

## **Thai University Students' Voices Heard: Aspired Pronunciation Model**

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### **Abstract**

It has been agreed at the ASEAN Summit, the English language is positioned to becoming the working language of the region. To comply with this decision, it is essential that Thai students be prepared to be competent in the English language, particularly for international communication, through a modification of the present teaching and learning paradigms. When it comes to English pronunciation, little is known to date about Thai university students' aspiration with regards to their pronunciation models. In order to shed some light into the issue, one questionnaire survey was conducted, in this study, to examine Thai university students' attitudes about their English pronunciation to the question of conforming to native speaker norms or to the ideologies of WEs, EIL, or ELF which focus on intelligibility. The analysis of 387 responses from first and second year students studying in a public university demonstrates that Thai university students hold more favorable attitudes towards the model of native speakers, and that their views tend to differ from the expectations

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of teachers and academics. It is therefore of utmost importance for educators to take these views into consideration when making decisions related to national educational plans for English.

**Keywords:** EIL; pronunciation; aspired model; learners of English; university students

### บทคัดย่อ

ที่ประชุมอาเซียนได้ตกลงให้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาที่ใช้ในการทำงานในบริบทของอาเซียน เพื่อให้สอดคล้องกับมติดังกล่าว ผู้เรียนไทยจำเป็นต้องเตรียมตัวให้พร้อมกับการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเพื่อรองรับกับการสื่อสารในระดับสากลต่อไป ในการนี้เอง จำต้องมีการปรับกระบวนการเกี่ยวกับการเรียนการสอนเพื่อสอดคล้องกับสถานการณ์ดังกล่าว ในส่วนที่เกี่ยวกับการออกเสียงนั้น ปัจจุบันเราแทบจะไม่ทราบเลยว่า นักศึกษามหาวิทยาลัยปรารถนาใช้การออกเสียงใดเป็นต้นแบบในการพัฒนาภาษาอังกฤษ เพื่อให้ความกระจ่างในประเด็นนี้ งานวิจัยนี้สำรวจความคิดเห็นของนักศึกษาในมหาวิทยาลัยของประเทศไทย ว่ามีทัศนคติเกี่ยวกับการพัฒนาการออกเสียงภาษาอังกฤษให้ได้ใกล้เคียงเจ้าของภาษา หรือมีความเชื่อสอดคล้องตามแนวคิดของ WEs (ภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะเป็นภาษาโลก) EIL (ภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาสากล) หรือ ELF (ภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะเป็นภาษากลาง) ซึ่งเน้นการออกเสียงภาษาอังกฤษที่พอเข้าใจได้ จากการวิเคราะห์คำตอบของแบบสอบถามรวม 387 ชุดจากนักศึกษาชั้นปีที่ 1 และ 2 ของมหาวิทยาลัยของรัฐแห่งหนึ่ง พบว่า โดยรวมแล้ว นักศึกษาเหล่านี้มีทัศนคติเอนเอียงไปในทิศทางที่ต้องการออกเสียงภาษาอังกฤษให้ได้ใกล้เคียงเจ้าของภาษา อันแสดงถึงข้อค้นพบที่อาจแตกต่างไปจากความคาดหวังของครูผู้สอนและนักวิชาการหลายๆ คน งานชิ้นนี้สะท้อนให้เห็นว่า ในการตัดสินใจใดๆ ที่เกี่ยวกับการกำหนดทิศทางแผนการศึกษาของชาติ จำเป็นต้องพิจารณาความเห็นของผู้เรียนด้วย

**คำสำคัญ:** ภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาสากล การออกเสียง ต้นแบบการออกเสียงที่คาดหวัง ผู้เรียนภาษาอังกฤษ นักศึกษามหาวิทยาลัย

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### **1. Introduction**

It is acknowledged that among all languages in the world, the English language plays an increasingly vital role in our daily life, particularly in business, education, entertainment, communication, and work. Moreover, the English language is not only used internationally, but also locally for communication between speakers from diverse language backgrounds. Since the role of the English language, used today, is primarily for communication, skills related to or emphasizing communication are significantly important (Graddol, 2004).

As known, oral communication involves two principal language skills: speaking and listening. In addition, listening and speaking are basic to the subsequent development of reading and writing skills (Liao, 2009; Yalçinkaya et al, 2009), which in turn contribute to the enhanced effectiveness and efficiency of English language learning, consequently contributing to the integration of English in daily life (e.g., Graddol, 2006; Amberg & Vause, 2009).

