguistic confidence and implementation readiness and incorporate classroom observations to triangulate self-reported attitudes with actual classroom practice.

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## Appendix A

### Focus-group interview questions

1. Were you introduced to ELF-informed teaching methods? If so, how were they presented?
2. If you have teaching experience, have you incorporated ELF principles in your classroom? If yes, how did you implement them? What benefits and challenges did you encounter?
3. Do you feel confident in incorporating ELF principles into your teaching? How would you go about it?
4. How well do you believe the current ELT curriculum in Thailand addresses the concept of ELF and its implications for teaching and learning?
5. What specific topics or aspects related to ELF do you think should be included or emphasized more in the ELT curriculum to better prepare pre-service and in-service teachers?