Thai educators indicate that, although the English language has been taught in Thailand as a foreign language for decades, Thai students' performance in English language subjects has generally seemed unsatisfactory (Foley, 2005; Wongsothorn, 1996). To be more specific, even though English listening and speaking skills are pivotal in Thailand, learners of the language seem to find these skills difficult to

achieve (Kanoksilapatham, 2005, 2009, 2010). It is claimed that, among other things, some of the major reasons contributing to incomplete mastery of these two skills include the lack of or limited exposure to the target language and a variety of factors related to teachers, learners, environment, teaching materials, and supporting technology, to name a few. In addition to these external factors, the success of speaking for communicative purposes is determined by how much the language learner knows about pertinent linguistic characteristics of the English language. That is, in addition to the content or message to be conveyed and the appropriate choice of language, a clearer understanding of the English language sound system is vital. Different from the Thai language to a large extent, the English language displays its own unique set of consonant and vowel sounds, stress placement, and intonation. Finally, paralinguistic features appropriate for certain situations are important, contributing to successful communication (Kanoksilapatham, 2009).

In general, English language teaching in Thailand, as far as pronunciation is concerned, aims to enable learners to master, or approximate, native-like pronunciation. In other words, traditionally, the ultimate goal of the English language teaching of pronunciation in Thailand is to speak like a native. However, in reality and practice, studies conducted by Kanoksilapatham (2005, 2010) demonstrated that the pronunciation of, not only Thai learners, but also Thai teachers of English seemed to be unsatisfactory. Furthermore, findings indicated that other factors responsible for inadequacy included those relating to instructors, learners, curriculum, and educational administrators.

Recently, in contrast to the ultimate goal of native-like pronunciation, the notions of World Englishes (WEs), English as an International Language (EIL), or English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), have merited substantial and worldwide atten-

tion (e.g., Kachru, 1995; Firth, 1996; Warschauer, 2000; Savignon & Sysoyev, 2002; Jenkins, 2003; Graddol, 2006; Kirkpatrick, 2007). To elaborate further, according to Bolton (2004) and Jenkins (2006), WEs has multiple interpretations of the expression. In the broad sense, it can be used as an umbrella term covering all English varieties worldwide, while in the narrow sense, it can be used to refer to the so-called new Englishes used in the outer circle and thus sometimes called nativized or indigenized Englishes.

According to Jenkins (2006: 160), EIL refers to “the local Englishes of those non-mother tongue countries where it has an intranational institutionalized role.” However, Trudgill and Hannah (2002) include mother tongue English countries in the definition of EIL. Another meaning of EIL would then refer to the use of English as a means of international communication across national and linguistic boundaries (Jenkins, 2006). As far as pronunciation is concerned, according to Jenkins (2000: 266), the optimum pronunciation models for EIL are those of fluent bilingual speakers of English because these models are not only intelligible but also more realistic and more appropriate than native speaker models.

Concurrently, ELF refers to a situation in which English is chosen to be a language of communication among speakers who share neither a common native tongue nor a common national cultural background (Seildhofer, 2004; Jenkins, 2004, 2006, 2009). ELF thus refers to English when it is used as a contact language across languages and cultures. According to Jenkins (2009), in the context of ELF, the opportunity for English learners to be exposed to, or actually use, the English language with native speakers of English is limited. Therefore, similar to EIL, according to ELF, intelligibility, rather than native speaker norms, is considered the ultimate goal of English language learning.

Even though these three ideologies are not identical, they certainly overlap when it comes to their definition and scope, and definitely exert some influence on the realm of language learning and teaching. As shown above, in an increasingly globalized society, learners of English, as citizens of the world, are expected to be able to communicate across cultural and national boundaries. In the Thai context, the advent of Thailand's integration into the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) has made more eminent and realistic the necessity to use English within the ASEAN community, as opposed to the traditionally expected interaction with native speakers from countries like the United States, England, New Zealand, Canada, or Australia. Consequently, based on the ELF concept, the goal and expectation to develop Thai learners' pronunciation of English for the purpose of communicating with the ASEAN members should be for intelligibility, a more reasonable and attainable goal than seeking to be native-like. That said, the notion of WEs, EIL, and ELF together with the AEC integration suggest that native speaker norms, which present learners of English have to adhere to, may no longer be valid. Instead, a form of language that takes into account their first language and diverse cultural identities surrounding them might be more appropriate in the current context.

At this juncture, given the merits for intelligibility of English, the practice of teaching and learning English in Thailand needs to be reviewed and challenged. This means all sectors and personnel involved should cooperate in the revision and implementation of the English curriculum and respective pedagogical applications. However, learners' voices should be heard with regard to their ultimate goal of learning English pronunciation. A study conducted on Thai university students would provide insights into how Thai learners of English perceive the spread of English as a lingua franca, and

whether they find the WEs, EIL, and ELF suggestions suitable. To be precise, it remains to be determined if Thai learners of English favor the traditional goal of native-like pronunciation or the emerging goal of intelligibility.

## **2. Previous studies on learners' attitudes towards English pronunciation norms**

Savignon (1983, p. 110) and Krashen (1984, p. 21) congruently agreed that motivation is highly correlated with the English language learning performance because it is one of the major driving forces that stimulates learners to use the language to communicate with native speakers and enhance language learning. With a positive attitude, learners are likely to be more successful in learning and consistent in using the language. Therefore, it is crucial that positive motivation should be reinforced among learners for positive learning outcomes.

The contributing role of motivation, or to be precise, positive attitudes in teaching and learning English pronunciation is essential. In this regard, a pertinent question to ask is: Which models of English pronunciation do learners favor most, native-like norms or models of other English varieties? This topic has been enthusiastically debated in recent years, evidenced by a plethora of studies conducted on learners' attitudes towards English pronunciation models. In fact, English pronunciation teaching and learning has been the subject of several surveys in English-speaking countries, such as Canada (Foote, Holtby & Derwing, 2011), Australia (Mac Donald, 2002), and Great Britain (Burgess & Spencer, 2000; Timmis, 2002).

Timmis (2002), for example, conducted a large scale study covering a relatively wide geographical location that examined the students and teachers' attitudes towards the norms of pronunciation. In this study, 400 students from 14

countries and 180 teachers participating in the IATEFL Dublin 2000 conference from 45 countries (nationalities unidentified for both groups). The analysis of two parallel questionnaires for both students and teachers revealed that 67% of the students surveyed agreed that they would like to use native-like pronunciation as a benchmark for English language achievement. In contrast, the majority of native English-speaking teachers surveyed believed that the goal of pronunciation should not be native-like. However, non-native-speaking English teachers believed that their students should like to possess native-like pronunciation. In sum, this study indicated that although the increasing use of English in an international context is quite eminent, teachers and students disagreed on what the benchmark for pronunciation should be. In fact, teachers in this study seemed to be moving away from the native speaker norms faster than students themselves.

In the eastern hemisphere, this topic has been enthusiastically debated in recent years (Kuo (2006; Kawanami & Kawanami, 2009; He & Zhang, 2010). He and Zhang (2010) investigated the attitudes of 984 college students and teachers at four universities in different parts of China. With three cross-validated research methods (1. questionnaire survey, 2. matched-guise technique, and 3. focused interview), they found that most of the respondents desired to conform to native-speaker based pronunciation models. However, they indicated that it should be acceptable, to a certain extent, to speak English using the Chinese accent. He and Zhang thus concluded that, while the native-speaker based pronunciation norms was a benchmark for the ultimate goal of language learning, it was acceptable to speak Chinese English. According to them, this was because the abilities to speak native-like and Chinese English seemed to be not only the best model but also the target that would satisfactorily meet the dynamic demand of Chinese learners.



In Japan, Kawanami and Kawanami (2009) investigated how Japanese learners of English perceived the English input heard. In this study, Japanese learners of English were asked to listen to recordings produced by native speakers of English, speakers of English as a second language, and speakers of English as a foreign language. The results revealed that these learners had positive attitudes to the recordings produced by native speakers of English, and negative attitudes towards the recordings produced by speakers of English as a second and foreign language. Simply stated, based on their positive attitudes towards the English input by native speakers, Japanese students are likely to use native-speaker based pronunciation as their benchmark.

As shown by these studies, the preference for native speaker norms as expressed by a number of students from different language backgrounds and contexts interestingly and congruently contradicts with the ideologies of WEs, EIL and ELF. That is, learners from different geographical locations generally aspire for native-like pronunciation. In the Thai context, a more recent study by Jindapitak and Teo (2013) on Thai students' preferences for varieties of English and their attitudes towards language learning is quite relevant. In this study, 52 third-year English majors in a university in Thailand were requested to complete a two-part questionnaire. Part one elicited the information on their preferred English pronunciation model based on multiple choice questions provided. Part two, on the other hand, asked respondents to express their attitudes towards the importance of understanding varieties of English on a 4-point Likert scale statement. The results showed that the top three popular varieties of English were American (28.85%), British (21.15%) and Thai (9.62%), followed by others including Chinese and Australian (7.69% each); Canadian (5.77%); Russian, Japanese, Singaporean, and Malaysian (3.85% each); while Korean ranked with the no pre-

ference (1.92% each) group. When the data was regrouped into two categories of native models and non-native models, the native speaker models (63.46%) were more favored over the non-native speaker models (34.62%). These findings therefore suggested that Thai university students' attitudes were inconsistent with the ideologies of WEs, EIL and ELF. However, a rather small number of the participants in this study precludes generalizations. Thus, more studies are needed to illuminate Thai university students' attitudes about their pronunciation models. Moreover, even though this study sheds light on English majors' preferences for English varieties in Thailand, it would still be interesting to obtain further insight into the attitudes of Thai university students whose majors or minors are not in English. This type of information would be most beneficial for reference in future national educational plans.

### **3. The study**

This section presents the details pertaining to the current study, including the objectives, the participants, the instrument, and data collection and analysis.

#### ***3.1. Objective***

This study sets out to investigate Thai students' attitudes towards the native-speaker and other ASEAN models in English pronunciation learning that highlight intelligibility with reference to the ideologies of ELF and EIL. Corresponding to the objective stipulated, the research question addressed in this study is: What are the Thai English learners' attitudes towards native-like pronunciation or the pronunciation of other varieties of English advocated by the notions of EIL, ELF, and WEs.

#### ***3.2. Participants***

The participants of this study consist of first and second year students at the Faculty of Arts of a public university in Thailand. At the time of the study, the participants had not yet

selected their majors or minors. This particular population pool was selected for a number of reasons. First, the participants were considered to be future users of English who would be confronted with many English varieties and be judged in their professional life, not on competence, intellect, and character alone, but also on their English accent. Therefore, their attitudes towards wider varieties of English are considered important and likely to provide some empirical insights into the field of EIL, ELF, and WEs. Second, as opposed to high school students, these tertiary education students were free from the heavy pressure of learning English in order to pass national entrance examinations for higher educational institutions. Consequently, students would have more autonomy to decide on their investment in learning English. Finally, the influence of academics might have on their role as respondents. At the time of study, the participants were not influenced by the content of English phonetics courses, which are normally offered in their third and fourth years of students majoring or minoring in English. Since these phonetics courses typically focus on American English or British English accents, as reflected from a number of textbooks available, the course content might create a bias in their attitudes towards pronunciation. Therefore, it was ideal and crucial that the study be conducted on first and second year university students only.

### ***3.3. Instrument***

The instrument used in this study is a questionnaire. To assure that the participants of this study had no difficulty understanding and responding to the questions asked, the questionnaire was written in Thai. The initial version of the questionnaire was piloted before use with 30 first and second year students at the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Science of a public university in the second semester of the 2012 academic year. The purpose of this piloting was to ensure that the

language used in the questions was understood by the respondents, and the questions successfully elicited what they were supposed to. Based on the comments and feedback from the respondents, the questionnaire was revised accordingly. Some question items were rewritten, and others were elaborated to make sure that confusion was eradicated, and clarity enhanced.

The revised questionnaire used in this study consists of three major parts. Part one collects the participants' personal information regarding gender, age, the year of study, the onset period of time English was studied, and the Likert scale self-assessment of their English language skills. Part two consists of five questions which aim to elicit the respondents' experience with native-like pronunciation and other ASEAN English varieties. Part three consists of a series of nine statements to collect information on the respondents' attitudes towards English pronunciation models of native-like and a variety of other models based on the concepts of WEs, EIL, and ELF.

#### ***3.4. Data collection***

Upon the final revision and improvement of the piloted questionnaire (see 3.3), the questionnaire was administered to the participants for a period of one week, in the middle of the second semester of the 2012 academic year. The participants were first and second year university students of the Faculty of Arts. The activity took place on campus and was conducted entirely on a voluntary basis.

#### ***3.5. Data analysis***

All of the returned questionnaires (N = 387) were quantitatively analyzed by using the SPSS Statistics (SPSS) program for descriptive statistics in order to calculate mean ratings and percentages, and to highlight any trends and significant commonalities, anomalies, etc. The Likert scale data analyzed by descriptive statistics provided a summary of

data that not only identified the most popular answer for each question but also a group average.

#### **4. Results and discussion**

This section presents the analysis results generated by the three-part questionnaire, each of which is presented individually as follows:

##### ***4.1. Respondents' personal information***

A summary of key descriptions about the cohort of 387 respondents as elicited through the five questions in part one of the questionnaire is as follows. It was not surprising that out of the 387 respondents, 73 (18.86%) were male, and 314 (81.14%) female, given the fact that the majority of the students in Thailand studying languages are predominantly female. Moreover, most of the respondents (271 or 70.03%) were first year and 116 (or 29.97%) second year students. Their ages ranged from 17 to 21 years old, with an average of 18.65 years of age. In addition, the majority them (315 or 81.40%) had been studying English since they were in kindergarten, the emphasis being that almost respondents had studied English for an extended period of more than 15 years. In fact, the calculated average of English language learning of participants in years was 14.35. Finally, the last question probed into the self-assessment of their English language skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The five Likert scale was used from with the highest being 5 and the lowest being 1 (5 = excellent, 4 = good, 3 = moderate, 2 = poor, and 1 = very poor). Table 1 displays the frequency of responses related to a self-assessment of their English language skills.

Table 1. Frequencies of responses regarding their self-assessment of four English skills

<i>Language skills</i>	Excellent (5)	Good (4)	Moderate (3)	Poor (2)	Very poor (1)	Mean score
Listening	5	54	135	146	47	2.54
Speaking	6	26	207	120	28	2.56
Reading	11	123	188	52	13	3.17
Writing	4	43	195	106	39	2.66

The mean scores facilitating the comparison of responses to this question and used as default statistics for summarizing Likert scale data are as follows: 1.00 – 1.80 was interpreted as ‘very poor’; 1.81 – 2.60 as ‘poor’; 2.61 – 3.40 as ‘moderate’; 3.41 – 4.20 as ‘good’; and 4.21 – 5.00 as ‘excellent’. On the whole, the mean values ranging from 2.54 to 3.17 for the four skills demonstrated that the respondents generally thought they were moderately competent users of English. Additionally, the average score for the four skills was 2.73, revealing that the respondents perceived that they were most confident in their reading skills, with the highest average of 3.17, followed by writing (2.66), speaking (2.56), and listening (2.54), respectively. Taken together and compared with the period of more than 15 years that the majority of them had studied English, the respondents did not think highly of their English performance. Given that the focus of this study is on pronunciation, a scrutiny of the participants’ self-assessment in oral communication skills is illuminated. As shown, the respondents’ rating of their language skills related to oral communication was quite low, indicating their low satisfaction with the two skills of listening and speaking. This finding also

suggested that the respondents seemed to be aware of the need to improve their communication skills. Therefore, in order to efficiently and effectively satisfy their demand, it was essential to examine their attitudes about their attainable goal of English pronunciation: native-like pronunciation or intelligibility, the objective of this study.

#### ***4.2. Respondents' English pronunciation experience***

Based on the responses to the five questions relating to the respondents' experience with native-like pronunciation and other ASEAN varieties, the majority of the respondents (291 or 75.19%) reported not having lived, studied, or travelled abroad, whereas 96 respondents (or 24.81%) claimed to have travelled to other ASEAN countries (Question 1 or Q1). Even though most of the respondents had no, or relatively limited, experience living in or traveling to other ASEAN countries, given the era of technology that allows people around the world to connect to each other, this finding cannot lead to the conclusion that the respondents were not aware of ASEAN countries, or the English varieties spoken by the people of those countries.

In response to Q2 (the respondents' exposure to the other ASEAN English varieties), 226 respondents (or 58.39%) gave a positive answer, and 161 respondents (or 41.60%) claimed they had no exposure. This finding substantiates the interpretation of Q1 that even though 75% of the respondents had no experience living in or traveling to ASEAN countries, again, thanks to technology, exposure to other language varieties is possible even without having physically been abroad. Also, recently, the Thai government has made tremendous efforts to mobilize partnerships among the ASEAN nations, resulting in diverse means of communication available including TV programs and commercials focusing on different ASEAN countries. In so doing, awareness of the aspects related to ASEAN (including English varieties in

ASEAN) has been fostered among Thai people. To a large extent, technology has made the English world we live in smaller.

The extent to which respondents understood other ASEAN English varieties that they had been exposed to was elicited in Q3. Only 1 respondent (or 0.44%) claimed to understand other ASEAN English varieties very well, whereas 73 respondents (or 32.30%) claimed that they could understand the some varieties most of the time, 128 respondents (or 56.64%) could moderately understand the same varieties, 18 respondents (or 7.96%) understood very little, and 6 of the respondents (or 2.65%) claimed that the ASEAN varieties were not intelligible to them. The mean score of 3.20 suggests that, on the whole, the respondents could understand other ASEAN varieties to a certain extent. Similarly, the respondents' moderate understanding of the other ASEAN Englishes can be attributed to the lack of knowledge about ASEAN countries made available by the Thai government to Thai nationals to help prepare them for the ASEAN integration in 2015.

English learning experience is addressed in Q4 when respondents were asked to specify the nationalities of their previous English teachers, excluding their Thai English teachers. Due to the significant number of years of English instruction, the respondents were allowed to write more than one answer to this question. Most of the responses indicated their experience being taught by American teachers (349 respondents), followed by British teachers (292 respondents), and Filipinos (146 respondents), with a small number having been taught by Singaporean, (16 respondents) Malaysian (6 respondents) teachers, and very few respondents (less than five) having been taught by teachers of other nationalities including Japanese, Chinese, Canadians, and Indonesians. Interestingly, many of the respondents had been taught by



Filipinos. This finding is congruent with the current scenario of English language teaching in Thailand which, in addition to qualified native speakers recruited, there is a growing demand for Filipino English teachers ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teaching\\_English\\_as\\_a\\_foreign\\_language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teaching_English_as_a_foreign_language)).

Question 5 probes into the respondents' awareness about the pertaining characteristics of English as an International Language or EIL. Based on a list of four statements provided, 296 out of 387 respondents (or 76.49%) seemed to have an accurate understanding of the central notion of EIL. In fact, the phrase of EIL has become a cliché in Thailand especially for scholars in language teaching. This notion calls for a change in how Thai teachers and learners perceive the role of English as a means of communication in a global context (Boriboon, 2011).

To summarize, even though most of the respondents had no experience spending time in other ASEAN countries, many of them admitted that they had exposure to other ASEAN English varieties. They also claimed that they could moderately understand those ASEAN English varieties. Most of the respondents, in their previous education, were taught by native speakers of English and non-native speakers of English including Filipinos, Singaporeans, and Malaysians. Finally, the majority of the respondents seemed to have an accurate understanding of the concept of EIL.

#### ***4.3. Respondents' attitudes towards varieties of English pronunciation***

This part consists of nine statements (Ss). Based on the Likert scale (5 = strongly agree, 4 = somewhat agree, 3 = neutral, 2 = somewhat disagree, and 1 = strongly disagree), the researcher was able to observe to what degree different Englishes were favored when students reflected upon what they wished to study. Descriptive statistics for the ratings is presented in Table 2. The interpretations of the average score

or the mean values pertaining to individual statements are as follows: 1.00 – 1.80 was interpreted as ‘strongly disagree’; 1.81 – 2.60 as ‘somewhat disagree’; 2.61 – 3.40 as ‘neutral’; 3.41 – 4.20 as ‘somewhat agree’; and 4.21 – 5.00 as ‘strongly agree’.

Table 2. Respondents’ attitudes towards pronunciation ( $N = 387$ )

Descriptor	(5)	(4)	(3)	(2)	(1)	Mean	Meaning
1. Aspiration for native-like pronunciation	207	127	44	7	2	4.37	strongly agree
2. Necessity to have native-like pronunciation	114	151	105	15	2	3.93	somewhat agree
3. Native-like pronunciation and positive attitudes	113	147	113	14	0	3.93	somewhat agree
4. Ideal English teachers not limited to native speakers	56	115	153	45	18	3.38	neutral
5. Native-like pronunciation instruction limited at university level	24	45	76	118	124	2.29	somewhat disagree
6. Perceived usefulness of native-like pronunciation at work and in society	155	140	83	8	1	4.14	somewhat agree
7. Ability to work with employers speaking other ASEAN English varieties for communication	63	142	156	20	6	3.61	somewhat agree
8. Comfort to communicate with colleagues and foreign friends speaking other ASEAN English varieties	77	37	38	22	13	3.63	somewhat agree
9. Willing to adopt other ASEAN Englishes for communication	63	111	127	57	29	3.31	neutral

S1: As shown, 207 respondents (53.49%) strongly agreed that, if they could, they would aspire for the native-like English pronunciation model. The average score for this

statement is 4.37, the highest of all nine statements, indicating that the respondents strongly aspired for native-like pronunciation as their ultimate goal for learning pronunciation. This finding is in agreement with that generated by previous studies (e.g., Timmis, 2002; Kawanami & Kawanami, 2009; He & Zhang, 2010; Jindapitak & Teo, 2013). Although this study did not set out to examine the reasons for their preferences, historically, English has become the most prestigious foreign language ever studied in Thailand since the reign of King Rama V (1868-1910) when there was a great need for English to communicate with foreigners visiting the kingdom. Thus, use of the English language at that time was warmly welcomed because it tremendously contributed to the country's educational, economic, and technological development. Currently, the prestigious status of the English language is still maintained as evidenced by this study. Similarly, based on the interviews conducted on Thai university students, Jindapitak and Teo (2013) asserted that the students' preference for native speaker pronunciation models was due to the prestige or high status of the native-speaker pronunciation.

S2: Even though most of the respondents aspired for native-like pronunciation in S1, the respondents were more liberal, welcoming other varieties for communication in the region. The average score for this statement is 3.93, which might be interpreted as showing that the respondents somewhat agreed on the need to possess native-like pronunciation. It should be noted that even though the respondents strongly aspired for native-like pronunciation, they were aware that native-like pronunciation is not the only requirement for successful communication. This finding resonates what Canagarajah (2006) emphasizes about the need for English language learners to be familiar with other varieties of English as a requirement of globalization.

S3: No respondents disputed that having native-like pronunciation entailed positive recognition. It thus becomes clear that native-like pronunciation was believed to have greater prestige or superiority to others. The average of 3.93 indicates that the respondents somewhat agreed on the increasing acceptance and positive attitudes from people by using native-like pronunciation. In support of the responses to S1, the responses to S3 suggest that it is commonly believed by the respondents that people with native-like pronunciation have an advantage over those without. The benefits of possessing native-like English pronunciation are more apparent in education, work, and business (Litchford, 2011).

S4: The majority of the respondents had neutral attitudes about this statement. It should be noted that, even though the native variety was judged as more favorably aspired goal than the other varieties, respondents did not seem to mind having teachers who were not native speakers of English. The average score for this statement is 3.38, implying that the respondents were neutral about their English teachers being non-native speakers of English even though their desirable outcome was to attain a so-called native-like pronunciation. This finding seems to be in contrast with certain previous studies. For instance, Lippi-Green (1997) and Thomas (1999) found that students tended to perceive teachers with non-native accents as less qualified and less effective, as opposed to native speaker teachers. At this juncture, the question whether English teachers should be native speakers or not has been raised by Phillipson (1992) where he uses the phrase “the native speaker fallacy” to refer to unfair treatment of qualified non-native English speaking teachers. According to him (1996), qualified English teachers should not be based on *who* they are (i.e., native or non-native speakers of English) but *what* they are (i.e., qualified English teachers). In congruence with Phillipson (1996), Medgyes (1996) conducted a survey and found that

qualified and experienced non-native English speaking teachers could contribute to English language teaching, having gone through the experience of learning English and devising language learning strategies.

S5: This statement drew the highest rate of disagreement and thus the average score is the lowest of all, 2.29. On the whole, the respondents negatively perceived the practice of teaching native-speaker models at university levels only. This means, if possible, they would prefer to see native-like pronunciation being taught at primary and secondary levels. The responses suggest that the students felt positively inadequate about the teaching of native-like pronunciation in Thailand. This finding corroborates with Kanoksilapatham's (2010) findings which indicated that, as far as stress placement is concerned, Thai teachers of English in high schools were not adequately prepared to be a resource person in English pronunciation.

S6: The average score for this statement is 4.14, indicating that, in general, the respondents somewhat agreed that native-like pronunciation was an asset. This rating on S6 substantiates their rating in S1 and S3, displaying their strong aspiration for native-like pronunciation. The ratings to these three statements suggest that the respondents aspired for native-like pronunciation especially in the areas of work and social life.

S7-S8: Most of the respondents had neutral attitudes towards this statement, and very few of them (6 respondents or 1.55%) did not think they could handle communication with their potential employers in other ASEAN English varieties. The average score for this statement is 3.61, suggesting that even though the respondents aspired for native-like pronunciation, they tended to have somewhat positive attitudes in working with those speaking other ASEAN Englishes. Similarly, in their responses to S8, the number of the res-

pondents who felt comfortable communicating with colleagues and foreign friends speaking other ASEAN English substantially outnumbered those who did not. The average score for this statement is 3.63. Given the fact that the Thai government has continuously mobilized its efforts to promote the benefits of ASEAN integration in 2015, these university students seemed to be ready for this event, developing positive attitudes towards communicating with other people who speak ASEAN Englishes.

S9: The average score for this statement is 3.31. On the whole, this finding suggests that even though respondents were more or less ready to communicate with people speaking other English varieties, the cohort respondents did not feel overwhelmingly committed to adopt other ASEAN Englishes pronunciation as a benchmark for communication. The responses to this statement consolidate their attitudes towards S1 that they strongly aspire for native-like pronunciation.

On the whole, with the use of the questionnaire administered to 387 Thai university students, the current study has provided a lot of insights related to English pronunciation, including learners' previous training, learners' views of their own pronunciation, learners' awareness of their goals and skills, learners' awareness of their motivation to speak English, and learners' awareness of their aspirations to achieve native-like pronunciation. Finally, the study also sheds light onto learners' positive attitudes towards other ASEAN English varieties.

## **5. Pedagogical implications**

The findings contribute to a better understanding of Thai university students' attitudes associated with the native speaker norms and other ASEAN English varieties. The study also reveals which varieties are perceived more or less favorably.

Although the current study adopted a learner perspective, their results are practically relevant for both teachers and learners.

### ***5.1. Suggestions for learners***

As shown, Thai learners' attempt to emulate the model of native speakers might not be enough to meet local and global needs. Learners need to be more accommodating to variations of ASEAN English because it is likely that no one language or code is appropriate in all cases. Therefore, they need to have sufficient awareness of other varieties of English. It is also possible that many students, due to insufficient exposure to the varieties of English, might hold a monolithic view that native-like pronunciation is the only norm for international communication. However, in the era of ELF, an attitude of not downplaying other English varieties while exalting native speaker English needs to be instilled in them.

### ***5.2. Suggestions for teachers***

To accommodate the learners' preference and at the same time prepare them for the challenge of the AEC integration, teachers of English might need to revise or reform their pedagogy. With the knowledge about the learners' actual desires and attitudes towards their preference of English pronunciation available, practical pedagogical implications are multiple. Here are some suggestions for what teachers can do to prepare their students.

Firstly, speech samples, including audio and video examples of ASEAN English varieties from various speech communities, should be collected and distributed for learners to explore at their own pace. These materials may also be used in classrooms as supplementary materials. Moreover, the access to media content, such as films and TV series focusing on the native speaker norms and other ASEAN English varieties, also allows learners of English to be increasingly exposed to other varieties of English.

Secondly, providing pronunciation training for Thai teacher of English would have a positive impact on how they prepare their students. According to Kanoksilapatham (2010), many Thai teachers of English lack training particularly in pronunciation, one of the descriptors of teachers' competence and also one of the key elements in the speaking component. It is anticipated that, with additional training on pronunciation, teachers will be better equipped to be more powerful resource persons contributing to learners' aspirations of native-like pronunciation. Meanwhile, pronunciation training will empower teachers with sensitivity to pronunciation subtleties belonging to individual ASEAN English varieties.

Finally, since most Thai university students in this study aspire for native speaker norms, teachers should strike a balance between promoting a high standard of English in the classroom and exposing learners to other ASEAN English varieties, by promoting greater understanding of cultural differences of language use in classrooms. In so doing, students would not only gain greater intercultural competence but also be empowered users of their own English.

In short, knowing more about Thai learners' attitudes is illuminating and beneficial to all sectors concerned. While learners' aspiration can be made explicit, they should be more aware of other English varieties prevalent in the region. For teachers, the findings help determine and assess if the current pedagogical directions are empirically validated. Eventually, an appropriate pedagogy for learners needs to be developed.

## **6. Conclusions**

This research study aims to provide a better understanding of the extent to which English learners are aware of varieties of English prevalent in the ASEAN region and the patterns of recognition associated with this awareness. Given the introduction of the notions of EIL, WEs and ELF, the



pronunciation model can be divided into two categories, namely, the native-like pronunciation and the expected intelligibility as imposed by the ideologies of EIL, WEs and ELF. Since learners' attitudes play a crucial role in determining the level of success in language learning, the findings generated by this study provide some empirical insights into the field of English language teaching in Thailand.

The analysis of 387 questionnaires completed by first and second year university students clearly suggest that, despite current ideologies of EIL, WEs and ELF, and their awareness of, and positive attitudes towards other ASEAN English language varieties, they not surprisingly still strongly aspired for native speaker norms as substantiated by Jindapitak and Teos' (2013) study on Thai university students.

At this point, the survey presented in this paper is preliminary, and thus the perspectives for further research are vast, and as such, will be improved and expanded on in further works. It would be interesting to find out whether or not there is a consensus on this issue amongst teachers, and whether this consensus is in harmony with the views of students. The comparison of the learners' data with the teachers' would be rather insightful. It would also be interesting to discover the extent to which students are willing to conform to native-speaker norms, not only in the field of pronunciation, but in relation to traditional written-based grammar and the kind of informal grammar highlighted by spoken corpora. Following Graddol (2006), teaching materials should embrace linguistic diversity and recognize the language shift. Correspondingly, in order to be effective, the materials that are authentic in terms of variety of Englishes need yet to be constructed.

Caveats are in order. The above data presented in this study is in no way a representation of all university students in Thailand. Therefore, tentative conclusions based on this study remain to be substantiated by additional future research. This

study included only first and second year Arts students at a public university. Due to the rather restricted pool of students and consequently restricted opinions, generalization of the findings to suit Thailand as a whole is limited. It is thus highly possible that students from different disciplines and universities might have more varied attitudes from those in this study. Therefore, a larger breadth of disciplines and respondent sample sizes would more accurately illuminate Thai university learners' attitudes. To complement the data elicited from the questionnaires, a more accurate picture of the students' attitudes can be obtained by integrating in-depth interviews with university students.

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